

2025-26 NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

NIGHT OF THE KNIGHTS!



2025-26 NORTHERN NASH FIGHTING KNIGHTS -- CLASS 6-A STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPS!

Fighting Knights bring home state basketball crown!



JAMIERE HARRIS' GAME WINNER

From Staff Reports

WINSTON-SALEM -- A split-second decision can lead to a lifetime of memories.

And, in the process, erase a 58-year hex.

Just like that.

Such was the case last Thursday for the Northern Nash Fighting Knights in the Class 6-A Boys Basketball

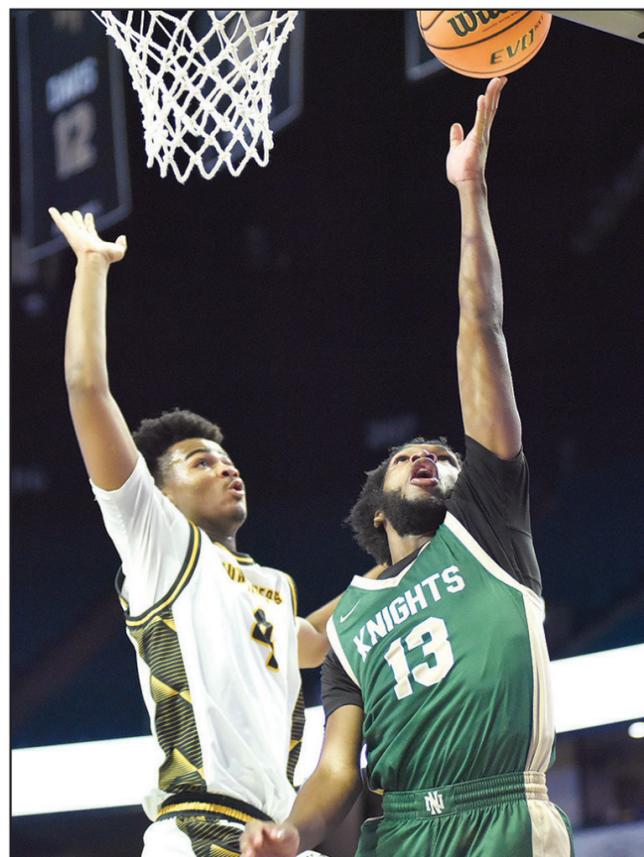
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THE FIGHTING KNIGHTS CELEBRATE THEIR STATE HOOPS CHAMPIONSHIP



CHRISTIAN BARNES WAS SELECTED AS THE TOURNAMENT MVP



NORTHERN NASH'S DAMONYAH ODOM MAKES A STRONG MOVE IN THE PAINT

PHOTOS BY CARL COPELAND, MERYN JOHNSON AND GEOFF NEVILLE

MORE NNHS HIGHLIGHTS



NN'S JAH'MARZEA WILLIAMS SCORES IN THE PAINT



CHRISTIAN BARNES FLOATS FOR TWO MORE POINTS

What A Season!

Knights defied the odds this winter

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

WINSTON-SALEM - As stories are told for years to come and when the book is one day written about Northern Nash boys basketball, March 12, 2026, will perhaps be the most important date of it all.

A night 58 years in the making, the Knights won their first state championship in boys hoops since 1968 and its first in any sport since 1998 last Thursday, putting a dream-filled bow on an immaculate decade on the hardwood.

Northern's program-defining 61-60 overtime victory over Kings Mountain was its 215th win over the past 10 years, holding a staggering 215-46 record since the 2016-17 campaign -- a special year that turned the tides for the Knights and happened to be this sentimental sports-writer's freshman year on the school's campus.

That season was the first truly great team directed by now 12th-year head coach Henry Drake, a squad that won his first Big East Conference Championship and made a run to the fourth round of the playoffs, finishing the year at 25-4 overall.

Leading the way for that roster was Darius Spragley, who now sits on Northern's bench as an assistant coach. Four of the team's five coaches are Northern Nash graduates, including Drake ('91), Spragley ('17), Moe Deloach ('05) and Mitchell Wells ('11), while Ashley Davis, who attended SouthWest Edgecombe, has been



NN'S QUANTAY JAMES FOR 2

assisting the program for 16 seasons.

That list of names and their continued involvement with the program speaks to the culture that's been built in the Knights' locker room and community in recent years, one that was fully on display Thursday night.

Despite the 6A title bout falling on a weeknight and the venue set nearly three hours away from the school's campus, droves of green and gold made the trip to Wake Forest University's Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum hoping to witness arguably the biggest athletic victory in Northern Nash history.

While the Knights trailed throughout the majority of the contest, the late-game heroics of Christian Barnes, the game's Most Valuable Player, paired with back-

to-back overtime buckets by Jamiere Harris gave so many people in the Northern Nash community what they came to see, and what so many had been waiting such a long time for.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the story-book ending is that this team, maybe more than any of the Knights' recent squads, was far from the one that was expected to finally break down the wall.

The offseason leading into tipoff was of course dominated by headlines of Class of 2027 star CJ Rosser, one of the best players in the nation, transferring out and opting to attend Southeastern Prep in Florida. Once the roster was constructed, an injury to 6'5 forward Kamren Freeman made matters even more difficult.

Despite that pair of unexpected absences, Northern raced its way to 14-straight victories to begin the year, with only two of those wins coming by fewer than ten points.

The Knights swept rival Nash Central and picked up wins away from their home gym against quality opponents such as Riverside-Durham, who reached the third round of the Class-7A Playoffs, as well as longtime power Kinston, who claimed the Class 3-A State Championship just two days after Northern was crowned.

Adversity trickled in once Big East play started, as Hunt issued the Knights their first loss of the season on Jan. 14.

Not long after that, Northern lost a stunner at C.B. Aycock then blew a 20-point lead against

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NORTHERN NASH COACH HENRY DRAKE ENCOURAGES HIS CLUB AT THE STATE FINALS



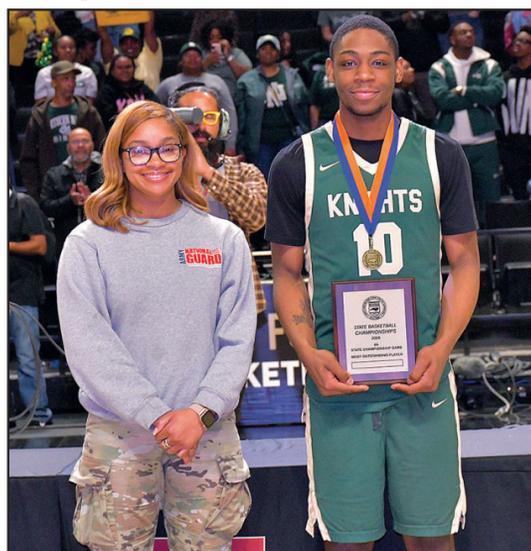
NORTHERN NASH'S TRESTON BATTLE ACCEPTS THE NCHSAA SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD



LET THE CHAMPIONSHIP CELEBRATION BEGIN!



NN'S CHRISTIAN BARNES GAME MVP



NNHS' JAH'MARZEA WILLIAMS MOST OUTSTANDING PLAYER



NN'S JAMIERE HARRIS WAS NOT TO BE DENIED

CHAMPS

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State Championship Game at Wake Forest University's Lawrence Joel Coliseum.

Let's head straight to the juicy part.

After a back-and-forth game -- so tight it went to overtime -- Kings Mountain made one of two free throws to tie the Knights with 36 seconds remaining.

After the Knights claimed the rebound courtesy of freshman Quantay James, NN 12-year coach Henry Drake had a decision to make.

Call a timeout? Run a set play? Trust his guys to do the right thing? Milk the clock for a last shot?

All of those scenarios surely ran through Drake's mind during those tense moments.

But before anyone else could act, Jamiere Harris acted on guile and instinct, and that was that.

Dribbling about 35 feet away from the basket near the top left key, Harris saw Kings Mountain's defense overloaded to the right.

At that instant, Harris saw that, if he got past his defender, he would have a clear path to the basket.

Harris did exactly that and was able to beat KM's weakside defense to the basket -- thanks in part to an inadvertent-but-effective pick from teammate Jah'Marzea Williams.

Twisting his body slightly to protect the ball, Harris laid it in to

give Northern Nash the lead for good.

After a timeout, the Mountaineers tried to set up for a tying or winning shot, but Northern's greatest season -long attribute -- its tenacious defense -- would come up with a steal from Damonyah Odom.

Speeding downcourt, Odom then dished to a streaking Williams on the right side, and his untested layup would seal the electrifying championship for the Fighting Knights.

A buzzer-beating trey from the Mountaineers proved to be inconsequential, and soon the Knights -- and pretty much everyone in Red Oak -- was celebrating their 61-60 decision.

After a string of near-misses, Northern Nash was finally able to claim its first boys hoops title since 1968, though the girls had also earned a crown in 1998.

The journey to the state championship was a memorable one -- and it was one with a foundation on the defensive side of the ball.

Even Drake would admit that this wasn't the most offensively gifted club he has ever coached, especially after All-American CJ Rosser transferred to a prep school in Florida over the summer.

No, this was a squad that needed to win with its defense. Some high-school kids would scoff at that proposition, but not this group.

Instead, they embraced the challenge. Night after night.

And that would include the finals as the Knights forced 13 turnovers and blocked 14 shots -- nine of which came from senior lane-clogger Chris Silver.

And even if Silver didn't block a shot in the paint, chances are he changed the trajectory toward a sure-fire miss.

As has been their case the entire winter, Northern Nash mustered just enough offense to come out on top.

When it mattered the most, NN's seniors took charge on offense, led by Tournament MVP Christian Barnes with 14 markers.

Williams, the Game MVP, collected 11 points, while Silver was spectacular on both ends with nine points to go with his blocked-shot numbers.

Harris delivered seven points, none bigger than his Basket-Heard-Round-Red Oak that will undoubtedly never be forgotten.

Northern Nash would finish at 25-3 overall. Ironically, the Fighting Knights didn't even win the Big East Conference crown, thanks in part to a few mid-season blips in the tough league.

But the Fighting Knights, fueled by their desire, defensive tenacity and clutch work on offense, would win the championship that mattered most -- and that will never be forgotten in Red Oak.

SEASON

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archrival Rocky Mount, a game that could have seriously sunk the team's season. From that point on, the Knights closed the year by winning seven games in a row, rounding out the regular season by blitzing Southern Wayne and then evened the season series against Hunt.

The playoff run included wins over Southern Alamance, West Johnston and Williams before taking on E.E. Smith in the school's first Regional Final appearance since 1970, already composing a special season prior to claiming the state's top honor.

It was truly a dream realized for the Northern Nash program, having compiled so many great teams that came so, so close to a Final Four or State Championship berth but were unable reach the mountaintop.

Of course there was the aforementioned 2017 squad, whose year came to an end in the fourth round, which was soon followed two years later by the 2019 group.

The 2019 season was highlighted by 27-straight victories engineered by an impressive group of seniors that featured Joseph Cherry-Blue, Sam Page, Darquez Flowers and Davontae "Crank" Wiggins.

All players who learned under greats from previous years such as Spragley, Raymond "Goody" Bullock and Undray Cherry, each of these local legends contributed to a spotless 30-0 record in conference play that spanned over three seasons.

2019 ended with a fourth-round heartbreaker at the hands of Eastern Alamance, and was initially thought to be a change in the program's trajectory

-- which was wrong.

The Knights once again reached the state quarterfinal in 2023, this time with names such as Jamal Townsend, Randall King, Demondre Haymond and Izeal Mallory leading the way. But ironically, it was E.E. Smith who sent Northern home in the fourth round, the same team Northern beat to advance to the state championship this year, and the same school they beat during the iconic 2002 football season when the school made its first appearance in a football title game.

That is in part what made Thursday night so special.

It wasn't a season's worth of build up, it was a decade's worth. Truthfully, it was over 50 year's worth.

I couldn't help but think about someone like Bobby Dunn, who coached the Northern boys program for years and recently passed away in December, even holding a celebration of life in the gymnasium at the school.

What would he have thought? How happy would he have been? What would Bill Ennis, who passed away in 2002 and led the school to its first state title in 1968 have thought?

Admittedly, I've enjoyed wandering through those scenarios over the past few days.

There's a lot that is special about Nash County, and basketball is one of those things. Northern Nash is one of those things.

It will likely be a long, long time before something tops what happened on Thursday evening in Winston-Salem for Northern Nash, but here's to hoping that it's a tad sooner than 58 years from now.



CENTRAL'S WESLEY LYNCH WATCHES ONE GO BY (Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Bulldogs claim a pair versus Northern Nash

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- With area basketball squads having wrapped up their 2025-26 campaigns as recently as last Thursday, baseball season has now taken center stage in Nash County.

The early episodes of the season have been headlined by Nash's Central fast start to the year, one that includes sweeping across-the-bridge rival Northern Nash in a two-game set.

The Bulldogs and Knights squared off in back-to-back games taking place on March 3 and March 6, Central blanking Northern 10-0 in the first outing followed by a come-from-behind 15-12 victory in the second leg of the series.

Head coach Willie Langley's Bulldog club scored one in the first, six in the fourth and three in the fifth during the first meeting between the two rivals, enough for a five-inning, run-rule victory.

Sophomore hurler Caleb Cox limited the Knights' lineup to just four hits while striking out 11 batters, tossing a gem in his second appearance of the season.

Cox helped himself out in the batter's box, contributing two hits while scoring three of Central's runs. Cox was matched by juniors Aiden Parks and Peyton Harris who contributed two hits apiece as well, as Harris registered the game's only extra-base hit and plated a game-high three RBI.

The second game of the Battle of the Bridge's diamond edition was much more dramatic, as Northern jumped out to an early 9-3 advantage just three innings in.

After breaking the ice in the second frame, Northern surrendered three runs to the Central lineup in the visitor's side of the third inning, falling behind 3-1.



CALEB COX BRINGS THE HEAT

Not long after that, the Knights offense exploded into its most productive half-inning of the young season, posting eight runs without recording an extra-base hit and making the Bulldogs pay for a flurry of mistakes.

Central finished the final game of the two-game series with six errors, but thanks to a 12-hit night offensively, the Bulldog bats were able to overcome the team's defensive woes.

After trailing early, Central retook the lead after totaling seven runs in the top half of the fifth, jumping ahead 10-9. The Knights quickly erased that lead by scoring once in the home half of the fifth and then again in the sixth, heading into the final inning with an 11-10 edge, looking to secure their first victory of the season and a crucial rivalry win.

That advantage didn't last, though, as one more offensive explosion from the Bulldogs in the batter's box brought five more runs home, enough to build an insurmountable four-run advantage needed just three outs to secure a season sweep of Northern.

While Joey Keefe's Knights were able to get one runner home in the final frame, it was too little, too late, as the 12 hits surrendered and three errors contributed were too much to overcome.

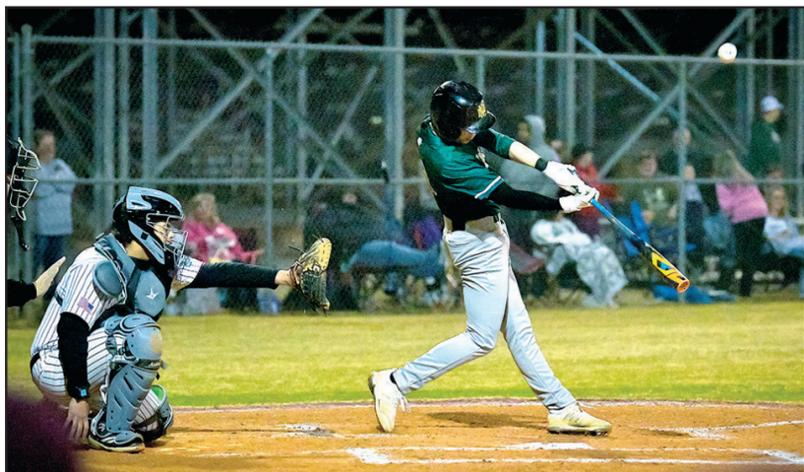
After starting the year 0-3, Northern finally secured its first victory on Friday, a 6-3 win over Big East foe and usual baseball power Fike, while Nash Central entered this week at 3-3 overall, their additional win coming in commanding fashion over Rocky Mount.

The Bulldogs squared off against Quad County Conference opponent Louisburg on Wednesday night in their first league matchup, making the return trip to the Warriors' sandlot on Thursday.

Central will then face Fike in Wilson on Friday, completing a demanding three games in three days stretch.

As for Northern, the Fighting Knights faced a pair of Wayne County league counterparts this week, hosting C.B. Aycock on Tuesday prior to hitting the road for Southern Wayne on Thursday night.

Thursday's first pitch at Southern Wayne is slated for 6 p.m.



NHHS' ANDREW TAYLOR MAKES SOLID CONTACT