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# LEVEL UP

JAYLA WHITSEY HEADS  
TO LAWSON STATE

SUMMER 2025  
MoodyLivingMagazine.com  
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READ THIS BOOK

On Vacation

Recommendations from  
Moody Library  
Staff

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The Doris Stanley Memorial Library staff has a combined experience of more than 25 years working in libraries. Sara Roberts, library director, has worked at Moody for about three and a half years and has seven years of prior library experience. Callie Jo Eastis and Shannon McCrary, both library assistants, have worked at the library for almost three years. Gwen Rollins, library assistant, has worked here for a year and a half and has seven and a half years of prior library experience. Here, they each recommend their choice read for vacation this summer.



Finlay Donovan is Killing It

By Elle Cosimano | Mystery

Review by Callie Jo Eastis

In this hilarious murder mystery with a touch of romance, Elle Cosimano introduces Finlay Donovan, a 31-year-old, newly-single mom and author, who is struggling big time. Her ex-husband is dealing her fits; she lost her nanny; she's broke; her 4-year-old just found the scissors; and it isn't even lunch. A case of mistaken identity leads to accidentally being hired as a hitwoman. This twisting plot kept me laughing as one disastrous decision after another leads Finlay and Vero, her re-employed nanny, on a journey to solve her hit's murder and hopefully stay out of jail.



A Duke for Diana

By Sabrina Jeffries | Romance

Review by Shannon McCrary

This classic, historical romance has a bit of mystery and an interesting twist. Diana and her two sisters endured scandal from their parents' divorce, so they started a business to help ladies navigate the marriage market in London. Their latest protégé's brother, Geoffrey, has unexpectedly inherited a dukedom. Sparks start to fly between Diana and Geoffrey, but will a secret from his past be too much for them to overcome? I loved the atypical Duke, and Diana is spunky and defies the traditions of the day by becoming a female business owner. This is the first book in the "Designing Debutantes" series, and the following books delve into the romantic entanglements of the sisters.

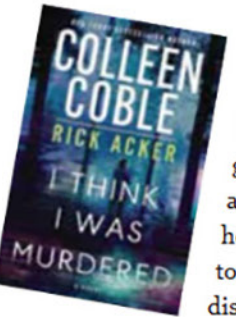


The Spellshop

By Sarah Beth Durst | Fantasy

Review by Sara Roberts

In "The Spellshop," librarian Kiela flees a warzone with her best/only friend, a sentient spider plant named Caz. They are carrying only a few crates of rescued spellbooks and what she can fit in a borrowed library boat. They make their way to an outlying island and experiment with illegal magic to improve the lives of their newfound community. This cozy fantasy is a great choice for a feel-good, vacation read. It has compelling world-building and characters you can feel good about cheering for. The relationships Kiela makes and develops throughout the book kept me thinking after I closed the cover, and I'm looking forward to the sequel, coming out in July.



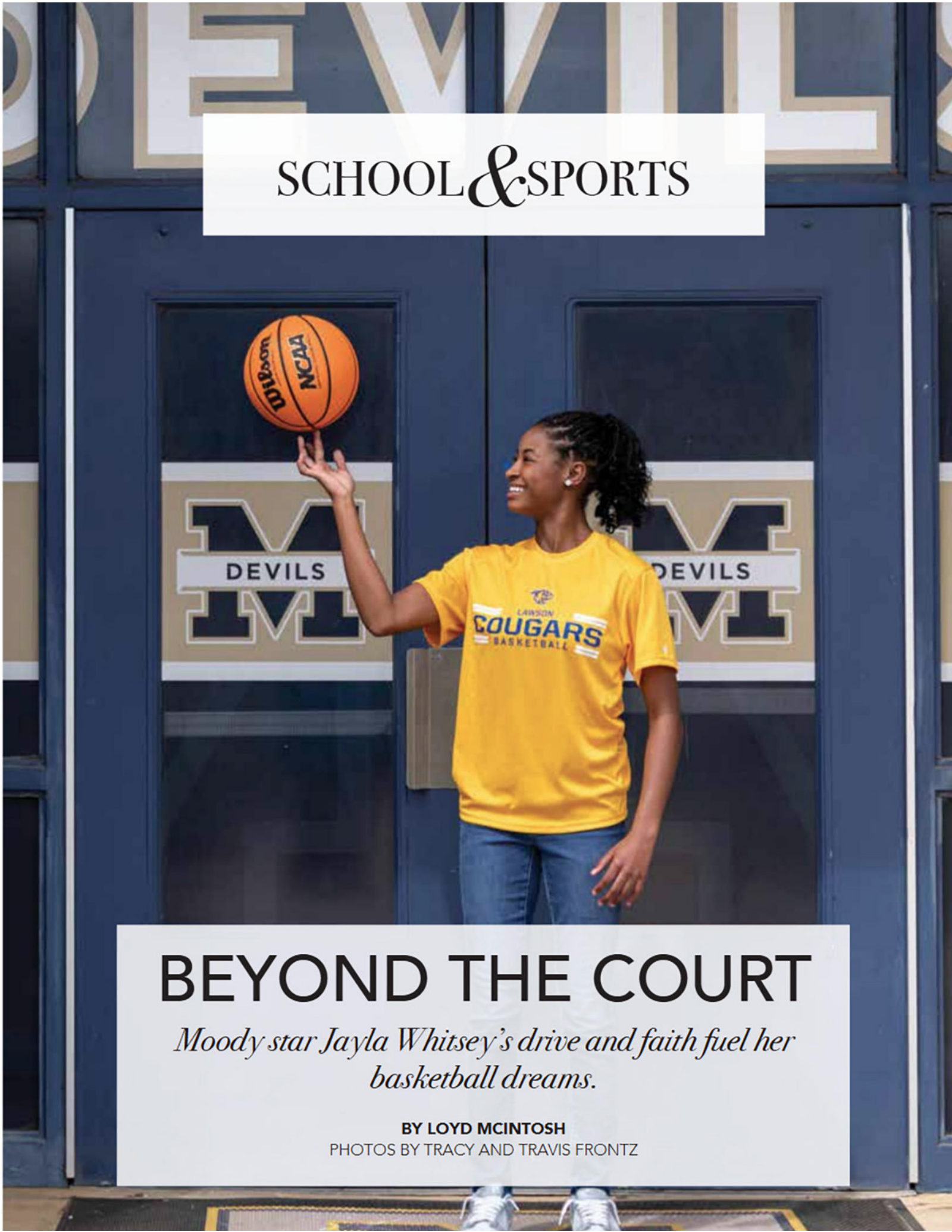
I Think I Was Murdered

By Colleen Coble | Thriller

Review by Gwen Rollins

In this thriller, the reader will find a story as intriguing as the title suggests! Following her husband's death, grief-stricken Katrina Berg turns to an AI chatbot prototype to "keep him alive" by uploading every piece of available data from his social media accounts, photos, emails and text messages. As she continues "talking" to her late husband via the chatbot, she begins to suspect that his death was not the tragic accident it was believed to be. When she digs deeper into the events surrounding his death, the reader is taken on a chilling journey of discovery about greed, loss and the ethical implications of future technology.

SCHOOL & SPORTS



BEYOND THE COURT

*Moody star Jayla Whitsey's drive and faith fuel her basketball dreams.*

BY LOYD MCINTOSH  
PHOTOS BY TRACY AND TRAVIS FRONTZ





For Jayla Whitsey, basketball is more than a sport. It's a passion. Even as her senior season faded into the past, the Moody High School phenom still spent several hours every day before and after school, sweating, grinding, dribbling and shooting, before waking up early the next morning to start the process all over again.

Honestly, simply listening to her relate the details of her training regimen can make any reasonably-fit adult exhausted. However, Whitsey understands the hard work will pay off as she prepares for her freshman year with the Lawson State Community College women's basketball team.

"At 6, before school, I lift weights. I get out of school at 2, so around 2:15, I go to the gym and try to get about an hour and a half in," Whitsey explained.

Each day of the week is devoted to specific skills or concepts. For instance, on Tuesdays, Whitsey works on specific moves such as a crossover dribble

or hesitation move—a slight pause while dribbling, luring a defensive player to change direction, setting up the ball handler for an open shot.

Wednesdays and Saturdays are typically set aside for shooting, while the remaining days vary.

"Whatever I'm feeling like I need to work on but also trying to make sure that I'm playing as often as I can," she said. "Playing with the guys, playing with any other girls that I can find."

At night, Whitsey works through a speed, agility and flexibility training regimen developed by her father and around 30 minutes of ball-handling exercises. Whitsey finishes her day by wearing Normatec compression therapy devices to massage aching muscles and aid in recovery, all to be ready to put on the Lawson State jersey later this year.

"I'm training every single day," Whitsey said. "I'm trying to make sure that when I go to Birmingham in August that I am the best player that I can be at that moment."





Whitsey is an incredibly well-rounded young woman with a GPA well above 4.0, an ACT score of 27 and an active life in her community and church. However, it's fair to say that Whitsey's life primarily revolves around basketball, ironic considering her father, a basketball player himself, did not want her to play the sport.

Whitsey said she idolized her dad and would often watch him play in men's league games, deciding at an early age she wanted to play too. So, displaying the tenacious attitude that makes her a menace to defenses on the court, Whitsey wore her father down until he waved the white flag.

"I just begged him enough that when I was 7 years old, he eventually let me play basketball," Whitsey

recalled. "So, that was my first year playing, and I've played ever since."

During her first few years, Whitsey played on teams with boys, admitting, "I wasn't really that good. I was just kind of out there." Her father pushed the community to create girls-only teams, and before long, Whitsey's talent became undeniable.

Whitsey spent the first two years of high school at St. Clair County High School in Odenville and was by far the best player on a bad team. After transferring to Moody for her junior year, 2023-24, Whitsey came into her own, amassing an array of personal and team awards, including several All-Area and All-County accolades. She helped lead



Moody to a St. Clair County championship in 2025 and led Moody to the Sweet 16 in the 2024 Alabama High School Athletic Association playoffs for the first time in more than 20 years.

She is also the only Moody basketball player, boy or girl, to score 1,500 points in her high school career. However, Moody Girls Basketball Head Coach Rebecca Davis said it was not just Whitsey's physical talents that impressed her, but her character as well.

"She is a wonderful human being," Davis said. "She's going to be where she's supposed to be, doing what she's supposed to be doing all the

time without somebody having to watch over her or without somebody having to make her do the right thing."

Davis said that Whitsey is one of those athletes who leads by example. She is the first one in the gym before practice, the last one to leave after practice and always offering words of encouragement to her teammates. Still, what has impressed Davis the most is Whitsey's knowledge of the game.

"Her basketball IQ separates her from so many. She understands spacing and the flooring of the game, and she studies the game. That's important



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to her," Davis said. "That is not something that's very common in high school girls."

For example, Davis said most high school girls basketball players are not terribly interested in studying game film or understanding the sport on a procedural level. However, Davis said her team captain approaches game preparation like a coach, analyzing her opponent's tendencies and weaknesses and offering potential strategies. She said these attributes will make Whitsey an asset at Lawson State.

"She is so intelligent that she understands that that aspect really can make the difference," Davis said. "She would go on her own and live scout teams and take notes. This is a kid who would have one night a week off, and she spent that one night a week going to scout other people because it was important to her." Davis said. "She felt like seeing them in person, seeing them live, was an advantage to her. [Lawson State] has no idea how much they've knocked it out of the park with her."

Whitsey credits her coaches, teammates and most importantly, God, for her success. As she moves on to the next level, she hopes her life on and off the basketball court can serve as an inspiration and testimony to others.

"That's the main goal in life: to please God and to be the best person that He called me to be and to be more and more like Him every single day," Whitsey added. "Being a good teammate, being a role model and everything that's part of who He's called me to be, impacting the lives of people in a positive way. Basketball is just a part of it."

*To keep up with Whitsey as she moves on to the next phase of her basketball career, follow her on X (@WhitseyJayla). ●*