

# Another Strong Season For SN



THE LADYBIRDS CELEBRATE A GREAT DEFENSIVE PLAY IN THE PLAYOFFS  
(Photo Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Birds boasted another deep playoff surge

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- Scott Collie couldn't have asked for a better way to close out his prolific 10-year tenure as the Southern Nash High School softball coach.

The Ladybirds, after winning the Big East Conference championship once again, advanced to the fourth round of the state playoffs before seeing their campaign close last Friday with a 2-0 home setback against West Carteret at Ladybird Field.

The loss was a disappointing one, but the season overall

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SNHS PITCHER GRAYDEN MURRAY

## Southern concludes campaign

By CHANCE PUCKETT  
Correspondent

STANHOPE -- Another spring on the baseball diamond has come to a close for the Southern Nash Firebirds, with head coach Kwamaine Battle continuing to stack successful seasons and playoff appearances.

While the Firebirds season unfortunately ended in the second round at the hands of Big East foe C.B. Aycock, 2026 was largely a positive

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# 2026 SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS SOCCER AHEAD OF SCHEDULE



SOUTHERN NASH'S JENNY FLORES MAKES A KEY DEFENSIVE PLAY AGAINST FIKE  
(Photo Submitted by Carl Copeland)

## Ladybirds making deep run in state playoffs

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- Looking at things from a long-term perspective, Southern Nash girls soccer coach Robbie Kennedy knew his freshman class had the talent to one day make a deep run in the state playoffs. Just maybe not this soon.

Southern, often playing with five freshman starters, has advanced to the Elite

Eight of the state playoffs and was slated to take on undefeated and former state champion Western Alamance on Wednesday on the road.

To date, it's been an amazing postseason ride for the ahead-of-schedule Ladybirds as they have secured three playoff wins, including last week's 3-1 decision at Wilson Fike -- a squad SN fell to on a pair of occasions during Big East Conference

action in the regular season.

But when it mattered most, Southern was able to claim the emotional conquest despite falling behind 1-0 early in the contest.

SN was able to counter with a goal from freshman phenom Brooklyn Rice before Emma Batchelor found the back of the

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NORTHERN NASH'S GROVER BATTLE

## Knights will host a camp

From Staff Reports

RED OAK -- Legendary head coach Grover Battle will host the annual Northern Nash High School Girls Basketball Camp from June 1-4 at the historic NNHS Gymnasium in Red Oak.

The event is open to players in grades 4-12 and will run

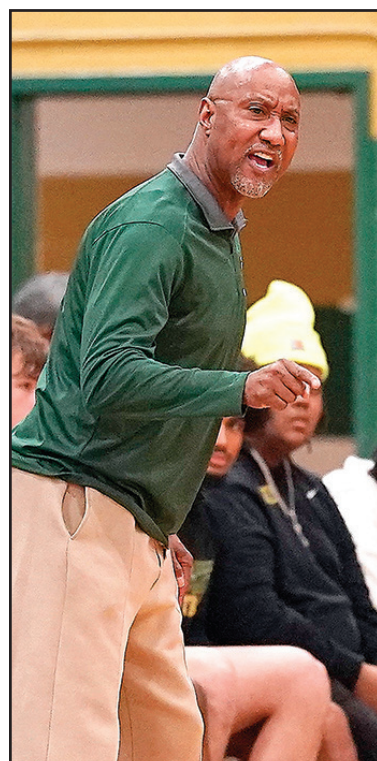
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# WHITLEY WINNER Drake receives county honor

By CHANCE PUCKETT  
Correspondent

RED OAK -- Nash County's most prestigious award designated for athletics coaches is annually given to a coach who exemplifies strong character, sportsmanship, leadership, and a commitment to serving as a positive role model for students and student-athletes.

Named for the legendary Dudley Whitley, who dedicated 35 years of service to Rocky Mount City Schools and Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, athletic



NN'S HENRY DRAKE

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NN'S HENRY DRAKE IS THIS YEAR'S DUDLEY WHITLEY AWARD RECIPIENT  
(Photo Submitted by Carl Copeland)



**NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL'S HENRY DRAKE ACCEPTS THE DUDLEY WHITLEY AWARD FROM BETH PRIDGEN**

**DRAKE**

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director, assistant superintendent and superintendent, the award recipient was announced on May 6, with Northern Nash High School Boys Basketball coach Henry Drake selected as this year's winner.

Drake, who guided the Fighting Knights to the program's first state championship since 1968 in March, became the third winner from Northern Nash, with longtime Cross Country and Track and Field coach Jeff Dodrill the school's first winner in 2010-11 followed by head football coach Andrew Farriss being named the honoree after the 2021-22 athletic year.

"Coach Drake represents the very best of what this award stands for," said Angie Miller, the head of athletics within Nash County Public Schools in a statement released by the district.

"He leads with integrity, models sportsmanship, and invests in his student-athletes both on and off the court. We are proud to celebrate him and the positive impact he continues to make at Northern Nash High School."

Drake is a 1991 graduate of Northern Nash, and has served as the head coach of the boys basketball program at the school for 12 years.

Under his watch, the Knights have risen to one of the top programs in Eastern North Carolina, capturing the school's second and his first state championship by way of a 61-60 overtime victory over Kings Mountain earlier this year.

Not only has Northern consistently won at a high clip under Drake's lead-

ership, Knights Basketball has become a true community event during his tenure as well. Northern Nash routinely boasts some of the area's best crowds, not just in Nash County but in North Carolina.

The influx of support for the program isn't just a result of the team's on-court success in recent years, but is a referendum on the community's perception of Drake as a public figure and representative of the school.

When the Knights won the state championship in Wake Forest University's Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum, perhaps the loudest that the arena got all night was when Drake's name was called as part of the post-game celebration and he was handed the trophy by North Carolina High School Athletics Association Commissioner Que Tucker.

Academically, Drake is a student-favorite in the social studies department at Northern, where he takes his emphasis on student success, leadership and character development to the classroom.

One of the most widely-respected coaches not just in Nash County but in North Carolina as a whole, you'll find very few people who have anything negative to say about Drake in general.

He's an extremely kind and respectful man, who loves his school and the student-athletes that he coaches more than anyone could.

Needless to say, there is an extremely short list of people that would be as deserving of the Dudley Whitley Award as Drake would.

**BIRDS**

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campaign for Southern Nash.

The Firebirds backed up last year's playoff run with another post-season victory, sending Fike home for the year in a big way by thumping the rival Golden Demons 20-8.

Southern defeated Fike in each of the three meetings between the two squads this year, the Golden Demons being one of four schools that the Firebirds swept over the course of the season.

Battle's club also registered two-game sweeps over conference foes Northern Nash, Rocky Mount and Southern Wayne, all games that helped catapult the Firebirds to a second-place finish in the Class-5A/6A Big East.

In the batter's box was truly where Southern buttered its bread, with four routine starters in the Firebird lineup finishing the year with

a batting average of at least .300 - and two of those hitters - Kwamaine Battle Jr. and Brayden Parker ending the year with averages above .400.

Eli Suydam closed the year at .324 while Maddox Deans wrapped things up at an even .300, and perhaps the best news for the Firebirds is that aside from Parker, the remaining three sluggers who hit at least .300 are expected to return next season, as both Battle and Deans were juniors in 2026 while Suydam was only a sophomore.

The only other senior in the dugout for Southern Nash was star student-athlete Luke Faulkner, who is headed to North Greenville University in South Carolina to play football. Faulkner slashed an impressive .281 for the Firebirds in 2026 while driving in 21 runs, ending his career with a stellar clip of .295

in the batter's box after spending four years at the varsity level for Southern.

On the pitcher's mound, Southern expects to bring back a pair of junior hurlers in Grayden Murray and Caiden Peeler, who were the team's two top performers in their rotation this season.

Both the Battle brothers - Kwamaine Jr. and Joshua - saw some respective time toeing the rubber as well, and will likely have increased roles in the bullpen for the Firebirds come 2027.

It's been a long, long time since Southern Nash has advanced beyond the second round in the state baseball playoffs, but with a hoard of returning talent making its way back to the field this time next year, the Firebirds are primed for what could be one of the best seasons in school history next spring.



**THE LADYBIRDS CELEBRATE THE HUGE VICTORY AT FIKE**

**SOCCER**

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net late in the opening half to give the Ladybirds the lead for good.

Rice tacked on an insurance goal in the second half off a corner, and SN would hold the Demons scoreless the rest of the way.

"We just played better than the first two times (versus Fike)-- we played like we are capable of," Kennedy said. "We put a lot of pressure on their back-line girls and I think we kind of wore them down a bit."

The Ladybirds continued their amazing push on Monday with a 2-1 PK triumph at Richlands.

After regulation ended with the score tied at 1-1,

the clubs played 30 minutes of overtime without a goal to force a penalty-kick session.

Kennedy then made a strategic decision to put Rice, his leading scorer, in net for the PK session, which the Ladybirds claimed 3-1 as Rice allowed just one tally -- and scored one of her own.

Ana Alonso delivered the clinching kick to send the Ladybirds into the Elite Eight.

"We knew athletically that we had talent," Kennedy said. "Last year, we just couldn't score. With this freshman class, we have kids who can score, so they did a good job

blending in with our experienced kids who were good defensively.

"We've got three starters from last year who aren't starting now because they have trouble getting on the field. That's how good the freshmen are, and that has given us some really good depth."

Western Alamance is one of the state's elite powerhouses, but Kennedy feels like his club will be ready for the lofty challenge.

"We'll just go up there and see what happens," Kennedy said. "It's going to be a good learning experience for this young group."



**SOUTHERN NASH'S MAKAYLA WEEKS RETRIEVES A SUCCESSFUL THROW AT FIRST BASE**

**SOFTBALL**

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was tremendously satisfying for Collie and Company.

After last year, Southern Nash was forced to undertake a reloading project following a mass graduation that included pitcher Anna Dickinson -- one of the greatest players in the history of the long-successful program.

With that in mind, Collie wasn't sure what to expect this spring, even though he did have some key players coming back, led by hitting sensation Noel Dobbins.

But Dobbins was injured just before the start of the campaign, although she played her way through pain (and still batted over .600!) before being shelved with two weeks remaining in the regular season.

Despite the adversity, Southern went 22-2 overall as several younger players stepped up, and some of the veteran players became leaders, most notably Aliyah Croll and pitcher Sarah Ewers, who did an exceptional job on the mound after taking over for Dickinson.

"This season was one of my favorite seasons I've had in any sport in my coaching career," said Collie, who has also coached girls basketball, girls golf

and boys golf at some stage during his tenure at SN, which is also his alma mater. "I felt like we would have a good team, but I had no idea we would have the season we ended up having."

"We lost so much experience from last year's team, and even though we had good players ready to step in and assume new roles, I thought there might be an adjustment period."

"But to the kids' credit, we hit the ground running and never looked back. We had amazing senior leadership from Sarah Ewers, Makayla Weeks and Jessica Sessoms."

"Sarah and Makayla set the tone for the season last May at our exit meeting by talking about the importance of working together, being unselfish and maintaining the standards of our program. I think our kids did an excellent job with that all season long."

Earlier this week, Collie announced his retirement from teaching and coaching. He will certainly be missed, but it's a well-deserved respite for a man who will be remembered as one of Southern Nash's all-time greatest coaches, regardless of sport (and there have been plenty of them).

**CAMP**

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from 5:45-8 p.m. each day.

The camp registration fee is \$35, which includes a T-shirt.

Registration forms can be picked up at the

NNHS Main Office and can be mailed to: Northern Nash HS Coach Grover Battle 4230 Green Hills Rd Rocky Mount NC 27804

Checks can be made payable to Northern Nash High School Girls Basketball.

For more information, contact NNHS at (252) 937-9040.