

2026 NASH CENTRAL HS FOOTBALL NEW ERA AT NC



FIRST-YEAR COACH CARTER VARNELL DISCUSSES STRATEGY WITH HIS NASH CENTRAL BULLDOGS AT THE BARTON COLLEGE JAMBOREE (Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Bulldogs prepare for season opener



BRAYLON WHITLEY
By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- Emotions are a part of any high school football game, or really any sporting event for that matter. But emotions are sure to be running at an all-time high on the campus of Nash Central High School this Friday night,



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NASH CENTRAL'S JONTAE WILLIAMS IN ACTION

Bulldogs Hit The QCC Links Brewer to oversee young girls golf squad at NCHS

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- The Nash Central Lady Bulldogs Golf Team is heading into its second season of play in the Quad Counties Conference and are coming off a second-place finish in 2025. The Lady Bulldogs will have a completely new roster of golfers after graduating three All Conference Team members from last year. With practice just recently starting the girls are working hard to get prepared for the season opening match at Roanoke Rapids, and are excited to open the season. The roster will have a combination of dual sport athletes and beginning golfers. Sophomore Elin Johnson brings the most experience into the season and will be compet-

ing in golf and volleyball along with other sophomores Bella Dillane and Caydence Harrelson. Other members of the golf team include Aubrey Poland, Lucero Velasco, Kimberly Ventura-Vasquez, and Emilyn Lopez-Jimenez. "The outlook for the season is promising with the high number of girls that we have," said NCHS veteran head coach Todd Brewer. "It is going to be a season of learning and improving and has a lot of potential. "The girls are going to go out and compete and give ourselves the best chance for a good finish in each match." Brewer has an extensive experience coaching girls golf and was in charge of the successful Southern Nash program before moving over to Nash Central.



SOUTHERN NASH'S ZAVAD CURTIS SPEEDS FOR YARDAGE AT THE BARTON JAMBOREE (Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

THE BABY BIRDS SN to feature young squad

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- Reloading and replacing lost players is an annual chore for the head coach of any successful prep football program.

But this? This is a bit extreme.

At Southern Nash, veteran skipper Brian Batchelor is faced with the herculean task of overcoming the loss of 20 starters from last year's club -- either due to graduation or transfer to another school.

Because of that, the Firebirds will field a young, inexperienced club this fall -- not the proposition any coach wants, especially in what is expected to be a strong Big East Conference.

But Batchelor sees a

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SOUTHERN NASH'S EMILIO ALVARADO



NORTHERN NASH COACH ANDREW FARRISS Knights to encounter early test against the Rampants

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RED OAK -- At long last, game week has arrived for area high school football teams. And with that comes one of the most anticipated week one matchups in the state, with the hometown Northern Nash Knights heading to Greenville tonight for its season opener against the always-strong J.H. Rose Ram-

pants. The contest was originally scheduled for Friday but has been moved up one day due to weather concerns. Two schools that were long-time conference rivals long before any current students on either campus were even born, Northern Nash and Rose have revamped their series against one another over the last three



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NASH CENTRAL'S COOPER PARKS EXECUTES A HANDOFF AT THE BARTON COLLEGE FOOTBALL JAMBOREE (Photo Submitted by Carl Copeland)

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fooplaying host to South-West Edgecombe in each school's season opener on the gridiron.

The contest is still scheduled for Friday at press time but might be moved up to today due to weather concerns.

While the two schools are former conference rivals and have played consistently since the inception of the Central program, things will be different this year, to say the least.

Of course, the extra intrigue comes from the decision of new Nash Central skipper Carter Varnell to return to Nash County and lead the Bulldogs, leaving the same role at SouthWest which he had held since Dec. 2020.

A move that was made late in the offseason after the retirement of long-time Nash Central head coach Chris Lee, it was officially announced that Varnell would take over the Bulldogs' program in May.

Just over a month later, veteran James Ward was named Varnell's successor at SouthWest, bringing head coaching experience from tenures at Beddingfield, Wakefield and Knightdale.

It will certainly be one of the most anticipated

games of the year for Nash Central, a program that's looking to improve upon last season's injury-riddled campaign.

The Bulldogs follow up its opener against the Cougars with a run of three-straight Nash County opponents, with Central hosting archrival Northern Nash on Aug. 28, followed by road trips to Southern Nash and Rocky Mount on Sept. 3 and Sept. 11, respectively.

The road trips to Southern and Rocky Mount are the first two legs of a four-game road trip for the Bulldogs, with Varnell's squad set to wrap its nonconference slate with a Saturday matinee at Warren County on Sept. 19 followed by opening Quad County Conference play at Lou- isburg High School on Oct. 2.

Looking to flip the script from a year ago, there's still a lot left to learn about Nash Central and the Bulldog roster.

Of course, any time a head coaching change is made, things turn over and there is an element of unknown to be navigated.

However, with the massive number of injuries that the Bulldogs dealt with a season ago, getting a clear picture of

this year's depth chart has been more than difficult.

Junior Emory Bynum is expected to handle the duties at quarterback for Central, serving as the leading rep-taker a season ago after multi-year starter Winston Lee suffered an early season-ending injury.

Bynum will likely be joined in the backfield by the duo of Zaquez Britt and David Porter, a pairing that combined for over 1,000 rushing yards in 2025.

If Varnell's offenses from his time at South- West are any indication, it's likely that his goal is to rely mostly on the run game, but be able to find explosiveness through the air as well.

In 2025, his Cougars compiled a whopping 3,174 rushing yards paired with over 1,500 passing yards, numbers that I'm sure the staff at Nash Central would be happy to duplicate in year one.

Friday's affair between the Bulldogs and Cougars will be held at the football stadium on the campus of Nash Central High School, with kick-off slated for 7 p.m. in the inaugural game of both schools' new eras.

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seasons – some instant classics coming with that renewal.

The Knights won the first contest in nearly 20 years between the two recent powers back in 2023, accruing over 200 yards rushing in a 34-20 decision.

A year removed from that, Northern erased an eight-point fourth-quarter deficit in a wacky come-from-behind victory on the road, winning the third leg of what would become just the second undefeated regular season in school history.

The Rampants got the next laugh in 2024, though, as injuries in the Knights' backfield kept multiple stars sidelined and Rose bested Northern 32-25 in the first round of the state playoffs.

Come 2025, the Knights and Ram- pants opened the year squaring off on the gridiron in a highly-anticipated tilt, one that ended with Northern Nash's Jessie Wade intercepting Rose on the goal line with fewer than 30 seconds remaining, escaping with a 26-20 thrill- ing victory.

Today's contest is expected to once again set the tone for the season in both locker rooms, with the Knights and Rampants alike picked as early favor- ites in their respective leagues.

While Northern is still working a handful of key contributors back from offseason injuries, the roster has already gotten some live reps under its belt after back-to-back scrimmages on the previous two Friday nights.

Northern hosted Corinth Holders in an exhibition on Aug. 7, with a strong performance against the Pirates in some of the fall's first action open to the public.

One week later, the Knights partici- pated in a prestigious event hosted by High School OT on the campus of Wake Forest High School, facing perennial power Garner in a 44-minute, running clock scrimmage.

While the Trojans nipped Northern 14-8, there was a lot to like from what the Knights showed including new- comer Camron Lyons, a running back who transferred from Southern Nash during the offseason.

While matchups against Nash Cen- tral, Cleveland and South Central have already built out quite the impressive nonconference schedule for head coach Andrew Farriss' squad, there's no debate in what the current focus is.

Rose returns 18 of its starters from last year's squad, one that took the Knights down to the wire in Death Valley and reached the second round of the state playoffs.

It's going to take a lot for Northern to knock off the Rampants on the road, but isn't a task that's impossible by any stretch.

The heralded meeting between Northern Nash and Rose is slated for tonight on the campus of J.H. Rose High School in Greenville, with kickoff in Pitt County slated for 7 p.m.



SOUTHERN NASH'S TREY SMITH ELEVATES FOR A RECEPTION AT THE BARTON COLLEGE JAMBOREE

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silver lining in the process as Southern, if it keeps its current roster intact, should continue to make progress as the season moves along -- and that would certainly bode well for the long-term future of the tradition-rich program.

"We might not have the talent and experience as some other teams we've had, but I have really enjoyed coaching this group," Batchelor said. "They come to practice every day, work hard, want to learn and are very unselfish."

Southern's young roster will get thrown into the fire immediately as the Firebirds will once again encounter a chal- lenging non-conference schedule, beginning with this Friday's opener on the road against Knight- dale.

SNHS defeated the Knights last fall in Stan- hope, but the Wake County school has expe- rienced plenty of changes since then, including a new skipper in Marcell Johnson.

"(Knightdale) has a new offense, so we're trying to get on top of that," Batchelor said. "They had a lot of staff turnover. They are young like us and will be very athletic."

After opening their scrimmage slate against North Lenoir, the Fire- birds returned to the field last Friday to compete in the inaugural Barton Col- lege Jamboree on the BC



SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACH BRIAN BATCHELOR

campus in Wilson. At that event, Southern Nash tangled with Amer- ican Leadership Acad- emy of Johnston County, a newish program that competes in the Quad County Conference alongside Nash Central.

"The biggest thing was that we saw a lot of growth from our first scrimmage to the second one," Batchelor said. "We're still trying to give these guys varsity experience, and we're still trying to get players at the right place. For so many of these kids, this is their first varsity expe- rience."

While several start-

ing spots are still up for grabs, one position that has been decided is quarterback, where sophomore LJ White will oversee the Firebirds' traditional double-wing offense.

"We really like what we have seen from (White) so far," Batchelor said.

SN's non-conference gauntlet will continue August 28 with the home opener against expected powerhouse Clayton.

Then comes a Sep- tember 4 trip to Warsaw James Kenan, which is regarded as one of East- ern North Carolina's top small-school gridiron programs.

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