



NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2025

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[TN Direct Admissions Pilot to simplify path to college and technical training](#)

Research shows that the college application and financial aid process often feels too complex, causing many students to give up before completing their applications. Tennessee's Direct Admissions Pilot is the first in the nation to directly connect automatic college admissions with state-supported and merit-based financial aid. The goal is to help students clearly see where they've been accepted and how they can afford to enroll, increasing the likelihood they'll attend college in the fall.

[Read More](#)

[Board of Control moves forward on office construction plans](#)

The Board approved the proposed construction budget for the new office building in Hermitage and voted to secure a loan of up to \$8 million for its construction.

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[Pioneer Comfort and TSSAA partner to support student-athletes and Tennessee families](#)

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) is proud to announce a new partnership with Pioneer Comfort for the 2025–26 school year. While the heart of this partnership is about celebration and support, Pioneer Comfort also hopes to raise awareness among students about the skilled trades. Careers in HVAC and other essential services offer stability, growth, and the opportunity to make a meaningful impact—values that resonate with the spirit of student-athletes.

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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 **teaching perseverance as part of educational athletics**? 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 presses play on new championship video archive

Hundreds of VHS tapes preserved in anticipation of association's centennial year

October 29, 2025

HERMITAGE, Tenn. — For the former high school star now in their 40s or 50s, the story is often the same. The tales of a state tournament run, the game-winning shot, the bone-crushing hit on a cold December day. For years, those memories lived only in fading yearbook photos and the mind's eye.

Now, that walk down memory lane is just a click away.

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) has unveiled a massive new feature on its website, TSSAAsports.com: a digitized archive of more than 1,100 video tapes from a large VHS collection. For the first time, fans can relive championship moments from a golden era of Tennessee high school sports, with games from 1989 through 2002 currently available and more being added.

The archive is a treasure trove of football, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, and soccer championship games, capturing the raw emotion and budding greatness of future stars. But the journey to get these moments from dusty shelves to digital screens was a rescue mission in itself, a race against time to preserve a priceless piece of the state's athletic history.

In 2021, the gentlemen maintaining the archive of the former VideoSports company needed to clear their storage space, putting the future of the collection in jeopardy. Then-Executive Director Bernard Childress knew the tapes couldn't be lost.

"Mr. Childress thought it was important that we preserve the collection, so we made arrangements to take possession of the tapes," said TSSAA's Matthew Gillespie. "Bradley [Lambert] and I drove to Jackson with a U-Haul trailer to pick them up and then eventually began the conversion process."

The task of setting up the conversion process fell to Lambert, who quickly became a video archaeologist of sorts. He began purchasing used VHS players from eBay and established a multi-step workflow to transfer the deteriorating tapes into a modern, searchable format.

After acquiring the needed equipment, Gillespie's office credenza became the central transfer hub, hosting a half-dozen ordinarily obsolete VHS tape players. The process of transferring is slow, since each game must play back in realtime—box by box, tape by tape.

"We've worn out two of the original tape players we purchased," Gillespie quipped, "but we just keep plugging along. And those stickers that used to be on rental tapes mean more to me now: Be Kind, Rewind."

Today, 1,102 videos are online, but with roughly 400 tapes still to transfer, the library will only continue to grow.

But the story of these tapes begins not in a storage unit, but in the forward-thinking minds of TSSAA leadership in the late 1980s. It was then that then-Executive Director Ronnie Carter, was approached by legendary official Billy Schrivner and Sam Wiley, a video professional from Jackson. Schrivner and Wiley created VideoSports, hatching a plan that was truly ahead of its time.

“When they came to me, I thought we could help people who weren’t going to get to the state tournament. They could still get access—grandparents, whoever—to see their kids playing,” Carter said. “That was so outside the box at the time, but we wanted to get ahead of the game so people had access to our great events.”

For families who couldn’t make the trip to Murfreesboro or Nashville for the state tournaments, a VHS tape was the next best thing.

The digitized collection is a veritable museum of Tennessee sports lore. It’s a world of three classifications, of public and private schools battling on the same field, and of football officiating crews of just four.

You can find the legendary football championship between Red Bank and Riverdale, played in a snowstorm at MTSU. You can watch the breathtaking 1990 triple-overtime girls’ basketball classic between York Institute and Loretto.

“How could you forget that one?” Carter said of the York-Loretto thriller. The archive also captures moments from schools that no longer exist, like Jackson’s Denmark West, Knoxville’s South-Young and Chattanooga’s City High, providing a historical snapshot of a bygone era.

For Gillespie, the project has been deeply personal. An Oakland High School graduate, he found himself digitizing games he attended as a kid, sitting next to his father, who was the public address announcer at many state tournament events.

“Once we got to the early ’90s state basketball games, it kind of changed my perspective,” Gillespie said. “I could hear my dad in the background doing the PA—doing starting lineups—and his voice stood out immediately to me. That’s been really neat.”

The online library is more than just a collection of videos; it’s an interactive experience. A search function allows users to find their school and specific types of games. A search for “OT” will pull up a list of every overtime game in the collection, ready for one-click viewing.

And the collection holds surprises beyond the VideoSports era. A film transfer of the 1938 state championship football game between Elizabethton and Jackson is also available, a remarkable window into a time long past.

“I’m looking forward to seeing that. That’s very, very special,” Carter said. “To think that’s been captured so people can watch it is beyond imagination.”

The VideoSports archive is more than just a library of old games. It’s a gift to every player who ever wore a jersey, every parent who ever cheered from the stands, and every fan who remembers the roar of the crowd. It’s a testament to the vision of those who knew, decades ago, that these moments were worth saving.

“It’s a special piece of history and a compliment to the people involved in getting done what y’all are doing now,” Carter said. “It’s a great gift to people all over the state.”

Visit <https://tssaasports.com/history/video/> to browse all the available videos, or go to TSSAAsports.com, click History, then Videos.



VHS Tape Transfers

TSSAA Video Library

Archive Highlights

Girls' Softball · May 25, 2000

[Hendersonville vs. Soddy-Daisy](#)

Boys' Basketball · March 22, 1990

[Science Hill vs. Christian Brothers](#)

Boys' Basketball · March 14, 1996

[Alcoa vs. Nashville MLK](#)

Baseball · May 22, 1998

[ECS vs. BGA](#)

Girls' Basketball · March 15, 1990

[York Institute vs. Loretto](#)

Football · December 2, 2000

[Red Bank vs. Riverdale](#)



West High senior recognized for perseverance and leadership

October 30, 2025

Cannon Dowd, a senior at West High School in Knoxville, is being honored with the NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence for his response to a significant personal challenge and the example he set for his peers.

During his sophomore year, Dowd, the school's quarterback, suffered a serious hand injury in a weightlifting accident. The incident required surgery and extensive rehabilitation, threatening not only his athletic participation but also his ability to perform routine tasks. In a school essay reflecting on the experience, Dowd described the frustration of recovery and the self-doubt he faced, even considering stepping away from football at one point.

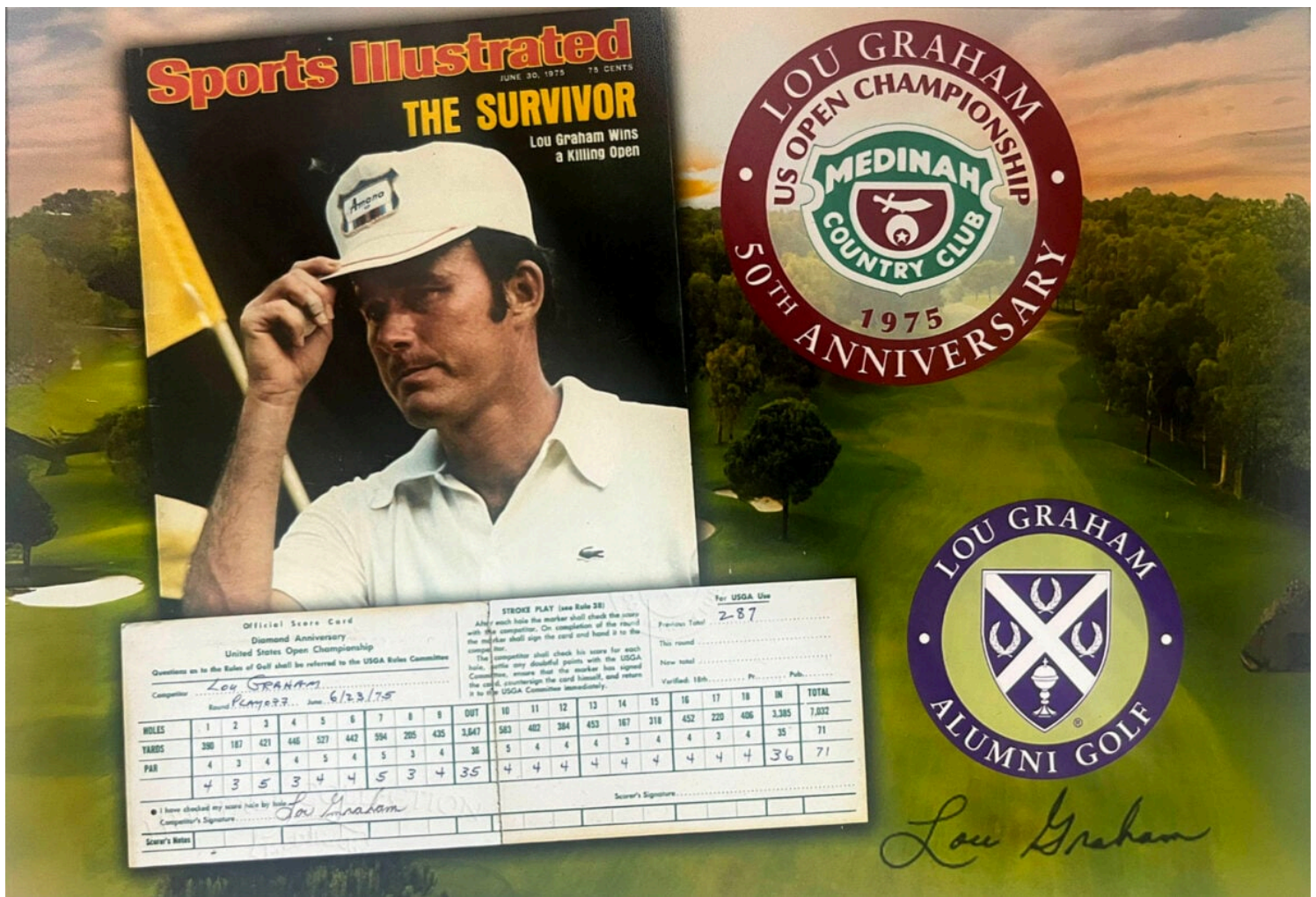
What stood out, however, was his decision to persevere. Through consistent effort, he worked his way back to the team. More importantly, his visible determination during this process had a clear effect on those around him. Teammates noted that watching him overcome his setback motivated them to push through their own difficulties.

In addition to football, Dowd is an International Baccalaureate Diploma candidate and serves on the Mayor of Knoxville Youth Council Board.

The TSSAA and the National Federation of State High School Associations present the Award of Excellence to highlight conduct that reflects the core values of educational athletics. Dowd's experience is a reminder that school sports are about more than winning; they are a setting for developing resilience, responsibility, and leadership. The way a student-athlete handles adversity—whether an injury, a loss, or academic pressure—can quietly inspire an entire team and reinforce the positive lessons that athletics are meant to teach. Dowd's example is one worth following.

Nominate a student in your school today! Please use the form linked below to share a story about a student-athlete you know who has demonstrated exceptional sportsmanship, integrity, and ethics. If you have any questions about the award or the nomination process, please contact Courtney Brunetz (cbrunetz@tssaa.org).

[More about Student-Athlete Award of Excellence](#)



Sports News

General News

Former U.S. Open Champ won state high school title 70 years ago

Lou Graham reflects on what the high school championship and his alma mater meant to him

October 6, 2025

Pristine Medinah Country Club, in the Chicago suburbs, has hosted a trio of U.S. Open championships, the 2012 Ryder Cup and a couple PGA Championships.

It was just earlier this year that the 50th anniversary of the 1975 U.S. Open Championship held at that venerable course was celebrated in Nashville, with the 17th annual Lou Graham Alumni Golf Tournament at Harpeth Hills Golf Course.

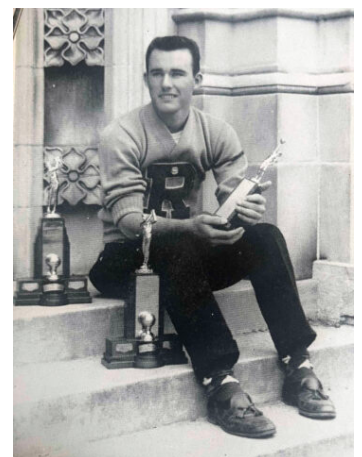
Graham, a native Tennessean, won that '75 Open Championship in one of professional golf's most captivating finishes in a Major: a full, 18-hole playoff on the Monday after the opening four rounds were completed. Graham toppled John Mahaffey by two strokes to garner the Championship.

But Graham's pathway to professional golf and championship-mettle was honed throughout his youth in Tennessee and, especially, during his stellar prep career at Father Ryan.

In fact, while Graham's 50-year anniversary of the Open triumph is celebrated around the professional golf world, one of his most compelling early-life championships marks its 70th anniversary this year: Graham's 1956 TSSAA State Golf Championship at Shelby Golf Course.

Graham commanded that individual crown with rounds of 72, 73 and 76 for his 221 total that delivered a two-stroke win for the title.

"As a young boy - it was fun!," Graham recently shared. "I suppose it was a confidence-builder, but all I remember is I loved the game of golf and always wanted to improve my game and to continue to play to the next level."



Lou with trophies

Graham's individual championship in '56 book-ended a stellar prep career that began with a team championship in the 1953 TSSAA State Golf Tournament.

While Graham has been enshrined in the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame, as well as the state's golf hall of fame following his brilliant prep career that preceded his collegiate career at then-Memphis State and a PGA run that included six Tour wins and three Ryder Cup appearances, he continues to give back to his roots with the annual golf tournament that bears his name.

The event, now closing in on two decades, gives back to Father Ryan with proceeds from the golf tournament going to the tuition assistance programs at Graham's prep alma mater.

Heady stuff for a golfing legend who began playing the game at age 5, alongside his brothers, Marty, Bob and Bud, and with Sam Snead's book "Quick Way to Better Golf." With piecemeal sets of clubs jump-started by contributions from his father and his uncle, Louis Krebs.

"I appreciate the influence Father Ryan had on me as a young boy to be the best I could possibly be, to be honest, have integrity, and to work my hardest to achieve my goals," Graham said.

"I do not know the young people there today (at Father Ryan), but I hope whatever I do will help give them the opportunities to succeed and to reach their goals in a Christian/Catholic environment. Giving back is important to me because Father Ryan has supported my family through multiple generations. We have seen first-hand the benefits of a Catholic education-my brothers, nephews and nieces, and me. We appreciate all that we have learned and continue to receive from Father Ryan."

The school continues to celebrate both the timeless achievements and examples of the Graham family.

"Father Ryan is proud to call Lou Graham '56 an alumnus of our school, and we strive to make him proud as we continue to honor his legacy," Father Ryan President Paul Davis said. "While his career and accomplishments are remarkable, what we celebrate most is his deep commitment to our mission and his life of integrity and character.

"At Father Ryan, we frequently emphasize the importance of honoring those who came before us and standing on the shoulders of giants to honor our history. Lou Graham will always be one of those giants, an enduring source of inspiration as we build the future of Father Ryan."



Louie Presenting Trophy 2022



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Sports News

General News

Coffee County cheer coach honored for distinguished service

October 31, 2025

There are more than three decades of teaching and more than three decades of being involved in the sport of cheerleading.

Good luck determining the source of Christy Clouse's own, personal fountain of youth.

Coffee County High School's decorated, long-running head cheer coach just keeps pouring into the youth of her community.

"I love the sport, and I love the relationships you build with the students and other coaches as well," said Clouse, 34 years deep into her work as cheer coach in the school system in which she grew up. "I work with a great group of people, and I get to work with some amazing coaches across the state as well."

"Officers for TCCA (Tennessee Cheerleaders Coaches Association) from Memphis to Knoxville and everywhere."

Clouse, who grew up in Manchester and is teaching in the school system that provided her foundation before her undergraduate degree at MTSU and post-graduate degree at Tennessee Tech, is the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association's Distinguished Service Award winner for October.

She is surrounded by her former pupils, still working with youth in her local church and still faithfully reporting for duty at Coffee County Raider Academy, the system's new ninth-grade home following her decades of service in the primary high school.

Cheerleading is public-facing, ever-demanding and – without a traditional playing surface – nonetheless developing future community leaders, which Clouse sees firsthand.

"That's the No. 1 goal of all of this, is to give students skills to move on and be good citizens and give back to their communities as well," she said. "Cheerleading is something that provides a skillset that not all sports provide."

"I have students who are leaders, former students and cheerleaders, now leaders in their areas who attribute a lot of those interpersonal skills to cheerleading. I feel it's something that kind of builds leaders."



Christy Clouse

Clouse's comments are cloaked in humility. She knows the leadership element firsthand. From her assistant coach to the school system's middle school coaches in the sport of cheerleading, they all trace their roots to experiences cheering under Clouse.

Lindsay Dickson and Courtney Eaton are coaching the community's future high school cheerleaders; Mandy Wallace is helping Clouse shape the high school participants.

Soon Clouse, a leader in state cheerleading organizations as well as a stalwart in her community who aides in Coffee County's annual fair, is going to be a central figure in helping select Tennessee's All-State cheerleaders – an incomparable honor closing in on two decades of history.

The process is as layered as an elite cheer routine.

"It's different for us, you don't have newspapers selecting an All-State or other districts, regions selecting or anything like that," she said. "This is our 18th year, I think. We really wanted to make sure that what we used as our criteria was well-rounded, because cheerleading, there are so many different things going on.

"You're not just an athlete but many times the face of your school. Community appearances, you're asked to stand in front of a crowd and try to get them to lead on another sport. It's more than just a sport, is what I like to say."

TSSAA proudly recognizes Christy Clouse for her decades of commitment as a coach and educator in Tennessee.

AUTHOR

John Brice



Sports News

Championships News

Flag football championship adds to growing Unified Sports program

Hardin Valley Academy wins first title

October 28, 2025

Talk about football and the ‘Third Week of October’ stretches back more than a century in the state of Tennessee.

But it was a new history made this year at the high school level, not the collegiate one, when the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association recently held its inaugural Unified Flag Football State Championship.

The sport, burgeoning in popularity throughout the United States, is the most recent to be added to TSSAA’s Special Olympics championship endeavors, coming on the heels of statewide bowling and track and field championships, respectively.

“Unified flag was kind of blowing up across the country for Special Olympics and Special Olympics Tennessee hopped on and it’s slowly become one of the bigger sports we have in the state,” said Colby Coulter, Unified Sports Coordinator who works in conjunction with TSSAA and Special Olympics Tennessee. “The third weekend in October, we had our fall games and had a huge number of schools that were interested in coming out for our Special Olympics Tennessee fall games.

“Last year we did an emerging year symmetric with girls flag football, with the state of Tennessee and TSSAA ready to bring flag football to the limelight.”

That symmetric approach prompted synergy in the sport; the Unified Flag season is in the fall and the girls’ TSSAA season is in the spring.



Hardin Valley Academy

“The idea behind that was we would hope to see many of the girls’ flag football players be partners with Unified Flag in the fall and to make connections with our Unified athletes,” Coulter said. “We hoped those two would work together and saw that pretty well last year.

“We had roughly 30 schools signed on last year, and we ultimately ended up with 21 total schools that played at least one game.”

The sport’s Unified growth was reflected in those recent championships held at Richard Siegel Park.

Overall in the state, the number of regular-season contests ticked upward this year as did full-schedule participation and team involvement, with a full roster consistent of 10 athletes and some 200 young student-athletes throughout the Volunteer State able to make their history on the weekend so closely associated with the longstanding Alabama-Tennessee SEC football rivalry.

Ultimately in the double-elimination, round-robin event, Hardin Valley Academy from East Tennessee topped McGavock High School, 38-30, for the championship.



McGavock High School

But what heartened Coulter was the sport's continued growth and expanded opportunities for young people, as well as the relentless selflessness of those who coached, officiated and otherwise assisted in helping young people build lifelong memories.

"When we first started, a definite concern of mine, our coaches for the most part are special education teachers or parent volunteers and a lot are already coaching bowling, track field, volunteering in their communities as well," Coulter said. "Our coaching staffs tend to be really overworked. I wasn't sure if it would be something our coaches wanted, to add another sport on. And our coaches said, 'No, we want this because our kids want it.' That was a sale point for me. They've done the heavy lifting of putting teams together, schedules together, transportation hurdles. Being a coach of a sport, it's funny in our state the championship was October 18 and two days later, I'm in a state bowling meeting and every single football coach was at the bowling meeting.

"I'm just incredibly impressed by the coaches who take all this on, coming from a coaching and teaching background myself. I know how much a school community can ask from you and these teachers, coaches, parents are taking on a lot. I'm just nonstop impressed with them."

Up next? Seeing the sport's continued growth, particularly Coulter noted with such a tremendous backdrop of support ensconced in Tennessee for the hundreds of youth participating.

"With flag football, it can be tough with the amount of travel necessary for regular -season games; logistics are often tough for teams because they're not all necessarily in a place where schools are financially ready to take on all that's involved with launching a new sport," Coulter said. "But Special Olympics has done a great job of covering a lot of costs, and schools can ask for grant money for travel, food, officials' costs, uniform costs, anything.

"Special Olympics has said don't let financials be a hurdle for you."

Instead, opportunity is harvesting new dreams and manifesting new memories.

AUTHOR

John Brice



[General News](#)

[Meeting Agendas/Minutes News](#)

Board of Control holds special called meeting

Loan for new office building approved

October 27, 2025

The TSSAA Board of Control met for a special called meeting at the TSSAA office building in Hermitage on Monday, October 27.

Representatives from Hewlett Spencer (owner's representative for TSSAA) discussed the design, pricing, and timeline for the new office building.

The Board took action to secure an \$8 million loan for the construction of the new TSSAA office building and approved construction of the new office building.

A full summary of the meeting can be viewed below.

1. Voted to approve the resolution for the Board of Control to authorize the borrowing of up to \$8 million and stating an official intent for reimbursement in order to finance the construction of a new TSSAA office building, with authorization for state office staff to work with the lender and lock in a rate if advantageous during construction.
2. Voted to approve the construction of a new TSSAA office building.
3. Voted to adjourn the meeting.



Pioneer Comfort and TSSAA partner to support student-athletes and Tennessee families

October 29, 2025

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) is proud to announce a new partnership with Pioneer Comfort for the 2025–26 school year. This collaboration centers on a shared mission: to celebrate student-athletes, uplift their families, and ensure every home is a place of comfort, care, and community.

As Middle Tennessee's highest-rated provider of HVAC, plumbing, electrical, generator, and garage door services, Pioneer Comfort brings trusted expertise to the families behind student-athletes—supporting wellness, energy efficiency, and lasting comfort at TSSAA events across the state.

“Student-athletes embody the values of hard work, perseverance, and leadership,” said Ryan Blessing, the General Manager at Pioneer Comfort in Nashville, Tennessee. “We’re honored to stand alongside these young leaders and the families who support them—not just in the stands, but in their homes. Our goal is to be the most trusted home service provider for these families, offering comfort they can count on and care that goes beyond the game.”

While the heart of this partnership is about celebration and support, Pioneer Comfort also hopes to raise awareness among students about the skilled trades. Careers in HVAC and other essential services offer stability, growth, and the opportunity to make a meaningful impact—values that resonate with the spirit of student-athletes.

Throughout the school year, Pioneer Comfort will have a strong presence at TSSAA championship events—bringing families together through interactive fan experiences, exciting giveaways, and uplifting messages shared across social media, newsletters, and streaming platforms. These efforts aim to connect with families, celebrate student achievements, and foster a sense of community statewide.

“Pioneer's commitment to supporting the efforts of student-athletes while raising their awareness of postgraduate career opportunities in skilled trades aligns with the mission of education-based athletics. We are grateful for this partnership and look forward to continuing in this endeavor together,” said Mark Reeves, TSSAA Executive Director.

To learn more about Pioneer Comfort visit pioneercomfort.com.

About Pioneer Comfort

Pioneer Comfort is Middle Tennessee's highest-rated provider of HVAC, plumbing, electrical, generator, garage door, and drain services. Known for dependable expertise and a customer-first approach, Pioneer Comfort delivers reliable solutions that keep homes safe, efficient, and comfortable—all backed by a deep commitment to the communities it serves.

About TSSAA

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association is a voluntary, nonprofit organization that serves member schools across the state. TSSAA supports student-athletes through athletic programs, championships, and educational initiatives that promote excellence, sportsmanship, and lifelong learning.