GREATER MEMPHIS

PREP INSIDER

No easy games in 15-AAA

JASON SMITH
On Preps

SURE, ERIC HARRIS KNEW life in District 15-AAA would be tough.

After all, Wooddale's first-year boys basketball coach has been around Memphis hoops for a while, having once been a prominent figure in local AAU circles before going on to coach at Division 2 Evangelical Christian School and District 13-AAA member Brighton.

"I knew 15-AAA was a tough district, but I had no clue just how tough it was," said Harris, whose Cardinals are tied for third in the district despite a 15-4 overall record. "Everybody said, 'It's gonna be hard winning games on the road,' and they were not kidding.

"It's so even. Even the teams toward the bottom that aren't doing as well, you'd better play well against them or you'll lose."

Case in point: Wooddale lost last Friday at Kirby; Kirby lost to district leader Ridgeway on Tuesday; Ridgeway, the only local team this season to beat nationally ranked Raleigh-Egypt, fell at home two weeks ago to White Station, which has losses this season to both Overton (at home) and Kirby (on the road).

So just who is the team to beat this season in 15-AAA, a district that's provided Tennessee with four of its last five boys Class AAA state champions? According to Harris, it's anybody's guess.

"Ridgeway has sort of probably been the traditional power and they've got a lot of experience, but the Kirbys and Overtons have some really great players as well," Harris said.

"I have to credit my seniors, (guards) Alvin Thomas and Kelvin Lester, and Michael Jamison, a junior, for helping me out with personnel on those other teams. Those are the only three guys that had any varsity experience from last year's team, and they've been so good at leading these guys and talking them through situations. They're the ones that have really helped me with the transition."

Ridgeway (17-5, 9-1) currently has the edge in the District 15-AAA standings with a one-game lead over White Station (16-7, 8-2), though the Roadrunners have remaining games at White Station (Feb. 9) and against Wooddale (Feb. 13) at home.

White Station plays at Wooddale on Friday, while Kirby (14-7, 7-3), which is tied for third in the district, travels to Overton (14-9, 5-5).

Thompson's back

Bartlett senior multisport standout Nikki Thompson returned to the basketball court Tuesday night for the first time since suffering a concussion in a Jan. 19 loss to Millington.

"She's doing OK," Bartlett girls coach Lynn Whitfield said Wednesday of District 14-AAA's fourth-leading scorer. "She went to the neurologist Tuesday and he gave her a release, so I let her play some (Tuesday) night (at Bolton).

"She was a little rusty, but she seems to be doing OK, and right now her status is looking good. She's got her memory back and mentally, she's definitely back to normal because she's talking a lot. Nikki's a pretty good talker."

Thompson is averaging 12.8 points this season for a Bartlett squad that's now 20-2 following its 50-36 win at Bolton on Tuesday.

Briefly

The Division 2 Boys Small School basketball tournament gets under way next Wednesday at St. George's and wraps up Feb. 10 with the 12:30 p.m. title game. First Assembly Christian School (16-3, 11-1 in Division 2 Small) appears to be the favorite for the tourney's No. 1 seed following its 75-65 win over St. George's last Friday. "We're playing well right now," FACS coach **J. Harold Cagle** said Wednesday. "(Senior) **Vincent Barnes** has been consistent for us all year, and now (senior guard) **Josh Booker** is back healthy and playing well." ... The Minnesota State High School League on Tuesday suspended high school wrestling in the state for eight days in hopes of controlling a serious outbreak of an infectious skin disease known as herpes gladiatorum. While not fatal, the disease, spread from direct skin-to-skin contact, becomes a permanent condition once it's contracted. If left untreated, it can lead to more serious consequences.

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Photographs by Mark Weber/The Commercial Appeal

In order to play their sport of choice, players like Larry Porter of CBHS have to be more dedicated than other athletes.

Cool customers

High school hockey players take sacrifices in stride

By Colin Donohue
Special to The Commercial Appeal

Trey Morris, a goaltender for the Germantown team, stops a Collierville shot in a recent game. Morris, whose previous sport of choice was baseball, soon left the diamond after discovering hockey.

No way would Brandon Parsons conform. Forget for a moment that the precocious Parsons, just a kid at the time, couldn't grasp the concept of conformity. But still, he remained steadfastly defiant: He had observed his schoolmates and his neighbors engage in the same pre- and postschool ritual: ice hockey, and he wanted no part of it.

But why not? The sport was his country's national pastime. Parsons is from Delta, British Columbia, in Canada, where, quite frankly, hockey is holy.

"When I was younger, when all my friends started playing, I didn't want to play," he said. "But when I was 7 or 8, I figured out I wanted to try it, and so I've played it ever since."

His aversion to hockey died quickly, and now, 10 years later, Parsons, a Memphis resident and Germantown High senior, stands in the bowels of the DeSoto Civic Center on a Friday evening discussing his fondness for hockey as he awaits the opening faceoff against Collierville High School.

"In my opinion, it's the best sport there is," he said. "The physicality, the speed, it's a good team sport."

And while hockey hasn't exactly boomed in the Memphis and Mid-South area, there are several other kids — some from the area and some transplanted from Canada and the Northeast and other outposts known for their hockey prowess — who share Parsons' affection for the game.

"I honestly think it's the sport that takes the most skill," said Parker Taylor, a junior center for North Mississippi High School and native of Dallas. "If you have natural athletic ability, anybody can jump and run, but in hockey, you have to skate, pass, shoot, go backwards."

"I love hockey," said Trey Morris, a Cordova senior, who plays goalie for the Germantown team. "I quit baseball to play hockey. Ever since I started playing hockey, baseball was just too slow for me."

But their adoration for the sport is always dampened by their struggles simply to play it. Memphis will never be confused with a hockey hotbed, but the game's Halcyon days in Bluff City have long since passed.

The core group of high school hockey nuts was introduced to the sport through roller hockey or through Memphis RiverKings games, while the team still played in Memphis. But three years ago, when the Mall of Memphis and the Mid-South Coliseum closed, hockey players lost their only sheets of ice.

"It's more difficult now (to find players) because there are no ice surfaces in Memphis city proper," said Germantown head coach Jim Parsons. "It was easier for fans, easier for players to get from home and school to the coliseum than it is to get (to the DeSoto Civic Center)."

The closest rink is, in fact, the DeSoto Civic Center, which is about 45 minutes away for some of the players.

The five-team league, comprising Germantown, Collierville, Christian Brothers, Houston and North Mississippi, share the ice with the RiverKings, with ice skating competitions and with boat shows.

The teams only get one hour of practice a week, but more startling is that players have to travel to Decatur, Ala. — about a three-hour trip — for tryouts.

"There's probably a lot of kids that would play," said Collierville coach Greg Evans, whose team won the Memphis Cup 7-3 over Houston on Thursday night.. "But we say, 'Hey, tryouts are three hours away.'

'What, I'll play soccer or something.' "

"Like any sport," said CBHS coach Denis DiAngelo, "a team needs to have practice time, not just game time. Unfortunately, we're not able to provide them with an adequate amount of time to really continue to develop their skills beyond what can happen in a recreation league."

And there's the rub for kids like Parsons and Morris, who have exhibited more dedication to a high school sport than most prep athletes ever do. They make the trips to Southaven and the DeSoto Civic Center. They pay for their equipment and jerseys. They travel into the heart of Alabama just to attempt to make a hockey team.

And for what? Their hockey development is stunted because they never have a chance to hone their craft.

"Not to knock it down here, but moving down here puts me far behind," Brandon Parsons said. "I'm not going to be able to play competitively."

North Mississippi freshman defender Jared Fiorito has NHL aspirations, but such a dream will likely not materialize unless he can play year round and practice at least four times a week.

There's an abundance of raw hockey talent in Memphis, talent waiting to be sculpted and molded. But more often than not, that gift remains unearthed and uncultivated.

"I honestly think if they were to put another rink in an athletic store, a hockey shop, hockey would take off," said North Mississippi coach Bryan Howley said. "It's hard to get into it when, if you want to buy a hockey stick, you have to go online to have it shipped to you."

SHELBY-METRO BASKETBALL STANDINGS

BOYS STANDINGS
Through Tuesday's games

DISTRICT 14-AAA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Raleigh-Egypt	6	0	19	3
Bolton	6	2	17	5
Craigmont	5	2	17	6
Bartlett	4	4	17	7
Cordova	4	4	10	12
Millington	1	6	9	12
Arlington	0	8	6	17

DISTRICT 15-AAA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Ridgeway	9	1	17	5
White Station	8	2	17	7
Wooddale	7	3	15	4
Kirby	7	3	14	7
Overton	5	5	14	9
Houston	2	8	9	15
Collierville	1	9	7	17
Germantown	1	9	6	18

DISTRICT 16-AAA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Central	8	0	17	3
Fairley	7	1	14	4
Hamilton	4	4	13	8
Whitehaven	4	4	12	9
East	3	5	9	9
Melrose	3	5	9	17
Kingsbury	3	5	4	13
Northside	0	8	5	16

DISTRICT 15-AA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Washington	6	0	20	1
Treadwell	3	2	7	12
Carver	3	3	14	9
Trezevant	2	4	8	16
Frayser	0	5	6	12

DISTRICT 16-AA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Sheffield	6	1	15	7
Mitchell	6	1	15	11
Hillcrest	3	4	9	12
Westwood	3	4	6	9
South Side	2	5	4	17
Oakhaven	1	6	5	17

DISTRICT 16-A

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Middleton	5	1	17	10
Manassas	5	2	15	9
Westside	3	3	15	7
Middle College	2	4	6	16
Fayette Academy	1	6	5	16

DIVISION 2 LARGE

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Briarcrest	5	2	23	5
CBHS	5	2	20	6
ECS	5	2	8	11
MUS	3	4	17	7
St. Benedict	2	5	13	9
Harding	1	6	13	13

DIVISION 2 SMALL

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
First Assembly	11	1	18	3
St. George's	12	2	17	4
Bishop Byrne	10	4	12	6
SBEC	7	5	14	9
Lausanne	6	7	6	17
Tipton-Rosemark	4	9	8	15
Rossville	2	11	3	19
Catholic	0	13	0	19

OTHERS

Team	W	L
Olive Branch	25	0
West Memphis Christian	26	3
Horn Lake	17	6
Hernando	17	8
Covington	15	8
Fayette-Ware	14	8
Central Baptist	15	10
Brighton	12	8
Desoto Central	13	15
MHEA	9	15
Munford	8	15
Southaven	7	17
MASE	0	6

BOYS SCORING LEADERS

	G	Pts.	Avg.
Smith, Treadwell	19	565	29.7
Culpepper, Sheffield	21	578	27.5
Wilkerson, Catholic	19	449	23.6
White, Craigmont	23	518	22.5
Williams, St. George's	20	445	22.3
Kerusch, Overton	23	502	21.8
Brereton, Bartlett	23	495	21.5
Barnes, FACS	20	417	20.8
Ware, BTW	21	414	19.7
Clayton, Central	20	393	19.6
McDonald, BCS	28	544	19.4

GIRLS STANDINGS
Through Tuesday's games

DISTRICT 14-AAA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Bartlett	7	1	20	2
Cordova	7	1	17	5
Millington	6	1	21	3
Craigmont	3	4	9	12
Bolton	2	6	9	15
Arlington	1	7	2	15
Raleigh-Egypt	0	6	1	12

DISTRICT 15-AAA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Houston	10	0	19	7
White Station	9	1	20	4
Ridgeway	7	3	17	8
Wooddale	6	4	13	6
Overton	4	6	8	12
Germantown	3	7	8	15
Kirby	1	9	5	17
Collierville	0	10	3	21

DISTRICT 16-AAA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
East	8	0	18	1
Northside	6	2	17	2
Central	6	2	17	5
Melrose	4	4	12	12
Whitehaven	3	5	11	9
Fairley	3	5	8	12
Hamilton	2	6	4	12
Kingsbury	0	8	1	15

DISTRICT 15-AA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Washington	6	0	22	5
Treadwell	3	2	13	8
Carver	3	3	10	11
Frayser	1	4	4	12
Trezevant	1	5	4	17

DISTRICT 16-AA

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Mitchell	7	0	17	5
Sheffield	5	2	9	10
Oakhaven	5	2	7	13
Hillcrest	3	4	9	13
Westwood	1	6	1	12
South Side	0	7	3	16

DISTRICT 16-A

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Middleton	6	0	16	7
Manassas	4	3	19	8
Fayette Academy	4	3	12	12
Middle College	2	4	7	13
Westside	0	6	7	13

DIVISION 2 LARGE

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Briarcrest	8	0	20	4
ECS	7	1	14	9
St. Agnes	4	4	10	9
Harding	4	4	5	17
St. Benedict	3	5	11	11
Hutchison	1	7	13	11
St. Mary's	0	6	5	12

DIVISION 2 SMALL

Team	District W	District L	Overall W	Overall L
Lausanne	15	0	24	3
SBEC	13	1	21	2
Bishop Byrne	10	5	13	10
St. George's	10	6	15	9
IC	7	8	13	10
Rossville	6	9	8	16
Tipton-Rosemark	3	12	3	20
First Assembly	2	12	3	20
Catholic	1	14	1	16

OTHERS

Team	W	L
West Memphis	18	3
Olive Branch	22	4
Central Baptist	16	5
Covington	13	7
West Memphis Christian	15	9
Fayette-Ware	11	7
Southaven	14	10
Horn Lake	11	12
Brighton	8	10
Munford	7	17
Hernando	5	20
Desoto Central	3	22
MASE	0	7

GIRLS SCORING LEADERS

	G	Pts.	Avg.
Jackson, Oakhaven	14	348	24.9
Holmes, Mitchell	23	567	24.7
Riley, Hillcrest	21	480	22.9
James, Bartlett	22	466	21.2
Jones, Westside	20	423	21.2
Laws, Northside	18	361	20.1
Gore, Kirby	13	239	18.4
Foster, Wooddale	19	342	18.0
Hart, Treadwell	12	212	17.7
K. Nelson, Cordova	16	271	16.9

For standings, schedules and scores, go to preps.commercialappeal.com/basketball

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK

BOYS

■ **WILLIAM GREEN, Fairley basketball:** A 6-5 senior forward, Green poured in a game-high 31 points in Fairley's 60-57 District 16-AAA victory at Hamilton on Tuesday, helping the No. 12-ranked Bulldogs improve to 7-1 in district play. Last Friday, Green scored 25 in an 82-72 victory over Northside.

GIRLS

■ **AMY MCNEAR, East basketball:** A 5-9 senior guard and Western Kentucky signee, McNear scored a game-high 21 points, grabbed six rebounds and had three steals and two blocked shots in the No. 2-ranked Lady Mustangs' 68-65 District 16-AAA victory over visiting Central on Tuesday. Against Melrose last Friday, McNear was one of four East players to finish in double figures with 13.

Nominations: Coaches can nominate candidates for Athlete of the Week by calling 529-2879 or e-mailing sports@commercialappeal.com. The deadline is noon Wednesday.

BASKETBALL DANDY DOZENS

(through Tuesday's games)

BOYS

	Rec	Last rank
1. RALEIGH-EGYPT	19-3	1
2. OLIVE BRANCH	25-0	2
3. WASHINGTON	20-1	3
4. CENTRAL	17-3	4
5. CRAIGMONT	17-6	5
6. RIDGEWAY	17-5	6
7. WHITE STATION	16-7	10
8. CBHS	20-6	11
9. WOODDALE	15-4	7
10. BRIARCREST	23-5	8
11. BOLTON	17-5	9
12. FAIRLEY	14-4	NR

GIRLS

	Rec	Last rank
1. BRIARCREST	20-4	1
2. EAST	18-1	2
3. LAUSANNE	24-3	3
4. BARTLETT	20-2	5
5. CENTRAL	17-5	4
6. NORTHSIDE	17-2	6
7. WASHINGTON	22-5	7
8. WEST MEMPHIS	18-3	8
9. MILLINGTON	21-3	9
10. HOUSTON	19-7	10
11. WHITE STATION	20-4	11
12. CORDOVA	17-5	12

UPCOMING EVENTS

TODAY

Girls/boys basketball: 6/7:30 p.m. — Melrose at Central, East at Kingsbury, Whitehaven at Fairley, Northside at Hamilton.

Girls basketball: 6 p.m. — St. Agnes at Fayette Academy, St. Mary's at Brighton, Bishop Byrne at IC.

FRIDAY

Girls/boys basketball: 6/7:30 p.m. — SBEC at Lausanne, Whitehaven at Central, East at Northside, Fairley at Melrose, Kingsbury at Hamilton, Germantown at Collierville, Ridgeway at Houston, Kirby at Overton, White Station at Wooddale, Raleigh-Egypt at Bartlett, Millington at Bolton, Craigmont at Cordova, Westwood at Hillcrest, Mitchell at South Side, Oakhaven at Sheffield, Carver at Frayser, Washington at Treadwell, Manassas at Middle College, Westside at Middleton, Briarcrest at Harding, Catholic at Rossville, Tipton-Rosemark at FACS, St. George's at Knoxville Webb.

Girls basketball: 4 p.m. — St. Benedict at St. Agnes. 6 p.m. — Hutchison at ECS.

Boys basketball: 7:30 p.m. — MUS at ECS, St. Benedict at CBHS.

SATURDAY

Girls/boys basketball: 6/7:30 p.m. — Oakhaven at White Station, Fayette Academy at Tipton-Rosemark, St. Benedict at Bishop Byrne.

MONDAY

Girls/boys basketball: 6/7:30 p.m. — Brighton at Arlington, FACS at SBEC, Lausanne at West Memphis Christian.

Girls basketball: 6 p.m. — Fayette Academy at St. Mary's.

TUESDAY

Girls/boys basketball: 6/7:30 p.m. — Fairley at East, Hamilton at Central, Kingsbury at Whitehaven, Northside at Melrose, Wooddale at Collierville, Germantown at Ridgeway, Houston at Overton, Kirby at White Station, Millington at Arlington, Bartlett at Craigmont, Cordova at Raleigh-Egypt, Sheffield at Hillcrest, Mitchell at Oakhaven, Westwood at South Side, Treadwell at Carver, Frayser at Trezevant, Westside at Fayette Academy, MASE at Manassas, Middleton at Middle College, Harding at St. Benedict.

Boys basketball: 7:30 p.m. — Briarcrest at MUS, CBHS at ECS,
Girls basketball: 6 p.m. — St. Agnes at ECS, Briarcrest at Hutchison.

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