

# Southern Nash Set For The States



NOEL DOBBINS HAS ENJOYED A HUGE YEAR FOR SOUTHERN NASH (Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

### 'Birds soared through action in conference

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- It's May, which means the Southern Nash Ladybirds are back in the Class 5-A State Softball Playoffs -- and hoping for another deep postseason run.



Southern appears poised to do just that as the Ladybirds enjoyed a prolific regular season campaign -- and are looking to continue where they left off after dominating the Big East Conference once again.

Under the direction of legendary veteran head coach Scott Collie, the Ladybirds went 20-1 in the regular season to go with an unblemished 12-0 mark while successfully

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SOUTHERN NASH'S VICTOR VARGAS

# SN star inks with Bulldogs

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

STANHOPE - One of the top soccer players in Southern Nash High School's recent history pledged his collegiate commitment last week, with Victor Vargas electing to spend his next chapter at Barton College in Wilson.



A four-year Firebird who spent time on the club circuit with local organizations such as TRYSA, WYSA and NCFC, Vargas is some of the best work produced by Southern head coach Carlos Barron -- who has led the Firebirds to three of the last four Big East Championships on the pitch.

Vargas cited both proximity to home and his relationship with Barton's coaching staff as the main contributors to his decision, putting a bow on a tremendous prep career in red and blue during last

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# NC names new coach

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- Nash Central High School has named Carter Varnell as its new Varsity Head Football Coach.

Varnell most recently served as the head football coach at SouthWest Edgecombe High School, where he led the program for the past six seasons.

During his tenure, Varnell built a strong and competitive program, highlighted by winning the Eastern Plains Conference Championship

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# 2025-26 NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS NCHS' LIFE OF RYLEE



NCHS SENIOR RYLEE BREWER

# Brewer is a true star at Central HS

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- It takes a special kind of student-athlete to excel in multiple sports at the high school level, especially after suffering an ACL injury that kept you on the sideline for a hefty chunk of your career.



On top of that, it takes someone that's disciplined and intentional about everything they do to handle all of that when their dad coaches multiple of

See BREWER, Page 2B



NASH CENTRAL'S FAMILY DYNAMIC DUO -- RYLEE AND TODD BREWER (Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

# QCC LINKS STARS Bulldogs excelled in league

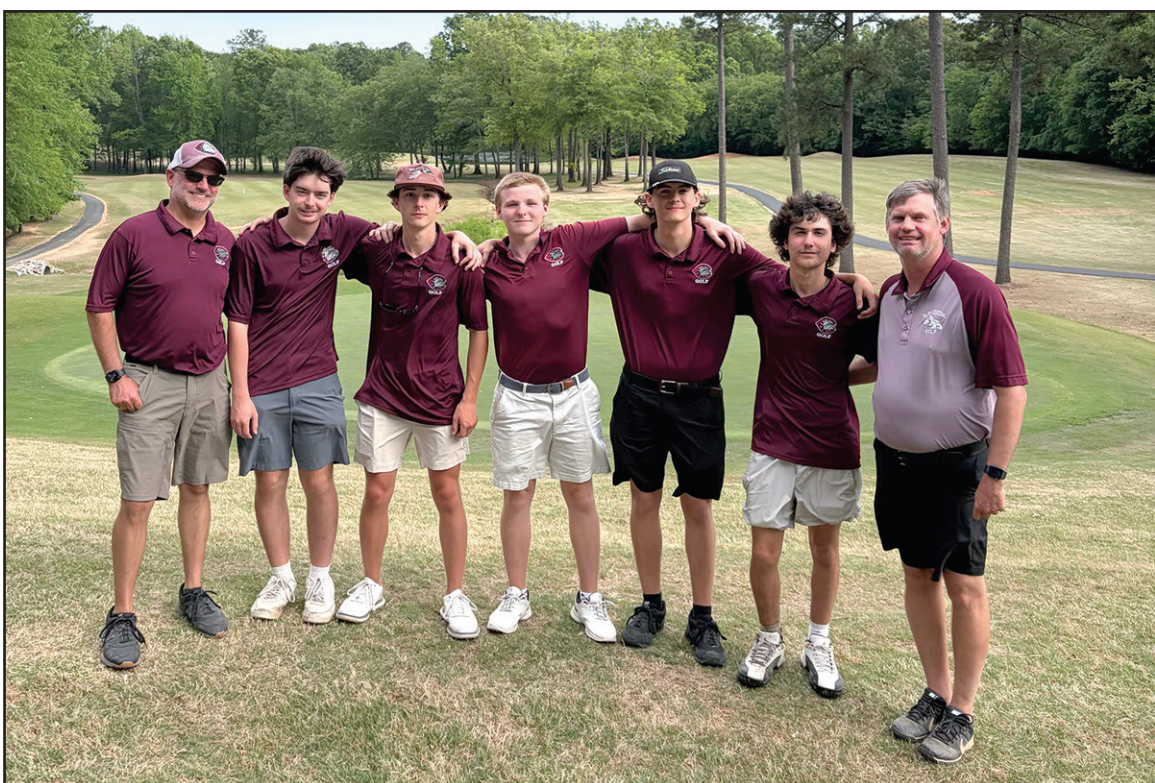
From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- Kent Cox kind of knew what to expect when his Nash Central squad kicked off its first-ever boys golf schedule this spring in the newly formed Quad County Conference.

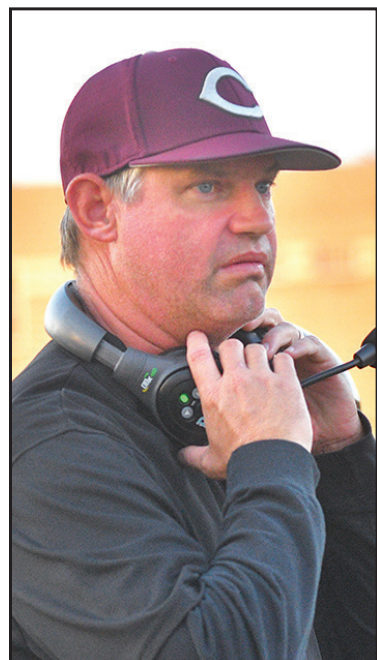
Roanoke Rapids and Bunn are former Big East Conference members along with Nash Central, and RR has been a dominant force in the Big East standings despite being a lower-classification school in the then-split league.

Louisburg was also in the Big East for a brief period, so Cox had a measure of familiarity with the Warriors' tradition.

But Cox knew very little about Wake Prep and American



2026 NASH CENTRAL HS BOYS GOLF TEAM -- (L to R) ASSISTANT COACH JAY HART, CONNOR BYRD, LEWIS TURNER, JAXSON HAYES, MASON TURNER, ELI JOHNSON AND HEAD COACH KENT COX. NOT PICTURED -- WINSTON LEE AND ELLIOT BUCKNER. (Photo Submitted)



CENTRAL COACHING GREAT KENT COX

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# BIRDS

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defending their conference crown.

Following a first-round bye, Southern Nash will kick off its postseason journey on Friday against Dixon -- a team SN has faced in the playoffs before -- at historic Ladybird Field on the SNHS campus in picturesque Stanhope.

The Ladybirds enter the playoffs as the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Regional behind Southeast Alamance.

Southern capped off its regular season -- and another perfect run through the Big East -- last Tuesday with a 16-0 road decision against county rival Northern Nash.

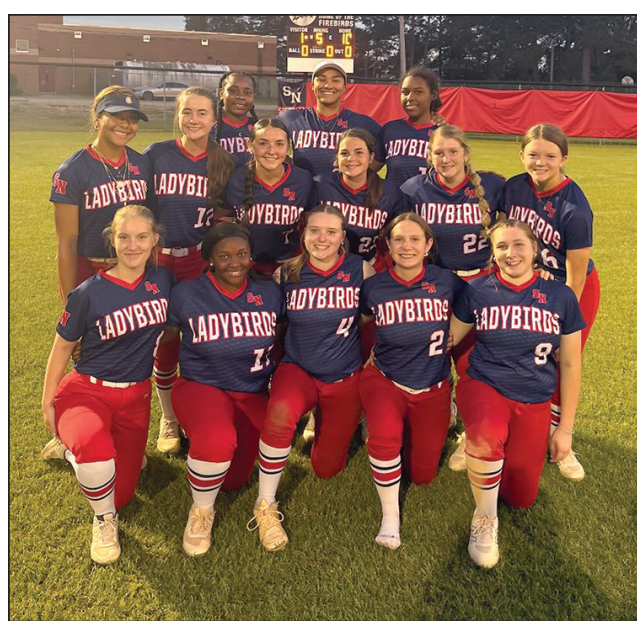
The Ladybirds were never threatened after posting a nine-spot in the opening stanza of action en route to the convincing triumph.

The game was stopped after the bottom of the third frame due to the mandatory run rule.

Senior hurler Sarah Ewers continued her strong spring by throwing a three-inning no-hitter, with one walk keeping her from perfection.

Ewers also struck out five while improving to 15-1 on the year to go with a sparring 1.04 earned-run average.

At the plate, the Lady-



**2026 SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL SOFTBALL LADYBIRDS**

birds delivered 16 hits -- three apiece from Aliyah Croll, Paisley Baker and Hayden Baker.

Croll, a junior, also homered to cap off her spectacular regular season, which saw her bat an impressive .550 with 40 runs scored to go with 33 RBI.

Croll's amazing batting average isn't even the top spot for the prolific Ladybirds as slugger Noel Dobbins, also a junior, is batting a gaudy .651 with eight doubles, six homers and 29 RBI.

Collie warned to not be deceived by Dixon's No. 15 seed as the club near the coast was a tri-champion in its competi-

tive conference along with Croatan and West Carteret.

The Bulldogs opened their playoff quest Tuesday with a victory over Havelock.

Last spring, the Ladybirds advanced to the fourth round of the postseason as part of a 24-1 campaign.

SN graduated several key stars from that squad, but the Ladybirds, as usual, rebuilt on the fly.

Southern's lone loss of the season came against Topsail in non-conference action, and SN appears to be on its collective game heading into the postseason.

# RYLEE

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the sports that they participate in.

That's how Nash Central High School star Rylee Brewer and her father, Todd, have been operating over the past four campaigns, though.

One of the top-student athletes at Central in recent years, Brewer has been a staple of the Lady Bulldog volleyball, girls golf, swimming and softball teams throughout her time on campus, with her dad serving as her coach both on the golf course and the softball field.

Despite her parents routinely being involved with her recreation league and travel teams growing up, the opportunity to work together at the high school level wasn't something that either expected a few years back, and was more a product of the circumstances than anything.

"It was definitely not our plan," said Todd Brewer, who before moving to Nash Central taught and coached at Southern Nash High School just a short ways down the road.

"I wouldn't trade it for anything, though."

While Brewer has a 21-year background in teaching and has either coached or officiated nearly every sport under the sun in some capacity, navigating coaching his daughter at this level was a new challenge.

"You try to separate being their coach and being their dad just by being supportive," remarked Brewer, who was also making an adjustment to working with girls after an eight-year stint as the skipper of the Southern Nash High School baseball team prior to landing at Central.

Now in their fourth year working alongside one another, the Brewer duo finds themselves headed into the second round of the Class-4A Softball playoffs after a comprehensive 14-0 win over T.W. Andrews in the opening round on Tuesday night, the Lady Bulldogs having now registered six straight wins and are seemingly peaking at the right time.

While the last few years have been fun and Brewer has certainly grown as

a student-athlete, it hasn't come without its challenges either,

The Central senior was forced to sit essentially her entire sophomore year with an ACL injury, one that could've wrecked the course of her high school career.

Brewer, though, didn't let the unfortunate situation define her and worked to get back on track, now having a plethora of options to compete at the next level as she furthers both her athletic and academic career.

"Anyone who has dealt with that knows it's mental as much as it is physical," stated her father.

Injury aside, there have been too many good memories to count between the two who share a field, a true family affair.

In fact, when a longtime assistant of Todd Brewer stepped away last off-season, his wife and Rylee's mother began filling in as an assistant coach.

Additionally the younger sister, Reagan, is a student-athlete as well, competing at the varsity level on the softball field for Faith Christian currently.

Her father remembered that one of his favorite memories between the two was during the conference tournament a few years back against Roanoke Rapids -- when a conference leading into an at-bat for Rylee turned into her driving in a run during her freshman season.

The moment produced a photo that Brewer remarked is his favorite of the two of them.

"I just told her that there's nobody in the world I'd rather be here with right now, and that was true," he recalled.

There's at least once last opportunity for the Brewers to share the field, with Nash Central set to travel to nearby SouthWest Edgecombe for their second round softball matchup on Friday night.

A time for Friday's contest has yet to be released, but will be held on the campus of SouthWest Edgecombe High School.

# COACH

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and earning Conference Coach of the Year honors during the 2020-2021 and 2023-2024 seasons.

Most recently, he guided the Cougars to the fourth round of the NCHSAA 4A State Football Playoffs in the fall of 2025.

On accepting the position, Coach Varnell stated, "I am incredibly excited to return home to Nash County and to be a Bulldog. There is something special about this place -- the pride, the people, and what it means to be a Bulldog."

"I have an unwavering belief in the future

of Nash County Public Schools athletics and Nash Central High School, and I am committed to leading a program that reflects excellence in every way.

"Being a Bulldog means toughness, discipline, and representing something bigger than yourself, and I am honored to be a part of that."

Varnell brings a proven track record of success, strong leadership, and a commitment to developing student-athletes both on and off the field. His ability to build relationships, foster a competitive culture, and guide

teams deep into postseason play will be instrumental as he leads the next chapter of Nash Central High School football.

Coach Varnell will serve as a Physical Education teacher beginning in August of the 2026-2027 school year.

With high schools in Nash County Schools beginning testing on May 12, Athletic Director Kyle Bain will begin working with Coach Varnell to prepare for the upcoming season, meet the Bulldog football team, and organize summer conditioning and workouts.

# GOLF

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Leadership Academy of Johnston County -- the other two members of the brand-new conference.

Given its rich links history, it was thought that Roanoke Rapids would be the favorite to take QCC Team Champion honors -- and the Yellow Jackets did exactly that at the league sixth and final event, which was held recently at The River Golf and Country Club in Franklin County.

But the overall team standings were tightly bunched, with RR closing with 2202 strokes, followed by Wake Prep (2240), Louisburg (2258), Nash Central (2266), Bunn (2273) and American Leadership Academy (2389).

In the race for the individual title, Bunn's Spencer Riley carded an 82 at The River to wrap up his championship.

Riley, a veteran performer for the Wildcats, finished with 327 strokes in the format, which allowed each player to drop his two highest scores of the six overall events.

Riley finished eight shots ahead of Wake Prep Academy's Evan Runyon, who finished at 335 shots.

Nash Central boasted a pair of Top-10 finishers as Jaxson Hayes was tied for the fourth position at 344 and Mason Turner was just one shot behind in sixth place with a 345.

The Top-10 players overall spots for the season were as follows:

- \* Spencer Riley, Bunn -- Player of the Year
- Evan Runyon, Wake Prep
- Josh Craddock, Roanoke Rapids



**NASH CENTRAL REGIONAL GOLFERS (LTO R) JAXSON HAYES, MASON TURNER**

- Luke Sheldon, Louisburg
  - Jaxson Hayes, Nash Central
  - Mason Turner, Nash Central
  - Jacob Sheldon, Louisburg
  - Ryan Higgason, Wake Prep
  - Blaine Little, American Leadership Academy of Johnston County
  - Holden Ford, Roanoke Rapids
  - Evan O'Neil, American Leadership Academy of Johnston County
- Hayes and Turner represented Nash Central

this week at the Class 4-A East Regional Tournament at Beechwood Country Club in Ahsoskie.

Hayes and Turner carded matching 93s to tie for 30th place overall.

Roanoke Rapids' Craddock earned medalist honors with a 78, and the Yellow Jackets claimed a state berth as a team with a second-place overall performance behind East Duplin.

Hayes went 45-48 over the 18-hole event, while Turner was 42-51 as the Bulldogs capped off their season.



**SOUTHERN NASH'S VICTOR VARGAS SIGNS PAPERS TO CONTINUE HIS SOCCER CAREER AT BARTON COLLEGE**

# VARGAS

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week's signing.

It was a full-circle moment for Vargas, who began playing soccer at only six years old and has played ever since. Both at the club and school level, Vargas made an impact on each team he played on while solely focusing on soccer athletically.

Despite an impressive and still-developing career on the pitch, Vargas hasn't gone without his difficult times.

In fact, at the end of his 2025 senior campaign, Vargas tore his meniscus -- sidelining him for the club season while he toughed out the Firebirds' run to the second round of the Class 5-A State Playoffs.

Despite the gutting injury, Vargas remained in the Firebird lineup, even playing his final high school contest while going through.

"I had to change everything," said Vargas of the response to his injury, reminiscing on just a few short months back. "All that I had ever known was soccer."

Of course, the time away from the field helped Vargas contribute to fostering a culture in the locker room that will likely be felt for years to come, the future Bulldog one of just six seniors on the Southern roster.

"I feel like I became a better team-

mate and leader," remarked Vargas not just of his time on the sidelines, but of his Southern Nash tenure.

Vargas helped guide the Firebirds to three conference championships during his freshman, sophomore and junior years, reaching the fourth round of the playoffs during the 2024 season.

The Firebirds knocked off perennial power J.H. Rose during the 2024 third round, racing to the state quarterfinals while Vargas was playing on a torn meniscus.

His new squad fired off an 8-8-3 overall record this past season while ending Conference of the Carolinas play at 6-4-2, ending the regular season by going 3-0-1 over the last four games before dropping a 2-0 decision to Ferrum in the conference tournament.

The Bulldogs have now finished .500 or better in their last three seasons, some program momentum that Vargas will look to help build on once he officially joins the program in the coming months.

Outside of his athletic ability, Vargas is weighing his options professionally, looking to either major in Business Administration and potentially take over the family logging business in the future, or working towards becoming a dental hygienist.