

NEWSLETTER
NOVEMBER 2025

[Knoxville golfer Ava Holmes takes on the toughest course](#)

The state-championship host is known for its brutal terrain, but Ava Holmes brought a different kind of toughness to Sevierville. The Knoxville Catholic standout battled pain, played through doubt, and rallied a community with her resolve—earning praise from her coach and teammates who say she never complained, only competed.

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[Meet TSSAA's new Director of Officials Services](#)

In an era when finding qualified sports officials has become increasingly challenging, the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association is taking bold action by creating a new position dedicated to supporting these essential game-changers. Meet David Uyl, a veteran umpire with decades of experience ranging from youth baseball games alongside his father to calling pitches at the prestigious College World Series, who will become TSSAA's first-ever Director of Officials Services this January. Uyl brings a unique perspective to a role aimed at strengthening relationships, increasing resources, and growing the number of officials across Tennessee.

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[Finalists for the 2025 Tennessee Titans Mr. Football Awards announced](#)

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[Longtime MTSU employee honored for Distinguished Service](#)

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[Board of Control handles appeals and hardships in November meeting](#)

The board approved one cooperative sports program, allowing St. Andrew's-Sewanee School to partner with Grundy County High School for girls softball. Two other cooperative program requests were tabled until January for further review. The Board of Control also discussed the new format for the DI football playoff brackets and how the recent change has been perceived in their respective areas. The Board wanted to wait until the January meeting to continue the discussion so they would have more data from this year's playoffs.

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[Build your future in Tennessee: Easy credit transfers and career-focused programs](#)

Making the jump from high school to college can feel overwhelming, especially when figuring out how to pay for it or what path to take. Now, credits earned at TCATs can be transferred to a participating community college and applied toward an Associate of Applied Science degree. This makes it easier to continue postsecondary education without starting from scratch.

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Use the coupon above to save 20% off your entire purchase at Dick's Sporting Goods between Dec. 5 and Dec. 8. See offer for details.

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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 **the proper role of coaches in school 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>.



Sports News

General News

Knoxville golfer Ava Holmes takes on the toughest course

High school standout shows courage in fight against cancer

November 24, 2025

Sevierville Golf Course is known for its unforgiving terrain, course demands and regular elevation changes.

In addition to in recent years being host site of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association State Golf Championship, it now also is the site where precocious Knoxville Catholic golfer Ava Holmes stuffed cancer.

A member of the Irish's girls' state championship-qualifying team, Holmes initially thought some lingering back pain late this summer likely stemmed from perhaps too many golf swings and not enough stretches.

Medical testing told an entirely different story.

"I'd been having back pain for about a year and had been in physical therapy throughout the duration," Holmes, undergoing surgery in the days here before Thanksgiving, said. "It wasn't helping; exercising, stretches weren't helping. One day, my entire right leg went numb, and that's when it hit me and my parents."

The it? Cancer in Holmes's L-3 and L-4 vertebrae requiring a significant surgical procedure in Nashville.

Then again, Holmes has an entirely different determination. Like learning of a cancer diagnosis and golfing the same day. Setting a personal mark for her career-best nine-hole score in a prep match at Knoxville's Beaver Brook Golf and Country Club, too.

"I found out that I had a tumor and went and played my golf match the same day," Holmes said. "I shot the lowest nine I've had, a 38."

Her courage has shot inspiration through those around her. Take Knoxville Catholic golf coach Peter Medlyn.



Ava Holmes

“Ava has never mentioned her illness and never complained about any pain issues, which I now know she endured,” said Medlyn, head of Catholic’s boys’ and girls’ golf programs since May 2024. “Ava always showed up to practice and games with the same big smile and positive attitude, not just for herself but for her teammates. Ava is a remarkable and courageous young woman.”

Surgery from oncology specialist Dr. Lackney this week in Nashville is a pivotal next step, but not the only step for Holmes.

Ava is surrounded by support from her father Brian, her mother Melissa, and her little sister Ella. She knows an arduous path awaits. Likewise, she knows golf isn’t over for her; that the sport she’s grown to love from those earliest outings with her father, Brian, is on pause; not permanent hiatus.

“I think the support system just makes it so much easier to deal with what I have going on,” Holmes said. “Because having the tumor and cancer I have at my young age, it’s hard. It’s a big burden to carry. Senior year, missing out on a bunch of events I’ve dreamed about since I was a freshman. Having the support system of teammates and friends I have makes it so much easier. I know every day how loved I am and how much they care for me.

“I’ve never doubted my support and people walking with me through it. It makes it a lot easier, and it really inspires me to have people who care so much about me.”

Even in those early days following the diagnosis, when questions can outweigh easy answers, Holmes’s tenacious resilience shines.

“So, when I first asked my doctor if it was okay for me to play golf, he was a little unsure,” Holmes said. “I first asked when I got my biopsy, before we knew I had cancer and just knew that I had a tumor.

“When I golf, it definitely hurts more but it was a risk I decided to take. They said it’s the state tournament, if that’s what you really want to do, you can do it. I did it last year, and it was super-fun.

“It was such a good experience, the tournament was fun and being with friends was super-fun. I didn’t want to let this thing define me; didn’t want to let it control me. I don’t want to be defined and controlled by this little bump in my road. I just really don’t want to let it get this best of me.”

So Holmes golfed. She battled the course, the cancer and the conditions in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Then, she put her golf clubs on the shelf. Temporarily.

“After surgery, it’s going to take some time for me to get up to walking, and I’m going to have metal in the lower part of my spine,” said Holmes, a few weeks prior to surgery. “I know it’s going to take me a bit to get walking, going up and down stairs, standing on my own. It will be probably eight to nine months before I can attempt to swing a golf club again.

“But I know once I get through this, it will be better. It will be a few months after surgery to go back to school and there are going to be a few minor inconveniences, like no stairs and no backpack.”

But?

“But, I’m going to make the most of my senior year rather than just be sitting at home,” Holmes said. “I just feel like dealing with this, pushing myself, going back to school is making me stronger.

“Yeah, I definitely ... I don’t care how long I have to wait. I will play golf again. I know I will.”

This warrior? Everyone knows she will.



Ava Holmes

AUTHOR

John Brice



General News

Officiating News

Meet TSSAA's new Director of Officials Services

David Uyl will assume the new position this January

October 23, 2025

In an era when it's arguably more difficult than ever to find officials, referees and umpires for sports of all ages, David Uyl is still investing in the vocation – after first umpiring youth games under the supervision of his father, Jim decades ago in Michigan.

“Dad ran the youth Little League program, and my older brother, Mark, and I, by the time we were 12, 13 years old, would play our basketball and baseball games,” Uyl said, “and then we officiated the younger kids’ games while our dad also officiated.”

Decades later, Uyl’s devotion to the oft-thankless vocation burns anew. And he’s preparing to transition into an all-new role in the Volunteer State as part of his commitment.

Uyl has been named the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association’s Director of Officials Services. The newly created post is TSSAA’s intentional endeavor to foster stronger relationships and additional resources for officials at the high school level throughout the state.

“The level of experience and deep understanding that David has of all levels of officiating in multiple sports makes him the ideal person to lead in this area,” stated Mark Reeves, TSSAA Executive Director. “We can’t wait to have him on board!”

Athletics director at Pope John Paul II, Uyl is set to transition to the TSSAA in January after more than two years at the Hendersonville school and after spending more than a decade umpiring professional baseball. He continues to call games at the highest levels of collegiate baseball, including in the Big Ten Conference and the SEC; he’s just two years removed from helping umpire the prestigious College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska.

“I have absolutely loved being back in education and working with kids and being involved with umpiring and officiating is a huge passion for me,” Uyl, married to wife Kristin for 19 years and with sons Eli and Wyatt, said. “I’m incredibly grateful for TSSAA for this opportunity and excited for what it brings.

“I can’t wait to help officials in our state, to grow our numbers and get more younger people involved in officiating.”



David Uyl

Particularly, Uyl embraces the opportunity to work with those refereeing and umpiring across the state in an era where ubiquitous cell phone cameras and a penchant for complaining often overshadow the selfless work of individuals passionate about giving back to their respective sports.

Uyl, a former two-sport athlete at Hope College envisions partnering with colleges, universities and recreational departments from Memphis to the Tri-Cities and all points in between. Likewise, Uyl wants to recognize the dozens of outstanding officials throughout the TSSAA's various sports while also being more open and transparent on rules interpretations as well as providing more access to video resources for local officials' associations.

"I was just going to touch on the world we live in now, where everybody's got a cell phone and officials are always under a microscope," said Uyl, who also previously helped officiate college football games at the Football Bowls Subdivision level. "Pro sports on Sundays, colleges on Saturdays have about 18 different camera angles to try to help get the calls right.

"High school officials don't have that. They have full-time jobs and they officiate because they love the sport. It is hard, and we're expected to be perfect in everything we do. But I really in this role want to support our officials, create relationships with our officials' associations and let them know they are appreciated."

Uyl's discerning eye, honed from his own decades of service, has seen his appreciation for this state's referees only increase since his work at Pope John Paul II.

"I've seen a lot of good officiating the last three or four years at the high school level here in Tennessee. I want to let our men and women in stripes and blue shirts know they are loved and appreciated and let them know they're doing a great job and we have their back.

"We're always going to care about it when we have to make a controversial or big call, but I really try to go out of my way when seeing a crew do a good job to let them know they're doing a great job."

In fact, Uyl believes this new position and forthcoming programs he seeks to spawn are steps to enhancing the competitive environment.

"Unfortunately, sportsmanship is somewhat at a breaking point, and we need to be better as a society," he said. "We harp on being a good sport, doing good things. We need to keep the bigger picture in mind.

"High school sports is another learning experience for our youth, and without sports officials, we can't do that."

AUTHOR

John Brice

[Sports News](#)[General News](#)

Finalists for the 2025 Tennessee Titans Mr. Football Awards announced

Winners will be unveiled at luncheon on December 9

November 25, 2025

The Tennessee Titans Mr. Football Awards will be presented to the top football players in nine classifications of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at Nissan Stadium in Nashville. The top kicker in the state will be recognized with a Mr. Football Award, regardless of classification.

Five semifinalists in each classification were announced on November 6. There are six classifications in Division I and three in Division II. Three finalists for each category were announced by Taylor Zarzour and Titans interim head coach Mike McCoy at 6:30pm CT/7:30pm ET. The three finalists for each award that were announced today will be the ones invited to attend the awards luncheon at Nissan Stadium, where the winner of each award will be announced.

A committee of statewide sports writers selected winners based on performance in the 2025 regular season. Academics and character were also taken into consideration. High school head coaches and members of the media nominated the finalists.

"We are very appreciative of the Tennessee Titans for their continued support of these awards," stated Mark Reeves, Executive Director of the TSSAA. "Having the awards presented at Nissan Stadium will provide a very special atmosphere for these outstanding student-athletes."

This is the 41st year that the Mr. Football Awards have been presented to Tennessee's best high school football players. A Mr. Football trophy will be presented to the winners of each category. A Mr. Football plaque will be presented to the other two finalists in each category. The other semi-finalists will each receive a certificate.

Taylor Zarzour, play-by-play voice of the Tennessee Titans, will emcee the awards presentation. A live videostream of the awards will be provided on the [Tennessee Titans website](#).

2025 Tennessee Titans Mr. Football Finalists

DIVISION I, CLASS 1A

Cole Brown, McKenzie High School

Jaiden Bunch, Coalfield High School

DaYon Cooper, South Pittsburg High School

DIVISION I, CLASS 2A

Zach Groves, East Robertson High School

Andrew Johnson, Fairley High School

Jaydon Peete, Milan High School

DIVISION I, CLASS 3A

Thomas Heffner, Melrose High School

Quincy Mitchell, Forrest High School

Graham Simpson, Westview High School

DIVISION I, CLASS 4A

Caden Baugh, Greeneville High School

Bronzden Chaffin, Upperman High School

Thomas Manu, Alcoa High School

DIVISION I, CLASS 5A

Kaden Long, Knoxville Central High School

Cooper Newman, Sevier County High School

Tay Starks, Munford High School

DIVISION I, CLASS 6A

Andre Adams, Antioch High School

Kelvin Perkins, Southwind High School

Craig Tutt, Oakland High School

DIVISION II, CLASS A

Jared Curtis, Nashville Christian School

Nix Fullen, Tipton-Rosemark Academy

Terry Ward, Nashville Christian School

DIVISION II, CLASS AA

David Green, Jr., Boyd Buchanan High School

Kaedyn Marable, Battle Ground Academy

Shavar Young, Webb School of Knoxville

DIVISION II, CLASS AAA

Briggs Cherry, Baylor School

David Gabriel Georges, Baylor School

Tyreek King, Knoxville Catholic High School

KICKER OF THE YEAR

Tommy Bauchiero, Brentwood Academy

Owen Maddox, Notre Dame High School

Mikel Van Pelt, Gibbs High School



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Sports News

General News

Longtime MTSU employee honored for Distinguished Service

Boniface Amuzu has worked with TSSAA championship events for decades

November 28, 2025

Sight unseen, Boniface Amuzu found a home he's never left.

After traveling more than 6,000 miles, from his native Ghana to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, almost three decades ago, Amuzu now finds his universe in the 'Boro.

Especially at his alma mater, Middle Tennessee State University. That's where Amuzu arrived into the United States as an international track prospect, and that's where Amuzu has climbed from student-athlete to part-time employee to MTSU's Murphy Center Complex Director.

It's also a pathway to Amuzu being the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association's Distinguished Service Award winner for November.

In addition to all of his duties for Blue Raiders athletics and Murphy Center Complex, he's a top liaison for TSSAA when its myriad championship events are hosted at MTSU facilities.

All because the late Dean Hayes, legendary MTSU track coach and OVC Hall of Famer with 29 conference titles, took a chance on Amuzu at the advice of Christian Nsiah, who already was starring at MTSU and happened to be Amuzu's best friend.

"I came to the United States on a track scholarship in 1996 thanks to the legend and may his sweet soul rest in peace, Dean Hayes; he recruited me and I came to the States on a full scholarship to MTSU," Amuzu, quick to praise his daughters, Alexandria and Alyssa, as well as fiancé Beth Neese, said. "It was my first time coming to the States in 1996.

"I love it. It's a great place. I love the people here, especially being here working on campus, love the culture that Dr. McPhee (MTSU President Sidney McPhee) has developed here. I love working with the people, past and present. It's just great and I love being in the athletic facilities, helping the student-athletes accomplish their goals and help them succeed. So that has been one of my motivations."



Boniface Amuzu

Amuzu's list of tasks on his journey to overseeing all Murphy Center operations – picking up trash, pressure-washing facilities, operating elevators, prepping playing surfaces – nearly matches that of his athletic endeavors as a Blue Raiders athlete, his track and field events including the long jump, 100- and 200-meter races, the 4x100m relay, 4x200m relay and “every now and then, Coach would throw me in the 4x400 (relay).”

Amuzu handled it all in stride, as the TSSAA has seen him do with events from Spring Fling State Track Championships to basketball tournaments in the Glass Palace to the more recent state volleyball championships.

“I have known ‘Boni’ for years,” said Matthew Gillespie, TSSAA Assistant Executive Director. “He’s an unbelievable and outstanding guy.

“He’s just one of those guys who does anything and everything for us when we host any event at MTSU.”

Recognizing what it means being an athlete chasing dreams at a higher level, Amuzu particularly relishes those opportunities in which he sees the best of Tennessee high school participants competing on the Volunteer State’s greatest stage.

“The biggest part is just everybody’s dream as a child is to go to the next level of whatever they’re doing in their lives,” said Amuzu, a two-time OVC long-jump champion. “The athletes coming to the MTSU campus, for us to showcase what we have here and seeing the families and student-athletes coming here, to see their dreams come true, moving to the next level, competing in college facilities, just the excitement I see is just something I don’t take for granted. It just puts a lot of happiness and smiles in me.”

In fact, heading into this holiday season Amuzu is still beaming from feedback following the TSSAA State Volleyball Championships at MTSU. He touts the camaraderie he says is inspired by Ron Malone and for the cohesive work among everything from campus police to facility services to transportation.

“The State Volleyball Tournament recently, almost every single player and all the coaches came up to me, even referees, and talked about how great the event went,” he said. “People came, had great time and it was a great environment for them.

“Seeing people compliment MTSU and thanking us for hosting goes a long way for me.”

TSSAA proudly salutes Boniface Amuzu for his continued efforts and numerous contributions over the years to high school student athletes, coaches, and schools throughout the years.

AUTHOR

John Brice



General News

Meeting Agendas/Minutes News

Board of Control handles appeals and hardships in November meeting

Meeting held at TSSAA office building in Hermitage

November 20, 2025

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Board of Control approved membership for two new schools and denied multiple appeals during its recent meeting.

The Board of Control discussed the first year of the new format for the DI football playoff brackets and how it has been perceived in their respective areas. The Board wanted to wait until the January meeting to continue the discussion so they would have more data from this year's playoffs after they are complete.

The board voted unanimously to admit Tri-Cities Christian Academy beginning in the 2026-27 school year and Dr. Paul L. Kelley Volunteer Academy for the 2025-26 school year. All existing schools were approved for continued membership.

In disciplinary matters, the board reinstated officials Richard Bridges and Brian Busler following appeals of their suspensions.

The board approved one cooperative sports program, allowing St. Andrew's-Sewanee School to partner with Grundy County High School for girls softball. Two other cooperative program requests were tabled until January for further review.

Tournament format changes were approved for Region 4 AAAA basketball, allowing quarterfinal games at a central site, and Gatlinburg-Pittman High School was approved as a regional tournament host.

The board also denied Covington High School's appeal regarding contract terms for a cancelled football game with Munford High School and approved new media credential requirements for internet websites covering TSSAA events.

Schools with outstanding fines or unpaid dues will be barred from postseason competition until obligations are met, the board decided.

A full summary of the meeting can be viewed below.

1. Voted to approve the Minutes of the August 18, 2025, meeting without reading since members had been sent a copy for review.
2. Voted to approve all schools for TSSAA membership for 2025-26.
3. Voted to not allow schools to participate in postseason competition until all outstanding fines and membership dues obligations to the association are met.

4. Voted to approve financial aid for tuition-receiving schools for the 2025-26 school year.
5. Voted to table Crosstown High School's request to form a baseball and softball cooperative program with Memphis Central High School until January.
6. Voted to table the request for South Greene High School, Greeneville High School, and Chuckey-Doak High School to form a three-team cooperative program in Lacrosse until January to see if there is support for the exception from other teams in the Region.
7. Voted to approve St. Andrew's-Sewanee School's request to form a cooperative program in girls softball with Grundy County High School.
8. Voted to deny Covington High School's appeal and uphold the contract terms for cancellation of football game with Munford High School.
9. Voted to approve DII A and AA quarterfinal game time provisions for baseball, softball, and tennis.
10. Voted to table Webb School of Knoxville's proposal for an exception to the sports calendar for boys basketball during NCAA live recruiting periods until January to determine how many schools will be involved and to see how other states are handling the conflict.
11. Voted to approve additions to media regulations regarding requirements for internet website credentials.
12. Voted to approve the Region 4 AAAA basketball tournament format change to play quarterfinal rounds at a central site as requested by James Lawson High School.
13. Voted to approve Gatlinburg-Pittman High School's request to be an approved host for the region basketball tournament.
14. Voted to approve Tri-Cities Christian Academy's TSSAA membership effective with the 2026-27 school year.
15. Voted to approve Dr. Paul L. Kelley Volunteer Academy's TSSAA membership effective for the 2025-26 school year.
16. Voted to reinstate Richard Bridges' registration as a TSSAA official.
17. Voted to reinstate Brian Busler's registration as a TSSAA official.