

County Football Skeds Finalized



NORTHERN NASH FOOTBALL COACH ANDREW FARRISS AND HIS FIGHTING KNIGHTS WILL OPEN AUGUST 21 AT GREENVILLE ROSE

August 21st is opening night for grid season

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- Hard to believe, but the high school football season will kick off just seven weeks from now -- and with some doozy first-date matchups.

Northern Nash, fresh off another Big East Conference championship, will open with a road showdown on August 21 against the Greenville Rose Rampants.

On the other side of US 64, Nash Central will begin the Carter Varnell Era with

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NASH CENTRAL'S GRACYN KING

Diamond Bulldogs honored

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- With long-time powerhouse foes Roanoke Rapids and Bunn also scheduled to hop aboard, Nash Central softball coach Todd Brewer understood coming in the challenges that awaited the Lady Bulldogs in the newly formed Quad County Conference.



Brewer's assessment proved to be correct as the QCC was a fast-pitch titan this spring, with Roanoke Rapids winning the league -- one game ahead of runner-up Bunn.

Nash Central, with a young roster, took fourth place with a 3-5 mark that featured a 14-9 worksheet overall.

The Lady Bulldogs would save their best for last, winning seven games in a row late in the campaign while reaching the third round of the

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NCHS' RAYLEIGH SUMMERLIN

UNIV. OF NORTH CAROLINA-WILMINGTON BASEBALL A SOARING SEAHAWK



NORTHERN NASH ALUM DANNY O'BRIEN TAKES A BIG CUT FOR THE UNC-W SEAHAWKS (Photos Courtesy of UNC-W Sports Information Department)

Northern's O'Brien excelling at UNC-Wilmington

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

WILMINGTON -- Attending three schools in three years can be a daunting or perhaps stressful task for a lot of people.

For former Northern Nash baseball star Danny O'Brien, that's been his last three collegiate diamond seasons.

One of the top prospects to come out of Northern in recent years, O'Brien began his collegiate career at nearby Louisburg College in the spring of 2024, hitting nine

home runs and driving in 39 while tabling a .361 batting average and slugging .478.



It didn't take long for a season such as that to begin drawing attention from other local schools and coaches, with Brunswick Community College interested in adding O'Brien to their club after seeing those numbers and his success at Louisburg.

The funny thing is, all those numbers got better after the move to Bolivia.

O'Brien's sophomore campaign resulted in All-Region honors for a second-straight

season, with his year at Brunswick enough to land him a spot as a finalist for Region X Player of the Year.

He was a third-team NJCAA DII All-American as well, hitting for a remarkable .474 average while slugging .596 as a sophomore. He smashed a career-best 12 home runs in a season while knocking in 45 RBI, doing so in just 32 games in 2025, once again drawing lots of attention from coaches.

This time though, they were at an even higher level for O'Brien.

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STATE STANDOUTS

Nash stars sparkle at State Games

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

GREENSBORO - It's been an eventful few weeks for Nash Central High School head baseball coach Willie Langley, who not only served as an assistant coach during this year's BODYARMOR State Games, but he brought two members of his Bulldog roster along with him in addition to a pair of Southern Nash Firebirds as well.



NC'S WILLIE LANGLEY



NASH CENTRAL'S AIDEN PARKS

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NCHS' (L TO R) AIDEN PARKS, WILLIE LANGLEY AND CALEB COX



DANNY O'BRIEN IS WELCOMED BACK AFTER A LONG HOMER

O' BRIEN

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O'Brien didn't have to go far to find his new home, electing to join head coach Randy Hood's squad at Division I UNC-Wilmington, a consistent and high-achieving program that has now rattled off 28-consecutive winning seasons and won the Coastal Athletic Association in both 2023 and 2024.

While playing time might've become more difficult to come by, and the talent pool obviously deeper and larger, it was an opportunity O'Brien couldn't pass up.

It didn't take long for him to find a role for himself, either.

On Feb. 25, in only the team's ninth game of the season, O'Brien launched a go-ahead home run out of Charleston Southern's Nielsen Field that gave the Seahawks an 11-10 11th-inning advantage, a margin they'd inevitably hold on to win by in extra innings.

That was O'Brien's fourth straight game with a hit, and one of six home runs he registered this season, perhaps the biggest one of his college career.

As a first-year Division I player, O'Brien made 34 appearances for UNCW, making 20 starts — two of which came in the CAA conference tournament in May. He drove in 23 RBI over 67 at bats, with his slugging per-



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL ALUM DANNY O'BRIEN

centage and on-base clip combining for an impressive OPS of .979, one that likely will have him in contention for an everyday starting role in 2027.

All-in-all, a potential breakout year is on the horizon for the former

Northern Nash All-Conference, All-Region and All-State honoree, and if he's able to take advantage of it, who knows what could soon be in the fold for Danny O'Brien as he continues his prolific diamond career.

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state playoffs.

Central boasted just two seniors on its roster -- Gracyn King and Rylee Brewer.

King was selected to the prestigious All-QCC Softball Team for the 2026 campaign, while Nash Central's other two picks were talented underclassmen -- sophomore Rayleigh Summerlin and freshman Bella Dillane.

Add honorable mention pick Elin Johnson, also a ninth-grader, and it's easy to see why the future is bright surrounding the NCHS softball program.

Roanoke Rapids' Cadence Ball, who led her club to the conference championship, was tabbed as the Pitcher of the Year, while Bunn's Maycey Buchanan was the pick as the Player of the Year.

Buchanan is the daughter of former legendary BHS golfer Doney Buchanan.

Bunn's Matt Keith was selected as the Coach of the Year.

The complete All-QCC Softball Team for the 2026 season is as follows:

2026 All-QCC Softball Team

- Madelyn Bell, Roanoke Rapids
- Kyla Odom, Roanoke Rapids
- Piper Vann, Roanoke Rapids

- Chloe Lyles, Roanoke Rapids
- Zoey Thomas, Roanoke Rapids
- Juleigh Hall, Roanoke Rapids
- Emily Baez, Bunn
- Paige Wood, Bunn
- Brooke Harrah, Bunn
- Mely Baez, Bunn
- Payton Wood, Bunn
- Lexi Chambers, Wake Prep
- Kyndall Miller, Wake Prep
- Kelcie McNeil-Whalen, Wake Prep
- Gabby Paulino, Wake Prep
- Bella Dillane, Nash Central
- Gracyn King, Nash Central
- Rayleigh Summerlin, Nash Central
- Molly Hughes, Louisburg
- Michaiiah Grissom, Louisburg

Honorable Mention

- Bella Wilson, Bunn
 - Harleigh Roberson, Louisburg
 - Elin Johnson, Nash Central
 - Addyson Butts, Roanoke Rapids
 - Brianna McCrea, Wake Prep
- Top Honors**
- Player of the Year -- Maycey Buchanan, Bunn
 - Pitcher of the Year -- Cadence Ball, Roanoke Rapids
 - Coach of the Year -- Matt Keith, Bunn

FOOTBALL

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a home meeting against Varnell's former school -- SouthWest Edgecombe.

Also on Opening Night, Rocky Mount will have its annual backyard grudge match against Tarboro, with the contest set to be held on the THS campus.

Southern Nash will also be in action on August 21 as the Firebirds will travel to Wake County to tangle with the Knightdale Knights.

Big East Conference play for SN, RM and NN will begin on September 25, while Nash Central's Quad County Conference slate will kick off on October 2 with a road event at Louisburg High School in Franklin County.

The complete schedules for Nash County's high school football teams are as follows, with home games listed in CAPS:

- NASH CENTRAL**
- August 21 -- SOUTH-WEST EDGECOMBE
 - August 28 -- NORTH-ERN NASH
 - September 3 -- at Rocky Mount
 - September 12 -- at Southern Nash
 - September 18 -- at Warren County
 - October 2 -- at Louisburg
 - October 9 -- ROA-NOKE RAPIDS*
 - October 16 - at Bunn*
 - October 23 -- WAKE PREP ACADEMY*
 - October 30 -- at American Leadership Academy of Johnston County*
 - * -- Denotes Quad County Athletic Conference Games
- NORTHERN NASH**
- August 21 -- at Greenville Rose
 - August 28 -- at Nash



NASH CENTRAL KEY GRIDIRON RETURNEE DAVID PORTER

- Central
- September 3 -- CLEVELAND
 - September 18 -- SOUTH CENTRAL
 - September 25 -- WILSON FIKE*
 - October 2 -- at CB Aycock*
 - October 9 -- SOUTH-ERN WAYNE*
 - October 16 -- at Wilson Hunt*
 - October 23 -- SOUTH-ERN NASH*
 - October 30 -- at Rocky Mount*
 - * -- Denotes Big East Conference Games
- ROCKY MOUNT**
- August 21 -- at Tarboro
 - August 28 -- at East Wake
 - September 3 -- NASH CENTRAL
 - September 11 -- VANCE COUNTY
 - September 17 -- WILSON FIKE*
 - October 2 -- SOUTH-ERN WAYNE*
 - October 9 -- CB
- AYCOCK*
- October 16 -- at Southern Nash*
 - October 23 -- WILSON HUNT*
 - October 30 -- NORTHERN NASH*
 - * -- Denotes Big East Conference Games
- SOUTHERN NASH**
- August 21 -- at Knightdale
 - August 28 -- CLAY-TON
 - September 4 -- at Warsaw James Kenan High School
 - September 11 -- NASH CENTRAL
 - September 18 -- at Southern Wayne*
 - September 25 -- CB AYCOCK*
 - October 2 -- at Wilson Fike*
 - October 9 -- WILSON HUNT*
 - October 16 -- ROCKY MOUNT*
 - October 23 -- at Northern Nash*
 - * -- Denotes Big East Conference Games

BASEBALL

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"It was a good showing for Nash County," Langley, who has now coached in the State Games in three straight years, remarked.

"We went and held our own against some really good competition."

Langley, alongside the squad's head coach Pat McRae of South Central, Granville Gehris of First Flight and Manteo's Zach Alexander — who has a Nash County tie of his own as a former North Carolina Wesleyan ballplayer and assistant coach — kicked off their State Games summer by hosting Region 1 tryouts earlier in 2026.

That group combed through a lengthy list of auditioners and settled on the top 20 players that were either freshmen, sophomores or juniors this past season, settling on a roster that included Nash Central's Caleb Cox and Aiden Parks plus Maddox Deans and Isaiah Battle of Southern Nash.

Cox, Parks, Deans and Battle were not only rostered, but real contributors to the Region 1 squad that consisted of players from Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Edgecombe, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Martin, Nash, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrell, Washington and Wilson Counties.

Once selections were made and a roster was built, Langley and the rest of the staff began prepping the team for four games of action that ran from June 16-19.

"I want to carry my guys but they have to earn it," Langley stated — emphasizing that even though he had preexisting relationships with multiple players on the team, those same people had to win over the



NASH CENTRAL'S CALEB COX

remaining coaches and play their way onto the roster.

The Nash County quartet left little doubt as to whether or not they should be included though, if their prolific résumés heading into the event weren't already enough.

"Caleb was a no-doubter," Langley stated of his ace. "He had a great tryout."

On top of that, he shouted out the efforts of Deans, Battle and Parks, specifically mentioning Battle's output during the event itself.

"He mashed some balls," remembered Langley — who felt that Battle hit the ball as well as anyone on his roster over the course of the four games the team played.

Region 1 fired off a 2-2 record en route to a seventh-place finish in the event, but the team also posted the best run differential (+3) in the group, one that included Regions 2, 4 and 5.

While everyone involved wants to win, ultimately the largest benefit in addition to the extra reps for coaches and players alike is the exposure players receive not only to scouts at the college level, but professional diamond scouts as well.

"It just feels big," Langley said of the event that

this year was held on the campus of UNC-Greensboro and at the High-A Greensboro Grasshoppers' First National Bank Field.

"They know the scouts are there."

Nearly every college program that one could think of as well as a strong number of Major League Baseball organizations were represented at this year's event, each jumping at one of the first real opportunities to lay their eyes on some of the state's top talent, all in the same place during the same week.

One of the key events of the year on the recruiting and scouting circuit, attention from scouts has become the norm for this event and will be the case in 2027 as well, a year in which Coach Langley will be taking on an enhanced role within the showcase.

Serving out the final summer of his four-year term, next year Langley will manage the Region 1 squad as its head coach, an opportunity that he's taking on with great enthusiasm.

"I can't even wrap my head around it," Langley said, including that he loved the entire process of this event, down to the opening tryouts, roster selections and so on.

He did mention, of course, that he'd be happy to potentially pass up or delay the opportunity if it meant that his Bulldogs could make a deep run into the playoffs or perhaps even content for a state championship, with high expectations already placed on next season's Nash Central club.

"Anything I do with this, I do it to make my baseball team better," Langley stated. "I want Nash Central baseball to be better."