

SIMMONS SAYS

**JEFFERY
SIMMONS**



Come back Kawhi

My favorite athlete is Kawhi Leonard. There's really not a close second.

The problem is my favorite athlete doesn't play basketball anymore. And there's no clear timetable when he'll play again.

If you follow the NBA, then the story about Leonard isn't a new one. The San Antonio superstar, the favorite in Las Vegas before the 2018-19 season to win MVP, has played a grand total of nine games this season. He's played 210 minutes, about 10,000 less than I've spent searching for news on when he'd return.

Just before preseason, it was announced Leonard would miss a couple weeks with a quad injury. It wasn't expected to keep him out long when he was sidelined in September.

It's now April and Kawhi is no closer to playing than he was seven months ago. In that time, I've become a WebMD expert on quadriceps tendinopathy. Well, maybe not an expert, but I can spell it without having to use a dictionary or spell check.

So now Kawhi is nestled away in New York, thousands of miles separating him from his teammates as they battle for a playoff berth. Rumors are swirling the organization and Kawhi's people are at odds, with trade talks already cropping up all around the league.

This leads me to a huge dilemma. Am I a Spurs fan, or am I a Kawhi fan?

I tend to say I'm a Spurs fan, as the money I spend for tickets in the past was to watch the Spurs, the memorabilia in my house says Spurs and I started following the Spurs when Kawhi was 7. And yet, this is the first time in four years I've not made a trip to see the Spurs – because Kawhi wasn't playing. Most of the memorabilia I own either says Kawhi, or is signed by Kawhi.

There's really no set rules to being a fan. There's backlash for "hopping on the bandwagon" and ridicule for "the fair-weather fans," but there's no rule preventing it. Everybody can cheer how they want, even if their allegiance is questioned.

I've had multiple people tell me I should be angry at Kawhi, that he's being paid \$18 million to do nothing (He's been medically cleared by the team for two months). Why should I be loyal to somebody who isn't loyal to his team? It's a valid point, but it's not my quad hurting.

The fan in me just wants Kawhi to be the guy I think he is – for him to strap on the red cape this weekend, swoop in just in time for the playoffs and lead the Spurs to their sixth title. Then this offseason, he'll sign a \$219 million contract.

Nothing ever seems to work out that perfectly. I wish it would. I would like to see my favorite athlete be an athlete again.

Bomb droppers



Jacob Dodd photo

Ashton Whiles, pictured in a previous game, hit her fourth home run in three games during Thursday's 14-3 victory over Stone Memorial. Whiles has hit six home runs for the Lady Pioneers this season, helping the team start 12-4.

Home runs power Lady Pioneer win

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

Coach Gooby Martin may have to check with NASA if his Lady Pioneers continue to launch rockets every game.

Home runs by Ashton Whiles, Emily Mikkola and Sadie Simmons highlighted Thursday's 14-3 victory over Stone Memorial, the team's eighth in 10 games and second straight District 6AAA win.

"They swung the bats really well," said coach Martin. "The last few games we've scored a lot of runs. That's what we need this time of year when facing district competition."

Warren County (12-4) followed a 13-6 win over White County with another dominant performance, this time on the road against the Lady Panthers. The Lady Pioneers got off to a fast start, scoring five runs in the first inning, highlighted by a two-run double by Hope Mullican.

Kyra Hillis also started her bid for the cycle in the first, roping a single to score Mullican. The senior would finish 4-for-4, finishing just a home run shy of the cycle while driving in two runs.

By the time Grace Rains scored with Savannah Cox with a single, Warren County was up 5-0 before the home team got to bat.

Ashton Whiles worked a clean first inning, then sent shockwaves in the second by starting the home-run barrage. Whiles followed a two-out single by Hillis with a big fly, rocking a 2-2 pitch that cleared the fence and a building behind the field.

"I think it was the longest home run I've ever seen in a fast-pitch game," said Martin.

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Raising the bar

BY **JEFFERY SIMMONS**
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Competing against Franklin North and Franklin South, the Warren County Middle School track team had plenty of standout performances Thursday.

The Lady Pioneers 4x400 relay team tied a school record and Paige Sweeton took home two of Warren County's five individual top finishes in the home meet.

Sweeton was part of the WCMS girls team dominating the long jump, with her leap of 11 feet, three inches matching teammate Arica Walker for top honors. Chloe Volf was just behind, finishing just nine inches behind her teammates for third.



Jeffery Simmons photo

Paige Sweeton clears the bar during her high-jump attempt. Sweeton won both the long jump and high jump during Thursday's track event at WCMS.

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