



Nash Central High School Coach Ricardo Jermome (right) is pictured with a Nash Central football standout Jayden Whitaker. Contributed photo



Southern Nash High School's top goal scorer, Brooklyn Rice, netted the most of any footballer in the big East Conference. Photo by Carl Copeland

## Back in the swing of things

Area schools ready for back half of league slate

BY CHANCE PUCKETT GRAPHIC CORRESPONDENT

Area girls soccer teams returned to action this week after a brief spring break intermission, with Northern Nash, Southern Nash and Nash Central High Schools each making their way back to the pitch by way of a home league contest.

It's a crucial week for Northern and Southern in particular, both of which currently sit in the top half of the Class-5A/6A Big East Conference.

The Northern Nash Lady Knights entered Tuesday's tilt with first-place Fike having not played in 13 days, their last outing coming against one of the state's top teams, J.H. Rose, on April 1.

After suffering a 6-0 loss Tuesday night, Northern has now dropped four of its last five games dating back to March 24, three of those losses coming to Big East opponents.

The Lady Knights' offense has struggled to find the back of the net during

their losing spurt, being held scoreless in contests against Rose, Southern Nash and most notably Hunt, where Northern lost a 1-0, double-overtime heartbreaker after starting the year 6-0-1 and 2-0 in Big East play.

Having now quickly slipped to 2-3 in their league slate, the Lady Knights have six regular season games remaining in the 2026 campaign. The Lady Knights offense will look to get back into the swing of things on Thursday against C.B. Aycock, likely looking for leading scorers Esther Edgerton and Annaliese Freeman – both of whom added goals against Aycock the last go-round – to help right the ship.

As for Southern Nash, the Ladybirds have been moving in the opposite direction as the Lady Knights, entering Tuesday's matchup with Aycock having won five in a row leading into spring break.

Southern's win streak, that's truthfully been more of a blowout streak, started with a 9-0 blitz of Nash Central on March 18, a

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# BEYOND THE CALL

Nash Central High coach goes beyond the call of duty, mentors athletes to find their future

BY CHANCE PUCKETT GRAPHIC CORRESPONDENT

ROCKY MOUNT - Coaches, especially at the high school level, are often much more than just coaches to the student-athletes that they help lead.

More times than not, coaches at area high schools can be mentors, rides to practice, references, therapists and of course, teachers as well.

One of the people who exemplify these qualities the most is Nash Central's Ricardo Jermome, the Bulldogs' longtime track and field coach who also serves as an assistant on the school's football staff.

Having been at Nash Central since 2015, Jerome has held many different roles at the school both

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Nash Central High School Coach Ricardo Jermome Contributed photo



Winston Lee, Nash Central High School senior, signs with Averett University. Contributed photo

# SIGNING DAY

Nash Central High School football standout signs with Averett University

ROCKY MOUNT - It typically doesn't take very long to notice when a student-athlete is the child of a coach.

More times than not you can even see it from a distance. They're often well-spoken, natural leaders on their respective roster and set clear goals for themselves and their team.

Those qualities accurately describe Nash Central High School senior Winston Lee, the son of the school's long-time head football coach Chris Lee, who wrapped his 11th year leading the Bulldog program last fall.

Despite being sidelined for the majority of his 2025 campaign due to injury, the younger Lee's high school résumé impressed more than enough regional college coaches, leading the now-former Nash Central quarterback to publicly pledge his collegiate commitment to Averett University on Feb. 25.

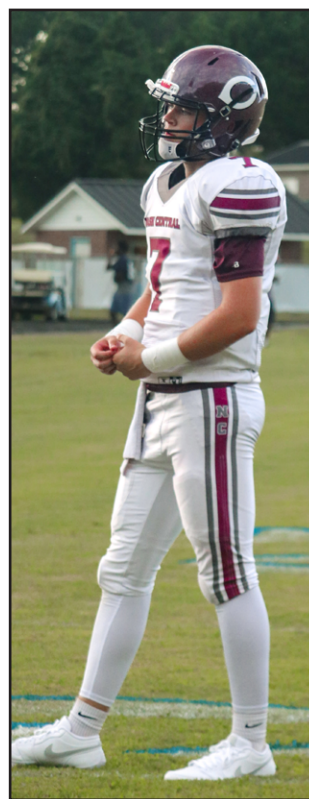
"From the moment I got there it felt like this is where I wanted to be," said Lee of his future home, one that it didn't take long for him to become well-acquainted with.

Lee was offered a scholarship spot the on the first day he spoke with the Cougars' first-year head coach Matt Quinn, an opportunity that arrived through conversations just a few short weeks before Lee's first visit to the school's campus in Danville, Va.

"He wanted to get me on a visit as soon as possible," Lee stated, with Quinn already eagerly looking to rebuild a roster that posted a 1-8 record a season ago.

"The overall atmosphere of the campus itself, not just the football, felt like home to me," remarked Lee of his first impression of the school. "Leaving

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WINSTON LEE Contributed photo



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# COACH

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academically and in the athletic department, with his athletic background highlighted by playing defensive line at Division I Norfolk State University from 2001-2005.

Ironically, one of Jerome's most recent pupils opted for a similar path, as Nash Central's Jayden Whitaker pledged his college commitment recently, choosing to attend Norfolk State as well where he also intends to play defensive line.

"He doesn't go to sleep until he finds a way to get his kids in contact with coaches," said Whitaker, one of the top prospects to come out of Central in recent years.

"He played a huge role in my recruitment process." Jerome, who serves as the junior varsity head coach of the Nash Central football program, has even served as a senior night escort for many of his student-athletes in recent years, wanting him to be a part of their special moment due to his contributions to their success.

"He is the closest thing that many of his players have to a father," said Chelsea Jones, a Nash Central High School alumnus, supporter of the school and future Bulldog parent.

"This type of pillar in the

Nash County community is definitely someone that more people should know about," Jones remarked.

Jerome's list of student-athletes is one that speaks for itself, a résumé that likely stacks up with any in the area.

He's assisted with football players such as Alex Nobles, who attended UNC-Chapel Hill out of high school, Malachi Ruffin of West Virginia, Travis Griffin who spent a year at North Carolina Central, Byron Hawkins of Norfolk State, Greyson Richardson of Hampton and Javaris Jones of Furman.

Outside of football, he contributed to sending Myia Spivey to Appalachian State and Michaela Nelms to Eastern Michigan, Colin Johnson to UNC-Charlotte and Jeremiah Jones to UNC-Greensboro.

Of course, this is far from everyone that he has helped push to continue their athletic and academic careers at the next level, but that would be far too long of a list to include.

It's easy to see, though, that Jerome isn't doing this to build or bolster his own byline, he's doing it with the intention of helping student-athletes find a home, and find their future – even if it's a student not

enrolled at Nash Central. Jerome also recently helped leverage connections to assist Southern Nash's Tylik Mitchell during his recruitment process in football, one that eventually led him to Temple University in Philadelphia.

A good friend once said to me that, "If you want to meet the best people in the world, you should go to a high school football game."

I smiled and laughed when he said it, thinking of a lot of the memories that I've had covering and attending high school sporting events throughout the years, and realized that his statement wasn't just about those in the stands – it was about those coaching and on the field too.

It's certainly easy to get caught up in wins and losses amongst trivial things that occur either inside or outside of the lines in sports. However, it's always important, especially in local, community settings such as high school athletic events, to remember what it's all really about and what so many in the area are doing to help young student-athletes achieve their goals – ones they sometimes didn't even know they were capable of achieving.

# SOCCER

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match that the Ladybirds haven't lost – or even given up a goal – since.

Prior to Tuesday evening, four of Southern's five most recent games were 9-0 routs, beating county foe Rocky Mount by that margin on March 24 and following that up with a pair of road wins at South Lenoir and Southern Wayne on March 30 and April 2, respectively.

Perhaps what's most impressive of the Ladybirds strong season thus far is the roster in which they're doing it with.

Three of Southern's top four goal scorers are freshmen, including team leader Brooklyn Rice who entered this week having netted 21 goals – the most of any footballer in the Big East Conference.

Rice is joined at the top of Southern's statsheet by senior Ana Alonso, who has tallied 14 goals in addition to a team-high six assists, while fellow first-years Hailey Couch and Tynley Dew have contributed 11 and six goals of their own.

Still in search of their first victory is 0-10 Rocky Mount, who will hit the road in hopes of turning things around against Southern Wayne on Thursday night. The Lady Gryphons were bounded by the Lady Saints 4-0 during their previous meeting on March 17, with five opportunities beyond Thursday still remaining for a chance at a win.

While Wilson's Fike and Hunt High Schools are currently in the league's driver seats, both Northern and Southern have serious chances at the playoffs and outside shots at making a run for the league crown, with the back half of conference play looking to be a crucial set of games for both squads.

The Lady Knights and Ladybirds both return to action on Thursday evening, with Northern hosting C.B. Aycock at 6 p.m. followed by Southern Nash's trip to highly-touted Fike kicking off at 6:30 p.m.

# LEE

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there without committing would've been delaying something that felt right."

A star student-athlete that has also competed on the school's swimming, golf and baseball teams, Lee closed his Bulldog career by airing out 1,949 passing yards over four years, with 1,856 of those coming during the 2023 and 2024 seasons.

Lee tossed 27 touchdowns and ran for four more during his time quarterbacking the Central offense, a post he held when helping shatter multiple school records as part of the Bulldogs' 2023 squad.

Under the direction of his father, Lee helped lead Nash Central to a program-record 11 wins during his sophomore season, closing the year at 11-3 and helping engineer a run to the fourth round of the Class-2A State Playoffs.

"It was a different level of intensity," remembered Lee fondly of his first year

in the varsity starting role, a season that was a key piece of his development as a player.

Of course, another crucial part of his improvement and progression as a student-athlete was his father's role in his journey, both on the field and during the recruitment process.

"He was probably the most involved person and the most involved he could've been," said the younger Lee. "He knew I had to work extra hard to get to where I am now."

"He takes pride in everything he does," said Coach Lee of his son – referencing both his athletics and academics. "He easily could have let this setback define his senior year but he didn't."

While a father as a head coach and a son as a quarterback could pose a unique dynamic, it certainly seemed to be something that the Lee family enjoyed, including Winston's older

sister and mother.

"One of the many positives was seeing how competitive he became," said Coach Lee of his son. "Not only did he want his teams to do well but he held himself to a higher standard."




Lee enters his undergraduate studies with hopes of working in sports upon graduation, similar to his father. He mentioned that law school is a potential possibility once his time at Averett is complete, with early thoughts of getting into the agency world upon the completion of his studies.

Lee and the Cougars will take the field for the first time in 2026 on Labor Day weekend, ironically not too far from home. Averett will kick off its new era of football on Saturday, Sept. 5 in Rocky Mount as they travel to face NC Wesleyan on the gridiron, Lee's first game at the collegiate level.

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# START, LOOK AND LISTEN

## What noisy brakes may be telling you

The only noises many drivers ever want to hear coming from their vehicles are the sounds of their favorite songs blasting from their car stereos. But cars sometimes make noises that aren't nearly as inviting as music.

Noises that seem to pop up when applying the brakes can be especially scary for motorists. No one wants to drive a vehicle with faltering or suspect brakes, so learning to distinguish between the two most common brake noises can be a wise move for drivers.

### Grinding brakes

A leading automotive expert notes that grinding noises indicate a serious problem with the braking system. There are two major causes behind the grinding noise made by brakes. If the grinding sound is audible when pressing on the brake pedal, this likely because the rotor disc is coming into contact

with part of the caliper.

This typically occurs because the brake pads or rotors are extremely worn down, causing the steel backing of the worn out pad to grind against the rotor. In such instances, it is recommended replacing the brake pads immediately.

If the grinding noise is audible while the vehicle is in motion, debris might be stuck inside the brakes. Drivers might be able to dislodge this debris by repeatedly moving their cars forward and backward in a safe place, such as a driveway. If that does not work, have the brakes serviced by a qualified mechanic.

### Squealing

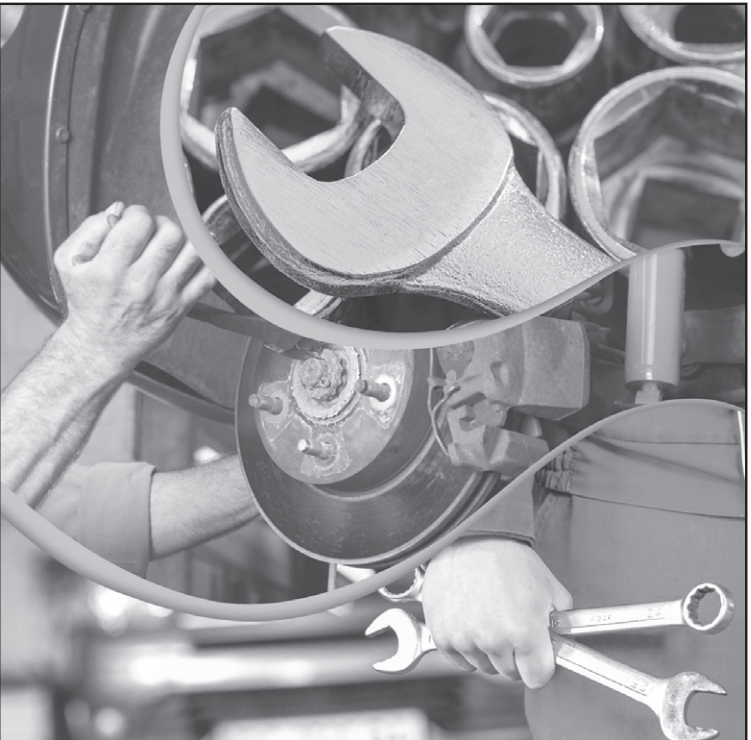
Many drivers are familiar with the high-pitched squealing sound that comes from their vehicles or those of fellow motorists. That squeal, while certainly not music to the ears, might be a good thing. That's because some

brake pads are equipped with small steel clips that serve as wear indicators. When brake pads have worn down, these devices produce a squealing sound to let drivers know it's time to get new brake pads.

But squealing can be indicative of other things as well. Squealing noises are sometimes heard immediately after brake pads or rotors have been replaced. In such instances, the noise typically subsides within a day or two once the pads have been broken in.

Glazed pads also can create a squealing sound. When calipers stick, the brakes stay partially applied, producing excessive friction or heat. The heat causes the brake pads to glaze.

No one wants to hear noises coming from their brakes. However, such noises are often a car's way of telling drivers that brakes need to be serviced.



Learning to distinguish between the two most common brake noises can be a wise move for drivers.

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