

SIMMONS SAYS

**JEFFERY
SIMMONS**



Hope springs eternal

Contrary to any shadow spotting by groundhogs, spring will officially start for local sports teams Monday.

The first day of practice will signal the start of seasons for the WCHS tennis, baseball, softball, track and boys soccer teams. One of the busiest sports seasons will be filled with new faces and big expectations.

Here's a quick rundown of big storylines leading into the spring:

THE ARRIVAL OF TRICE POWERS – A lot has been made about the ousting of Adam Childs (and rightfully so). Despite what feelings people may have about getting rid of a coach who made the Pioneers a perennial district contender, none of that should color the perception of Powers.

Powers has the bloodline of coaching success. His father led Riverdale to multiple state tournaments, including a couple years when Trice was on the field for the Warriors.

Warren County won over 20 games last year, so the pressure to win will be immediate.

DOES MATT JACKSON'S CHAMPIONSHIP TOUCH TRANSLATE? – There's no question Jackson, the new WCHS soccer coach, knows how to win titles. He's won five straight CTC titles at the middle school.

But, with every sport it seems, replicating that success at the next level has been a challenge. Jackson isn't backing down from the expectation though. He came out when he was hired and made sure people knew his goal was a District 6-AAA title.

Nobody in the area knows the talent at hand better than Jackson, so it makes sense for him to be so confident, so early. Here's hoping by May, Jackson is celebrating his sixth straight championship.

DOES THE LADY PIONEER SOFTBALL TEAM HAVE AN ENCORE READY? – Coach Gooby Martin's crew blew away the field last season in District 6-AAA. The Lady Pioneers relished demolishing teams last year, punctuated by a 20-3 victory over Cookeville en route to 10-0 regular season in district. Taking out years of frustrations on opponents was extra special last spring, but it puts the target on the Lady Pioneers this year.

There's plenty of reason to believe they're more than ready for the challenge.

Ashton Whiles and Maddie Cantrell are as good as any pitching combination in the district. Hailey Wood and Hope Mullican anchor a stout defense. If that's not enough, supporting players from last year's runs are ready for bigger roles and a talented freshman class is waiting in the wing as well.

Spring will bring with it warmer weather, but for Warren County, the only W's that matter are wins.

Spoiler alert

Warriors stun Warren County

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

Before the Pioneers could start cleaning off a spot for a banner, or plan a parade for their impending district championship, they first had to beat White County Friday on the road. The only problem - somebody forgot to make sure the Warriors were advised of the plan.

White County walloped the Pioneers 63-45 Friday, avenging two narrow losses to Warren County from earlier in the season. The loss, coupled with Cookeville beating Stone Memorial, eliminated any possibility the Pioneers would claim their first district championship in over 30 years.

"We just didn't get it done as a team," said coach Chris Sullens. "We didn't battle. They whipped us, plain and simple."

White County (11-18, 2-6) led wire-to-wire, including holding a double-digit lead the entire second half. The Warriors were up 17-10 after the first quarter, with an Isaiah Grayson's late 3-pointer being the only thing keeping the Pioneers from trailing by double figures after eight minutes.

Warren County (21-6, 5-3) had only one bright spot - an 8-0 run in the second quarter. Irving Espinoza and Chance Hobbs both hit 3-pointers before Tyree Ladet threaded the needle to Caleb Newby for layup. The run cut the



Austin Hodges got playing time late in Friday's blowout loss at White County. The Pioneers fell 63-45, ending any chance of a regular season district title.

deficit to 21-18.

White County responded swiftly. The Warriors got a big boost going into the locker rooms when Dylan Reese sank a 3-pointer with seconds left for a 28-20 lead.

The Warriors opened the second half on a 14-2 run, most coming by

dumping the ball in to David Kinser. The Pioneers had no answers for the powerful post, who scored 11 points in the period and a game-high 17 points overall. Reese also had 17 points as the Warriors dominated.

Hobbs led the Pioneers with 15

points, while Grayson finished with 13. Espinoza added 9, followed by Newby and Austin Hodges with 3 each and Bunker Brock with 2.

A preview of the Pioneers' district tournament game will be in Friday's *Southern Standard*.

Lady Pioneers fall in regular season finale

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

A clean slate may be the perfect cure for the Lady Pioneers. They'll get it next weekend.

Warren County completed the regular season Friday with a 70-57 loss to the White County Warrior-ettes, its seventh straight loss.

Channeling her inner Bill Belichick, coach Shea Panter didn't waste long in getting focused on the next task.

"It's on to Cookeville," said Panter after her team was swept by the Warrior-ettes. "This game could've given us some momentum into the district tournament, but it ultimately didn't mean much. We know it is going to come down to beating Cookeville."

The loss spoiled a valiant effort from Tyra Wright, who scored 24 points in the loss. The junior fought off an ankle injury just before halftime to play almost the entire second half, when she scored 14 points - 11 in the fourth quarter alone.

White County (20-7, 5-3) got 20 points from Kendra Reeves and 17 from Gracie Dodgen.

The Warrior-ettes used a 15-2 run to end the third quarter, highlighted by a Dodgen corner 3-pointer right before the buzzer, to break the game open. White County had led by six before the run, but went into the fourth quarter ahead 52-33.

The Lady Pioneers trimmed the deficit to single digits twice in the fourth - first on a Megan Patch 3 with 3:48 and next on a Wright layup at the 2:57 mark that made it 60-52.

Warren County (11-17, 1-7) followed by missing point-blank layups on back-to-back possessions, while Kanden Reeves drove in the dagger with two 3-pointers in the span of 45 seconds.

Coach Panter immediately turned her sole focus to a win-or-go-home game against Cookeville Friday in Rhea County. The time for the game will not be decided until all district games are completed Tuesday, but the Lady Pioneers and Lady Cavaliers are already set for a third meeting. Both teams won on the road in the regular season, with the Lady Pioneers topping Cookeville 46-41 on Jan. 20 before falling at home 52-47 two weeks later.

A division winner won't be crowned until Tuesday when Stone Memorial, currently 6-1 in district, travels to face Rhea County (5-2). Stone Memorial won the previous meeting on its homecourt 80-60. If the Lady Panthers were to win, they would await the Warren County - Cookeville victor in the semifinals Saturday.

All district tournament games will be played at Rhea County High School in Dayton. A full preview will be in Friday's *Southern Standard*.



Tyra Wright blows past Megan Anderson for a layup during the fourth quarter of Friday's game. Wright scored 24 points in a 70-57 loss to White County.





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