

BIG EAST CONFERENCE CROSS COUNTRY FANTASTIC 15!



NORTHERN NASH FIGHTING KNIGHTS
BIG EAST CROSS COUNTRY BOYS TEAM CHAMPS



NORTHERN NASH FIGHTING KNIGHTS
BIG EAST CROSS COUNTRY GIRLS TEAM CHAMPS

NN boys continue Big East dynasty

From Staff Reports

RED OAK -- Regardless of endeavor, few high school sports programs boast the tradition of the Northern Nash High School boys cross country program.

And the Fighting Knights show no signs of slowing down -- literally -- in the near future.

Runners come, prosper and go, but the tradition -- and results -- stay the same for the Knights under the direction of legendary head coach Jeff Dodrill.

Last Wednesday at their home course at Red Oak Middle School, the Knights claimed their



almost-unbelievable 15th consecutive Big East Conference Team Championship -- despite competing without two of their top runners.

Northern rolled to the conquest with 20 points, far ahead of runner-up Southern Nash at 52 tallies.

Hunt was third at 62, followed by Fike (121) and CB Aycock (133).

Northern Nash was able to claim its crown despite the fact that regular Top-Five standouts Christian Powell (the Big East Runner of the Year) and Ayden Wright were unavailable due to injuries.

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NORTHERN NASH'S ISMAEL MARTINEZ MAKES A STRONG MOVE UPFIELD LAST WEEK AGAINST THE WILSON HUNT WARRIORS
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Conference Clinchers Northern Nash wraps up Big East soccer title

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

STANHOPE -- It's been a long, long time since a conference championship made its way to the boys soccer pitch at Northern Nash High School.

Well -- it had been a long, long time.

A longstanding streak that stretched back to Joe McCarthy's first stint as the Northern Nash boys soccer coach came to an end on Monday evening, as the Fighting Knights knocked

off Southern Nash 2-0, clinching the school's first soccer conference title in recent memory.

A pair of first half goals off the foot of Jayden Roberson

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NASH CENTRAL MOUND ACE CALEB COX
(Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

CALEB'S CHOICE NCHS' Cox commits to Pack

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- It's not every day that an athlete bred in Nash County drives attention from area Atlantic Coast Conference schools -- which makes it all the more special when that rarity occurs.

As for Nash Central High School junior Caleb Cox, that has become reality.

Cox pledged his collegiate commitment to the baseball program at NC State last week after just two seasons on the high school diamond, drawing lots of well-deserved attention from nearby programs but ultimately settling on the Wolfpack -- who qualified for a



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NCHS' CALEB COX



NASH CENTRAL FULLBACK AVERY FLOWERS
(Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Nash Central's victory streak is now at three

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- It may have taken a few weeks for the Nash Central Bulldogs to find their groove on the gridiron this fall, but with one week remaining in the regular season, there's still a lot to play for as year one

of the Carter Varnell Era winds down.

The Bulldogs picked up their third straight win last Friday night in a 14-2 rockfight against Wake Prep Academy -- locking themselves into a three-way tie for first place in the Quad County



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NORTHERN NASH'S EMMA MATTHEWS



NORTHERN NASH'S HAYLEY MOSS

Lady Knights wrap up spectacular campaign

From Staff Reports

RED OAK -- Northern Nash's girls golf program has traveled a long way in a very short period of time.

For a handful of seasons, legendary NNHS head coach Brian Taylor would only have one or two girls to carry to Big East Conference links events.

Because of the low number, the Lady Knights weren't even eligible for consideration in the Big East overall team standings.

Things have changed dramatically since then as Northern Nash now boasts a strong four-person roster -- and each of those standouts will be returning next season.

Northern, with two juniors and two freshmen in its lineup, delivered an effective fourth-place team finish in the Big East -- a league that was controlled this fall by the Wilson Fike Lady Demons.

In the individual standings, NN's Emma Matthews was sixth in the Big East season cumulative standings -- and was the top non-Wilson Fike finisher.

Also breaking into the Top 10 for the Lady Knights was Hayley Moss in the 10th spot.

Both Matthews (a freshman) and Moss (a junior) claimed All-Big East Conference honors and took part in the Class 6-A East Regional Championships, which were staged October 19-20 at the historic Reedy Creek Golf Course in Johnston County.

Rounding out NN's roster this fall were junior Pier Rochelle and freshman Monica Jarrell.

"I had a lot of fun this season," Taylor said. "These girls were so much fun to be around

-- great personalities and great people.

"They were never a problem. They came to practice every day and worked hard -- and it showed. All of them got better throughout the season.

"I also want to thank Mrs. Lauren Runyon, one of our teachers who helped me coach this season. She was a great addition also."

As part of their solid campaigns, both Moss and Matthews earned positions on the prestigious All-Big East Conference Team.

This was Taylor's final season as head coach as he is retiring from teaching and coaching next summer -- though he will still coach the Northern Nash boys for the Spring 2027 campaign.

A list of those performers is as follows:

- 2026
All-Big East
Conference
Girls Golf Team
- Kensley Hill, Wilson Fike
 - Loulie Harrison, Wilson Fike
 - Payton Durham, Wilson Fike
 - Addison Barnes, Wilson Fike
 - Addison Brinkley, Wilson Fike
 - Emma Matthews, Northern Nash
 - Mikyla Cosgriff, CB Aycock
 - Courtney Barfield, Wilson Hunt
 - Katherine Horton, CB Aycock
 - Hayley Moss, Northern Nash
 - Jenna Antill, Southern Nash

- Top Honors
- Big East Conference Girls Golf Player of the Year -- Kensley Hill, Wilson Fike
 - Big East Conference Girls Golf Coach of the Year -- Clint Carter, Wilson Fike



NORTHERN NASH'S KAMREN FREEMAN BREAKS AWAY FOR A TD RECEPTION
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Northern Stifles Firebirds Knights clinch a share of conference crown

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RED OAK -- Domination is really the only word that comes to mind when examining the last few weeks of Northern Nash High School Football.

The Knights, who head into this weekend's regular season finale against archrival Rocky Mount having won six games in a row, throttled long-time county foe Southern Nash 49-0 last Friday evening -- locking up at least a share of third straight Big East Conference championship on the gridiron and the school's fifth title over the last six seasons.

Northern, which has now outscored its league opponents 251-20 through five games, used six touchdowns from quarterback Jaice Johnson in its senior night thumping of the Firebirds, half of which came through the air while the other three came on the ground.

A few pure passes paired with the efforts of his receivers resulted in touchdown connections of 43, 48 and 74 yards, with Hassan Davis-McKinney turning a screen pass into an icebreaking 43-yard touchdown followed by star senior Kamren Freeman registering the 48 and 74-yard scores.

Johnson, who has consistently gotten better as the season has progressed, also found the end zone on keepers of 29 and nine yards, leading the way in a wire-to-wire win that also included touchdowns from running backs Myles Eatmon and Jamarcus Robinson.

The Fighting Knights' prolific offense has been on quite the impressive heater as of late, but it's somehow been outperformed by the team's hard-hitting, physical and swarm-to-the-ball defensive attack.

Northern has now won a whopping four straight games via shutout, and the team also held Nash Central scoreless earlier in the year -- finding a new gear defensively once league play arrived.

Visiting Southern Nash could muster only 49



CAMRON LYONS PICKS UP YARDAGE FOR NORTHERN NASH

offensive yards against the stellar Knights' defense -- ending its regular season at 4-6 overall and 2-4 in league play.

The loss resulted in the Firebirds suffering their first losing season since the COVID-shortened season of spring 2021, and their first time below .500 in a standard fall season since 2008.

A talented but young squad, the Firebirds are off during the final week of the regular season and will await playoff selections -- which will be released on Oct. 31 -- to see if their season will continue.

As for Northern Nash, the Knights will take the field against Rocky Mount on Friday night in each team's final bout of the regular season.

While Northern has already earned at least a share of the league title, a win over the Gryphons would clinch solo share of the league crown and would result in a third-straight undefeated season within Big East Conference play.

Northern -- which handed both Hunt and Fike its lone losses of the season -- could tie the winner of this weekend's rivalry matchup between the league's two Wilson's schools if they were upset by Rocky Mount, but will still ultimately hold the tiebreaker.

The Knights' season finale against the Gryphons is slated for a



SOUTHERN NASH'S KEE'BRION SMITH



NORTHERN NASH'S MYLES EATMON

7 p.m. kickoff on the campus of Rocky Mount High School -- with a lot of bragging rights and

more on the line between the two long-time Nash County high school gridiron foes.

NC Wesleyan delivers resounding home victory

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- The North Carolina Wesleyan football team made its first home night game under the lights one to remember last Saturday, putting together a dominant all-around performance in a 45-3 victory over Methodist at Stallings Field at Vernon T. Bradley Jr. Stadium.

The Battling Bishops scored 28

unanswered points in the fourth quarter to pull away and secure their first USA South victory of the season, improving to 3-4 overall and 1-3 in conference play.

Playing beneath the lights at home for the first time, Wesleyan wasted little time giving the home crowd something to celebrate.

After the defense forced a Methodist punt, the Bishops marched 59 yards in just four plays. Jack Pear-

son connected with Tyson Resper for a 46-yard touchdown with 6:51 remaining in the opening quarter, and Jorge Hernandez-Lara added the extra point to give Wesleyan a 7-0 advantage.

The Bishops added to their lead early in the second quarter with an impressive 80-yard scoring drive. Pearson found Jimmie West

XC

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Still, NN claimed three of the top five positions in the standings behind Rocky Mount's Tayquan Alston, who was the winner at 17:56.

NN's Miguel Guzman was second at 18:06, while teammate Daymond Sherrod claimed the third overall spot at 18:31.

NN's Joey Lewis took fifth at 18:47, and Dillon Newbold (eighth) and Humberto Escobar (10th) also nailed Top-10 performances to spark Dodrill's always-strong Fighting Knights.

"The boys demonstrated the true concept of a team," Dodrill said. "The leadership of Dillon and Daymond has brought the younger runners into the group, and everyone feels like they can contribute."

Southern Nash boast a pair of Top-10 finishers -- Mason Edwards (seventh) and Kyle Smart (ninth).

Both Edwards and Smart are sophomores, giving the Firebirds a solid foundation to build upon for the future.

In girls action, Northern Nash finished off the double-double team title by securing 34 points -- compared to 46 for runner-up Southern Nash.

Wilson Hunt was third at 83, followed by Rocky Mount (103) and Wilson Fike (112).

"The girls have worked hard to accomplish their



SOUTHERN NASH'S BROOKLYN RICE

title and are striving to earn a state championship berth," Dodrill said. "We have been in a battle with Southern for two years and, with only seven runners, all of them are important."

Southern Nash's Brooklyn Rice, who is only a sophomore, continued her year-long dominance by winning the individual crown with an effective time of 21:16.

Teammate Emma Batchelor was fifth at 23:24 as the Ladybirds claimed a pair of Top-

Five finishes.

So did Northern Nash, led by Alaina Davis in the second overall spot at 21:46.

NN's Michala Dawes was fourth at 23:14, while the Lady Knights also received exceptional performances from Kasen Batts-Wood (sixth) and Nevaeh Silver (10th).

"Nevaeh started the season at number seven (on NN's times list), and she ended up making All-Conference," Dodrill said. "That's commitment and dedication to the program."



NASH CENTRAL'S TRISTIAN WHITLEY EARNS YARDAGE

DOGS

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Conference alongside Louisburg and Bunn, both of which Central has already faced.

Varnell's squad started the season with six-straight losses and were shut out in three of their first five games -- digging themselves into a deep hole that mimicked last year's injury-riddled, frustrating campaign.

After suffering heartbreakers against county rival Southern Nash and conference foe Louisburg, the Bulldogs finally got into the win column on Oct. 9 -- avenging last season's playoff loss to Roanoke Rapids in a 19-3 victory.

A few days later in a rare Thursday night tilt, Central upset Bunn on the road by a thrilling 14-13 margin, establishing themselves a contender in the league despite the slow start to the year.

The Bulldogs' turnaround has in large part been directed by the team's defense -- one who has yet to surrender 20 or more points in league play.

Even their lone conference loss, a 27-19 decision at Louisburg -- Central's defense was a strong highlight.

That night, the Bulldogs both saw the Warriors return an interception and a fumble surrendered by their offense for

a touchdown -- with the team's defense providing a reason for optimism as the season progressed.

Now, that defense has proven to be more than just a reason for optimism, but the engine behind a drastic turn of the tides.

Led by two-way star Avery Flowers -- who has totaled a team-best 84 tackles -- 14 of which have come behind the line of scrimmage -- has a chance to toss its first shutout of the year on the board as the Bulldogs will travel to 1-7 American Leadership Academy - Johnston (ALAJ) on Friday night in each team's regular season finale.

Many around the Nash Central program will likely have an eye on the score of the matchup between Wake Prep Academy and Louisburg, as well as the bout between Bunn and Roanoke Rapids.

Both these games could potentially impact the Bulldogs in the race for the conference crown, with Central currently in the midst of a thrilling three-way tie.

The final tilt of the regular season for the Bulldogs is slated for a 7 p.m. kickoff in Clayton on the campus of ALAJ.

NCWC

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III for a six-yard touchdown to cap the 11-play possession and extend Wesleyan's advantage to 14-0. Methodist managed a field goal late in the half, but North Carolina Wesleyan immediately responded.

Jaylen Solomon broke

free for a 38-yard run before Pearson connected with Ethan Fay for 17 yards, setting up Hernandez-Lara's 39-yard field goal with two seconds remaining to send the Bishops into halftime ahead 17-3.

The Wesleyan defense

continued to control the game in the third quarter. Methodist threatened with a 41-yard field goal attempt, but Michael Wallace blocked the kick and Mathias Winston recovered it before returning the ball 40 yards to midfield.



NORTHERN NASH'S GEHOVANY ALVAREZ-PACHECO

SOCCER

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helped engineer perhaps the most rewarding and exciting night of Northern Nash soccer this century -- capping a decade that has included five different head coaches -- as well as two separate stints from the legendary McCarthy.

The Knights had four different coaches over four seasons from 2016-19, struggling with continuity and never winning more than five games in a season over that timeframe.

After McCarthy retired in 2016, he rejoined the program in the COVID-impacted spring 2021 season as head coach -- a position he held until the end of the 2022 season.

McCarthy helped turn the program around from 3-13 in the fall of 2021 to 10-6-1 in the fall of 2022 before turning the reins over to Baltazar Rodriguez in 2023 -- when things really began to pick up.

After a 5-11 mark in 2023, Rodriguez and his squad have improved each season in which he's served as the school's head coach -- this year's conference title serving as the most impressive achievement of the program in quite some time.

Roberson, as well as leading goal scorer Ismael Martinez, are perhaps

the two most impactful players out of a group of five seniors, with sophomores Noah Blanton and Pearson Bissette each having registered double-digit goals as well.

That impressive offensive output has helped the Knights deliver two-game sweeps over conference foes Southern Nash, Southern Wayne and Fike -- with the opportunity to sweep archrival Rocky Mount taking place earlier this week on Wednesday.

Northern tied C.B. Ayccock twice, and beat Tarboro, Nash Central, Pender and North Pitt outside of its league slate.

With the regular season for the league champion Knights now complete, the playoffs -- a space where Northern could sneak some real noise for the first time in a long time -- the new priority for Rodriguez and his club.

Brackets for the 2026 Boys Soccer playoffs are slated to be released today with the first round of competition in the postseason scheduled for Monday, Nov. 2.

While it's unknown what the postseason will hold Northern and Rodriguez -- it's certainly nice for the Knights to have this level of optimism at this point in the season

COX

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fourth straight NCAA Tournament appearance earlier this year.

"They offered me right on the phone," said Cox of his conversations with NC State, a program that will see a new skipper heading up the dugout for the first time in 30 years come 2027.

"They wanted me from day one and they kept pursuing me," Cox remarked.

The main person making those phone calls and pitching Cox was the program's new head coach Chris Hart -- a longtime assistant at the school who spent his college years on the roster at Florida State under the legendary Mike Martin.

Hart was named just the fifth coach at NC State since 1946 in May, shortly after the announcement that 30-year veteran and Nash County native Elliott Avent would be stepping down from the role.

"He will do a good job," said Cox of Hart -- who clearly made a strong impression on the Central junior during the recruiting process.

Of course, connections to Nash County are nothing new for the Wolfpack program -- one that outside of Avent rostered Reid Johnston out of Rocky Mount Academy and David Harrison of Rocky Mount High School in recent years -- with Johnston serving as a starting pitcher and key piece of NC State's 2021 College World Series team.

It's not hard to determine why a program like NC State, and the many others schools who sought after him -- made a run at Cox.

In his sophomore campaign, the young left-handed pitcher issued an



NASH CENTRAL'S CALEB COX

impressive 1.61 earned run average (ERA) over 56-plus innings of work, as well as 123 strikeouts -- a state that ranked first in the entire state of North Carolina.

Cox made an impact as soon as he landed on the campus of Nash Central -- but largely credits his head coach Willie Langley, high school pitching coach Noah Shrock and private pitching coach Logan Bender -- who played at both Campbell and NC State -- in assisting with his development as a player.

"They gave me a chance early and I've really progressed," said Cox of his high school coaches -- ones that have helped the Bulldogs to four-straight winning seasons.

"The way they've believed in me through my two years here, it means a lot."

Aside from Bender and the staff at Nash Central -- Cox also highlighted his parents as key stewards of his athletic journey.

"They've been great," Cox stated of his family -- particularly as it relates to the recruiting process that he has undergone over the last few months.

"This is new for all of us and they've been there for me when it counts."

Cox has big goals both for himself and this year's Bulldog club -- one that he feels can compete for a conference title despite defending 4A Champion Bunn potentially standing in the way.

"We're capable of winning the conference," Cox stated of this year's Central roster -- one that's returning a hefty chunk of its production from a season ago. "If we really put our minds to it, I really think we could go deep."