

# WCMS wins again

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

Spring break may be the only thing that can stop the Warren County Middle School softball team.

The Lady Pioneers continued their dominant play with an 8-0 victory over the DeKalb County Lady Saints, their fifth straight win and third shutout this season.

Warren County (7-1) took control in the second, exploding for seven runs while sending 12 batters to the plate. Marli McBride started the scoring with a bases-loaded single, which scored Halo Armstrong – who reached on a double – and Mea Starkey.

Shelby Roberts followed with a blast to left field, allowing Bella Cantrell and McBride to score while Roberts cruised into third base. She scored on the next pitch when Madison Hollis lofted a sacrifice fly into center field, jumping the lead to 5-0.

The Lady Pioneers rallied on two outs, stringing together four singles to score two more runs. Juju Pyburn, Aleya

Esparza, Danika Reno and Armstrong had consecutive hits, with Reno and Armstrong each collecting RBIs.

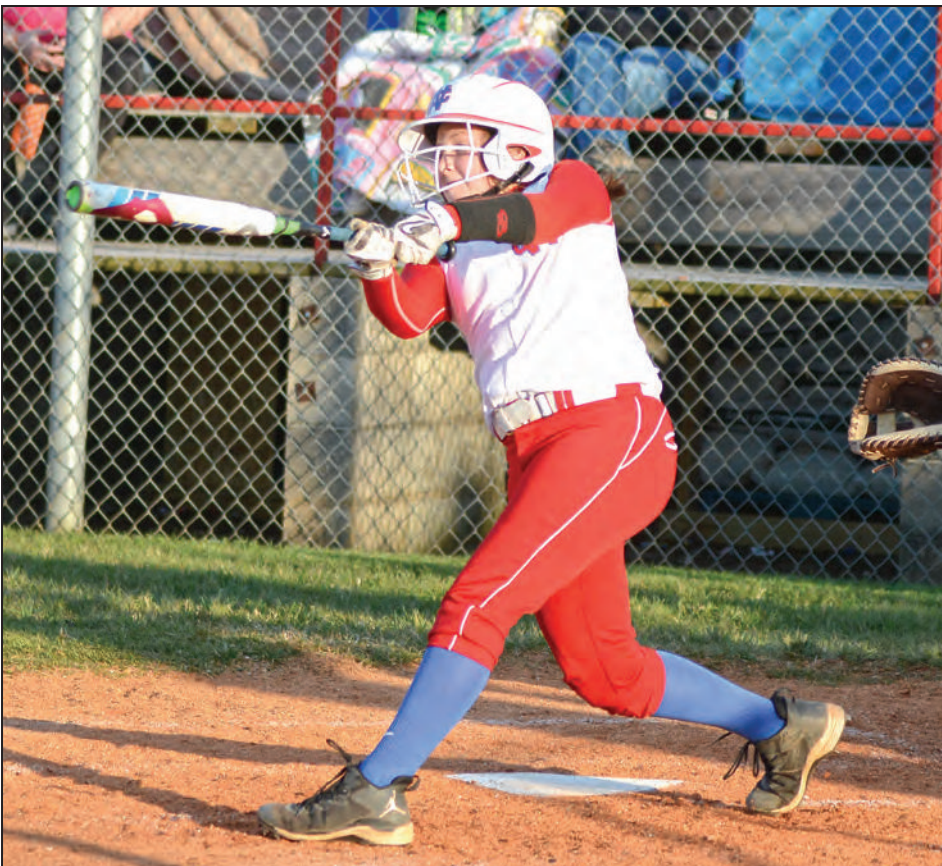
Hollis, who started and earned the win in the circle, helped her own cause with an RBI single in the third to complete the scoring.

Hollis improved to 3-0 this season by throwing three scoreless innings while allowing just one hit while striking out six. Reno completed the shutout with two innings of work. Reno struck out three and surrendered three hits.

With the ability to trot out a dominant pair of pitchers, coach Joe Damon knows all his team needs is some run support and good defense to be successful.

“We got the bats going early,” said Damon. “It’s been our way to be successful. When we back up our pitching with runs and defense, we’re in good shape.”

Warren County will have a lengthy wait before it gets a chance to extend the win streak. The Lady Pioneers will be off next week for spring break before returning to action Monday, March 26 with a home game against Tullahoma.



Jeffery Simmons photo  
**Aleya Esparza's big bat has helped the WCMS softball team start 7-1. Esparza had a hit and RBI in Thursday's 8-0 win over DeKalb County.**



Jeffery Simmons photo  
**WCMS Pioneer Eli Kuykendall safely steals second during Friday's game against Oakland. Spring break may be coming at the perfect time for the Pioneers. Warren County fell Thursday night 7-5 to Upperman and followed with a 13-0 loss to the Patriots.**

## Predators win, clinch playoff bid

**DENVER (AP)** — The Nashville Predators didn't break out the bubbly or anything rowdy like that after becoming the first NHL team to clinch a playoff spot this season.

"Business as usual," defenseman Ryan Ellis said of the low-key celebration that included some pizza. "Back to work."

Colton Sissons and Filip Forsberg each scored twice, backup goaltender Juuse Saros stopped 33 shots and the Predators secured their postseason berth by beating the Colorado Avalanche 4-2 on Friday night.

The streaking Predators are 13-0-1 in their last 14 games and haven't lost in regulation since Feb. 17 against Detroit.

"The guys knew with a win we would clinch and I think they fought hard for it," coach Peter Laviolette said. "I really liked our game."

Starting goalie Pekka Rinne was given the night off after helping Nashville to a win Thursday at Arizona. The team didn't miss a beat with Saros in net.

Gabriel Landeskog gave the Avalanche a 2-1 lead in the second, but Forsberg tied it three minutes later. Sissons put the Predators up for good when his shot clanged off the crossbar and dropped into the net.

The Predators have at least one point in a franchise-best 14 consecutive road games.

"We're just working hard. We played last night, got in late, but everybody's here, everybody's working hard," Forsberg said. "It doesn't have to be pretty. Get the job done."

## Titans sign pair of Patriots

**NASHVILLE (AP)** — The Tennessee Titans have a definite New England Patriots influence these days.

Running back Dion Lewis believes the Titans' acquisition of ex-Patriots like himself and cornerback Malcolm Butler says more about their talent than their background.

"I wouldn't say (they're trying to replicate New England here)," Lewis said Thursday.

"I'd just say they're trying to bring good football players here — good, smart football players. I'm just happy they thought I'm one of those players to help."

The Titans announced their latest free agent additions Thursday after both players came in and signed their new multi-year deals.

The Patriots' connections in Music City began prior to the 2016 season, when the Titans hired Jon Robinson as the team's general manager. In the 2017 offseason, Robinson signed starting cornerback Logan Ryan, a former Patriots starter.

A few months ago, the Titans made Mike Vrabel — a former Patriots line-

backer — the team's head coach, and then agreed to terms with Butler and Lewis on Tuesday.

"The New England Patriots are the New England Patriots, and the Tennessee Titans are the Tennessee Titans," Butler said. "But it's all about having great players, great coaches, no matter what organization it is. You know everybody has the same, equal opportunity in the NFL."

Lewis is looking forward to working in a backfield with one of Robinson's first draft picks, 2015 Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry. The 5-foot-8, 195-pound Lewis said he's used to sharing carries and that the 6-3, 247-pound Henry should make for a diverse running game

in new offensive coordinator Matt LaFleur's offense.

"I think it will be a huge challenge for defenses because you've got a guy a lot bigger than me, and then a guy like me that is quick and can break tackles, too," said Lewis, who ran for a career-best 896 yards last season. "So I definitely think it will make the defense be on their toes on who is in the game. I think that we'll definitely be able to work together and use each other's skillset to benefit each other."

Lewis also caught more than 30 passes in two of the past three seasons.

"It's just using my quickness, using my smarts," Lewis said. "When I see a linebacker trying to guard me, I know I'm expected to

win. So anything short of that is not acceptable to me."

Lewis, Butler and Ryan were all part of the Patriots team that won the Super Bowl after the 2016 season.

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