

2025-26 NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS A TERRIFIC TANDEM



NASH CENTRAL'S JAYDEN WHITAKER
Whitaker & Cash starred for Bulldogs

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT - One of the most anticipated moments of the athletic year at essentially any high school around is the announcement of the Male and Female Athlete of the Year award winners.

Often times, the title of Athlete of the Year is something that's not only highly-sought after by student-athletes across schools, but is something those top performers have had their eye on for years.

At Nash Central High School, that was certainly the case for Jayden Whitaker, a four-sport star that is headed to Division I Norfolk State University to continue his academic and athletic career on the football field this fall. "That was the goal," said Whitaker of his recognition as the award winner. "It's a big honor."

A four-sport star that excelled in Football, Wrestling and both Indoor and Outdoor Track & Field, the future Norfolk State Spartan is an outstanding student-athlete and representative of Nash Central High, never shying away from showing his school pride in addition to his maturity.

Whitaker was a three-time all-conference selection on the gridiron for the Bulldogs, also



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES OF THE YEAR (L TO R) A'DIA CASH AND JAYDEN WHITAKER

collecting two all-region accolades and was an East-West All-Star game honoree as well.

Outside of Football, Whitaker was a three-time all-conference team member in both Indoor and Outdoor Track & Field, competing in the shot put and discus events. He holds the school record

for outdoor shot put at 52 feet, finishing as high as second in the state in that event.

As a wrestler, he brought home the Quad County Conference individual title amongst the heavyweight division competitors, finishing third in the region at that weight class.

One couldn't build a more perfect candidate or

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NORTHERN'S BRITT CRUMLEY

Crumley excelled in league

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- For the second consecutive season, Northern Nash's Britt Crumley was the undisputed leader of the pack this spring during the Big East Conference's boys golf campaign.



Taking on a new set of challengers due to the Big East's realignment, Crumley was still the league's top talent, roaring to first place in the cumulative season standings by a considerable margin.

Crumley, a junior, was then sharp at the regionals and qualified for the State Championships for the second straight time under the direction of legendary NNHS head

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Nash's stars are honored

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- The realigned Big East Conference offered a fresh set of challenges this spring for Nash County's tradition-rich boys tennis programs.

New entrants Wilson Fike, Wilson Hunt, Southern Wayne and CB Aycock joined the league, and Aycock out

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A'DIA CASH IS A SPECIAL PERSON AND STUDENT-ATHLETE FOR NASH CENTRAL



2025-26 SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL CHEER SQUAD

SNHS Stole The Show

Ladybirds claimed the Big East cheer crown

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

STANHOPE -- Yet another conference championship trophy made its way into the trophy case at Southern Nash High School in February, this particular title coming with a little extra excitement.

After a few consecutive years of not competing in a conference championship event due to realignment, the Ladybird cheerleading



team claimed the Big East Conference crown over county foes Northern Nash and Rocky Mount, as well as new league opponents Fike, Southern Wayne and C.B. Aycock.

Southern finished its competition season with four all-conference honorees, one of which was awarded to Aamara Moore that was additionally

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NORTHERN NASH'S KHALEEK EVANS POSES WITH COACH JACOBY BULLOCK AND NASH COUNTY SCHOOLS ATHLETIC DIRECTOR ANGIE MILLER AT A RECENT SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

NN's Evans picks up title at 6-A state track event

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

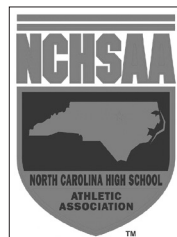
RED OAK -- Needless to say, it was an exhilarating year on the campus of Northern Nash High School.

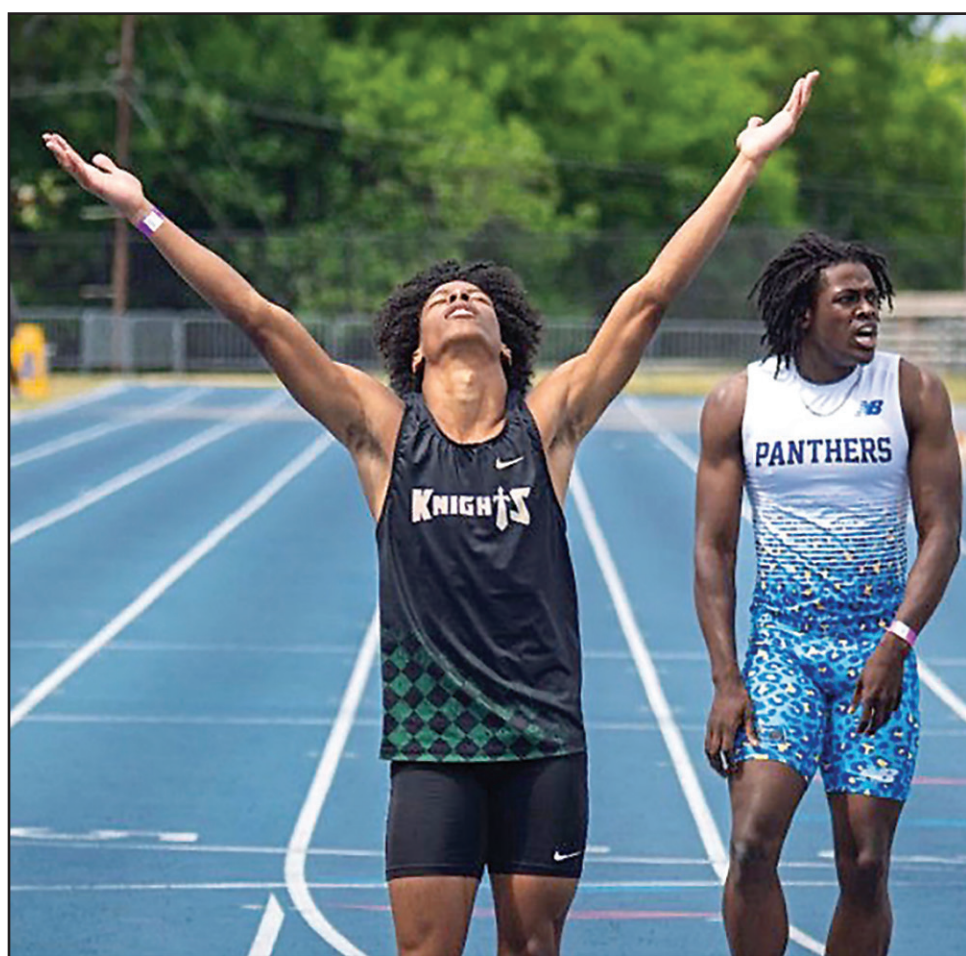
The Knights had a swarm of teams around campus experience success during their 2025-26 campaign, but

perhaps no individual performers were as successful or impressive as junior Khaleek Evans was over the course of the year.

Evans, a third-year track & field competitor at Northern Nash, brought home not one, but two individual state titles earlier this season,

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NORTHERN NASH TRACK STAR KHALEEK EVANS

EVANS

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one coming during the winter Indoor Track & Field season while the second came during the Outdoor Track & Field spring slate.

Under the direction of head coach Jacoby Bullock, Evans dazzled as a runner on the indoor circuit, claiming first-place honors in the boys 6A classification with a time of 1:04.59 in the 500-meter race.

After a stellar winter season, Evans only continued to get better and make his mark in the spring, eventually claiming the title in the outdoor 400-meter dash with a personal record of 47.63.

Evans fired off an untouched, undefeated record while running the 400-meter race during the spring season, results that helped push the Northern Nash standout to the recognition of Big East Conference Runner of the Year as well as the team's most valuable player at the end-of-year banquet.

Perhaps what is most admirable about Evans' record career is not only



KHALEEK EVANS CELEBRATES HIS TITLE

that he hasn't been running or competing in track and field that long, but how quickly he has improved while at Northern.

Evans didn't crack the top 10 during last year's state championship meet, pushing himself to break down walls and barriers until he was among the state's top runners.

"If I say I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it," Evans said of his work ethic, one that will soon certainly be noticed by both local and national college coaches.

Evans' desire to improve not only helped him rack up local and area honors in addition to a state championship, but

also helped him improve from meet-to-meet.

Every single outing this spring season, Evans set a new personal best in the 400-meter dash, eventually leading to the state crown with his sights now set on breaking the state record of 45.93.

Outside of hoping to continue his success on the track during his upcoming senior season, Evans hopes to soon major in psychology in college with the eventual goal of becoming a sports psychologist.

"The time I hit opened a lot of new doors," remarked Evans, who aspires to compete at the collegiate level upon his upcoming graduation.

CHEER

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recognized as the Big East Conference Cheerleader of the Year.

"I'm very proud of all the girls," said Tracey Bandel, who leads the squad as their head coach and is a former Southern Nash cheerleader in her own right.

"It was a fabulous win for us." The Ladybirds had a strong year not only in what Bandel refers to as "sideline cheer" – the more traditional element of cheering at football and basketball games – but in competition as well, a campaign that began in November with a regional competition that they also won in Raleigh.

Despite some early success, there were some mishaps that needed to be corrected, and two members of the team elected to graduate in December, meaning that much had to change after the calendar flipped to prepare for the conference meet that fell on President's Day.

"We had to redo everything," remembered Bandel, who emphasized that unlike other sports, cheerleading doesn't have a bench where you can call on reserves when needed.

"We basically had to start fresh." While a few members of the team were forced to leave their comfort zones, it all worked out in the end as Southern claimed the league title in a high-pressure, high-intensity evening. What differentiates cheerleading from other sports – is that the season largely comes down to one night, one event, one routine.

"We work for months and months for one three-minute space in time," said Bandel with a laugh.

"If you mess up there, you don't get a redo."

A redo wasn't necessary for the Lady-

birds though, who despite two seniors leaving the team midyear due to graduation, despite having multiple student-athletes who partake in other sports that may be considered a higher priority, despite all the other noise associated with such a high-stakes showing, still managed to come out on top.

"I have a team of athletes," proudly stated Bandel – who pointed to multiple different student-athletes that participate in sports outside of cheerleading, and still find themselves back in the sport in large part because of their affinity for the competitive nature of it.

"Cheer has evolved so much since I was in school," Bandel remarked, reflecting on her own Southern Nash career.

Aliyah Croll and Noel Dobbins, both of which are standout players on the storied Southern Nash Softball squad, earned All-Conference accolades as cheerleaders this season, while Moore and Olivia Jenkins each received the same honors.

The rest of the roster included the likes of Alyson Sharp, Lizabeth Cordova, Lauren Stallings, Saniya Taybron, Addison Clane, Ava Wilson, Hadley Bone, Kayla Thomas, Savannah Williams, Tynley Dew, Savannah Rethford, Marley Capps and Lauren Renfrow, all of which played key roles during the Ladybirds' run to the conference title.

Despite a hefty group of seniors having now turned their tassel, Bandel remains optimistic about what the next few years could bring in competition.

"We are pretty stacked with ninth and 10th graders," Southern's skipper stated.

"And we have an amazing group of seniors this upcoming year, too."



NORTHERN NASH BOYS TENNIS COACH TREMEL DAVIS (LEFT) POSES WITH PLAYERS EVAN MALLORY, GRANT THOMPSON AND TEAM MANAGER ELLA MALLORY

TENNIS

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of Wayne County would rule the Big East with an undefeated worksheet.

Wilson Fike was second, while Southern Nash, which always fields a competitive roster, was third as the Firebirds went 12-4 overall to go with an 8-4 worksheet in Big East competition.

Wilson Hunt closed in the fourth position, followed by Rocky Mount, Northern Nash and Southern Wayne.

CB Aycock High School's Nathan Call was the 2026 Big East Player of the Year, while Aycock's Craig Hassell was the automatic selection as the Big East Conference Coach of the Year.

The complete 2026 All-Big East Conference Boys Tennis Team is as follows:

- 2026 All-Big East Conference Boys Tennis Team**
- Nathan Call, CB Aycock
 - Preston Boothman, CB Aycock
 - Beau Rogers, CB Aycock
 - Drew Huff, CB Aycock

- Collins Pearson, Wilson Fike
- Cian Bonner, Wilson Fike
- Jamey Richardson, Southern Nash
- Jose Torres, Southern Nash
- Victor Gutierrez, Wilson Hunt
- Mason Gessell, Wilson Hunt
- Seth Hall, Rocky Mount
- Elijah Purdy, Rocky Mount
- Caleb Price, Northern Nash
- Grant Thompson, Northern Nash
- Cameren Jones, Southern Wayne

- Honorable Mention**
- Alex Bailey, CB Aycock
 - Mitch Thurston, Wilson Fike
 - Brayden Wells, Southern Nash
 - Jake Mauze, Wilson Hunt
 - Myles Thompson, Northern Nash
 - Tyshawn Melvin, Southern Wayne

- Top Honors**
- Big East Conference Player of the Year -- Nathan Call, CB Aycock High School
 - Big East Conference Champion Coach of the Year -- Craig Hassell, CB Aycock High School

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predictable Male Athlete of the Year for the Bulldogs, but contrarily, the Female Athlete of the Year at Nash Central was far from the standard – in all the right ways.

A'dia Cash is a freshman Girls Basketball, Volleyball, Cross Country and Outdoor Track & Field star who despite being just one year into her high school career, is already Nash Central royalty.

Cash is the daughter of the school's longtime Girls Basketball coach Terri Cash, and the younger sister of former Boys Basketball standout Montre' Cash – coming in with high expectations not only because of her last name, but because of her already impressive résumé that was built as a student-athlete at Nash Central Middle.

Cash averaged a team-best 18.2 points per game

on the basketball court this winter, also dishing out 8.0 assists per game while totaling 6.3 steals and 6.0 rebounds per outing as well. Aside from hoops, she's a strong volleyball player as well as a key contributor to the Cross Country and Track & Field squads, making serious noise in both the pole vault and 4x400 events.

Academically, Cash currently sits at the top of her class, maintaining status as a straight-A student throughout her classroom career as well.

Athlete of the Year honors as a freshman is something that's nearly unprecedented, but not impossible for someone as impressive as Cash. That success has drawn attention from droves of people around the area, including Whitaker, who she considers a close friend.

"Jayden [Whitaker] is like a big brother to me," Cash stated of her Male Athlete of the Year counterpart. "He has a lot of wisdom, he's overall a great dude."

Whitaker spoke similarly of Cash, who commended how she handled the burden and that comes with the lofty expectations placed on her.

"She had a lot of pressure," remarked Whitaker.

"There's a lot of pressure on you to do well and succeed and she didn't back down from that."

Cash will continue her athletic career at Nash Central this fall as she hits the cross country course and volleyball court in year two of her Bulldog tenure, while football at Norfolk State University is what's next for Whitaker.

GOLF

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coach Brian Taylor.

Crumley was once again the automatic selection as the Big East Player of the Year. He also led the All-Big East list, which is basically the Top 11 finishers in the season standings.

Four other Nash Counties were tabbed for the prestigious group -- Southern Nash's Joshua Barnes and Noah Craft and Rocky Mount's Kaleb Wells and Benjamin Parks.

The complete 2026 All-Big East Conference Boys Golf Team is as follows:

- 2026 All-Big East Conference Boys Golf Team**
- Britt Crumley, Northern Nash (Big East Conference Boys Golf Player of the Year)
 - Charlie Thurston, Wilson Fike
 - Joshua Barnes, Southern Nash
 - Landon Kintzale, Wilson Hunt
 - Caden Paugh, CB Aycock
 - Nathan Skinner, Wilson Hunt
 - Maddux Gray, CB Aycock
 - Connor Lewis, Wilson Fike
 - Kaleb Wells, Rocky Mount
 - Benjamin Parks, Rocky Mount
 - Noah Craft, Southern Nash

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