

The Grid

Today

Varsity Boys Golf
Noon
Greenwood at Palmetto Champi-
onship

Varsity Track and Field
5 p.m.
Saluda at Ridge View

Varsity Baseball
6 p.m.
Fountain Inn at Emerald

Varsity Boys Soccer
7:30 p.m.
Saluda at American Leadership

Men's and Women's College Track
and Field
All-Day
Lander at Anderson

Women's College Tennis
1 p.m.
Georgia Southwestern at Lander

Men's College Tennis
2:30 p.m.
Lander at North Georgia

College Softball
5 p.m.
Augusta at Lander

College Baseball
5 p.m.
USC Aiken at Lander

Saturday

Varsity Boys Golf
9 a.m.
Greenwood at Palmetto Champi-
onship

Varsity Baseball
2 p.m.
Mountain View Prep at Saluda
(Swansea Tournament)

Men's and Women's College Track
and Field
All-Day
Lander at Anderson

Women's College lacrosse
Noon
Montevallo at Lander

College Softball
Noon
Augusta at Lander

2 p.m.
Augusta at Lander

College Baseball
3 p.m.
USC Aiken at Lander

AREA ROUNDUP

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Wednesday

Emerald routed by Fountain Inn in four innings

The Emerald baseball team suffered their second straight defeat to a stellar Fountain Inn team, falling 16-0 in four innings. The result dropped the Vikings to 4-4 in region play.

Saluda earns bounce back region win

The Saluda softball team took down American Leadership Academy 4-0 in a solid all-round effort. The Tigers improved to 13-2 overall and 4-1 in region play with the win.

Abbeville crushed by GREEN Upstate

The Abbeville girls soccer team was trounced by GREEN Upstate 7-0 on Wednesday afternoon, falling to 0-3 in region play.

Dixie holds off surge to edge Spartanburg

The Dixie baseball team used a four-run fifth inning to build a 10-4 cushion, then hung on for a 10-9 win over Spartanburg on Wednesday night. The Hornets improved to 7-4 overall with the non-region win.

Fleet softball earns sweep against Shorter

The Erskine College softball team (9-21, 7-9 CC) defeated Shorter University in both games of a double-header at the Erskine Softball Complex on Wednesday afternoon, taking the first game 5-2 and the second 3-1.

SALUDA

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respond.

“The thing that I’ve always learned is the sun’s always going to come up tomorrow,” Towery said. “So no matter what, the sun’s going to come up, and you choose what you can do with your day. So tomorrow’s a great day to bounce back and get us back on the right track.”

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Bearcat Nation shows up as Lander heads to title game

From Staff Reports

On Wednesday afternoon, the Lander men’s basketball team boarded the bus to head to the national title game, and Bearcat Nation showed up to give the team a championship-level send-off.

With music blasting and an animated crowd flocking to get a view, head coach Omar Wattad took the stage to address the Lander community.

“We came here, my wife and I, in April 2020, having not won a college basketball game as a head coach,” he said. “Six years later, we’ve won over 100 games, been to three NCAA Tournaments, two Sweet 16 appearances, won an Elite Eight game, won a Final Four game...”

“On Sunday, we plan to bring back a National Championship too.”

The Bearcats will take on the Gannon Golden Knights for the Division II National Championship at the Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on April 5. The game will begin at 1 p.m. and be broadcast on CBS.



CORT STREET | INDEX-JOURNAL

Lander coach Omar Wattad, with his team behind him, addressed the crowd at the Bearcats’ send-off event.

DUO

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year with the team. After a shocking run through the Florida 4A state playoffs, Gibbs fell just short in the Final Four against Andrew Jackson despite a game-leading 21-point effort from Daniels. Murphy was sure he had something special.

“Jacob just had a knack for winning,” Murphy said. “He was super competitive, and he made everybody around him better. He did whatever it took for us to win the game. Some games, it would be him being the leading scorer, some nights there may have been someone else. But whatever it took, he was gonna get it done.”

While Daniels was shining in the spotlight, Crawford was putting in the work off the court, pushed harder by the level of his teammate and friend.



SUBMITTED

Lander’s Jacob Daniels was named Florida Class 4A Player of the Year during his junior season at Gibbs High School.



SUBMITTED

Lander’s Bobby Crawford had never played organized basketball before joining the Gibbs High School team his freshman year.

Together, Daniels and Crawford led Gibbs to heights rarely before achieved, winning the school’s first state title since 1969 their junior year and falling just short of a repeat their senior year, finishing as runners-up after a buzzer beater loss in the championship. Along the way, through basketball, they formed an unbreakable bond.

“Through all of their basketball stuff, they were connected with each other,” Murphy said. “They were always on the same team. And I think over time, that bond that they had from playing so many games together, from eating lunch together, from working out together, it just kind of grew on them.”

Confident in their ability to adjust immediately to the college level, Wattad set out to land the duo.

“I saw film on those two, and I knew we had to have them,” Wattad said. “I spent probably five days down in Florida and then with these two guys up on an official visit,” Wattad said. “Instead of focusing on the portal — it was early April at the time — I spent about a week of my time making sure, trying to do whatever we could to get them.”

At Lander, Daniels and Crawford were given the chance to start a new

chapter of their basketball careers together.

“We got a lot of chemistry together already,” Daniels said. “We felt like we could go here and keep doing the same thing.”

And from the moment the duo got on campus at Lander, they could tell something was different.

“It felt genuine,” Daniels said. “What Coach (Omar) was telling us, it wasn’t fake. I knew everything he was telling me was gonna happen.”

That vision only grew clearer throughout the year, as Daniels carved out a role as the team’s leading facilitator and Crawford grew into a force on the defensive end. As the stakes got higher and the pressure mounted, Daniels and Crawford remained at the center of the team’s success.

There’s at least one person who is not surprised.

“They had success at Gibbs, and they’re continuing to have that success in college,” Murphy said. “It means a lot just to know that they came through Gibbs High School. And for me, it just shows the success is not by accident. They put in a lot of hours in the gym, a lot of a lot of work of just trying to do thing that they knew would help get them

better. So I think it’s just a reward for all the work that they put in over the years.”

If Murphy had a chance to watch the Bearcats’ Final Four game against Nova Southeastern, he would have seen Crawford spark an early Lander scoring run with a leaping block on defense and a fast break layup on the other end. Later, he would have seen Daniels drain a clutch 3-pointer, followed by a transition layup, that iced the game to book Lander’s first ever trip to the DII National Championship.

It was two moments that Murphy had undoubtedly seen many times before, all the way back in those early days in the Gibbs High School gym.

And if he stuck around after the clock hit zero, he would have been greeted by another familiar scene — of Daniels finding Crawford on the sideline, in the midst of a raucous celebration, and giving him a knowing look — a look that could only be shared by two young athletes who just can’t stop winning.

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AREA ROUNDUP

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tuesday

Balance aids T.L. Hanna in win over Greenwood

The Greenwood baseball team scored eight runs in the second inning, but defensive struggles continued to plague the Eagles in a 14-8 T.L. Hanna win. Jameson Pate led Greenwood offensively, going 2-4 at the plate with three RBIs. The Eagles dropped to 3-10 overall and 0-7 in region play.

Saluda’s 13-run fourth leads to run-rule victory

The Saluda baseball team took down Ridge Spring-Monetta 17-0 after exploding for 13 runs in the fourth inning. The Tigers improved to 8-5 with the non-region win.

Emerald softball falls against Laurens Academy

The Emerald softball team was defeated by Laurens Academy by a wild 33-22 scoreline. The Vikings jumped out to a 10-0 first inning lead and led 15-7 entering the fifth

inning, but Laurens Academy scored 26 runs over the next two innings, including 18 in the sixth, to put the game out of reach. Senior Paydyn Stafford led the Vikings with three runs and five RBIs.

Saluda boys edge out Batesburg-Leesville

The Saluda boys soccer team played Batesburg-Leesville to a scoreless draw in regulation, but the Tigers survived in a penalty shootout for a 0-0 (4-3) win. Saluda improved to 7-2 and 5-0 in region play.

Ninety Six routs Dixie in run-rule victory

The Ninety Six baseball team put together a dominant effort, breezing past Dixie 17-1 to improve to 5-5. The Hornets fell to 6-4 with the loss

Second-half surge send Westside past Abbeville

The Abbeville girls soccer team entered the second half tied at 2-2 against 4A Westside, but a second-half surge resulted in a 6-3 win for Westside. The Panthers fell to 1-5 overall with the loss.

Saluda girls soccer rule Batesburg-Leesville

The Saluda girls soccer team breezed past Batesburg-Leesville 8-1 on Tuesday to improve to 8-3 overall and 4-0 in region play.

Calhoun Falls drops doubleheader at Whitmire

The Calhoun Falls softball team was routed in both legs of a double-header at Whitmire, losing game one 17-0 and game two 15-0.

Lander falls to No. 6 North Greenville

The Lander baseball team struggled to generate offense in an 11-2 loss to No. 6 North Greenville at Ray & Bea Dillard Field.

Lander women’s golf gets 2nd at Grand Harbor Classic

Riding the wave of momentum from its win in the Greenwood Women’s Invitational a week ago, the No. 7 Lander women’s golf team nearly went back-to-back this week and finished runner-up by three shots at the 2026 Grand Harbor Classic. The Bearcats posted a com-

bined 286 (-2) in both the second and third rounds to climb into contention and earned their sixth top-three of 2025-26.

Bearcats finish Argonaut Invitational in 10th

The Lander men’s golf team finished 10th at +9 (873) at this week’s Argonaut Invitational at Pensacola Country Club.

Fleet take care of Claflin, extend winning streak to six

The Erskine College baseball team (18-19, 12-9 CC) defeated Claflin 16-1 at Historic Mirmow Field. The Fleet have won six consecutive games, fueled by an offensive explosion, totaling 106 runs in their winning streak that dates back to the series finale against Mount Olive.

Comeback against Emmanuel falls short

The Erskine College men’s volleyball team (8-12, 4-7 CC) was defeated by Emmanuel in five sets, 20-25, 23-25, 25-22, 25-17, 12-15, at Belk Arena in the Fleet’s final home regular season game in 2026.