

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIV. BASEBALL THE TRUE WOLF



COACH ELLIOTT AVENT -- A NASH COUNTY LEGEND AND BEYOND
(Photos Courtesy NCSU Sports Information Department)

Avent closes out illustrious career

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RALEIGH -- A legendary coach and Nash County native closed out a more-than-successful career on the baseball diamond this spring, wrapping up 38 years as an NCAA Division I skipper.

Elliott Avent is a Northern Nash High School graduate who concluded his 30th season leading the NC State Baseball program this year, tying a bow on one of the most successful tenures in the sport's history.

Avent registered a record 1,103 victories in his career at NC State, the most



THE GREAT NUMBER NINE WAVES GOODBYE

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2026 NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL TEAM

Big East Baseball Battles

Northern, Southern adjusted to new diamond league

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- A new set of foes -- some familiar, some not -- were some of the obstacles that Southern Nash and Northern Nash encountered this spring in the newfangled baseball portion of the Big East Conference.

The baseball Battle -- dad Kwamaine as the head coach and Isaiah and Joshua as players -- were up to the task for Southern Nash as the Firebirds took second place in the tough league while reaching the second round of the state playoffs.

Isaiah, a junior, was tabbed as the Big East Player of the Year as he batted a herculean .485 with six home runs and 27 RBI.

And here's the best part for the Firebirds -- all three Battles will be returning next season as SN lost just two seniors from this year's successful squad.

Stone Massey, who helped lead Wilson Hunt to the league title, was tabbed as the Pitcher of the Year, while Hunt's Jonathan Smith was the automatic selection as the Conference

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NORTHERN NASH ALUM CALEB REAMS
(Photo Courtesy of Barton Sports Information)

CALEB'S QUEST

Reams wraps up his career

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

WILSON -- It's been said that all roads, regardless of the twists and turns that they may take, lead back home.

That was certainly the case for former Northern Nash boys basketball standout Caleb Reams, who wrapped up a stellar collegiate career on the hardwood earlier this year at nearby Barton College.

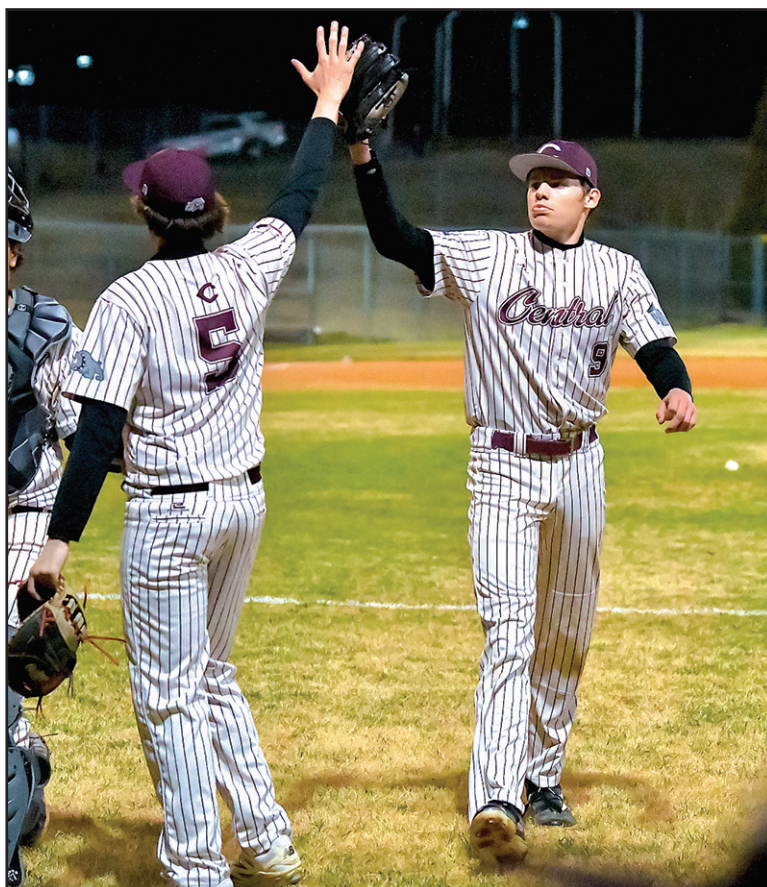
Reams was a star shooter and key guard for Northern and head coach Henry Drake from 2017-21, ending his career with the Knights during a ten-game, COVID-shortened season in which he averaged a team-best 17.7 points per game.

He additionally passed out a team-high 4.6 assists per outing



BARTON COLLEGE'S CALEB REAMS

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NASH CENTRAL PITCHING STAR CALEB COX (R) Cox claims mound honor for Nash Central in QCC

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- Even before the first pitch was thrown, Nash Central High School baseball coach Willie Langley assessed that moving to the Quad County Conference would present many of the same challenges

-- literally -- that his club experienced during its four campaigns in the Big East Conference.



That's because former Big East schools and long-time powers Roanoke Rapids and Bunn were joining Nash Central for the journey.

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AVENT

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amongst any coach in any sport at the school, while reaching the NCAA Tournament 23 times over the course of the 29 occasions it was held while he was coaching in Raleigh. Most notably, his teams reached the College World Series three times (2013, 2021 and 2024) – all coming in the previous fourteen seasons.

The Wolfpack won six regionals during Avent's tenure as head coach, hosting six as well over the course of his career at their Doak Field at Dail Park home, with an additional hosting selection being granted to Wilson's histori Fleming Stadium in which NC State was the top seed due to ongoing renovations at the ballpark.

The program's long-time west campus home additionally underwent some recent renovation both in terms of fan experience and spaces for the team itself, all of which were largely spearheaded by Avent.

The additions included some added seating and standing room areas, a new hitting facility and pitching lab, as well as a new team communal area that has deservingly been named the Elliott Avent Clubhouse.

Avent attended NC State upon his graduation from Northern Nash, eventually opting to leave school early to focus on kickstarting his baseball coaching career.

Despite later earning a degree from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, Va., Avent always considered NC State his home and repeatedly emphasized that he considered being the school's head coach his "dream job."

He spent time as an assistant at North Caro-

lina Wesleyan in Rocky Mount, as well as VCU, Louisburg College, William & Mary and NC State before landing his first head coaching job prior to the 1989 season, landing the manager position at New Mexico State.

Avent helped revive a New Mexico State program that was on the verge of being cut, spending eight years in Las Cruces, N.M. as the school's head man. Avent's success at the school later earned him a spot in the university's 2023 Hall of Fame class.

When including his time with the Aggies, Avent recorded 1,327 career wins and is one of just 24 Division I head coaches to have amassed more than 1,300 wins in his career, and is on an even shorter list of coaches to have won at least 1,000 games at one school.

While at NC State, Avent coached 104 All-ACC players, 43 of which received first-team honors.

Additionally, 137 of his former players have been selected into the MLB Draft, with 31 still playing professional baseball in some capacity and four currently rostered in Major League Baseball (MLB) clubhouses.

Avent also spent three summers in the dugout of the USA Baseball Collegiate National Team, assisting the staff in 2004 and 2015 while managing the group in 2021.

Avent won a Gold Medal with Team USA at the World University Games in Chinese Taipei in 2004.

In terms of accolades, Avent was voted both Atlantic Coast Conference and National Coach of the Year after the 2003

season, following that up by being named as USA Baseball's College Coach of the Year in 2021.

He was also honored by Gov. Josh Stein in 2025 as a recipient of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, recognizing his significant contributions to that state of North Carolina.

"He has been a wonderful representative of our department and university and will forever be a part of our story," said NC State Director of Athletics Boo Corrigan of Avent.

"I want to thank him for his many contributions and wish him all the best in his retirement."

In a statement released by the university, Avent reiterated his love of NC State, while thanking the coaches, staff, players and fans who contributed to making his time in Raleigh special.

Avent, who is known universally for his storytelling abilities, love of NC State University and the proper way he treats people – including the writer of this story, a former NC State Baseball bat boy and sports information assistant – will also largely be remembered for how his players looked up to him and the relationships he built with them.

Once his retirement announcement was made public, former players, media and many others shared countless stories online and highlighted their gratitude for the longtime leader in NC State's dugout.

"This game is about teammates and memories. My memories will be a constant companion and our players, coaches, staff, and fans are teammates I'll hold in my heart forever," stated Avent.



NASH CENTRAL DIAMOND STANDOUT AVERY FLOWERS

NCHS

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And even though RR and BHS were among the lower-enrollment schools in the Big East, they were consistently at or near the top of the league standings -- including Bunn's championship in 2025.

Bunn went on the hunt for even bigger crowns this spring and came away with the school's first state title in 45 years.

Before then, the Wildcats went undefeated while claiming QCC supremacy, but parity ruled the season beyond that as a trio of clubs -- including Nash Central -- tied for the second position in the competitive conference.

Nash Central, with a young roster, went 13-12 overall to go with a 5-5 worksheet in the QCC.

One of the greatest contributors to the Bulldogs' success was sophomore lefty hurler Caleb Cox, who went 7-3 overall with a sterling 1.61 earned-run average.

The talented Cox, who is the son of the legendary Kent Cox, struck out an unbelievable 123 batters (tops in the entire state) in 56 innings of work.

For his excellence, Cox was the selection as the QCC Pitcher of the Year. Bunn senior mound ace Jared Hagwood, a Wake Tech signee, was the Player of the Year, while BHS' Patrick Warren was the Coach of the Year.

Joining Cox on the prestigious list from NCHS were Avery Flowers, Aiden Parks, Dylan Moseley and Tanner Moss. Central's Peyton Harris, another hill standout, was saluted with a spot on the Honorable Mention squad.

The complete 2026 All-QCC Baseball

Team is as follows:

2026 All-QCC Baseball Team

- Caleb Johnson, Bunn
- Owen Mitchell, Bunn
- Connor Hathaway, Bunn
- Dylan Mitchell, Bunn
- Tariq Stone, Bunn
- Keagan Price, Bunn
- Jared Hagwood, Bunn
- Cash Tolley, ALAJ
- Tanner Elmore, ALAJ
- Gavin Jackson, ALAJ
- Jayen Bicki, ALAJ
- Caleb Cox, Nash Central
- Aiden Parks, Nash Central
- Dylan Moseley, Nash Central
- Avery Flowers, Nash Central
- Tanner Moss, Nash Central
- Nathaneal Martin, Wake Prep
- Ethan Hernandez, Wake Prep
- Tyson Spence, Wake Prep
- Garrett Watkins, Wake Prep
- RJ Williams, Roanoke Rapids
- Bryce Manning, Roanoke Rapids
- Andrew Manthie, Louisburg

Honorable Mention

- Robby Boswell, ALAJ
- Peyton Harris, Nash Central
- AJ Hurd, Wake Prep
- Ben Snead, Roanoke Rapids
- Tripp Hock, Louisburg

Top Honors

- Player of the Year -- Jared Hagwood, Bunn
- Pitcher of the Year -- Caleb Cox, Nash Central
- Coach of the Year -- Patrick Warren, Bunn

REAMS

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while averaging more than three rebounds and one steal per game during his senior campaign with the Knights.

"I had a different confidence about myself," reflected Reams of his final year on the high school circuit, a winter that he fired off those career-best stats despite working back from an injury.

Reams largely attributed that confidence boost to the work he did with local trainer Jeremy Jeffers, who he collaborated with during his final two years of high school. Of course, his continued improvement had contributions from his Northern Nash coaching staff as well.

The successes from the back half of his career in green-and-gold led to attention from college coaches, inevitably resulting in Reams committing to Barton in Wilson, where he spent the first two years of his collegiate career.

After making 52 appearances and eight starts through those initial two seasons, Reams made the decision to transfer from Barton, electing to join a conference foe of the Bulldogs, Converse University in Spartanburg, S.C.

Reams had a preexisting relationship with then-Converse head coach Nick Pasqua from Pasqua's time at Southern Wesleyan University, a fellow member of the Division II Conference Carolinas.

Since he was transferring within the league, he was forced to sit out during the 2023-24 season and redshirt, something that was difficult for him in more ways than one.

As a result of having to redshirt, Reams also wasn't able to be put on scholarship, and not playing basketball was something that was certainly a foreign concept to him.

"I never pictured having to take a game off, much less a season," Reams remarked, yet assuring that he used his redshirt season to the fullest in effort to train, work out and become a better all-around player.

Outside of basketball, Reams' mother picked up a second job to help with the cost of tuition, something that pushed him to not take the opportunity in front of him for granted.

"That motivated me," Reams said of his mother's sacrifices, ones that he ensured went to good use.

After sitting for one season, Reams not only earned a scholarship, but bounced back in a big way.

The 2024-25 season brought 27 appearances and 21 starts for the Valkyries, tabbing a stout 43.1% shoot-

ing mark from the field and a 36% total from beyond-the-arc. He additionally registered eight double-digit scoring outings, including a collegiate-career best 21-point showing against Georgia College.

With two years under his belt at Converse, Reams still felt he had more potential to exploit. He had both matured as a person and grown as a player, thus electing to once again enter the transfer portal, and head back to none other than his first collegiate home, Barton College.

"I had a peace about it," remembered Reams of his decision to rejoin the Bulldogs' roster. "I had matured, and Coach [Joel] Zimmerman told me that I can be myself."

Reams and Zimmerman had a longstanding relationship from when the former was first enrolled at Barton, with Zimmerman having served as an assistant coach at the school since 2010 prior to being promoted to head coach.

Zimmerman recognized the maturity and athletic growth that Reams experienced while in Converse, with Reams himself admitting that his priorities weren't what they should have been while he was first in Wilson.

"I never worked out, I would just show up to practice and games," he recalled of his first two seasons on Barton's campus. "I fell in love with the grind when I came back and I felt complete."

Of course, being closer to home where his mother consistently can watch him compete played a factor in his decision as well.

Reams had the best season of his career to close out his stretch of college years, one that consisted of 28 starts and 30 appearances while averaging 8.2 points per game in addition to 2.3 rebounds per outing and nearly four assists per game.

"I put it all together," Reams said of his last dance at Barton, having now obtained a Health Promotion degree with aspirations of entering the world of coaching.

"I love basketball and want to stay around the game," stated Reams, who also mentioned that he enjoyed watching his alma mater of Northern Nash win the state championship back in March.

"It was a cherishable moment," he remembered, flashing back to the evening that the Knights won it all, an evening that he spent watching while on a phone call with his brother.

BIG EAST

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Champion Coach of the Year.

As part of a rebuilding campaign, the Northern Nash Fighting Knights went 8-11 overall to go with a 6-6 ledger in the Big East.

Northern Nash was able to qualify for the state playoffs.

The complete 2026 All-Big East Basetball Team was as follows:

2026 All-Big East Baseball Team

- Will Doll, Hunt
- Angel Saldana, Hunt
- Mattox McKeel, Hunt
- Zach Taylor, Hunt
- Trevor Moore, Hunt
- Stone Massey, Hunt
- Jameson Steele, CB

Aycock

- Caden Cox, CB

Aycock

- Ashton Fricks, CB

Aycock

- Brayden Smith, CB

Aycock

- Isaiah Battle, Southern Nash

Aycock

- Brayden Parker, Southern Nash

Aycock

- Maddox Deans, Southern Nash

Aycock

- Grayden Murray, Southern Nash

Aycock

- Hylan Wheeler, Northern Nash

Aycock

- Brody O'Brien, Northern Nash

Aycock

- Gehrig Miller, Northern Nash

Aycock

- Landon Carlone, Fike

Aycock

- Charlie Maddrey, Fike

Aycock

- James Graham, Southern Wayne

Aycock

- Channing Grady,



SOUTHERN NASH'S ISAIAH BATTLE

Southern Wayne
• Jack McKellar, Rocky Mount

Honorable Mention

- Jake Harris, Hunt
- Jonesy Spencer, CB
- Luke Faulkner, Southern Nash
- Landon Keefe, Northern Nash
- Connor Spencer, Fike
- Logan Denning,

Southern Wayne
• Jason Battle Jr., Rocky Mount

Top Honors

- Pitcher of the Year -- Stone Massey, Wilson Hunt
- Player of the Year -- Isaiah Battle, Southern Nash
- Conference Champion Coach of the Year -- Jonathan Smith, Wilson Hunt