

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026

2025-26 NASH COUNTY GIRLS BASKETBALL FINAL STRETCH



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR GREAT JAKAYLA GAY
(Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Hoops squads return after long break



NCHS' A'DIA CASH

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

NASH COUNTY -- Area girls basketball teams have two weeks remaining in the regular season and in their playoff push, with each of the county's four teams maintaining reason for optimism late in the year.

Leading the way of course



NASH CENTRAL COACH TERRI CASH
INSTRUCTS CHRISTIANA LYNCH

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NORTH CAROLINA STATE LEGENDARY COACH ELLIOTT AVENT
(Photos Courtesy NCSU Sports Information Department)



SOUTHERN NASH'S ZAH-MIR ASHFORD SIGNS WITH ELIZABETH CITY STATE



SOUTHERN NASH'S LUKE FAULKNER SIGNS WITH NORTH GREENVILLE

SPECIAL SIGNEES SN stars finalize college plans

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- Rarely does a College Football National Signing Day go by without plenty of representation from the Southern Nash Firebirds -- and this year's version proved to be no different.

Earlier this week, a pair of long-time Southern-Nash standouts finalized their intentions to compete at the collegiate level.



Defensive lineman Zah-Mir Ashford inked a deal to join the program at nearby Elizabeth City State University, while fullback/linebacker Luke Faulkner will cross state lines to attend North Greenville University in South Carolina.

Ashford was a tower of power along the defensive front while also seeing duty as a blocker on

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Avent looks for another strong season at NCSU

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RALEIGH -- It was an eventful offseason for Northern Nash High graduate and longtime NC State Baseball coach Elliott Avent, a skipper who's headed into his 30th spring managing the Wolfpack program this month.

After leading NC State to the Auburn Regional and its 23rd NCAA Tournament appearance under his watch last year, Avent's offseason included presiding over a mirage of roster changes, ballpark renovations, and even receiving the prestigious Order of the Long Leaf Pine courtesy of Gov. Josh Stein.

Avent was inducted



NASH COUNTY'S OWN ELLIOTT AVENT

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NASH CENTRAL'S A'DIA CASH INDUCES A HELD BALL DURING TUESDAY'S VICTORY OVER THE BUNN LADYCATS

HOOPS

is Rocky Mount in the 5A/6A Big East and Nash Central in the 2A/3A/4A Quad County Conference, both having held the top spot in the conference standings of their respective leagues all year.

The Lady Gryphons improved to a spotless 9-0 in Big East play on Tuesday night with a victory over Hunt, while Nash Central simultaneously remained perfect in its Quad County slate by knocking off Bunn, the league's second place squad, 55-23.

The pair of victories improved Rocky Mount to 16-2 overall, whereas the Lady Bulldogs jumped to a season-long mark of 14-5.

The Lady Gryphons swept the two-game set between the county rivals this season, but both teams look to be serious threats in the playoffs.

Led by longtime head coach Terri Cash, this year's Central squad has been fueled in large part by her freshman daughter, A'dia Cash.

Cash entered this week averaging more than 17 points per game, that number highlighted by a career-best 30 points last week in a 75-35 thumping of Roanoke Rapids.

Cash has been paired on the court with senior JaKayla Gay and fellow first-year Harmony Dupree, both of which are matching Cash by averaging double figures in scoring. Not far behind them is fourth-year Jayden Baggett, entering Tuesday's contest against Bunn at 9.6 points per game.

Rocky Mount is the only Nash County opponent that's been able to stop the Lady Bulldogs thus far, in large part due to the play of senior Kira Jones.

A paint-touch guard, Jones entered the week leading the team in points per game (18.4), field goal percentage (57%), rebounds per game (5.5) and steals per game (5.5), emerging as one of the top players in eastern North Carolina.

Widely considered the favorite to win the league, next week's



NASH CENTRAL'S A'DIA CASH SKIES FOR A LAYUP AT THE DAWG POUND

matchup against 15-4 C.B. Aycock, whose only league loss is to the Lady Gryphons, looms large in the conference race.

A bit further down in the standings sit Northern Nash and Southern Nash, who squared off on Tuesday night.

The Lady Knights pulled an eyebrow-raising upset on their home floor, dropping the Ladybirds 42-36 to improve to 6-13 on the year.

Led by a game-high 19 points from Maliyah Johnson, Northern erased a five-point halftime deficit and a three-point Southern Nash edge to start the final period, limiting the Ladybirds to just four points in the final frame.

The loss saw Southern fall to 12-9 overall, still firmly in the hunt for the postseason.

With conference tournaments now canceled in both leagues due to

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NORTH CAROLINA STATE COACHING LEGEND ELLIOTT AVENT

AVENT

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into the Order of the Long Leaf Pine Society alongside five other prominent sports stars in North Carolina, including for Wolfpack wide receiver and Super Bowl champion Torry Holt, longtime North Carolina women's lacrosse coach Jenny Levy, former Tar Heel women's soccer player and three-time Olympic gold medalist Heather O'Reilly, LeVelle Moton -- the all-time winningest men's basketball coach at North Carolina Central -- and Carolina Hurricanes team captain Jordan Staal.

Avent was inducted on Oct. 3, 2025, officially becoming a member of the highest honorary society in North Carolina.

This is the most recent of Avent's long list of accomplishments in his career, one that also includes a spot in the New Mexico State Athletics Hall of Fame, where he spent eight seasons as the head coach of the Aggie program before coming to NC State.

Closer to his office and post in the dugout, construction on NC State's new indoor practice facility is nearing its end as the season draws closer.

Announced in January of 2022, the Wolfpack have been working towards much-needed improvements in its team performance spaces, with an upgraded locker room, team lounge, weight room, batting facility and pitching lab each part of the new additions to Doak Field at Dail Park.

Recent years have resulted in the ballpark seeing enhancements to its playing surface in addition to new LED stadium lights, an upgraded scoreboard and sound system as well as bullpen relocations.

Future upgrades are set to include expanded seating options, concession upgrades, a new shaded area and premium seating spaces.

All this, of course, is secondary to what takes place on the field for the tradition-rich Wolfpack.

Avent and NC State followed up the program's fourth College World Series appearance in 2024 with a 35-21 mark a season ago, a year headlined by sweeping then second-ranked Clemson inside the confines of Doak Field as well as taking a best-of-three series against Louisville, who was the Atlantic Coast Conference's lone representative at the 2025 College World Series in Omaha, Neb.

The Wolfpack will look to build on last year's campaign in Avent's 30th

season, with NC State ranked as highly as 17th in preseason top 25 polls.

The Pack is returning a healthy chunk of production from last year's roster, including star pitchers Jacob Dudan, Ryan Marohn and Anderson Nance. Junior right-hander Heath Andrews will likely be a fixture of NC State's rotation, having made 14 starts last season and wrapping the year with 64-plus innings pitched.

Cooper Consiglio is set for a potential bounceback year on the bump, with transfer additions Ryder Garino and Collins Black likely to carry weight as well for the Wolfpack.

Offensively, NC State brings back first baseman Chris McHugh from last year's squad, a 6'3 junior who spent his freshman campaign at VCU, where Avent earned his degree from.

McHugh hit for a team-leading average of .365 in 2025, with second baseman Luke Nixon and outfielders Ty Head and Brayden Fraasman projected to be everyday starters as returners as well.

The Wolfpack made some key additions to their lineup through the transfer portal as well, most notably Dalton Bargo, a power bat out of Tennessee who smashed 14 home runs for the Volunteers last season.

McIkey Ryan out of LSU and Sherman Johnston of McLennan Community College will likely see ample playing time on the left side of the infield as transfers also, providing NC State a strong number of options at different positions across the field.

It all gets started this week for the Wolfpack, with NC State headed to Puerto Rico to kick off its season at the Puerto Rico Challenge.

Avent's squad will face Washington to open the year this Friday, followed by a Valentine's Day date with Indiana State and a Feb. 15 contest against Seton Hall.

The Pack opens its home slate on Wednesday, Feb. 18 against Winthrop while the team's ACC schedule begins on March 13 at home against Boston College.

Area fans will especially take interest in some of NC State's rivalry series, ones that take place April 10-12 at home against Duke, April 17-19 at Wake Forest, May 14-16 against North Carolina, while facing East Carolina in a pair of nonconference midweek matchups on April 14 & 28.

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the offensive side of the ball.

A two-year starter, Ashford, who is 6-foot-3 and 350 pounds, finished with 40 career tackles, 10 of which went for a loss. He also delivered a trio of quarterback hurries.

"(Ashford) is a big kid who can really move," said SNHS Defensive Coordinator Robbie Kennedy. "He is very athletic, and he had the ability to play both sides of the ball for us when needed. He is a great athlete and overall a really good player."

The same could be said for Faulkner, a four-year starter who played in 46 career games for the Firebirds.

During that span, Faulkner accumulated 1,498 rushing yards to go with 23 touchdowns on offense.

Faulkner was also effective on defense as a linebacker, racking up a massive 347 total tackles along with

three fumble recoveries, three interceptions, 55 tackles for loss, 17 hurries and nine sacks.

Faulkner's prolific career was punctuated when he competed in the East-West All-Star Game in December in Greensboro.

And one more thing -- Faulkner is also a baseball standout who is getting ready to lead the Firebirds this spring.

"(Faulkner) is a hardworker was able to contribute in several different areas for our team," Kennedy said. "He was our team captain and defensive leader -- a guy all of our kids looked up to. He was just a solid football player who led by example."

With Ashford and Faulkner serving as starters the past two years, Southern Nash went 16-8 during that span and qualified for the state playoffs in each campaign.

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