

# SWAINSBORO TIGERS

## 2020 Class AA State Basketball Champions



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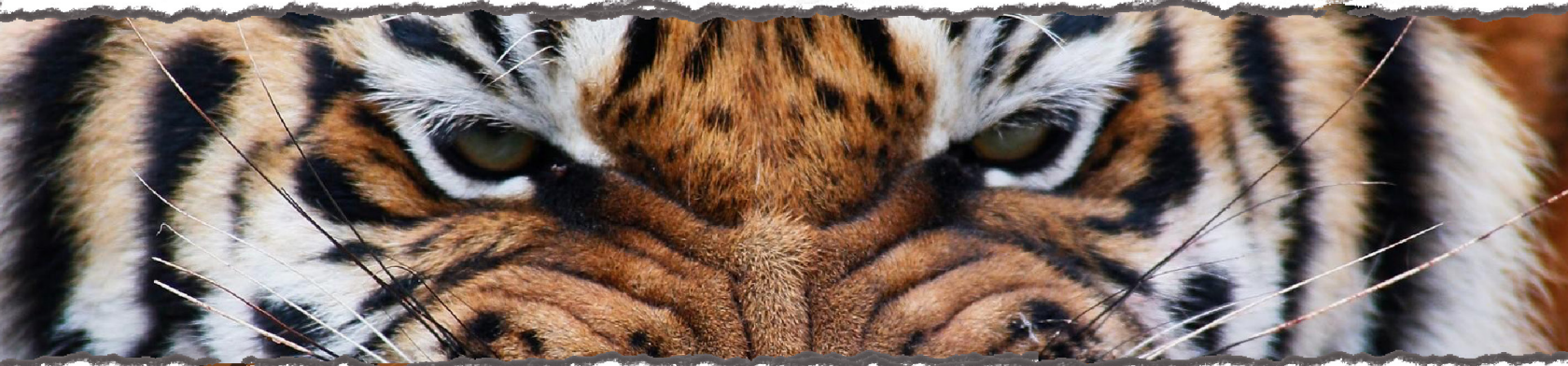


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# SHS TIGERS OFF TO FAST START

*Originally published in the December 11, 2019 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers jump started a new season with a blistering schedule in preparation for a season packed with entertaining matchups. Swainsboro is 6-0 to get things going and 3-0 in region play, and the competition is about to ratchet up a notch this weekend.

The Tigers knocked off Jefferson County and Statesboro in non-region play before blowing out defending region champ Woodville-Tompkins 73-55 and Bacon County 77-60. The Tigers also won a non-region contest against Tattnall County last weekend 66-46. Swainsboro will be on the road this weekend to take on two huge region foes, Jeff Davis on

Friday night and Vidalia on Saturday night. The Yellow Jackets and Indians are a combined 11-1 on the season with the only loss being Woodville-Tompkins' defeat of Vidalia.

Swainsboro has done it so far this season with a balanced attack as Frederick and Cedric Seabrough control the paint and a variety of inside/outside threats stretch the defense. AJ Kingsberry is one of the deadliest 3-point shooters in the area and can score in the lane as well. Tyler Kelly is his backcourt mate with range from long distance and the ability to get into the lane. Transfer Immanuel Hackett from Metter is a midrange shooter who averaged 16 points per game last season for his previous school. A strong bench adds to the versatility of this squad that has them undefeated in the early season.



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# SWAINSBORO DROPS FIRST GAME OF SEASON IN JEFF DAVIS

Originally published in the December 18, 2019 edition of *The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers (7–1 overall, 4–1 region) lost their first game of the season in a wild finish on Friday night in Hazlehurst, losing 71–68 in the final minute of the game. The Tigers trailed by 9 points with just under 2:30 remaining but rallied to take a brief lead before a questionable no-call on what appeared to be a goal-tending infraction allowed Jeff Davis to take the lead in the final seconds.

Swainsboro jumped out to a 13–2 lead in the first quarter, but Jeff Davis (7–2 overall, 3–1 region) capitalized on turnovers to pull even at the halftime break, 26–26. The Yellow Jackets put together a big third quarter to lead by 10 entering the final period.

Immanuel Hackett took over in the second half for Swainsboro on his way to 22 points. AJ Kingsberry added 17 points.

Swainsboro recovered with a dominant performance on Saturday night against Vidalia (7–2 overall, 3–2 region), winning 53–30. Vidalia was fresh off of a 51–47 victory over Jeff Davis earlier in the week, but Swainsboro’s defense was just too suffocating. The Tigers led 30–16 at the half and dominated the fourth quarter 17–5 to cruise to an easy victory. Hackett again led the way with 19 points for Swainsboro.

Swainsboro will host two non-region opponents this week as Wilkinson County comes to town on Friday night and Tattnall County visits on Saturday night.



**FRED SEABROUGH GETTING THE TIGERS OFF TO GREAT START**



**AJ KINGSBERRY MOVING DOWN THE COURT**

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# TIGERS SWEEP OPPONENTS

Originally published in the December 25, 2019 edition of *The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers (9–1), currently ranked at No. 2 in MaxPreps' Class AA state rankings, continued their torrid start to the season by rolling through two non-region opponents. Swainsboro cruised to an easy 72–47 victory over longtime rival Wilkinson County and completely destroyed Tattnall County 82–47.

Swainsboro has long history with Wilkinson County with championship caliber matchups year in and out. The Tigers' intensity was pitch-perfect from the beginning, and their defense clamped down on the run-and-gun Warriors. Immanuel Hackett set the tone with 8 first-quarter points, and Swainsboro never looked back. The officials called an unbelievably tight game and turned the game into a free throw competition late, but the Tigers were able to maintain a safe cushion and enjoy a double-digit win. Cedric Seabrough led the scoring with 18 points. Fed Seabrough had 12 points, Immanuel Hackett had 12 points, and Derrick Jones added 10 points.

In Saturday's game against Tattnall County, Swainsboro again used a fast start as AJ Kingsberry dominated the opening period with 8 quick points, all break-away layups facilitated by great defense and quick outlet passes. Tattnall Count had no answer, and the Tigers steadily pulled away. Hackett and Fred Seabrough each had 15 points while Cedric Seabrough and Kingsberry both had 13 points for the balanced scoring attack.


The boys will tee it up again this week on Thursday in the Statesboro Holiday Classic.



**DERRICK JONES GOES UP TO THE RIM**



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# SHS STREAKING INTO NEW YEAR

Originally published in the January 1, 2020 edition of *The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers (12-1) have reeled off six consecutive wins since their lone loss of the season to Jeff Davis. The polls have taken note as the Tigers are now the No. 1 team in Class AA, according to MaxPreps. Swainsboro is tied at the top of Region 2-AA with Woodville-Tompkins and Jeff Davis, each team suffering just one region loss.

Swainsboro had a productive Christmas break, sweeping through all three opponents in Statesboro's Gentleman's Classic.

The Tigers started sluggishly the day after Christmas, allowing a much less talented Greenbriar team to hang around and trailed the Tigers by only 2 points entering the fourth quarter. It wasn't until Tyler Kelly nailed two 3-pointers in the final minutes that Swainsboro pulled away, stretching the lead to 10 points. In the final minute, Greenbriar nailed a couple late 3-pointers to provide the final score of 57-53. Immanuel Hackett continues to be the stabilizing



## IMMANUEL HACKETT FLOATS IN FOR THE LAYUP

force for this offense, consistently making shots from long range and driving into the lane to draw fouls to keep the offense moving.

Swainsboro had much easier games with Richmond Academy and Life Academy, shaking off the rust from the Christmas break and finding their rhythm. The Tigers hammered Richmond Academy 86-63 and cruised against Life Academy 75-55.

The season gets serious this week as region play ramps up. The Tigers will host last season's state runner-up, Vidalia, in Swainsboro on Friday night. The Tigers handled the Indians easily earlier in the season, winning 53-30, but Vidalia has a defense capable of locking any opponent down. Vidalia has beaten Jeff Davis, the only team to give Swainsboro a loss this season.

The Tigers will travel to Statesboro on Saturday to play the Blue Devils. Swainsboro knocked off Statesboro back in November in a tightly contested game, 62-58.

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# TIGERS BLAST VIDALIA INDIANS

Originally published in the January 8, 2020 edition of *The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers completed a season sweep of region rival Vidalia this past Friday night in the Tigers' Den with a convincing 68-39 victory. Swainsboro (13-2) remains atop Region 2-AA (5-1), tied in the loss column with Jeff Davis and Woodville-Tompkins. The Tigers had beaten the Indians earlier this season by a score of 52-30 in Vidalia.

Vidalia put up a fight early, tied 6-6 midway through the first period before the Tigers turned up the defense and rattled the Indians. AJ Kingsberry converted on 3 layups for 6 points, and Cedric Seabrough

dominated inside for 8 quick points to grab a 20-8 lead after one quarter.

Swainsboro kept the pressure on in the second period, locking down Vidalia for only 6 points. Demonte Smith came in off the bench and blocked shots, grabbed rebounds and drilled a 3-pointer for 5 second-quarter points, and the Tigers led 37-14 at the half.

Kingsberry kept it rolling in the second half with 8 points in the third period, and Immanuel Hackett put in 6 points to give Vidalia no hope of a late comeback. Swainsboro led 59-31 heading into the final period and emptied the bench for an easy victory. Kingsberry led the way with 16 points. Seabrough added 13 points while Smith put in 12 points.



## AJ KINGSBERRY DRIVING TO THE HOOP

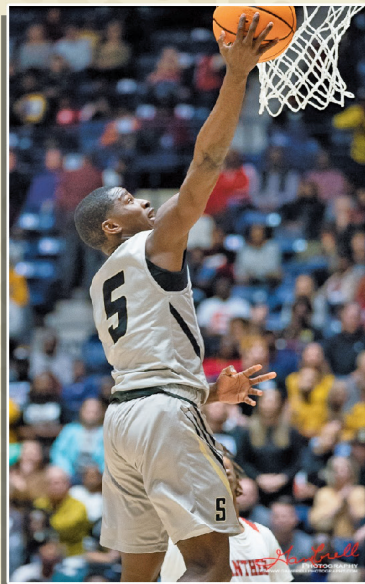
Hackett chipped in 10 points for the blowout win.

On Saturday night, Swainsboro traveled to Statesboro, where they suffered just their second loss of the season as the Blue Devils avenged an early season loss to the Tigers, 62-58. The Tigers led

21-13 after one period, but Statesboro chipped away and outscored Swainsboro by 8 points in the final quarter to get the victory.

The boys will be on the road for two games this week, traveling to Metter on Tuesday and Toombs County on Friday.

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# SWAINSBORO PLAYING AT AN ELITE LEVEL

*Originally published in the January 15, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers (16–2) demolished two region opponents last week, beating Metter 89–47 and Toombs County 92–53, both on the road, as they continue to march towards the playoffs and a possible region championship. Swainsboro is ranked by MaxPreps as the No. 1 team in Class AA and lately, they have looked the part.

Neither Metter nor Toombs County could find a solution to Swainsboro's stifling defense, producing turnovers and easy buckets at the other end. The overbearing and disruptive defense has become the calling card of this season's Tigers, reminiscent of defenses from the mid '90s during Swainsboro's championship run.

Against Toombs County, Swainsboro got whatever they wanted on offense. Layups were there to be had as the Tigers' superior quickness resulted in easy baskets. AJ

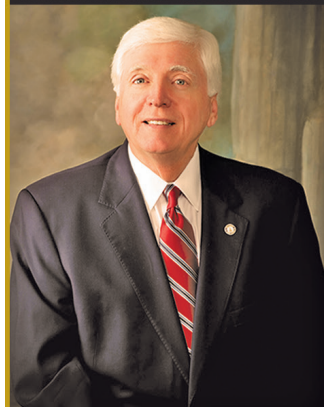
Kingsberry got off to a fast start with 3 early buckets at the rim. Then, Swainsboro poured it in from deep as Immanuel Hackett began raining in 3-pointers. Swainsboro scored 29 points in the opening quarter as Kingsberry led the way with 14 points, and the Tigers combined for 5 baskets from beyond the arc to take control of the game.

Swainsboro continued to rain in the 3-pointers in the second quarter, Hackett hitting two more of his 6 total long-range bombs on the game. The Tigers led 51–28 at the halftime break. Derek Jones owned the third quarter, scoring 13 of Swainsboro's 29 points in the period, and Swainsboro took an 80–43 lead into the final quarter and emptied their bench.

Kingsberry led the way with 24 points, and Hackett and Jones followed closely with 23 points each. The Tigers knocked down a total of twelve 3-pointers on the game.

Two big games loom on the Tigers' schedule: Woodville-Tompkins tomorrow, January 16, and Jeff Davis on January 24, both at the Tigers' Den. Woodville-Tompkins has two region losses, courtesy of Swainsboro and Jeff Davis. Jeff Davis has but one region loss to Vidalia. Swainsboro's lone region loss is to Jeff Davis.

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**FRED SEABROUGH GOES UP FOR THE DUNK**





# ***TIGERS PREP FOR SHOWDOWN WITH JEFF DAVIS***

*Originally published in the January 22, 2020 edition of  
The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers (19–2) continue to roll with three more wins during the week as their focus shifts to Friday’s home matchup with Jeff Davis. A win against the Yellow Jackets would move the Tigers into the region’s top spot heading into the region playoffs. MaxPreps has Swainsboro ranked as the No. 1 team in Class AA while having Jeff Davis (16–5) ranked No. 8.

Swainsboro started the week with a big win over dangerous region foe Woodville-Tompkins. AJ Kingsberry got the Tigers off to a fast start with 7 first-quarter points as Swainsboro took a 22–14 lead after one quarter. The offense slowed a little in the second quarter and Woodville-Tompkins made a run, cutting the score to 30–28 at the half. Cedric Seabrough got it rolling in the third quarter with 9 points as the Tigers took complete control, outscoring the visitors 18–6 in the period. The Tigers held

on for a 64–53 victory. Cedric led the way with 16 points while his brother, Fred, along with Kingsberry scored 15 points apiece.

Swainsboro then hit the road on Friday night to take on Bacon County before Saturday night’s road contest with Wilkinson County. The Tigers won both, taking down the Red Raiders 70–65 and closing out the week with a 74–59 victory over the Warriors.

The Tigers will travel to Bryan County on Tuesday. The Redskins are possibly the worst team in Class AA with an 0–20 overall record.

Friday will be the matchup that everyone is waiting for. Jeff Davis handed the Tigers their one region loss on the season, 71–68, in mid-December. Jeff Davis is 9–1 in the region, losing only to Vidalia. A victory for Swainsboro would give the Tigers a leg up in the region with only Metter and Toombs County to come next week. Swainsboro beat both of those teams by 40 points earlier in the month.



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# SHS TIGERS PUT ENTIRE STATE ON NOTICE

*Originally published in the January 29, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers hosted the Jeff Davis Yellow Jackets last Friday night in a game that likely decided the region's No. 1 seed with a week to go in the regular season. Swainsboro (22-2), ranked No. 1 by MaxPreps and No. 2 by the AJC, dismantled Jeff Davis (17-6), ranked No. 8 by MaxPreps and No. 3 by the AJC, in a top-10 matchup that was an amazing exhibition of what this talented Tigers team is capable of, winning 97-53 in front a packed and raucous crowd in the Tigers' Den.

If ever there was a statement game that avenged an earlier season loss to a rival opponent, oh boy, this was as sweet as they come! Swainsboro had lost to the Yellow Jackets on the road earlier



**AJ KINGSBERRY GLIDES IN FOR A LAYUP AGAINST JEFF DAVIS**

in the season in a game that came down to the last seconds, 71-68. This game would be decided earlier as Swainsboro pounced on Jeff Davis immediately. With a defense that shut down all lanes and harassed Jeff Davis on every inch of the court, the Tigers forced 12 turnovers in the initial quarter and

raced to a 35-9 lead. Fred Seabrough highlighted the attack with two thunderous dunks that had the partisan crowd shaking the building. Fred scored 14 of his 20 total points in that quarter but had plenty of help. AJ Kingsberry converted turnovers into easy points with 10 first-quarter points, and the steady of-

fensive production of Immanuel Hackett put 9 points on the board in the frame.

By halftime, the deed was done as Swainsboro continued to deliver a whipping, 57-24, and Jeff Davis had to wonder what they had done to deserve such punishment. Hackett poured it on in the third quarter, scoring 13 more of his game-high 22 points, and Swainsboro took an astounding 55-point lead, 84-29. Reserves handled the fourth quarter for the 97-53 rout. Kingsberry finished with 20 points.

Swainsboro beat winless Bryan County 93-22 earlier in the week and pulled away from Jefferson County 69-50 in a Saturday night contest. The Tigers will host Metter this Tuesday night and wrap up the regular season at home on Friday against Toombs County. Region playoffs start next week.



**JALEN CARSWELL OUTREACHES A JEFF DAVIS YELLOW JACKET TO PUT 2 POINTS ON THE FRAME**



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## SEASON AT A GLANCE

30-2 OVERALL | 13-1 REGION  
REGION 2-AA WINNERS

Nov. 23	Jefferson County	(W) 69-53
Nov. 30	Statesboro	(W) 62-58
Dec. 3	@ Woodville-Tompkins	(W) 73-55
Dec. 6	Bacon County	(W) 77-60
Dec. 7	@ Tattnall County	(W) 66-46
Dec. 10	Bryan County	(W) 93-22
Dec. 13	@ Jeff Davis	(L) 71-68
Dec. 14	@ Vidalia	(W) 53-30
Dec. 20	Wilkinson County	(W) 72-57
Dec. 21	Tattnall County	(W) 82-47
Dec. 26	Greenbrier	(W) 57-53
Dec. 27	Academy of Richmond Co.	(W) 86-63
Dec. 28	@ Life Christian Academy	(W) 75-55
Jan. 1	Vidalia	(W) 68-39
Jan. 4	@ Statesboro	(L) 62-58
Jan. 7	@ Metter	(W) 89-47
Jan. 10	@ Toombs County	(W) 92-53
Jan. 14	Woodville-Tompkins	(W) 64-53
Jan. 17	@ Bacon County	(W) 70-65
Jan. 18	Wilkinson County	(W) 74-59
Jan. 21	@ Bryan County	(W) 93-22
Jan. 24	Jeff Davis	(W) 97-53
Jan. 25	@ Jefferson County	(W) 69-50
Jan. 28	Metter	(W) 88-72
Jan. 31	Toombs County	(W) 93-46
Feb. 7	Woodville-Tompkins	(W) 87-54
Feb. 8	Vidalia	(W) 78-55
Feb. 15	Jefferson County	(W) 72-52
Feb. 20	South Atlanta	(W) 74-56
Feb. 25	Rockmart	(W) 94-55
Feb. 29	Glenn Hills	(W) 80-62
Mar. 5	Therrell	(W) 69-65

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# SHS TIGERS PULL AWAY FROM METTER LATE

*Originally published in the February 5, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers (23–2) clinched the No. 1 region seed heading into this week’s region tournament, sweeping both Metter and Toombs County. The Tigers rolled through this season’s region schedule, averaging nearly 80 points per game and losing only once. Swainsboro is recognized by MaxPreps as the No. 1 team in the AA classification. Swainsboro has secured a bid into the state playoffs and will compete for a region championship this Friday and Saturday night.

Swainsboro took care of business last week, wrapping up their regular season, but it didn’t come without some drama against Metter. Metter shot the lights out from deep in the first half and played like a motivated bunch. Immanuel Hackett was a member of Metter’s squad last season before transferring to Swainsboro. He nailed three 3-pointers in the opening quarter to keep Swainsboro on pace with Metter’s hot start. Metter had the game knotted at 37-all heading into the half and the crowd, albeit a bit stunned, knew this game would be a fight to the finish.

Swainsboro uncharacteristically missed multiple chip shots from close throughout the game and Metter capitalized, leading 58–56 heading into the final quarter. Swainsboro, as if they had had enough allowing Metter

to hang around, turned up the defensive intensity, and the pressure was too much for Metter to withstand. Multiple turnovers early in the final period got Swainsboro rolling. Hackett scored 15 of his game-high 30 points in the quarter, and Swainsboro pulled away for an 88–72 victory. DJ Jones and AJ Kingsberry scored 14 apiece, and Fred Seabrough chipped in 11 points. Swainsboro got big minutes from Juan Brown and Dre Miles down the stretch to secure the win.

Swainsboro plays the late game Friday night in Metter, but the opponent has yet to be determined. Swainsboro and Jeff Davis are the top two seeds and will receive a bye for early round games. Vidalia and Woodville-Tompkins round out the top four. Metter and Bacon County make up formidable foes in the fifth and sixth spots in the region pecking order.



**FRED SEABROUGH HAS BEEN A FORCE FOR SWAINSBORO THIS SEASON**



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To the Coaches and Players of  
The 2020 State Champion Swainsboro Tigers

It is with great pleasure that I send the congratulations and expressions of pride from the citizens of Swainsboro to the 2020 Georgia State Basketball Champion Swainsboro Tigers. By your hard work, dedication and winning spirit you have made your hometown proud.

Your determination and attitude has shown that this team understands what winners are made of. As Coach Brice Hobbs said, "when you get down, you just can't quit", and your victory is a great example to all of us in overcoming challenges and giving your very best.

On behalf of your fellow citizens, thank you for bringing the trophy home! You have given us a great season, great wins and a great title. We wish you the very best, and hope this will be just the first of many great accomplishments that await each and every one of you in the future.

GO TIGERS !

Charles Schwabe  
Mayor, City of Swainsboro





## SHS CLAIMS REGION CHAMPIONSHIP



### 2019-2020 REGION 2-AA CHAMPIONS

*Originally published in the January 12, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers won the Region 2-AA championship this past Saturday and secured a No. 1 seed heading into this week's state playoffs, dominating both tournament games last weekend in Metter. The Tigers dismantled Woodville-Tompkins in the semifinals 87-54 and whipped Vidalia in the finals 78-55. Swainsboro is 25-2 on the season and the consensus No. 1 team in Class AA, according to MaxPreps and *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The Tigers will host the No. 4 seed from Region 4-AA, Jefferson County, this Saturday at 6:30 p.m. in the Tigers' Den.

Neither game last weekend had much drama, although a packed overflow crowd jammed into every nook and cranny to get a look at the state's most dominant force. Swainsboro jumped on Woodville-Tompkins immediately, swarming them with defense that created turnovers and led to easy baskets. Swainsboro led by as many as 48 points in the second half. In the championship game against Vidalia, the Indians kept things close early, trailing only 15-11 in the opening quarter before the Tigers began to stretch the lead into double figures. Once Swainsboro pushed the lead to 15 points, the Indians were in a lose-lose situation. They prefer to slow the game down and limit the opponent's opportunities, which is not a winning formula with a double-digit deficit. Speeding

the game up would also have put them in peril as Swainsboro thrives in the open court. They chose the slow death, playing at their normal snail's pace.

The Tigers are completely suffocating defensively and so good at converting defense into offense that opponents wilt under the pressure and lose their composure when Swainsboro turns up the heat. Combine that defensive talent and the ability to get easy transition points with the deadliest 3-point shooting team in Swainsboro basketball history and you have the best Tigers team since Swainsboro's state championship team in 1996.

Immanuel Hackett was amazing last weekend, combining for an incredible twelve 3-pointers in the two games and a steadying influence offensively. Hackett has an easy and sweet stroke with range far beyond the arc. He scored 20 points against Woodville-Tompkins and 23 points against Vidalia, both games where his offense was only needed for three quarters as backups got most of the time in the fourth quarter.

AJ Kingsberry has also had a sensational season, the catalyst defensively, lightening quickness, fearless and with a ferocious edge to his game that ignites his team. He had 18 points against Woodville-Tompkins and set the tone defensively. He left the Vidalia game in the third quarter with a shoulder injury (which is expected to be fine) after scoring 9 points.

Fred Seabrough was also a force last weekend,

scoring 18 and 22 points in the two games. He and twin brother Cedric are a physical tandem that are relentless on the boards, contesting every shot and have proven to be maybe the best rebounding frontcourt in the state. They dominate on the glass, and their quickness and athleticism on defense pushes Swainsboro over the top.

The emergence of Derrick Jones as lead guard cannot be overstated as he protects the basketball with excellent decision making. He is deadly from range and is another defensive standout, leading the team in blocked shots.

Tyler Kelly, Demonte Smith, and DJ Miles round out the 8-man rotation as potent as any team that you are likely to see across the state.

Vidalia claimed the No. 2 spot in the region and will host top-10 ranked Butler in the first round. Jeff Davis slides in at No. 3 and will travel to Laney to play the top-5 ranked Wildcats. Woodville-Tompkins is the region's No. 4 seed and will play against top-5 ranked Glenn Hills. Region 2 and Region 4 have proven to be the toughest regions across the state, at one point or another with six of the 10 teams in MaxPreps' top 10.

Fortunately for Swainsboro, they will play Region 4-AA's lone team not top-10 quality, Jefferson County. The Tigers defeated the Warriors less than two weeks ago in a non-region game, 69-50. Jefferson County is 15-12 on the season but battled the Tigers in that recent game with Swainsboro only pulling away late in the contest.



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# SWAINSBORO HOOPERS ADVANCE TO SWEET 16

*Originally published in the February 19, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers knocked off the Jefferson County Warriors 72–52 this past Saturday night in the first round of the state playoffs to advance to the Sweet 16 and a home date with South Atlanta. Swainsboro lost to South Atlanta in the state championship game three years ago but will have them in the Tigers' Den this Thursday at 6 p.m.

The playoffs are a do-or-die proposition and not the place where aesthetics matter. Still, this was a victory that wasn't pretty by any means other than the final scoreboard. The Tigers trailed for much of the first half as their normally explosive offense sputtered. Leading scorer Immanuel Hackett struggled to get his game on track, scoreless in the opening half, and the entire Swainsboro unit missed maybe half a dozen point-blank layups in the early going to fuel Jefferson County's run. Demonte Smith had a big second quarter with 8 points to give Swainsboro a 25–22 lead in the final sec-

onds of the period. However, the Warriors banked a 3-pointer off the glass at the buzzer to tie the game at the half.

The Tigers turned up the defensive pressure in the third quarter, and it paid immediate dividends. Turnovers and defensive rebounds led to fast break opportunities, and AJ Kingsberry led the charge, who scored 10 points in the quarter as Swainsboro surged with a 20–4 run to open the period and take control of the game. Kingsberry put 8 more points (22 total for the game) on the scoreboard in the fourth quarter, and Swainsboro pulled away with a 20-point victory. Hackett only scored off of 2 free throws and fouled out in the final quarter. Fred Seabrough had 14 points, and Derrick Jones scored 13 points. Swainsboro only made two 3-pointers after totaling 22 baskets from beyond the arc last weekend in the two region playoff games.

Swainsboro (26–2) will host South Atlanta (16–10) and attempt to pay back the Hornets for the loss in the finals in 2017. South Atlanta is the No. 3 seed from Region 6-AA, a very tough region where the Hornets played a lot of close games and are battle-tested. This will be perhaps Swainsboro's toughest game outside of the Final 4, and the Tigers will need to be clicking on all cylinders to advance. South Atlanta is stout defensively and has not allowed an opponent to top 80 points all season, allowing an average of 55 points in region play. If Swainsboro hopes to move on to the Elite 8, they will need to have a championship-quality performance against a team that expects to win in the Tigers' Den.

The rest of Region 2-AA didn't fare well against Region 4-AA. Vidalia lost to Butler 60–56, Jeff Davis lost to Laney 64–44, and Woodville-Tompkins lost to Glenn Hills 72–58.

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#2 IMMANUEL HACKETT WATCHES #11 CEDRIC SEABROUGH HIT A JUMP SHOT





# ***DOWN GOES SOUTH ATLANTA! TIGERS MOVE ON TO ELITE 8***

*Originally published in the February 26, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

Avenging their loss in the 2017 state championship game, the Swainsboro Tigers routed the South Atlanta Hornets last Thursday night in the Tigers’ Den 74–56. The win catapults the Tigers into the Elite 8 on Tuesday night. A win Tuesday will send Swainsboro to the Final 4 on Saturday in Milledgeville.

Swainsboro (27–2) packed the house for the highly-anticipated matchup with South Atlanta and gave their amped up fan base what they were waiting for. The Tigers jumped on the Hornets immediately, harassing and antagonizing their opponents into mistakes and turnovers. Swainsboro scored the game’s first 12 points and never looked back. AJ Kingsberry netted 8 quick points, and the Seabrough twins did work in the paint to give Swainsboro a 20–7 lead after one quarter. The second quarter was more of the same as the state’s No. 1 team would never allow South Atlanta to find any rhythm. At times, it seemed the Tigers had seven men on the court to the Hornets’ five players with Swainsboro contesting every inch of movement, every pass, and every shot. South Atlanta wilted under the pressure, and Swainsboro took a 38–16 lead into the half.

The Tigers poured it on in the third quarter to leave little doubt of the outcome. Immanuel Hackett got on track with two 3-pointers and 8 points, and Fred Seabrough dominated down low with 10 points in the period. By the quarters’ end, the Tigers had their largest lead at 65–35. The bench was able to play the fourth quarter, and Swainsboro cruised into the Elite 8 with the impressive victory.

Fred Seabrough led the way with 20 points, Hackett added 16 points, and Kingsberry put in 15 points.

Swainsboro hosts Rockmart Tuesday night with a Final 4 appearance hanging in the balance. The winner will move on to a Saturday night game in the Centennial Center on the campus of Georgia State College and University.



**JUWAN WASHINGTON, A SOPHOMORE, SIZES UP A SOUTH ATLANTA DEFENDER**



**SENIOR KAYUN DAVIS, #55, IN ACTION AGAINST THE HORNETS**

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## TIGERS EARN ALL-REGION HONORS

Originally published in the February 26, 2020 edition of *The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers cleaned up on region awards after their sensational regular season. The Tigers won the region championship and have been ranked No. 1 in the state for much of the year and when region honors came out recently, Swainsboro was well represented.

Immanuel Hackett, AJ Kingsberry, Fredrick Seabrough, and Cedric Seabrough all made First Team All-Region. Coach Brice Hobbs was awarded the Region Coach of the Year. Jeff Davis standout Jaquez Kirby won Region Player of the Year Award for Region 2-AA.

Swainsboro lost but one game this season in a 14-game region schedule, plus two more in the region tournament. The Tigers lost to Jeff Davis early in the season in a 3-point road loss. Swainsboro would avenge that loss in the Tigers' Den with a resounding 97-53 victory over the Yellow Jackets.



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Head coach: Brice Hobbs | Assistant coaches: Danny Evans & Quan McKinney

0	Juan Brown	C	Junior	6'4"	160
1	Tyler Kelly	PG	Junior	6'1"	150
2	Immanuel Hackett	SG	Senior	6'1"	
3	Derrick Jones	G	Junior	6'1"	155
4	Fred Seabrough	F	Junior	6'1"	200
5	AJ Kingsberry (captain)	SG	Senior	5'9"	160
10	Demonte Smith	F	Junior	6'2"	
11	Cedric Seabrough	F	Junior	6'1"	220
12	Alphonso Durden	F	Sophomore	6'0"	168
20	Jalen Carswell	SG	Senior	6'0"	165
22	Juwan Washington	PG	Sophomore	6'1"	160
23	Deondre Miles	G	Senior	5'10"	180
35	Chris Brooks	F	Sophomore	6'3"	180
55	Kayun Davis	C	Senior	5'10"	225

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# ***TIGERS TO PLAY FOR STATE CHAMPIONSHIP***

*Originally published in the March 4, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers conquered Glenn Hills last Saturday at the Centennial Center in Milledgeville 79–62 to send the Tigers to their second state championship game in four years. Swainsboro (29–2) will face the Therrell Panthers (25–7) in what will be a battle of titans. Therrell won Atlanta's Region 6-AA and are the defending state champions. Swainsboro and Therrell have both shared time as the No. 1 ranked team at varying points this season.

The Tigers won in Swainsboro on Tuesday night against Rockmart 94–55 in a game that was never in doubt. Swainsboro led by 12 after the first quarter and 22 points at the half as they cruised to the blowout win, knocking down eleven 3-pointers and playing spectacular defense. Immanuel Hackett led the way with 28 points in the Elite 8 victory.

Saturday in the Final 4, Swainsboro faced their toughest test to date. Glenn Hills was big and talented and played with a swagger of a team that had no doubt they would win. The Spartans, led by 6'8" Emmanuel Jones, posed problems for



## **IMMANUEL HACKETT POWERS TO THE BASKET**

Swainsboro, especially on the boards, but the game would come down to which team was more mentally tough and poised under duress.

Swainsboro, leading 8–5 with just under 3 minutes to play in the opening quarter, landed the first haymaker of the game as AJ Kingsberry ran a 2-on-1 fast break and lobbed a perfect alley-oop pass to Fred Seabrough, who hammered home the 2-handed dunk. The Centennial Center shook with the partisan crowd of Tiger fans turning up the volume like it was a home game. Kingsberry drilled a 3-pointer moments later and the Tigers had a 13-7 lead, asserting themselves in what was a heavy weight fight for most of this game.

Swainsboro did not have one of their better shooting nights, making only three

er faltered. The Spartans surged in the second quarter and took a momentary 27–25 lead. Swainsboro responded immediately and closed the half with 4 points to take a 29–27 lead at the break. Cedric Seabrough and Kingsberry both found themselves in foul trouble early on, but Demonte Smith and Deondre Miles played big minutes to keep Swainsboro afloat. The Tigers stretched the lead to 9 points in the third quarter behind Fred Seabrough's 4 baskets and a free throw, and Swains-  
*(Continued on page 24)*

## **PROUD OF OUR TIGERS!**



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## TIGERS TO PLAY...

(From page 23)

boro could smell a trip to the finals leading 44-35 with only 8 minutes remaining.

The fourth quarter was a testament to poise and composure. Glenn Hills was frustrated with Swainsboro's tenacious defense and with a spirited Tigers' student section that seemed to get under the Spartans' skin. Glenn Hills' head coach was charged with a technical foul midway through the quarter as he argued with referees, resulting in Swainsboro free throws. Next, a Spartan lost his cool and threw the ball into Swainsboro's student section, resulting in another technical foul. To cap off the total meltdown from Glenn Hills, a Spartan spit into Swainsboro's student section, (Continued on page 25)



SWAINSBORO HIGH'S STUDENT SECTION ELECTRIFIES THE PLAYOFF ATMOSPHERE

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# TIGERS TO PLAY...

(From page 24)  
resulting in an ejection and more free throws as the Tigers stretched their lead to 23 with just under 3 minutes remaining. Swainsboro made 16 out of 23 free throws in the quarter to salt the game away as part of a 35-point quarter. Kingsberry scored 14 in the period, and Fred Seabrough threw down another thunderous dunk for the exclamation point. Glenn Hills' Emmanuel Jones scored 18 of his 28 points in the quarter but it would not

be enough.  
Kingsberry finished with 21 points as did Fred Seabrough. Hackett added 12 points, and Derrick Jones chipped in 10 points for the Tigers.  
Swainsboro will play Therrell Thursday at 4 p.m. in the Macon Centreplex for the Class AA Boys Basketball State Championship. Swainsboro last claimed the championship in 1996 as Coach Leroy Jordan led the Tigers with standouts Sergio Washington

and Randy Hughes leading the way.  
Therrell won the championship a year ago against Vidalia in a game that came down to the final seconds. The Panthers are long and athletic with several key players in the 6'4" to 6'5" range. They play a similar attacking, trapping defensive style to Swainsboro and will present the Tigers with their toughest challenge of the season as these two juggernauts meet in a winner-take-all showdown for the state title.



AJ KINGSBERRY GLIDES IN FOR THE BASKET



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# THROUGH THE EYES

by TROUP BRINSON

Five players working as one unit, constant movement, and communication, yet there is one player who has the keys to the ignition and the decision making that ties it all together. Derrick Jones, junior point guard for Swainsboro, sees the basketball court and his teammates from a unique perspective. He led a state championship team this season and from his eyes, he saw a team come together in spectacular fashion to form arguably the most dominant force in Swainsboro basketball history.

"I saw us as a state title contender over the summer," said Jones. "We were hungry from missing the playoffs last season, how that happened, and how we went out. We worked hard in the gym at 6 a.m. for two-a-day practices."

The groundwork was being laid for a team that knew each other and played a lot of basketball together. Still, an addition to Swainsboro's starting five would help push

them to new heights but would also serve as a challenge to team chemistry. Senior Immanuel Hackett transferred from Metter and would transform this unit from contender to front-runner.

"When summer workouts started, we knew our plan and what we had to do, and the dynamics of the team seemed pretty much set," said Jones. "We had heard that Immanuel was coming, but it wasn't a sure thing and we had to prepare without him. He's a great player and I was happy that we were getting him, but adding that kind of talent meant a big adjustment. Immanuel had to learn how to play with us, but also everyone else's role would change and sacrifices would need to be made for him to do his thing. Teamwork."

Hackett became the team's leading scorer as the season progressed and set the tone in the state championship game with two 3-pointers in the first quarter to get Swainsboro off to a great start.



**DERRICK JONES, STATE CHAMPION POINT GUARD**

If Jones was the calming influence on the court, AJ Kingsberry was the team's heart. "Excitable, combustible, passionate, and explosive," all describe Kingsberry on the

court as he led the charge defensively and flew from basket to basket as one of the fastest players in the state. Kingsberry turned defense into offense all season and made the momentum-shifting basket in the championship game.

"AJ is maybe the biggest part of the team," said Jones. "He works hard every day. He played on the runner-up team in 2017. He saw us go from a 1 to a 4 seed in 2018, and he saw us not make the playoffs in 2019. He's seen it all. He was a big scorer for us but even bigger was the defensive role that he played, and that was our identity."

Anyone who watches this team notices something different and unique from the jump. Twins Cedric and Frederick Seabrough stand out. Yes, seeing near-mirror image players on the court at the same time is eye-catching, but these guys are both 6'3" and 215 lbs. of muscle and are special athletes individually. In tandem, they are the stuff that dreams are made of as they impact every aspect of a ball game.

"It's because there's two of 'em," said Jones with a laugh, describing what makes the Seabroughs special. "There's two of 'em, and they are both big bodies and they can do anything on the court. We had two weapons that could play as guards or in the post. They can defend any position on defense, and they can play any position on offense."

The rebounding and defensive prowess of the twins was an advantage that no other teams would have throughout the season. As Swainsboro's power forwards, they played defense as well  
(Continued on page 27)







# OF A POINT GUARD

(From page 26)

as anyone on the court and could switch to the perimeter or the low post and harass ball handlers. That is a weapon (times two!) that solidified Swainsboro's sensational defense. Fred led Swainsboro with 18 points in the championship game and knocked down big shot after big shot down the stretch. Cedric played terrific defense, knocking down a 3-pointer in the second quarter and making shots when the team needed his offense the most.

Now to the glue that helped keep it all together, point guard Derrick Jones. Jones, a sharpshooter from behind the arc and often a voice of reason and calmness during emotional points of a game, played an integral role in keeping the team balanced throughout the season.

"My job was to keep everyone positive," said Jones. "Everyone sees us winning, but it wasn't always that simple. Even I was down sometimes and they would help me,

but my job was to stay positive and to lead."

In the fourth quarter of the championship game, the nerve of Tiger players and fans alike would be tested. Down by 4 points midway through the quarter, the Tigers were teetering on the edge of winning/losing. The game hung in the balance and depending on how Swainsboro handled the final minutes, a title would be decided.

"We were rushing and I wanted us to calm down," explained Jones. "I was a little nervous. I knew the score and the situation, but as a matter of fact, that tightened our focus and we had to execute."

That leads us to the sequence that changed the course of the championship game. Down 59-55 with just over 3 minutes to play, Hackett drove into the lane and made a short runner to cut the lead in half. Next, Kingsberry and Jones made the play that will be remembered as one of the most important plays in Swainsboro athletics history. Therrell's Calvin Miller dribbled

to half court and slowed as Jones pushed up and Kingsberry came in from the side. Jones tipped the ball away, and Kingsberry grabbed the loose basketball and raced to the basket for a score to tie the game and the foul, which he would convert to give the Tigers a 60-59 lead.

"I was so happy, yelling, didn't even know what I was saying," said Jones as Kingsberry made the basket and got fouled. "At that moment, I knew we would win. I knew he would make the free throw and at that moment, I knew."

The Tigers never gave up that lead, and Jones made sure to orchestrate the final minutes and put his team in position to execute with the lead and salt the game away.

Swainsboro came together at their moment of most anxiety and pressure and played like champions. Let the banner hang proudly, "30-2, Class AA State Champions."

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# SWAINSBORO TIGERS



**TIGERS POSE FOR PHOTOGRAPH WITH GHSA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP SIGN**

*Originally published in the March 11, 2020 edition of The Forest-Blade*

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers completed their amazing season last Thursday in the Macon Centreplex by defeating the Therrell Panthers 69–65 to claim the Class AA Boys Basketball State Championship. Swainsboro (30–2) last won the title in 1996, put together the most dominant season in program history, and stamped their name into the history books in a season to remember.

Swainsboro capped off this amazing playoff run by knocking off the defending state champs, Therrell (25–8). The Panthers were battle-tested and presented the toughest challenge of the season for the Tigers, having played maybe the most difficult schedule in the state and winning a powerhouse region in the Atlanta area.

The game started as both teams traded buckets, first for

Therrell as point guard Roman Son drove to the basket for 2 points and then for Swainsboro when power forward Fred Seabrough flipped in a short 2-pointer to tie the game. With the ice broken, the Tigers got the ball out on a fast break to AJ Kingsberry, who laid in a reverse layup to give Swainsboro their first lead. Therrell's RaSean Frederick tied the game at 4 with two free throws before Immanuel Hackett got Swainsboro's long-range game on track, knocking down consecutive bombs deep behind the arc to give Swainsboro a 10–4 lead and prompt a Therrell timeout as a huge Tigers' crowd had the Centreplex buzzing with excitement.

Guard Derrick Jones turned up the pressure with a block and a steal as Swainsboro turned defense into offense, picking up the pace. Fred Seabrough hit Kingsberry for a layup to extend the lead to 14–8 before RaSean Frederick tied the game on consecutive 3-pointers to end the quarter 14–14.

*(Continued on page 29)*





# ARE STATE CHAMPS!

(From page 28)

Swainsboro took over midway through the second quarter with a 12–0 run as Jones, Cedrick Seabrough, Dre Miles, and Tyler Kelly all made 3-point plays to give the Tigers their largest lead at 35–23. Therrell closed the half with 6 consecutive points in the final 64 seconds to cut the score to 35–29 at the halftime break and break the Tigers' momentum.

In the third quarter, Therrell's Calvin Miller came to life, knocking down double-digit points and fueling the Panthers' comeback. Fortunately for Swainsboro, Fred Seabrough, playing at the top of his game, had an answer and repeatedly forced his way into the lane and converted mid-range shots and then his own 3-pointer to keep Swainsboro on top in a highly contested quarter. Still, late in the quarter Therrell went on a 7–0 run, punctuated by a 3-pointer to give the Panthers their first lead since the game's first basket. Cedrick Seabrough put in 2 free throws to tie the game at 50 to end the quarter.

The fourth quarter saw Therrell begin to take control and threaten to pull away from the Tigers. With 3:36 to go in the game, the Panthers took a 59–55 lead before Hackett drove in and cut the lead in half with a short runner. Next, in what should be remembered as the play that changed

the course of the state championship game, Jones and Kingsberry trapped Miller near half court. Jones tipped the ball away, and Kingsberry grabbed the loose ball and streaked down court, converting the basket to tie the game and getting fouled in the process. Kingsberry made the free throw to give Swainsboro a 60–59 lead that they would not relinquish. Cedrick Seabrough and RaSean Frederick traded baskets, and Jones put in 2 free throws for the 64–61 lead. The Tigers forced a turnover with 48 seconds remaining and with Jones fouled and heading back to the line, Tiger Nation could begin to celebrate. Jones and Kingsberry made 2 out of 4 free throws and after a Roman Son layup cut lead to 67–65 with 4 seconds remaining, Cedrick Seabrough was sent to the line for 2 free throws and a chance to put the game away. Seabrough calmly knocked down both free throws for a 69–65 lead. The last-second heave from Therrell was inconsequential as Swainsboro claimed the 2019-2020 state championship.

Fred Seabrough finished with 18 points to lead Swainsboro. Hackett put in 11 points, Jones with 10 points, Kingsberry with 10 points, Cedrick Seabrough with 9 points, Kelly with 6 points, and Miles with 5 points. RaSean Frederick led all scorers with 23 points for Therrell.



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# SHS TIGERS

Photos courtesy of Michael Woody





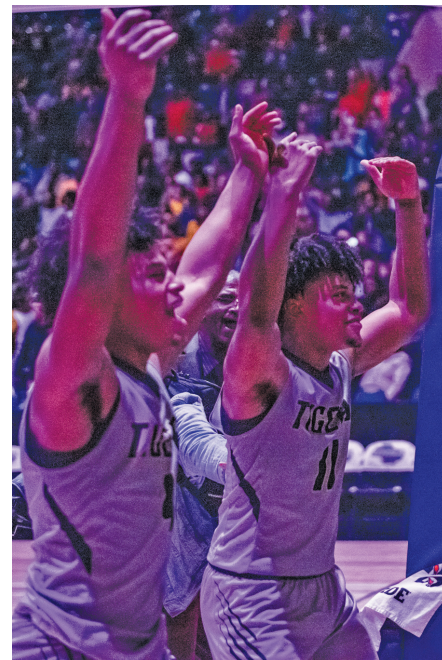


Photos courtesy of Michael Woody





SCENES



*Above photos courtesy of Michael Woody, below photos courtesy of Clint Braswell*

SHS



MORE







# OFFICIAL BOX SCORE

## Official Basketball Box Score -- Game Totals -- Final Statistics

Swainsboro vs Therrell

03-05-20 4:00pm at Macon Centreplex-Macon, GA

Swainsboro 69 • (29-3)

#	Player		Total	3-Ptr	FT-FTA	Rebounds			PF	TP	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Min
			FG-FGA	FG-FGA		Off	Def	Tot							
02	Immanuel Hackett	*	4-10	2-6	1-2	4	6	10	5	11	1	1	0	1	24
03	Derrick Jones	*	1-8	1-6	7-10	1	2	3	1	10	3	4	0	2	30
04	Fredrick Seabrough	*	7-14	1-1	3-6	4	4	8	3	18	1	1	0	1	30
05	Artis Kingsberry	*	4-11	0-5	2-3	1	3	4	2	10	1	2	0	1	28
11	Cedrick Seabrough	*	3-6	1-2	2-3	2	7	9	4	9	3	5	1	0	24
00	Juan Brown		0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	6
01	Tyler Kelly		2-4	2-3	0-0	0	2	2	0	6	2	0	0	0	9
10	Demonte Smith		0-2	0-2	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
23	Dre Miles		2-2	0-0	1-1	1	0	1	1	5	0	0	1	1	4
Team						1	1	2							
Totals			23-58	7-25	16-25	14	25	39	17	69	12	14	3	7	160

1st - FG %:	5-16	31.3%	2nd: 8-16	50.0%	3rd: 6-17	35.3%	4th: 4-9	44.4%	Game: 23-58	39.7%	Deadball
3FG %:	2-11	18.2%	4-9	44.4%	1-5	20.0%	0-0	0.0%	7-25	28.0%	Rebounds
FT %:	2-6	33.3%	1-1	100.0%	2-2	100.0%	11-16	68.8%	16-25	64.0%	4

Therrell 65 • (26-7)

#	Player		Total	3-Ptr	FT-FTA	Rebounds			PF	TP	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Min
			FG-FGA	FG-FGA		Off	Def	Tot							
02	RaSean Frederick	*	9-24	2-5	3-6	4	5	9	5	23	1	5	0	2	25
03	Roman Son	*	4-13	0-0	0-4	1	5	6	4	8	6	3	1	5	32
04	Cameron Fortson	*	1-3	0-0	7-8	2	4	6	3	9	1	2	0	0	24
11	Calvin Miller	*	7-18	2-9	0-0	2	1	3	1	16	3	2	0	2	22
33	Khamar Carlisle	*	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	3	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	21
00	Caleb Smith		1-1	0-0	2-2	1	3	4	3	4	0	0	0	0	17
05	Justin Worrill		2-3	1-2	0-0	2	3	5	2	5	0	1	0	2	18
30	Caden Tukes		0-1	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Team						4	2	6							
Totals			24-64	5-17	12-20	16	26	42	20	65	11	14	1	11	160

1st - FG %:	5-15	33.3%	2nd: 5-15	33.3%	3rd: 10-16	62.5%	4th: 4-18	22.2%	Game: 24-64	37.5%	Deadball
3FG %:	2-3	66.7%	1-5	20.0%	1-2	50.0%	1-7	14.3%	5-17	29.4%	Rebounds
FT %:	2-4	50.0%	4-7	57.1%	0-0	0.0%	6-9	66.7%	12-20	60.0%	7

Officials: Derrick Taylor, David Yancey, Regis Young

Technical fouls: Swainsboro-None. Therrell-None.

Attendance:

2A Boys Championship

Statistics provided by West Georgia Sports Information Services

Score by periods	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
Swainsboro	14	21	15	19	69
Therrell	14	15	21	15	65

	In	Off	2nd	Fast	
Points	Paint	T/O	Chance	Break	Bench
SHS	30	15	10	8	11
THERRE	24	18	12	14	9

Last FG - SHS 4th-02:41, THERRELL 4th-00:05.

Largest lead - SHS by 12 2nd-02:21, THERRELL by 4 4th-06:38.

SHS led for 22:19. THERRELL led for 04:26. Game was tied for 04:51.

Score tied - 7 times.

Lead changed - 3 times.





# THE LOOK OF A CHAMPION

by TROUP BRINSON

The Swainsboro Tigers dominated the 2019-2020 season like none other. Beating nine teams by 30 or more points over the course of their championship season is plenty of evidence as to the offensive and defensive firepower that this team displayed. Still, one game stands out during the season that signified just how good this team was and what they could do when motivated and locked in. That game was when Jeff Davis came to town on January 24 as the No. 3 ranked team in the state.

On that Friday night in the Tigers' Den, a playoff atmosphere was building as a huge crowd filtered in. Swainsboro was 20-2 and ranked No. 2 in the state and tied in the region standings with the 17-5 visitors. Jeff Davis, paced by eventual region Player of the Year Jaquez Kirby, had beaten the Tigers in December in Hazlehurst. The Yellow Jackets pushed a lead to 10 points late in the fourth quarter of that game until Swainsboro came storming back, losing in the final seconds. It felt like payback, a reckoning, was due as Jeff Davis brought a large crowd and expected to lay claim to Region 2-AA.


This game would be the game that Swainsboro put the

word out across the state's basketball landscape that the Tigers were a dominant force, no matter the classification. The swarm happened immediately. Swainsboro's defense overwhelmed Jeff Davis. Clamped down on them and refused to let them inhale one breath of air. Forcing 12 early turnovers, AJ Kingsberry and Fred Seabrough combined for 26 first quarter points and Swainsboro flexed their muscle with a 35-9 lead after one period. Immanuel Hackett added insult to injury in the second half with 13 points in the third quarter, including two deep 3-pointers that were like uppercuts to an already dazed opponent. Swainsboro took a 55-point lead, 84-29, against the No. 3 ranked team in the state. Amazing!


After this stunning performance, it was evident that this wasn't just a very good team in Swainsboro. This was a team that could win it all. The Tigers weren't a team built on one player or a team that needed a special set of circumstances to "put it all together" as many teams require. This team was built on a ferocious defense that only required Swainsboro to play with that unmatched effort and tenacity. Opponents withered under the stress and pressure. Offense flowed naturally from that defense and once Swainsboro got you down and inevitably, the 3-pointers would begin to rain down, lights out.

The Tigers used the momentum of that game to propel them to a new level—to expect that effort every night. Once that mindset was the standard, championship quality basketball was on display every time Swainsboro took the court. The buzz saw was engaged and the Tigers became the team that no one had an answer for. A very good team became the beast of Class AA on that night against Jeff Davis.

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# 2019-2020 BASKETBALL CHEERLEADERS



Zamauria David, Jariah Easterling, captain Sh’nyah Ellison, Imani Harmon, Mariah Jones, Malayshia Lockett, Yaliah Silas, co-captain Dameria Rountree, Lawren Wadley, manager Kaitlin Williams, head coach Monica Y. Pace, and volunteer coach Amaya Smith

# 2019-2020 BASKETBALL TEAM



Photos courtesy of Mark Williams Studio



# BRICE HOBBS: THE COACH

by TROUP BRINSON

Swainsboro basketball head coach Brice Hobbs just led his team to the Class AA State Championship. His team found few challengers this season on the road to one of the most dominant runs in Swainsboro history. Hobbs and his team like to say they have “seen it all” in reference to the roller coaster journey of the past few seasons. This one ended with a victory celebration, though few would have predicted that finish given the way the past few seasons have trended.

In 2016, Hobbs took over as the Swainsboro Tigers’ boys basketball head coach. That was a trying season. Hobbs was taking over for the late Bobby Andrews and also had his mother pass away during the season. Pulled in different directions, emotionally and physically drained, Hobbs was also trying to do his best for a talented team of Tigers who needed his direction and stability. After the new year flipped to 2017, Hobbs began to find his peace again. He refocused his team and went on an epic run to the region championship and to a state championship game that saw Swainsboro fall to South Atlanta, finishing as state runner-up.

It’s been a long road for Coach Hobbs. He began his head coaching career at Swainsboro as the track head man in 2001. After nearly winning a region championship in 2004 and 2005, his team built on those near-misses and won region, followed by the state championship in 2006-2007 school year. The following year, his team won region again and finished as state runner-up.

Hobbs was an assistant basketball coach for 11 years under Coach Leroy Jordan and Andrews before leaving for Jenkins County as the head basketball coach for three seasons. When he returned in 2016, he was at the right place at the right time.

Looking at that team, Hobbs could see the talent. The team would at least see the Elite 8, he’d say at first glimpse, but with the right push and just the right team chemistry, Hobbs could see the team going further.



COACH HOBBS

“I knew I had to stay on the grind because I had big shoes to fill,” said Hobbs when looking back on that first season. “I felt as a program that we needed to stay very competitive, winning the region championship year in and year out.”

That team won the region and played inspired basketball, culminating with a Final 4 victory over Dublin in a game that came down to the final seconds. The state championship game went awry early in a 68–33 defeat, but big things were on the way. The road, however, would not be smooth.

The following year, his team came into the season with a bullseye on its back. There was something missing with that squad chemistry-wise, and they would fall from

a 1-seed entering the playoffs to a No. 4 seed in the state playoffs, where they lost in the first round to Thomasville. In 2018-2019, another talented team that just couldn’t find the right ingredients and were knocked out of the region playoffs and failed to qualify for the state playoffs.

With no state playoffs and a chip on their shoulder, the Tigers began summer practice for this season and changes were everywhere.

“I started out this season having to replace two really great coaches on my staff, Neal David and Dwight Smith, and I really thought things could fall apart,” said Hobbs. “I immediately contacted Coach Quan McKinney, who is a community coach, and he was eager to get started. I called Coach Danny Evans, who is our middle school head coach, and wanted him on my staff and he accepted. Once I put together our staff, it was time to hit the court rolling and put together this season.”

Still, other changes were ahead as Swainsboro was getting a big-time talent in transfer Immanuel Hackett.

“Hackett, who moved in from Metter, is a sharp shooter, and everyone was saying we wouldn’t have enough basketballs to go around for our offense,” said Hobbs, ex-  
(Continued on page 31)





# WHO HAS 'SEEN IT ALL'



**"GOAT" HOBBS CELEBRATES WITH THE CROWD**

*(From page 30)*

plaining a potential chemistry pitfall. "I will admit it was rocky going into Christmas break, and we didn't seem to have the right chemistry."

But this wasn't Coach Hobb's first rodeo. He knew that with the right tweaking, this team could find another gear and play its best basketball down the stretch.

"Even though we were 11-1 before Christmas, I felt like this team was slipping away," said Hobbs. "We did some team bonding, went to dinner, and, as a team, we went to see Georgia Southern play. This was the turning point. They got a chance to watch how college guys leave it all on the court, and that's really where the journey took off."

Swainsboro's defense began to play at a differently level. Teams no longer had the luxury of casually getting

down court and into their offense. Swainsboro made every inch a labor, every pass, every shot contested. In short, they made opponents miserable on offense. From that, Swainsboro's offense flowed. Easy transition baskets wore out teams and loosened up space for Swainsboro's offense. Three-pointers began to rain down as defenses were too tired to get out and guard Tiger perimeter players. This was the recipe. Ferocious defense ignited everything with this team.

"We are tenacious!" exclaimed Hobbs when asked about his team's identity. "I'm still in shock about this season. It seemed sometimes during the season we were almost unstoppable and everyone was at our mercy. Even though it felt that way, I constantly reminded them about professionalism and sportsmanship that Swainsboro must always display."

Still, in the playoffs, all it takes is one bad shooting game or a match-up against a team that just has your number. Despite Swainsboro's domination in the regular season, there was some anxiety. The cure? Preparation.

"During the playoffs, every team brought something different," said Hobbs. "The coaching staff and kids all watch film. We came up with the best possible game plan against each of our opponents."

What a run it was. A 20-point victory over Jefferson County. An 18-point victory over South Atlanta. A 39-point victory over Rockmart. An 18-point victory over Glenn Hills. To be honest, all of those games had Swainsboro calling off the starters and allowing their bench to get minutes for the majority of the final quarter. The theme was complete domination.

Still, in the fourth quarter of the championship game, Swainsboro was down in the final minutes and needed direction.

"This is it!" Coach Hobbs said to his team. "This what you have worked for all year." I pointed to the shirt Ka'yun Davis had on that said 'Seen it All,' and I told them, 'Let's get it done!'"

The rest is history. The Tigers got it done, and Coach Hobbs saw his faith in this team rewarded. Hobbs doesn't enjoy talking about himself or taking the spotlight away from his players, but henceforth, he won't have to say much. His state championship ring will do the talking. The banner that he hangs will say "2019-2020 State Champions, 30-2." Coach Hobbs has the resume of a champion, and Swainsboro will forever remember this team and this season for the ages.



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