

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026

[Lebanon's Jayden Bailey selected as national Spirit of Sport Award recipient](#)

The "National High School Spirit of Sport Award" was created by the NFHS to recognize individuals who exemplify the ideals of the spirit of sport that represent the core mission of education-based athletics.

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[Bruceton's Patrick Willis to be inducted into National High School Hall of Fame](#)

In football, Willis compiled staggering career numbers at Hollow Rock-Bruceton Central: 465 tackles, 258 solo tackles, 20 sacks, 42 tackles for loss, and 13 interceptions – all school records. Willis and 11 others will be honored in a June 29 ceremony at the Hyatt Regency in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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[Dual-sport senior recognized for leadership on basketball court](#)

Lakeland Prep senior Tatum Madden has earned the NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence for her mentorship of younger teammates on the basketball court.

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[2026 Mr. and Miss Basketball Award Winners Announced](#)

The top girls and boys basketball players in six classifications of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association were honored by being named the winners of the 2026 Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards. The awards presentation took place at Tucker Theater on the campus of MTSU on Tuesday, March 10 at 5:30 p.m.

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[Board of Control meets leading up to state basketball tournaments](#)

The Board conducted its March meeting in Mt. Juliet, taking action on a variety of issues including Division II football classification for the next two-year cycle. The board approved Lead Christian Academy's application for TSSAA membership beginning in 2026-27 and granted two schools permission to form cooperative agreements—Fayette Academy with Fayette-Ware High School in boys track and field, and St. Benedict at Auburndale with Lausanne Collegiate School in girls lacrosse.

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As one of few returning players on the team, Duncan took initiative in fostering team-first principles among his teammates. When injuries began affecting the squad, Duncan approached coaches with a solution: he volunteered to switch positions despite already being a two-way starter. The move meant trading a more prominent role for one that better served the team's needs.

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[TCATs Fuel our State's Future in Clean Energy](#)

Community and technical colleges across Tennessee play a critical role in preparing students for careers that support the clean energy sector, including nuclear energy. Our colleges deliver hands-on training and industry-aligned programs that address immediate workforce needs. Our TCATs allow students to pursue credentials in fields such as truck driving, welding, and machine tool technology—all of which lead to careers at nuclear energy facilities or organizations that support the nuclear energy industry.

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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 **sportsmanship**? 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](#)

Lebanon's Jayden Bailey selected as national Spirit of Sport Award recipient

March 16, 2026

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 16, 2026) — **Jayden Bailey**, a basketball player from Lebanon (Tennessee) High School, who sadly passed away in February after a four-year battle with cancer, has been selected as the 2026 national recipient of the “National High School Spirit of Sport Award” by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The “National High School Spirit of Sport Award” was created by the NFHS to recognize individuals who exemplify the ideals of the spirit of sport that represent the core mission of education-based athletics.

Bailey was a promising basketball player in middle school in 2022 when he was initially diagnosed with osteosarcoma in his shoulder – a bone cancer that originates in the cells and represents about three percent of all childhood cancers, according to the American Cancer Society. After 39 weeks of chemotherapy treatment cost Bailey his entire eighth-grade basketball season, he was determined to return to the hardwood and the game he loved.

As he began his freshman year at Lebanon, Bailey and his family were optimistic about his prognosis. He made the school’s basketball team and was a valuable player on the varsity squad by his sophomore year.

However, in December 2024, during a game early in his sophomore season, Bailey lost feeling in his left arm and was unable to lift it. He managed the pain and continued to play basketball, learning to shoot with just his right arm.

Doctors told Bailey the cancer had returned to his arm and was growing fast. They weren’t sure how long Bailey had to live and recommended hospice care. He had other plans. Amazingly, Bailey was able to return to school and the basketball court to finish his sophomore season.

His junior year began with more uncertainty. With his left arm still causing a significant amount of pain, the decision was made to amputate it. And, despite the pain relief, the cancer continued to spread – this time to Bailey’s stomach. And unfortunately, because of the location, there wasn’t anything doctors could do.



Jayden Bailey

Nonetheless, Bailey kept playing basketball. Even with one arm, he made the varsity team and started each morning at 6:45 a.m. in the gym with his coach, Jim McDowell, doing shooting drills to hone his shot. He continued to do what he loves and provide inspiration even given just weeks to live.

“It’s hard to have bad days with him around,” McDowell said prior to Bailey’s death. “His personality and mindset are contagious.”

Bailey continued to suit up for Lebanon through December. Nearly four years after his initial diagnosis, Bailey passed away February 17.

About the Award

In addition to the selection of Jayden Bailey as the national award recipient, the NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee chose seven other individuals for section awards. Following are the 2026 National High School Spirit of Sport section winners:

Section 1 – Cameron Soucy, student-athlete, Tolland (Connecticut) High School

Diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer at age 4, Soucy was given little chance to survive. After treatment and a bone marrow transplant, he has flourished to lead Tolland’s boys soccer team to back-to-back state championships as team captain.

Section 2 – Steven Vipperman, student-athlete, Belfry (Kentucky) High School

Vipperman survived a major car accident last May which left him without use of his right hand, severe knee and elbow lacerations and a head injury. After multiple surgeries to repair his hand and hours of painful physical therapy, Vipperman was able to rejoin the Belfry football team this fall.

Section 3 – Jayden Bailey, student-athlete, Lebanon (Tennessee) High School

Section 4 – Boys basketball team, Abundant Life Christian School, Madison, Wisconsin

A mass shooting at the Abundant Life Christian School in December 2024 took three lives and shook the community. While difficult, the return of sports at the school helped heal and inspire. It included the boys basketball team, which rode a magical and emotional run to the state tournament semifinals

Section 5 – Braxton Wohlferd, student-athlete, St. Charles (Minnesota) High School

In 2024, Wohlferd, a wrestler at St. Charles High school, contracted a virus to which his body had a rare reaction, causing cardiac arrest and eventually a heart transplant. However, one year and a day after the transplant, Wohlferd was back on the wrestling mat to a standing ovation.

Section 6 – Tony Robinson, girls basketball coach, Durant (Oklahoma) High School

Robinson already had more than 300 career victories as a basketball coach when he decided to join his son, Will’s coaching staff at Durant as an assistant coach in 2022. Robinson helped turn the program around before tragedy struck in December 2024. Will and his 8-year-old daughter died after their car was swept away in a flash flood. Will died after saving his wife, two sons and another daughter. Robinson then took over head coaching duties for his son’s team leading the girls basketball team to the state tournament.

Section 7 – Ramiro Mendoza, student-athlete, Gunnison Valley (Utah) High School

Mendoza is a four-year letter winner for the Gunnison Valley football and wrestling programs, but a freak injury during a football game this year sent the linebacker via helicopter to the hospital for surgery to save his life. Mendoza had a kidney removed and has endured a slow and painful recovery. However, his upbeat attitude and encouragement of his teammates have served as an inspiration to all.

Nominations for this award were generated through NFHS member state associations and reviewed by the NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee. The national winner and section recipients will be recognized June 26 at the NFHS Summer Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The National High School Spirit of Sport Award was started in 2008. The previous national award recipients follow:

2008 – Tammy Dufford, cheerleading coach, Evergreen (Colorado) High School, and Megan Bomgaars, cheerleader, Evergreen (Colorado) High School

2009 – Dakota Dana, student-athlete, Afton (Wyoming) Star Valley High School

2010 – Tori Clark, student-athlete, Roselle (Illinois) Lake Park High School

2011 – New Kensington (Pennsylvania) Valley High School Softball Team and Umpire Bill Dithrich

2012 – Jacob Goldberg, student-athlete, Fort Lauderdale (Florida) Pine Crest High School

2013 – Magoffin County High School, Salyersville, Kentucky, and Logan County High School, Russellville, Kentucky

2014 – Zach Pickett, student-athlete, Shingle Springs (California) Ponderosa High School

2015 – Grace Cummings, student-athlete, Madison (Connecticut) High School

2016 – Ashley Carson, student-athlete, Ord (Nebraska) High School

2017 – Danny Lilya, student-athlete, Moose Lake (Minnesota) High School

2018 – Marissa Walker, student-athlete, Waterford (Connecticut) High School

2019 – Amanda Merrell, student-athlete, Huntingtown (Maryland) High School

2020 – Noah Lambrecht, student-athlete, McCool-Junction (Nebraska) High School

2021 – Hayden Holton, student-athlete, Elmore County (Alabama) High School

2022 – The Wyatt Family, Medina (Tennessee) South Gibson High School

2023 – Gabe Marsh, student-athlete, Guntersville (Alabama) High School

2024 – Merik Dismang, student-athlete, Olathe (Kansas) East High School

2025 – Jack Punswick, student-athlete, Overland Park (Kansas) Blue Valley West High School

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 18 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,800 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 8.2 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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

Patrick Willis inducted into National High School Hall of Fame

Former Mr. Football winner becomes Tennessee's 16th inductee

June 29, 2026

Before ever playing an organized sport, Patrick Willis recalls seeing highlight tapes – yes, the old VHS variety in his elementary classroom – of former Hollow Rock-Bruceton Central High School players who starred for the Tigers before him.

“I remember that day like yesterday,” Willis recalls of a moment in science class. “I remember saying to myself, ‘Academics is tough. What am I gonna do? I want to be a doctor or maybe a lawyer.’ I loved Columbo and Matlock, but the more I thought about it, I said ‘Wait, I heard that if you can be really good at sports—it’s very hard to accomplish—they will also pay you to do it as well.’”

“So that day I said I’m gonna give it everything I’ve got and become a professional athlete and by 30 years old, I’ll be able to retire.”

Having watched his grandfather work into his 80s before retiring, the young Willis set himself on a different path that day in Mr. Neal’s classroom – one that would require extraordinary sacrifice and determination, but one that has led to countless accolades including his College Football Hall of Fame induction in 2019, Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinement in 2024, and now his 2026 induction into the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame. Willis and 11 others will be honored in a June 29 ceremony at the Hyatt Regency in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Growing up in a trailer park in rural Tennessee, Willis faced childhood difficulties that would have crushed most spirits. By age 10, he was working cotton fields to help support his family while simultaneously serving as caretaker to three younger siblings in an abusive household. Through the hardship, something deep within Willis was beginning to take shape – a resilience and mental fortitude that his future coaches would marvel at and a quiet determination that refused to let circumstances define destiny.

“It was vision, faith and purpose in there as well. I thank God every day because of what was shown to me, granted also my circumstances. It was like an equation of becoming something more or letting it swallow you up and become what I call a complaining victim.”

Although his career is defined by his impeccable performances on the football field, where Willis owns career distinction beyond the prep level for both the Ole Miss Rebels and NFL’s San Francisco 49ers, one of Willis’ seminal moments is a regretful mishap in a TSSAA state semifinal playoff game.

“One game that I know I will never forget was against Moore County my freshman year,” Willis says of the 1999 road contest. “I was so hyped, thinking holy crap we are one game away from going to the championship. This is what I imagined and saw in first grade.

"They kicked the ball off, second or third kickoff, I was so excited and thought I'm finally gonna get a chance to get my hands on the ball. I was looking at the kickoff guys coming down the field and the ball went between my arms, they got the ball back and scored."

Former Central High School coach and Tennessee Football Coaches Association Hall of Famer Rod Sturdivant remembers the night well.

"On the way home, Patrick sat right behind me on the bus," Sturdivant recalls. "If he told me once, he told me 100 times how sorry he was. But we had a couple linebackers hurt, and he ended up playing just about the whole game on defense."

Thus is the true origin story of Willis' famed career, a dominant tour de force through his years at Central to include four letters apiece in football and basketball, as well as another three in baseball from 1999 to his graduation in 2003.

"I was devastated after that kickoff, and I remember talking to myself and talking to God," Willis shares. "I was feeling down on myself, and Coach (Jack) McGee said, 'Patrick, go get in the game.'"

"I went in there, I tell you I don't know what was over me, I played like I was a senior and that was a special moment."

Perhaps the first of countless such moments.

In football, Willis compiled staggering career numbers at Hollow Rock-Bruceton Central: 465 tackles, 258 solo tackles, 20 sacks, 42 tackles for loss, and 13 interceptions – all school records. He remains the only player in Tennessee history to be named as a finalist for both back and lineman Mr. Football Awards in the same season, winning the Lineman Award outright in 2002.

In basketball, he scored 1,609 career points for the Tigers while helping transform a program that had gone 0-68 in the three years before his arrival into District Champions by 2003. He earned All-District honors in baseball as well, cementing his status as a true three-sport star for the small Carroll County school.

Willis now is the state of Tennessee's 16th NFHS Hall of Fame inductee.

He credits just about everyone but himself.

"It was like a village," says Willis, winner of SEC Defensive Player of the Year, Butkus and Lambert awards in his 2006 farewell campaign at Ole Miss. "My grandmother lived up on the hill, my cousins and uncles who I grew up playing all the sports with lived just around the corner."

"Truthfully, I would like to give a shoutout to my cousin, Jonte Willis. He was the one that always pushed me to compete even harder. He was always that one who said, 'We got to go work, got to go lift; if we want to be good, we got to be stronger than all those other guys.' I'd just follow his lead."

"I'm just grateful for my coaches and teammates and teachers and family. All of the above. They did this."

Willis does, however, remember a singular performance on the high school gridiron after his dream collegiate program, Phillip Fulmer's University of Tennessee, had informed him that the Vols would not recruit him. In the Central stands that day was then-Ole Miss defensive assistant coach Mike MacIntyre.

"Coach Sturdivant comes and tells me, 'Ole Miss is in the stands,'" says Willis, who would eventually become both a College Football and Pro Football Hall of Famer and a No. 11 overall NFL draft pick in 2007. "I just remember being like 'focus on ball and school.' Don't do what people do in the movies and mess up, just go out there and play my game and be me."

"I went out and set a record for the first three touches scoring a touchdown and had 17 tackles on defense and one interception."

Sturdivant remembers Willis for bringing the entire community along with him – and reminisces on what he might have been on the baseball diamond.

"He just made everybody feel like they were a part of his life and what he accomplished, everybody felt a part of that," says Sturdivant.

His selection as "Mr. CHS" by his peers spoke to his character beyond the field, while his involvement in FCA, Math Club, Spanish Club, and other organizations made him a visible leader across campus. For the communities of Hollow Rock and Bruceton, he wasn't just their star athlete – he was their son, their neighbor, their proof that hard work and character could overcome any obstacle.

His 2019 induction into the Carroll County Sports Hall of Fame cemented his status as a local legend, forever woven into the fabric of West Tennessee sports history.

"He was such an athlete," Coach Sturdivant adds, recounting a bit more of Willis' remarkable story. "He was just learning to hit the curve ball and then broke his wrist his junior year. But he hit a ball at Milan one time that went through their wooden fence and left a hole the size of a baseball. I think it's the hardest ball I've ever seen hit in my life."



Patrick Willis

That childhood daydream in Mr. Neal's science class – the prayer of a boy who dared to imagine a different future – manifested into a career worthy of his growing stack of hall of fame accolades. Patrick Willis proved that with passion, perseverance, and supporting those around him, even the most audacious dreams whispered in elementary school classrooms can become reality. And he did it all by age 30, just as he promised himself he would.

About the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame

The National High School Hall of Fame was started in 1982 by the NFHS to honor high school athletes, coaches, contest officials, administrators, performing arts coaches/directors and others for their extraordinary achievements and accomplishments in high school sports and performing arts programs. This year's class increases the number of individuals in the Hall of Fame to 552.

The 12 individuals were chosen after a two-level selection process involving a screening committee composed of active high school state association administrators, coaches and officials, and a final selection committee composed of coaches, former athletes, state association officials, media representatives and educational leaders. Nominations were made through NFHS member associations.

A complete list of inductees and link to the NFHS article for the 2026 National High School Hall of Fame Class can be found [here](#).



Patrick Willis Tigers Have Grit



Patrick Willis - Pro Football Hall of Fame



Patrick Willis

AUTHOR
John Brice



Dual-sport senior recognized for leadership on basketball court

March 31, 2026

Lakeland Prep senior Tatum Madden has earned the NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence for her mentorship of younger teammates on the basketball court.

The award, presented by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) and the National Federation of State High School Associations, recognizes students who demonstrate exceptional sportsmanship and character in school athletics.

Madden, who participates in both basketball and cross country, caught the attention of coaches after taking a freshman teammate under her wing. When the newcomer struggled to learn plays and felt overwhelmed, Madden stepped up by creating diagrams, walking through court positions, and providing consistent guidance during practices.

Her teammates and coaches have come to rely on her awareness during games, as she helps the squad stay organized and focused on the floor. This natural leadership has contributed to better team chemistry and more fluid gameplay for the Lakeland Prep basketball program.

The senior balances her athletic commitments with participation in the school's Criminal Justice program and holds a part-time position at a local ice cream shop after school.

School athletics serve as a training ground not just for physical skills but for life lessons that extend well beyond graduation. When students like Madden take initiative to support teammates, they demonstrate the core values educational sports aim to develop.

The NFHS Student-Athlete Award highlights these meaningful contributions that might otherwise go unnoticed in the box scores but make all the difference in creating positive athletic environments.

As another sports season progresses across our state, Madden's example reminds us that the most valuable plays often happen during practice sessions and quiet moments when no one is watching – when one athlete simply takes time to help another succeed.



Sports News

General News

2026 Mr. and Miss Basketball Award Winners Announced

The top girls and boys basketball players in six classifications honored at awards ceremony in Murfreesboro

March 9, 2026

The top girls and boys basketball players in six classifications of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association were honored by being named the winners of the 2026 Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards. The awards presentation took place at Tucker Theater on the campus of MTSU on Tuesday, March 10 at 5:30 p.m.

A statewide committee of sportswriters selected the winners based on performance during the 2024-2025 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 36 of the young men and women recognized this evening at the Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards," said Mark Reeves, 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 41st 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 as well as the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-10 pandemic, the Mr. and Miss Basketball Awards were presented at the conclusion of each respective championship game as part of the post-game trophy ceremony.

2026 MR. AND MISS BASKETBALL WINNERS

Division II-A Miss Basketball

Haylen Ayers, University School of Jackson

Division II-AA Miss Basketball

Meeyah Green, Webb School of Knoxville

Class 1A Miss Basketball

Zoey Nicholas, Pickett County High School

Class 2A Miss Basketball

Maliyah Glasper, Gatlinburg-Pittman High School

Class 3A Miss Basketball

Andrea Flores, Daniel Boone High School

Class 4A Miss Basketball

Kimora Fields, Bradley Central High School

Division II-A Mr. Basketball

Chistopher Washington, Jr., Providence Christian Academy

Division II-AA Mr. Basketball

Fred Smith, Jr., Briarcrest Christian School

Class 1A Mr. Basketball

Will McCrary, Jackson County High School

Class 2A Mr. Basketball

Derrick Roberson, Chattanooga Preparatory School

Class 3A Mr. Basketball

Ty Cobb, Upperman High School

Class 4A Mr. Basketball

DJ Okoth, BartlettHigh School



General News

Meeting Agendas/Minutes News

Board of Control meets leading up to state basketball tournaments

Officials fees for 2026-29 approved

March 4, 2026

The TSSAA Board of Control unanimously elected Grant Swallows of Warren County Schools as president and Bryan True from Loretto High School as vice president by acclamation at its March 4 meeting. The board also approved several classification and structural changes affecting multiple sports, most notably eliminating the success formula for Division II football classification and establishing a minimum of 12 teams in AAA with remaining schools divided by enrollment, a measure that passed 10-2.

In membership and cooperative actions, the board approved Lead Christian Academy's application for TSSAA membership beginning in 2026-27 and granted two schools permission to form cooperative agreements—Fayette Academy with Fayette-Ware High School in boys track and field, and St. Benedict at Auburndale with Lausanne Collegiate School in girls lacrosse. However, the board denied The Howard School's request to move to 3A classification in basketball, soccer and softball.

The board also approved on second reading a minor increase of officials' fees and voted to maintain the current one-year Average Daily Membership model for determining school classifications for 2027-2029. Nashville Christian School's request to switch wrestling regions was tabled pending input from all affected schools, while Division II AA softball programs were given flexibility to adjust their bracket structure due to low participation in the western region.

1. Voted to approve the Minutes of the January 15, 2026 meeting.
2. Elected Grant Swallows as President by acclamation.
3. Elected Bryan True as Vice President by acclamation.
4. Voted to deny The Howard School's request to move to 3A classification in basketball, soccer, and softball for the 2026-27 school year.
5. Voted to table Nashville Christian School's request to move from DII West Region to DII East Region in Wrestling and Dual Wrestling until hearing from all schools.
6. Voted to use the current model for enrollments for the 2027-2029 classification period, taking a one-year picture of the ADM (Average Daily Membership).
7. Voted to eliminate the success formula for Division II Football classification and establish a minimum of 12 teams in AAA, dividing the remaining schools based on enrollment.
8. Voted to approve the officials' fees recommendation for 2026-2029 (approved on second reading).

9. Voted to approve Fayette Academy's request to co-op with Fayette-Ware High School in Boys Track and Field.
10. Voted to approve St. Benedict at Auburndale's request to co-op with Lausanne Collegiate School in Girls Lacrosse, contingent upon the state office receiving approval from other schools in the Region.
11. Voted to allow Division II AA schools to adjust the softball bracket as needed due to the lack of schools participating in the West, with schools required to agree to the bracket by April 1 or the state office will set the bracket.
12. Voted to approve Lead Christian Academy's TSSAA membership application for the 2026-27 school year.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Sports News

General News

Middle Tennessee track official honored for distinguished service

Mike Tribue has made decades of contributions through multiple roles

March 27, 2026

No element of life's odds appeared to favor Mike Tribue.

Living through segregation – and desegregation – in the South, specifically metro Nashville, Tribue confronted daily discomfort.

“I was at Haynes High School as a ninth-grader and then Donelson in 1967 because desegregation started,” Tribue said. “Davidson County and metro government came together for metro Nashville.

“It was a very scary time, because I was one of the first few blacks to ever attend Donelson High School. There were four of us, three girls and me.”

Those formative years constituted the foundation for Tribue, who became a three-sport standout at Donelson – basketball, football and track, became the first college graduate in his family and then dedicated his life to giving back as a high school coach, teacher, principal.

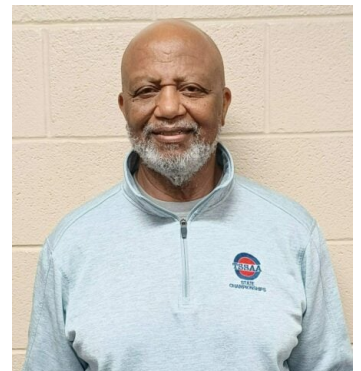
Tribue also carved a career officiating high school athletics, working extensively as a track and field official who evolved into the role of director for the Tennessee State Championships.

It's that backdrop of officiating, coupled with his career of service, that sees Tribue honored as a TSSAA Distinguished Service Award recipient.

He traces his entire journey to those days of desegregation.

“It shaped me for everything that I have grown through in my adult life,” said Tribue, who became a hometown-star at Fisk University and garnered an NFL tryout with the Philadelphia Eagles. “Those experiences taught me how to get along with folks, when to keep my mouth shut and...when to react and be heard.”

Tribue still is heard these days as an assistant basketball coach at Cane Ridge High School, where his wife, Joanne, is the head coach – and boss.



Mike Tribue

“Well, I told her, that’s the only time she’s in charge is when we’re on the basketball court, Tribue, whose football scholarship fueled his path to college, said. “She laughed at that like you just did.

“But I think one of the greatest things between her and I is that when I was principal at McGavock and teaching and coaching, she was at Hunters Lane and we never brought anything home about our sports. But at least when we played each other, one of us would be happy and the other one could be happy for the one who won.”

It’s the joy in continuing to help guide youth on a path for potential success in life that keeps Tribue serving through the decades.

“You hit the nail on the head, I just enjoy being around the youngsters and if I feel like I can help change one life that’s headed in the wrong direction, it’s worth it,” Tribue said. “That’s why I’m still doing it.

“And when these kids come back as adults, and I tell all the young coaches and teachers, when they come back and tell you what they’re doing and tell you how you helped them, I tell them that’s worth a million dollars to me.”

TSSAA proudly salutes Mike Tribue for his contributions to student-athletes in Tennessee as an official, coach, teacher, and administrator.

AUTHOR

John Brice



Brentwood Middle student recognized for sportsmanship

March 31, 2026

Brentwood Middle School eighth-grader Knox Duncan was recently honored with the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Student-Athlete Award of Excellence, presented by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA).

The award recognizes Duncan's commitment to sportsmanship and selflessness during the football season. As one of few returning players on the team, Duncan took initiative in fostering team-first principles among his teammates.

When injuries began affecting the squad, Duncan approached coaches with a solution: he volunteered to switch positions despite already being a two-way starter. The move meant trading a more prominent role for one that better served the team's needs.

Throughout the season, Duncan consistently worked with younger, less experienced players, helping them understand the finer points of the game. His sportsmanship caught the attention of game officials, who made specific mention of the positive way he communicated with teammates between plays.

Duncan's leadership extended beyond the field. His constructive communication style and willingness to take on leadership roles made a difference in the school's hallways and classrooms as well.

These qualities reflect the core values of educational athletics, where character development and sportsmanship carry equal weight with competition. At a time when many students hesitate to take leadership positions for fear of peer rejection, Duncan showed how positive leadership can unite rather than divide.

Duncan, who also plays basketball and participates in his church youth group, has established a standard of sportsmanship that enhances the educational value of athletics at Brentwood Middle School—a reminder that how we play matters just as much as whether we win.