

## NASCAR



MARVIN GENTRY/USA TODAY SPORTS

Chase Elliott has been close to finding a victory in Sprint Cup this season, but now he needs one to stay in the Chase.

## Chase over for Chase if he can't earn Talladega win

JENNA FRYER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLADEGA, Ala. - Chase Elliott has been inching toward his first career Sprint Cup victory all year, only to come up short time and time again.

He needs it to come Sunday at Talladega Superspeedway, where anything but a win will likely eliminate the rookie phenom from NASCAR's playoffs.

There have been five times this year that Elliott has finished second or third. He's been inside the top five a total of nine times. He might have even won at Charlotte Motor Speedway two weeks ago until he wrecked. Then a tire problem at Kansas dropped him to last in the Chase for the Sprint Cup standings and on the edge of elimination.

"We are obviously disappointed in the way the past two weeks have gone, having such strong cars," Elliott said Friday. "But it puts us in a pretty simplistic situation for this weekend."

The third and final race of this leg of the Chase will trim the title contenders from 12 to eight, and Jimmie Johnson and Kevin Harvick already have spots locked down. There are no guarantees for the remaining six spots, as drivers have come to Talladega the last two years in good position only to be bounced out after a bad day at the superspeedway.

At the bottom of the standings along with Elliott are Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin, who raced for the title two years ago, and Brad Keselowski, who was in a must-win situation at Talladega two years ago and got the victory needed to advance to the third round.

Also in shaky position: Joey Logano, who won all three races in the second round last year, and Martin Truex Jr., winner of two races in the first round this season but suddenly is one sub-par day away from being bounced out of the Chase.

Truex made it to the championship round a year ago and didn't seem too stressed about his chances on Friday. He's sixth in the standings.

"You just go racing, see what happens," Truex said. "We're either going to make it or we're not. Worrying about it, thinking about scenarios, what do you have to do? All those things, it doesn't do anybody any good."

Elliott is realistic about his chances. He finished third in two of the first three Chase races and soared into the second round behind improved performance from Hendrick Motorsports. Then he led 103 laps at Charlotte, only to be caught in an accident that wasn't his fault. He finished 33rd and then 31st at Kansas.

Typically very hard on himself after a poor finish, Elliott was encouraged by how well his Hendrick Motorsports team has been running. He said he believes he can race his way into the third round — and race for the championship.

## Cordova

Continued from Page 1C

Fourteen points in a little over three minutes. Forget about Whitehaven, Cordova had a fight on its hands right here.

"The momentum flipped there," said Jones. "We just told the guys to relax, settle down and get back to doing what we were doing."

The Wolves responded to the punch by marching 80 yards on 8 plays, all on the ground. Quarterback Devin Coleman did the honors from 12 yards out. After forcing a three-and-out, Cordova then went 63 yards on five plays — again all on the ground — with Harold Lacy going in from the 19.

Just like that, it was a 17-point game again.

"It was frustrating, but we had to take a step back and remember who we were playing," said Mustangs coach Will Hudgens, whose team remains on pace to host a first-round playoff game with White Station on the schedule for next week.

"You have to give (Cordova) credit where credit's due. But our guys fought. We're down 31-14 and we never stopped fighting."

Jeremy Banks had a 32-yard touchdown run in the first quarter, while Lacy added a 9-yard run in the second on a drive that was set up by a spectacular over-the-shoulder interception by Isaiah Norman.

## TENNESSEE TITANS

# Be it his benching or snub, Matthews' fire is stoked

JASON WOLF  
JWOLF@TENNESSEAN.COM

Guess who leads the Titans in receiving yards.

It's not Pro Bowl tight end Delanie Walker, who set franchise records at his position for catches and receiving yards last season. It's not running back DeMarco Murray, who has more receptions than any of his teammates. It's a wide receiver who has started in just two of the team's six games.

Rishard Matthews has 282 yards and two touchdowns on 19 catches and is coming on strong, with scores each of the last two weeks, victories against his former team, the Dolphins, and at home against the Browns.

"I think his focus changed a little bit, like it does for most of us, when we took off going down to Miami," Titans offensive coordinator Terry Robiskie said. "I like to tell him, 'Miami didn't want him. They say he wasn't good enough.' And that kind of makes him mad. So it made him focus a little bit."

The Titans signed Matthews in free agency in March, ostensibly as a starting wide receiver, after the former seventh-round draft pick's breakout season with the Dolphins. He had 43 catches for 662 yards and four touchdowns in 10 games a year ago before multiple fractured ribs ended his season.

Matthews got off to a slow start in Tennessee. Through his first three



ANDREW NELLES / THE TENNESSEAN  
Titans wide receiver Rishard Matthews celebrates his touchdown on the opening drive against the Browns on Oct. 16.

games, two of them starts, he had just 10 catches for 98 yards and no scores.

Matthews hasn't started since, and although Titans coach Mike Mularkey described the apparent demotion as a rotation, Andre Johnson has been the team's starting "Z" receiver for three straight games.

Matthews disputed Robiskie's asser-

## NEXT GAME

COLTS (2-4) at TITANS (3-3)

When: Noon Sunday

TV/radio: WREG Channel 3

tion that animosity toward the Dolphins ramped up his game.

"I probably got mad more when I got benched," Matthews said. "So that's probably what got me mad. But other than that, no teams get me mad when we play them. I just try to go out there and make plays and do what I can when I'm on the field."

In the last three games, Matthews has nine catches for 184 yards — including a career-long 60-yard catch at Houston — and two scores.

**Andrews not fined:** Antonio Andrews was not fined for his blindside hit that ended Browns safety Jordan Poyer's season.

Andrews received a 15-yard penalty for crushing Poyer during a Titans punt return last Sunday, but insisted the hit was clean. Poyer spent two nights in a Nashville hospital with a lacerated spleen.

The Browns were upset that Andrews posted video of the hit on Instagram.

Reach Jason Wolf at [jwolf@tennessean.com](mailto:jwolf@tennessean.com) and follow him on Twitter at @JasonWolf and on Instagram and Snapchat at TitansBeat.

## HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

# Briarcrest's long wait is over

## Saints capture their first volleyball state crown since 2003

JOHN VARLAS  
JOHN.VARLAS@COMMERCIALAPPEAL.COM

Prior to Friday's Division 2-AA state volleyball championship, a Briarcrest supporter hung a banner over the railing at the Murphy Center that said "12 years overdue."

This time, the Saints came through. Led by an MVP performance from senior Kendal Strand, the Saints won their first state championship since 2003, defeating Chattanooga Baylor 25-18, 25-17, 25-23. The victory put an exclamation mark on a dominating season that saw Briarcrest go undefeated against in-state competition while finishing 46-3.

And it came after a disappointing trip to state last year, when they finished runner-up to Father Ryan.

"We made sure everyone was all prepared," said senior Callie Anderton. "We made sure we didn't overlook any opponent."

The Saints — who also beat Baylor Thursday — were confident from the time they walked off the bus and played with poise throughout the match, especially in the deciding set when they fell behind 7-2 and didn't take their first lead until it was 24-23.

"They had a lot of pressure on them," said head coach Carla Anderton. "But they were pretty confident. The first game here, they were a little tight. There were some nerves but they re-focused and re-grouped."

"And my captains played steady and composed the entire time."

One of those captains, Anderton, became the state's all-time career assist leader earlier in the season and capped off her career with 44 more in the final. The other, Strand, played a tremendous all-around game, finishing 14 kills and 15 digs. Libero Abigayle Ramey had 17 digs.

But the Saints wouldn't have won without a terrific performance from Wells. The 6-2 sophomore was dialed in from the opening whistle and finished



MICHAEL MURPHY / THE TENNESSEAN

Briarcrest's Alyiah Wells, left, and Maddie Wilmore celebrate during Friday's Division II-AA championship match against Baylor.

with 19 kills, three blocks and a robust .667 hitting percentage.

Ironically for a player with such power, Wells ended the match with a little dink over the net that found a gap between two Baylor players. She then dove headlong on the floor before the rest of the team piled in on celebration.

"Last year, I ended the match in the net," Wells said. "With the last point ... it's not always about power. It's about getting the job done."

Baylor was without its best player, senior Gabby Gray, who was injured Thursday. The Lady Red Raiders end the year 45-4, with two of those losses to Briarcrest.

"They beat us in the sub-state when the seniors were freshmen and we haven't lost to them since," said Carla Anderton. "Even the year they won state (2014) we beat them in a tournament."

## HARDING FALLS IN D2-A

Harding coach Michael Sansone said his team had been pointing to Oct. 21 all season long. And it was a special day, just not in the way they hoped for.

The Lions battled Knoxville Webb hard all match before falling 27-25, 25-21, 26-24 in the Division 2-A championship. It's the fourth state title in a row for the Spartans while the Lions — who end the year 41-10 — finish runner-up for the sec-

ond straight year.

"This is just an amazing group of amazing young ladies," said Sansone. "They've done everything we've asked them to do all year long. From the start of two-a-days, we pointed to Oct. 21. We had it circled on our calendar."

"We checked the box for (winning) the region and sub-state; we checked the box for Wednesday and Thursday and we checked the box for Oct. 21, just not in the way we would have liked."

Webb, led by sisters Nicklin and Kayleigh Hames who have committed to Nebraska and Pepperdine respectively, never looked totally comfortable against the Lions, who lost to the Spartans on Thursday before defeating St. George's in an elimination game to advance.

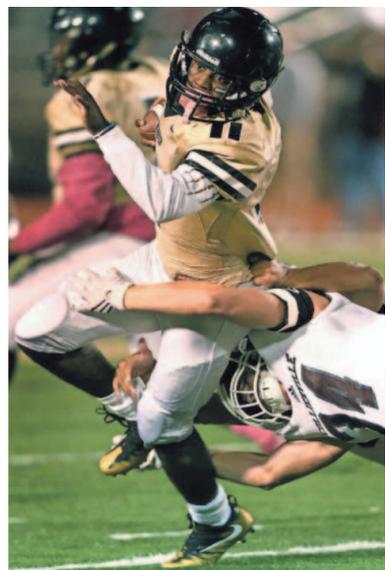
"The two sisters are dynamic players and they have others that do the little things well," Sansone said. "We played hard ... we just couldn't get the ball to go down."

Outside hitter Lauren Deaton, who will return for her senior year in 2017, led the Lions with 17 kills while Antoinette Lewis chipped in with 14 in her final high school match. Senior Taylor Ferrante had 30 assists.

Nicklin Hames hit .652 for the match with 17 kills to earn the tournament Most Valuable Player award. Kaleigh Hames led with 22 kills while Meredith Wallace had 13.

## WHITEHAVEN, 43, COLLIERVILLE 3

# Whitehaven crushes Collierville



STAN CARROLL / THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Whitehaven senior running back Kylan Watkins fights through a tackle attempt by Collierville senior middle linebacker Tylet Garvey in first-quarter action on Friday. Watkins rushed for 184 yards and two touchdowns as Whitehaven improved to 9-0 on the season.

JASON WILLIAMS  
SPECIAL TO THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

As the playoffs near and cooler temperatures begin to arrive, Whitehaven head coach Rodney Saulsberry knows his team has the recipe for success in its ability to run the football and play defense.

Top-ranked Whitehaven (9-0, 6-0 Class 6A Region 4) rushed for 369 yards and allowed only 54 yards in its 43-3 victory over Collierville (2-7, 1-5).

"The running game and the ability to stop the run is the pedigree for winning championships," Saulsberry said. "You see that at any level. That's what we hang our hats on."

Senior running back Kylan Watkins added to his spectacular season with 184 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 16 carries, including a 70-yarder in the third quarter. Watkins now has 1,287 rushing yards and 22 touchdowns for the season.

The depth in the backfield was apparent for the Tigers as fullback Tyrone Cason scored two touchdowns and rushed for 62 yards. Junior Chris Witherspoon, who rushed for over 1,000 yards at Lausanne last season, also scored two rushing touchdowns in the second half.

"We've been blessed to have some great backs," Saulsberry said. "Guys have to be patient and wait their turn

sometimes, but when they get their chance, they're excited about getting the ball. ... We're just happy to have quality depth. No matter who is back there, we are a threat to run the football."

The defense continued its dominating play by collecting 15 tackles for loss and four sacks as the Tigers held Collierville to -50 rushing yards. The Dragons struggled to find running room against an attacking defense and also had problems with high snaps.

"The defensive line played a great game tonight," Saulsberry said. "We missed a few plays out there, but I'm very happy with the outcome of how we played."

After its special senior night victory, Whitehaven turns its attention to its biggest test of the season as the Tigers travel to Cordova in a battle of undefeated teams looking for a region championship.

"We're excited about the opportunity, and our mind has already turned to it," Saulsberry said. "A perfect season doesn't mean much. It's all about winning our region. That's our No. 1 goal so we can get home field advantage throughout the playoffs."

With a strong running game and one of the top defenses in the area, Saulsberry enters the final week of the regular season confident in his team as long as they stick to their identity