

Marshall Co. primed for Lexington in 2nd round match up

By **Chris Siers**
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To win at this stage of the postseason, teams have to play their best game of the year, each and every week.

On Friday night, the Marshall County Tigers (10-1) will travel to face Region 6-AAAA champion Lexington.

Lexington enters Friday night's second round game of the Class 4A playoffs with an 8-3 record, having beaten Greenbrier in the first-round last week.

It's been 14 years since Lexington and Marshall County last met and the Tigers are hoping to win their fifth-straight game of the season on Friday night.

"It's always a challenge to go on the road and travel a long distance to a place you are unfamiliar with. Obviously we try our best to train year round to prepare our team for adversity. Staying mentally focused during this trip is no different," Tiger head coach Thomas Osteen said.

Much like the Marshall County Tigers, the Lexington Tigers have a breadwinner in the backfield that is the key



Demari Braden has been a workhorse for Marshall County this season, rushing for 13 touchdowns and over 700 yards.

to making the offense going.

"Lexington has had a really good program for a long time. They are routinely one of the best teams in West Tennessee. They have a returning all-state tailback that makes their team go. They are a run-first team. They base out of

the single-wing but will do some other things as well," Osteen said.

The task for the Tigers defense will be in the trenches and fall on the senior leadership of the linebacking corps led by Thomas Beech, Grayson Miller and Trey Warner.

"They are very simi-



Aja Jones has been the big-play threat at receiver, hauling in nearly 600 receiving yards and eight touchdowns.

Tribune Photos by Chris Siers

lar to us as a team in regards to their athleticism, size, and being sound in the kicking game. They run a 3-4 on defense and have won seven games in-a-row, shutting down most opponents offenses," Osteen said

For the Tigers, the game plan is to stick

with the balance of the offense and rely on senior tailback Demari Braden out of the backfield, as well as junior quarterback Silas Teat to move the chains through the air.

Braden enters Friday night's second-round playoff game having rushed for 13 touch-

downs and over 700 yards on 132 carries this season.

Teat has been equally as efficient through the air, completing 119 passes for 1,576 yards and 26 touchdowns.

Jayden Randolph and Aja Jones have been the big play threats at receiver for the Tigers, with both having eclipsed the 500-receiving yards mark. Jones has caught eight touchdown passes for Marshall County, while Randolph has 10 to his credit.

"We are gonna stick with our identity which is to try and be balanced and take what the defense gives us.

"I feel like we have gotten better each week this season. That's a tribute to our guys and their commitment to wanting to be coached and pushed each week. I hope that progression continues for another week," Osteen said.

The Lexington Tigers enter Friday night's game on a seven-game win-streak and have scored at least 40 points in their last three games.

Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. in Lexington.

Front office, not Willis, at fault for Titans' loss



Chris Siers

The Extra Point

week against the Texans, it's clear Willis isn't ready to be the everyday starter as his style of play at Liberty doesn't necessarily transition well to the NFL.

The tools and mechanics are there but it's almost like rebuilding a quarterback from the ground up.

With the Titans rolling into Kansas City on Sunday night prime time, fans and pundits alike pinning the blame on Willis is rather inexcusable.

His second-ever start in front of a national audience and facing arguably the greatest quarterback talent to ever play the game in Patrick Mahomes, Mike Vrabel and the coaching staff weren't going to ask Willis to get into a run-and-gun shootout with Mahomes.

Instead, Willis was going to have to be surgical in his throws and rely on Derrick Henry to be the bell cow of the offense.

Henry delivered for much of the first half. He went on to finish



AP Photo/Ed Zurga

Malik Willis got his second career start in primetime at Kansas City on Sunday night.

with 115 yards on 17 carries and a pair of scores.

But the bigger issue is, Willis did what he was asked.

Was his stats line of 5-for-16 for 80 yards impressive? Absolutely not. But he added 40 yards on eight carries and didn't do anything to cost the Titans the game.

As a rookie still transitioning to the NFL, that's exactly what you

want out of a quarterback put in that situation when he's not ready.

Look around the NFL from Sunday: Aaron Rodgers went 23-for-43 for 291 yards and one touchdown and three interceptions; Josh Allen went 18-for-34 for 205 yards and two interceptions; P.J. Walker went 3-for-10 for nine yards and two interceptions.

Those quarterbacks

all made mistakes that led to eventual losses—Willis didn't do that.

No, Sunday's loss wasn't on Willis in the slightest, but rather the Titans' front office for not having a NFL-ready backup to go in the event of a Tannehill injury.

With the trade deadline having come and gone, the Titans stood pat and didn't make a move. There are free agent quarterbacks out

there capable of spot starts and even quarterbacks on the trade block the Titans could have made a move for.

Instead, the front office decided to hope Willis would be ready before his time and Henry could deliver more of his history-making magic.

Willis' numbers through two starts should be taken with a grain of salt at this point. He's been in the system less than nine months and any player who transitions from college to the NFL will tell you, it's not an easy task, and for a quarterback having to relearn proper mechanics, having to unlearn what's made you successful is about as easy as learning how to walk again.

The loss absolutely hurts, but if fans and pundits are going to point fingers and blame at someone, do it at the front office, not at the guy who was put in a no-win situation.

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UGA is top 'dog', Vols slip to 5th

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**
AP College Football Writer

Georgia was the new No. 1 in the College Football Playoff rankings Tuesday night, followed by Ohio State, Michigan and TCU.

The Bulldogs' rise from No. 3 was no surprise after their dominant victory against previously top-ranked Tennessee on Saturday.

Clemson, which was No. 4 in the selection committee's first rankings last week, also lost, clearing the way for changes in the top four.

The Bulldogs stayed at two. The Buckeyes' Big Ten rival, Michigan, moved up from five to three. TCU jumped three spots to No. 4, putting the nation's four unbeaten teams at the top of the rankings.

"It's going to be a challenge to stay here," TCU coach Sonny Dykes said during ESPN's rankings show.

Tennessee fell to No. 5 and was followed by Oregon from the Pac-12 and LSU, which jumped three

spots to seventh after the Tigers knocked off Alabama.

Selection committee chairman Boo Corrigan, who is the athletic director at North Carolina State, said TCU's six victories against teams with above .500 records were notable.

"I don't think it was as much what Tennessee didn't do as much as what TCU did do," Corrigan said.

He added the Volunteers' big victories against Alabama and LSU helped keep them above Oregon, which also played Georgia and lost by 46.

Clemson fell to 10th after being routed by Notre Dame. Alabama dropped from sixth to ninth after its second loss of the season.

This is the first time since the College Football Playoff rankings began in 2014 that neither Clemson nor Alabama have been ranked in the top six.

There has never been a College Football Playoff without the Tigers and the Crimson Tide, which

have combined to win five of the eight CFP championships.

Analysis

Are Alabama and Clemson done?

No, both still have a path to the playoff, but a lot is going to have to break their way — especially for Alabama.

First thing working against the Tide is there has never been a two-loss team in the College Football Playoff. But the SEC champion has never been left out of the CFP.

If Alabama could win the SEC, beating Georgia in the process, good luck keeping the Tide out. But the road to the SEC championship game for the Tide is blocked by LSU, which would have to lose both of its remaining conference games at Arkansas and Texas A&M to clear the way for Alabama.

That's assuming Alabama wins out. The Tide plays at Mississippi, which was 11th in the committee's rankings, on Saturday and then Austin Peay before the Iron



AP Photo/John Bazemore

Georgia jumped to No. 1 after defeating Tennessee, who slipped to No. 5, on Saturday.

Bowl against Auburn.

Before writing Alabama off, take note: LSU is only a 3-point favorite at Arkansas this weekend and might be a single-digit favorite against a struggling but talented Texas A&M team.

As for Clemson, this is a long way from over. A 12-1 Power Five conference champion will always have a shot and the Tigers could still end up there.

The Tigers' bigger is-

sue could be winning a resume contest against one-loss champions from the Big 12, where TCU is still unbeaten, or Pac-12, which currently has four teams in the committee's top 13 — Oregon, No. 8 USC, No. 12 UCLA and No. 13 Utah.

Plus, there is the question of whether an 11-1 team that doesn't win its division, like Tennessee or the loser of Ohio State-Michigan, would get the nod over Clemson

at 12-1 with an ACC title.

On top of all that, the Tigers have to win out against an improving Louisville team, rival South Carolina and likely No. 15 North Carolina and star quarterback Drake Maye in the ACC championship game.

After a run of six straight CFP appearances by Clemson was snapped last year, the Tigers are now staring at consecutive seasons being left out.