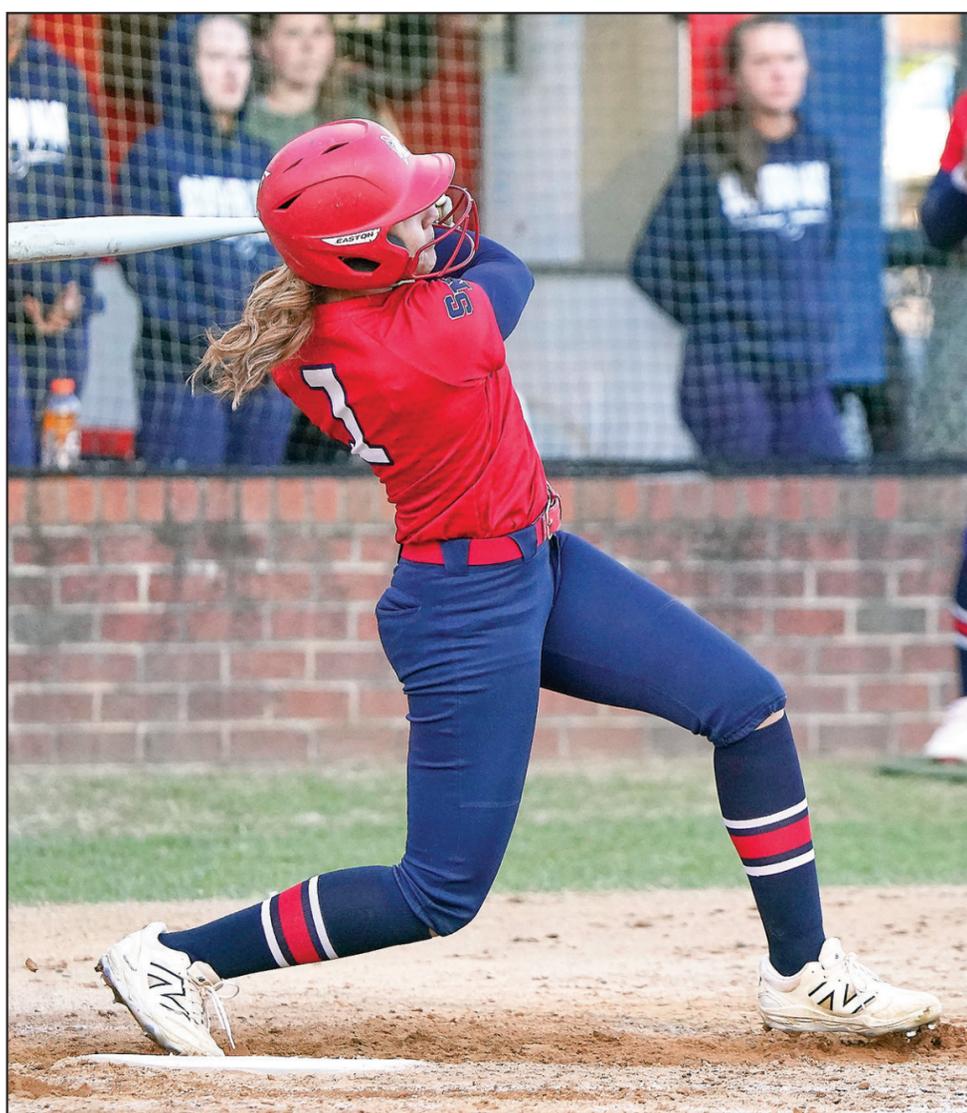


# 2026 SOUTHERN NASH HS SOFTBALL STILL ON A ROLL



SOUTHERN NASH JUNIOR STAR ALIYAH CROLL SENDS ONE DEEP  
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

## Heroics continue for Southern Nash

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- Reloading after mass graduation is the true test of a high school dynasty -- regardless of sport.

And the Southern Nash softball program has accomplished that lofty goal time and time again during Scott Collie's glorious tenure as the Ladybirds' head coach. Certainly, the 2026 campaign was destined to be a test for the Ladybirds after they graduated one of the best senior classes the school has ever produced -- led by all-everything pitcher Anna Dickinson, now at USC-Upstate.

But anyone expecting a downtick in the program must surely be disappointed as Southern Nash is at it again, rolling off 10 straight victories to begin the season by an unbelievable combined score of



NEWS FLASH -- SCOTT COLLIE IS A PRETTY GOOD SOFTBALL COACH

See SOFTBALL, Page 2B



SOUTHERN NASH'S TAJ MARTIN SIGNS WITH BREVARD COLLEGE

## Birds Ink College Deals

Odom, Martin were defensive stars for SNHS

By CHANCE PUCKETT  
Correspondent

STANHOPE -- A pair of Southern Nash High Football standouts pledged their commitments to continue their athletic and academic careers recently, with Zion Odom electing to attend Winston-Salem State while Taj Martin will spend his next four years at Brevard College.

Two key pieces of the Firebird defense in recent years, both Odom and Martin did more than enough to garner attention from college coaches.

Only behind fellow senior and North Greenville University linebacker commit Luke Faulkner, Odom and Martin ranked second

See FOOTBALL, Page 2B



SOUTHERN NASH FRESHMAN BROOKLYN RICE DISPLAYS HER DRIBBLING SKILLS  
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

## STARTING ANEW

Young Ladybirds flash potential

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- These days, Robbie Kennedy can't help but have flashbacks to six years ago, when a talented group of freshmen entered his Southern Nash girls soccer program -- and eventually transformed the Ladybirds into a Big East Conference powerhouse.

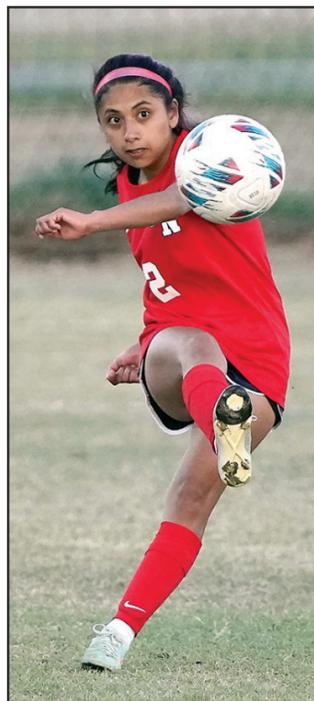


That's the same scenario Kennedy is hoping for in the near future as, once again, the Ladybirds are loaded with ninth-graders as they make their way through a challenging schedule during the 2026 campaign.

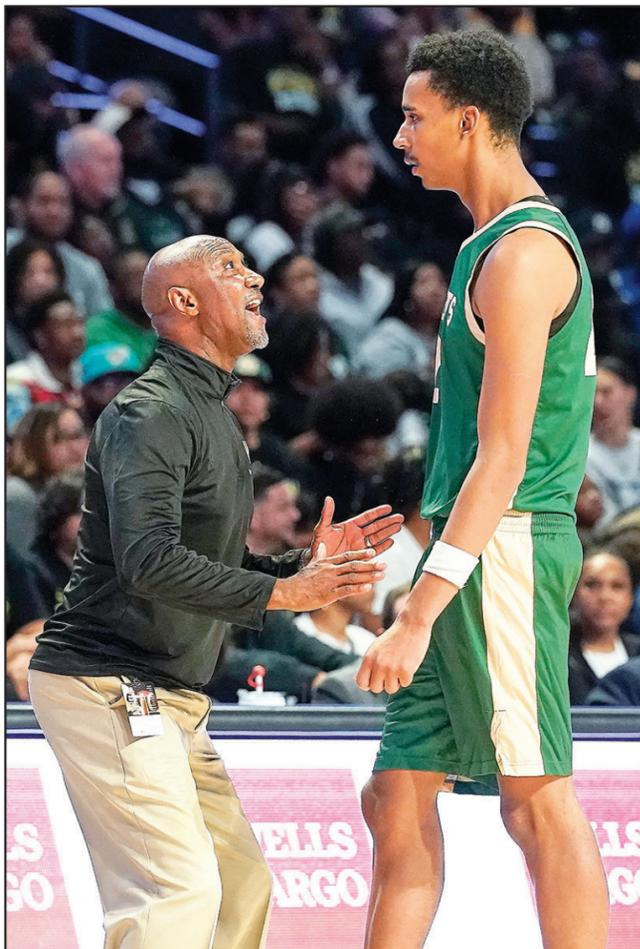
The results have been promising to date as Southern Nash is 6-4 overall to go with a 1-1 mark in the always-tough Big East.

Southern Nash boasts eight

See SOCCER, Page 2B



SNHS VETERAN JENNY FLORES



NORTHERN NASH COACH HENRY DRAKE ENCOURAGES CHRIS SILVER AT THE FINALS

## Community-oriented Drake relishes crown

By CHANCE PUCKETT  
Correspondent

dreaming of just two short weeks ago.

RED OAK -- It's been a long time coming for Northern Nash boys basketball coach Henry Drake.

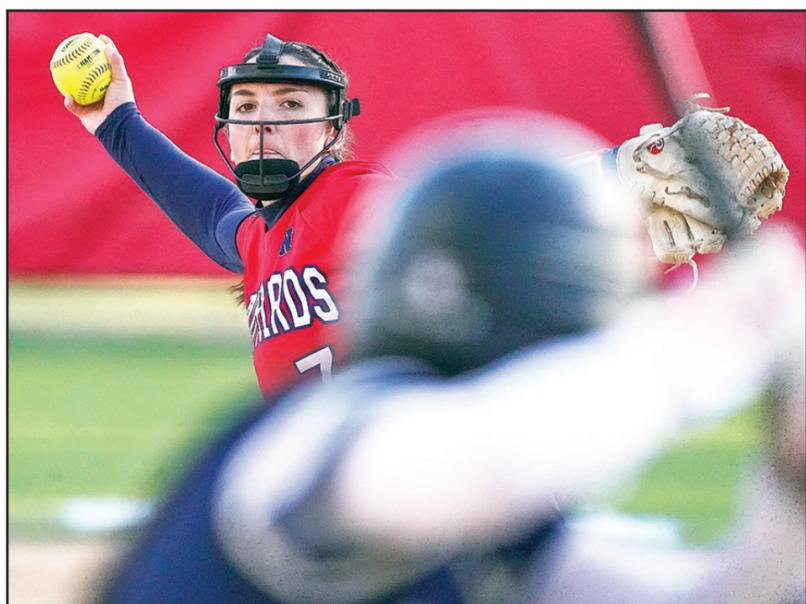


The beloved leader of the Knights' program finally got the moment he had waited years for and spent many days and nights

After 12 seasons leading the Northern Nash program, Drake directed the Knights to their first state championship since 1968.

"It hasn't set in yet," said Drake, who over the last ten years on the

See DRAKE, Page 2B



SOUTHERN NASH FLAMETHROWER SARAH EWERS

SOFTBALL

continued from page 1B

121-10. "This has been a fun team to work with," Collie said. "I thought going into the season that we had some talent -- we just had to figure out where to play everyone to give us the best chance to succeed."

Replacing Dickinson was SN's top off-season priority, and Sarah Ewers, who saw some mound duty last spring, has effectively stepped into that role.

Paisley Baker has also seen some hill work behind Ewers, who is the younger sister of SNHS pitching legend Carrigan Ewers.

Senior Makayla Weeks is one of four returning starters, along with Ewers, Aliyah Croll and Noel Dobbins.

The talented Croll, a junior, has seen duty at catcher and shortstop along with serving as one of SN's best baserunners. Her veteran leadership along with offensive and defensive skills make her one of the Ladybirds' most valuable performers.

Dobbins, though only in the 11th grade, has already established herself as one of the top power bats in Nash County softball history -- and she has

added five more longballs to her career total already this season.

Dobbins now has 25 home runs over the past three years -- and counting -- to go with 76 runs batted in and a batting average of over .500.

Hayden Baker has taken over at the leadoff spot for Southern, while A'Nya Cooke, Jessica Sessoms, Jenna Antill and Grace Jordan have excelled in increased roles.

"I have been very pleased thus far with the attitude and the togetherness of the team," Collie said. "Hopefully, we can continue to work hard and improve and be playing our best at the end of the season."

As always, Collie has dotted his schedule with plenty of challenging tests -- and the Ladybirds have passed every one so far with flying colors.

SN has already topped the likes of Bunn, Erwin Triton and CB Aycock.

Seven of Southern Nash's victories have come via shutout, including Tuesday's 26-0 decision over Rocky Mount that improved the Ladybirds to 3-0 overall in the competitive Big East Conference.



SOUTHERN NASH SENIOR STANDOUT ANA ALONSO IS ON THE MOVE AGAINST THE WILSON FIKE GOLDEN DEMONS

SOCCER

continued from page 1B

freshmen on its varsity roster, and six of them see extensive playing time each outing.

Of the 48 goals the Ladybirds have registered this spring, 30 of them have come from ninth-graders, led by Brooklyn Rice with 14 and Hailey Couch with 10.

"We're going to be good -- we just need to get a little more seasoned," Kennedy said. "This is a really good freshman group."

Fortunately for the Ladybirds, they also have a solid group of veterans who can provide leadership, guidance and experience for the younger players.

Seniors Jenny Flores, Ana Alonso and Erika Landa have been long-time staples of the program, and Alonso is currently second on the team in goals with 11 markers.

Junior Emma Batchelor, who can excel at any position in the lineup, is also a three-year starter for Kennedy's club.



SOUTHERN FRESHMAN TYNLEY DEW

Two things Kennedy would like to see improve are his goaltending, along with more consistent scoring.

In Southern's four losses, against solid foes New Bern, Croatan, DASH United and Wilson Fike, the Ladybirds have been shut out twice and have scored just a combined two goals over those quartet of outings.

"If we can get a couple

of areas straightened out, we can be pretty good," Kennedy said.

Southern Nash played two contests at the recent The Brittany Girls Soccer Showcase in Wilson, defeating Camden County (3-0) while being edged by DASH (2-1).

Southern Nash will have an important Big East matchup today on the road against the Northern Nash Lady Knights.



SNHS' ZION ODOM SIGNS WITH WINSTON-SALEM STATE

FOOTBALL

continued from page 1B

and third, respectively, on the team in tackles.

Odom totaled 47 take-downs while spending time at both outside linebacker and defensive end, while Martin wasn't far behind him at 38, the top tackler amongst Southern's defensive linemen.

"It was a ball playing with those guys," said Martin of his impressive Firebird teammates.

"We complemented each other very well on the field."

Both Odom and Martin's efforts helped push Southern Nash to the third round of the Class 5-A State Playoffs in their final fall on the high school circuit, the team's regular season results enough to earn a first-round bye followed by a 58-39 walloping of Southeast Alamance in the second round.

During the regular season, the Firebird defense pitched a 35-0 shutout at C.B. Aycock in what was that side of the ball's best outing of the year, a performance that was one week removed from limiting Southern Wayne to just six points and a 56-6 drudging of the Saints.

Both Odom and Martin had big performances in

the Southern Wayne contest, Odom registering four tackles for loss and two sacks while he and Martin both accounted for a fumble recovery.

Odom's new digs at Winston-Salem State will be as part of the NCAA Division II Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA), with the Rams slated to begin their 2026 campaign at Division I Norfolk State on Saturday, August 29. Winston-Salem State will open its home schedule a week later, hosting Mars Hill at the Rams' Bowman Gray Stadium.

"There's a good culture and the coaching staff will help me develop," said Odom of his decision to join the Winston-Salem State program, opting to spend his next four years there after having discussions with other schools such as UNC-Pembroke, Chowan, Barton College and Campbell.

As for Martin, Division III Brevard will be his new home, the Tornadoes competing in the USA South amongst fellow Old North State schools such as Greensboro, Methodist, NC Wesleyan and Pfeiffer.

"It felt like a family when I went on a visit," said Martin, who said

that class size was also a factor in his decision, choosing to major in Business.

Brevard went a strong 6-4 during their 2025 season, continuing an impressive turnaround from previous seasons since head coach Bill Khayat took over the program in 2017.

Both Odom and Martin mentioned the importance of their coaching staff, teammates and their families when discussing their impending athletic and academic career paths, pointing out that in recent years, especially during their time in the Southern Nash High football program, that they developed both as men as well as student-athletes.

"It's a good school and a good program if you want to be developed as a young man," Odom remarked while Martin followed by stating that each of his coaches at Southern had a major impact on him.

While Odom and Martin will be graduating in just a few short months and will be kicking off their college careers, the Southern Nash Firebirds will be beginning the football season on August 21.

DRAKE

continued from page 1B

Northern Nash sideline has compiled a hard-to-believe record of 215-46.

"I feel like I'm gonna wake up from a dream and be in practice."

The positive reality for Drake, as well as his staff of assistant coaches and players, though, is that it in fact wasn't a dream. The Knights earned the 6A state title in dramatic fashion, one that everyone in Nash County seems to be familiar with by now.

Back-to-back buckets from Jamiere Harris in the final 25 seconds of overtime sealed the title game's fate, as Northern topped Kings Mountain 61-60 in a game that will be remembered by Drake, his staff and roster, and quite frankly most everyone else in Red Oak for years to come.

"I was just soaking all of it in," remarked Drake, who could barely move once he came to the realization that the Knights were finally going to get their much-awaited moment in the spotlight.

"For over 60 years our community has been looking for a state championship, and these guys pulled it off," said Drake with a smile. "They shocked the world, they really did."

Of course, it wasn't just the players who made it happen, it was Drake and his staff who prepared and led the team into battle repeatedly, both in the regular season and in the playoffs.

Certainly, 25-3, state-championship caliber seasons that end with a new trophy in the school lobby or a banner raised in the team's gymnasium don't just happen overnight.

It takes preparation, hard work and execution, all of which are things that the Fighting Knights and Coach Drake checked off as the hoops season progressed.

"They motivated each other like I had never seen a team before," Drake said, saying that it went beyond practice and games, but into film sessions and outside of basketball as well.

"It was amazing to see all of this." Ironically, this was one of the few

Drake teams that didn't bring home any Big East hardware, finishing the regular season in third place in the league after a 9-3 mark in conference play.

Perhaps that adversity, a run of losses that included an uncompetitive outing against Hunt, a shocker at C.B. Aycock and a 20-point lead coughed up against Rocky Mount resulted in the tenacity that was seen by the Knights throughout the playoffs, particularly on the defensive end of the floor.

"We were better prepared than we've ever been in the playoffs," said Drake, stating he felt more prep work and film was important going into the postseason than what the program had previously done.

"They were looking at who we had to play religiously. Everyone knew what they had to do."

That playoff preparation translated to limiting their postseason opponents to fewer than 50 points per game, a mark just shy of the team's regular season total, one that held Southern Nash to just 17 points during the second meeting between the two foes and posted three games where the opponent scored fewer than 30 points over 32 minutes of play.

Drake, of course, gave little to no credit to himself and opted to shift the spotlight to his players and the Northern Nash community - one that runs deep within him.

A 1991 graduate of Northern, Drake celebrated with students after the team advanced to the state championship and has continued to find himself in awe of the support that the community has shown in response to winning the state championship. It's certainly been impressive, but far from unexpected.

"The support has been tremendous," said Drake, who noted that it isn't just him who sees it, but the student-athletes too.

"I'm so happy to be a part of the Northern Nash community that I don't even know what to do, and I know our boys are too."