

2026 NASH COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL SEASON

THE EXCITEMENT BUILDS



NORTHERN NASH'S MYLES EATMON TOTES THE BALL VERSUS NCHS
(Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Fighting Knights shut out Bulldogs



NASH CENTRAL'S TRISTIAN WHITLEY

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent



NASH CENTRAL'S ELIJAH DUNN ATTEMPTS TO COME UP WITH A RECEPTION AS NORTHERN NASH'S CALEB MAYFIELD DEFENDS



NORTHERN NASH'S JAICE JOHNSON ESCAPES FOR YARDAGE AGAINST NASH CENTRAL

ROCKY MOUNT -- It was crucial that the Northern Nash High School gridiron squad bounce back from an underwhelming Week One performance, and the Knights did so in a big way last Friday night. Northern thumped rival Nash Central 43-0 en route to its first win of the season, a game that was never competitive and that the Knights controlled from start to finish.

"It's always great to get a shutout," stated ninth-year Northern Nash head



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SOUTHERN NASH'S WESTON CROCKER MAKES A TACKLE AGAINST THE CLAYTON COMETS
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Southern drops to 1-1 after defeat vs. Comets

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

STANHOPE --Rushing for over 300 yards is typically enough to win a football game, and that's normally the case for the historically-dominant ground game at Southern Nash High School.

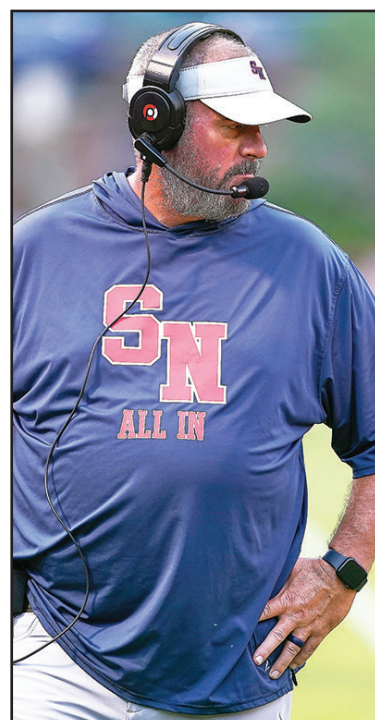


Unfortunately for this year's Firebird squad though, a strong showing running the football

wasn't enough to upset Clayton – a program that has recently established itself as one of the top contenders across the state.

The visiting Comets lived up to their billing last Friday night, thrashing Southern Nash's defense in a 56-13 decision that served as each team's second outing of the 2026 campaign.

Clayton posted 21 points in the opening frame and added 28 more in the second, flexing its muscles and cementing



SOUTHERN COACH BRIAN BATCHELOR

itself once again as a favorite in the 7A classification – the same division that they finished as the state runner-up a

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RUNNING BACK DJ BAKER IS DETERMINED TO PICK UP YARDAGE FOR SOUTHERN NASH DURING ITS HOME LOSS TO CLAYTON



SOUTHERN NASH'S KEE'BRION SMITH SURGES AHEAD FOR YARDAGE AGAINST THE CLAYTON COMETS

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season ago.

"They're a really good football team and we're a really young and inexperienced football team," sixth-year Firebird head coach Brian Batchelor said – pointing to multiple sophomores and first-year varsity players taking the field on the defensive side of the ball for his club.

"Some of the things we gave up were inexcusable," Batchelor remarked, who still emphasized that he feels there is a lot of room to grow and plenty of potential on defense.

Offensively, the Southern Nash rushing attack headlined by freshman Kee'Brion Smith and third-year performer DJ Baker showed a lot to like, with Smith totaling 172 yards on the ground and added a pair of touchdowns as well while Baker rushed for 142 yards and snagged 60 more through the air.

"Offensively I thought we played really well," Batchelor stated, but stressed that ball security would be a focus moving forward as a result of the Firebirds turning the ball over twice after driving into the red zone – one of

which resulted in a scoop-and-score for Clayton.

"We just made too many mistakes," Batchelor said. "We were far from perfect."

Never a group that looks to back down from a challenge, the nonconference schedule won't be getting any easier for 1-1 Southern Nash this week, with the Firebirds slated to travel to Duplin County on Friday night for a date with an always-fiesty James Kenan squad.

The Firebirds and Tigers played a doozy of a game last season, with James Kenan missing a field goal in the game's final minute that would've resulted in an upset win in Stanhope in 2025.

One of the most consistent small-school programs in the state, the Tigers lost in the Class 3-A Eastern Final last season and are off to a hot start this year after a 49-6 rout of Southern Wayne in week one.

Kickoff between Southern Nash and James Kenan is slated for 7 p.m. on Friday with the contest held on the campus of James Kenan High School in Warsaw.



SOUTHERN NASH'S DJ BAKER LOSES CONTROL OF THE FOOTBALL DURING HIS CLUB'S LOSS TO CLAYTON



NORTHERN NASH'S CALEB WALSTON SENDS A KICKOFF DOWNFIELD FOR THE NORTHERN NASH FIGHTING KNIGHTS DURING THEIR ROAD VICTORY LAST FRIDAY NIGHT AGAINST BACKYARD RIVAL NASH CENTRAL

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coach Andrew Farriss – emphasizing that holding the Bulldogs scoreless was a goal for the team heading into the week.

The Knights' defense forced Central into four turnovers, with Cam Lyons, Zephaniah Queen and Caleb Mayfield each registering interceptions while Jaquaye Arrington recovered a Bulldog fumble.

"We weren't able to sustain drives," Carter Varnell said – a man who was coaching just his second game at the school after taking the reins as Nash Central's head coach this off-season.

Despite that, Varnell was still happy with the early energy that he saw from his squad and felt that there were things to build off of in the loss.

"We played tough defensively in the first quarter," said Varnell, whose team gave up one of the Knights' scores early on a turnover rather than to the Northern offense.

The Knights registered 14 points in the first and second quarters and added 15 more in the third period before a running clock was implemented throughout the

final frame, improving dramatically from their Week One loss at J.H. Rose in Greenville.

A large part of that turnaround was Northern Nash quarterback Jaice Johnson, a transfer from Nash Central, who made his first start in green-and-gold after coming off the bench following an injury suffered by Brayden English against Rose.

Johnson, a junior, connected with Omare Porter for a touchdown pass and ran for two more, ending the evening as the Knights' leading rusher having racked up 53 yards on just seven carries.

Through the air, Johnson added 35 yards on a 3-of-4 completion clip, dishing out two passes to Porter while Hassan Davis-McKinney also nabbed a reception.

Johnson is once again expected to start for Northern this week, with the Knights slated for perhaps their most difficult game of the season against the Cleveland Rams.

Cleveland – which currently sits at 2-0 and is expected to be a favorite in the 7A classification – has lost just one regular

season game in the past six seasons and has won at least 10 games in every season since 2018.

Always perceived as a threat for the state title, the Rams escaped Pinecrest with a 41-40 overtime victory in week one before topping Corinth Holders 43-0 in Week Two.

The contest will be the first home game of the season for Northern Nash, and will be held today at historic Death Valley ahead of Labor Day Weekend.

As for Nash Central, the Bulldogs are set for a matchup against cross-town rival Rocky Mount, with the contest between 0-2 Central and the 1-1 Gryphons also slated for today.

It will be the first leg of a rigorous four-game road trip for the Bulldogs, with Southern Nash on deck next week followed by a Saturday matinee at Warren County on Sept. 19, then kicking off Quad County Conference play on Oct. 2 at Louisburg High School in Franklin County.

Both Northern Nash's home tilt against Cleveland and Nash Central's trip to Rocky Mount are slated for 7 p.m. kickoffs.



NC'S TRISTIAN WHITLEY IS CHASED BY NN'S ELIJAH WOOD



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