



# Rebels' command of Bulldogs at new level

SPORTS, 1B

# Clarion Ledger

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## BETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE ARSON



This photo of a bronze bust of Moses was taken moments before it crumbled at the Beth Israel temple on Jan. 10. The temple was a victim of arson as much of the library and temple were burned. The bust of Moses was one of the few things that had survived a 1967 bombing. PROVIDED BY ZACH SHEMPER

# Temple congregants preparing to rebuild

**Ross Reily**  
Mississippi Clarion Ledger | USA TODAY NETWORK

Zach Shemper walked into the Beth Israel Congregation synagogue on Jan. 10 to a scene of utter destruction. An arsonist had set fire to the building around 3 a.m. leaving most of the library and synagogue in ruins. One of the first things Shemper, president of the board of directors for Beth Israel Congregation, saw was a bronze sculpture of Moses holding the Ten Commandments. It appeared to have survived the fire, but

soon after, it crumbled into pieces. Beth Israel is Mississippi's second oldest and its largest Jewish synagogue. The Moses sculpture was one of the few things that had survived a Ku Klux Klan bombing at both the temple's office and former Rabbi Perry Nussbaum's home in November 1967. The 1967 bombing came about after Beth Israel leaders became involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

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# Suspect ID'd after setting synagogue on fire

**Pam Dankins**  
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A suspect was identified in connection with the arson fire at the Beth Israel Congregation synagogue in Mississippi, according to an affidavit filed Monday, Jan. 12, in U.S. Southern District Court of Mississippi. The affidavit states Stephen Spencer Pittman, 19, was charged with maliciously damaging or destroying a building by means of fire or an explosive. Pittman was a former student and baseball player at St. Joseph Catholic School in Madison and a baseball player at Coahoma Community College. "Pittman was identified as a person of interest and ultimately confessed to lighting a fire inside the building due to the building's Jewish ties," the affidavit reads. The fire occurred around 3 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 10, at the synagogue. The Jackson Fire Department responded and was able to contain and extinguish the blaze. No congregants or firefighters were injured in the blaze. Security camera footage released later by the synagogue showed a masked and hooded person, now alleged to be Pittman, using a gas container to pour a liquid on the floor and a couch in the building's lobby. The affidavit states that in an Jan. 10 interview with law enforcement, Pittman referred to the synagogue as the "synagogue of Satan." The affidavit states that during that interview with representatives of the FBI, Jackson Fire Department and Hinds County Sheriff's Office, Pittman "admitted to starting a fire inside the Beth Israel Congregation/ISJL building." Pittman allegedly traveled from his residence in Madison County and stopped at Mac's Gas on Highway 51 in Ridgeland to purchase the gas used for the fire. He also took his license plate off at the gas station before heading to the synagogue. While there, Pittman allegedly texted his father,

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Caution tape blocks an entryway at Beth Israel Congregation synagogue on Jan. 11. A suspect has been arrested by Jackson's fire department arson division. AYRTON BRECKENRIDGE/CLARION LEDGER

# Will there be a PGA Tour event for Mississippi in 2027?

**Ross Reily**  
Mississippi Clarion Ledger | USA TODAY NETWORK

What had been feared for some time has come true as 2026 will come and go without Mississippi having a PGA tournament in Mississippi. Now, Executive Director of the Wayne-Sanderson Farm Classic Steve Jent is looking toward 2027.

All of this became official when the PGA Tour released its eight-tournament slate for the fall portion of 2026. The schedule did not include Napa or Sanderson Farms but the fall series does feature two new tournaments, one in Asheville, North Carolina, and one in Austin, Texas. On Dec. 16 Century Club Charities, which puts on the tournament, announced that it was giving \$1 mil-

lion from proceeds of the 2025 Sanderson Farms Championships to the Friends of Children's Hospital, an organization that supports the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Then, there were still serious questions as to whether there would be another PGA golf tournament played in Jackson.

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