

2026 NASH COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL SEASON
BIRDS WITH A RALLY



SOUTHERN NASH'S DJ BAKER TRIES TO ESCAPE A TACKLE ATTEMPT FOR THE FIREBIRDS DURING LAST FRIDAY NIGHT'S HOME VICTORY OVER THE NASH CENTRAL BULLDOGS
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Late touchdowns send Southern past Bulldogs



SN'S EMILIO ALVARADO
By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

STANHOPE -- Only once since 2011 have the Southern Nash Firebirds fallen to the Nash Central Bulldogs on the gridiron. While this year's Firebirds

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NASH CENTRAL QUARTERBACK EMORY BYNUM SCRAMBLES FOR YARDAGE LAST FRIDAY NIGHT VERSUS RIVAL SOUTHERN NASH



NORTHERN NASH'S ALEX ZIPKO

Northern ready for Falcons

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RED OAK -- It's been quite some time since Northern Nash had to work out of an early-season deficit in the football field.

This year's week one loss at J.H. Rose was the first season-opening loss of the Andrew Far-riss era for the Knights, and Northern has now sandwiched a win over Nash Central between that loss to Rose and a Sept. 3 defeat at the hands of always-strong Cleveland.

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NCWU takes home opener

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- The North Carolina Wesleyan University football squad made a statement in its 2026 home opener last Saturday afternoon, rolling to a dominant 42-0

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2026 NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS GOLF TEAM

Fike Showing The Way
Demons atop the Big East girls golf standings

From Staff Reports

FRANKLIN COUNTY -- Barring an unexpected, catastrophic development, Wilson Fike will be the 2026 girls golf team champion in the Big East Conference. It's still early in the campaign, but the Lady Demons have dominated the first two league matches, including Monday's nine-hole event at The River Golf Club at Lake Royale near Bunn.

Led by matching 38s from Kensley Hill and Payton Durham, the Lady Demons once again easily controlled the team standings with 121 strokes -- far ahead of runner-up CB Aycokk Northern Nash, coached by the legendary Brian Taylor, was third at 159, followed by Wilson Hunt (162) and Southern Nash (167). Fike's performance was so impressive that

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NASH CENTRAL'S TERRI CASH TAKES THE ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE
(Photo Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Coach Cash gets chilly for a very good cause

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- It's always amazing when rival schools can come together for a common cause -- and that's exactly what happened leading up to the Nash Central-Northern Nash football game two weeks ago. Over the course of the summer, Nash Central long-time girls basketball coach

Terri Cash was making plans to accept the Ice Bucket Challenge -- an event used since 2014 to raise money for the ALS Foundation's NC Chapter. ALS is currently incurable, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a family that has not had a loved one that has been lost because of the debilitating disease.

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NASH CENTRAL COACH TERRI CASH WITH FAMILY MEMBERS (L TO R) MONTRE' CASH (SON), JANET GERLACH (SISTER) AND A'DIA CASH (DAUGHTER)

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And that list would include Cash's family as her mother passed away in 2022 after an eight-year battle with ALS.

Her mother's spirit and fight has remained a constant within Cash's heart, and she wanted to give something back to the ALS Foundation -- and decided to do so by taking the Ice Bucket Challenge at halftime of the NN-NC gridiron contest.

What Cash didn't expect was the support she received from not only the Nash Central community, but also the other high school -- Northern Nash -- across US 64.

"This summer, I saw (former NFL star) Chris Johnson on Good Morning America discussing his (ALS) diagnosis," Cash said. "Shortly after that, I saw his young daughter do the ice bucket challenge."

"I talked to my mom's husband about the different ways local chapters

help people. They are lifesavers. I thought why not give it a chance and raise money and awareness for our local chapter?"

The decision was made to hold the event at The Dawg Pound as part of NC's annual football meeting with Northern Nash.

During a recent volleyball match between the two schools, Cash approached NN Athletic Director Joey Keefe to talk about her intentions.

"I saw Joey and asked him if NN Athletics wanted to make a donation, and he said -- without hesitation-- that he would match us up to \$1,000."

"I told him I only expected to raise \$400-600, and he basically told me he thought we would raise more."

During the contest, wristbands and stickers were sold, and donations were accepted.

Coach Cash then received a tremendous surprise when her sister

showed up from Pennsylvania.

Then came the challenge at halftime, and Cash gladly accepted a chilly bucket of ice over her head, courtesy of several cheerleaders from NC and NN.

When it was over, Cash had raised over \$1,075. Throw in NN's matching contribution, and that's \$2,075 -- much more than Cash could have anticipated.

"It was an emotional night as my sister showed up unannounced to support me," Cash said. Then Monday, when I realized how much we collected, it brought tears to my eyes.

"I was overwhelmed with gratitude about our collective effort to support the North Carolina Chapter of ALS."

"While Nash Central may have led the way, it was a collective effort from both the NC and NN communities that made this gift possible."

"It was very humbling."



NASH CENTRAL'S BRAYLON WHITLEY IS ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH SOUTHERN NASH'S DJ BAKER

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may have kept that streak intact -- it took a minor miracle for them to do so.

The rivalry now dubbed "The Battle for the Banks" -- a nod to each school's close proximity to the Tar River Reservoir -- renewed its latest chapter last Friday night on the campus of Southern Nash High School, the 28-27 result serving as perhaps the most exciting game in series history between the two county foes.

The 'Birds rallied from 13 points down in the fourth quarter to secure their fourth-straight win over the Bulldogs, improving to 2-2 on the young season while Central fell to 0-4, still in search of the program's first victory of the Carter Varnell era.

"I thought our kids did a good job of staying in the game through adversity," said sixth-year Southern Nash head coach Brian Batchelor.

"As young as we are, it was nice to see those guys stay with it."

The Bulldogs entered the final frame on Friday night with a 21-14 edge, able to then push that lead to 27-14 after a long touchdown run by Avery Flowers.

Knowing they needed to score, a pressing Firebird squad immediately threw an interception once they got the ball back, this one all but looking over with around nine minutes left in the game.

Of course, that's when things started to get wacky.

Southern forced Central's offense into a three-and-out, followed by a poor snap by the Bulldogs on a punt attempt giving the Firebirds prime field position and keeping the dream of a dramatic comeback alive.

Soon after, running back DJ Baker

found the end zone for the second time of the evening, bringing Southern within six points at 27-21.

Once again, a Firebird defense that's desperately been in need of some positive momentum engineered another stop, giving the team's offense another chance -- this time with an opportunity to take the lead.

It was Baker once again who found the end zone and flipped the scoreboard -- the junior finishing the Firebirds' nonconference curtain call with a 120-yard, three-touchdown performance on the ground.

From there, Southern's defense would keep the Bulldogs from scoring, holding off Central in exciting fashion to level the 'Birds back to .500 on the young season.

While the loss was certainly a heart-breaker for Nash Central and Varnell, who are still hungry for their first victory of the season -- and would've loved for that to come in a rivalry game -- it's clear the Bulldogs had shown some early improvements from their first few outings, something Batchelor took notice of.

"Carter [Varnell] has done a good job getting kids out and trying to get those young guys to grow up," remarked Southern Nash's Batchelor -- who believes that there are a lot of similarities between the rosters as Central and Southern.

"I think they're a lot like us and that's how the game played out."

One last game remains for the Bulldogs outside of conference play, with Central set for a Saturday afternoon matinee at Warren County this weekend.

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the Lady Demons claimed the top five spots in the individual race, led by Hill and Durham sharing overall medalist honors as part of the links festivities.

Fike's Addison Barnes was third at 45, while teammates Addison Brinkley and Loulie Harrison tied for the fifth position with matching 46s.

The Lady Knights received a pair of Top 10s as junior Hayley Moss fashioned a 50 for ninth place, while potential-rich freshman Emma Matthews carded a 52 to close in the 10th spot.

Southern Nash's best finishers were Jenna Antill (12th with a 54) and Bella McCullen (tied for 13th with a 56).

The next Big East Conference match was staged Wednesday at Wedgewood Golf Course in Wilson.

Team and Top 20 scores from the nine-hole match at The River GC were as follows:

Team Scores

- 1) Wilson Fike 121
- 2) CB Aycock 152
- 3) Northern Nash 159
- 4) Wilson Hunt 162

5) Southern Nash 167

Individuals
Top 20 Finishers

- 1) (tie) Kensley Hill (Wilson Fike) and Payton Durham (Wilson Fike), both with 38s
- 3) Addison Barnes (Wilson Fike) 45
- 4) (tie) Addison Brinkley (Wilson Fike) and Loulie Harrison (Wilson Fike), both with 46s
- 6) Katherine Horton (CB Aycock) 47
- 7) Courtney Barfield (Wilson Hunt), 49
- 8) Hayley Moss (Northern Nash), 50
- 9) Sophie Lester Veal (CB Aycock) 51
- 10) Emma Matthews (Northern Nash) 52
- 11) Mikyla Cosgriff (CB Aycock) 53
- 12) Jenna Antill (Southern Nash) 54
- 13) (tie) Bella McCullen (Southern Nash) and Ava Martin (Wilson Hunt), both with 56s
- 15) (tie) Leila Gonzalez (Southern Nash), Amelia McCarty (Wilson Hunt), Ella Farmer (Wilson Hunt), Pier Rochelle (Northern Nash) and Andrea Allen (CB Aycock), all with 57s

NNHS

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A program that has consistently been one of the top programs in the East post-pandemic -- to check the boxes that Northern has become accustomed to checking in recent years, the Knights are going to need to flip things after a slow start to the year.

The Fighting Knights are set to take the field for the final time in nonconference play this week, hosting a stellar South Central squad this Friday night.

The 3-1 Falcons make the trip to Death Valley having already accrued wins over nearby Kingston, Farmville Central and North Pitt -- the team's lone blemish a 45-42 thriller at Laney.

From there, Northern will kick off Big East play on Sept. 25 against Fike -- a team that's experi-

encing one of the most dramatic year-to-year turnarounds across the state.

After a 4-7 campaign in 2025, the Golden Demons have already matched their season total from a year ago, entering this week at 4-0 on the young season.

Fike's offense has been among the top in the state, currently averaging over 60 points a game with nonconference play wrapped up.

As for Northern, the Knights have only scored 66 points total through its first three outings of the season -- and that includes a 43-0 thumping of rival Nash Central.

Northern's defense has found the end zone multiple times throughout the season after capitalizing big-time on some forced turnovers, but the

offense has been an early issue for the Knights.

This all comes in the absence of star receiver Kam Freeman, who is rumored to be making his return to the field soon after an ACL injury in the offseason. Injuries have been an early theme for the Knights, with Fariss saying in a previous interview with *The Graphic* that he doesn't think he's ever coached a season in which injuries stacked up this much prior to taking the field.

Despite those early issues, the Knights have seen some early success in more areas than one.

As predicted in the preseason, a stacked running back room keeps opposing teams guessing, with four different ballcarriers already having racked up triple-digit rushing yards.



SOUTHERN NASH'S KEEBRION SMITH PULLS AWAY FOR YARDAGE DURING HIS TEAM'S HOME WIN VS. NASH CENTRAL

NCWU

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victory over Apprentice School at Vernon T. Bradley Jr. Stadium.

The Battling Bishops improved to 2-0 on the season while delivering a complete performance on both sides of the ball in their first game in front of the home crowd.

Wesleyan wasted little time setting the tone. Nahjir Seagraves broke free for a 47-yard touchdown run just over two minutes into the game to give the Bishops an early 7-0 advantage.

Quarterback Braden Selvage then connected with Jimmie West III for a 10-yard touchdown later in the opening quarter, sending North Carolina Wesleyan into the second period with a 14-0 lead.

The offense continued to control the game in the second quarter. Selvage found West III again, this time for a

31-yard touchdown on fourth down, before the quarterback used his legs for a 12-yard score with 2:32 remaining in the half.

The pair of touchdowns gave North Carolina Wesleyan a commanding 28-0 advantage heading into halftime.

North Carolina Wesleyan continued to pull away in the third quarter before the defense put an exclamation point on the afternoon.

With 4:19 remaining in the period, Josiah Thomas forced a fumble that Tyquan Richardson-Battle recovered and returned 16 yards for a touchdown, extending the lead to 42-0.

The undefeated Bishops will hit the road this Saturday for Tennessee at a matchup against Sewanee.

Kickoff is scheduled for 2 p.m. (Eastern).