



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2021

[Board of Control selects Chattanooga as BlueCross Bowl host for next two years](#)

The Board voted to select Chattanooga as the host for the football championships in 2021 and 2022. The games will be played at Finley Stadium. The Board also voted to change the postseason wrestling format beginning in 2022.

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[2021 Mr. and Miss Basketball Award Winners Announced](#)

The winner of each respective award in TSSAA's five basketball classifications was announced at the conclusion of each championship game.

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[TSSAA Hall of Fame ceremony date set](#)

The Class of 2020 will be inducted on Saturday, July 17, 2021 at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The induction ceremony is set to begin at 11:00 a.m. CST.

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[Cleveland wrestling official honored for distinguished service](#)

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[Girls' teams return to state basketball tournament after 2020 disruption](#)

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Call for Submissions

We want to include your thoughts in the monthly TSSAA Newsletter! Do you have 50-500 words to share on the topic of **overwork & fatigue in sports**? We welcome submissions from principals, athletic administrators, coaches and students! Consider sharing your thoughts, essays or even poems for an upcoming issue. Please send submissions in Microsoft Word format to mgillespie@tssaa.org.

TSSAA continues its support of the **National SAT/ACT Prep Project** through the NFHS and eKnowledge which allows any Tennessee student to receive a 95% discount on SAT or ACT prep courses. This is a community-service, non-profit project and all student fees are reinvested to improve the program and reach more families. The project has more than 45,000 five-star reviews and has already assisted nearly 300,000 families. Learn more at <https://eknowledge.com/TSSAA>.



General News

Meeting Agendas/Minutes News

Board of Control selects Chattanooga as BlueCross Bowl host for next two years

Board and Council meet on same day in Murfreesboro

March 16, 2021

The TSSAA Board of Control and Legislative Council both conducted meetings at Siegel High School in Murfreesboro on Tuesday.

The most notable item of interest on the Board agenda was the site selection for the BlueCross Bowl football championships. Both Cookeville and Chattanooga submitted bids to host the three-day event. The Board voted to select Chattanooga as the host for 2021 and 2022. The games will be played at Finley Stadium.

Financial reports for all sport championships and bowling were approved by the Board.

The Board also voted to change the postseason wrestling format beginning in 2022. The individual state tournament will now be 16-person brackets for each classification (Division I Class A, Division I Class AA, and Girls). Dual meet championship brackets will have eight teams in Class A and Class AA. Girls dual meet championship brackets will have four teams. An additional sectional round has been added to the postseason for the individual tournaments and dual meet tournaments. Division II will be determined at a later date.

Four schools were approved for membership in the association. Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts and Robertson County Innovation Academy were both approved for membership in the association for the first time. Jackson Central Merry, which is re-opening for the 2021-22 school year after being closed for five years, and Collegiate School of Memphis were both approved to rejoin the association.

A big change for member schools for the summer was passed, as modifications to the COVID-19 protocols were approved that will allow schools to participate in team camps and 7-on-7 in football, as long as they follow the TSSAA calendar and the COVID-19 protocols that are in place.

The Legislative Council made a change to the Home School Rule by removing the requirement for families to notify the Director of Schools/Head of School of their intent to participate as a homeschool student by August 1. The deadline for families to notify the Principal of the school remains. The Council also added sectional wrestling to the percentage share of gross proceeds submitted to the state office for the postseason.

The minutes for both the Board of Control and Legislative Council meetings are linked below.

Documents

[Board of Control Minutes \(March 16, 2021\) \(PDF\)](#)



Sports News

General News

2021 Mr. and Miss Basketball Award Winners Announced

TSSAA honors the top girls and boys basketball players in five classifications

March 20, 2021

The top girls and boys basketball players in five classifications of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association were honored by being named the winners of the 2021 Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards. The winner of each respective award was announced at the conclusion of the championship game for each classification.

A statewide committee of sportswriters selected the winners based on performance during the 2020-2021 regular season. Academics and character were also taken into consideration. High school head basketball coaches and members of the media nominated the finalists.

"This is such an outstanding honor for all 30 of the young men and women recognized this evening at the Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards," said Bernard Childress, Executive Director of the TSSAA. "They were here not only due to their athletic ability that they displayed on the court throughout the season, but just as much for their outstanding character and academic achievements."

This was the 37th year that the Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards have been presented to Tennessee's best high school basketball players. American General was the sponsor of the event since the inception of the awards in 1985 until 2001. The Memphis Grizzlies were sponsors of the awards from 2002-2004. From 2005-2015 the Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards were presented at the conclusion of each respective championship game as part of the post-game trophy ceremony.

2021 MR. BASKETBALL WINNERS

Division I Class A

Grant Strong, Clay County High School

Division I Class AA

Toris Woods, Bolivar Central High School

Division I Class AAA

Mason Miller, Houston High School

Division II Class A

Kameron Jones, Evangelical Christian School

Division II Class AA

B. J. Edwards, Knoxville Catholic High School

2021 MISS BASKETBALL WINNERS

Division I Class A

Karly Weathers, Loretto High School

Division I Class AA

Reagan Hurst, Upperman High School

Division I Class AAA

Denae Fritz, Maryville High School

Division II Class A

Jordaynia Ivie, Lakeway Christian

Division II Class AA

Jaloni Cambridge, Ensworth High School

[View All Finalists](#)



Sports News

General News

TSSAA Hall of Fame ceremony date set

Class of 2020 will be inducted on July 17, 2021

March 24, 2021

The Hall of Fame induction ceremony that was planned for Saturday, April 17, has been postponed one final time.

The Class of 2020 will now be inducted on Saturday, July 17, 2021 at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The induction ceremony is set to begin at 11:00 a.m. CST.

While TSSAA is hopeful that it can host the usual number of attendees, it may be necessary to hold the ceremony with a much more limited audience. The number of tickets available will be determined at a later date.

Ticket forms will be made available on our website and will be mailed to all Hall of Fame members in May.

Those being inducted at this year's luncheon are: **Barbara Daush**, administrator from Memphis; **Turner Jackson**, administrator from Cleveland; **Clint Parnell**, administrator from Nashville; **Bobby Alston**, coach from Memphis; **Buck Coatney**, coach from Knoxville; **Carolyn Jackson**, coach from Chattanooga; **Jeff Morris**, coach from Milan; **Shelby Miller**, official from Elizabethton; and the late **Marion Wilhoite**, contributor from Columbia.

Nomination forms for the Class of 2022 are due in the TSSAA office by November 1. Forms are available at tssaa.org/hall-of-fame.

Please contact Heather Carter at hcarter@tssaa.org if you have any questions or need additional information.



Distinguished Service

Sports News

General News

Cleveland wrestling official honored for distinguished service

Walt Vineyard has worked over 55 state events as an official

March 25, 2021

Walt Vineyard more or less was minding his own business, walking the halls of then-Bradley Junior High School in between classes.

Bill Curtis, the school's longtime wrestling coach, had something in mind for Vineyard, affectionately dubbed "Tater."

"I didn't have any inkling about wrestling until I was in junior high," said Vineyard, a Knoxville native and University of Tennessee graduate who spent most of his youth in the Cleveland area. "I got plucked out of the hallway by the wrestling coach, Bill Curtis, to fill a weight class (87 pounds).

"I wrestled the following day, was somehow able to win a JV match, and I've been hooked since then. That's been 40-plus years ago."

Bradley Junior High is now Ocoee Middle School; the Cleveland/Bradley community just might be the high school wrestling capital of the Volunteer State; and Vineyard, among the most tenured prep wrestling officials in the country, is the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association's Distinguished Service Award winner for March.

"It's awesome; it's humbling to be honored," Vineyard said. "I'm just excited."

After wrestling under Turner Jackson at Bradley Central High School and heading to UT-Knoxville, Vineyard still had interest in the sport. Living near Karns High School just outside of Knoxville, Vineyard ambled to a prep football game on a random Friday night.

Like the walk down the hallway, this moment also changed his life.

"I got plucked out of the bleachers by the wrestling coach at Karns, Dan Dugger, and he asked me what I was doing," Vineyard recalled. "He told me, 'Maybe you ought to officiate. You ever thought about it?'"

"Two weeks later, I did my first tournament, and I've done it ever since. Then it was the Karns Invitational/Beaver Classic, and now it's morphed into the Knox Catholic tournament. I've done it for 35 years."



Walt Vineyard

In the sport, there is little Vineyard has not done through his decades of competition and service, including 31 consecutive selections to work the state's traditional wrestling championships and another 25 times on the mat for the state duals championships.

After finishing his electrical engineering degree at UT, Vineyard returned to work for Cleveland Utilities. There, he met his wife, Lesley, and they have since raised two daughters, MacKenzie and Emma. The trio of ladies have provided Vineyard a priceless support system for his calling to give back to youth and the sport that taught him so much.

"They're incredibly supportive," Vineyard, a three-time region champion wrestler for the Bears, said. "They know from November through February, I'm going to be gone a lot of nights and weekends.

"I think that the camaraderie, giving back to the sport, the self-discipline the sport requires and teaches, all the things you hear other long-term officials say, keeps me involved. I don't really care about the compensation at all. It's the camaraderie with the coaches. I've got the best seat in the house and I know the score before anybody else does."

Vineyard also has duties beyond competition; he's spent the past couple years as the assigning officer for the Chattanooga-region's officials' association.

Yet with nearly five decades in the sport, he doesn't plan on slowing down anytime soon.

"It's just so fun," he said. "I'm always looking forward to the start of the wrestling season, and I am glad when it's over. But as long as I'm physically able to do it and I know that I've not lost a step, I'll keep doing it.

"I'll know when it's time. I might not get out of the bed on Sunday as easily as 20 years ago after working a tournament all weekend, but I still feel like I'm able to contribute at a high level and enjoy it."

TSSAA is proud to recognize Walt Vineyard for his numerous contributions to high school athletics in Tennessee.

AUTHOR

John Brice



Boys' basketball teams take the Murphy Center floor for first time since 2019

Nine qualifiers from 2020 are back in 2021 field

March 16, 2021

It has been a year-long goal to return to the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Boys' State Basketball Tournament this week, amidst a continuing pandemic that last season robbed 24 teams across the Volunteer State of a shot at a state championship title.

Nine squads this week are back – Clay County, MAHS, Greeneville, Jackson South Side, Upperman, Cleveland, Houston, Oak Ridge and Pearl Cohn – after earning berths in the tournament a year ago but never lacing up a single shoe inside the 'Glass House' as the virus unleashed its crippling effects in every facet of life.

For some, the price to pay to return to the hardwood has meant regular COVID-19 screenings.

For members of Nashville's Pearl-Cohn team, the price to pay for returning to the hardwood has meant submitting to daily virus testing.

Not just gamedays.

Not just schooldays.

Every day.

If there's a practice, there's a test. If there's a game, there's a test; rapid tests are administered via a nurse sent to the school.

"We've been taking COVID tests every day. Every day," says first-year Pearl head coach Larrie Smith, previously an assistant in the program. "I'm just happy we can play under all the circumstances.

"But we had to take one just before practice (Monday), we'll take one Tuesday, and Wednesday before the game. If we win, we'll take one Thursday before practice and again Friday and Saturday before the games if we can keep playing. We've got some of these kids that have taken 60 COVID tests."

Sacrifices are bonds as common this week as dribbles and dunks for all participating teams inside Middle Tennessee State University's Murphy Center.

"I was an assistant for (Oak Ridge coach Aaron) Green for five years before this and that's who we play in the first round," Siegel coach Dyron Birdwell, a former University of Tennessee manager under Bruce Pearl, says. "I've talked to him a lot. Both of us are just happy to still be practicing.

“There was a point in time in December we were afraid the season was going to get shut down or if we did finish, it might just be with parents. It means a lot to these kids, to these communities and to show the type of young men that have bought into doing what they are supposed to do. It's tough. And a huge shoutout to Gov. (Bill) Lee and the TSSAA for giving us this opportunity to finish this thing out on the floor.”

Tucked in the Bluff City, Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS) players meet only on the hardwood floors. The school's been in virtual learning the entirety of the academic year as school leaders and elected officials have grappled with the best path.

“It's a good day for the MAHS community for us to be able to go back to state again, from being so disappointed last year from getting there and not getting that opportunity to play,” says Lions coach Vernon Watkins. “We came in this year and had like half a season, really. But (the students) worked extremely hard this year for this.

“It's very valuable. We've been in virtual learning all year, and they didn't get the opportunity to walk the halls together, didn't get a chance to have that good fellowship with one another at lunch. They go to school all day virtually and come in and practice after school.”

At Cleveland High School, a program with a long-storied tradition on the state stage, the Blue Raiders emerge from southeast Tennessee as a hardened group.

“Well, this is our third year in a row earning our spot to compete in the state tournament and it's my second as the Runnin' Raiders head coach,” Cleveland's Reggie Tucker says. “Each time has been a special moment, but this time our players were offered a chance to do a very special and unique thing under tough circumstances and facing different roadblocks on the way.”

In addition to the universally shared battle with the pandemic, Tucker's Raiders also are back in the 'Boro after persevering through not one but two season-ending injuries to previous starters.

“For these student-athletes to accomplish so much this season through all the obstacles makes this one so special,” Tucker says. “Last season was a season to remember and one that I'll never forget, but I owed it to this group to put that season behind us and focus on preparing them mentally and physically on what was ahead. They needed to know that I believed in them and that they could get it done.”

To a coach, it is the shared trait of team-above-self that marks this season as a unicorn; one-of-a-kind.

“That's what the kids wanted, just to compete and have a chance to be where we are now,” Birdwell says. “We got shut down once right at fall break for a positive test, but we've not been shut down to this point in-season and that's a credit to our kids, having to sacrifice some of the memories that you get when you're a senior.”

Adds the Firebirds' Smith, “I'm just very proud of this group. Just to see the development of the young men and the want to get better and the want to have the opportunity to play in the state tournament and to work hard and sacrifice and to try to get to go play ball at some level of college, get a free education so that Mom and Dad aren't paying or so that they don't have student loans in 20 years. I'm proud of them.”

Regardless of what unfolds the next four days in Murfreesboro, Watkins knows these players leave a lasting legacy.

“Every day we always say we have to be disciplined if we want to continue to play, that we have to do what we are supposed to do off the court. It would have been extremely hard for my generation to sacrifice so many social freedoms.

“We've got kids from all parts of the city; southeast, west, all different places. They've come together to make this work. I think about that all of the time.”

It is then, perhaps, the lasting image of this entire championship week.

AUTHOR

John Brice



2020 Girls' State Basketball Tournament

Sports News

General News

Girls' teams return to state basketball tournament after 2020 disruption

March 9, 2021

They're back.

From the COVID-19 pandemic that wrecked the 2020 TSSAA Girls' State Tournament after its quarterfinal rounds while the as-yet-unconquered virus disrupted, halted and forever changed life around the globe.

Back from tornadoes that likewise ravaged the midstate region all the way from west of Nashville east to the Cumberland Plateau last spring.

For Maryville High School's Lady Rebels, back more so as testament to the immense courage of assistant coach Kayla Tillie Rooney, a former standout-player at the school always known for her effervescent attitude.

She's in the fight of her life as she confronts leukemia and finds an entire community, not just coaches and players, rallying at her side.

"We may have been lucky last year because we got to play and know our outcome," said veteran Maryville coach Scott West, whose squad fell in a see-saw battle against Whitehaven last year in the Class AAA quarterfinals. "We knew we had a special team coming back, but when Coach Kayla Rooney was diagnosed with leukemia, it hit all of us pretty hard.

"It makes all the other struggles in life pale in comparison to what Kayla has had to endure. We wanted to get to Murfreesboro and compete for her, to give it our all, as she fights the toughest battle of her life every day."

Twenty-four teams descend this week upon Middle Tennessee State University's 'Glass House,' where some players are preparing to don a uniform for the last time ever. Yet the mere event itself is a victory for every player, coach, parent, referee, scoreboard operator and medical expert who helped an entire state persevere for young people to regain a semblance of normalcy in the form of 32 minutes per game.

"With COVID-19 happening over the last year, our kids were put in tough situations and not just our's but everybody in general. We were told to stay home and not do anything," said Lebanon coach Cory Barrett, whose program is back in Murfreesboro at the state tournament for a third year in a row. "Trying to tell 14- to 17-, 18-year-old kids they can't be around their friends and can't go to Sonic and have a slushie, things like that, you were asking them to take away their high school experience of being together. It was a promotion for laziness and there was just nothing we could do about that.

"For them to come back and jump back into physical work, into mental preparation, into the weight room, into all the things that encompass what we do as a program and them embrace it and run with it, I think it's just something remarkable."

It's remarkable any year, any level, when individuals coalesce into a team that reaches MTSU's Murphy Center for a 96-hour stretch from Wednesday through Saturday, sneakers squeaking and whistles echoing, with a gold ball as the unified goal.

For Arlington, Clarkrange, Gibson County, Loretto, Macon County, Westview and the aforementioned Lebanon, it's a return to where the world as it was then known traces its expiration.

The disease, as well as mother nature, make this year's event unlike any of its decades of forerunners.

"Well, you know, we were shocked it ended," legendary Clarkrange coach Lamar Rogers, Tennessee's all-time wins leaders in girls' basketball, said. "It's just been a long journey, a long trip to make it back."

Like many, Clarkrange's season includes some coronavirus hiccups; this includes a team-wide 10-day quarantine early on in which there were no practices, no interpersonal interactions.

Barrett's program is this week on spring break, after only recently returning to full classrooms and with the discipline and good luck to endure no team-wide – only individual – COVID-19 shutdowns this season.

"It was just something new every day, some other type of stress level," Barrett said. "We tried not to put that on the kids. We just tried to continue to talk to them about being cautious around other people and things like that.

"We only went back to a full schedule a couple weeks ago, going from about 900 kids to a little over 1800. That immediately gave me a lot of anxiety for our team, but we've been able to separate them for lunches, bring them into the gym during that time. Our administration and teachers have been great; we've pleaded with them to try to help us find some way to social-distance our players in a class of 35."

His Lebanon team isn't quite a full year removed from winning its quarterfinals opener and preparing for the semifinals when a team dinner and team breakfast, as well as a couple just-in-case practices, became the lasting images of that 2019-20 season.

"Our team was at Chili's eating dinner," Barrett said. "We didn't tell them; didn't want to say anything for sure. We had worked on our family list that day, we were told it would be immediate family only if the tournament could continue. When it comes across that it's been suspended, postponed at that point, I talked to the team.

"We felt like at that point, no one knew where it was going to go from there, so we came in and met the next morning. Had team breakfast, explained to them where we were."

Rogers owns too many wins, too many trips along the nearly 200-mile jaunt from Clarkrange west to MTSU and back, to not already have months of addressing this week with his team.

"I think as long you tell them what is going on and they have some facts, they handle it all right," Rogers said. "You wish everything had been normal but it's not. We've got five seniors, it's affected them a lot. We adjusted homecoming and senior night, and we had those things. Up north, some schools aren't even going at all, which is their decision. But there's a lot of dedication and resiliency in these girls and in young people. They've handled it maybe better than parents."

Mostly, though, Rogers wishes the worst of this deadly disaster is in everyone's rear-view mirrors – especially young people.

"Hopefully, this is the worst thing they have to go through in their life," he said, "and they certainly will remember this year forever. We've lost a lot of people. Everyone probably knows somebody who's passed away, but hopefully this is the worst of it.

"I think everything is looking up."

AUTHOR

John Brice