



NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

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[Chattanooga junior receives NFHS award for commitment and support of others](#)

A Silverdale Baptist Academy junior has been recognized with a prestigious national award for exemplifying the true spirit of educational athletics through service and encouragement. Noah Williams, a member of Silverdale's cross country and track teams, recently received the NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence, presented by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

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[Pigeon Forge: Most Valuable Parent Awards](#)

The Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism, in partnership with the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association, is excited to announce the first-ever "Most Valuable Parent" Award. Nominate your school's Team Parent today!

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[Johnson City eighth-grader earns national award for responsibility and positive attitude](#)

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[Fueling Tennessee's Future: Pathways Into Nuclear Careers Through TBR](#)

Tennessee's nuclear industry is growing, creating new opportunities for students who want stable, high-demand careers. The "Work in Nuclear" initiative highlights how Tennessee's community and technical colleges are preparing students for jobs that support safe, clean and reliable nuclear power. Training takes as little as six weeks to two years, allowing students to enter the workforce quickly, often at little to no cost.

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[Richard McWhirter honored with NFHS Citation Award](#)

Richard McWhirter, Assistant Executive Director for TSSAA, is one of the 13 leaders in high school activity programs from across the country to be selected for an NFHS Citation this year, representing Section 3.

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[Pioneer Comfort's Playbook](#)

Whether it's on the field, in the stands, or at a local festival, Pioneer Comfort is proud to be part of the moments that bring Middle Tennessee communities together. With every event, every handshake, and every first down, the company continues to build a legacy of comfort, connection, and community.

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[Official Championship Event Merchandise](#)

Official state championship event apparel is available online anytime from the Northwest Designs store.

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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 **empathy 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 discusses classification items and football playoff brackets

Possible seeding for state basketball tournament also discussed

January 15, 2026

The Board of Control for the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association held its meeting on January 15, 2026 in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee.

The Board approved the 2026–2028 TSSAA calendars, updated football regulations, and a three-team cooperative lacrosse program for South Greene, Greeneville, and Chuckey-Doak. The board also maintained the current football playoff bracket format for an additional year and preliminarily approved officials' fees for the 2026–2029 period.

Several major decisions were deferred to allow for further research or feedback. Notably, the board tabled Page High School's golf realignment request and the Division II football classification until the March meeting. Additionally, the state office was tasked with preparing a hypothetical RPI-based bracket for Division I basketball to be reviewed in June.

The full summary from the meeting can be found below.

1. Approved the Minutes of the November 20, 2025.
2. Discussed enrollment collection options for the 2027-2029 classification period. This item will be placed on the March agenda for first reading and the June agenda for second reading.
3. Approved the 2026-27 and 2027-28 TSSAA calendars with changes to the Regional Meeting schedule.
4. Tabled Page High School's request to move to Class AA, Region 4, District 8 in golf beginning with the 2026-27 school year to allow Page to bring information about whether other schools in the new District would be open to the change.
5. Approved the proposed changes to Football Regulations.
6. Voted to continue the current Region alignment for football playoffs for one more year.
7. Tabled the DII Football Classification decision until March and will distribute survey results to the DII schools. The decision needs to be

made in March.

8. Preliminarily approved the recommended officials' fees for 2026-2029. Second consideration will be at the March meeting.

9. Approved the request for a three-team cooperative program in Lacrosse between South Greene High School, Greeneville High School, and Chuckey-Doak High School, conditional on the state office receiving approval from the other schools in the Region.

10. Denied Webb School of Knoxville's proposal for an exception to the sports calendar for Boys Basketball during the NCAA Live Recruiting Periods.

11. Discussed seeding for TSSAA Division I Basketball Tournament. The state office will prepare a hypothetical bracket using RPI for review at the June meeting.



Chattanooga junior receives NFHS award for commitment and support of others

January 29, 2026

A Silverdale Baptist Academy junior has been recognized with a prestigious national award for exemplifying the true spirit of educational athletics through service and encouragement.

Noah Williams, a member of Silverdale's cross country and track teams, recently received the NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence, presented by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

Williams has established himself as a behind-the-scenes leader who prioritizes service to his team and community. While not typically crossing the finish line first in competitions, Williams demonstrates commitment through consistent effort to improve his performance and support for fellow runners.

His coaches note that Williams regularly assists with setup and cleanup at events, volunteers to handle equipment, and takes initiative in maintaining facilities. These contributions extend beyond athletics, as Williams participates in his church praise team and dedicates time to mentoring middle school students through youth group activities.

Perhaps most notably, Williams forgoes personal time during summer and winter breaks to participate in mission trips, reflecting his commitment to service beyond the school environment.

The NFHS Student-Athlete Award recognizes students who demonstrate exceptional character and citizenship through actions that enhance the educational value of high school athletics.

As educational athletics continue to face challenges ranging from sportsmanship concerns to participation declines, examples like Williams highlight the positive impact of student-athletes who understand that their influence extends beyond performance statistics and that their most meaningful contributions often happen through consistent, humble service rather than spotlight achievements.

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).



Noah Williams

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



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Sports News

General News

West Tennessee sportswriter honored for distinguished service

Relationships with players and coaches keeps Michael Odom going

January 23, 2026

At one time a biology major during his collegiate studies, Michael Odom instead discovered the perfect formula for a career in journalism.

Care about the people. Care about the subjects. Be a passionate storyteller.

Check, check, check.

For those reasons, as obvious as an above-the-fold headline, Odom is a 2025-26 Tennessee Distinguished Service Award winner.

“That’s what keeps me going, the relationships with players and coaches in West Tennessee,” said Odom, sports editor of the Milan Mirror-Exchange. “I get to see and tell the stories of the some of the best the state has to offer, night in and night out.”

A Jackson, Tennessee, native and graduate of the city’s North Side High School, Odom first became a basketball graduate-assistant at his alma mater before he transitioned into what has evolved into a two-decades-plus journalism career.

But Odom initially was not in a public-facing post at the Sun, for which he answered phones, jotted down box scores and ensured as many young athletes’ names as possible appeared on the newspaper’s Scoreboard page.

When Matthew Borenstein departed, Odom filled the role of high school sports coverage coordinator. He has chronicled Spring Flings and incomparable moments in MTSU’s ‘Glass House.’

Those teams are forever etched into the annals of their respective school’s programs. Odom, however, has proved adroit at humanizing the participants. He originated a series about the young student-athletes in the Jackson area who synergized their faith with athletic competition. He has covered tragedy, as well as triumph.



Michael Odom

“I’ve always been a passionate person and one of my passions is high school sports, and getting to tell the stories of these athletes,” said Odom, married to his high school sweetheart, Jean, and now with twin, 17-year-old daughters, Joselynn and Karlee. “I remember back when I was with the Jackson Sun, a kid at Haywood (High School) lost his arm and pitched his senior year with only one arm.

“I started a ‘Faith in Practice’ series, telling stories of West Tennessee athletes and their faith. One girl came back and told me that a small college in Florida saw the story about her faith and offered her a scholarship to come play softball because of her faith story that I wrote about.”

Today, Odom bases his work for the Milan Mirror-Exchange – following his recruitment away from the Jackson Sun earlier this decade by newspaper owner Victor Parkins – but also helps tell the stories in some 10 West Tennessee communities; Brownsville, Fayette and Lexington among them.

“I’ve just always loved sports,” Odom said, “and always had a passion for them.”

TSSAA proudly salutes Michael Odom for his years of work and dedication covering high school sports in Tennessee.

AUTHOR

John Brice



Johnson City eighth-grader earns national award for responsibility and positive attitude

January 29, 2026

An eighth-grade cheerleader from University School of East Tennessee State University has been recognized nationally for her exceptional leadership and sportsmanship.

Ansley James has been awarded the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Student-Athlete Award of Excellence, presented by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA).

Despite being new to cheerleading and the only new eighth-grader on the squad, James has quickly earned respect from both teammates and coaches. According to those who nominated her, James serves as "the heart of the team," maintaining a positive attitude even during challenging practices and performances.

"Her level of maturity and responsibility is far beyond her years," noted her coach. "She's a natural leader who doesn't need words to inspire her teammates."

The NFHS Student-Athlete Award recognizes students who demonstrate the values of educational athletics through their actions and character.

James, who also participates in the school chorus and enjoys singing when not at cheer practice, has shown that leadership doesn't always require seniority or vocal authority.

Educational athletics aim to develop not just physical skills but character traits that serve young people throughout life. Settings like team sports provide real-world opportunities to practice values like perseverance, respect, and responsibility.

Community members can support positive sportsmanship by recognizing and encouraging students who, like James, demonstrate these values consistently rather than only during moments of victory.

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](#)



General News

Richard McWhirter honored with NFHS Citation Award

TSSAA assistant executive director will be presented citation June 28 at the annual NFHS Summer Meeting

January 22, 2026

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (January 22, 2026) — Richard McWhirter, Assistant Executive Director for TSSAA, is one of the 13 leaders in high school activity programs from across the country to be selected for an NFHS Citation this year, representing Section 3.

An award designed to honor individuals who have made contributions to the NFHS, state high school associations, athletic director and coaching professions, the officiating avocation and fine arts/performing arts programs, the NFHS Citation is one of the most highly regarded achievements in high school athletics and performing arts.

Citations for state high school associations, coaching, officiating and performing arts will be presented June 28, 2026 at the annual NFHS Summer Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Eight of the 13 award recipients represent NFHS-member state high school associations, and the other five represent NFHS professional organizations for officials, coaches, music leaders and speech/debate/theatre directors.

McWhirter has been a leader in high school athletics in the state of Tennessee for more than 40 years. Since 2010, he has been an assistant executive director of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) overseeing the sports of football, cross country, and track and field.

However, McWhirter is best known for his advancement of middle school athletics in Tennessee. Under his direction, the TSSAA middle school division more than doubled its membership of middle schools and now hosts 23 state championships in seven sports. McWhirter has regularly been a presenter on middle school issues at national meetings.

Nationally, McWhirter recently completed a term as chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee and has been Tennessee's voting member on the committee since 2010.



Richard Mc Whirter

Prior to joining the TSSAA, McWhirter was the activities coordinator for the Clarksville Montgomery County School System. He also was a TSSAA football official for 27 years and a baseball and softball official for eight years.

For a full list of this year's citation winners, please visit [NFHS.org](https://www.nfhs.org).