

2026 NASH CENTRAL HS FOOTBALL SLUGGISH START



NASH CENTRAL'S EMORY BYNUM LOOKS TO PASS DURING LAST FRIDAY'S HOME LOSS AGAINST SOUTHWEST EDGECOMBE
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Nash Central falls to SW Edgecombe

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- It's going to take a bit longer for win No. 1 of the Carter Varnell Era to arrive on the campus of Nash Central High School, and it's certainly going to take at least one week longer than what Varnell and his team would've preferred.



The Bulldogs' grid squad dropped their home opener last Friday night to SouthWest Edgecombe, as the Cougars thumped Central 36-8 in each team's first game of the 2026 campaign.

Two schools that are already well-acquainted with one another, having spent previous years as conference rivals, this game of course felt as if there were a bit more at stake.

Yes, it was a traditional week-one nonconference game. And



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NASH CENTRAL'S ROBERT PITT TAKES OFF



2026 NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY SQUAD NN Tangles With The Best Knights compete at prestigious XC invitational

From Staff Reports

CHARLOTTE -- Testing his group against elite-level competition is nothing new for Northern Nash legendary cross country coach Jeff Dodrill.

Dodrill will take his club far and wide as the season progresses -- and that journey took the

Fighting Knights to Charlotte last weekend to participate in the prestigious South Mecklenburg Invitational at McAlpine Park in Charlotte.

Northern's boys showcased their overall strength by taking third place as a team in the invitational category against some

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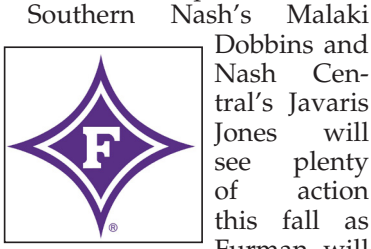


FORMER SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL GRIDIRON STANDOUT MALAKI DOBBINS

TOP PALADINS Nash stars excel at Furman

From Staff Reports

GREENVILLE, S.C. -- Furman University will kick off its football season today at home against Anderson -- and a pair of Nash County standouts are expected to play key roles for the Purple Paladins.



Southern Nash's Malaki Dobbins and Nash Central's Javaris Jones will see plenty of action this fall as Furman will undergo a tough schedule while hoping to compete for a Southern Conference gridiron championship.

Both Dobbins and Jones are juniors who play on the defensive side of the ball.

A defensive end known for his pass-rushing abilities, Dobbins is part of Furman's up-front rotation.

During the 2025 campaign, Dobbins registered 12 tackles,



CENTRAL ALUM
JAVARIS JONES

two of which were for a loss, to go with 1.5 sacks while helping Furman post a 6-6 worksheet.

With another year of experience under his belt, Dobbins is expected to be even more of

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SOUTHERN NASH'S DINYATRAL BLACKWELL Firebirds, Fighting Knights kick off football schedules

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

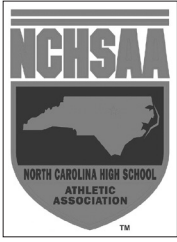
NASH COUNTY -- Week One of the 2026 high school football season is officially wrapped up for area high school teams, with Southern Nash and Northern Nash closing out last week's openers in vastly different fashions.

Southern started the year with a loud 33-13 thumping of the Knightdale Knights, a

game in which the Firebirds did typical Firebird things.

Southern, as it seemingly always does, wore the Knights down via their physically taxing rushing attack -- one that opened the 2026 season by compiling over 300 yards in the ground in game one.

Four different Southern Nash ballcarriers found their way into the endzone, with feature back



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NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL'S ELIJAH HORTON

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yes, ultimately league play is going to be what's most important for both teams as the season progresses. But this year's matchup felt different than previous years, largely in part due to the coaching situation for both squads.

Around Nash County, this past offseason was dominated by headlines of Nash Central's coaching search landing on Varnell, plucking him from SouthWest Edgecome, which was the first head coaching job of his career.

A Rocky Mount alumnus, Varnell of course spent many years as an assistant with the Gryphons before taking a head coaching gig, opting to return to Nash County after it was announced that Chris Lee would retire at the end of the school year.

With Varnell leaving, the Cougars were left with a late-cycle coaching search, one that eventually landed on James "Pooh" Ward – the former head man at Knightdale, Wakefield and Beddingfield High Schools.

Much to their satisfaction, Ward and the Cougars spoiled Var-

nell's debut in a big way, dominating the first half in a game that was quite frankly, never competitive.

The D.J. Mayo Show made its way to the Dawg Pound on Friday, with SouthWest's star quarterback finding the endzone a whopping four times – twice through the air and twice on the ground.

Mayo started the Cougars' season with a three-yard rushing touchdown that put SouthWest up 6-0, followed by Andre Downey Jr. converting on a four-and-goal from the one yard line which extended the lead to 14-0.

A consistent theme of the contest was the Cougars' ability to take advantage of Nash Central mistakes, and after forcing an early turnover SouthWest later took advantage of a bad snap on a Bulldog punt attempt.

Taking over in prime field position, Mayo connected with De'Mazion Williams on a 22-yard pass to push the lead to 22-0 just over 16 minutes into the game, with things getting out of hand quickly for Central.

Just before the half, SouthWest struck again – with the Bulldog defense

unable to get off the field on third and 21.

Mayo hit Zion Horne-Harris for a 36-yard touchdown, building the Cougars' lead up to a whopping 29-0 at half-time, nearly a flawless first two frames from Ward's squad in a contest that could have easily turned into emotionfest more than it was a football game.

Mayo found the end zone once more on the ground in the second half, and Central finally crossed the goal line in the fourth period, but it was all navy and baby blue in each team's season opener.

With SouthWest's focus shifted to its home opener against Hertford County, the Bulldogs will now shift their focus to the first of three-straight outings against Nash County opponents, with archrival Northern Nash set to visit Central on Friday evening.

The 0-1 Northern Nash Knights are also in search of their first victory of the season, with kickoff in the annual Battle of the Bridge slated for 7 p.m. on Aug. 28 at The Dawg Pound on the campus of Nash Central High School.

Wesleyan announces HOF Class

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT – North Carolina Wesleyan University Athletics has announced its 2026 Athletics Hall of Fame class, which will be formally inducted during the University's Hall of Fame ceremony on October 24 at Powers Auditorium.

The afternoon will begin with a reception at 2 p.m., followed by the Hall of Fame induction ceremony at 2:30 p.m.

The 2026 class features three former Bishop standouts whose accomplishments and contributions left a lasting impact on their respective programs and the history of N.C. Wesleyan Athletics.

This year's Hall of Fame class includes three former student athlete standouts Mackenzie Tingle (Volleyball), Jarmel Arrington (Men's Basketball) and Shannon St. George (Women's Soccer).

- **Mackenzie Tingle – Volleyball, 2008–2012**

Tingle was a four-year standout for the N.C. Wesleyan volleyball program and played a significant role in the Bishops' success throughout her career.

She earned First-Team All-Conference honors in 2008, 2009 and 2011 and was named the Conference Rookie of the Year following her freshman season in 2008. Tingle also received Third-Team All-Conference recognition in 2010 and was honored with the Rita Wiggs Conference Award in 2012.

- **Jarmel Arrington – Men's Basket-**

ball, 2005–2010

Arrington, a Northern Nash alum, established himself as one of the most prolific scorers and shooters in the history of the N.C. Wesleyan men's basketball program.

A four-time All-Conference selection, Arrington earned First-Team All-Conference honors during his career and was also named to the 2007–08 USA South All-Tournament Team.

Arrington remains the program's all-time leader in career three-pointers made with 268 and ranks fourth in N.C. Wesleyan history with 1,727 career points. He also ranks fourth in program history for single-season three-pointers made with 77.

- **Shannon St. George – Women's Soccer, 1998–2002**

St. George was a four-year starter and one of the most decorated players in the history of the N.C. Wesleyan women's soccer program. A four-time Dixie Conference First Team selection and Scholar Athlete, she also earned regional All-America recognition three times and served as a team captain for three seasons.

As a freshman in 1998, St. George was named the Dixie Conference Rookie of the Year under head coach Rob Donnenwirth. She went on to help guide the Bishops through one of the most successful stretches in program history, including three consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances from 1999 through 2001.



NORTHERN NASH VETERAN RUNNER MIGUEL GUZMAN (L)

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top-notch runners.

West Stanly was the winner with 115 points, followed by Charlotte Catholic (122) and Northern Nash (151).

Sophomore Christian Powell paced the Fighting Knights by claiming the 21st position overall with a time of 17:38.75.

Miguel Guzman was just one spot behind at 17:40.15, while Joey Lewis was 42nd at 18:36.17.

Guzman and Lewis are both juniors.

Senior Dillon Newbold, the Knights' lone

upperclassman, was 43rd at 18:36, followed by freshman Ayden Wright in 44th place at 18:41.28

"This was a great weekend for our team," Guzman said. "Most of us set new personal records and ran well."

"We have had a great start to our season, and our times will only continue to drop as we improve."

Northern Nash's girls were also entered in the invitational category and came away with a 14th-place performance in the 19-school field.

Leading the way for the Lady Knights was senior Alaina Davis, who took 35th place overall in the quality event with a time of 22:22.04.

Other strong finishers for Northern Nash included Shyann Minchew (90th place at 24:48.09), Kasen Batts-Wood (93rd at 25:25.12) and Naomi Ellis (25:41.31).

Like the boys side, the Northern Nash girls are dominated by underclassmen, with the lone seniors being Davis and Nevaeh Silver.

FURMAN

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an important defensive contributor this time around for the Purple Paladins.

Jones is a reserve safety who has carved out a niche at Furman as a special teams ace.

In 2025, Jones saw action in all 12 games for the Purple Paladins and registered five overall tackles.

Dobbins and Jones have both overcome injury issues during their time in Greenville in order to make extensive contributions.

Both players were also exceptional students in high school, so it comes as no surprise that they were both named to the All-Southern Conference Academic Team to cap off the 2025 season.

After tonight's contest, the Purple Paladins will hit the road next Saturday for a showdown against the mighty Tennessee Volunteers at historic Ney-

land Stadium on the UT campus in Knoxville.

Furman's complete schedule is as follows, with the Paladins' closest game to Nash County coming on September 26 at Richmond:

- August 27 -- ANDERSON
- September 5 -- at Tennessee
- September 12 -- at Mercer
- September 19 -- SOUTH CAROLINA STATE
- September 26 -- at Richmond University
- October 3 -- WOFFORD
- October 10 -- at Tennessee Tech
- October 24 -- SAMFORD
- October 31 -- WESTERN CAROLINA
- November 7 -- at The Citadel
- November 14 -- CHATTANOOGA
- November 21 -- at VMI

GRID

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DJ Baker crossing the goal line twice in the first half of action.

Baker ended the night with a team-high 127 rushing yards, followed closely behind by first-year Kee'Brion Smith who closed with 91.

Smith also found the endzone twice, making a huge impact in the first game of his highly-anticipated and high-potential freshman campaign.

Likely to be a key contributor in Southern Nash's run game, Smith is expected to have a breakout year for the Firebirds in his first season on campus.

Another candidate to make a splash for the revamped Firebird squad is Trey Smith, who opened the second half with a touchdown of his own while Lovelle White Jr. scored Southern's final points of the evening on a keeper.

A dominant, controlled victory to the extent that the Firebirds handled Knightdale might be a bit tougher to replicate in week two, with Clayton – one of the state's top

teams and the Class 7-A runner-up a season ago – headed to Stanhope on Friday evening.

The Comets from Johnston County routed 2025 1A State Champion Wilson Prep 46-6 on Saturday and blitzed the Firebirds 49-14 last season, with Friday expected to be the most difficult game for Southern Nash this year.

As for Northern, the Knights struggled offensively in a 20-11 loss at J.H. Rose on Thursday night.

The team's offensive line struggled to contain a physical and aggressive defensive front posed by the Rampants, a unit that kept Northern out of the end zone until the game's final minute.

A seven-yard touchdown run from Preston McDaniel was one of the few bright spots in Northern's season-opening loss, the first time since 2017 that the Knights have fallen in their first game of the season, and the first time in the head coach Andrew Farriss era as well.

While much needs to be improved early on for Northern to match the consistency and success the program has achieved post-pandemic, a golden opportunity for an early rivalry win to get the train back on the tracks is appearing on the horizon.

While one streak of Farriss' may have been broken in week one, the ninth-year coach has never lost to Nash Central – and his smallest margin of victory against the Bulldogs was 11 points, which happened all the way back in 2018.

Never a game that's taken lightly by the Knights, Friday's trip to Central presents the opportunity to regain some momentum and confidence potentially lost in Northern's trip to Rose.

Both Northern's game at Central's and Southern's home opener against Clayton are slated for a 7 p.m. kickoff, with the contests held at Nash Central High School and Southern Nash High School, respectively.