Sports

Southern Standard

McMinnville, Tennessee

SUNDAY
APRIL 29, 2018

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SIMMONS SAYS

NFL draft full of surprises

I spent all week trying to avoid spoilers. Granted it wasn't the first pick of the NFL draft acting as my primary concern, but instead trying to stay far away from any plot points from "Avengers: Infinity War."

I made it to the premiere at Three Star Cinema unscathed, then proceeded to enjoy nearly 150 minutes of Marvel's mash-up. At one point, my phone began to buzz over and over. It was on mute, as to not bother anybody except for me. After the fifth buzz, I had to know what was going on.

Every type of sports app I had was trying to let me know the Cleveland Browns had shocked the world, selecting Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield No. 1 overall. I muted all alerts after that, mostly because I wanted to enjoy Thanos as he . . . just kidding, no spoilers.

I'm not one for hot takes, especially when it comes to the NFL draft. I don't follow the prospects enough, nor do I feel like I know how to layout a professional football team better than, well, professionals.

Mayfield doesn't strike me as what I would envision as a team-defining pick, but then again he did rip my heart out a few years back when he led the Sooners to an OT victory in Neyland Stadium. He was unstoppable in the second half, making every single play against what seemed to be a helpless Vols team (only later would we find out that was just Butch Jones' coaching style).

While the 2017 Heisman winner didn't wait long to hear his name called, his predecessor waited over five hours Thursday before knowing his future team.

Lamar Jackson, owner of his own stiff-arm trophy from 2016, had to wait until the final pick of the first round. The Baltimore Ravens pounced on the chance to trade back into the first round and pick Louisville's dynamic QB, one many argued should have been the No. 1 pick - or, at the very least, the first QB chosen.

In between the two defining picks of the first round were a few more interesting selections.

QB Josh Rosen, the No. 10 pick, said there were "nine mistakes ahead of me." Congrats Arizona Cardinals, you've got your future signal caller and the chip on his shoulder.

Many local football fans were probably excited to see the Tennessee Titans move up in the draft to select Alabama LB Rashaan Evans. Maybe it wasn't that shocking considering the Titans just hired former linebacker Mike Vrabel as head coach.

My personal favorite pick from Thursday? It was probably the Avengers bringing in ---- actually, just go see the movie. It's really good.

File photo

Clay Thompson, pictured catching a touchdown last season in Fayetteville, will be one of many young players who will be counted on to take the next step this fall. The Pioneers begin spring practice Monday and will finish the spring with a scrimmage Friday, May 18 against Grundy County.

Pioneers ready to work

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

Almost six months to the day the Pioneers last hit the gridiron, coach Tom Moore is getting the team ready to put on the pads once again.

The Warren County High School football team is set to start spring practice Monday, the first of nine dates the team is set to hit the field over three weeks.

The Pioneers saw last year's season end Oct. 26 with a 56-7 loss to Oakland, which fell in the state semifinals.

Warren County lost a number of key contributors from last season, including record-setting quarterback Isaiah Grayson. With holes to fill, coach Moore plans on focusing on fundamentals this spring.

"Spring practice is a time to improve. We're looking for a number of younger guys to step up and be ready to play high school football," said Moore. "This group is committed. They have been fun to coach so far. They need to improve everyday."

One person who believes last year's 3-7 campaign will help the younger Pioneers is a player who was a big part of each win. Grayson believes his former teammates are ready to take the mantle.

"The upcoming group is very determined. They're putting in hard work and really trying to get stronger and faster," said Grayson. "They really want to prove everyone wrong and try to get Warren County back to the old days of winning a lot of games."

One area where the Pioneers can lean on for experience and talent is in the trenches.

"The offensive line is a strength of the team. It's virtually impossible to be successful without strong play on the line," said Moore.

Along with fundamentals, strength and conditioning will be at the forefront. The offseason has seen several players make big gains, but Monday will be their first chance to apply their hard work.

"Strength and conditioning is critical. We can't afford to miss days," said Moore.

The Pioneers aren't expected to be at full strength for the spring. Many players expected to fill roles this fall are currently playing spring sports. With spots to fill and knowing there are more athletes waiting in the wings, Moore is encouraging students to give football a try.

"There are some good young athletes in our school," said Moore. "We have a good environment and would love to have them join us. I've noticed nearly all of our kids are encouraging each other to be successful. That's what you need to be a team."

Moore asks any prospective student interested in playing football this season to come see him as soon as possible with spring practice beginning this week.

The Pioneers will conclude the spring with a home scrimmage Friday, May 18. Warren County will welcome the Grundy County Jackets to Nunley Stadium.

Jeffery Simmons photos

Clayton Myers dominated the Project Graduation golf tournament Friday. Myers hit a hole-in-one on No. 14, won the longest putt challenge on No. 18 and was closest to the hole on No. 2.

Tourney raises $11K for Project Graduation

A soggy week subsided just in time for the Project Graduation golf tournament. Sixteen teams took to the course at McMinnville Country Club for the fundraiser, which was a huge boost for this year's seniors.

Organizers estimated nearly $11,000 was raised for the event, the most profitable tournament in event history.

The tournament was divided into three flights, with the championship flight won by the team of Jamey Sain, Whit Taylor, Steve Biles and Hunter Sain.

Brent Brock, Nick Stern, Brad Brock and Bunker Brock teamed to win the first flight, while Terry Smith, Matt Brown, Jackie Matheny and Jackie Matheny Jr. were the second-flight winners.

Clayton Myers provided the biggest highlight, using a 9-iron to sink a hole-in-one at No. 14. He measured the 157-yard shot perfectly for his first ace.

"It hit the green and took one bounce and went straight in," said Myers.

The former Pioneer standout went on the win the closest to the hole on No. 14, as well as the par-3, No. 2. Myers also sank the longest putt made on No. 18.

Other closest to the hole winners were Larry Wilmore (No. 2) and John McNulty (No. 7).

Pictures of the team winners are on 2B.

Hunter Sain tracks a tee shot during Friday's Project Graduation golf tournament.