

Whitehaven needs win, help tonight

By COLIN DONOHUE
Special to The Commercial Appeal

The Whitehaven Tigers are well aware of their precarious playoff position. The Tigers, winners of three games in a row, have done well just to put themselves on the brink heading into tonight's home game at 7 against Houston.

Because Whitehaven began the season in a lull, sleepwalking to a 2-4 record, the Tigers find themselves teetering on the postseason ledge, well aware that their season may expire in 48 Friday minutes.

In order to qualify for the playoffs, host Whitehaven (5-4, 3-3 Region 8-5A) must beat Houston (7-2, 5-1) and hope struggling Germantown has a meltdown against winless Kirby.

If those two scenarios play out, the Tigers would claim the region's fourth and final seed.

"The only thing I tell them is only worry about the things you can control," said

"We made some mistakes and should've come away with victories in those. Now we're playing at the level we expected at the beginning of the year. But we expected a lot more."

Whitehaven coach Rodney Saulsberry. "And the only thing we can control is us winning, so our focus is on our game with Houston."

And with wins the last three weeks, including a 20-6 victory against Hamilton last Friday, the Tigers at least have given themselves a chance to extend their season.

"We played very well in a couple of games we fell short in," Saulsberry said. "We made some mistakes and should've come away with victories in those. Now we're playing at the level we expected at the beginning of the year. But we expected a lot more."

Houston's future is more certain. The Mustangs know they'll be playing beyond this evening. They can finish no worse than third in the region.

"(The players) know what's going on, and they know what our chances are and what has to happen," said Houston coach Tim Haney. "But I want them to know that we are in the playoffs. Period."

A top seed is still within Houston's grasp. A win against Whitehaven, coupled with a Wooddale loss to Collierville, would give the Mustangs the No. 1 slot and a coveted first-round bye.

Houston placed itself in this advantageous position because of last week's 7-3 victory against previously unbeaten White Station.

"I thought that we would have a good chance of getting to the playoffs," Haney said. "We have to have some help (to get the first seed), but we're in the playoffs, and when you get there, anything can happen."



Thomas Busler/The Commercial Appeal

Grant Jessen of St. George's (right) has rushed for a team-leading 1,070 yards and 19 touchdowns; his 118.9 rushing yards per game rank eighth in Shelby-Metro.

Sizable talent

This year, some smaller schools have produced players with big potential

By JASON SMITH
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West Memphis Christian senior football star LaTony Sims doesn't worry much about college coaches overlooking him.

The way he sees it, if you're good, you're good, no matter how small the school you're playing for.

"Some (colleges) have called me and they're like, 'If you're good, we're going to find you no matter where you're at,'" said Sims, the Black Knights' 6-2, 195-pound quarterback and free safety.

"Everybody that says you have to go to a big (high) school to go to a big college, it's not true. Colleges are looking for pure talent, and that's what they see with me."

Despite playing for a tiny high school that's produced a grand total of about 650 graduates since 1977, Sims' glaring production this season in the Mississippi Private School Association has not gone totally unnoticed.

How could it? In eight games this season, Sims has rushed for more than 1,200 yards, averaging around 9 per carry. He's also passed for 350 yards since being moved from running back to quarterback midway through the season.

Three weeks ago, Sims accounted for 355 total yards and four touchdowns in the Black Knights' 32-8 victory over Marvell. A week later against Carroll Academy, he rushed for 221 yards and three scores and passed for four touchdowns.

"I don't play for stats," Sims said. "I'm looking to win. I'm trying to help this team get in the playoffs because it's been (four) years since we made it."

ON THE WEB

To see the TSSAA prep football playoff possibilities go to commercialappeal.com/mca/preps



Mindy Bush/Special to The Commercial Appeal

Fayette Academy running back Joe Wentworth is "having a great year; better than we ever dreamed," his coach, Wes Kennedy, said.

West Memphis Christian School coach T.J. Pugh said he's been most impressed with the way Sims has adjusted to playing quarterback.

"Against Carroll, he checked for the first time on his own. ... He had the presence to do that," Pugh said. "That's not a big thing. You go, 'Hey. Everybody should be able to do that.'"

but he can do some different things. He's got good hands. He could play the slot easily for somebody."

With situations much like Sims' St. George's junior running back Grant Jessen and Fayette Academy senior running back Joe Wentworth are having big years for not-so-large schools.

Jessen, a 6-0, 190-pound tailback, has rushed for a team-leading 1,070 yards and 19 touchdowns. His 118.9 rushing yards per game rank eighth in Shelby-Metro.

"We've all gotten a year older, and many of us have been in the weight room working," Jessen said. "I played the same position last year, but I've just had a few more carries and the offensive line's doing a lot better."

"I really didn't have any personal goals coming into this year. I just wanted us to play well."

Wentworth, a 5-10, 180-pound receiver turned running back this season, ranks sixth in the area in rushing yards per game (120.6), having racked up over 1,080 yards and 12 touchdowns on the ground in nine games this season despite playing in a two-back system.

"He's having a great year; better than we ever dreamed," Fayette Academy coach Wes Kennedy said. "He went to several camps and got himself better over the summer and he's been killing himself in the weight room for the last couple of years."

"I tell you, he's rushed for over 1,000, but it could be a lot more if I wanted it to be because I like (playing) two backs. But he understands that because he's a team guy."

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TODAY'S GAMES

No. 1 Ridgeway (9-0, 6-0 in Region 7-5A) vs. Overton (2-7, 2-4) at Fairgrounds

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: The Roadrunners have already locked up the No. 1 seed from Region 7-5A and appear headed for a first-round playoff match-up with Germantown. With a win tonight, Ridgeway would run its region record to a perfect 14-0 since jumping to Class 5A from 4A last year. Overton, which halted a four-game losing streak last Friday with its region win over Craigmont, lost, 45-6, in last year's regular-season finale against Ridgeway. The Wolverines enter this one allowing 310.2 total yards and 27 points per game.

No. 2 ECS (9-0, 4-0 in Division 2-AA) at Knoxville Webb (6-2, 2-2)

Time: 6:30 p.m. CDT
Storylines: Coming off its first-ever win over Christian Brothers last Friday, ECS has nothing to lose in this one except its undefeated status, having already earned the No. 1 seed in Division 2-AA. This game should be a preview of the Eagles' first-round playoff game on Nov. 10 since Knoxville Webb stands to be the No. 4 seed if Harding gets by winless Franklin Battle Ground Academy tonight. ECS, which entered tonight's game with the area's third-ranked offense (358 total yards per game), has outscored opponents, 273-103, this season.

No. 3 Olive Branch (8-1, 4-1 in MHSAA Region 1-5A) at Columbus (2-5, 1-3)

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: It took three quarters for the Conquistadors to warm up last Friday, but they finally did in a 27-13 region win over a solid Starkville ball club, scoring 14 fourth-quarter points to break what had been a 13-13 tie after three. Things don't figure to be as close tonight against a Columbus team that has given up 26.4 points per game this season.

Expect Olive Branch to roll.

Northside (0-8, 0-4 in Region 8-4A) at No. 4 Melrose (8-1, 4-0)

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: This won't be a contest, as Melrose has already earned the No. 1 seed from Region 8-4A and Northside enters this one having dropped 19 straight games going back to the 2004 season. Melrose has won eight straight since its season-opening loss to Memphis University School with an offense averaging just 246.7 yards per game. The Golden Wildcat defense, however, has been its usual, stand-out self, allowing opponents just 144.1 yards per game.

No. 6 Wooddale (8-1, 5-1 in Region 8-5A) at Collierville (5-4, 2-4)

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: Wooddale can't afford to slip up here against a Collierville team that knocked the Cardinals off, 17-13, in their 2005 regular-season finale. Wooddale can still earn Region 8-5A's top seed and home-field advantage in the playoffs with a win and a White Station loss to Hamilton (Thursday night). However, with the latter not likely to happen, the Cardinals can lock themselves in the No. 2 spot with a win tonight. If Wooddale loses and White Station and Houston both win, Wooddale would finish No. 3, and then face No. 2-seed Bolton in the first round of the playoffs next week.

No. 8 CBHS (6-3, 3-1 in Division 2-AAA) at Brentwood Academy (8-1, 3-1)

Time: 7:30 p.m.
Storylines: While last week's 31-28 home loss to ECS was a tough pill to swallow for the Purple Wave, it didn't mean anything in terms of the division standings. This one does, as CBHS can earn Division 2-AAA's No. 2 seed with a victory tonight over Brentwood Academy, which has won four straight since a Week 4 loss to top-seeded Chattanooga

Expect Purple Wave freshman RB Eric Watson (810 rushing yards, 11 TDs) to suit up tonight after sitting out last week's loss with what the CBHS coaching staff described as torn cartilage in his chest.

Bartlett (1-8, 1-5 in Region 7-5A) at No. 9 Bolton (6-3, 5-1)

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: Bartlett knocked off Central, 27-19, last week to halt a nine-game losing streak dating back to last season. The hero was freshman RB Keenan Madden (6-1, 180), who rushed for 223 yards and a touchdown on 30 carries and had a 42-yard punt return for a touchdown in the second quarter. Bolton has won five consecutive games since a 14-0 Week 4 loss to Ridgeway, and last week secured the No. 2 seed in Region 7-5A with its 14-6 win at Millington.

No. 10 West Memphis (6-2, 4-1 in Ark. Class 6A East) at Jacksonville-Ark. (6-2, 4-1)

Time: 7:30 p.m.
Storylines: West Memphis was shocked, 17-7, last week by Mountain Home, which rolled up a whopping 340 rushing yards against the Blue Devils. Tonight the Blue Devils take on a Jacksonville squad that needed overtime last week to beat Forrest City (2-6). Daniel Hubbard's 10-yard TD run in overtime gave Jacksonville the 23-20 conference win. With both teams tied atop the conference standings, tonight's game will be for first place with West Memphis still to play Forrest City next week and Jacksonville to finish out its regular season at Marion.

No. 11 Covington (7-2, 3-2 Region 7-3A) at Dyer County (4-5, 1-4)

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: The Chargers are locked into the No. 3 seed in Region 7-3A following their 35-6 home loss to region leader Crockett County last week in which Covington gave up 245 passing yards. The Chargers don't figure

to be tested as much through the air tonight against Dyer County, which snapped a five-game losing streak last week with a 48-13 win over a Class 1A Halls team that's tasted victory just once this season.

No. 12 Germantown (5-4 (3-3 Region 8-5A) at Kirby (0-9, 0-6)

Time: 7 p.m.
Storylines: Barring a colossal upset here, Germantown will earn the fourth and final playoff spot in Region 8-5A and a first-round match-up with top-ranked Ridgeway. The Red Devils have dropped three straight coming in to White Station, Houston and Wooddale. Kirby, on the other hand, has lost 20 straight games going back to 2004 and has been shut out on five occasions this season.

Other games

Region 7-5A
Craigmont (3-6) at Cordova (3-6); Central (2-7) at Millington (6-3)
Region 7-4A
Brighton (5-4) at Munford (6-3)
Region 8-4A
Kingsbury (1-8) vs. Fairley (7-2) at Freeman; East (5-4) at Raleigh-Egypt (2-7)
Region 6-3A
Chester Co. (0-9) at Fayette-Ware (5-4)
Region 8-3A
Frayser (2-6) vs. Trezevant (5-4) at Greenhill
Region 8-2A
South Side (3-6) vs. Carver (4-5) at BTW; Westwood (2-7) at Oakhaven (1-8)
Region 8-1A
Trinity Christian (8-1) at Fayette Aca. (8-1); Manassas (2-7) at Halls (1-8)
Division 2
Bishop Byrne (5-3) at St. Andrew's (1-8); Pope John Paul II (6-3) at St. Benedict (3-6); Harding (7-2) at BGA (0-9); Briarcrest (2-7) at MUS (4-5); Tipton-Rosemark Aca. (1-7) at SBEC (5-3); First Assembly (4-5) at Davidson Aca. (8-1)
Arkansas 6A East
Marion (5-3) at Jonesboro-Ark. (5-3)
Mississippi
Horn Lake (1-7) at Tupelo (5-3); Grenada (6-3) at Southaven (3-6); Cleveland (4-5) at Hernando (5-4); New Albany (4-5) at DeSoto Central (2-7); North Panola (1-7) at Senatobia (5-4)
Non-league
Ensworth (6-2) at Arlington (6-2); WMC (4-4) at Bayou Aca. (5-4)

SHELBY-METRO STANDINGS

(Through Friday's games)

STANDINGS

REGION 7-5A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-Ridgeway	6	0	9
x-Bolton	5	1	6
x-Millington	4	2	6
x-Cordova	3	3	6
Central	2	4	2
Overton	2	4	2
Craigmont	1	5	3
Bartlett	1	5	1
*Arlington	0	0	6

REGION 8-5A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-White Station	5	1	8
x-Wooddale	5	1	7
x-Houston	5	1	7
Germantown	3	3	5
Whitehaven	3	3	5
Collierville	2	5	2
Hamilton	1	5	2
Kirby	0	6	0

REGION 8-4A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-Melrose	4	0	8
x-Fairley	3	1	7
East	3	2	5
Raleigh-Egypt	2	2	2
Kingsbury	1	3	1
Northside	0	4	0

REGION 8-3A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-Sheffield	3	0	6
x-Trezevant	2	1	5
x-Mitchell	2	2	7
x-Frayser	1	2	6
Hillcrest	0	3	1

REGION 8-2A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-Washington	6	0	9
x-Carver	4	1	4
South Side	3	2	3
Westwood	2	3	2
Treadwell	2	3	2
Oakhaven	1	4	1
Westside	0	5	1

DIVISION 2-AAA		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-Chatt. McCallie	4	0	8
x-Brentwood Aca.	3	1	8
x-CBHS	3	1	6
x-Chatt. Baylor	2	2	7
x-Father Ryan	2	2	5
MUS	1	3	4
Nashville MBA	1	3	4
Briarcrest	0	4	2

DIVISION 2-AA		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-ECS	4	0	9
x-Pope John Paul	3	1	6
x-Harding	2	2	7
x-Knox. Webb	2	2	6
St. Benedict	1	3	3
Franklin BGA	0	4	0

DIVISION 2-A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
x-Davidson Aca.	6	0	8
x-St. George's	6	0	8
x-Bishop Byrne	4	2	5
x-SBEC	4	2	5
x-Ross. Christian	3	4	4
FACS	3	4	4
Tipton-Rosemark	1	5	1
David Brainerd	1	5	1
St. Andrew's	0	5	1

MHSAA REGION 1-5A		Region	Overall
Team	W	L	W
South Panola	5	0	9
Olive Branch	4	1	8
Tupelo	4	1	5
Starkville	3	2	5
Grenada	2	3	6
Columbus	2	3	6
Southaven	0	5	3
Horn Lake	0	5	1

OTHERS

Team	W	L
x-Fayette Academy	8	1
x-Covington	7	2
West Memphis	6	3
x-Munford	6	3
Marion	5	3
Brighton	5	4
Fayette-Ware	5	4
Hernando	5	4
Senatobia	5	4
West Memphis Christian	4	4
DeSoto Central	2	7
Manassas	2	7

*not eligible for playoffs; x—clinched a spot in the TSSAA state playoffs.

STAT LEADERS

RUSHING			
Name	Att.	Yds.	YPG TD
Crawford, Ridge.	108	1110	185.0 13
Sims, WMC	119	1164	145.5 16
Marks, Whitthven	178	1189	132.1 7
Simpson, Mill.	139	1150	127.8 5
Hunter, Kingsbury	166	1138	126.4 10
Wentworth, F.A.	137	1085	120.6 12
Field, Mitchell	111	1080	120.0 9
Jessen, SGIS	114	1070	118.9 19
Watson, CBHS	122	810	115.7 11
Jones, BTW	135	992	110.2 9

PASSING			
Name	C	A	Yds. YPG TD
Link, W. Station	91	167	1640 205.0 20
Currie, ECS	105	200	1841 204.6 14
Perry, W'dale	89	168	1731 192.3 24
Washington, F-W	55	99	1189 169.9 12
Skinner, CBHS	90	173	1522 169.1 13
Smith, O.B.	74	150	1401 155.7 16
Smith, Wstwood	72	183	1217 135.2 8
Toney, Melrose	87	158	1167 129.7 13
Mayfield, Hrding	57	134	904 129.1 7
Mize, Rossville	67	143	1011 126.4 10

RECEIVING			
Name	Rec.	Yds.	YPG TD
Davis, Wooddale	31	804	89.3 12
Rodgers, W. Sta.	37	773	85.9 8
Jenkins, ECS	30	629	69.9 7
Martinez, CBHS	31	600	66.7 6
Armstrong, Wood.			