

The O'Courier Herald

\$1

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026

COURIERHERALDTODAY.COM

Green... and Gold St. Pat's events, East Laurens girls' state basketball championship offer plenty to celebrate on memorable Super Saturday



Dr. Andy Bozeman and sons sport the look of the Irish during Saturday's parade/KYLE DOMINY



East Laurens head coach Danielle Lowther accepts the state championship trophy and game ball after the Lady Falcons' 63-55 win Friday in Macon/JASON VORHEES, GTLN

By CLAY REYNOLDS
Sports Editor

Friday afternoon, the East Laurens Lady Falcons won a state basketball title.

Saturday morning, they had their championship parade.

Dublin's traditional St. Patrick's procession turned into the perfect victory lap for players and coaches who got to hold their newly gained trophy high as the crowds lining downtown streets gave them ovations almost every few steps.

"It was great," said senior Layla Tanner. "We have a bunch of supporters, and to see how many people were cheering for us, it was great to see all that."

LADY FALCONS
Continued on page 11

SUPER(B) SATURDAY: GREAT WEATHER, BIG CROWDS SHOW UP FOR FESTIVAL'S BIG DAY



Residents and visitors young and old came out to downtown Dublin to mark the climax of the St. Patrick's Festival. Super Saturday crowds lined the street early in the day for the best view of the annual St. Patrick's Parade, organized by the local Civitan Club. Festivities moved to the Market on Madison, as festival-goers browsed wares from vendors and munched on treats from food trucks, while kids enjoyed rides and games. Dancers from G Rhythm entertained the crowd before the action moved back to Jackson Street for Music & Munchies, rounding out the day-long affair/CLAY REYNOLDS, PAYTON TOWNS III and KYLE DOMINY



Award winners (from left) Royce Hall, Kathy Jones, Belinda Ricks, James Deal, Jeanette Fulford, Sara Kolbie, Pat Brock and Chase Wilson/RODNEY MANLEY

Retired teacher, former student honored to win St. Patrick's Awards

By PAYTON TOWNS III
Senior Reporter

The St. Patrick's Senior Adult of the Year and Man of the Year have something in common. She taught him in school.

James Deal was shocked when his name was called for the Man of the Year, but he was glad to hear his former teacher Jeanette Fulford's name called for the Senior Citizen of the Year award moments later.

"I was thrilled to be honored with him," Fulford said after the Joint Civic Luncheon, held at the DuBose Porter Center on the campus of Oconee Fall Line Technical College, Friday.

It was a special moment. "I told her the best part about this was her and I get-

ting this together," Deal said. "Her and her husband, Mr. Hubert Fulford, both taught me at East Laurens. I have known them for 55 years. They were such an influence on my life. They were such shining examples. Teachers like that taught you more than the subjects. That was emotional, especially when they said her name."

Fulford was not expecting to be honored.

"I was surprised," she said.

So was Deal. When the biography for the Man of the Year was read, Deal dropped his pen in surprise.

"I am the most unworthy person in this room. I do not deserve this," Deal said. "Not in the least little bit. I ride on the shoulders of so many

people in this room who have donated financially by donating thousands of Bibles and literally thousands of coats and blessing bags. You have prayed for us and encouraged us. This is an incredible community to live in. When I see Man of the Year, and see Louie Livingston (1980) on it and he is one of my mentors, I definitely don't deserve to be on that list."

Quoting Scripture, he said he accepted the award on behalf "of the least of these" in the community, sharing several stories about people helped through City of Hope, an organization led by Deal.

An award named in memory of Dick Killebrew,

CIVIC LUNCHEON
Continued on page 3

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1 section, 12 pages • Vol. 112, No. 32, Pub. No. 161860

OBITUARIES



Minnie J. Hodges

Celebration of Life services for Mrs. Minnie J. Hodges will be held Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 1 p.m. at Brown Chapel Baptist Church - East Dublin, Georgia, with Rev. Issac Lawson officiating. Interment will follow at Lovett Mission Cemetery.

Minnie was born on May 3, 1936, in Dublin, Georgia, to the late Willie D. Jones. She was a dedicated employee of the Laurens County School System, where she faithfully served until her retirement.

Minnie passed away on Friday, March 13, 2026, at the Dublinair Nursing Facility in Dublin, Georgia.

She was the beloved wife of the late Thomas Hodges Jr. and the loving mother of the late Lois, Eddie, Richard, Homer and Leon Hodges, all of whom preceded her in death.

Minnie was known for her compassion, strength and grace. She leaves behind a lasting legacy of love, service and devotion to her family, church and community. Her gentle spirit and warm smile touched the lives of many, and her presence brought comfort and joy to all who knew her.

She leaves to cherish her memory her devoted children, Willie (Kathy) Hodges of Dublin, Georgia, and Angel (Tony) Cephus of Atlanta, Georgia.

She is also survived by three sisters-in-law: Mazell Jones of Dublin, Georgia; Joyce Hodges of Goulds, Florida; and Esther Hodges of Miami, Florida.

Her legacy continues through nine grandchildren, a host of great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, relatives, and friends who will forever cherish her memory.

Visitation will be held Wednesday, March 18, 2026, from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at Serenity Funeral Home - 414 Telfair Street - Dublin.

Serenity Funeral Home - Dublin has charge of arrangements.

Jon Groves

Jon Groves, 48, of Eastman, Ga., died on Tuesday, March 10, 2026.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday, March 18, at Southerland Funeral Chapel, with interment in Plainfield Cemetery.

He is survived by his companion -Kat Brown; son - Chase Groves (Makayla Faulk); daughter - Allie Groves; step-children - Sawyer Brown and Dalton Brown; grandchildren - Braxton and Brantley; mother - Patty Smith; sister - Angela Martin (Brian); and brother - Chris Groves.

The family will receive

ANNIVERSARIES

Mar. 16

Donald & Chynell Way

BIRTHDAYS

Mar. 17

Aubree Lucas
Christal Rozier

Mar. 18

Devin Edwards
Lorraine Smith
Jeffery Rozier Jr.

friends in Southerland Funeral Chapel from 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. Wednesday, March 18.

Stokes-Southerland Funeral Home of Eastman has charge of arrangements.

William Bradley "Brad" Campbell

William Bradley "Brad" Campbell, 75, of Toombsboro, Ga. died on Thursday, March 12, 2026.

Funeral services were held at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 15, at Sweet Home Baptist Church, with interment in Sweet Home Church Cemetery.

He is survived by his wife - Barbara Graham Campbell; son - Bill Campbell (Fonda); stepson - Daniel Evans (Melissa); brothers - Ronnie Campbell (Becky), Stanley Campbell, and Bobby Campbell; brother-in-law - Tony Graham (Beverly).

The family received friends in Southerland Funeral Chapel from 5 p.m. - 7 p.m. Saturday, March 14.

Stokes-Southerland Funeral Home of Eastman has charge of arrangements.



Janie L. Fuller

A celebration of life service for Mrs. Janie L. Fuller, 97, and former resident of Macon, Georgia will be held Tuesday, March 17, 2026 in the Millville Baptist Church at 11 a.m. The Pastor Carwell of the St. Paul A. M. E. of Gray, Georgia will officiate and the interment will follow in the Oak Grove II Cemetery, Montrose, Georgia.

On Saturday, March 7, 2026, Janie Lee Fuller entered eternal rest at home with her family at her side. She was the daughter of the late Wesley Edwards, Sr and Ruby Lee Hicks, born on July 3, 1928, in Laurens County, Georgia.

She accepted the Lord as her savior at an early age. On Nov. 27, 1948, she married Junior Fuller Jr. and they were married until his death Nov. 16, 2012 (nearly 64 years). She is also preceded in death by her god parents Sam and Marietta Mitchell, her son Claxton Lee Mitchell, siblings Mildred Chapelle, Christine Coleman and Willie Charles Cotton III.

After moving to Macon, Ga., Janie worked several jobs including "the Laundry," "the school," "the day-care" and "the Convalescent home" until she retired. She never used their actual names, just their titles. She was an active member of St. Paul AME (Gray) for many years. She loved singing and was a member of the Choir and taught Sunday School. She was one of the original founding 17 members of the Zeta Amicae Macon GA founded in 1966. A newspaper clipping found in her home shows she was the president. Their mission: to assist the elderly and incapacitated citizens by taking a joy box to them during the holidays and taking them to church.

Left to cherish her love and memories: her daughter-in-love Betty J. (Cummings) Mitchell (Oxon Hill, Md.); her grandchildren: Candice "Can-Can" L. Mitchell (Macon, Ga.), Charlene L. (Mitchell) Jackson (Bowie, Md.) and Barry J. Mitchell (Oxon Hill, Md.); great-grandchildren: Joseph L. and Stephanie L. McNeil (Macon, Ga.) and Joshua L. McNeil (Oxon Hill, Md.); great-great-

Georgia legislation raises concerns about public access to police videos

By TY TAGAMI
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — Four words added to legislation that targets mugshot mills have free speech advocates worried the public could lose access to videos that hold police accountable for their conduct.

Legislation that started in Georgia's Senate as a solution to the reputational harm caused when booking photographs circulate online after charges are dismissed has evolved into a much broader measure.

Senate Bill 482, supported by sheriffs across Georgia, pits personal privacy of the accused against the public's right to examine government use of force.

Blake Feldman, senior policy counsel with the Southern Center for Human Rights, said it raises a red flag when "a law enforcement agency that wields incredible authority to stop and detain people and discharge firearms at people" seeks to withhold footage from body-worn cameras.

He and advocates for free speech and for newsgathering operations, including broadcasters and the newspaper industry, argued that the requirements would pose a barrier to such access.

The legislation started

as a requirement for anyone who wants a mugshot to obtain it in person, with a notarized statement that they would comply with existing law intended to protect people in those images.

In 2013, Georgia made it illegal for websites that publish mugshots to make subjects who were not convicted pay to take their picture down.

But that law did not solve the problem, so the next year Rep. Brian Strickland, R-McDonough, pushed through a law requiring operators to promise in writing that they would abide by the takedown requirements.

That still didn't fix the problem.

So, this year Strickland, now a state senator, introduced SB 482, intending to make it harder to get mugshots in the first place.

Along the way, he added the four words to his bill that have the free speech advocates concerned: "or law enforcement video."

Not only would news organizations have to drive across the state to get an official copy of a police video from a far-flung community, but they arguably could be forced to identify everyone in the video they are seeking, said Sarah Brewerton-Palmer, a lawyer with the Georgia First Amendment Foundation.

"In order to get this footage, you have to name everybody who's in it," she said. But there could be bystanders in a video of an altercation between police and a suspect, she said, "and before you see it, you don't know who those people are."

Brewerton-Palmer said bodycam videos of a shooting by police during a protest would effectively become exempt from the state open records act.

She and others are less concerned about the proposed restrictions on releasing mugshots because of the way their enduring presence online has upended the lives of innocent people.

At a Feb. 18 Senate committee hearing on Strickland's bill, a representative from the Georgia Justice Project, which helps people reintegrate into their communities after tangling with the criminal justice system, said it remains a common issue among their clients.

It was at that hearing

where videos entered the conversation.

(The Georgia Press Association was among the news organizations that raised concerns. Capitol Beat is a project of the association.)

Forsyth County Sheriff Ron Freeman, president of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, told senators on the committee that his colleagues across the state complain about bulk requests for mugshots and videos that are then exploited for profit.

Ashley Henson, the sheriff in Paulding County, said the accused who have their cases dismissed go on to get "destroyed" on social media. He said that when he tried to intervene to ask for removal of material, the publishing organization did not respond.

"Monetization of someone else's misery is not right," Henson said. "We are not here to give these YouTubers content."

Strickland said in an interview that he was moved to action against mugshot mills by a teacher who noticed her students passing around her booking picture of her. The charges against her had been dropped, so she had contacted the publisher and paid to take it down, he said. But then the photo popped up on another site.

Strickland described it as a "whack-a-mole" problem.

Publishers were not honoring the takedown requests they had submitted in writing per the 2014 law. And even when they did, out-of-state or even international actors beyond the reach of Georgia law enforcement were republishing them.

"Once the image is there, it's there forever," he said.

So, now he is proposing to restrict supply by forcing those who want mugshots - and police videos - to request them in person. Requiring requesters to identify the subjects in those images would cut down on the number of bulk requests, which tend to be by profiteers, he said.

At that February committee hearing, he agreed with another senator who said the public could still obtain pictures and videos, they just had to "go through the legwork" to get them.

The committee passed

SB 482 unanimously, sending it to the Senate floor, where it also passed unanimously on March 6, and now awaits hearings in the House.

The Senate floor vote occurred on "crossover" day, the deadline to move bills from the Senate to the House and vice versa. It is an exceptionally rushed time during any legislative session, when mountains of legislation are getting votes, giving lawmakers little time to read the language.

Democrats backed the measure without question, except for one raised about an unrelated part of the bill. That might have been due to the backing by Democrats. They had voted it out of committee, and two had co-signed it back when Strickland had introduced it - before he added those four words about videos.

Reached by phone, one of those two co-sponsors, Sen. Kenya Wicks, D-Fayette, said she was unaware of the new language.

"I don't think I can comment because there are a lot of amendments to this bill," said Wicks, who voted for SB 482 with the other Democrats when it reached the full Senate.

Strickland said he is willing to work with advocates to address their concerns, perhaps by changing his bill to require that those seeking a video must identify only the officer who took it or the time and location where it was shot.

But it is unclear whether a compromise can be reached, at least on the video language.

Brewerton-Palmer said she sympathized with Strickland's concerns. The internet and, now artificial intelligence, have stripped away privacy, she said.

But the public's right to know outweighs that harm, she said. "There needs to be a thumb on the scales in favor of access."

Feldman said his organization supports the new restrictions that Strickland wants to impose for access to mugshots, but he said applying those same obstacles to the release of law enforcement videos would be an indirect way to erode the state open records law, something his organization opposes because of the erosion of transparency around police encounters with the public.

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO INTRODUCE LOCAL LEGISLATION

Notice is given that there will be introduced at the 2026 regular session of the General Assembly of Georgia a bill to provide a homestead exemption from Laurens County school district ad valorem taxes for educational purposes; and for other purposes.

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CIVIC LUNCHEON

Continued from page 1

who helped begin the St. Patrick's Festival in 1966, went to the previous past co-chairs who served in that role in 2025, Belinda Ricks and Chase Wilson.

The Woman of the Year award went to Dublin City Councilwoman Sara Kolbie.

"No. 1, I am absolutely shocked," Kolbie said. "Secondarily, I am just honored to stand with people like these and the incredible work that they do every day. I just feel very honored. At first I felt like it was one of my city council workers. I was excited and then very, very surprised."

Pat Brock and Royce Hall were named Honorary Leprechauns for the Order of the Shillelagh and Order of the Blarney Stone.

"I was like, wait a minute," Brock said when she realized they were talking about her. "It feels good to be seen, especially with all of the work that I do, the volunteer work that I do, the love that I have for this community and how I really love what I do and that I do it with my whole heart. I do not expect a reward. I truly believe the Lord is rewarding me for all of the things I do, seen and unseen."



Atlanta sports executive Rich McKay responds to a question from Courier Herald sports editor Clay Reynolds (right) during Friday's Joint Civic Luncheon/RODNEY MANLEY

Hall admittedly said "they got me" when he walked back to his seat after picking up his award.

"They knew about this before I did," Hall said about his co-workers at city hall. "When they started reading the accolades, I knew it was me then at that point. I stand on the shoulders of my community, the city of Dublin and everybody that had an input that touched my life. I love what

I do, which is serving and giving back to the community."

Elinor Mullis was named the 2026 Youth of the Year. Her mother, Misty, accepted the award since Elinor was studying abroad.

"I am incredibly honored to receive this award, and I owe none of it to myself," Elinor said in a text message. "I thank God, my family, my friends, my mentors and the members of this

community for helping me step into a life that I only dreamed of. I am grateful for the opportunities I have been given, and I will continue to work to make Dublin-Laurens proud."

The Amy Cannon Spirit of the Festival Award went to Kathy Jones.

"This was a total shock," Jones said. "Mrs. Amy meant a lot to me. We were seat mates in the choir at First Methodist. I think a

lot of my love of the festival was because of her and the wonderful contributions she made to this festival. It's an honor to be a part of this award and the other people who came before me."

Rich McKay, who serves as chief executive officer of AMB Sports and Entertainment, congratulated all of the award winners. McKay was the speaker for the event, and was interviewed on stage by Courier Herald sports editor Clay Reynolds.

When it came to building Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Arthur Blank, owner and chairman of the Atlanta Falcons and Atlanta United, gave advice about it.

"He said not to build the building for the Falcons, don't build the building for the SEC Championship, don't build the building for a new soccer team," McKay said. "He said to build it for everybody."

Atlanta will be a major host city for the 2026 FIFA World Cup where eight matches will be held there between June 15 and July 15.

"This will be eight weeks and eight matches," McKay said. "Every match will be equal to a Super Bowl. In the world, 50 percent of the televisions will watch at least one match. Our semi-final match will be watched

by 2.5 million people from the stadium. That is where it will be our opportunity as Georgians because we have not had a moment like this since the 1996 Olympics. We need to make everything go right, because the size of the event is unbelievable."

McKay has been on the NFL Competition Committee for 32 years. He said they are willing to change anything when it comes to the game of pro football.

"The game should be able to continue to evolve to make the game as important as it can be to one group of people – the fans," McKay said. "We will change any rule at any time to help it keep going and to keep it safe for the players."

One thing McKay hopes Atlanta will see in the future are many championships.

"That's what our focus is, that's what the Braves' focus is and what the Hawks' focus should be," McKay said. "That is what the University of Georgia has done well."

"I think Atlanta has a secret in its airport. We have a good airport that people can fly into and go to many of the big events and plenty of hotels. That's what we have to keep pushing for because there are plenty of big events coming to Atlanta."

ST. PATRICK'S SNAPSHOTS: MORE FROM SUPER SATURDAY



Jeremi Hightower, PA-C



Madeleine Price, PA-C

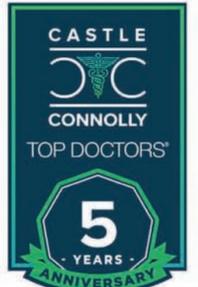


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KIDS' CORNER

Vol. 003 | A fun page for kids from [The Courier Herald](#)

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Dublin-Laurens County
**CHAMBER
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FOUNDATION**

Class of the week: Mrs. Daughtry's 2nd graders at Northwest Laurens

Herald the Hound continued his travels around Dublin-Laurens County with a stop at Mrs. Ally Daughtry's second grade class at Northwest Laurens Elementary School. The students heard a story, learned about newspapers and played letter hide-and-seek before giving Herald some scratches (see bottom right photo). Herald will be at Hillcrest Elementary today and has upcoming visits planned for Susie Dasher and Southwest Laurens Elementary /PAYTON TOWNS III



Puzzles4Kids by Helene Hovanec

RIDDLE SEARCH – ANIMALS

Look up, down, and diagonally, both forward and backward to find every word on the list. Circle each one as you find it. When all the words are circled, take the UNUSED letters and write them on the blanks below. Go from left to right and top to bottom to find the answer to this riddle: **Why can't a leopard hide?**

- ADDER
- ALPACA
- CAMEL
- CHEETAH
- CHICKEN
- COUGAR
- DEER
- DOG
- GIRAFFE
- GOAT
- HIPPO
- HORSE
- HYENA
- IGUANA
- IMPALA
- KOALA
- LION
- LIZARD
- LLAMA

H	L	I	Z	A	R	D	E	E	R
A	E	N	O	I	L	L	A	M	A
N	C	I	S	E	A	P	L	W	I
E	H	A	M	Y	S	S	A	P	G
Y	I	A	R	A	G	U	O	C	U
H	C	H	E	E	T	A	H	K	A
O	K	A	L	A	P	M	I	O	N
R	E	A	D	D	E	R	P	A	A
S	N	O	T	T	O	E	P	L	D
E	F	F	A	R	I	G	O	A	T

Riddle answer: _____

Fun Fact

Reese's Peanut Butter Cups are the **best-selling candy** in the U.S., with \$2.84 billion in sales, and stocked in 97% of grocery stores and 89% of convenience chain stores. Skittles follow with \$1.91 billion in sales, as do Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bars with \$1.76 billion. M&Ms, Starburst, Snickers, and Twizzlers also have high sales.
Source: www.alibaba.com



MINI SUDOKU

3					
	5				4
		2			
	4		2		
					5
		1		3	

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 6-box square contains all of the numbers from one to six.

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ANSWER KEYS

MINI SUDOKU ANSWERS	3	1	6	3	2	5
	2	5	6	4	1	3
	4	6	3	1	5	2
	5	2	4	3	1	6
	6	1	5	2	4	3
	4	3	1	6	5	2

Puzzles4Kids Answer

H	L	I	Z	A	R	D	E	E	R
A	E	N	O	I	L	L	A	M	A
N	C	I	S	E	A	P	L	W	I
E	H	A	M	Y	S	S	A	P	G
Y	I	A	R	A	G	U	O	C	U
H	C	H	E	E	T	A	H	K	A
O	K	A	L	A	P	M	I	O	N
R	E	A	D	D	E	R	P	A	A
S	N	O	T	T	O	E	P	L	D
E	F	F	A	R	I	G	O	A	T

Riddle Answer:
He is always spotted.

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Teachers, do you want us to visit your classroom next? Students, do you have artwork, poems or stories you want to submit for possible publication? Email us at read@courierheraldtoday.com.



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Joe Wos

OUR TAKE...



Early voting for the May 19 primary will be from April 27 to May 15/RODNEY MANLEY, File

Let your voice be heard - vote!

On a national scale, this year's election has the potential to be as hotly contested as any midterm in recent memory.

ICE and immigration, war with Iran and the economy as just some of the issues that continue to stir the political pot. Whether that's enough to generate interest and drive voters to the polls remains to be seen, but there are significant local and state races on the ballot, as well.

The majority of local candidates drew no challengers and will return to office unopposed, but voters still must decide contested races for county commissioner and state representative. And Georgia voters also this year will elect a U.S. senator and all 14 congressmen, governor, lieutenant governor and a number of other constitutional officers, such as secretary of state, attorney general and state school superintendent.

Election Day is Nov. 3, but voters will go to the polls first on May 19 for the primary election, with early voting from April 27 to May 15.

We encourage voters take advantage of advance voting. Not only does it help voters avoid long waits and inclement weather, but it also, as election officials said recently, takes some pressure off poll workers.

However, there are some who prefer the excitement and hustle-and-bustle of Election Day. The important thing, though, is to vote, no matter the time. There is still time to register to vote in the primary, with deadline set for April 20.

The freedom to vote in free and open elections is a privilege that not every country enjoys. In a democratic republic such as ours, your vote is a your voice.

Let yours be heard May 19, if not earlier.

- Rodney Manley

YOUR TURN:

Share your opinion on current events, or topics covered in The Courier Herald by emailing us: tchnewsreporter@gmail.com

THOUGHT FOR TODAY...

"No one has a good day on Facebook. It's everybody's worst days of their lives."

- Nate Bargatze

DAILY SCRIPTURE...

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

- Romans 8:28 (NIV)

EVERY DAY'S A HOLIDAY...

- March 17, 2026 is...
- St. Patrick's Day
- National Corned Beef And Cabbage Day

Taking a flying leap across the Theatre Dublin



By PAYTON TOWNS III

move my arms and legs. I really wanted to be still, hoping that nobody saw that or was looking at me. But I could clearly hear the questions and knew I could not remain on the stage like that for too long.

Was I okay? I was in pain but I did believe I was good enough to at least sit up. But truthfully, since I had not too long landed from my unannounced take off, I did not know if I was totally okay.

Besides pain coming from my foot and side, I believed I would be okay. The next question I heard was what happened? I knew what had happened. I walked into the black box. I didn't see it because the

script book I was carrying blocked my view of the box. I stepped around Lausch and the next thing I knew I was taking off like Superman.

Honestly, maybe what I did was more like William Katt in "The Greatest American Hero." From what I remember from this 1980s ABC television show, Katt's character - Ralph Hanley - could take off and fly but he never landed right. That was pretty much what I did.

Standing up on stage, I looked at my cast mates and told them that I just showed them how not to go across the stage. I then asked my wife, Jill, who is helping out with the orphans in the cast, for some drugs while clarifying she was handing me some pain relief pills.

Director Glenda Berry asked me if I wanted to sit for a few minutes while practice continued. As I contemplated this, that famous phrase in show business, "The show must go on," was ringing through my head. Or in this case, practice had to keep going and since the opening dates for "Annie" - April 23-25 - are now almost a month away, I was bound and determined to make the best of it even if I had to limp on. Also, I was hoping that the young

actors watching would see that it was going to take a lot more than a box to get me to tap out of practice and that the best thing to do when you fall is to dust yourself off and get back to work.

In one of my favorite movies, "Batman Begins" - another comic book reference - a young Bruce Wayne accidentally falls into an old well. Young Wayne was asked, "Why do we fall?" The answer he received from his father Thomas, and later by Alfred Pennyworth, was "So that we can learn to pick ourselves up."

We all will fall. Hopefully, not on stage. But somewhere in life something will happen and we will go down. Thankfully, the good Lord allowed me to get up and keep on going.

Embarrassing? Yes! And what did I learn? Two things actually - keep your eyes where you are going and the sooner I can memorize the music, the sooner I can better see where I am heading.

Later that day all of us had to be measured for our costumes for the show. Maybe it is not too late for me to request a cape on mine just in case I should happen to take off again.



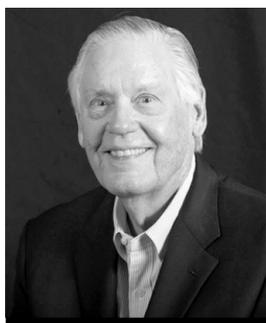
Mining opponent takes issue with county official's rationale

Last week, Charlton County commissioner Drew Jones used this space to defend the actions of Toledo Manufacturing in the Okefenokee mining controversy. Comm. Jones, who also runs Toledo's day-to-day operations, says Toledo has gotten a bad rap from me and others over their intentions and wished to clarify their position, which includes how studies are done and by whom on whether or not to permit mining on Trail Ridge, adjacent to the swamp. He also emphasized the economic pressures being currently felt by forestland ownership. Toledo owns some 50,000 acres in Charlton County where Trail Ridge is located.

Now, attorney Josh Marks, president of Georgians for the Okefenokee, a statewide group focused on protecting the Okefenokee from mining, has his say:

"Drew Jones's comments professing dedication to independent science for safeguarding the Okefenokee Swamp were simply jaw-dropping in their audacity. The truth is Toledo and its owners, led by Jones and his uncle Joe Hopkins, have no interest in science unless it supports mining along the swamp's edge, and accordingly they remain the most serious threat to the Okefenokee.

"Here are the facts: Toledo has been pushing for mining of its 30,000-plus acres along the swamp's edge for over 30 years. Toledo leased 23,000 acres to Dupont Chemical in the 1990s despite numerous independent scientists saying mining could damage the swamp. And in 2024,



By DICK YARBROUGH

Hopkins was quoted saying: 'I honestly wish Chemours [DuPont's successor] was in Twin Pines' place right now,' referring to Twin Pines Minerals, the company that tried and failed to open its own strip mine immediately south of the Toledo land. That sure sounds like solicitation.

"During the Twin Pines saga, scores of independent scientists, none of whom received compensation from project opponents, produced hundreds of pages of data and reports showing mining would damage the swamp.

"These scientists also repeatedly criticized Georgia EPD, the state's mining regulator, for repeatedly using faulty methods in its analysis of TPM's project, which criticism was joined by former EPD employees. EPD's failure could be explained by its lack of any groundwater hydrologists or that the agency answers to Governor Kemp, who received over \$150,000 from Hopkins, Twin Pines and other mining interests. Either way, the regulators Jones thinks

deserve our deference have instead been proven incapable of doing the job.

"UGA released a rigorously prepared peer-reviewed study in December 2025 proving that pumping of groundwater would draw down the swamp's surface, and because any mining on Trail Ridge would require groundwater pumping, shows mining would damage the swamp. Not a single scientist with the requisite expertise said that Twin Pines' project could be done safely or has challenged the UGA study. Toledo's response? Silence.

"If Toledo truly supported independent, rigorous science, why has it ignored the independent scientific consensus, especially the UGA study, and the criticism of EPD?

"The only possible explanation: money. Toledo and the extended Hopkins family would make hundreds of millions from mining. And to be clear, they're not poor, but are in fact incredibly wealthy. Toledo's and Hopkins's land holdings collectively exceed \$30 million in value.

"And yet Jones, Hopkins, et al have repeatedly claimed that a scientific study supported prohibition of mining on Toledo's land would destroy their property rights. That is simply ludicrous. Toledo's lands have generated millions from decades of timber harvesting and can continue generating millions via timber, appropriately designed residential development and conservation strategies like stream mitigation.

"Not only is the Hopkins family wealthy, but they

also exert outsized political influence. As a Charlton County Commissioner, Jones endorsed the Twin Pines project in 2019 despite Toledo having a direct interest in seeing mining approved in the county and the eventual windfall that would create. He chose not to recuse himself despite the apparent conflict of interest. Not exactly a paragon of transparency.

"Jones and Hopkins testified twice against the Okefenokee Protection Act, even though the bill would protect the swamp and the over 800 jobs and \$90 million in annual revenues the swamp generates and was supported by nearly 100 bipartisan Georgia House members. And they are leading the opposition to the Oke's World Heritage Site designation, even though such recognition will generate more visitation and improve his community. Why have they done all of this? Take one guess.

"The bottom line: if Toledo Manufacturing really believes in environmental stewardship, they should follow their own advice, listen to the independent scientists, abandon the pursuit of mining and sell or donate their land for conservation. That would be a tremendous gift to Georgia and the world and cement the legacy of the Hopkins family for present and future generations."

There you have it. Both sides have spoken. Now, it is your turn.

You can reach Dick Yarbrough at dick@dickyarbrough.com or at P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139.

The Courier Herald

LOCAL MATTERS



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This newspaper is committed to the idea that the press should tell the truth without prejudice and spread knowledge with malicious intent.



Cheering the Lady Falcons to victory

A group of employees at the Bank of Dudley gathered outside the East Dublin branch to cheer on the East Laurens Lady Falcons Friday morning as they headed to Macon to play Elbert County in the state title game. For more coverage, see sports on page 9-12/PAYTON TOWNS III



Raising money for local pets

"Prisoners" raised money for pets during the Shamrock Animal League Jail & Bail Friday afternoon. The event, a kick off to the St. Patrick's Festival Super Weekend, saw prospective donors jailed until their bail could be posted. All proceeds go towards supporting local pets and animals/KYLE DOMINY



Dublin Police Department

- Around 11 a.m., on March 2, officers were dispatched to Dollar Tree on Veterans Boulevard in reference to a woman in the store currently shoplifting. An officer met with the store manager who pointed to a red car saying that it belonged to the offender. The vehicle sped away, across the parking stalls towards the Tidal Wave Car Wash and stopped. The officer pulled up behind it, and the car sped away and did not stop before entering Veterans Boulevard. It cut off four cars, causing all to stop. The officer provided a Be On the Lookout (Bolo) for this vehicle, discontinued the attempt to stop it and returned to the Dollar Tree. The officer saw a video of the offender placing items in a bag and leaving without

paying for the merchandise. Another officer saw the vehicle on Fair Street, the address associated with the car's tag. The officer also found the woman, identified as Patrice Williams, 43, and a small child. The officer arrived and identified Williams, saying her clothing matched the description of the suspect. Williams at first denied taking anything. The merchandise was found next to the car in the front yard and returned to the store. She was arrested and charged with theft by shoplifting and reckless driving. Williams was also wanted for a shoplifting offense from Centerville. - Keyondra Jevon Reed, 25, was charged with obstruction of law enforcement officers at Harry's Package Shop, on Telfair Street, around 12:45 p.m. on March 7.



POLICE BEAT...

Police were dispatched to the area in reference to multiple people reportedly involved in a verbal dispute while displaying and pointing firearms at one another. - Christopher Luke Sanders, 19, was charged with battery first offense, false imprisonment and criminal damage to property in the second degree, on Parker Dairy Road around 1 a.m. on March 8. An officer responded to a second call on Parker Dairy Road in reference to damage to a vehicle. A woman told an officer that Sanders had become irate from officers responding to the

location earlier that day for an argument. The investigation led the man's arrest. He was transported to the LEC and transferred custody to jail staff. **Laurens County Sheriff's Office** - A deputy was dispatched to Third Street in reference to a burglary around 11:10 a.m. on March 1. - On March 4, around 1:24 a.m., a deputy was dispatched to Walke Dairy Road in reference to someone walking around a house. - On Feb. 25, around

8:40 p.m., a deputy responded to Robert Webb Road in reference to shots fired. - On March 1, around 10:35 p.m., a deputy received a phone message in reference to a theft that happened on Iris Lowery Loop Road in Cadwell. - Alvinskie W. Roberson, 32, of Dublin, was charged with driving under the influence of drugs, at the intersection of South Rowe and West Madison Street around 10:48 p.m. on March 28. A deputy stopped a silver Nissan Sentra for failure to obey a stop sign. - Timothy Duncan Hoarsley, 51, was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol, at the intersection of Highway 257 and Quail Run Extension around 5:34 p.m. on Feb. 27. A deputy made a traffic stop on a Ford pickup in reference to no valid insur-

ance. - Property was damaged on Gordon Edwards Road around 8:39 a.m. on March 1. - A vehicle was damaged on I-16 West near mile marker 60 around 8:30 p.m. on Feb. 27. *Editor's note: This information is public record and was taken from reports of local law enforcement agencies. These reports do not reflect guilt or innocence. An "arrest" does not always indicate incarceration. Readers are cautioned that people may have similar names. Police Beat does not identify minor children, victims of sexual assault, suicide attempts or medical conditions. Cases dismissed do not appear if the newspaper is notified before deadline.*

Some of the convenience stores in Dublin are the first to raise the gasoline prices and the last to lower them. We should not buy gasoline from these people.

When the gas prices across the street from each other are \$3.49 and \$3.09 one of these convenience stores is gouging.

If people keep building houses in Dudley, we're going to have to have a grocery store up here in Dudley.

The Irish Gifted Academy Principal Matt Taylor is trying to keep his job. If all of the students they have in that class, only 14 percent that is actually gifted, why have it? Fifty-one percent and 44 percent and then only 14 percent, that's not even gifted. If they are truly gifted, they can be gifted in any school that they are in. The taxpayers should not have to pay for a private school that.

You can tell it's election year for all of these people running for every kind of office. They are making all of these beautiful promises even if they don't have that kind of power.

Consolidation of city and county government helps a community think beyond boundaries and govern for the common good, with decisions shaped by what benefits all citizens.

Consolidation of city and county government turns separate interests into shared purpose, helping a community lead with unity, plan with clarity and serve with fairness. It's a must!

TELL IT!

CALL 272-0375, EMAIL CHTELLIT@GMAIL.COM, OR TELL IT! AT COURIERHERALDTODAY.COM

A unified government helps communities stop competing within themselves and start working together for shared prosperity, stability and long-term success. Consolidate governments now. It's a must!

Does anyone else see the orange sky this morning (March 12)? What in the world does that mean? *Editor's note: Red sky at morn,*

Local 7-day Forecast:

The next 48 hours:

	TUESDAY: 55° Partly sunny and cooler. Sunrise: 7:40 a.m.
	TUESDAY NIGHT: 29° Clear and cold. Sunset: 7:41 p.m.
	WEDNESDAY: 57° Sunny to partly cloudy. Sunrise: 7:38 a.m.
	WEDNESDAY NIGHT: 30° Clear and cold. Sunset: 7:42 p.m.

Thursday 3/19 HIGH/LOW 70/40 Mostly sunny and pleasant. Sunrise: 7:37 a.m. Sunset: 7:42 p.m.	Friday 3/20 HIGH/LOW 75/45 Nice with plenty of sunshine. Sunrise: 7:36 a.m. Sunset: 7:43 p.m.	Saturday 3/21 HIGH/LOW 80/53 Partial sunshine. Sunrise: 7:35 a.m. Sunset: 7:44 p.m.	Sunday 3/22 HIGH/LOW 83/54 Very warm with plenty of sunshine. Sunrise: 7:33 a.m. Sunset: 7:45 p.m.	Monday 3/23 HIGH/LOW 74/50 Plenty of sun. Sunrise: 7:32 a.m. Sunset: 7:45 p.m.

River levels...
Oconee (at Dublin) 6.28'
Ocmulgee (at Macon) 10.42'

Talking about consolidation of all of the schools, would Dublin be the Dublin Irish? We don't think so!

sailors be warned. Bad weather is coming.

There is really not a need for another charter school in this area. Dublin City is a charter school system. They need to solve their problems. What they need to do is to elect board members who has no interest other than saving the Dublin City School System. Let them hire a superintendent who does not have any community or family connection in Dublin, Laurens County. Let them straighten the mess out and move on to somewhere else. There is really not enough population in this area to justify a private academy like ACE Academy in Macon.

How will the City of Dublin deal with HB 803 school tax exemption when one spouse on the deed is below 64 years of age and the other is 70 years old? Should we quit claim our deed to reflect the older spouse is the sole owner? No one could answer this question at City Hall. The city should be transparent and let the public know!

Why do the Dublin City school board members act like are above reproach? Y'all approved the salary scales and supplements. Y'all had a hay day spending money.

Go EL girls basketball! Those girls sure have a lot of fight in them!

Classifieds

Employment

PART-TIME RANGER
The City of Dublin has an opening for a team member with a positive attitude and initiative. A part-time Ranger for the River-view Golf Course is needed. Patrols the golf course property; performs lining up, cleaning, gassing and storage of golf carts; and maintains the driving range, e.g., picking up balls, cleaning them and returning, along with baskets, to the Pro Shop. Serves as a public relations person on the course. Work is performed under the direction of the Golf Course Superintendent. Applicants must have a valid driver's license. The successful applicant must pass a drug screen. Starting salary is \$13.52 an hour. Applicants must be available to work on Saturday and Sunday. Applicants may apply online through our www.cityofdublin.org website until position is filled. The City of Dublin is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Real Estate

For Rent/Lease

Houses for Rent: 2 bedroom \$1,050/month and 2 bedroom \$725/month. No Animals; References required

Fairfield

BY MARRIOTT

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SUPER SATURDAY SCENES: ST. PATRICKS FESTIVAL SNAPSHOTS



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

BY STEPHAN PASTIS

GARFIELD

BY JIM DAVIS

OVERBOARD

BY CHIP DUNHAM

DEFLOCKED

BY JEFF CORRIVEAU

ZIGGY

BY TOM WILSON

PLUGGERS

BY JEFF MACNELLY

Boyfriend's Behavior Swings from one extreme to another!

DEAR ABBY: My boyfriend, "Roy," is a quiet person. His ex-girlfriend put him and his family through something so terrible that he shuts down and pulls away from me a lot. He won't introduce me to his mother, although I have met his son. We've been together almost 18 months.

Five months ago, Roy stopped making love with me. I accused him of cheating, but he denied it. He's just 44 and claims he has lost interest in sex and he doesn't know why. He claims he's still in love with me, but at times, I feel unloved by him. He has never treated me badly, but he barely kisses me now and he used to be affectionate. He says he was affectionate before his ex nearly destroyed him and his family's lives.

Roy loves it when I call myself his wife and him my husband, but he acts like he is scared of love. What do you think? -- **LOVES MY TEDDY BEAR MAN**

DEAR LOVES: I think your boyfriend (not husband) is sorely in need of counseling to resolve his trauma. Your relationship will not progress unless he finds the courage to discuss what happened with his ex with someone who can guide him on a path forward.



DEAR ABBY

BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: I married a man who was divorced after 10 years of marriage. He and his ex-wife had four children together. After their divorce, they received joint custody of the children. He moved to another state, and the children remained with their mother.

We have been married for 38 years. When my husband's mother died, his ex-wife attended the funeral. All of the children, spouses and grandchildren sat with her and not their father at the viewing and funeral service. It was heartbreaking.

How can I or my family ask her to NOT attend my husband's funeral when he passes away? -- **HIS LONG-TIME WIFE**

DEAR WIFE: Funerals are for the comfort of the living, not the dead. If your husband predeceases you,

the person who will be in charge of the arrangements for his funeral, memorial, cremation or burial will be you. If you prefer that his former wife not make an appearance, speak up at the appropriate time. If she shows up anyway, you can instruct security not to admit her.

TO MY READERS: Happy St. Patrick's Day:

May there always be work for your hands to do. May your purse always hold a coin or two.

May the sun always shine on your window-pane.

May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain.

May the hand of a friend always be near you.

May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.

LOVE, ABBY

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH BOB JONES
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WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ ANSWERS

Q 1 - Neither vulnerable, as South, you hold:
♠ A J 5 ♠ A 8 2 ♠ A K 10 9 5 ♣ A J

Q 2 - North-South vulnerable, as South, you hold:
♠ Q 8 6 ♠ 10 9 7 6 3 ♠ K 10 6 ♠ 6 5

Q 3 - East-West vulnerable, as South, you hold:
♠ Q 9 8 7 5 4 ♠ 7 2 ♠ 8 5 ♠ 9 7 6

Q 4 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:
♠ A K 6 ♠ A 6 5 2 ♠ K 8 5 ♠ 9 7 5

Q 5 - North-South vulnerable, as South, you hold:
♠ Q 10 7 ♠ Q J 6 5 ♠ K 10 6 3 ♠ 7 4

Q 6 - East-West vulnerable, as South, you hold:
♠ K 7 ♠ A 10 ♠ A 7 5 ♠ K Q 9 8 5 3

Answers for West, North, East, South, and Pass are provided for each question.

THE Daily Commuter Puzzle by Stella Zawistowski

- ACROSS
- Flexed
 - "The Simpsons" son
 - Run after
 - Happily ___ after
 - Rideshare brand
 - One who prefers solitude
 - Census info
 - Kill, as a dragon
 - River mammal
 - '90s sitcom starring Tia and Tamera Mowry: 2 wds.
 - Falsehood
 - Maple or fir
 - Goes upward
 - "Seinfeld" character
 - Conductor Solti
 - ___ upon a time
 - Former QB Manning
 - Lodges
 - Notes played together
 - Housekeeper
 - Nonverbal "yes"
 - Brand's emblem
 - "The Inferno" poet
 - Grumble
 - Animal, in slang
 - Scholastic sports group: Abbr.
 - Mined rock
 - Athletes who squat and deadlift
 - Rustic log home
 - "___ does it!"
 - Middle of the face
 - Make amends
 - Seep slowly
 - "You said it!"
 - Requires
 - Traveled very fast
 - Starring role

- DOWN
- Sleeping furniture
 - Actress Mendes
 - Clears after taxes
 - Movie teasers
 - "Caught you!"
 - Up to the task
 - Hindmost
 - Lovers' meeting
 - Brand's emblem
 - "The Inferno" poet
 - Grumble
 - Animal, in slang
 - Scholastic sports group: Abbr.
 - Mined rock
 - Athletes who squat and deadlift
 - Rustic log home
 - "___ does it!"
 - Middle of the face
 - Make amends
 - Seep slowly
 - "You said it!"
 - Requires
 - Traveled very fast
 - Starring role
 - Perilous
 - Loosen up
 - Parts of stage plays
 - Decayed
 - Choral section
 - Top of the head
 - Double-reed instrument
 - Denny's competitor
 - Disconcert
 - Not none, but not all
 - Soup container
 - Mediterranean, e.g.
 - Finale

SUDOKU

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

Level: Beginner

Here's How It Works: Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

ANSWER:

GHSA STATE HOOPS CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Falcons' finest hour...

East Laurens girls endure Elbert County upset bid to bring home school's first-ever state crown

By MICHAEL A. LOUGH
For the GTLN

MACON — There were times when it appeared East Laurens was destined to let success slip through its fingers and open the door for Elbert County.

And then just as quickly, Elbert County reciprocated.

Eventually, East Laurens had enough of that.

Elbert County gave East Laurens a serious late challenge after trailing by 14 in the first half, and the Falcons got just enough key plays down the stretch for a 63-55 win Friday in the GHSA Class A/Division I girls state championship at the Macon Coliseum.

Not until the final dozen seconds could the throng of black — with a little gold in there — start seriously celebrating, while head coach Danielle Lowther calmly took it all in.

"I feel overwhelmed," she admitted.

She kept her composure after the game and through a few rounds of interviews, an impressive feat for somebody who has been tied to East Laurens for decades, and still plenty today.

Behind the bench stood her husband Dwayne, the boys coach, who eventually made his misty-eyed way to the locker room. There were Lowthers and Burleys — the coach's maiden name — throughout the Coliseum.

"My dad worked at East Laurens High school," she said. "My husband works at East Laurens. My brother, he worked at East Laurens, both my brother and his wife."

There's a graduated Lowther, former Falcon basketball player (De'Asia), as well as the two on the team, DeAndrea and Deanna. And husband Dwayne coaches the East Laurens boys.

Deanna Lowther was the



LAST ONE LEFT: Just as they held up four fingers, then two, to celebrate wins in the quarterfinals and semis, East Laurens head coach Danielle Lowther, her players and staff were down to one as they became the state's last team left standing with Friday's victory /JASON VORHEES, GTLN

game's MVP.

"It's very emotional," the senior forward said. "We practice like we play in the game."

Elbert County, with a drive of about 120 interstate-free miles, leading 14-11 five minutes into the game.

East Laurens' first "enough of that" appeared, with Garyunna Mitchell's layup and bucket off a steal, giving the Falcons an 18-14 lead that stood at 23-18 after a quarter.

The teams both took 17 shots, East Laurens making one more and getting four more points at the line.

The Coliseum then became East Laurens' living room.

The Falcons upped the margin to double digits in a little more than a minute, with a 16-footer



THE MOMENT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR: East Laurens players hoist the state championship trophy after defeating Elbert County 63-55 to win the GHSA state championship Friday at the Macon Coliseum/JASON VORHEES, GTLN



THE NATION IS WATCHING: Zahmaria Robinson (10) puts up a running shot in front of a gallery of Falcon faithful in the second half/JASON VORHEES, GTLN

and 3-pointer from Jemeria Bing, battling an illness, sandwiching a 3 from Alasia Wiggins to make it 31-20.

The comfort zone and accuracy rate grew, and two more buckets from Mitchell and one from Deanna Lowther put East Laurens ahead 36-22 and in control.

Seemingly.

Elbert County slowly started playing better defense and taking control of the ball more, both of which helped keep East Laurens

in range. A 3 from Kaylen Rucker was part of a solid ending to the second quarter, allowing Elbert County to get within 42-33 at half-time.

At one point, she gave a frustrated Robinson a hug.

"She turned the ball over a little bit," Lowther said. "I said, 'We're OK. Relax. We're OK. We're going to do this, and we're going to do this together.'"

"And they believe me."

As decent as the first half was,

the third quarter was the opposite, as neither team had much going for it.

Elbert County hit on all of four shots in 14 tries for 29 percent, and East Laurens kept the door open by making only 3 of 12 shots, 25 percent.

The Blue Devils took some advantage of the Falcons' drought of 5:35 to get within a bucket on another 3 from Rucker, who finished with a team-high 16 points. That made it 46-44 with 1:16 left in the third, East Laurens watching the school's first state title perhaps slip away.

Two free throws, after Bing's fourth foul, with two seconds left pulled Elbert County within 50-46 heading to the fourth.

"We knew they were coming out real hard in the second half," Deanna Lowther said. "We expected it."

The teams traded misses and turnovers and a few baskets until Elbert County warmed up and East Laurens chilled out. Rucker's off-balance bucket and two freebies from Tiyah Thurman got the sweat glands going in suddenly a one-point game.

"We've been telling them all since we knew we were going to play them that they're a team that kind of gets down in the first half,"

CHAMPIONS
Continued on page 10



IS IT REAL LIFE?: East Laurens head coach Danielle Lowther paused for a glance at the scoreboard as her players began celebrating with cheerleaders and fans when the reality of their state championship victory began to set in with only seconds to go in the fourth quarter/ZACH DAWSON



THE CELEBRATION BEGINS: Lady Falcons erupt onto the court as the final horn signals an end to Friday's game, and their successful state championship run/ZACH DAWSON



FIRE IT UP, EASTSIDE: FALCON FANS OUT IN FORCE AT THE COLISEUM

East Laurens supporters made their presence felt all throughout Friday's state championship game, dressing out to turn a whole side of the Macon Coliseum into a sea of black, accented by the gold of shakers and ribbons that were passed around the seating area. They were heard as much as they were seen down the stretch of the afternoon as chants and cheers broke out to celebrate the Lady Falcons 63-55 win to capture a first team state title in school history/ZACH DAWSON

CHAMPIONS

Continued from page 9

Danielle Lowther said. “Second half, they come full force. We told them we can’t be that team that they come back on and beat like they beat all the other teams.”

“We told them to stay the course, stay composed, that we were OK.”

Two missed free throws and four more Rucker scores – including one the went through the rim as she hit the floor – later, Elbert County was on top 55-54 with 2:49 to go until a coronation or overtime.

Wiggins struggled to a 1-for-6 night from the floor, but two free throws eight seconds later returned East Laurens to the lead.

For good. The Blue Devils turned it over, and paid on Zahmaria Robinson’s short baseline bucket with 2:10 left.

Effort overshadowed execution for a spell, Elbert County blowing chances to make up ground and East Laurens failing to deliver a knockout punch.

Until seconds remained, the clock having become East Laurens’ best friend as the teams swung and missed.

Bing returned to the game, and put the Falcons up 61-55 with a pair of free throws with 18 seconds left. Wiggins followed a turnover with a pair of party-starting makes at the line, giving the veteran head coach the confidence to stroll down the bench and low-five her team.

She did have to lovingly bop one Falcon, covering her tearing-up face, on the forehead so she wasn’t left hanging.

Lowther stood at the end of the bench then took a few steps back and all but melted into a chair as the horn sounded and Falcons stormed the court. It took her almost half a minute to resume breathing and get up to join the joy.

“They work hard, they believe, and they want to win,” the head coach said after her team battled a little bit better down the stretch. “That’s what they do.”

Deanna Lowther led the Falcons with 18 points and



DE-TERMINED EFFORT: Deanna Lowther (15) loses control of the ball while driving to the basket in the first half. The senior’s 18 points and 11 rebounds gave her one of two double-doubles by Falcon forwards/**JASON VORHEES, GTLN**



A MIDCOURT SCRUM: East Laurens’ Deanna Lowther and Garyunna Mitchell join two Elbert County players in the scramble for a loose ball/**JASON VORHEES, GTLN**

11 rebounds, while Mitchell played beyond her freshman year’s experience with 17 points and 10 rebounds, plus four steals.

“They are twin towers, we call them,” Danielle Lowther said. “We haven’t come across a team this whole season that can stop both of them. They do dynamite stuff. And they work very good together.”

Bing, in fewer minutes than usual, added 12 points. Robinson was good for another nine points and eight rebounds as well as six assists.

Rucker had 16 for Elbert County (22-8), with Lunsford and Thurman adding 12 each.

The Falcons got 12 more points off of turnovers, 12

more in the paint, and held the Blue Devils to 34.5 percent shooting. East Laurens was good on 38.9 percent, and made five more free throws than Elbert County attempted.

Championship games are less about exceptional play and highlights and more about the details, composure and steadiness when it counts the most. And the Falcons checked those boxes.

“It really does feel good,” the head coach said. “I don’t think really it has sunk in yet. Just to be able to do something for my school that hadn’t been done. It speaks wonders to what God did.”

And what the Falcons did, too.



GETTING A MOVE ON: East Laurens Garyunna Mitchell (2) attacks a window of opportunity with this drive toward the basket during the first half/**JASON VORHEES, GTLN**



ROARING START: East Laurens’ Jameria Bing (12, above) and Zahmaria Robinson (10, below) scream after made baskets during Friday’s championship game. Bing hit a pair of 3s on her way to 12 points, and Robinson one of her three made shots from the field, to help the Falcons set the game’s pace with 42 before halftime/**JASON VORHEES, GTLN**



SCOREBOARD

GIRLS HOOPS
Friday
East Laurens 63,
Elbert Co. 55

BASEBALL
Friday
West Laurens 17,
Westside Augusta 0
Dodge Co. 8, EL 3
Gatewood 13, Trinity 9

BOYS SOCCER
Friday
WL 2, Westside Augusta 0

PREP SCHEDULE

BASEBALL
Monday
West Laurens at
Morgan Co./5:30 p.m.
Tattnall Co. at East Laurens
/6 p.m.

Tuesday
Dublin at Northeast Macon
/4:30 p.m.
ACE Charter at EL
Trinity at Windsor/6 p.m.

Wednesday
Bleckley Co. at WL
Dublin at GMC/6 p.m.

Thursday
EL at Tattnall Co.
WL at Washington Co.
/6 p.m.

Friday
EL at ACE Charter
Northeast at Dublin
Windsor at Trinity/6 p.m.

SOCCER
Monday
WL at Aquinas/5 p.m.

Tuesday
Dublin at Swainsboro
EL at Treutlen
WL at Howard/5 p.m.
Covenant at Trinity
/5:30 p.m.

Wednesday
EL at Northeast Macon
/5 p.m.

Friday
Dodge Co. at EL
Trinity at WL/5 p.m.

TENNIS
Monday
Robert Toombs at Trinity
/4 p.m.

Tuesday
WL at Aquinas/4 p.m.

Thursday
Trinity at Central
Fellowship and Covenant
/3:30

Friday
WL at Harlem/4 p.m.

GOLF
Monday
WL at Stratford Invitational
(Idle Hour CC, Macon)
/2 p.m.
Gatewood at Trinity (DCC)
/2:30 p.m.

Thursday
FPD at WL (Green Acres)
/3:30 p.m.

CONTACT US:
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HIGHLIGHT REEL: SUPER SATURDAY SPORTS SCENES

PACE BIKE: After riding out front of the field along the one-mile course, Ronda Walker stopped off to the side to encourage and cheer on these Leprechaun Road Race runners over their last few steps toward the finish line/**CLAY REYNOLDS**



BRAGGING RIGHTS: Will Tyler, of Adrian, turned for a glance back at his competitor as he overtook defending LRR one-mile champion River Kight on this final sprint to the finish line to claim first place with a time of 5:58.2. Kight, of Dublin, and Daniel Auker, of Wrightsville took silver and bronze in the fun run. Levi Dailey and Noah Dixon were respective winners of the morning’s 5K and 10K races/**CLAY REYNOLDS**



ENJOYING THE RIDE: The East Laurens Lady Falcons acknowledge the admiring crowds over the last few blocks of Saturday’s St. Patrick’s parade/**CLAY REYNOLDS**



HOLDING COURT: Competitors exchanged some rallies, and post-match hugs, after some friendly competition in both singles and doubles during Saturday’s portion of the 46th St. Patrick’s Tennis Tournament. The event, once again drawing participation exceeding 100 players, enjoyed perfect weather throughout the weekend at the Dublin High tennis complex/**CLAY REYNOLDS**

LADY FALCONS

Continued from page 1

Their float was a Tanner Service Center flatbed, driven by East Dublin city councilman, Falcon supporter and proud player grandparent Len Tanner, with banners reading "East Laurens Girls Varsity Basketball – State Champions" signed by each member of the team draped alongside.

Coaches Danielle Lowther and Scotteria Rozier had seats atop the wrecker as a few of the players rode along the edges, while others walked along behind it. The brightly polished silver trophy cup changed hands as different players took turns carrying it along the route.

All were smiling as spectators lining every part of the route offered their applause, cheers and way-to-gos.

"It feels good that people are supporting us and that our community is behind us," senior Deanna Lowther said.

This was kind of the perfect opportunity for a triumphant homecoming, which gave many who couldn't be in Macon to support in person due to Friday's midday tipoff an opportunity to give them their due moment of recognition.

East Dublin, Dublin and Laurens County still showed out with a strong turnout to the Coliseum, as plenty more watched the championship game at home on GPB. And the Lady Falcons, all Friday night and Saturday, were the talk of the town.

"It was awesome," Coach Lowther said. "Just seeing the community, seeing different people in the community just watching us. We've kind of been the focal point, in a sense. It's awesome just coming back to where your community is and celebrating a little bit."

The game was mostly decided, as Elbert County failed to score after going ahead slightly with a little under three minutes left.

East Laurens only slowly slammed the door, but added five unanswered free throws to its original lead of two – regained with the help of a four-point swing as Alasia Wiggins sunk a pair at the line, and Zahmaria Robison hit a layup – in the last 30 seconds of the game.

As the Lady Falcons were pulling away, the Macon Coliseum echoed with the "Fire it up, Eastside" chant from fans dressed in mostly black across multiple sections of the arena.

Moments later, East Laurens players exploded onto the court as the buzzer sounded to make their 63-55 win, and championship dreams, a reality.

"It felt so great," said senior Jameria Bing. "It felt like we really were on top. Once that buzzer went off, it felt like all that hard work we put in throughout the season, it finally came true. It made us where we had got that whole trophy we had talked about it the whole season. It was great to see, and finally have in our hands and know that we brought it home to East Dublin."

Though this – as East Laurens High School's first team state championship in history – is something monumental on its own, the accomplishment was as much a milestone for a senior class of players who've broken a lot of ground in their decorated basketball careers.

As sophomores, they were part of a team that finished region runner-up, and won a pair of playoff games on the road to reach the quarterfinals. A year later, it



PRESENTING, THE STATE CHAMPS: East Laurens players and coaches pose for a postgame photo after Friday's trophy ceremony/JASON VORHEES, GTLN

as a region title and step further to the Final Four for the first time ever.

This season, they became the program's first team since 1999 and 2000 to win back-to-back region championships, and to make the state finals.

Taking the final step, and doing what it took to get through the pesky barriers that had prevented it the seasons leading up, was what was most satisfying.

"It was a good moment," Deanna Lowther said. "It was like one of the moments where we finally won it. After so long and after all the hard work that we put in, we finally won it."

The Lady Falcons are no strangers to handling third-quarter surges.

Elbert County came with likely the strongest they've seen since the last game of the regular season when Northeast Macon flipped over an early lead, and handed their shorthanded lineup a couple-point loss.

The Blue Devils, with a 13-8 surplus in the third, ate up all but four points of the nine in East's halftime advantage, and eliminated the rest of the cushion to grab a brief lead of one midway through the fourth.

Down to the last couple of minutes, the game was right up there for grabs. But East Laurens, with its usual edge

provided inside by prolific shot-blockers and rebounders Deanna Lowther and Garyunna Mitchell, made the handful of gritty plays needed to pull it out. The Lady Falcons also, in no small detail, made seven out of their last nine free throw attempts to atone for 10 misses at the line back in the first half.

"It took a lot of heart and pride," said Bing, who was out of the game for a solid chunk of time in the critical stretch after picking up her third and fourth fouls back-

to-back late in the third quarter.

East Laurens, which has survived many of these second-half runs all season and fully expected this type of rally from a notorious second-half team, knew this year was different from last. But they couldn't help but recall a year ago at Georgia College, and a similar situation out of halftime that would lead to their elimination in the state semifinals.

Despite leading 30-25 at the half, they'd be outscored by nine and five in the last

two quarters.

That's where their resolve to make this time different, formed sometime just after that game early last March, started to kick in. For Deanna Lowther, it came down to "working so hard to get something you wanted so bad."

"They were coming back," Bing said. "We had to push through and fight just how anybody else would. It was a matter of who wanted it more, and we had really really wanted it. We had been talking about it for the longest time... since last season... We knew we couldn't have that happen again, so we had to keep it strong."

Once again, you could see an overpowering sense of joy in the expressions of Coach Lowther as she paced the bench, with the late lead solidified, glancing up at the scoreboard and across to the hundreds of supporters on their feet in the stands.

The experience of playing at the Coliseum and feeling the energy of the electric crowd over those few final moments will be her most unforgettable memory.

"Seeing the communi-

ty behind us, it just speaks volumes about when our community comes together for something special," she said.

For the players, it was a moment to encapsulate everything that made this season special, with their 27 wins and state title as a bonus to the camaraderie of teammates and the fun of playing the game of basketball throughout the season.

"It was very exciting," Tanner said. "It was emotional, because it's my last year. But it was exciting that we got to go as far as we did, and we won state."

If it didn't set in with Friday's trophy presentation or an LCSO-escorted ride down I-16 and back through East Dublin for a cheering reception from hometown supporters waiting on campus, then it had to at some point during Saturday's parade, right?

A few Lady Falcons may still be pinching themselves.

"I woke up this morning and said, am I really a state champion? Is our team really a state champion?" Coach Lowther said. "It's still an unbelievable moment."

Great job, Lady Falcons!

Your hard work and dedication has led you to enormous heights. Congratulations on a great season!

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CONGRATULATIONS!

The Lady Falcons have played a great basketball season. Great job to all of the team members!

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Congratulations, Ladies!

We are proud of all of you!

– State Representative Matt Hatchett and family

20 26

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