

2025-26 NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL ON THEIR WAY TO WINSTON



NNHS REGIONAL HARDWARE COLLECTORS (L TO R) JAMIERE HARRIS, HENRY DRAKE, CHRIS SILVER AND TRESTON BATTLE (Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Northern Nash to play for state basketball championship

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

GREENVILLE -- A feeling in the Northern Nash community that hadn't shown itself since 1968 arose last Wednesday, one that in previous years has simultaneously felt both inches and miles away.

For the first time in 58 seasons, the Fighting Knight boys basketball team is headed to the State Championship Game, set for the Class 6-A Finals today at Wake Forest University.

For NN, the upcoming trip to Winston-Salem comes after emerging the victor in a 50-39 semifinal rockfight against Fayetteville's E.E. Smith High School, using a fierce defensive effort to land a spot in the title game.

That contest was played at East Carolina University's Minges Coliseum.



CHRISTIAN BARNES SCORES ON A BREAKAWAY LAYUP FOR THE KNIGHTS VERSUS EE SMITH



NORTHERN NASH COACH HENRY DRAKE MAKES HIS POINT CLEAR



NORTHERN'S JAH'MARZEA WILLIAMS WORKS HIS WAY THROUGH A CROWD FOR TWO POINTS



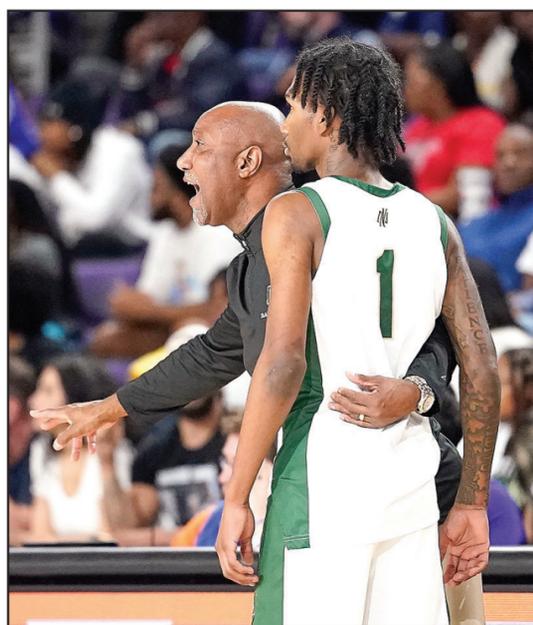


NORTHERN NASH'S JAMIERE HARRIS SPEEDS UPCOURT

NNHS to take on Kings Mountain for state title



JAMIERE HARRIS CANS A JUMPER



COACH HENRY DRAKE HAS HIS ALMA MATER IN THE STATE FINALS

Knights set for crown showdown

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RED OAK -- There's only one left. No matter what, it's just this one. One game separates the 2025-26 Northern Nash boys basketball squad from immortality. A team that didn't even win the Big East Conference championship, something that's become almost automatic for the program in recent years, is now just 32 minutes away from claiming the school's first boys basketball state championship in 58 years. After withstanding a 50-39 defensive slugfest against E.E. Smith in the Eastern Regional Final last Wednesday, the Knights are now primed for a state championship bout with 12th-seeded Kings Mountain today at 7:30 p.m. at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem.



The Mountaineers have made quite the Cinderella run en route to the Class 6-A Final, having won a staggering five games in nine days against the likes of St. Stephens, Freedom, T.C. Roberson, top-seeded Ben L. Smith and most recently Charlotte Catholic. Now 16-12 overall, Kings Mountain managed to enter the playoffs with a sub-.500 record, having now ripped off five victories in a row with a state championship berth secured. As for No. 1 Northern, the Fighting Knights defeated Southern Alamance, West Johnston, Wallter Williams and E.E. Smith advanced to the state title game, perceived as the favorite in the East throughout the playoffs and most of the regular season. Throughout the playoffs, the Knights' bus has been driven in large part by senior guard Christian Barnes, whose three-point shooting has begun clicking at the right time of year. Barnes has now finished in double figures in seven of the team's last eight outings, including in all four of its playoff games so far. This of course was headlined by a team-best 27 against Walter Williams to advance to the Eastern Final, doing so one game after bucketing a season-high six-three pointers in the third round against West Johnston. "We've been waiting on that," said Northern Nash head coach Henry Drake after Barnes' 22-point third-

round explosion, understanding that it was likely the team would go as far as Barnes could help take them. Another key contributor for the Knights has been senior Jah'Marzea Williams, a football star as well who like Barnes, has finished with 12 or more points in each of the team's four playoff games. Williams scored six of Northern's final eight points down the stretch in the semifinal game, throwing down an emphatic breakaway dunk that got the crowd on its feet late in the game as the team's fate seemed sealed at that point. JaMiere Harris, Quantay James, Kingston Little and Chris Silver round out the remaining key contributors for the Knights are expected to see action in the title game, with Damonyah Odom and Terrance Saunders Jr. each seeing their roles grow in the postseason as well. As for the West Region Mountaineers, juniors Caleb Nixon, Ethan Daniel and sophomore Xavier Hutchens have led the way for Kings Mountain throughout the season. Nixon averages a team-best 20 points per game, while Daniel enters the title game having accumulated 16.1 points per outing, followed by Hutchens' 10.9. It was sophomore post player Micahiah Daniel who largely pushed head coach Andrew Fann's squad to this point, though. Traditionally the team's leading rebounder, Daniel was a spotless 10-of-10 from the field in the Mountaineers' semifinal game, helping engineer an upset of Charlotte Catholic by bucketing a team-high 22 points. Quite the change of pace from their last opponent, Kings Mountain averages over 70 points per game as a team, nearly 13 points more than E.E. Smith - who relies on its defense more than scoring. While Northern has made deep playoff runs in the past, such as 2017, 2019 and 2023, it's never reached this point, at least under Henry Drake. The longtime Knights head coach has now guided the program to somewhere it hasn't been since 1968 after just knocking down a 56-year old wall, reaching the Final Four. Drake credited Northern's tough schedule, testing the team throughout conference play.

KNIGHTS

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NN'S TERRANCE SAUNDERS

Only three Golden Bulls were able to score on the Knights' suffocating defense, with Northern turning up the pressure and limiting E.E. Smith to single digits in both the second and fourth periods. The seven points surrendered by the Fighting Knights in the final frame were few enough that Northern was able to retake the lead after falling behind early in the fourth quarter, then closing on an 8-0 run that took a game largely played within one possession and turned it into a double-digit win. The top-seeded Knights entered the contest's final eight minutes leading by a slim 33-32 margin, an advantage that soon flipped in E.E. Smith's favor after Golden Bull sophomore Nick Smith swished the game's first three-pointer, giving his squad a brief two-point edge. From that point on, Northern outscored the Golden Bulls 17-5, quickly reextending its lead to five points at 40-35 following a Christian Barnes fadeaway and back-to-back baskets from Jamiere Harris, including the Knights first and only basket from beyond-the-arc. "Our defensive presence was the key in the fourth quarter," said Northern Nash head coach Henry Drake of his squad's tenacity and aggressiveness late in the contest. "We didn't get tired and it looked like they got a little fatigued." Six of the eight unanswered points registered by the Knights in the final period were scored by Jah'Marzea Williams, perhaps the team's most consistent player during the 2025-26 season. Williams led the way for Northern with 14 points against the Golden Bulls, and was joined in double figures by Barnes who wrapped the evening with 12. Barnes also added nine rebounds while freshman phenom Quantay James



NNHS' DAMONYAH ODOM SCORES IN THE PAINT IN THE REGIONAL FINALS

added a game-high 11, a strong defensive showing that was aided by seven blocks from seven-footer Chris Silver. With one game left on the schedule, a playoff run that has consisted of wins over Southern Alamance, West Johnston, Walter Williams and most recently E.E. Smith has catapulted the Knights record to 24-3, but it wasn't a season without adversity. Northern dropped frustrating contests, each coming in a different way, to Wilson Hunt, C.B. Aycock and archrival Rocky Mount in the regular season, but belief and support from those in and around the program never wavered. In a year that was supposed to be a rebuild, a year that started with one of the Class of 2027's top players nationally transferring out of state, a year that resulted in high-potential returner Kamren Freeman being sidelined due to injury, the Knights finally reached a goal that the program has come so close to so frequently in recent years. Perhaps with memories of elite right runs that were just that and only that, Drake smiled from ear-to-ear and began to get emotional in the game's waning seconds, once the result was inevitable. Not long after that, he ran and celebrated with the crowd, the school's students and many of its fans in the bleachers at East Carolina's Minges Coliseum, all of whom witnessed Northern end a drought older than most of those in the building that day. "It means the world to me and the world to these guys, it means the world to our community — the Red Oak community and the people back home," remarked Drake during his postgame address at Minges Coliseum. "They have supported us for a long time, since I've been at Northern as the head coach. I couldn't be more proud to be the Northern Nash boys' basketball coach. "This team fought and fought and fought and fought, even when things didn't go our way early and late in the game. "They stayed tough and stayed disciplined and somehow, we were able to get the job done." One job remains unfinished for the Fighting Knights, though, who hope that a trip to the state final isn't the only 58-year streak being broken in 2026. Today's finale will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Lawrence Joel Veteran Memorial Coliseum in Winston-Salem.

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