

Prep Sports

Preps at a glance

SCORES

Boys	
Butler	62
Huntsville	54
Minor	61
Grissom	36
M. Academy	66
New Hope	36
Austin	62
Sparkman	55
Bob Jones	74
Decatur	59
Plainview	72
Randolph	44
Woodville	70
Catholic	39
DAR	65
Douglas	58
Arab	54
Scottsboro	46
Athens	71
Cullman	62
Tullahoma	68
Lincoln Co.	51
Dec. Heritage	74
Speake	55
Elkmont	60
W. Limestone	55
Girls	
Butler	58
Huntsville	28
Minor	45
Grissom	32
M. Academy	40
New Hope	16
Madison Co.	51
N. Jackson	45
Sparkman	77
Austin	28
Decatur	59
Bob Jones	48
Plainview	75
Randolph	39
Woodville	76
Catholic	19
Boaz	45
Guntersville	34
DAR	71
Douglas	35
Arab	57
Scottsboro	46
Athens	87
Cullman	38
Speake	67
Dec. Heritage	51
Huntland	71
St. Andrews	17

STARS OF THE NIGHT

Haley Finley, Madison Co.

Teammate Teresa Matthews had 20 points, but Finley's double-double of 10 assists and 10 points helped key an area win over North Jackson.

Jake Pressnell, Elkmont

Pressnell's 33 points led an overtime win over county rival West Limestone.

Mike Hamilton, Butler

Hamilton had a double-double of 13 points and 11 rebounds in a city and area win over Huntsville. Teammate Courtney Beasley led the scoring with 20 points.

UP NEXT

Basketball Thursday

Arab at Buckhorn

One down, but two still to go

With streak done, Sparkman girls can focus on second title

By MIKE EASTERLING
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HARVEST — Their winning streak over at 51 straight, the Sparkman Lady Senators can now turn their attention to the only thing they really care about — repeating as Class 6A state champions.

The Lady Senators, who lost for the first time in two seasons Saturday at Johnson, insisted all season the winning streak was not a priority. Now, they can put it to rest and focus on gearing up for the postseason.

Area tournaments begin in a month.

"It was a letdown because this group hasn't lost, or it's been a year-and-a-half since they lost a game, but they now see it absolutely can happen unless you work hard every day and work hard every game," Sparkman coach June Seals said.

"You can't let anyone slide and you can't underestimate anybody. We didn't underestimate Johnson — they brought their A-plus game and we weren't ready for an A-plus game."

Sparkman, ranked No. 1 all season and coming off the school's first basketball title, is obviously a team that garners plenty of attention. Perhaps now the Lady Senators, who might as well have worn uniforms sponsored by Target with a dot and a circle on the front and back, will become less of one for opponents now that the streak is over.

But that's not something the Lady Senators are counting on.

"Every time somebody plays us they play us a little harder than other teams, it seems," senior forward Tiffany Benford said.

According to Seals, the reigning champions will continue to see opponents' best efforts.

"You know everybody around here is tough, even the lesser teams," Seals said. "Nothing is a gimme. There's a lot of pride in basketball around here.

"What we get is everybody's best every night. But we expect that, for everybody to come at



Bob Gathary/Huntsville Times

Sparkman second-year coach June Seals takes her first loss with the defending Class 6A state champion Lady Senators last Saturday against Johnson.

"What we get is everybody's best every night. But we expect that, for everybody to come at us every night."

June Seals, Sparkman coach

us every night. That's how we would be."

Whether or not the streak was a burden is now moot. But it was apparent Tuesday night against Austin that the Lady Senators (17-1) played like a relieved team in a 77-28 rout.

Johnson was no slouch. The Lady Jaguars are ranked No. 7 in 5A, are undefeated at home this season and sank 15-of-17 free throws to slip past the Lady Senators 66-58.

"What we've got to do is play four quarters wide open," Seals said. "We're playing some very

talented teams, no doubt about it. We went to their house, where they haven't lost a game this year, and that's a lot of pride.

"We talked about playing better defense and working harder on the things we're doing OK with because OK is not good enough."

Different pace

Sparkman returned key elements from its championship team, but the loss of two senior starters prompted a change in the Lady Senators' approach.

Point guard Netra Smith, a master of tempo control, is now at Alabama-Birmingham. Center Tiffany Moore, a presence inside at 6-foot-2, is now at Mississippi State.

But All-State senior forward Meme Moore and Benford, also a senior forward, as well as junior guard Latoya Barclay returned to start.

Moore, a relentless player who was the Super All-Metro

Player of the Year last season, averages 17 points and 10 rebounds. Benford, who was the Most Valuable Player at last summer's North-South All-Star game, averages 20 points and seven rebounds.

Meanwhile, Barclay averages 13 points and six assists.

Those three are joined in the starting lineup by seniors Morgan Chatman, a forward, and guard Tunisha Clay.

"I think we're quicker than we were last year," Moore said. "We get to run the break more. We like to run the floor."

Barclay and Benford back that notion.

"I like to go. I can't wait around," Barclay said as Benford echoed, "We don't like to slow it down."

Seals doesn't try to.

"This is more of a transition team and we have to be because we don't have that height," she said.

Please see **TITLE** on D2

Athens' streak lives on, but second state title is what matters most

By SKIP VAUGHN
For The Times
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The Athens girls lost three starters and a key reserve from last year's unbeaten state championship team.

But they haven't lost anything else.

The Eaglettes, ranked No. 1 in Class 5A, stand 18-0. They've won 52 in a row and 71 of their last 72 games. The state record for consecutive wins is 62 shared by Hartselle (1984-86) and T. R. Miller (1994-96).

"We haven't really talked about it," coach Randy White said of the streak. "Even last year we didn't. I'm sure the kids read the paper. You're only as good as your last game. It's more the end of the season, how you're playing. It is good recognition for the kids."

He doesn't believe the streak adds pressure. He's more concerned that his team hasn't been shooting as well lately.

"Our kids are pretty well focused," he said. "They know if you don't come out and play well on any given night, teams can beat you."

Athens just keeps winning by putting defensive pressure on its opponents.

"The defensive part allows you to come out on top in all the games," White said. "And that's what we stress."

The Eaglettes entered Tuesday night game against Cullman giving up 36.6 points per game while scoring 70.5. Their closest game was a 59-53 win over Father Ryan of Nashville in the semifinals of the River City Classic in Decatur late last month.

Christine Scales, a senior post player, averages 19.5 points and 6.1 rebounds. LaKisha Johnson, a senior wing, averages 16.4 points, 7.8 rebounds and 3.8 steals. India Wood, a junior guard, averages 10.6 points. Shauntae Lockett, a senior post, contributes 7.6 rebounds. Christian Malone, a junior guard, adds 5.5 assists.

The reserves include senior

Please see **MATTERS** on D2

Former double play combo together in new venture

An idea set into motion by two close friends years ago is nearing reality.

Scott Johnson and Todd Hayes, All-City baseball players for Ray Walker's Grissom Tigers in the mid-1980s, once imagined how it would be to share a physical therapy business. They'll find out beginning Monday when the two open a private PT practice on Balmoral Drive under the name Johnson and Hayes.

"Both of us wanted to make a bigger impact for our families," Johnson said.

The path the two friends took to Balmoral wasn't a straight one.

After earning All-City distinction before graduating from Grissom in 1987 — Hayes was a shortstop, Johnson a second baseman — they played together for two years at



MIKE EASTERLING
Prep editor

Gadsden State. Hayes later played at Lipscomb, while Johnson played at Birmingham-Southern.

Hayes graduated from Lipscomb in '91, then went to Auburn to earn an electrical engineering degree to go with his math degree. After graduating in '93, he returned to Huntsville and began working with an engineering company.

Meanwhile, Johnson earned a biology degree from Birmingham-Southern in '91 and began working in the PT field for Baptist Health Systems in Birmingham. (He later earned a PT masters from UAB).

He enjoyed his line of work but Hayes, who said the two had been "inseparable" since becoming friends in the eighth grade, was traveling with his job and wanted to spend more time at home.

His pal then took the first step in what would later become the dream.

"Scott told me, 'Come down to Birmingham and see if you like (PT),' " Hayes said.

That was in '94, and one November night Johnson suggested to Hayes if he entered the PT business maybe they could someday share a practice.

Hayes began taking night classes and by '98 returned to college full-time. He graduated into the PT world in '99.

By then Scott was working as an area administrator for HealthSouth in Huntsville and helped bring Hayes aboard.

The two have worked together at HealthSouth for the past three years and several months ago decided the time was ripe to go their own way.

"We're chasing down a dream," Johnson said.

Not surprisingly, both married high school sweethearts months apart in '93. Scott and the former Carrie Cason have son Sam, 4, and daughter Alley, 2. Todd and the former Monica Lancaster have daughters Katie, 5, and Lauren, five months, and son Carter, 2.

Both say their growing families weighed heavily into their decision to branch out on their own in a highly competitive business.

Perhaps fittingly, the name of Johnson and Hayes' holding company is 6-4-3 Incorporated, a play off the shortstop-to-second-to-first double play in baseball.

The friends say they'll bring a "hands-on" and "one-on-one" philosophy with a home-grown element into their business. And as Monday's opening nears, both are excited as well as a little anxious.

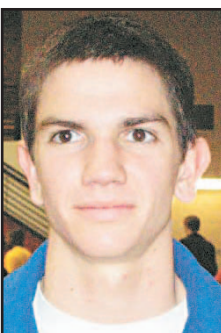
"The response we've had so far is overwhelming," Johnson said.

Hopefully, the transition for the former Grissom standouts will be as smooth as a well-turned 6-4-3 double play.

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THE HEAD OF THE CLASS

LUKE POWELL
Huntsville High School



Huntsville High senior Luke Powell is in his third season of varsity wrestling. He has made All-City twice, takes part in cross country and golf, maintains a 4.0 grade point average, was a National Merit semifinalist, is in Mu Alpha Theta and is president of the senior class.

KYLE BRICKHOUSE
Madison Academy



Madison Academy senior Kyle Brickhouse is in his third season of varsity basketball. He has made All-Area two seasons, was honorable mention All-Metro, is SGA vice president, maintains a 3.29 grade point average, received the basketball academic award and is in Mu Alpha Theta.

PAIGE ASHLEY
Section High School



Section senior Paige Ashley is in her fourth season of basketball for the Lady Lions. She has made the All-Region tournament team, has been her team's top rebounder and best field goal shooter for two seasons, maintains a 3.69 grade point average, is on the National Honor Roll and has been a class president for three years.

ALEXIS OGBIE
Johnson High School



Johnson junior Alexis Ogbie averages about 12 points per game for the Lady Jags basketball team. Class senator, she maintains a 3.5 grade point average, has made All-City and All-Area and is in the magnet program.

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