

Mountain Roots and Relics is made possible in part by the Union County Rotary Club through a 2017 grant bestowed upon Union County High School (UCHS) to supplement the publishing center. This is the sixth year of a collaboration with students in the UCHS Interact Club, Rotary's youth division, sponsored by Melissa Bridges, and sixth grade students in Sean Spade's ELA class at Union County Middle School. This year, our stories feature local people who have a background in sports.

Our students gathered stories and revised them from February through April. We are excited to share the copies with the participants and community. We always enjoy meeting everyone and learning about their lives! We would like to thank all of the participants for making this collaboration possible.

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**MOUNTAIN
ROOTS & RELICS
PUBLISHING**

— Appalachian Heritage —

Mountain Roots and Relics Volume 6 is dedicated to all athletes, sports fans, and supporters of athletics. Having sports in our lives enriches us and teaches valuable lessons. Play on!

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Haylie Blalock

By: Adeline Alvarado, Maggie Carroll, and Ava Serrano



Haylie Blalock was told to always have fun and live in the moment. Those words stuck with her throughout her whole life, especially when she played in the National Softball Championship World Series, but that

accomplishment only showed her determination and perseverance for sports. Haylie learned that when she puts her mind to something she can do much more than she thinks she is capable of.

Prior to all of her accomplishments, Haylie had a simple childhood. She was born at Union General Hospital in Blairsville, Georgia. She lived in a white house when she was younger until she was 10 years old. She then lived in her newly built gray house with a lot of land around it. She loved all of the land because it gave her space to run freely. Along with the large amount of land, she also didn't have to worry about any neighbors because her house was very secluded.

Haylie's favorite room had to be the kitchen because it was where she and her family spent the most time together.



Haylie and her two siblings all had separate rooms. So luckily, she never had to sleep in a crowded room or put up with their nonsense.

While Haylie was at school her parents were working at Ware Chevrolet. With the family business starting with her grandfather, Max Ware, Chevrolet has

always been in her life. Haylie's dad, James, sells cars while having the job of managing the store. Haylie's mother, Tammy, does all of the paperwork for the store. Haylie's grandfather, the owner of the store, does a great job of keeping everything together and in line. Haylie's family set an example to her that she can be successful in life, and that definitely showed throughout her life. She has always been very confident and very social. Even at a young age, she really started to fall in love with sports and being physical.

At the beginning of it all, she started with gymnastics at the age of 4 years old. Along with gymnastics, she also loved

to play T-ball. T-ball was only the beginning of Haylie's softball career. When she got older, she stopped participating in gymnastics to start trying other sports she was interested in. After she stopped doing gymnastics, she never quit the other sports she played. Haylie was always taught never to quit. Gymnastics may not have been something she really wanted to do, but fastpitch softball was the sport she actually wanted to focus on.

Haylie didn't get hooked on sports overnight. Her older sister, Hannah Shope, showed Haylie the fun and excitement in sports. Whenever Haylie needed it, her sister, along with her father, was always there to encourage her. All of the support from her family really showed when she played any sport. Later on in her career, Haylie was very lucky to have never gotten seriously hurt when playing any game. She has had black eyes, sprained ankles, bruises, cuts, and scraped knees, but never anything life-threatening.

Haylie wasn't just in love with softball; she was very interested in basketball as well. There are many differences between the two, but she really loves the idea of both of them. Basketball to her was very fast-paced. It never gave her time to think about the next move or action to take. That's what she loved the most about basketball. On the other hand, softball was very different. When playing softball, Haylie

needed to think slow. Haylie was a pitcher, and pitching takes a lot of thinking.

Whether it was changing the speed or throwing a rise ball, she needed to think ahead of time as to when to pitch it. Haylie is a thinker, and she usually thinks things through before doing something. That's why she likes basketball and softball.



Even though Haylie loved basketball, she stuck with softball. One of her greatest memories from it was playing in the National Championship World Series, all the way in Denver, Colorado. Haylie and her team were one of the best. They were in the top eight teams. After the championship, Haylie and her teammates got 4th place. All of the hard work really paid off. The win for her is one of her biggest accomplishments. It has definitely made an impact on her life now. Haylie has also earned a ring from playing in the super regional game, along with the others on her team.

Speaking of accomplishments, Haylie has many amazing awards that athletes could only imagine. She

received the North Carolina Female Athlete of the Year Award. Haylie wouldn't have had the confidence to do what she did without her father's words of encouragement.

When she was young, her father always said to have fun and to live out every moment of her life. Sports and life in general are full of so many memories, and time goes by a lot quicker than people think. So when her father encouraged her to stop stressing about the game, to have fun, and make memories, Haylie had so much more confidence in herself than she thought she had previously.

Haylie's confidence and good sportsmanship influenced others in the game greatly. The dedication she had in a game and her life outside of softball significantly benefited her in her adult life. It has also taught her to work harder at everything she does if she wants to achieve more.

It's a perfect blend of faith, optimism, confidence, sportsmanship, and dedication that helped Haylie through her sports career, even through childhood and adulthood. Good time management was one of the skills she was taught. Between softball practices, softball games, homework, and school, she was very busy, but she also had very good time management. That really made an impact when she got older, since it helped her to keep track of her work and her students' education. Being a teacher involves a lot of

communication. Haylie developed great communication skills, and that was essential because she needed to talk to and communicate with her students.

Some advice Haylie would give future student-athletes to help them succeed like she did is to “Enjoy it. When you get older you will think of memories. Time goes by faster than you think. So enjoy every second!” Haylie knows how fast time flies, so she really wants to encourage athletes to have fun while it lasts. Haylie’s accomplishments have taught her a lot and she hopes that future athletes that want to be like her also succeed as Haylie did.

Anna Beck Chapman

By: Abbi McCollum & Charlotte Peters

When Anna Beck Chapman was in high school she had absolutely shattered her middle finger in the Volleyball Region Championships and played anyway. It was through this experience that she learned a lot about herself, and was able to learn a lot about her sports life/career.

Anna Beck Chapman was born in Escanaba, Michigan. She was born December 30, 1987. Anna came

to Blairsville when she was 32 years old, and has lived in Blairsville for three years. Anna lived in the same red brick house from when she was three to 10 years old.

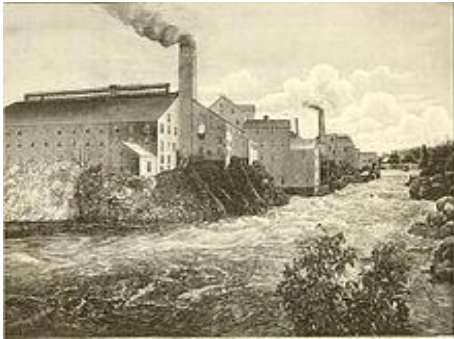
A very big memory in that house was the white rocking chairs on the porch that she had sat in for many hours at a time. There was also a trampoline at her house, and she loved jumping on it with her siblings and friends while playing a game called Earthquake on it. Her favorite part about the house was the playroom that she had. The reason why is because it had a TV and many board games in there. She had her own bedroom because she wasn't the nicest to her siblings.

Her siblings' names are Katy, Ben, Paul, Woody, and Charlie. She also had step-siblings named Katie, Sarah, Richard, Austin, Andrew, and Ashley. That is 12 including her! Anna's mom stayed home to take care of her siblings and sometimes she would take photos for the newspaper as a second job. Her mom



even got on *The Today Show*.

Her dad has been an engineer for his whole life, and when he would come home from the paper mill he



stunk of paper. Sometimes she can still smell the paper mill.

When Anna was a child she loved to swim, so she often played sharks and minnows in the pool with her siblings. Rollerblading

was also something she did very often when she was a kid. Anna even baked a lot!

She had many siblings, so the trampoline was always their favorite thing to do when they were kids.

At five years old, the first sport that Anna played was soccer, and she was not very fond of this sport because she wasn't very good at it. When Anna was seven years old, she loved the water, so she decided to join the swim team, and she loved it. She also cheered when



she was 12



years old. Anna even golfed with her dad.

In high school she played volleyball, and to her it was the most fun thing she had done. When Anna was swimming it was her favorite sport, but unfortunately she stopped swimming at 10 years old.

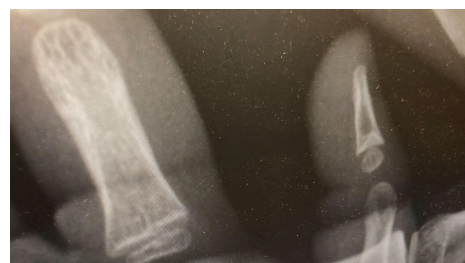
Although Anna loved sports, she was sort of forced into them by her parents because she had so many siblings, but now she claims that she was glad that her parents made her play. Each day at school she would practice, but on the weekends she would only play a bit to keep up with her skill. Even though swimming was her favorite sport to play, volleyball was also very fun to her because her friends were there.

In swim, her favorite stroke was the butterfly. She was very good at this style of swimming—so good in



fact, that she won a medal in this event. She also went to region state in swim and got first place because no one else was brave enough to

do it.



Anna had a very interesting time when she shattered her middle finger while playing volleyball.

The story goes a bit like this: It was Anna's sophomore year of high school, and she was playing front row setter. She had jumped up to block the ball from coming over to her side when her finger was jammed head on by the ball, and that is when it shattered. Once it happened, she avoided telling her parents for about a week and decided to play for the rest of the season. Once she did tell her parents, they scheduled a surgery, and she is now left with a screw in her middle finger.



Other than sports she was greatly involved in drama and band. In band she played the biggest instrument there—the tuba!

In volleyball she only traveled as far as Atlanta; in fact, that was the furthest she has ever traveled.

At school everyone called her AnnaBeck as one word, not Anna Beck as two words. Some people still call her that today. In school her absolute favorite subject was math.

The strong math skills she learned helped her in many aspects of her life,



including several of her hobbies. One of these hobbies is baking. Growing up she always wanted to be a pastry chef, a pilot in the Air Force, or a math teacher.

She has quite a few hobbies including reading, baking, working out, and running. Advice was always a thing that kept Anna going.

A piece of advice that Anna would like to give to anyone who is playing volleyball is to trust the coach and that in high school students will think that they are the best when they are not. Also if students do have a



coach, he/she is put in their life for a reason.

Athletics were a big role in Anna's life and have benefited her greatly.

Athletics have benefited

Anna because they taught her hard work, team work, and now she can teach volleyball to others. Some people don't learn the importance of athletics.

Many people think that athletics are just for playing, but in all reality they teach students things. Anna has learned from sports that time is everything and team mentality is a very big part of athletics.

The best advice she has received is to treat a sport like a job, do the best she can, work for a common goal, and always be open to feedback. Anna has lived an incredible life through her childhood into sports and now she can live the rest of her life knowing that her coach was put into her life for a reason.



Parker Daniel

By Gracie Miller and Ryland Zammetti

Most people look up to famous baseball players and football players, but Parker Daniel never did. He believed that he could do what any professional could do and better. But we're getting ahead of ourselves; let's start from the beginning. Parker Daniel was born on June 11th, 1997. His first name came from his mom's maiden name, which was Parker. He was born in Blairsville, Georgia and still lives here to this day.

Parker Daniel lived in a two story house with a garage, kitchen, living room, and three bedrooms. He had a younger brother, but they never had to share a room with each other luckily. Their house was located on top of a hill on a



cattle farm bordered by the woods.

Parker loves his family, especially his parents and his brother. His Mom, Leslie Daniel, his Dad, Robert Daniel, and his brother, Coleson Daniel, have always been there for him through hard times and long days. He loved playing in the woods with his brother behind their house. He and his family went camping when he was a kid. They always went to places that they had never seen before plus they got to see some really intriguing places like Pigeon Forge, Gatlinburg, and Stone Hill. Parker and his brother would always play sports together growing up.

His father was a Georgia State Patrol Officer. His father enjoyed working there, and stayed for 27 years before retiring. His mother is an administrator at Union General Hospital and still works there today. His younger brother is currently enrolled at Kennesaw State University and is majoring in civil engineering.



When he was younger, he loved to do any outdoor activity possible. He enjoyed working on his family farm as well as hunting,

fishing, riding motorcycles and four-wheelers, and playing football with his younger brother. He always tried to do his best at everything he attempted. The first sport he ever played was baseball, which he started at age five. Then he started playing football in seventh grade. He began playing sports because all of his family participated in sports, and he wanted more time to hang out with his friends.

He never really looked up to any famous athletes. Parker always believed that he could be the best if he tried. He played for the Union County High School Panthers. Although he played baseball longer than he played football, he preferred football. The main reason he liked playing football more than baseball was because he was better at it. He also loved all the players on his team. When Parker was a senior, he made all of his fun memories with his coaches, specifically Coach Setzer, his teammates, and started getting attached to them.

His accomplishments are amazing and so inspiring. He was part of the most winning team in Union County High School



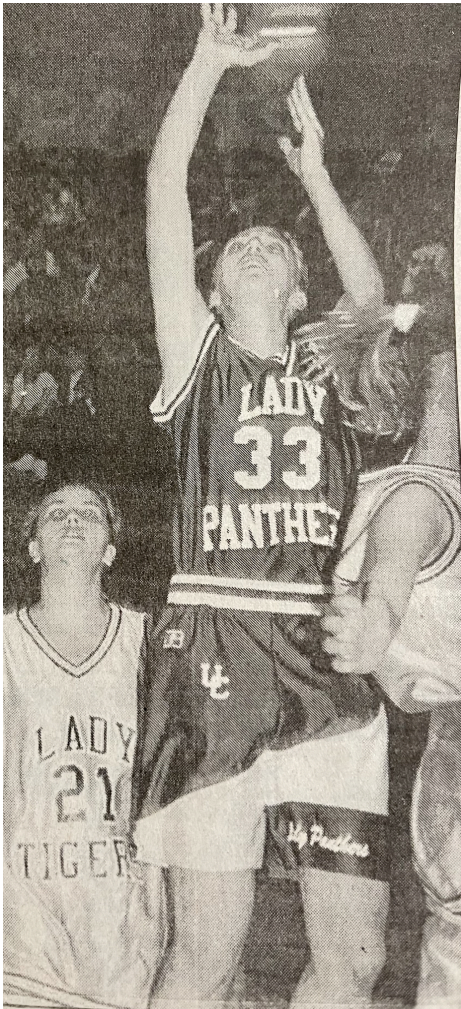
history. This meant a lot to him knowing all his hard work and dedication paid off. He also made it to the playoffs with his brother—not once, not even twice, but three times! The greatest advice Parker has ever received was from his grandfather, who told him, “Always do your best at anything you do.” Athletics has definitely benefited Parker but specifically because it taught him teamwork, responsibility, character, and how to be accountable for his actions.

Sports impacted his life by teaching him how to work as a team. He was told to always try his best by his coaches. Parker wants to let everyone trying to make it to high school or collegiate athletics know this: “Don’t let anything disturb you from your dream. If you want to do something, do it to the best of your ability.”

In conclusion, Parker Drew Daniel lives a great life in Blairsville, Georgia. He had an amazing childhood living on his cattle farm hanging out with his brother. He excelled in his athletic career. He played football for the high school with his brother right next to him! Parker has an amazing career in teaching and has accomplished so much in his lifetime and will most certainly accomplish much more.

Ashley Davis

By Addie Ortiz and Trey Rhatigan



Ashley Davis was named MVP her junior year in high school when she was playing basketball. The award was given to her by the other coaches, but she wouldn't be able to accomplish this without the help of her peers and the support from the people around her. It has always been important for her to remember not to let anyone or anything get in the way of achieving her dreams.

Ashley was born and raised in Blairsville, Georgia where she spent all of her life except for when she went to college. She went to Young Harris College for one year, Kennesaw State University for two years, and Piedmont College for one year.

The home she grew up in was small and cozy and there were always people around. She loved her home, and when she would walk into her bedroom Ashley would see vibrant, blue and yellow sponge paint on her walls. Her father started



working in construction when he was only 16 years old. He even owned a construction business. Her mother, on the other hand, was a distribution manager.

They had three dogs, many rabbits, and a guinea pig. She

had a lot of responsibility, but she also had a lot of fun! In her free time, she liked to ride four wheelers with her younger sister, go to the lake, and go camping with her family. During the summer, she enjoyed going to basketball camps also.

She started to play sports the second she was able to join a team. Ashley started playing because her mother was a coach, so she always got to watch the other teams play. She liked playing softball, but her main focus was basketball where she played point guard as number 33 like her aunt. She loved how competitive basketball seemed. This is

because it was fast paced and she was good at it from the very beginning.

Playing sports made many memories, but they don't all compare to her favorites. Her greatest memories came from all of the bus rides to and from games. She loved being able to talk, bond with her teammates, and make new friends. One of her biggest accomplishments was when Ashley won the All-Tournament Award whenever she was a senior in high school. But her greatest was when she was named MVP as a junior in high school. This award was given to her by other coaches, and it meant a lot to her because she put her heart and soul into the game and she felt appreciated.

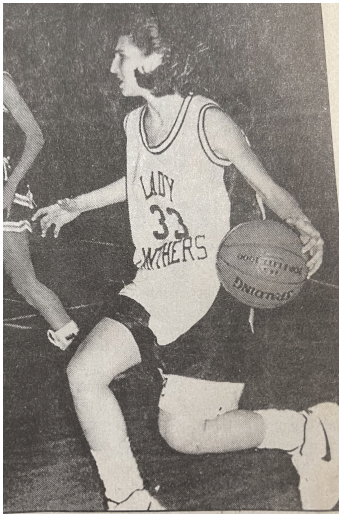
Ashley wouldn't be where she is now without the great advice and support she had been given over the years. The



best advice she had ever received was to never give up no matter what happens and don't let anything stop you. Many people have told her this throughout her years of playing basketball and just in general. Athletics has definitely benefited Ashley in many ways. Playing sports bloomed lifelong friendships. It has also taught her life skills including

respect, responsibility, and accountability which have helped her through her whole life.

She has always wanted to be a mother, teacher, and coach like her mom. Thankfully, with her hard work and dedication she was able to make this dream come true. She teaches seventh grade except for her last class of the day when she teaches sixth grade. She is also able to coach



basketball. She has coached for her 10 year old daughter Bristol, and hopes to eventually coach for her seven year-old, Brylie. What really matters is that Ashley was only able to accomplish her dreams by staying determined, focused, and passionate. These things are what make her a great teacher, mother, and coach.

Katie Davis

By Isabel Lander, Ansley Stroud, and Savannah Ryan

When Katie Davis was young, she never would have thought she would score four goals for her soccer team even if three of them were in the wrong goal! Since those days, Mrs. Davis has learned which goal to pursue.

Katie Davis was originally born in Marietta, Georgia. She later moved to Blairsville, Georgia in 2016. Her two daughters, Arlee and Evyn, were young when she moved



here, only being in pre-K and Kindergarten. She has lived in Blairsville for six years and still resides here to this day.

Her childhood played a big part in who she became as a student-athlete and as a teacher today. Her childhood home was in a

suburb right on the outskirts of Atlanta. She was raised in a one-story three-bedroom home, but another room was added for one of her little brothers. She grew up in a family of five with two brothers. As children, she and her brothers fought and squabbled, but as adults, they have grown to be very close with each other.

Her family also owned a dog named Chucky. The dog, unfortunately, ran away, so they adopted a new puppy, this



time named Suzy. The most special time of Katie's childhood was Christmas. She always loved receiving packages from her family in Pennsylvania. Her father worked as a paint salesman for a company named Glidden. Her mother also worked, working for a Japanese company

named Murata Electronics as a Marketing Coordinator. As her two younger brothers started adulthood, they both started to make livings of their own. The older of the two, Joe

Brehun, went into the Army, later becoming a First Sergeant. The youngest, Erik Brehun, also joined the Army and later went on to become a probation officer.

Growing up, Mrs. Davis's favorite thing to do was to invite all of her friends over for a big sleepover. Katie liked to call these meet-ups "gatherings." She also liked to bond with her friends by playing sports. Her parents originally signed her up for cheer when she was only in kindergarten. She

stuck with cheer but also dabbled in other sports such as soccer. Her friends played a large part in her athletic career, often influencing her to sign up for sports with them. While she tried many sports overall, her favorite was cheerleading. It was the sport she stayed with the longest, and she

was skilled at it. While Mrs. Davis has had a long athletic career, the memories that always stuck with her were



traveling with her cheer team to different games and competitions. While Mrs. Davis has accomplished many things athletically, she is the proudest of her achievements in cheerleading. It was the one sport she stuck with since the beginning, from kindergarten all the way through to senior year.

Throughout her life, Katie received all sorts of advice that shaped who she became as a person. The one that stuck with her the most, however, was from her father. Her dad always told her and her brothers to talk to one new person



every day. He taught her about never being a stranger and making friends in unlikely places. She took this advice to heart, which led her to make many friends.

In her athletic career, many things have been beneficial to her and her team.

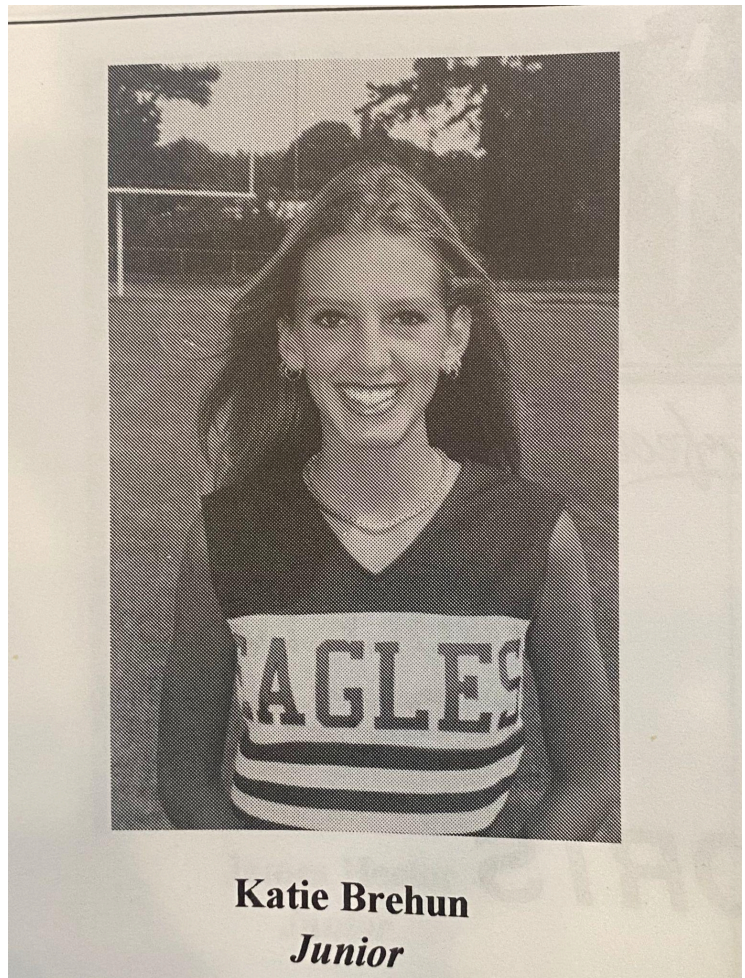
Leading a team is one of the most important

skills Katie has mastered. Relying on her team members has been just as important of a lesson for her to learn. Being in cheer helped her be more involved in her school, such as pep rallies, games, and events.

Katie has learned many things from sports, some more beneficial than others. In her eyes working hard to reach your goals is one of the most useful things a student-athlete can learn, along with not having anxiety while performing in front of others. Being a

team player has helped her to create stronger bonds with her teammates and other teams.

In all of her time in sports, she has learned many things. If Katie had an opportunity to give some pieces of advice to future student-athletes, it would be, "...always work



hard towards your goals, work as a team, and know that people will always look up to you for your leadership.”

Her athletic career was just the beginning of Katie Davis’s successful life, with hopefully much more to come.

Chris Mathis

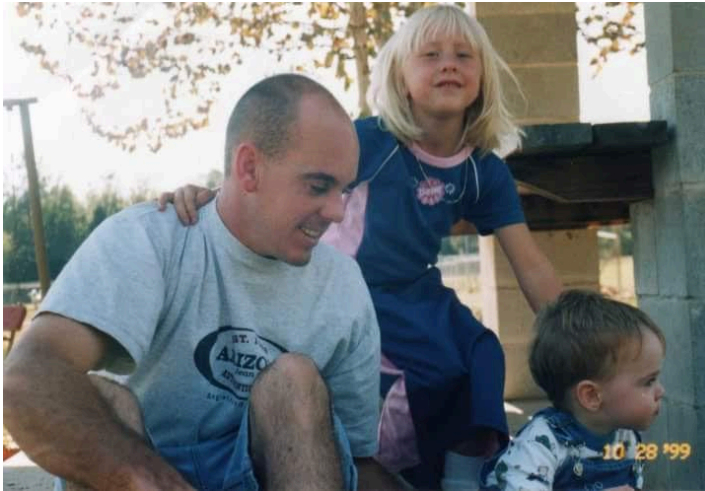
By: Will Thompson and Charlotte Llewellyn

At a young age, Chris Mathis would have only dreamed of being able to interview people like Gene Deckerhoff, the voice of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers! Christopher Sean Mathis II was born in St. Petersburg, Florida. He moved to Blairsville, Georgia in 2002. Of course, when he moved from a beach in Florida to a lonely mountain town in northern Georgia, it wasn't easy to get adjusted to.

Chris's home in Blairsville was a beige three-story house on top of a ridge. He had a great view down below. Chris's favorite place in the house was the loft. He and his brother, Spencer, played



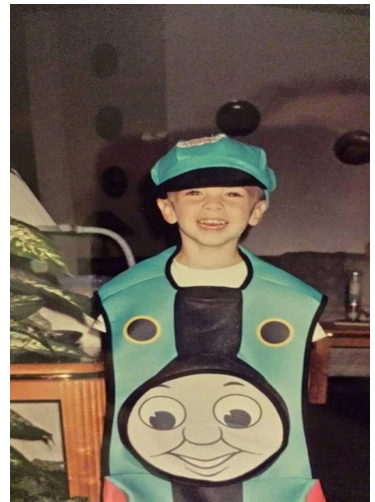
with their Nintendo Gamecube and built forts on the big couch. He and his brother shared a bedroom, and they had car and dinosaur paintings made with unique shaped sponges on their bedroom walls.



Chris's father, Chris, worked fiber optics across the country for a living. His mother, Micha, worked for a company that cleaned people's cabins for the first few years

that they lived in Blairsville. Chris loved it the most when his Dad would come home for Christmas. It always made him excited to see his dad's smiling face look back at him when he walked through the door.

Chris has had a lot of great memories throughout his childhood, but the one he found most fun involved playing Madden 2002 on his Nintendo



Gamecube. Chris also loved playing a lot outside. When he was outside he enjoyed playing football with his brother. Chris also loved to race remote-control cars

outside. He even had a remote-control gas truck. His favorite place to go as a child was his grandmother's house in Florida. Chris had fun planting flowers in the backyard, and then he would go inside, have ice cream, and watch a movie. Even though Chris had a good childhood, he also loved to play sports through his childhood too.



Chris started playing sports in 7th grade and continued through 8th grade. Chris scored one goal in his soccer career and knew that was the end of his soccer playing days.

Chris started playing soccer surprisingly from his friends. They told him there would be soccer tryouts and they wanted him to come to play. Chris thought that it would be fun to play because he liked sports.

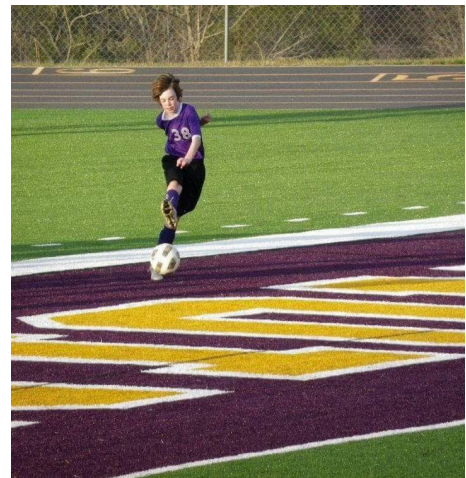
Chris's favorite sport was



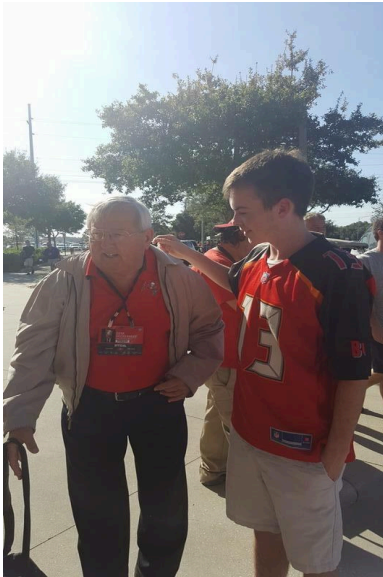
football.

He loved

this sport because he and his brother always watched and played it, so when they were playing or watching they would always get



along. Chris's greatest memory in his athletic career was when he scored a goal. Chris claimed he was very bad at soccer, so when he scored his one goal he was leaping with



joy. Chris was also happy his time playing soccer was now over. Chris had another great accomplishment. He was able to meet the voice of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Gene Deckerhoff. He was Chris's role model, which encouraged him to start his career chase. Through his podcast, *The Chris Mathis Podcast*, Chris met Superbowl

Champion Quarterback Brad Johnson. Chris said it was “a dream come true.” In his childhood home, Chris and his brother would watch Brad Johnson on the TV and in the Madden video games. All it took was him reaching out and risking getting a no. He also had YouTube celebrity Danny Duncan on his radio show. He says it only took “taking a leap of faith and believing in yourself.”

The greatest advice Chris says he has ever received is to “Never say no to an opportunity to be on a mic.” It



changed his life because he went from one opportunity of broadcasting to calling over 500 games and having two radio shows and podcasts. Since Chris played soccer, it benefitted him a lot throughout his life.

The reason Chris thinks athletics benefitted him is that it was his passion ever since he was a kid; he knew he wanted to be a broadcaster since he was 12. He was also able to get into the sports media field and start a career.



Sports have taught Chris many things, but the most important is that one person can't do it all, no matter how good they are at any aspect of life. It takes the entire team,



whether they're on a field or in an office building, to be successful. Sports have taught Chris many things in life, and he shares some of that advice with other people.

Chris Mathis gives a lot of guidance to young people interested in sports and broadcasting in high school and college. It is to be passionate, coachable, to step up for teammates, lead vocally

and by action, and to put in the additional work outside of what's required.



After years of opportunities to be on a mic in the sports field, his experience has allowed him to work at IHeartMedia in Tampa Bay, Florida

producing *The Pat and Aaron Show* at the beginning of March 2022.

Sports play a big part in Chris Mathis's life, and he has given some great advice throughout his life. This shows that if



someone is determined to do something, they will try their hardest to get it done, and at the end of the day, they will be successful. Lastly, Chris Mathis's life is filled with inspiration, determination, and success.

Heather Mitchell

By Samuel Quillian and John Tippens

“Make no excuses”: this is the advice that helped Heather Mitchell win the basketball state championship in 1990. To get to this point it was a hard grind but the effort paid off.



Heather Mitchell was born in Carrollton, Georgia. She got her name from a soap opera. In the show, *General Hospital*, one of the actors was named Heather, and she was nice and pretty, so that's why her mom named her Heather. Even though her family loved living in

Bowdon, Georgia, her family had a better chance for opportunities for life in Blairsville.

Mrs. Mitchell has lived in Blairsville for four years. Before Heather moved to Blairsville, she used to live in Bowdon, Georgia. Ranburne, Alabama, the town she grew up in, was very small; it didn't even have a red light for traffic, and it still doesn't. Since she was coming from a small, west Georgia town, the transition to mountain life was an easy one. Her family lived on a small street only a few minutes away from the school. At the time Mrs. Mitchell grew up, the town had an elementary school and high school. This small-town feel made it easy to get along with all her classmates. She lived in a fairly small single-wide trailer. The trailer had three bedrooms and one bathroom, a living room, dining room, and a kitchen. Outside there was a short unpaved driveway, big front yard, and backyard.

Heather Mitchell's mother was a cosmetologist. Her Dad, on the other hand, was a co-op farmer. She did not have technology since technology was not a big and popular thing when Mrs. Mitchell was younger. As a result, Heather loved playing outside. Even though she liked the outdoors, Heather did not do as much hiking as she does now. When Mrs. Mitchell was outside, she also tried to play any sport, such as softball and basketball, and she enjoyed any competition.

Heather loved sports; she started playing sports as soon as she could walk. All her life Mrs. Mitchell was cheering all year round, then she played basketball and softball. She played an assortment of sports; Heather did cheerleading all year. Basketball was in the winter, and softball was in spring.



Heather was a sports enthusiast, but she had a favorite sport in particular. The sport Heather loved the most was basketball. Mrs. Mitchell was a wing (someone who

plays to one side left or right of the goal) and post (a player who plays right below or close next to the goal), and 10-12 people on her team were on the starting roster. Most teams Heather played were bigger than hers.

Heather also had some neat memories from her athletic career. First of all, she got to play in a state championship in

1990. Her team was not predicted to win against Fyffe, another team in Alabama. Heather fought hard and got to the top after her win at the state championship. Heather kept



playing basketball and became a coach. Mrs. Mitchell loved to coach. She believes that coaching was her greatest athletic achievement because she loved teaching others what she learned and watching them grow.

Heather also had some amazing

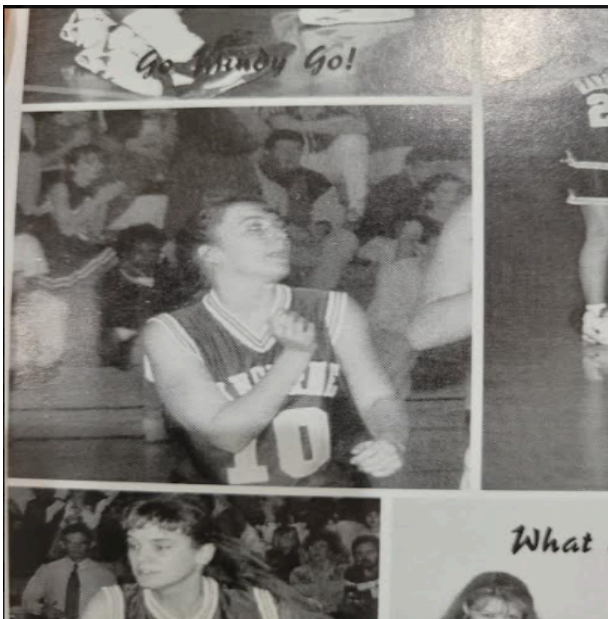
advice, such as the advice from her pastor. Her pastor said to her "do what is right even when no one is looking." Even now Heather still believes it is very important to do what is right. Mrs. Mitchell thinks sports have benefited her in many ways. She mainly thinks that sports teach responsibility because

you have to be responsible and want to go to practice.

Heather also learned how to be part of a team. Sports helped her learn not to make excuses and also that you have to put in the work if you want to win. When Mrs. Mitchell played sports, she learned lots of valuable life skills.

Heather stated that "she wanted to influence kids and students just like other people influenced responsibility to her." She also has some amazing advice to give to future high school athletes. Her advice is to "work every day and to make the decision to work harder than anyone else." Also, Mrs. Mitchell thinks that high school students should maintain a positive attitude in sports and just in life in general. She also believes that "to succeed, high school athletes should fight the urge to be selfish." All in all, Heather Mitchell has done

some amazing things such as winning a state championship, coaching, and even being a teacher; who knows what life holds for her next.



Caleb Paul

By: Vivian McNabb and R.David Tiu

“It doesn’t matter what kind of athlete you are, you still treat people the same”; this is the quote that inspired the rest of Caleb Paul’s career and life. It all started in Athens, Georgia where he was born. He lived in Watkinsville,



Georgia in a normal house in a basic neighborhood.

From the start, Caleb always had a passion for athletics. His sport-themed bedroom could tell the story of all of the sports he loved to anyone who walked in.

He started playing sports when he was about five years old.

Any sport with a ball kept him going; however, his athletic career initially started with basketball. Of course, he didn’t just play one sport; he also played baseball and football, but had never liked soccer. Even though he played two other sports, basketball was initially what kept him going.

When he didn't have sports, he still had a lot of things he could do in the neighborhood he lived in. Basketball, baseball, football, and any game that involved tag were the ones he liked the most. When he was with his neighborhood friends he played with his two dogs, Buddy and Sadie, and in the night hours they played manhunt in the woods. Besides just playing with his friends, his dad always brought him to North Oconee High School basketball games. When they lived in Athens, his dad would always bring him to the University of Georgia to watch all kinds of different sports.

After all of the years of playing basketball and academics, he made it to state his junior year of high school.

Everyone was dressed up, and it was crazy. Even though they lost, it



was a very legendary experience in his school. The team was the first in the school's history that had ever gone to state for basketball. Even though it was a big loss against Lovett, Caleb still loved the game and the pep rally that the school held before the game. The team's coach was Hal Wilson, and the assistant coach was Coach Sean Smith. Unfortunately,



Sean died along with some of his teammates in a car accident. The loss of Coach Sean brought a drag among the entire community. After the school's and team's accomplishments together, Caleb still had his own accomplishments.

Against Oglethorpe, Caleb drained 6-7 from three and left the court with 33 points total. Even after he had a legendary experience in his junior year at

North Oconee, Paul left to attend Young Harris College so he could further his career. He wanted more opportunities, and



Young Harris for him sounded like a good decision. Going to Young Harris College is also what got him to his major in education, while only being in North Georgia for four years. His mother was a receptionist, and his father was the owner of a motor company, while Caleb had his own dreams and knew that he needed to follow them. Caleb never really liked playing sports at Young Harris because he played mostly garbage time. Caleb had never liked going on the court



because he always thought there was no need for it.

Sports have benefited Paul's life very much, teaching him discipline, respect, perseverance, and teamwork with his team on the field. Sports also taught Paul to keep his words and to work hard in life in order to be

able to have faith and achieve more. The advice Paul would give to any future athlete would be: "Practice as hard as you can. If you stop working, someone out there would be working just as hard while you do nothing. Don't focus on just one sport; play multiple sports that you like. Just hoping won't fix your problems; you've got to have confidence in yourself. Trust in your own abilities."

Neil Setzer

By Roland Lawrence and Chloe Mallette

The best advice Neil Setzer has ever received is to have big dreams and try to accomplish them; he has followed this all through his athletic career. Mr. Setzer was born in Sylva, North Carolina but has lived in Hayesville for 27 years. He lived in many other places including Hendersonville, North Carolina and Cullowhee, North Carolina. Cullowhee is where Mr. Setzer grew up and spent a majority of his early years. In Cullowhee he lived in a brick house with a large yard. His house had two floors, five bedrooms, three bathrooms, a basement, and a barn with horses. Mr. Setzer lived there with his mom and dad who had good jobs that allowed them to live there. He has worked in Blairsville for 10 years.

Mr. Setzer's mother was a high school English teacher for about 30 years. Before that she was a librarian. Setzer's father coached football for about 30 years, wrestling for about 10 years, and did wood working for about 30 years. His last job was athletic director at Western Carolina University. Today his parents are sadly deceased, though they used to live in Cullowhee North Carolina.

For fun, sometimes Mr. Setzer would go swimming in the lake near his house. He had five dogs and loved to play with them. He also liked to play outside. Another fun thing



Neil liked to do was sports in middle school, especially baseball and basketball, although he liked baseball more.

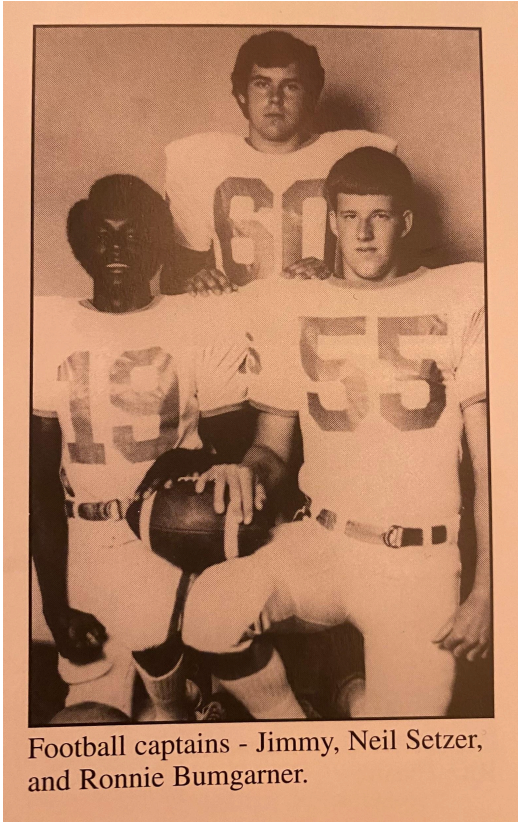
Mr. Setzer also liked to play

sports in middle school and high school. He often liked to water ski too. He learned how to water ski at 12 years old. He also liked to play many other sports.

Mr. Setzer started playing organized sports in middle school. The first sport he played was baseball. He thought it was fun and enjoyed playing with his friends.

Mr. Setzer made many friends while playing sports, and he still communicates with some of them today. His best friend from college football is Bill Garrett. When Mr. Setzer went to Presbyterian College, he did not know anyone. Bill Garrett was his roommate, and they both played football together.

They depended on each other to learn how to manage college life, and they became lifelong friends. Mr. Garrett and Mr.



Setzer pushed each other to be more competitive as they got older.

As he got older Mr. Setzer was looking for another sport to play. Mr. Setzer's favorite sport is water skiing because he can do it at any age. He has been water skiing for 52 years. He loves to water ski with his friends. Once he water skied with six people at once! One of

his favorite traditions is every Fourth of July he and his family will go water skiing. Neil and his family would have a reunion at Bear

Lake. One year Neil and his family decided to see how many slalom skiers they could pull up behind the boat,



and the tradition was started. Now every year Neil and his

family pull six or seven skiers with the American flag around the lake. People around the lake have come to expect to see Neil and his family and cheer while they ski by.

Winning the state championship in football was Mr. Setzer's greatest accomplishment. Neil and his team won state twice. Mr. Setzer's school, Sylva Webster High School, won state in football his freshman year and his junior year. He enjoyed winning state more as a junior than his freshman and senior year. Mr. Setzer and his team only lost two games in his four years of playing football. The only times they lost were against state championship winners. During Neil's senior year of high school, his football team lost to Pisgah High School in his football playoffs. Pisgah won the State Championship that year. In Neil's junior year he won the North Carolina State Championship in football against Tabor City High School. He lost during his senior year, but he enjoyed both seasons. During Neil's four years of high school, his school, Sylva-Webster High School, only lost two games. Winning state was the best memory for Neil because it was exciting. It was his best athletic accomplishment. It excited him, and he felt good about winning. He felt as if he accomplished his goals. Setzer was also a football coach for 41 years.

Throughout his coaching career, he received some great advice. This advice was given by his high school football coach, Boyce T. Deitz. Deitz was Mr. Setzer's favorite coach,



and he is now 75 years old. Mr. Deitz coached Neil for four years during high school. They are still friends today and see each other very regularly. Neil and Boyce also coached against each other when Neil was the football coach at Hayesville High School. Setzer has followed this advice all throughout his

athletic career. He strongly believes that athletics have benefitted him in many ways. It has kept him fit and his brain focused. This is important to Neil because he has gotten through many sports by keeping himself healthy and practicing every day. Sports also gives many people occupations.

Mr. Setzer taught himself and his players to be dedicated. He taught them how to train, how to be mentally focused, and how to manage their time. The best thing Mr.

Setzer taught and learned was to persevere. He learned how to get up when he fell down and to never give up. Mr. Setzer told his team, “Practice even though you don’t want to!” He taught them how to keep themselves healthy and to keep their grades up, because students come first and athletes come second. Mr. Setzer believes that these benefits can also come from things like FFA, chorus, band, drama, and clubs. With a better academic life, Mr. Setzer believes that a person can have more opportunities and a better sports career. After a long career of success and challenge, Neil Setzer has positively influenced his students and athletes; this for any teacher or coach is their first priority.

Jessica Stewart

By Nia Wykle and Bella Young

Jessica Leigh Stewart has always been the kind of person to want to help people and coach. She has always had this passion since the day she was born in Dalton, Georgia on November 14, 1980. Jessica has lived in Blairsville for the past 16 years. She moved to Blairsville in 2006 to coach high school and to be the middle school PE coach.



Growing up she moved around a lot, but the house she remembers most was a small, white, two bedroom house in a big neighborhood. She had lots of friends that lived in her neighborhood. Since they moved a lot, she had to share a room with her brother, Josh, but this was not very bad considering they were best friends. Since they were always so

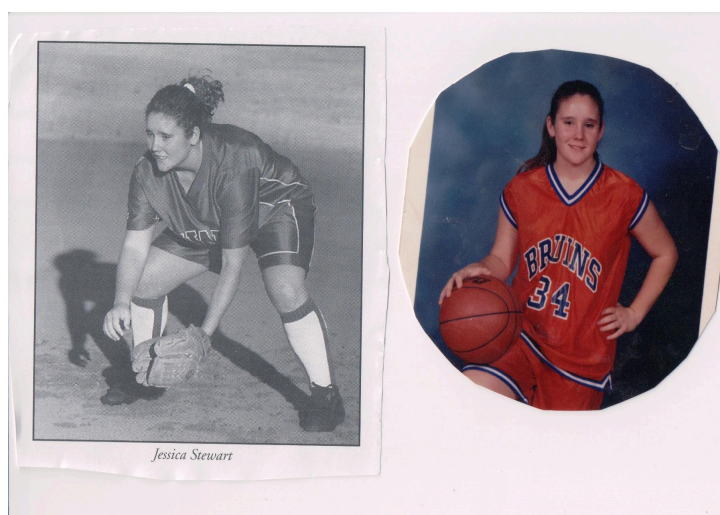
close as children, they always played sports together. They had a very special bond and rarely fought.

The sports that she played included softball and basketball, and she also threw shot put for track. In addition to playing sports, Jessica fished and shopped with her friends in her spare time while her family was working. Jessica's dad worked at the Dalton, Georgia carpet mill. He was the office manager of the mill. He was very high up considering that Dalton is the capital for carpet selling. Furthermore, her grandmother, Joann Stewart, worked with him as well. Although Jessica's mother was not around, her grandmother was always there to offer motherly advice. This helped Jessica develop a strong bond with her grandmother. Jessica's family has now expanded to include her husband, Randy Stewart, and her son, Cayden Walden. These two are Jessica's current immediate family. Both of these people inspire Jessica every day, and she loves them very much.

Her family worked hard to make sure Jessica and her brother were happy. Jessica's happy place was playing sports, so her parents let her play. She started participating in and playing sports at the age of nine years old. The first sport she played was softball. She played second base and loved it very much. When Jessica had her first game, her dad gave her a left handed glove. He didn't really realize it until

Jessica told him it didn't feel right, and he could tell she couldn't catch the ball. Jessica wasn't the best because it was just her first year playing. Since she didn't have the right handed glove, this made her worse than she actually was. This is one of Jessica's favorite funny memories growing up, and it warms her heart.

Jessica started playing sports to be involved in different kinds of activities, but most of all she loved hanging out with her friends. She also liked playing sports because she got to have different mentors to guide her through life. The person she remembers most is her high school softball coach who inspired her to teach and coach. She coached softball because it was her favorite and she loved it the most. She was also the best at it. She was so good that she started



playing travel softball when she was 12 years old. At the young age of thirteen, she was the USSSA Player of the Year in softball. Getting

USSSA is a very special moment because this meant that she

was the best out of the whole United States. This was a great honor for Jessica and another one of her fond memories.

Jessica has had many athletic accomplishments in her lifetime. One of the most influential experiences that she experienced was getting a college softball scholarship. The reason for this is because if she wouldn't have received the scholarship she probably would not have been able to attend college.

Another one of her greatest accomplishments would be coaching and having several players sign scholarships to go to different colleges. The last and greatest accomplishment would be her making it to the Elite Eight four times. If it



wasn't for the great advice Jessica had along the way from her mentors, she might not have accomplished these amazing things. Some of the greatest advice she got was the importance of a good work ethic. She got this advice from several of her coaches. As stated earlier, one time her dad sent her

with a left handed glove. This taught her that you can do

anything you want even if you don't have the right equipment. If you try hard enough and have perseverance, you will make it to the goal you want.

If it wasn't for sports Jessica wouldn't be in the position she is in today. They benefited Jessica's life very much. They are the reason she got into college, and it is why she has the career that she is in right now. She affects many kids' lives by coaching and teaching them new things and giving them great advice daily. She gives them this advice because she knows just how much it affected her. It affected her so much in middle school she realized that coaching and teaching was her dream, and she was going to push for her goal. She has been doing this for 16 years now and loves what she does. She has had many ways sports have helped her, but there are also multiple instances where sports have hurt her. She hurt her knee playing basketball and then had to stop playing. She realized that two

sports was too hard on her mentally and physically. She decided to focus on the sport she was best at and loved the most.



All kinds of sports Jessica has played have taught her different skills, but softball has taught her dedication, passion, and integrity. It has also taught her to never give up and always work hard for the things you want in life. Jessica will always tell anyone who wants to go to the high school level or collegiate level to give their maximum effort, and if you work hard enough you can play any sport you want to play. One of Jessica's mentors always said, "You just have to work to get there, and even if it takes weeks, months, or years, you will make it." This advice is something she has poured into her student-athletes over the last 16 years of coaching. While this has taught her many things coaching wise, it has also taught her things in real life like goal setting, time management and learning to deal with different kinds of athletes and people. This has taken her immensely far in life and she plans to keep persevering through it with her family.

Valerie Taylor

By Ian Lander and Morgan Montgomery

As a child, Valerie's father told her, "If you ever want to be good at something, you have to work for it." This advice really influenced Mrs. Taylor over the years and set the path for the rest of her life.

She was born in Hamilton Medical Center in Dalton, Georgia. Valerie grew up in a small trailer with one bathroom and had to share her bedroom with other siblings. She grew up in Gordon County, Georgia. Gordon County is an hour and fifteen minutes away from Blairsville. When she was in 8th grade her family remodeled their trailer, and she got her own bedroom. Valerie would live there until she went to college and later on got married. She thought she would hate the country and wanted to move to Washington, DC; however, when she moved to Blairsville three years ago, she loved it!



Her mother worked as a bus driver for Calhoun City Schools, and her father was a probate judge. Her father was also her first coach. Valerie Taylor is married to her husband

who is a pastor. She also has four children who all at some point were active in sports in their lives. As a child, Valerie liked to play in the woods and build forts with her friends and camp out in them. In addition, she liked to have pinecone fights with her friends.

At the age of seven Mrs. Taylor played t-ball coached by her dad. She started playing sports as she was influenced by her family. Her dad especially encouraged her to be involved



in sports.

Mrs. Taylor's favorite sport is basketball, as her dad influenced her and she later became successful.

Her dad made her shoot 100 free throws a day. During her athletic career, the most memorable thing for her was winning the championship in 7th grade. In her junior year, she tore her ACL and was on the bench for a year. When she tore her ACL, her team was 2nd in the state and 17 - 0. As a result, Valerie was very disappointed.

The doctor told her that she could run again once she got her brace. Two months later she got fitted for her brace. She started training for track and competed in the 200 and

400. Afterward, much to the doctor's objection, she started practicing basketball again. Mrs. Taylor was very lucky that during it all she did not tear her ACL a second time, and after she realized that, she was more careful in the future.

Valerie's greatest athletic achievement was playing in the college league. She also played fastpitch softball and basketball in middle school. In college, she earned the Most Defensive Player and the Character Award.

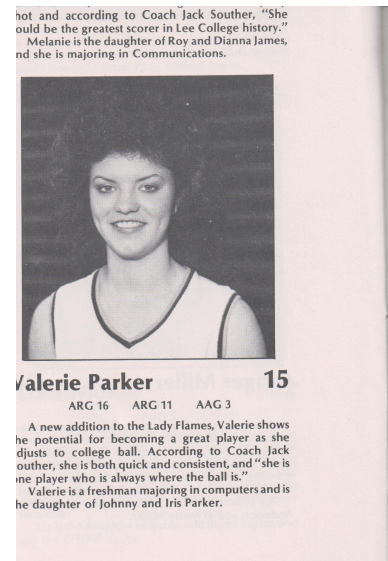
Mrs. Taylor thinks athletics has benefitted her by



teaching discipline, teamwork, and hard work. Sports also have taught her dedication and determination. Through sports, Mrs. Taylor met her best friend, Venessa Lewis, who was from South Florida.

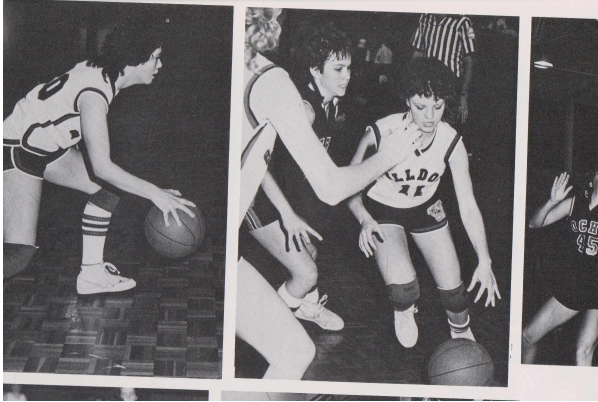
Her friend's dad owned an airboat business in the

Everglades and would take Mrs. Taylor and her friend out on the swamp. They also played basketball together at Lee



University. Mrs. Taylor also worked with her in a carpet mill, making Mrs. Taylor realize how much she wanted a college education.

A piece of advice Mrs. Taylor would give to other



student-athletes is that you should work hard and practice every day if that sport is something you want to continue with and pursue. She also advises young student-athletes to

never give up and that they can make mistakes. She wants people to know to work hard at what you do and it will show.

To summarize, Valerie Taylor grew up in Gordon County, Georgia, and came to Blairsville three years ago and loved it more than she thought she would. As a child, she had so much fun hanging out with her friends in the forest. When she started playing sports at seven, she fell in love with them and would go on to have an amazing career in college basketball. Valerie has accomplished a lot in her lifetime, and we only hope she will get to do more.

Debbie Wilson

By Ryker Lambert and Abigail Meyer

Debbie Wilson is a strong basketball player here in Union County. The advice that she would give to anyone pursuing sports would be, “Education comes first.” She believes this advice is necessary because it is important to have a strong educational background to which you can fall back on.

Debbie Wilson was born on August 10th, 1957 in Manila, Philippines. Debbie’s family left the Philippines because her father served in the U.S. military for 20 years before he retired. After he retired, he wanted his family to move back to Blairsville where he was raised and to be closer to his mother and sister. The Wilson family has been in Blairsville since 1970.

When they moved to Blairsville, her family built their home on family land. Debbie helped build the house whenever she could. Debbie still remembers hammering



nails to the floor of their house and helping out whenever she could. Along with that she remembers escaping to her room, which was her favorite place in the entire house. She had shag carpet in her room and had to share the bedroom with her two younger sisters. Her younger sisters' names are Kim and Robin. When Debbie wanted to call her friends, she would quietly go into the living room to call them. She had to do this because the only phone was mounted to the wall. She would crouch down and whisper into the phone to not be heard by her family. She recalls that the home always had a warm and loving feeling to her family.

Debbie's mother was secretary for the Georgia Mountain Experiment Station for 25 years in Blairsville. It was hard for the family, especially the kids, when they had to move around all the time, and that also meant that they had to go to many different schools since her father worked for the U.S. service. Sometimes Mrs. Wilson would get ahead in school, and other times she would get behind. Even though her father served for the U.S. military, Debbie still had a good childhood.

Throughout Debbie's childhood, she loved to play basketball. Upon graduating high school, she received a scholarship for playing basketball, and she was the first girl in the U.S. to get a scholarship for playing basketball. On top

of that she liked playing basketball because of the competition and friendships you get from the sport. When Debbie played basketball, she looked up to the upperclassmen. Her parents didn't help coach when she played sports. Debbie played many other sports than basketball. When she was in 7th grade, she played on the 8th grade girls' volleyball team. Debbie's teammates and coaches treated her with respect. Although she loved playing volleyball, she loved playing basketball even more.



Debbie graduated from Union County High School, and she played basketball there for competition. The high school team was called the Lady Panthers. When she graduated, she also played basketball at Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia for the Lady Lions. Debbie started playing these sports because she loved to play them and she liked the competition against other teams. Her favorite sport to play was basketball because of the competition, and her parents supported her.

Debbie acquired many memories from playing basketball too. Debbie's favorite memory while playing sports was when her team was in the top four in a championship game and lost by two points in 1974. Sometimes Debbie would get down on herself playing sports, and sometimes she would be a hustler. She has also received many accomplishments playing basketball. That was when she made lots of friends. Why this is Debbie's favorite accomplishment is because playing basketball taught her many things in life, and the friendships she made on the basketball court are the friends that she has today. Basketball also earned Debbie many awards, and she got some of the best awards that she has ever gotten. Those awards are Most Athletic and Most Valuable Defensive Player when she was in high school. When she got these awards she felt proud of herself and really happy. Even though she received big awards, advice led her to the top.

Jesus, her mother, and her coaches gave her a lot of great advice throughout her whole life. That advice was "Do your best." This advice was given to her by her coaches and her mother. Her coach and mother also gave her this advice: "Pick up and keep going." This advice also benefited her through her entire life.

How this advice benefited Debbie is that it makes her the strong, dedicated person that she is today. Sports also taught her a lot of things too. It taught her teamwork because you can't win any game by yourself. Now, Debbie is a teacher at Union County Middle School and will be retiring in May with 30 years at Union County Schools. Debbie was called to teach here at Union County Schools. God spoke to her in a dream and told her that she was meant to teach. Debbie teaches social studies for 7th grade here in Union County. Along with that she has two kids, a boy and a girl, and has four grandkids. Debbie now has many other hobbies besides sports, and those are teaching, spending time with her grandkids, cooking, decorating her house, and taking care of her flower garden. In summary, Debbie Wilson has had a great time playing sports in her life and still has a lot more adventures to come.

Epilogue

It is always a pleasure to interview and learn more about the people around us; everyone has a story to tell, and we hope our book helps share the wonderful tales of our community with everyone. Reading these stories helps us realize how sports can draw us together—as teams, families, and schools. Lessons people learn from sports stay with them forever and provide valuable insight for life, as do the memories from their days on the fields and courts. As Arthur Ashe once said, “You are never really playing an opponent. You are playing yourself, your own highest standards, and when you reach your limits, that is real joy.” Every athlete featured in these pages would no doubt agree with that sentiment. We hope their stories inspire you and let you see a part of their lives that may not be on display every day.