

SIMMONS SAYS

**JEFFERY
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Watching top talent a bonus

There tends to be a bit of disconnect at times when I see fans out and about at games. And by fans, I mean Pioneer fans. I have to go to my parents' houses to see my fans.

It was crystallized to me early this season when the Warren County basketball teams swept a pair of close games over Cannon County. As I was leaving, one person right by the door said something of the nature of "I can't take those close games."

And, without really thinking, I responded, "Yeah, those are intense... if you're rooting for the teams."

It wasn't my best PR moment. And I realized it about 0.5 seconds later as he gave me an odd glance and walked on by.

I am a fan. Anybody who has read my columns for years knows I am passionate about Vol football, the San Antonio Spurs, and, to a lesser extent, the Jacksonville Jaguars.

I wouldn't classify myself as a Warren County fan, not when I'm wearing a camera around my neck anyway. It's not that I have issues with the Pioneers or Lady Pioneers. In fact, I hope all the local teams win all the time. It's a lot easier writing stories about wins than losses. Everybody loves talking after a win. Vocal chords seem to swell up after losses.

But I decided way back in 2011 – my second year on the job – that I couldn't be passionate about local sports. I was walking and talking with Tommy Johnson after a tough loss, finding myself getting as worked up as he was, and I couldn't take it.

When I saw him again on Monday and was still hurt by the loss, I told him, "Man I can't care like this anymore. You live this stuff. I just write about it."

Since then, that's been my motto.

If there's one perk I've noticed lately, it's the amount of talent I've seen Warren County face recently in all sports.

Bradley Central's Rhyne Howard certainly qualifies. She's easily the best girls basketball player I've seen in high school.

When I saw Howard working through warm-ups Friday, I knew the Lady Pioneers were in for a long day. There's not many ways coach Shea Panter was going to prepare her team for a 6-foot guard who could fill it up from 25 feet or slice through five defenders and finish over everybody at the rim.

She was special. She may win a state title. At the very least, Howard will be on ESPN at this time next year playing for Kentucky.

Count me in as being a fan of great talent.

Mauled by Bearettes

WCHS girls' season ends

BY **JEFFERY SIMMONS**
Sports Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The Lady Pioneers weren't beat coming off the bus, but it wasn't much long after that Warren County knew its season was over.

Bradley Central showed why it is a contender for the state championship in the opening round of the regionals, downing Warren County 87-22 to move to 29-0 this season.

"Bradley Central has a well-rounded team. I completely understand why they are undefeated," said coach Shea Panter.

Rhyne Howard lived up to the billing as one of the nation's top players, scoring 32 points before sitting out the majority of the second half. Jamaryn Blair added 18 points off the bench, including hitting buzzer beaters in the first and second quarters to give her team huge momentum boosts.

Warren County (12-20) was led by Tyra Wright's nine points and Grace Rains' four-point performance.

Bradley Central began the game on an 8-0 run before Emily Mikkola rifled a pass past three Bearettes to Rains for a layup. It did little to slow down the Bearettes though, who scored on nine of their first 10 possessions to build a double-digit advantage.

Wright tried to keep Warren County relatively close. The junior did her damage right around the rim, getting deep post positions for a pair of layups before sweeping across the lane for a lefty hook shot that banked in.

Blair was able to push the lead to 23-10 in the waning seconds of the first quarter when she pick-pocketed a Lady Pioneer and drove for a layup to end the period.

After that, Howard took over.

The Kentucky signee started the second quarter with a 3-pointer, then followed with a steal and a layup. After feeding Blair for a 3-pointer, Howard stuck back a miss to put the Bearettes up 33-10 and force Panter into a timeout.

Howard would help fuel a 28-3 advantage in the second quarter with 11 points, three steals, three rebounds and three assists – the last going to Blair when she sank a corner 3 at the buzzer to give the Bearettes a 50-13 halftime lead.

Continued on **2B**



Jeffery Simmons photos
Rhealee Johnson works to get around the pressure defense of Bradley Central's Jamia Williams. The No. 2 ranked Bearettes downed the Lady Pioneers 87-22 in the opening round of the region tournament Friday.



Boyd senior Josh Argo tries to get a shot over the defense of Western Kentuckys' Jon Moore.

Blazers blast Boyd

BY **JEFFERY SIMMONS**
Sports Editor for the Southern Standard
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They weren't the college Hilltoppers, but the Western Kentucky team still gave Boyd an advanced education in basketball.

The Trailblazers blew out the Broncos 77-46 at J.K. Stanley Gymnasium, quickly ending any hope Boyd had for making a deep run in the Middle Tennessee Athletic Conference tournament.

Jack Tinsley scored 22 points and Ben Kirkpatrick added 17 as Western Kentucky led nearly wire-to-wire against the Broncos. The Trailblazers built a 31-24 lead by halftime, then led by double figures for the majority of the second half.

Boyd got a spirited effort from a trio of seniors playing their last game at home, but not enough to top one of the top teams in the MTAC. Jayden Reno scored 20 points for the Broncos, while Josh Argo added 14 and Tyler Pomales finished with 11.

The trio combined for all but one point for Boyd. Bryson Stiles split a pair of fourth-quarter free throws for his only point.

The Broncos dug an early hole in the first quarter, but Reno helped them claw back into the game with seven points in the second quarter. His three-point play in the final minute gave Boyd some momentum going into halftime.

Tinsley extinguished the run from the start of the second half. He began with a 3-pointer, then drove for a layup. Tinsley polished off the Broncos in the fourth quarter, getting seven quick points as the Blazers continued to press full court until the end.

The loss dropped the Broncos to 10-17 this year, the first losing season for the Boyd boys since switching from TSSAA to MTAC in 2011.



Jeffery Simmons photos
Cain Buckner squares up for a 3-pointer during Boyd's MTAC tournament game Thursday.




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