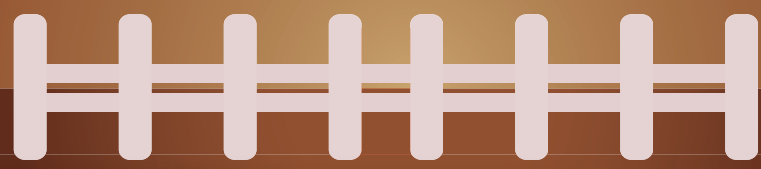


THE NASHVILLE GRAPHIC

PIGSKIN

PREVIEW
2023



**NASH CENTRAL
BULLDOGS**



**SOUTHERN NASH
FIREBIRDS**



**ROCKY MOUNT
GRYPHONS**



**NORTHERN NASH
KNIGHTS**



NASH CENTRAL

BULLDOGS



KEYWORDS - VETERAN ROSTER, 2-A THREE-PEAT?

CENTRAL'S BIG CAUSE

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

ROCKY MOUNT

Came and went a time -- and it wasn't too long ago -- when Chris Lee wasn't sure about the future of his Nash Central High School football program.

COVID-19 had depleted Central's roster numbers, and the losses were piling up.

Coaches were hard to find, especially volunteer ones -- and that made practices sessions short on development time.

There just weren't that many numbers, expect for the lofty ones opponents were putting on the scoreboard.

That may have been just three years in the past, but doesn't it seem like forever ago now?

After posting a 2-4 record in the Spring of 2021 season -- and

NASH CENTRAL
BULLDOGS

CHRIS LEE

Years at School:
9
Last Season:
9-4
Record at School:
45 - 45
Starters Returning:
0-X, D-X



OUTLOOK

Nash Central made a bit of history by making the third round of the playoffs in 2022 for the second consecutive year. With so many key returnees, more gridiron success is expected this time around at The Dawg Pound.

2023 SCHEDULE

Aug. 18.....at Southeast Halifax
Aug. 25.....at SW Edgecombe
Sept. 1.....GOLDSBORO
Sept. 8.....BEDDINGFIELD
Sept. 15.....SOUTHERN NASH*
Sept. 22.....at Franklinton*
Sept. 29.....ROCKY MOUNT*
Oct. 6.....at Northern Nash*
Oct. 13.....BUNN*
Oct. 27.....at Roanoke Rapids*

* Denotes Big East Games

being outscored by a combined 249-115 -- the Bulldogs have been roaring ever since, reaching the third round of the Class 2-A State Playoffs in back-to-back campaigns.

Central has also won the 2-A portion of the Big East Conference twice in a row, and even shocked the league world last fall by securing a major upset over long-time power Southern Nash.

"When we beat Southern Nash, it was kind of a turning point for us," Lee

said. "That gave our kids confidence that they could play with some of these (Class 3-A schools in the Big East)."

For the Dawg Pound, the best news is that, indeed, the best may be yet to come for the Bulldogs, who return a wealth of talent from last season's 9-4 contingent.

Things are certainly different now at Nash Central. Lee has almost 40 players on both his varsity and junior varsity rosters -- unheard of numbers



TYZIE ARRINGTON



NASH CENTRAL'S MARQUEL WARREN BRINGS IN A RECEPTION
(Graphic Photo by Geoff Neville)



JON-AYDEN HORNE

three years ago.

Just as important, Lee has a full staff -- and even coaches for specific positions. Receiving individualized work can be instrumental in the development of a player on the

See NCHS, Page 10



NC LINEMAN GABRIEL WHITTINGTON



NASH CENTRAL (Graphic Photo by Geoff Neville)
VETERAN RUNNING BACK JAMES RODGERS
(Graphic Photo by Geoff Neville)



COACH CHRIS LEE GETS HIS POINT ACROSS
(Graphic Photo by Geoff Neville)



2023 NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL TEAM
(Photo Submitted by Meryn Johnson)



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
DEFENSIVE LINEMAN OLIVER BELHOMME
(Graphic Photo by Geoff Neville)

NORTHERN NASH

KNIGHTS



KEYWORDS - BAR HAS BEEN RAISED, READY TO DEFEND TITLE WHAT'S NEXT FOR NN?

By **CHANCE PUCKETT**
Correspondent

RED OAK

One year removed from a Class 3-A Eastern Regional crown and a berth in the State Championship game, head coach Andrew Farriss' Northern Nash Knights are settling in for the 2023 campaign with high hopes once again.

Coming off back-to-back Big East Conference titles, the Knights have posted a 26-3 record over the last two seasons, with their last loss to a league opponent coming during the Spring 2021 season.

Northern will kick-off conference play on September 22 with a home game against Bunn, while Roanoke Rapids, Nash Central, Franklinton, Southern Nash, and Rocky Mount make up the remainder of the league schedule that runs through October 27.

The Knights began non-conference play last Friday with a commanding 48-13 over Hunt -- their first win over the Warriors in Wilson since 2016.

Northern will take on its second straight opponent from Wilson in

NORTHERN NASH KNIGHTS

ANDREW FARRISS

Years at School: 6
Last Season: 15-1
Record at School: 41 - 17
Starters Returning: 0-6, D-6



OUTLOOK

What can Northern Nash possibly do for an encore after last year's Class 3-A East Regional Championship? We'll soon find out as the Fighting Knights hope to reload on the fly. Some talented returnees are back, but NN's vaunted graduating class will be difficult to replace.

2023 SCHEDULE

Aug. 18.....at Wilson Hunt
Aug. 25.....WILSON FIKE
Aug. 31.....GREENVILLE ROSE
Sept. 8.....at DH Conley
Sept. 22.....BUNN*
Sept. 29.....at Roanoke Rapids*
Oct. 6.....NASH CENTRAL*
Oct. 13.....at Franklinton*
Oct. 20.....at Southern Nash*
Oct. 27.....ROCKY MOUNT*

* Denotes Big East Games

as many weeks this Friday as the Fike Golden Demons will travel to Red Oak for the Knights' home opener, followed by Northern hosting J.H. Rose on August 31.

The Knights will wrap up their non-conference slate on September 8 with an away match-up against D.H. Conley, who served Northern its lone loss of the



See NNHS, Page 3



NNHS BACKFIELD STANDOUT. Talented veteran Dywhaun Mitchell returns at the running back position this season for the Northern Nash High School Fighting Knights. (Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)



NNHS RUNNING BACK AZARIAH LORING
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)



NNHS LINEMAN HAYDEN JOYNER
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)




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SOUTHERN NASH

FIREBIRDS



KEYWORDS - SOLID LINEBACKER GROUP, GRINDING OFFENSE
MODEL OF CONSISTENCY

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

STANHOPE

Zonovan Knight. Quinton Cooley. Tralon Mitchell. Kendrick Bell. Tracey Coppedge. Terron Huffman.

The list of great running backs who have donned the red and blue uniforms at Southern Nash High School over the past 15 years is seemingly endless -- and loaded with college-level (and even professional) talent.

And that intangible has fit in perfectly with the Double-Wing offense that then-head coach Brian Foster and now-head coach Brian Batchelor first collaborated on shortly before the Firebirds reached the Class 3-A East Regional Finals in 2009.

Since then, the points have piled up and the offensive record books have been shattered -- over and over again.

SN also reached the Class 3-A State Finals during that period while claiming a slew of Big East Conference Championships.

Southern Nash's strategy -- though it



SOUTHERN NASH
FIREBIRDS

BRIAN BATCHELOR

Years at School:

3

Last Season:

8-4

Record at School:

17-6

Starters Returning:

0-4, D-6



OUTLOOK

Few area football programs are as good year-in and year-out as Southern Nash. Look for that to continue in 2023 -- and there is the framework for future success thanks to a strong group of incoming freshmen. SN should once again be a factor in the Big East Conference standings.

2023 SCHEDULE

Aug. 18.....at East Wake
Aug. 25.....SOUTH GRANVILLE
Aug. 31.....at Wilson Fike
Sept. 8.....SO. ALAMANCE
Sept. 15.....at Nash Central*
Sept. 22.....ROANOKE RAPIDS*
Oct. 6.....at Bunn*
Oct. 13.....at Rocky Mount*
Oct. 20.....NORTHERN NASH*
Oct. 27.....FRANKLINTON*

* Denotes Big East Games

might not say it on the playbook -- was to simply outscore its opponents with its myriad of offensive weaponry.

And SN's defense was counted on to be just good enough to help the Firebirds add another victory in the 'W' column.

But that might not necessarily be the case this fall as Southern



BACK IN THE FOLD. Veteran Malaki Dobbins returns this fall for the Southern Nash Firebirds -- and will be on the team's leaders on the defensive side of the ball. (Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)

Nash looks to regain the Big East title after a two-year reign by rival Northern Nash.

Not only did the Firebirds fall to Northern in 2022 in the second round of the state playoffs, they also were stopped by the Knights in regular season action.

Climbing back to the top of the Big East mountain is Priority Number One in Firebird Country this fall.

But the trail to the summit might be a bit unique in the recent history of Southern Nash Football.

Instead of a single running back superstar, the Firebirds will rely on a 'by committee' backfield this fall.

And the SNHS defense is expected to be one of the best the school has produced in recent history.

So while Southern Nash might not set any offensive records in 2023, the Firebirds might just find themselves back in the conversation of Eastern North Carolina's top Class 3-A schools,



SNHS SENIOR SAFETY
LOGAN SAUNDERS

thanks to a timely offense and a stout defense.

Attend a Southern Nash practice, and talk of the school's linebacker group will immediately bring a smile to each coach's face.

Isaac Joyner, Luke



SNHS DEFENDER ISRAEL WHITAKER
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)

See SNHS, Page 10



KADEN RICKS TUCKER MAKES A GRAB
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)



SOUTHERN NASH JUNIOR RB/DB TYLIK MITCHELL
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)



JAKE COOPER WILL START AT QUARTERBACK FOR SOUTHERN NASH
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)

ROCKY MOUNT

GRYPHONS



KEYWORDS - YOUNG ROSTER, BOUNCEBACK TIME

RM READY FOR BATTLE

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

ROCKY MOUNT

Most high school football teams could take a 7-4 record and a playoff appearance and run with it -- more than happy to submit that type of worksheet for the history books. But this is Rocky Mount we're talking about, where tradition and expectation meet every fall at the RMHS Football Field. So while the mark was an improvement over the five-win season one year earlier, it still isn't up to the Gryphons' standards -- a trend that RM and Coach Jason Battle hope to erase in 2023.

But in order to do so, Rocky Mount will have to roll without a group of decorated seniors that graduated back in June.

That means a group of newcomers -- young but loaded with potential -- will have to step up for RM to be competitive and successful in the always-strong Big East Conference, which is regarded as one of the top leagues in Eastern North Carolina.

The reloading starts at the quarterback position, where Christian Buck and Isaiah Silver are vying for playing time. When Buck isn't behind center, the junior will serve as RM's placekicker and punter -- and will be one of the best in the area. Silver is also slotted to line up at running back in Rocky Mount's

ROCKY MOUNT GRYPHONS

JASON BATTLE

Years at School: 12
Last Season: 7-4
Record at School: 91 - 42
Starters Returning: 0-4, D-4

OUTLOOK

Rocky Mount will have to replace several graduated starters from last year's club, which went 7-4 and reached the Class 3-A State Playoffs. The quick development of RM's younger players will be paramount to the Gryphons' success in the tough Big East Conference.

2023 SCHEDULE

Aug. 18.....TARBORO
Aug. 31.....EDENTON HOLMES
Sept. 8.....at Northeastern
Sept. 15.....BUNN*
Sept. 29.....at Nash Central*
Oct. 6.....ROANOKE RAPIDS*
Oct. 13.....SOUTHERN NASH*
Oct. 20.....at Franklinton*
Oct. 27.....at Northern Nash*

* Denotes Big East Games

wing-T formation, along with the likes of Ty'lik Harrell and C'quarhion Mitchell -- both sophomores. Receiving options include Jaden Haney and Anthony Fields (two more 10th graders). RM's offensive front



ALL-AROUND STAR. Junior Christian Buck will see duty at quarterback, punter and placekicker this season for the Rocky Mount High School football squad. (Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)

will consist of Johnny Horton, Hakeem Harrison, Cayden Revels, Lavar Williams and Eric Gupton. Defense has always been a hallmark of the Rocky Mount gridiron program, and Battle is looking for that success to continue. Up front, Joe Lewis,

Gupton, Marcus Towah and Denari Harrison will hope to take up the slack from graduated star DeAndre Lych -- a former havoc-wrecker of Big East opponents. Linebacker options are Harrell and

See RMHS, Page 11

ROCKY MOUNT VETERAN COACH JASON BATTLE

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JACK OF ALL TRADES. Senior Randall King can do a little bit of everything for the Northern Nash Fighting Knights, including returning kickoffs during a recent practice session at Death Valley in Red Oak. (Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)




HANDS-ON SKILLS. Look for Northern Nash veteran Trey Battle to be one of the top wide receivers this season in the always-tough Big East Conference. (Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)



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TAKING OVER NOW. Davis Wells will be the placekicker this season for the Northern Nash Fighting Knights following the graduation of Bryson Jenkins. (Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)

NNHS

continued from page 3

regular season during the 2021 campaign. Despite returning a significant chunk of its production from the 2022 season, Northern is tasked with replacing its starting quarterback in Keno Jones from a year ago. Jones accounted for 3,741 total yards of offense in 2022, adding 54 touchdowns both through the air and on the ground. Jones is set to begin his freshman season at Barton College this year, alongside Northern Nash teammate Carson Jenkins. A linebacker who finished his senior season with a state-leading 216 tackles, Jenkins was aided on the defense by Chris Manning and Allen Barnes who finished the year with 89 and 83 tackles, respectively. With a new playcaller on the offensive side of the ball, Northern will likely shift to a more run-focused offense in 2023 with Dywhaun Mitchell, Azariah Loring and B.J. Strickland returning to compliment quarterback Elijay Pitt in the backfield. Mitchell, Loring, and Strickland combined for 1,391 yards on the ground last season and look to play critical roles in the new-look Northern Nash offense. At receiver, Northern returns both Randall King and Trey Battle, with King having collected 1,144 receiving yards in 2022 and Battle having added 536 yards through the air. Defensively, the Knights return Conner Baker at linebacker, serving as the lone returner in the linebacking corps from the unit that has been arguably the Knights' best in recent years. Kaleb Station and Jaquille Arrington each look to play crucial roles on Northern's defense this season as well, taking over starting roles in the secondary. A strong suit of the Knights 2022 squad, Northern's defense from a year ago surrendered 20 or more points just twice during the season -- the first of which came in a 23-22 victory over Seventy-First in the Class-3A Eastern Final -- and the second in the Knights' finals' loss to East Lincoln.

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NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL ALUM KAMERON JOHNSON
NOW AT BARTON COLLEGE
(Photo Courtesy Matt Proseus, Barton College Sports Information)



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL'S JAQUAVIUS MOODY
(Photo by Geoff Neville, Graphic Sportswriter)

Uncertainty Rules In The Big East

COLLEGE SKEDS

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

NASH COUNTY -- Here are the area college football schedules for the upcoming 2023 season:
APPALACHIAN STATE
Coach: Shawn Clark
September 2 -- GARDNER-WEBB
September 9 -- at North Carolina
September 16 -- EAST CAROLINA
September 23 -- at Wyoming
September 30 -- at Louisiana-Monroe*
October 10 -- COASTAL CAROLINA*
October 21 -- at Old Dominion*
October 28 -- SOUTHERN MISS*

See SKEDS, Page 8



ROCKY MOUNT ALUM SHYHEIM BATTLE
NOW AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE
(Photo by Gregg Forwerck, NCSU SID)

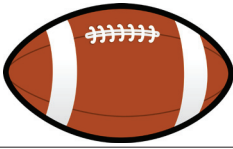
By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

NASH COUNTY -- There was hardly a question about which football team was the best in 2022 as Northern Nash reigned supreme and didn't lose a game until the Class 3-A State Championship contest.
Along the way, the Knights steamrolled through the Big East, winning their six outings by a whopping combined 203 points.
But things could be different this fall in the competitive league as just about every club will be extremely young, with the exception of the Nash Central Bulldogs.
Central, coached by former Louisburg High School skipper Chris



NASH CENTRAL'S AIDEN SCOTT
(Photo by Geoff Neville, Graphic Sportswriter)

Lee, will be the prohibitive favorite in the Class 2-A portion of the Big East standings.
The Bulldogs have reached the third round of the Class 3-A State Playoffs in each of the last two campaigns, and will be blessed with a veteran group that looks solid on both sides of the ball.
Bunn and Roanoke Rapids will be the other Class 2-A schools in the league. The Wildcats will be young once again, though the Bunn Middle School program continues



to churn out quality future BHS standouts.
Bunn will have a new coach in former BHS quarterback Andre Davis. Speaking of quarterbacks, one of the Wildcats' few graduates from last season is Damarion Watkins, who was a consistent signal-caller who excelled as both a passer and runner.
And Roanoke Rapids is always a threat that nobody can overlook, so the Wildcats and Yellow Jackets will both have chances

See BE, Page 8



SOUTHERN NASH'S DANNY DUNSTON
(Photo by Geoff Neville, Graphic Sportswriter)

Faith Christian School Patriots

Nash Central High School Bulldogs

NC Wesleyan College Battling Bishops

Northern Nash High School Knights

Rocky Mount Academy Eagles

Rocky Mount High School Gryphons

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BUNN HIGH SCHOOL FIRST-YEAR HEAD FOOTBALL COACH ANDRE' DAVIS
(Graphic photo by Geoff Neville)

BE

continued from page 7

to upset Nash Central. The Class 3-A portion of the Big East is anybody's guess as each of the four teams -- Northern Nash, Franklinton, Southern Nash and Rocky Mount, will have to replace a slew of graduated senior stars. Each of those four teams will be young, though Northern Nash has a strong group of skill position athletes -- though quarterback Keno Jones will be difficult (if not impossible) to replace. For the first time in 10 years, Southern Nash won't have a future Division I runner in its backfield. And in what has to be considered a rare moment in Stanhope, the Firebirds could actually be stronger on the defensive side of the ball. Rocky Mount lost its quarterback, best

receiver and best defensive lineman, but Coach Jason Battle always seem to find a way to put the Gryphons in position to succeed. Franklinton will also be extremely young after several key seniors graduated, including FHS' top running back, quarterback and wide receiver. The Big East Conference's in-league slate begins September 15 with the following games -- Bunn at Rocky Mount, Southern Nash at Nash Central and Franklinton at Roanoke Rapids. One week later, Northern Nash will kick off its conference schedule with a home matchup against the Bunn Wildcats. Bunn's Davis is the lone new head coach this fall in the Big East Conference.



NASH CENTRAL QUARTERBACK WINSTON LEE
(Photo Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Down East Viking Classic scheduled

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- The Down East Viking Classic has become one of the most-anticipated annual events in Nash County -- and this season's renewal promises to be no different. The Elizabeth City State University Vikings will be returning to the Rocky Mount Sports Complex on September 9 for a football showdown against St. Augustine's College from Raleigh. Kickoff will be at 1 p.m. at the complex. Tickets can be

ordered by calling (252) 335-3354 or by visiting <https://www.ecsu.edu/down-east.php>. The Down East Viking Classic has been held at the Rocky Mount Sports Complex since 1998 and draws fans from all across the region. But the fun won't begin and end with just the gridiron matchup, which is expected to draw over 10,000 spectators. There are plenty of weekend-long events scheduled, including

See ECSU, Page 9



SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL ALUM JACKSON VICK (LEFT) NOW AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
(Photo by Gregg Forwerck, North Carolina State University Sports Information Department)

SKEDS

continued from page 7

November 4 -- MARSHALL*
November 11 -- at Georgia State*
November 18 -- at James Madison*
November 25 -- GEORGIA SOUTHERN*
* -- Denotes Sun Belt Conference Games
BARTON COLLEGE
Coach: Chip Hester
August 31 -- CHOWAN
September 9 -- at Davidson
September 16 -- VIRGINIA-WISE*
September 23 -- at Mars Hill*
September 30 -- at Tusculum*
October 7 -- NEWBERRY*
October 14 -- at Lenoir-Rhyne*
October 21 -- WINGATE*
October 28 -- at Catawba*
November 4 -- LIMESTONE*
November 11 -- at Erskine*
* -- Denotes South Atlantic Conference Games
CAMPBELL
Coach: Mike Minter
August 31 -- WILLIAM & MARY*
September 9 -- at The Citadel
September 16 -- at Monmouth*
September 23 -- ELON*
September 30 -- at North Carolina Central
October 7 -- at Hampton*
October 21 -- MAINE*
October 28 -- at Richmond*
November 4 -- at North Carolina
November 11 -- DEL-AWARE*
November 18 -- at North Carolina A&T*
* -- Denotes Coastal Athletic Association Games
DUKE
Coach: Mike Elko
September 4 -- CLEMSON*
September 9 -- LAFAYETTE
September 16 -- NORTHWESTERN
September 23 -- at UConn
September 30 -- NOTRE DAME
October 14 -- NORTH CAROLINA STATE*
October 21 -- at Florida State*
October 28 -- at Louisville*
November 2 -- WAKE FOREST*
November 11 -- at North Carolina*
November 18 -- at Virginia*
November 25 -- PITTSBURGH*
* -- Denotes Atlantic Coast Conference Games
EAST CAROLINA
Coach: Mike Houston
September 2 -- at Michigan
September 9 -- MARSHALL
September 16 -- at Appalachian State
September 23 --



SOUTHERN NASH'S QUENTIN COOLEY HAS TRANSFERRED FROM WAKE FOREST TO LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
(Photo Courtesy Liberty University Sports Information Department)

GARDNER-WEBB
September 30 -- at Rice*
October 12 -- SOUTHERN METHODIST*
October 21 -- CHARLOTTE*
October 28 -- at UTSA*
November 4 -- TULANE*
November 11 -- at Florida Atlantic*
November 18 -- at Navy*
November 25 -- TULSA*
* -- Denotes American Athletic Conference Games
LOUISBURG COLLEGE
Coach: Quinderra Spellman
September 3 -- at Christopher Newport University Junior Varsity
September 9 -- at Lackawanna College
September 16 -- at Hocking College
September 23 -- JIREH PREP
September 30 -- MARYLAND PREP
October 7 -- at Georgia Military College
October 14 -- MONROE COLLEGE
October 28 -- MYRTLE BEACH COLLEGIATE
November 4 -- at Nassau Community College
NORTH CAROLINA
Coach: Mack Brown
September 2 -- vs. South Carolina (neutral site of Bank of America Stadium, Charlotte)
September 9 -- APPALACHIAN STATE
September 16 -- MINNESOTA
September 23 -- at Pittsburgh*
October 7 -- SYRACUSE*
October 14 -- MIAMI FLA.*
October 21 -- VIRGINIA
October 28 -- at Georgia Tech*
November 4 -- CAMP-

BELL
November 11 -- at DUKE*
November 18 -- at Clemson*
November 25 -- at North Carolina State*
* -- Denotes Atlantic Coast Conference Games
NORTH CAROLINA A&T
Coach: Vincent Brown
August 31 -- at UAB
September 9 -- NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL
September 16 -- at Elon*
September 30 -- at Norfolk State
October 7 -- VILLANOVA*
October 14 -- at Delaware*
September 9 -- at North Carolina A&T
September 16 -- at UCLA
September 23 -- Mississippi Valley State (at neutral site of Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis)
September 30 -- CAMPBELL
October 7 -- at Elon
October 19 -- at Morgan State*
October 26 -- SOUTH CAROLINA STATE*
November 4 -- NORFOLK STATE*
November 11 -- at Howard*
November 18 -- DEL-AWARE STATE*
* -- Denotes MEAC Games
NORTH CAROLINA STATE
Coach: Dave Doeren
August 31 -- at Connecticut
September 9 -- NOTRE DAME
September 16 -- VMI
September 22 -- at Virginia*
September 29 -- LOUISVILLE*
October 7 -- MARSHALL
October 14 -- at Duke*
October 28 -- CLEMSON*

November 4 -- MIAMI*
November 11 -- at Wake Forest*
November 18 -- at Virginia Tech*
November 25 -- NORTH CAROLINA*
* -- Denotes Atlantic Coast Conference Games
NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN
Coach: Jeff Filkovski
September 2 -- RANDOLPH-MACON
September 9 -- at Ferrum
September 16 -- at Bridgewater
September 30 -- BELHAVEN*
October 7 -- at LaGrange*
October 14 -- GREENSBORO*
October 21 -- SOUTHERN VIRGINIA*
October 28 -- at Methodist
November 4 -- MARYVILLE COLLEGE*
November 11 -- at Huntingdon College*
* -- Denotes USA South Conference Games
WAKE FOREST
Coach: Dave Clawson
August 31 -- ELON
September 9 -- VANDERBILT
September 16 -- at Old Dominion
September 23 -- GEORGIA TECH*
October 7 -- at Clemson*
October 14 -- at Virginia Tech*
October 21 -- PITTSBURGH*
October 28 -- FLORIDA STATE*
November 2 -- at Duke*
November 11 -- NORTH CAROLINA STATE*
November 18 -- at Notre Dame
November 25 -- at Syracuse*
* -- Denotes ACC Games



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL'S ELISHA DANCY
(Graphic Photo By Geoff Neville)

WHIG-TV Set For Football Season

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

NASH COUNTY -- WHIG-TV will once again be your source for televised sports in Nash, Edgecombe and Wilson Counties as the station will air its high school football 'Game of the Week' every week during the 2023 season.

WHIG's schedule began last week with the backyard rivalry meeting between the Rocky Mount Gryphons and the Tarboro Vikings.

This Friday, the spotlight will be on the Northern Nash Knights as they will entertain the Wilson Fike Golden Demons.

WHIG's complete on-air slate for the 2023 high school football season is as follows:

- August 18 -- Tarboro at Rocky Mount
- August 25 -- Wilson Fike at Northern Nash
- August 31 -- Southern Nash at Wilson Fike
- September 8 -- Tarboro at SouthWest Edgecombe
- September 15 -- Southern Nash at Nash Central
- September 22 -- No Game
- September 29 -- Rocky Mount at Nash Central
- October 6 -- Nash Central at Northern Nash
- October 13 -- Southern Nash at Rocky Mount
- October 20 -- Northern Nash at Southern Nash
- October 27 -- Wilson Hunt at Wilson Fike



ON THE AIR THIS FALL. WHIG-TV will televise three football games this season that will feature the Northern Nash High School Fighting Knights and Head Coach Andrew Farriss. (Graphic Photo By Geoff Neville)

ECSU

continued from page 8

a golf challenge, college and high school bands, worship service, alumni socials and other entertainment activities.

The festivities will kick off on September 8 with a Viking Fan Zone Pep Rally at the Rocky Mount Event Center.

ECSU players, coaches and

administrators will be on hand to engage with visitors.

Everyone is welcome to attend this event.

Tickets for the football game are \$25.

Last year's contest saw Livingstone College defeat the Vikings by a 19-0 margin.



NORTHERN NASH QUARTERBACK GREAT KENO JONES
(Photo Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

WHAT A YEAR!

2022 was a season to remember

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Graphic Sportswriter

NASH COUNTY -- The 2023 high school football campaign was unforgettable in Nash County -- and it was highlighted by Northern Nash's historic march toward the Class 3-A State Finals.

Northern went undefeated in the regular season and then won four playoff contests -- in which the Knights trailed each time -- to claim the East Regional crown and reach the state championship for only the second time in NN's existence.

The Fighting Knights saved their greatest moment for the regional finale as they put together a late drive to rally to edge Fayetteville 71st in what will be remembered as one of the best-ever games at Death Valley.

Facing a fourth-and-goal situation in the closing minute, NN was able to secure a touchdown -- much to the glee of the overflow crowd.

Northern quarterback Keno Jones, destined to be unforgettable in Red Oak, rolled right and found tight end Ashton Rhodes open in the back of the end zone for the eventual game-winner.

NN's huge fanbase was at Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh eight days later for a title showdown against East Lincoln.

The Knights scored on their first drive and then pounced on a turnover, but couldn't convert on the miscue.

Instead, an East Lincoln club loaded with Division 1 prospects would eventually rally for the triumph.

It was a tough loss to take for Northern, but in no way, shape or form should it detract from how the 2023 season is remembered in Death Valley.

NN repeated as the Big East Conference Champion and went 15-1 over-



NORTHERN NASH COACH ANDREW FARRISS
ACCEPTS THE EAST REGIONAL PLAQUE
(Graphic Photo By Geoff Neville)

all, outscoring its foes by a combined whopping number of 621-177.

But the Nash County heroics didn't stop in Red Oak.

Just across the US 64 bridge, the Nash Central Bulldogs won the Class 2-A portion of the Big East for the second straight year -- along with making a back-to-back appearance in the third round of the playoffs.

The Bulldogs, coached by Chris Lee, went 9-4 overall and even secured a pair of victories against two Class 3-A squads in the Big East -- Franklinton and Southern Nash.

Southern Nash and Rocky Mount also made their usual trips to the postseason, meaning all four county schools made it to at least the third round.

Two of Southern Nash's defeats came versus Northern Nash -- once in the regular season and once in the second round of the Class 3-A State Playoffs.

In all, Nash County boasted a combined 39-13 record, with seven of those setbacks coming against other county opponents as part of a grid season that will long be remembered in the county.



JOB WELL DONE. Nash Central High School claimed the Class 2-A portion of the Big East Conference Championship in 2022 and reached the third round of the Class 2-A State Football Playoffs. (Graphic Photo By Geoff Neville)



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL DEFENSIVE ACE ZAY DRAUGHN



SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL EDGE RUSHER CHRIS HARRIS



JAVARIS JONES TRIES TO HAUL IN A PASS AT THE WILSON JAMBOREE

NCHS

continued from page 2

high school level.

So it's no surprise that the Bulldogs are now the overwhelming favorites to three-peat as the Big East Class 2-A champs -- and even give the quartet of 3-A clubs in the league a collective run for their money.

"We have a veteran group now," Lee said. "We have accomplished a lot the last two years, but with expectation comes pressure. Our guys used to be underdogs, now we are the ones with the targets on our backs.

"We've made it two years in a row to the third round of the playoffs, so the players now want to take the next step."

Once again, Nash Central's wing-T set will be loaded with skill position standouts -- and the Bulldogs may even take to the air more than foes are accustomed due thanks to the presence of sophomore quarterback Winston Lee.

Lee is surrounded by skill talent, as just about every player who put up big offensive numbers last fall for Central is back in the fold.

That would include the likes of wingbacks Javaris Jones and James Rodgers, fullback Zay Draughn, wide receiver Isaiah Finkley and tight end D'Angelo Johnson.

Look for Marquel Warren, Elijah Harrison, Amir Graham and Tyquan Jones (last year's quarterback) to also receive their share of touches as part of NCHS' depth-filled offense.

The Bulldogs' skill standouts should get ample protection and



NASH CENTRAL'S TYQUAN JONES

space thanks to linemen Blake Hedgepeth, Jayden Whitaker, Aiden Scott, Zeek Bailey and Jah Strayhorn.

While the offensive receives the glory, it's the Nash Central defense that has played a huge role in the Bulldogs' recent success.

That trend should continue as NCHS is quick and aggressive on that side of the ball, led by linebackers Jase Wilkerson, Draughn, Kam Tucker and Nykeem Johnson.

Oliver Belhomme, Gabe Whittington, D'Angelo Johnson and Malik Pittman form a solid quartet up front, while Tyquan Jones, Javaris Jones and Elijah Harrison will

comprise a speedy secondary.

Elisha Dancy and Tyzarion Arrington should also see ample reps on the defense.

Returnee Braxton Sykes is back to handle the kicking chores.

"This is by far the most veteran team we have had here," Coach Lee said. "We have seven starters on offense and six on defense back, but that number is actually eight each way because some younger guys have stepped up. We've got depth with our skill guys and depth along both lines."

Central's first Big East game will be a September 15 rematch versus Southern Nash.

NCHS

continued from page 2

Faulkner, Daevon Richardson and Israel Whitaker lead that group, while Logan Saunders -- a starting linebacker in 2022 -- has been moved to the safety position.

Malaki Dobbins, a three-year starter, is a force along Southern Nash's defensive front and should be one of the Big East's top stars on that side of the ball.

Chris Harris, a throwing star during track and field season, should also be an impact performer.

But while Southern Nash doesn't have a running back that causes college recruiters to salivate, there is still plenty of talent on board -- more than enough skill to find the end zone, as evidenced by the Firebirds' 39-point uprising in their season opener last Friday night against backyard rival East Wake.

Another Mitchell is set to take over -- this time it's Tylik, the younger brother of Tralon, who is now a member of the gridiron program at Virginia Tech.

Kaden Ricks Tucker and Jonathan Hines are also talents in Southern's preferred double-wing set, while senior Jake Cooper will take over at quarterback after serving a three-year apprenticeship.

Throw in a veteran offensive line, and the pieces are in place for the Firebirds to enjoy yet another strong gridiron campaign -- one that Batchelor and Company hopes will include contention for the Big East crown.

But first, Southern Nash will have to endure a strong schedule -- one that includes non-league dates with the likes of Southern Alamance and Wilson Fike.

Then comes the always-grueling Big East Conference slate, with Northern Nash serving as the two-time defending league champion -- and now winners of four in a row over the Firebirds.

Add the fact that Southern Nash was stunned last fall by Big East upstart Nash Central -- and also fell to rival Rocky Mount -- and there are plenty of past factors to motivate the current Firebirds under Batchelor's direction.



SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL KICKER EXTRAORDINAIRE CHARLOTTE BENSON



SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL LINEBACKER LUKE FAULKNER EYES A POSSIBLE BLITZ

Southern Nash's Big East Conference worksheet will begin on September 15 with a doozy as the Firebirds look to avenge last year's home setback versus Nash Central.

This time around, the rematch will be played at The Dawg Pound on NCHS' campus.

The Firebirds will tangle with Rocky Mount on October 13 on the road before a much-anticipated showdown with Northern Nash on October 20 at historic Firebird Stadium.

One week later, SN will host the Franklin-ton Red Rams.



NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN'S KANE WALKER

NCWU Picked 6th In The USA South

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- The USA South Athletic Conference's football coaches have released their 2023 preseason poll., and the North Carolina Wesleyan University Battling Bishops have been picked to finish in the sixth spot in the always-competitive league.

Head coaches do not vote for their own teams in the balloting. Huntingdon was placed atop the rankings thanks to receiving 61 total points and six of the possible nine first place votes.

The Hawks finished last season with a 7-0 Conference record, marking the second consecutive year without dropping a conference contest.

Huntingdon claimed its seventh league title in the last eight years.

Belhaven, which joined the USA South last season in the sport of football, was second in the poll grabbing 55 total points and the final three first place votes.

Maryville rounded out the top-three with 52 points while Brevard and Methodist shared fourth place with 40 points.

Since the first conference football preseason poll in 2003, the Huntingdon program, which joined the USA South in 2013, has been picked to capture the title six times, following through on that prediction five times, including last fall.

The team picked first in the preseason poll's



NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN'S JORDAN BARNES

history has grabbed the conference crown 11 out of 19 years.

Conversely, the team picked second has won the conference championship four times.

North Carolina Wesleyan boasts three conference crowns and a 74-54 overall record during the school's gridiron existence.

The Battling Bishops, coached by Jeff Filkovski, went 3-4 in the USA South Conference during the 2022 campaign.

Several key returnees are back this fall for North Carolina Wesleyan, including defensive standouts Charles Sias (linebacker) and RJ Carter

(defensive back). NCWU's offensive line is expected to be stout thanks to returners Desmond Barnes and Elijah Broache, while Tyree Byrd is back at the wide receiver position.

The Bishops will open their schedule on September 2 with a matchup against Randolph-Macon at NCWU's on-campus stadium.

2023 USA South Coaches Preseason Football Poll

1. Huntingdon* (6) 61
 2. Belhaven (3) 55
 3. Maryville 52
 - t-4. Brevard 40
 - t-4. Methodist 40
 6. N.C. Wesleyan 31
 7. LaGrange 17
 8. Southern Virginia 15
 9. Greensboro 13
- *Defending Conference Champion

BC stars nab league honors

From Staff Reports

WILSON - Three members of the Barton College Football Team were named to the 2023 All-Piedmont Division Preseason Team for the South Atlantic Conference.

Barton junior running back Jordan Terrell (Ramseu), junior offensive lineman Alex Buschow (Raleigh) and junior linebacker Shane Perry (Holly Springs) all garnered all-league preseason honors.

All three players earned All-SAC accolades last season.

Terrell ranked fourth in the nation in rushing average (148.4 ypg) and

fifth in NCAA Division II in rushing yards (1,632) to go along with 15 touchdowns while being named to the All-Super Region II Team for the second straight year last fall.

The talented Terrell, the school's all-time leading rusher (3,755 yards), was an honorable mention All-American by Don Hansen's in 2022 as well.

Buschow anchored an offensive line last year which averaged over 213 yards rushing per contest while Perry led the squad in tackles (98) in 2022 and has 214 takedowns and six forced fumbles in his collegiate career.



ROCKY MOUNT DEFENSIVE LINEMAN MICAHIS JONES

RMHS

continued from page 5

Jack McKellar, Micahis Jones, while the secondary will consist of Mitchell, Harrell, Anthony Williams and Norwood.

This is perhaps the most interesting statistic for Rocky Mount this fall -- the Gryphons have only eight seniors on their varsity roster. And with so many sophomores

making an impact this year, expect the RM program to be in good shape down the road.

But of course, expectation is always there for the Gryphons to be good now.

For that to happen, the younger players will have to step up immediately.

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August 25 August 31 September 8 September 15 September 22	SOUTH GRANVILLE at Fike SOUTHERN ALAMANCE at Nash Central ROANOKE RAPIDS	October 6 October 13 October 20 October 27	at Bunn at Rocky Mount NORTHERN NASH FRANKLINTON
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NASH CENTRAL 2023 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

AUGUST 25 SEPTEMBER 1 SEPTEMBER 8 SEPTEMBER 15 SEPTEMBER 22	at SW Edgecombe GOLDSBORO BEDDINGFIELD SOUTHERN NASH at Franklinton	SEPTEMBER 29 OCTOBER 6 OCTOBER 13 OCTOBER 27	ROCKY MOUNT at Nothern Nash BUNN AT Roanoke Rapids
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NORTH CAROLINA
TARHEELS

2023 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent
Saturday • September 2	South Carolina
Saturday • September 9	Appalachian State
Saturday • September 16	Minnesota
Saturday • September 23	at Pittsburgh
Saturday • October 7	Syracuse
Saturday • October 14	Miami
Saturday • October 21	Virginia
Saturday • October 28	at Georgia Tech
Saturday • November 4	Campbell
Saturday • November 11	Duke
Saturday • November 18	at Clemson
Saturday • November 25	at NC State



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Rocky Mount Academy
EAGLES

2023 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT
August 25	at Halifax Academy
August 31	Berean Baptist Academy
September 8	at Father Vincent Capodanno High
September 15	Arendell Parrott Academy
September 22*	St. David's School
September 29	Sallie B. Howard
October 6	at Liberty Christian
October 13	Cary Christian School
October 20	at Faith Christian School

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Rocky Mount Gryphon Football Schedule

Date	Opponent
August 31	HOLMES
September 8	at Northeastern
September 15	BUNN
September 29	at Nash Central
October 6	ROANOKE RAPIDS
October 13	SOUTHERN NASH
October 20	at Franklinton
October 27	at Northern Nash



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