

McKENZIE REBELS BASKETBALL IS #STATEBOUND


SPECIAL EDITION **TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2019**




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- AND MUCH MORE!

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STATE BOUND



Far Left, Rebel Ben Austin led all scorers with 27 points in the Sectional win. Left, Rebel Lucas King scored 10 points in the Sectional win. Right, Rebel Nate Whitsell scored 22 points in the Sectional win. Far Right, Rebel senior Ben Austin gets a hug from Head Coach John Wilkins and a pat on the back from Assistant Coach Larry Joe Smith as he exits the Sectional game for the final time. Photos by Brad Sam/The Banner



Above, Rebel fans storm the court when the clock hits double-zeros to certify McKenzie's ticket to the state tournament. Below Left, The Rebel student section erupts in cheers after a monster slam dunk by Ben Austin with the Sectional win all but secured. Below Right, Rebel Nate Whitsell celebrates the Sectional victory as McKenzie fans storm the court. Photos by Brad Sam/The Banner



McKenzie Rebels Earn State Tournament Berth with Sectional Win

BY BRAD SAM

brad@mckenziebanner.com
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McKENZIE (March 5) — The McKenzie High School Rebels will travel to Murfreesboro next week as one of the “Elite Eight” teams in the 2019 TSSAA Class A State Boys’ Basketball Tournament at the Murphy Center on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University.

The Rebels punched their tickets Monday with a 69-57 Sectional win over a tough East Robertson team before a raucous crowd at Bethel University’s Crisp

Arena. It is just the second trip the Rebels have made to the state tournament in the history of the program, the first coming 21 years ago.

After a tight first quarter, the Rebels gradually built up a lead over the resilient Indians. A Lucas King three-pointer to open the second half finally gave McKenzie its first double-digit lead, and from there the gap hovered between eight and 14 points. With just over a minute to play, Ben Austin punctuated the win with a breakaway and a two-handed slam dunk that elicited a thunderous reaction from Rebel faithful.

When time expired, an ocean of red and gray swept onto the court in celebration. Each player, Assistant Coach Larry Joe Smith and finally Head Coach John Wilkins cut a piece of the net down from the goal in traditional fashion.

The Rebels will be joined by Columbia Academy, Humboldt, Manassas, University School – Johnson City, Cosby, Fayetteville and Eagleville in the single-elimination tournament.

First round games in Class A are Thursday, March 14 at 1:15, 2:45, 4:30 and 6 p.m. Semifinal games are Friday at 4:30 and 6 p.m., and the championship game

is Saturday at 6 p.m.

McKenzie begins tournament play Thursday at 4:30 p.m. against University School – Johnson City.

McKenzie Rebels 69, East Robertson Indians 57

The Rebels had a 16-15 edge after the opening frame, led by Ben Austin with nine points. Lucas King scored four, Lane Horton had a pair, and Lazarick Hill hit a free throw. Taylor Groves led the Indians with eight points. Isaiah Hobby scored four, and Darion Shannon hit a three-pointer.

McKenzie had a 16-10 advantage in the second quarter, led again by Austin with seven points. Nate Whitsell scored four, Micah Austin

hit a three-pointer, and Hill added a pair. Dalton Hammonds led East Robertson with six points on a pair of threes, and Groves and Hobby each added a pair. At the half, the Rebels led 32-25.

The Rebels outscored the Indians 18-17 in the third, led by Whitsell with ten points, including a pair of threes. King scored five with a three-pointer, M. Austin added a pair, and B. Austin hit a freebie. Groves led East Robertson with eight, including a three. Shannon scored six, and Hobby had three points. Heading into the final frame, McKenzie led 50-42.

McKenzie capped the win with a 19-15 tilt in the fourth, led by B.

Austin with ten points. Whitsell scored eight, and King hit a free throw. Groves and Shannon each scored six for the Indians, and Hammonds hit a three-pointer.

Rebel Ben Austin led all scores with 27 points. Nate Whitsell scored 22 with a pair of three-pointers. Lucas King had ten points, also with a three.

Taylor Groves led East Robertson with 24 points, including a three-pointer. He was 11-for-11 at the line. Darion Shannon scored 15 points with a three.

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Tyler Spivey

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STATE BOUND



Big Ben Brings the Thunder!

BY BRAD SAM
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With a minute and a half remaining in the McKenzie's Sectional win over East Robertson, the Rebels had the game well in hand, leading 65-53 when Ben Austin added a punctuation mark to the victory.

He got ahead of the Indian defense in transition, and Nate Whitsell threw a Hail Mary from the other end. The 6'8" Austin caught

the pass and floated to the basket for a two-handed slam dunk, swinging briefly from the rim. The Rebel faithful filling the stands erupted in thunderous jubilation.

Then, just as that earthquake was subsiding, the towering senior brought on an aftershock with a block of a shot by Indian Taylor Groves. A third wave of deafening cheers and applause would come shortly after when Austin exited the game for the final time.

In an interview with The Ban-

ner, Austin said it was his fourth dunk of the season, by his count, "but that was definitely the best one." He said that as Whitsell's perfect pass was coming to him, he was thinking, "I knew there was no one. This has got to be my chance. Everybody's getting on me about not dunking it a few times in the past games. The crowd's going wild, we're already hyped up, so I might as well do it. And I did it, and that was the best feeling ever, how loud that place got. And then to go down there a block, that's just an awesome sequence."

Asked about how he got his bearings after the dunk to get

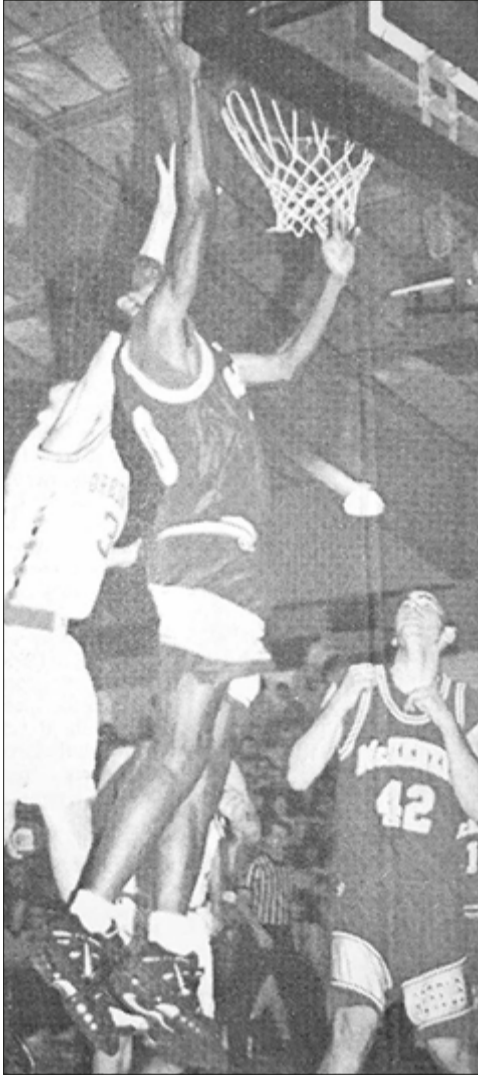
down the court and get a block so quickly, he said, "Because whenever you dunk like that, you grow about three inches and you think you can jump out of the gym. That was probably the fastest I've ever run down the court, and then as soon as I saw [Groves] coming in there, I knew I was either gonna foul him or block him. It ended up a block. After that I knew it was over, because we had too much energy and we were too excited. There was no way they were coming back."

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

1998 McKenzie Rebels Advance to State, Defeat Greenfield 63-59



Above, McKenzie Rebels, cheerleaders, and fans enjoy the Substate victory Monday evening. They now advance to state tournaments in Murfreesboro. Below Left, Calvin Perkins moved inside for an easy shot while Jason Ross waits for a rebound if necessary. Below Center, McKenzie's Chuck Washburn and Josh Morton allowed Jacket Jeremy Vujicic the shot to avoid a foul. Below Right, Justin Stafford moved inside for this shot against Yellowjacket opposition. File photos originally published on March 11, 1998



How to Attend, Watch or Listen

The Rebels will be counting on community support as they compete for a state championship beginning Thursday.

To Attend:

The TSSAA State Basketball Tournaments are played at the Murphy Center on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University at 1500 Greenland Drive, Murfreesboro, TN 37132. From McKenzie, travel to I-40, then take I-840 East at Exit 176. This avoids the Nashville metro area and meets I-24 just north of Murfreesboro.

According to the TSSAA website, gates generally open 45 minutes before the first scheduled game of the day.

Admission is \$10 per day Wednesday through Friday for school-age children and older. Tickets for Saturday's championship games are \$12 each. TSSAA Championship Event Cards and TACA cards will be accepted for admission at the pass gate to the right of the main entrance. The TSSAA ID card and TMSAA ID card are not accepted for admission to championship events. Tickets may be purchased at the gate or in advance through GoFan online ticketing.

Parking is \$5 per day near Murphy Center in the large parking lot on Greenland Drive. Due to road construction around the campus all attendees are encouraged to allow for plenty of travel time.

Murphy Center is handicap accessible via the loading dock on the east side of the arena. Parking is available in the Greenland Dr. lot for vehicles displaying valid handicap placards. Food and drink will be available for purchase at Murphy Center. No outside food or drink will be allowed.

For more information about the area including hotels, visit the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce website at VisitRutherfordTN.com.

To Watch or Listen:

Fans unable to travel to Murfreesboro for the tournament, games are available for live streaming at tssaasports.com/basketball.

Live video is available for a nominal fee through the NFHS Network. Live audio provided by TSSAA is free.

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Rebels Celebrate Sectional Victory with Cutting of the Net



Top Left, Ben Austin. Top Center, Tyler Spivey. Top Right, Brandon Hobson. Above Left, Lucas King. Above Center, Nate Whitsell. Above Right, Lazarick Hill. Below Left, Caleb Gill. Below Right, Lane Horton. Photos by Brad Sam/The Banner





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STATE BOUND



Top Left, 2018-19 McKenzie Rebels Basketball Team, Top Right, MHS Basketball Cheerleaders (L to R): Front Row — Haven Hargrove, Marisa Nunnery and Sydney Pate; Second Row — Ashlyn Drewry, Anna Grace Spivey, Savannah Hill and Taylor Hall; Back Row — Jessica Moore, Lauren Mansfield, Madison Hendrix, Momi DeLoach and Kristen Taylor. Above, Seniors (L to R): Stephone Haynes, Ben Austin, Brandon Hobson, Tyler Spivey, Jazmin Ventura, Tayla Stubbs, Mi'Kayla Gill, Julie French, Macey Ognibene, La'Jada Edmonson, Marisa Nunnery, Kristen Taylor and Haven Hargrove.

2018-19 McKenzie High School Senior Spotlights



Ben Austin

Parents: John and Natalie Austin

Favorite Basketball Player: Larry Bird

On finishing his high school basketball career at the state tournament: "It's awesome. We've got a great group of guys. I have amazing teammates around me. We've made a post-season push. A lot of people didn't think we were gonna be here, but we did it. And we knew from the beginning of the year that we could do it if we just worked hard and never gave up, and that's what we did. We bought into the mentality as

a team. I couldn't ask for a better group of guys, from freshmen to seniors, to surround myself with, that work as hard in practice. That's something that goes overlooked a lot is our practice players. They do a lot of work for us. They make us work in practice, and it shows during the games. So, I just love being around them and having fun with them."

On representing McKenzie: "Coming from a small town, the support that we've gotten is just amazing. I've had so many people tell me they're coming, driving three hours away just to support us. It just means a lot. You can tell that our community is behind us, and we're gonna try and make them proud."



Tyler Spivey

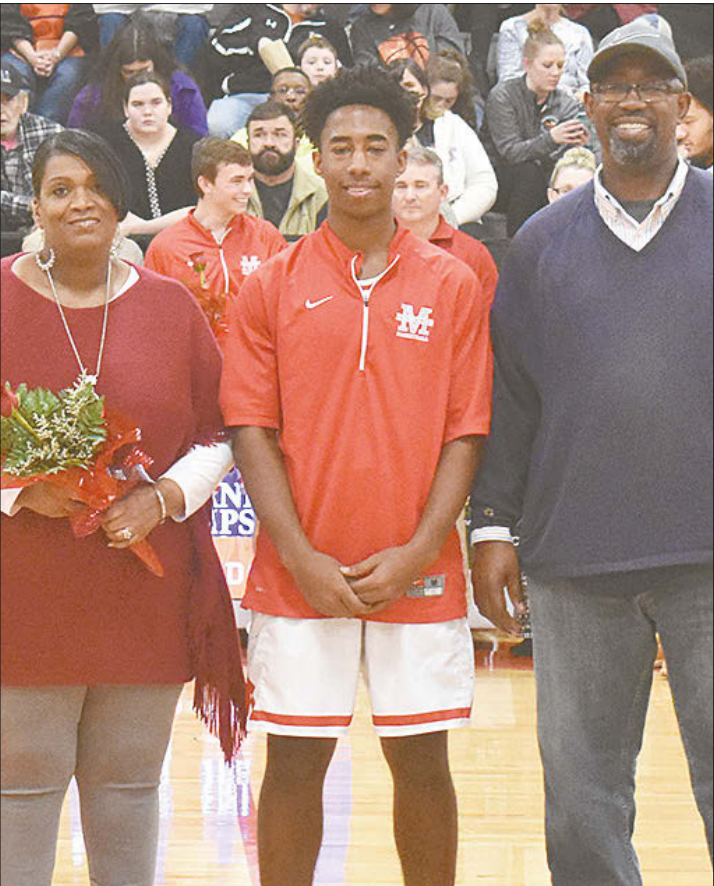
Parents: Kelly and Mary Spivey

Favorite Basketball Player: Ben Simmons

On finishing his high school basketball career at the state tournament: "It's always been a dream of mine. As a little kid, thinking of going to the state tournament, watching sometimes on Saturday the championship games, and see-

ing all of those athletes over there, and always dreaming about going. It's just an awesome opportunity."

On representing McKenzie: "Well I'm not from here (Spivey's family moved here when he was in seventh grade), so coming here, everybody's accepted me. I've become close with my fellow seniors and my guys. Being with the juniors for three years now, we've all become close like brothers. I've enjoyed it. I'm glad I can represent McKenzie. I wouldn't want to represent anybody else."



Brandon Hobson

Parents: Craig and Renee Hobson

Favorite Basketball Player: Stephen Curry

On finishing his high school basketball career at the state tournament: "It's been fun. I've

been with my friends, making a lot of memories. It's going to be something I'll remember for the rest of my life. It's gonna be great. It's been a great season, seeing everybody grow and everything."

On representing McKenzie: "It feels great to represent my hometown."

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STATE BOUND

2018-19 McKenzie High School Boys Basketball Team



Freshman #12 Zayden McCaslin



Freshman #22 Andrew Cole



Freshman #34 Caleb Gill



Freshman #42 Jake McDaniel



Sophomore #2 Elijah Seivers



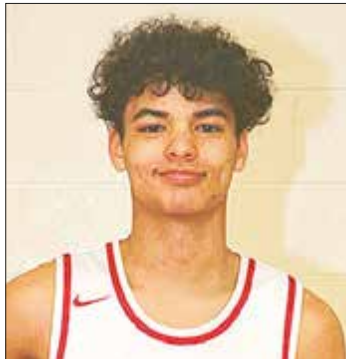
Sophomore #10 Jaden Currie



Sophomore #21 Johnathan Moore



Sophomore #33 Eli Surber



Junior #1 Lucas King



Junior #4 West Cook



Junior #5 Lazarick Hill



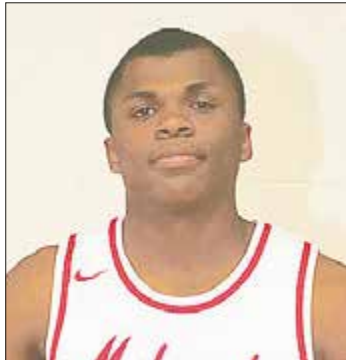
Junior #15 Lane Horton



Junior #20 Evan Jarrett



Junior #23 Micah Austin



Junior #25 Nate Whitsell



Senior #3 Tyler Spivey



Senior #11 Brandon Hobson



Senior #32 Ben Austin

2018-19 McKenzie High School Boys Statistics

#	Names	GP	FGM-A	3PTM-A	FG%	FTM-A	Tot. Pts	AVG/GM	TREB	REB/GM
1	Lucas King	29	151 - 345	49 - 151	43.4	93 - 116	441	15.2	119	4.1
3	Tyler Spivey	30	6 - 39	3 - 21	15.8	6 - 6	21	.7	24	.8
5	Lazarick Hill	31	115 - 242	19 - 74	47.5	53 - 84	304	9.8	109	3.5
15	Lane Horton	31	31 - 62	0 - 3	47.0	16 - 28	81	2.6	78	2.5
20	Evan Jarrett	25	15 - 40	3 - 10	39.0	13 - 15	48	1.9	40	1.6
23	Micah Austin	17	27 - 92	14 - 48	30.4	19 - 31	88	5.2	36	2.1
25	Nate Whitsell	31	105 - 189	12 - 31	59.3	31 - 47	254	8.2	161	5.2
32	Ben Austin	31	223 - 366	25 - 74	60.7	96 - 130	567	18.3	322	10.4
34	Caleb Gill	31	50 - 127	12 - 43	39.1	25 - 37	136	4.4	36	2.1
	TOTALS	31	723 - 1502	137 - 455	48.1	352 - 494	1940	62.5	925	29.8

2018-19 McKenzie High School Boys Roster

#	Player		
1	Lucas King	25	Nate Whitsell
2	Elijah Seivers	32	Ben Austin
3	Tyler Spivey	33	Eli Surber
4	West Cook	34	Caleb Gill
5	Lazarick Hill	42	Jake McDaniel
10	Jaden Currie		Head Coach: John Wilkins
11	Brandon Hobson		Assistant Coach: Larry Joe Smith
12	Zayden McCaslin		Managers: Stephone Haynes, Drew Beeler,
15	Lane Horton		Allie Chappell and Claire Wilkins
20	Evan Jarrett		Videographer: Logan Green
21	Jonathan Moore		Team Scorekeeper: Ladona Herrin
22	Andrew Cole		Social Media Director: Tim McBride
23	Micah Austin		Principal/Athletic Director: Tim Watkins

1997-98 Rebels Honored for Historic Season

BY BRAD SAM

brad@mckenziebanner.com
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The 2017-98 basketball season was the 20th anniversary of the McKenzie High School Rebels reaching the state tournament for the first time in the program's history. An event was planned prior to a Friday night game during that season, but fate (in the form of Mother Nature) forced that event to be canceled. Members of the 1997-98 team were invited to come back early in the next season, on Friday, December 7, 2018 for a reception prior to and recognition during the game. It would turn out to be fitting as the Rebels had high expectations for the 2018-19 season, expectations that they would meet head-on. The following article appeared in the December 11, 2018 edition of The Banner.

McKENZIE (December 7) — The 1997-98 McKenzie High School Rebels basketball team was honored between Friday's games. The team was the first and only boys basketball team in school history to advance to the state tournament. Prior to the games, former players and other team members were invited to a reception in the cafeteria. They were treated to a meal catered by Mallard's Restaurant as video was played of their sub-state victory over Greenfield. On display was memorabilia from the historic season.



Members of the 1997-98 MHS Rebels basketball team present at Friday's game were (L to R): Front Row — team scorer Tim McBride, Head Coach Larry Joe Smith, Mat Kee, Justin Stafford, Assistant Coach Bruce Herrin and Principal Terry Howell; Back Row — Calvin Perkins, Chuck Washburn, Scott Schweitzer, Clint Verner, John Lankford, Andrew Foster and Thom Woodson. Photo by Brad Sam/The Banner

The team finished as district champions and region runners-up before defeating Greenfield to earn the state berth. They ended the season in the quarterfinals with an overall record of 24-6. During the reception, then Head Coach (and current Assistant Coach) Larry Joe Smith addressed those present. He said that those that were a part of that team have "got a bond that will hold us together."

He introduced current Head Coach John Wilkins, who wanted his players to "see guys who have done it before."

Both Smith and Wilkins expressed their hope that this year's team could match that historic season.

Between games, the players were welcomed onto the court, entering through a tunnel of current players and cheerleaders. The teams' accolades were listed and the players recognized individually. They then joined the cheerleaders in a tunnel for the current team to enter for warm-ups.

Present for the festivities were players Mat Kee, Chuck Washburn, Justin Stafford, Calvin Perkins (who flew in from Philadelphia), Thom

Woodson, John Lankford, Andrew Foster, Clint Verner and Scott Schweitzer, team scorer Tim McBride, Principal Terry Howell, Assistant Coach Bruce Herrin and Head Coach Larry Joe Smith.

Those not able to attend were Jason Ross, Clay Boyd, Shannon Milton, Darrian Allen, Ryan Kirk, Ryan Anderson, Josh Morton, Mark Smith, Colby Brandon and manager Corey Glisson. The event was scheduled during last season (the 20th anniversary), but inclement weather forced its cancellation.

2018-19 McKenzie Rebels

28-3 Overall • 11-1 District 11A

Date	Opponent	Result
Nov. 13	Madison Academic	W 80-43
Nov. 16	Stewart County	W 70-44
Nov. 20	at #12 Peabody	W 69-67
Nov. 27	at Bradford	W 62-52
Nov. 30	#22 Camden	W 89-82
Dec. 4	at Clarksburg	W 73-19
Dec. 7	Obion County	W 71-40
Dec. 11	at Big Sandy	W 76-27
Dec. 14	West Carroll	L 62-69
Dec. 17	Bradford	W 63-41
Dec. 27	Lexington	L 47-53
Dec. 28	Waverly	W 72-38
Jan. 3	Dresden	W 74-21
Jan. 4	at Hollow Rock-Bruceton	W 75-56
Jan. 8	Natchez Trace	W 68-10
Jan. 11	Huntingdon	W 67-33
Jan. 15	Clarksburg	W 77-31
Jan. 18	#2 Columbia Academy	L 38-51
Jan. 19	at Dresden	W 57-45
Jan. 22	Big Sandy	W 76-37
Jan. 25	at West Carroll	W 66-54
Jan. 29	Hollow Rock-Bruceton	W 56-39
Jan. 31	Natchez Trace	W 64-10
Feb. 1	Greenfield	W 66-46
Feb. 5	at Huntingdon	W 67-45
Feb. 12	Hollow Rock-Bruceton	W 77-32
Feb. 15	D11A Semifinal	
	Huntingdon	W 52-43
Feb. 22	D11A Championship	
	Perry County	W 63-50
Feb. 26	Region 6A Quarterfinal	
	#11 Summertown	W 66-42
Feb. 28	Region 6A Semifinal	
	#8 Loretto	W 54-51
Mar. 4	Region 6A Championship	
	#10 East Robertson	W 69-57
	Class A Sectional	

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Above, The Rebels celebrate their first region championship in 45 years. Below, The Rebels celebrate their fifth consecutive district championship. Right, Lane Horton scores and draws a foul in McKenzie's loss to Columbia Academy in January. Columbia Academy will also appear in the state tournament. Far Right, Lazarick Hill scores against Loretto in McKenzie's Region 6A championship win. Photos by Brad Sam/The Banner



The Long Road Back to the State Tournament

BY JIM POTTS

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One could have a really good debate on when the current journey that has led to this state tournament berth began. Some would say it started after the last trip to state in 1998. Some would say it started in 2014-15 season which was the first of five consecutive district titles. You could even make a case for the journey starting right after the upset loss to Collinwood last year in the first round of the region tournament when play had to be stopped due to dangerous weather. The Rebels had the lead, the momentum, and the ball when play was stopped. When the game resumed some 45 minutes later, McKenzie couldn't get the momentum back and lost 62-57. The fact is all of these played

a part in the Rebel basketball program getting back to the state tournament.

McKenzie began the 21st century in a losing rut with several consecutive losing seasons with some of that due to competing in double A against the likes of Bolivar, Camden, Milan, and Lexington. The first winning season of the new century came in 2005-2006 when the Rebels returned to Class A and immediately improved from 12-13 the previous year to 24-6 and 10-1 with a district championship but lost in the first round of the region tournament. McKenzie was competitive for the next couple of seasons, but struggled from 2007-2012. In the 2012-2013 season, the Rebels improved to 22-8 and 14-2 in the district, winning the district championship but losing in the first round of the region tournament. This would be a burr in the Rebels' behind for the next

several seasons.

The current streak of district championships began with the 2014-2015 season with the Rebels averaging 20-plus wins per season but losing in the first round of the region tournament. McKenzie wasn't the only team with that problem; the entire district was being swept out in the first round of the region tournament for several seasons.

The Rebels put together a solid 2017-2018 campaign posting a 23-8 record with a 10-2 district record plus their fourth straight district title. It was Saturday, February 24, they played host to #17 Collinwood in the first round of the Region 6 tournament in front of a full-house crowd. The game was close from the start. Early in the fourth period, McKenzie had the lead, momentum, and possession of the ball when play was stopped due to dangerous weather in the area. 45

minutes later, the game resumed but the Rebels lost the momentum and went cold shooting which led to a 62-57 loss abruptly ending the season.

2018 — 2019

There was a lot of excitement about this year's team way before the season even began knowing that the Rebels returned a lot of talent from the previous season. The season dawned on November 13, 2018 with an 80-43 blowout win against Madison Academic. They won their first eight games including a 69-67 win over Trenton Peabody who was ranked #12 at the time. Peabody went all the way to the sectionals ending their season against Memphis-Manassas. They defeated another ranked team in #22 Camden in an 89-82 shootout.

McKenzie's first loss came to West Carroll on December 14 after the War Eagles erased a

double digit lead with a scorching shooting streak in the final period defeating the Rebels 69-67 in overtime. They bounced back in the next game defeating Bradford by 22 points at home heading into the Christmas Break. Their second loss came in their first game in the Huntingdon Point Guard Classic when they came out flat against Lexington losing 53-47. The very next day they came out and whipped Waverly 72-38 to close out 2018. Starting with the Waverly win, McKenzie went 14-1 during the remainder of the regular season losing only to #2 Columbia Academy who is also in the State Tournament with the Rebels. After that loss on January 18, the Rebels have not lost since posting a number of lopsided victories, sweeping the district tournament for their fifth straight district title.

They went into the Region

Tournament at Bethel University defeating Perry County in the quarterfinals 63-50 and then ended #11 Summertown's season in the semi-finals 66-42, and won a close 54-51 contest against #8 Loretto who was the defending state champion in Class A, to win their first region title since the 1970s. Next up was a talented, #10 ranked East Robertson team in the sectionals. This game was a win or season over contest. McKenzie kept the momentum the entire contest and punched their ticket to the state tournament with a convincing 69-57 win.

Putting the season in perspective, the Rebels have been dominating with the exception of the three hiccups. They defeated six ranked teams including three in a row in the tournaments. No matter how things turn out in Murfreesboro, this team will be remembered for years to come.

Wilkins Makes First Trip to State Tournament

BY BRAD SAM

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McKenzie High School boys basketball Head Coach John Wilkins will make his first appearance as a coach at the TSSAA State Basketball Tournament Thursday when he leads his 28-3 Rebels to their second appearance in program history and first since 1998.

Wilkins has attended several TSSAA state tournaments as a fan, most notably and most recently last Thursday through Saturday as his father, Mitch Wilkins, coached the Gibson County Lady Pioneers to the Class A Girls Championship. It was his first championship win.

John is in his seventh season as the Rebels' head coach, following six years as assistant coach under his father at Henry County High School. The two departed Henry County for their respective current positions during the same summer. During a post-game interview with The Banner following the Rebels Sectional win

against East Robertson, Wilkins said, "We hoped the moment wouldn't get too big for us, and it didn't. We just focused on defending and rebounding and doing those things, and we knew everything else would take care of itself."

He said of East Robertson, "They're a good team. Everybody from here on out is. We get a two-point win or whatever, we're gonna be happy to have it."

He addressed facing a long break between the Sectional and the first round of the state tournament, and made reference to the fact that he wasn't the only Wilkins coaching at this year's state tournaments. "It'll be different. Dad's in the state tournament Thursday, so I have to kind of balance going and watching him and also getting prepared at the same time. That's a good problem to have. I'll figure all this stuff out. I love being in the position of having to figure out how I can prepare my team for the state tournament, and watch my dad's team. It's just such a blessing. We're fortunate to be where we are, we have caught



some breaks this year. We've got a good group of kids that have worked and continue to work. It's going to be fun. We're gonna

figure it out."

Wilkins also noted the Rebels' crucial comeback win against Loretto in the Region champion-

ship game. "That fourth-quarter comeback was big the other night, staying here." But come-from-behind wins are nothing new for this McKenzie squad. "Our kids believe they can win. We've been in that scenario a couple of times and been able to get over the hump. Now, we get down six, eight or ten, it's not panic time for us. You need some of that in a group."

In a follow-up telephone interview Sunday, Wilkins wished to first and foremost thank God. "He led us to McKenzie and the blessing that it's been."

He also called his wife, Lauren, an "unsung hero" of the team's success. "I couldn't do it without her," he said, noting how much she supports him and the team while also caring for their three young children.

He credited his team for their unselfishness. "They all bought in. Everyone accepted the role they've been given and have been truly about trying to do what it takes to win. Any time you get a team focused on overall results, you can accomplish a lot."

He noted that there were no

seniors last year, so the entire team returned. He said that the Rebels' elimination in the region tournament last year (in a game interrupted by a tornado warning) didn't sit well, and that they knew they were close. Wilkins said that community support has had a huge impact. "It's been overwhelming. We needed money [for the trip], and with the amount of people reaching out to help, we've raised all that we'll need. We can focus on basketball."

He's also thrilled at the opportunity it is for many of the kids. "They're gonna get to do some things they never get to do. We're blessed to live in a community that supports us so much. The school administration had also been great. Since day one, they've done whatever they could and provided anything we've asked."

He said that being in the Murphy Center last week to support his dad and the Lady Pioneers was "exciting, but also strange," knowing that the roles would be reversed this week. He noted that every break he had from supporting them, he was preparing for his own tournament, looking over information and watching film.

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Cosby (24-8)		H			
		Game 5 Fri. Mar. 15 4:30 PM MTSU			
Columbia Academy (28-5)	H			H	
Game 2 Thu. Mar. 14 2:45 PM MTSU					
Manassas (30-3)					
				Game 7 Sat. Mar. 16 6:00 PM MTSU	
Univ. School - JC (29-5)	H				STATE CHAMPION
Game 3 Thu. Mar. 14 4:30 PM MTSU					
McKenzie (28-3)		H			
		Game 6 Fri. Mar. 15 6:00 PM MTSU			
Humboldt (28-3)	H				
Game 4 Thu. Mar. 14 6:00 PM MTSU					
Fayetteville (26-7)					

Sonic Drive-In Hosts Spirit Night, Donates Funds for Rebels' Trip



McKENZIE (March 8) — Sonic Drive-In hosted a Spirit Night Friday in celebration of the Rebels' trip to the state tournament. Sonic donated 20 percent of all sales from 5-8 p.m. to the team. During that time, many players and cheerleaders were on hand to greet fans. Sonic provided each player and cheerleader with a free meal and, at 8 p.m., General Manager Chance Hudgins and Assistant Manager Erica Hudgins (pictured far left) presented the team with a check for \$318.17. Photo courtesy Sonic Drive-In

Larry Joe Smith Returns to State

BY JIM POTTS
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It has been 21 years since McKenzie last qualified for the state tournament and there is one person on McKenzie's staff that has had a front row seat to both trips. That would be assistant basketball coach Larry Joe Smith. He was the head coach of the '98 Rebels that made the trip. It's ironic in a way that the '98 team was just honored during this season while this team was working their way through the regular season.

The first words from Coach Smith were that he didn't want this to be about him. Well it is and it isn't. You see, Coach Smith has been a teacher and coached multiple sports at McKenzie for the last 35 years or so. And if you include the two years at DeSoto Academy in Arkansas, he's closing in on 40 years in the educating and coaching business. At one time or another he has coached nearly every sport sponsored by the McKenzie School System. He has coached football, basketball, baseball, softball, and golf. He was head coach for Rebel basketball for 11 or 12 seasons before stepping down in 2007. He has coached golf the longest at 25 continuous years. Several of his teams have gone to State. The 2006 baseball team he helped coach won it all. Of course his '98 basketball team made the trip to Murfreesboro, and several of his golf teams have gone to state including both boys and girls this year. He would say enough bragging about him at this point.



He took a trip down memory lane about the '98 tournament run. "We had good size with three kids going 6'4, 6'4, and 6'5. We won the district and beat Middleton in the region quarterfinals, USJ in the region semi-finals at USJ, but lost to Adamsville in the region finals setting up a trip to Greenfield for substate (now sectionals)," said Smith.

He recalled the gym being full an hour before the game and also added that they had just played Greenfield at the end of the regular season losing by double digits. It was a close game from start to finish. McKenzie was up one and missed a free throw. Calvin Perkins grabbed an offensive rebound and was fouled. He hit both forcing Greenfield to shoot a three with just seconds left that missed giving the Rebels a 64-61 win.

About the trip to Murfreesboro, Smith recalled McKenzie being the first team randomly drawn meaning they would have a morning game. They played Oneida. The Rebels built a 13-point lead in the opening period and were still up 9 at the half. In the third period, McKenzie's shooting went into the freezer hitting no baskets in the period and just two free throws. He remembered the game being either tied or close after three. In the fourth it went back and forth the whole period with Oneida hitting the game-winning shot with 8 seconds left and the Rebels lost by one and went home.

Coach Smith is in the unique position to compare this year's team to the '98 team. "The game itself has gotten a lot quicker since then," said Smith. "The '98 team was a senior-experienced team that was better outside and this year's team is better inside. Of course, we've never had a 6'8 player until now either. This group is quicker and more athletic than the '98 group."

He emphasized the one major similarity between the two teams, "Both teams were made up of good kids that worked hard and we got the most out of both of those teams."

Coach Smith enjoys his role helping Coach John Wilkins with the team. "In 1998, Bruce Herrin was my assistant and I was lucky to have him. Now here I am being the "old" guy helping Coach Wilkins." He added that he and Coach Wilkins have a good relationship and both enjoy working with the kids.

"I am very blessed to go back and do this again after 21 years", said Smith. There are a lot of good coaches here at McKenzie and elsewhere that don't ever get to do this. I'm going to sit back and enjoy all of this."

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