

# Sports

## Wildcats finish 10th at state; Inscore Essick reaches podium

BY ABBY HOOVEN

The Henry County boys cross country team concluded a successful 2025 season with a 10th place finish at the KHSAA Class 2A State Championship in Lexington on Saturday, Nov. 1.

Last year, the Wildcats came in 13th overall in Class 2A with a total score of 422. This season, fresh off their second straight region title, the Wildcats broke into the top 10 with a score of 285.

Junior Olin Inscore Essick capped off a decorated junior campaign by achieving his season-long goal of reaching the podium at state.

He ended in ninth place out of 262 runners with a time of 16:49.42, surpassing his 38th place finish in 2024 by over a minute (17:57).

Eighth grader Leif Inscore Essick followed in 42nd place with a time of 17:57.43, sophomore Clark Willis ended in 56th with a time of 18:18.75 and freshman Eli



Photo submitted

The Henry County boys cross country team finished 10th overall at the KHSAA Class 2A State Championship in Lexington on Saturday, Nov. 1.

Kirk placed 90th with a time of 18:58.66.

Cason Fischer also ran a time of 19:30.84 for 120th place, Liam Buckley clocked a 20:52.79 for 196th place and Nathan Vega ran a 21:55.75 for 218th place.

The Henry County girls cross country team also ended the season on a high

note at state.

Caylee Fischer led Henry County with a 40th place finish, clocking a 21:39.78, and Taylor Lawrey chipped in a time of 24:01.91 for 106th place.

Jenna Bryant added a time of 27:58.02 for 192nd and Chloe Calhoun followed with a time of 28:26.18 for 196th.

Along with Henry County, Eminence had a strong showing at the Class A State Championship as well.

Junior Joey Reed paced the Warriors in the boys 5K event with a 49th place finish, clocking a time of 18:24.48.

Eighth grader Jackson Reed also came in 191st place with a time of 21:07.03.



Photo submitted

Olin Inscore Essick reached the podium with a ninth place finish at the Class 2A State Championship on Nov. 1.

## Wildcats earn first playoff win since 2009

BY ABBY HOOVEN

Voices outside the Henry County football program had seemingly written off this team's chances for success before a single play ever took place on the field.

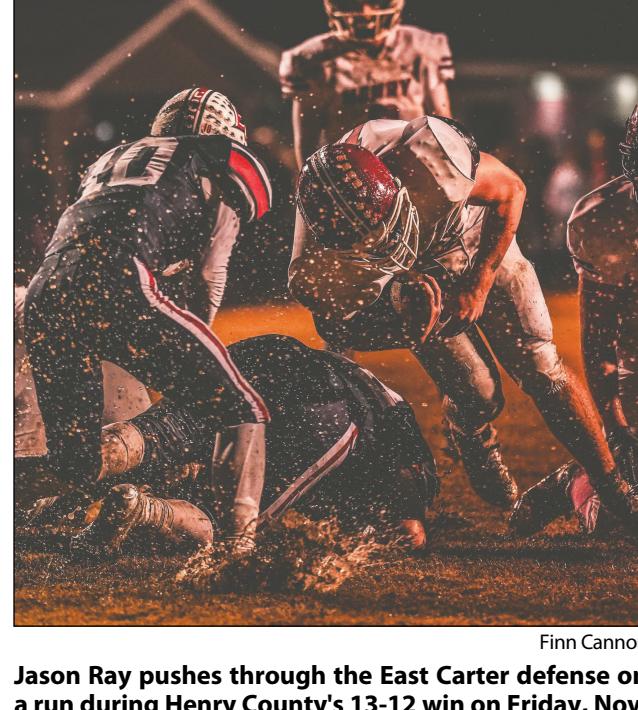
Word spread that the Wildcats lost 17 seniors, only returned 33 yards of offense and didn't have a single player back that scored during the 2024 season.

Too young, too inexperienced, small in numbers, etc. was the consensus.

Henry County blocked out the noise, and on Friday night, the Wildcats silenced the skeptics with a hard-fought 13-12 win over East Carter in the first round of the Class 3A playoffs.

The Wildcats not only proved doubters wrong, but they also accomplished a feat on the minds of each Henry County athlete since the moment they joined the program, becoming the fourth team in school history, and first team since 2009, to secure a playoff victory.

"People have said before the year that it was going to be a rough year for us," said head coach Matt Wright.



Finn Cannon

Jason Ray pushes through the East Carter defense on a run during Henry County's 13-12 win on Friday, Nov. 7.

"We talked about it all year, nobody thought it could be this team to kind of break that streak and now you go back to, this is the fourth team that's ever won a playoff game. That's something that's special because I think it was this young, whatever group, (that)

just battled to get through it."

Heading into the post-season, Henry County faced the possibility of playing without Jason Ray, the team's leading rusher and tackler, and Levi Higdon, another key component of Henry County's

O-line and D-line.

Yet, both players returned against East Carter and made great contributions throughout the night.

Younger players also rose to the occasion at various points during the game, including Cam Clark, who returned a punt inside the 15-yard line on Henry County's first series.

"I had some younger players really step up in big spots," said Wright.

Wyatt Ward concluded the drive with a touchdown to give the Wildcats a 6-0 edge early.

East Carter responded later in the period, though, to tie the game.

Thomas Burton found Caleb Hall for a 13-yard touchdown pass but failed on the conversion attempt to put the score at 6-6 with 4:47 left in the first quarter.

Henry County stayed aggressive on both sides of

the ball in the second quarter and used a touchdown run by Ray to go ahead 13-6.

"He played decently," said Wright. "I think it was a 24-yard touchdown run in the second quarter to take the lead."

East Carter put together a promising drive near the end of the first half and looked to even the score again.

Yet, Henry County came

SEE WILDCATS/PAGE A8

## Warriors shut out in first round of playoffs

BY ABBY HOOVEN

Nicholas County exacted revenge for last year's opening round playoff loss to Eminence with a 26-0 victory over the Warriors on Friday, Nov. 7.

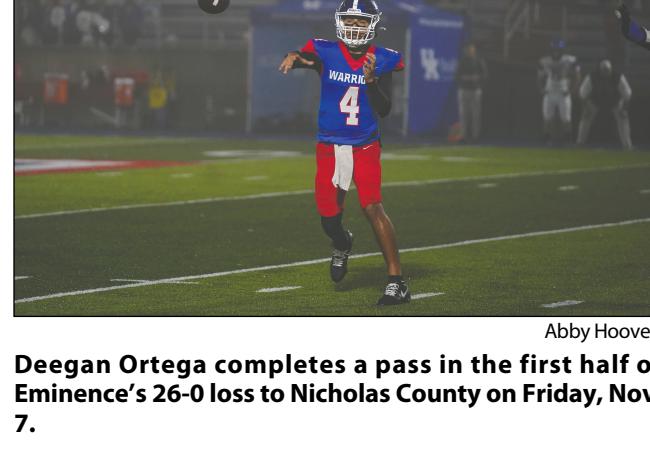
The Blue Jackets raced out to a 26-point lead by halftime and withstood Eminence's tough defensive efforts in the second half to advance to the second round of the Class A playoffs.

"More than anything, I'm proud of our kids for continuing to fight the entire game. We didn't have the result that we wanted, but I never saw a kid just simply give up," said head coach Barrett Sanderson. "I'm really proud of each kid, every senior, every junior, every sophomore, every freshman, all of them gave everything they had for all 48 minutes."

Nicholas County's run game attacked early and often to take a quick lead.

Wyatt Simons, ranked fifth in Class A in rushing heading into the game, used a lengthy run on the first play of the evening to put the Blue Jackets within scoring range.

A few plays later, Simons finished the drive with a 4-



Abby Hooven

Deegan Ortega completes a pass in the first half of Eminence's 26-0 loss to Nicholas County on Friday, Nov. 7.

yard touchdown run up the middle to give Nicholas County a 6-0 edge.

The Blue Jacket defense stepped up early as well, holding Eminence to a three-and-out possession on its opening drive of the game.

Nicholas County took control in Warrior territory and stayed aggressive on the ground to extend the lead to 12.

With a combination of runs from Simons and Jayden Watkins, the Blue Jackets made a push toward the goal and Watkins capped off the

drive with a powerful 25-yard touchdown run to bring the lead out to 12-0 with 6:22 left in the first quarter.

Eminence looked to bounce back offensively immediately after and gained a first down with a pair of runs from Raihan Steed.

However, the Blue Jackets stood firm to contain Eminence and broke up a pair of passes to force a turnover on downs.

Simons and Watkins kept attacking with strong runs near the end of the first quarter,



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Photo by Joe Durbin

**Student Molly Kuhn, left, is telling Vicki Yearly what kind of entertainment she wants to pay for while student Brynlee Yenshaw explains her entertainment choices to Angie Baxter during the Reality Store on Oct. 30. Both girls are eighth-grade students at Eminence Independent Schools.**



Photo by Joe Durbin

**Pictured seated, from left, are Beth Douglas, Dalisha Nelson and Amanda Workman advising students on medical costs on different plans, expenses with or without insurance, and how children affect your insurance rates. Pictured behind them are Nancy Young assisting with grocery costs and Kathy Gephart helping with household furniture for their home.**



Photo by Joe Durbin

**Pictured, from left, are Melissa Blankenship, Megan Wetenkamp and Amanda Workman. Workman served as a coordinator for the volunteers for the Reality Store event on Oct. 30 at the Henry County Middle School gymnasium.**

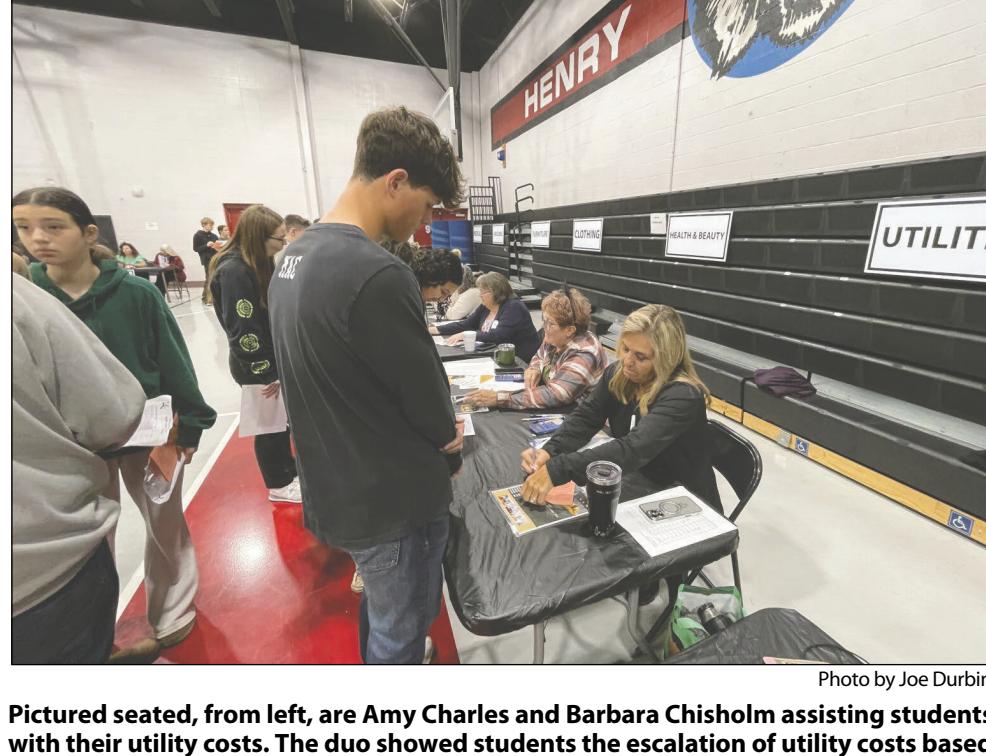


Photo by Joe Durbin

**Pictured seated, from left, are Amy Charles and Barbara Chisholm assisting students with their utility costs. The duo showed students the escalation of utility costs based on family size during the Reality Store at the Henry County Middle School gymnasium.**

## STORE

### FROM PAGE A1

\$200 for gas and \$5 a month in property taxes.

Childcare was considered by a number of students to be a significant burden. These

students asked if there was an option where they could give their children up for adoption. When they were told that was not an option, some students said it should be part of the project.

The cost of groceries was in focus this year more than in 2024. Grocery costs ranged

between \$200 and \$400 for one adult and \$500 to \$700 for a family of five.

Entertainment choices went from a night out for dinner for \$40, a sporting event for \$50, to attending a concert for \$100. Students could rent a movie for \$5 or have a party for \$200.

"This was my first time participating in the Reality Store," stated Amanda Workman, administrative assistant at the Henry County Extension office. "I enjoyed the experience!"

"I believe this program provides a good opportunity for youth to see how their

choices now can affect them later. I hope the students gained some useful tools to help them plan for their futures."

The program was presented by 4-H Extension agent Cathy Toole and Debbie Hartford, coordinator for the middle school's youth services

center. The Henry County Extension Office also coordinated all the volunteers for the event.

Linda Aldridge from All the Way Shoppe once again catered a Thanksgiving meal with all the traditional meats, sides and desserts for the volunteers.

## WILDCATS

### FROM PAGE A6

up with a huge defensive stop near the goal to maintain its lead at the break.

"They had the ball on the 2-yard line and they were going in for a touchdown and we stripped it and (Clark) ended up picking it up and we were able to run the clock out for the half," said Wright.

East Carter recovered an onside kick to take control at the start of the second half but was stifled by Henry County's defensive efforts.

A botched snap on a punt attempt was recovered by the Raiders at the 5-yard line, and Landon Yoak, the team's top rusher, scored on a 1-yard run to cut the lead to one.

However, Henry County halted the 2-point conversion attempt to stay in front 13-12 with 4:49 left in the third quarter.

Both offenses struggled to move the ball for the remainder of the game against muddy field conditions.

"We really, offensively, couldn't get anything going in the second half. Both teams are running the ball. It was so wet and muddy, you couldn't throw it at all," said Wright.

The Wildcat defense also came up with several clutch plays, especially down the stretch, to hold off the Raiders.

"Our defense was unbelievable," said Wright.

Henry County, who had a punt blocked and a dropped snap on a punt earlier in the game, had a successful punt with six minutes remaining to give East Carter a chance to take the lead.

The Raiders drove down the field before Henry County forced East Carter into a third-and-long situation.

"They threw a go ball down the sideline, and Grayson Chisholm defended it on third



Finn Cannon

**Jason Ray and Wyatt Ward celebrate during Henry County's 13-12 win over East Carter in the first round of the Class 3A playoffs on Friday, Nov. 7.**

year have killed us," said Wright.

Following Chisholm's huge breakup, East Carter sent another deep pass into the end zone on fourth down and Ward came up with a clutch deflection to hold the Raiders off the board.

With about two minutes left, Henry County regained possession and ran out the clock to secure the team's first playoff victory in 15 years.

"There's so many things I could say in terms of growth. If this was week two, we lose that game," said Wright. "When things went wrong in game two, we showed our youth and kind of backed down, and then this game, when things got hard, the guys rose to it and just seeing that level of growth is amazing."

Henry County moves on to face Lloyd Memorial in the second round on Friday, Nov. 14.

The Wildcats fell on the

road 41-6 to the Juggernauts earlier this season, but stayed within reach throughout the first half of the previous matchup.

"They're a top five team in the state... I know they're still undefeated," said Wright. "We talked about it, it was 20-6, but with 50 seconds left, we gave up a long pass again and gave up a touchdown, and turns it to 27-6 instead of 20-6."

Wright hopes his team can carry the momentum of the playoff win into next week's game to have an opportunity to make even more history. "To these freshmen, they've never not won a playoff game. This is something that grows in the future, so now there's never been a team to win playoff games in back-to-back seasons. There's only been two teams that have won two playoff games. So obviously, this year, this next game is big too," said Wright.

## WARRIORS

### FROM PAGE A6

and continued to excel on the ground at the outset of the second period.

After another Watkins run, Simons found an opening and ran for a 40-yard touchdown. The 2-point conversion attempt was halted by the Warriors, though, leaving the margin at 18-0 with 10:55 to go.

Both defenses quickly halted the next drives before Eminence put together a tough possession to attempt to cut into the lead.

Steed and Deegan Ortega contributed a few tough runs and Tavion Chambers added a reception early, and Xavier Payne powered up the gut on fourth down to keep the Warrior possession alive.

Nicholas County regrouped defensively, though, and held off another pass attempt on fourth down to keep the Warriors off the board.

Both teams earned another quality defensive stop apiece later in the quarter before Eminence came up with a pair of crucial stops on pass attempts to keep the Blue Jackets off the board.

The Warriors had a chance to break up the shutout bid near the end of the third quarter with a promising possession.

Eminence took advantage of a facemask penalty and a huge reception by Kenien Foree to enter Nicholas County territory.

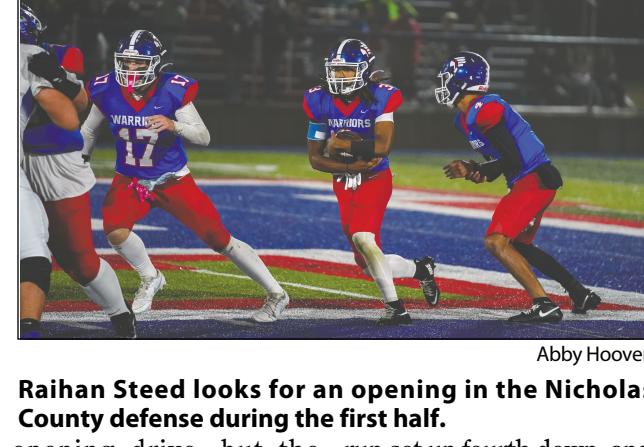
Chambers followed with a highlight-worthy catch over a Blue Jacket defender, but Nicholas County fought back to stifle the attack.

Eminence bounced back with a huge fumble recovery at the 3-yard line at the start of the fourth quarter.

Yet, Nicholas County quickly stuffed each run attempt by the Warriors to force a turnover on downs and reclaim possession within the red zone.

Despite the field positioning,

a pair of recovered fumbles by the Blue Jackets and a short



Abby Hooven

**Raihan Steed looks for an opening in the Nicholas County defense during the first half.**

run set up fourth down, and Eminence stood firm to stop another run down the middle and prevent a touchdown.

Nicholas County kept fighting defensively and stopped Eminence again for a turnover on downs. The Warriors stayed the course, though, and matched the intensity for a Blue Jacket turnover on downs with three minutes to play.

Eminence fought until the end, but Nicholas County held off the Warriors' final drive to secure a 26-point playoff victory.

With the loss, Eminence ends the season with a 4-7 record. The loss also brings the high school careers of Steed, Foree, Charlie Prenn, Matthew Roby, Jackson Preher, Xavier Payne, Kyle Baker and Ryan Lawson.

"I think more than anything, and the most important part for me, is for these kids to know that they are loved and that our staff loves them well and cares deeply for them," said Sanderson. "No matter where I am and what I'm doing, I deeply love them and want them to know that they have someone in their corner at all times."

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