

2025-26 NORTHERN NASH HS GIRLS BASKETBALL COACH BATTLE IS BACK!



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL LEGENDARY GIRLS HOOPS COACH GROVER BATTLE
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Battle returns to help guide young NNHS squad

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

WILSON -- A 52-40 road victory over the Fike Golden Demons gave the Northern Nash girls basketball team its first Big East Conference win of the season last Friday night, with the Lady Knights opening league play by ending a four-game losing streak.

"Our effort on the floor and our intensity were a little bit different," said long-time Northern Nash girls basketball head coach Grover Battle, who stepped back into his role leading the Lady Knights' program ahead of this season after a three-year intermission.

"We're a little behind but I can't be more pleased with the effort that everyone has given,"

See NN GIRLS, Page 2B



NORTHERN NASH VETERAN STANDOUT MALIYAH JOHNSON



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL BOYS SOCCER STANDOUT COREY ODOM

Bounceback Year For NN Fighting Knights were effective in the Big East Conference

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- The 2025 campaign proved to be a renaissance one for the Northern Nash High School boys soccer program as the Knights, after a brief hiatus, regained their usual status as one of the top clubs in the always-strong Big East Conference.

The Knights, under head coach Baltazar Rodriguez and assistant (and former playing standout) Parker Dickens, went 14-5-2 overall and 8-3-1 in the Big East, which was good enough for the second position behind powerhouse and state semifinalist CB Aycokk High School out of Wayne County.

See BE SOCCER, Page 2B



NORTHERN NASH'S
QUANTAY JAMES



NORTHERN NASH'S
TERRANCE SAUNDERS

Northern rallies to stop Fike

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

WILSON -- The Northern Nash High School boys basketball team opened its Big East Conference slate December 19, using a furious fourth-quarter comeback to topple Fike 70-60. The Fighting Knights entered the final frame trailing the Golden Demons by



See NNHS BOYS, Page 2B



NASH CENTRAL'S
AURELIEN FRAND

NC seniors were sharp

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- Nash Central featured one of its youngest-ever boys soccer teams during the 2025 campaign as the Bulldogs featured just two seniors -- Paxten Summerlin and Aurelien Frand.

Those two players showed skill and leadership, helping the Bulldogs build a

See NC SOCCER, Page 2B



NORTHERN NASH’S CHRISTIAN BARNES SINKS A LAYUP
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

NNHS BOYS

continued from page 1B

seven points, outscoring Fike 25-8 over the game’s final eight minutes of play en route to securing their eighth-straight victory to open the season.

“I thought our experience in playing in big games from last season showed in this game,” said 12th-year Northern Nash head coach Henry Drake. “We never let the game get out of reach.”

Northern was able to work back from that deficit in large part due to spectacular performances from senior Christian Barnes and freshman Quantay James, both of whom have been focal points of the team so far this season.

Barnes racked up a season-high 24 points while passing out a team-best three assists, while James kept a strong first-year campaign moving in a 19-point showing, finishing one rebound shy of a double-double with nine boards.

The duo additionally combined for an impressive nine steals on the defensive end of the court and accounted for all four of the team’s made three-pointers.

“Christian was the key in the fourth quarter,” remarked Drake of his veteran point guard.

“Over the summer Christian worked hard in the weight room and at his conditioning, he sees it is paying off for him in late game situations like on Friday night.”

Outside of Barnes and James, Jah’Marzea Williams additionally finished in double figures with 12, doing so on an efficient five-of-seven from the field. Williams recorded the first double-double of his career against the Golden Demons, snatching 10 rebounds on top of his 12 points.

Despite needing a serious fourth-period comeback to keep its win streak alive, Northern actually outscored Fike

in three of the game’s four quarters.

The Knights topped the Golden Demons by one point in the opening and penultimate frames, but went into halftime trailing 34-26 after allowing Fike to outscore them 20-11 in the second quarter.

“I was not happy with our practices all week,” said Drake of the team’s leadup to the conference opener, a trend that appeared to continue into the first three periods of last Friday’s contest.

But all-in-all, the Knights did enough to open league play with a victory for a fourth-straight season, and the momentum continued beyond their matchup against Fike.

Northern proceeded to improve its resumé less than 24 hours after its matchup with the Golden Demons by knocking off previously undefeated Riverside-Durham 53-46, jumping to 9-0 on the year.

Once again, just two days after that, the Knights were back in action at the Holiday Hoopfest event in Edgecombe County, taking home a Christmas Tournament title and improving to 11-0 after a 63-39 victory over North Edgecombe on December 22 followed by a 66-47 defeat of Tarboro a day later.

Northern is now in the midst of a 10-day break from action in observance of the Christmas and New Years holidays, but will return to the court for an exciting matchup on Saturday, January 3.

The Knights will travel to undefeated Kinston, one of the state’s most successful programs and an 11-time state champion, for a crucial nonconference tilt before revving league play back up on January 6. This weekend’s contest between the Knights and Vikings will be held at Kinston.

NC SOCCER

continued from page 1B

foundation for what is hoped to be a prosperous future.

Summerlin and Frand represent Nash Central on the All-Quad County Conference Team, with fellow Bulldog Jason Lagos-Zambrano earning a position on the Honorable Mention list.

Wake Prep, which went undefeated in league play en route to claiming the QCC Championship, saw Matthew Parker take the league’s Offensive Player of the Year, while WPA’s Gody Zayobi was the Coach of the Year after guiding the Youngsville school to a 15-3-1 overall work-sheet.

Roanoke Rapids, which claimed second place in the QCC, featured Edenilson Saravia as the Defensive Player of the Year.

The complete All-QCC Boys Soccer Team for the 2025 campaign is as follows:

2025 All-QCC Boys Soccer Team

- Jason Amadike, Wake Prep
- Shawn Amadike, Wake Prep
- Jackson Garrett, Wake Prep
- Carter Solak, Wake Prep
- Kaden Reese, Wake Prep
- Jack Gold, Wake Prep
- Shawn Morgan, Roanoke Rapids
- Esteven Cordon, Roanoke Rapids
- Noah Wiggins, Roanoke Rapids
- Rayan Kassem, Roanoke Rapids



(L TO R) NASH CENTRAL SOCCER STARS PAXTON SUMMERLIN, AURELIEN FRAND

- Abdul Alrahimi, Roanoke Rapids
- Joseph Rivera, Bunn
- Jayden Cruz, Bunn
- Samuel Coombs, Bunn
- Virgilio Roman, Bunn
- Julio Gasga, Bunn
- Emmanuel Bulson, Louisburg
- Justin Harrison, Louisburg
- Sutter Cheshire, Louisburg
- Diego Cortez, American Leadership Academy of Johnston County
- Josiah Cool, American Leadership Academy of Johnston County
- Samuel Guaza, American Leadership Academy of Johnston County
- Paxten Summerlin, Nash Central
- Aurelien Frand, Nash Central

- Gabriel Aguilar, American Leadership Academy of Johnston County
 - Jason Lagos-Zambrano, Nash Central
 - Abimael Ramirez, Louisburg
 - Johnathan Fabian, Bunn
 - Ahmed Alrahimi, Roanoke Rapids
 - Connor Langton, Wake Prep
- Top Honors**
- Offensive Player of the Year -- Matthew Parker, Wake Prep Academy
 - Defensive Player of the Year -- Edenilson Saravia, Roanoke Rapids High School
 - Coach of the Year -- Gody Zayobi, Wake Prep Academy

NN GIRLS

continued from page 1B

assessed the legendary Battle, whose team improved to 3-5 on the young season with the victory.

Northern used a 50-37 rebounding advantage to clip the Golden Demons, outscoring Fike in each of the game’s four periods.

The Lady Knights were led in large part by senior guard Maliyah Johnson, who bucketed a game-high 17 points while both Ramsey Harris and Zykira Cofield each added 10 points.

Cofield, the team’s only junior, additionally grabbed 11 rebounds, registering the junior for a double-double.

“Maliyah has made a real difference in being the floor general,” remarked Battle of his veteran point guard, while Harris “has provided the intensity” that have been a hallmark of his teams throughout his illustrious career.

That intensity showed up on defense against Fike, with the 40 points that Northern surrendered to the Golden Demons the second-fewest allowed by the Lady Knights this season.

“Our defensive intensity was the best I had seen it this year,” Battle stated. “I think we’re getting better every day.”

Arguably Battle and his staff’s biggest challenge so far this season has been surrounding the number of freshmen on the team, with first-years making up eight



MALIJAH JOHNSON BURIES A JUMPER

spots of the Lady Knights 15-person roster.

One of those freshmen is Trinadi Williams, who started against Fike last Friday. Williams finished with an impressive five points and 10 rebounds, but wasn’t the only first-year to make her way onto the stat sheet.

Nashona Alston added three points of her own in addition to one steal, earning some crucial playing time early in her green-and-gold career.

“This is the first time that they’ve seen varsity competition,” reminded Battle. “We’re getting them to gel with the seniors and that’s what we’re really working on.”

After observing a seven-day break for the Christmas holiday, the Lady Knights returned to action last Saturday, in round one of the four-team, two-game Bunn Holiday Tournament

hosted by Bunn High School.

Northern faced Vance County in the event’s opening round, and are now settled for its penultimate nonconference contest of the season after the calendar turns to 2026.

Battle and his Lady Knights will travel to Kinston, one of the state’s top programs, on Saturday, January 3, for a doubleheader with the two school’s boys teams before conference play picks back up on January 6.

Kinston entered the FCA Christmas Tournament that took place December 29-30 at 4-0, its smallest margin of victory thus far coming by 24 points over Jacksonville.

Tipoff between the Lady Knights and Lady Vikings is slated for 2:30 p.m.



SOUTHERN NASH’S VICTOR VARGAS CELEBRATES A GOAL DURING THE BOYS SOCCER STATE PLAYOFFS
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

BE SOCCER

continued from page 1B

Northern even played the Falcons to a pair of nail-biters, eventually falling by a 2-1 margin in each contest.

That’s a notable accomplishment considering the fact that Aycock didn’t lose a match the entire season until falling to eventual state champ Western Alamance in the Final Four.

Five Fighting Knights earned spots on the All-Big East Conference Team -- Ayden Batts-Wood, Ismael Martinez, Jayden Tucker, Caleb Walston and Corey Odom.

Gehovany Alvarez-Pacheco earned an honorable mention salute for the Knights.

Southern Nash, which encountered a rare rebuilding season, featured a trio of standouts on the prestigious list -- Victor Vargas, Mario Arredondo and Leo Diaz.

SN’s Jiovanny Macias made the honorable mention group.

NN’s Batts-Wood, a sophomore keeper, was tabbed as the Big East Defensive Player of the Year after allowing just 23 goals in 19 matches.

With Batts-Wood playing a key role, the Knights reached the second round of the state playoffs.

The complete All-Big East Conference Boys Soccer Team for the 2025 schedule is as follows:

2025 All-Big East Boys Soccer Team

- Drew Huff, CB Aycock
- Gabe Payne, CB Aycock
- Eli Waters, CB Aycock
- Brian King, CB Aycock
- Adrian Salazar, CB Aycock
- Gregory Smith, CB Aycock
- Ayden Batts-Wood, Northern Nash

- Ismael Martinez, Northern Nash
 - Jayden Tucker, Northern Nash
 - Caleb Walston, Northern Nash
 - Corey Odom, Northern Nash
 - Micah Foula, Wilson Fike
 - Christoper Hill, Wilson Fike
 - Enrique Ramirez, Wilson Fike
 - Junior Moran, Wilson Fike
 - Mark Dixon, Wilson Hunt
 - Santiago Herrera, Wilson Hunt
 - Zane Eaton, Wilson Hunt
 - Gerardo Sauno, Southern Wayne
 - Skervenson Aphael, Southern Wayne
 - Jesus Giron Castillo, Southern Wayne
 - Angel Ramirez Cruz, Southern Wayne
 - Victor Vargas, Southern Nash
 - Mario Arredondo, Southern Nash
 - Leo Diaz, Southern Nash
 - Guliany Fernandez-Pineda, Rocky Mount
 - Nathaniel Combs, Rocky Mount
- Honorable Mention**
- Gabe Jazi, CB Aycock
 - Gehovany Alvarez-Pacheco, Northern Nash
 - Victor Vasquez, Wilson Fike
 - Will Doll, Wilson Hunt
 - Angel Ramirez Cruz, Southern Wayne
 - Jiovanny Macias, Southern Nash
 - Benjamin Parks, Rocky Mount High School
- Top Honors**
- Offensive Player of the Year -- Drew Huff, CB Aycock
 - Defensive Player of the Year -- Ayden Batts-Wood, Northern Nash
 - Conference Champion Coach of the Year -- Rich Huff, CB Aycock