NASH COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL

IT'S HOOPS TIME!

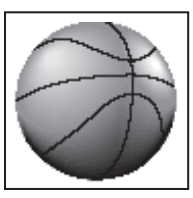


NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL KEY RETURNEE QUANTAY JAMES
(Photos Submitted by Carl Copeland)

County clubs look for strong seasons

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- Northern Nash's boys state title defense and Nash Central's hopes for a three-peat girls conference crown are among the top storylines heading into the 2026-27 basketball campaign in Nash County.



The Fighting Knights, coached by Henry Drake, claimed the state championship back in March with a victory over Kings Mountain.

Drake and Company kicked off this season Wednesday at home against backyard rival Nash Central at the historic NNHS Gymnasium.

On that same day, Terri Cash's Nash Central girls were in action versus the Lady Knights.

Nash Central has won the Quad County Conference

See HOOPS, Page 2B



NASH CENTRAL STANDOUT A'DIA CASH (RIGHT)

STATE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF SKED

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- Here are the North Carolina High School Athletic Association's updated brackets for the Class 4-A (Nash Central), 5-A (Rocky Mount and Southern Nash) and 6-A (Northern Nash) State Football Playoffs.

Listed are last week's second-round results and this week's third-round schedule:

Class 4-A
East Regional
Second Round
Last Week

- East Duplin 41, Washington 20
- SW Randolph 43, Fairmont 14
- Reidsville 55, Randleman 30
- West Craven 65, Ledford 21
- Clinton 17, SW Onslow 16
- SW Edgecombe 40, Central Davidson 21
- Morehead 28, Lexington 7
- High Point Andrews 48, Anson 21

Third Round
This Week

- SW Randolph (8) at East Duplin (1)
- Reidsville (5) at West Craven (4)
- SW Edgecombe (6) at Clinton (3)
- Morehead (7) at High Point Andrews (2)

West Regional
Second Round
Last Week

- Hibriten 38, East Burke 0
- Lake Norman Charter 56, R-S Central 21
- Wilkes Central 31, Mount Pleasant 13

See PLAYOFFS, Page 2B



NORTHERN NASH FOOTBALL STARS (L TO R)
HOLTON WESTBROOK & JAQUAYE ARRINGTON
(Photo Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

WHAT A STREAK!

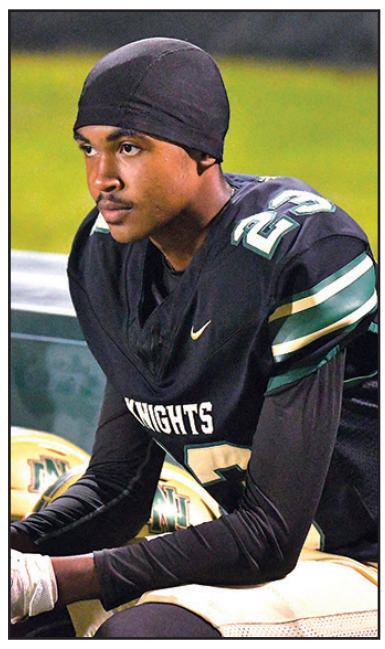
NN continues to dominate

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

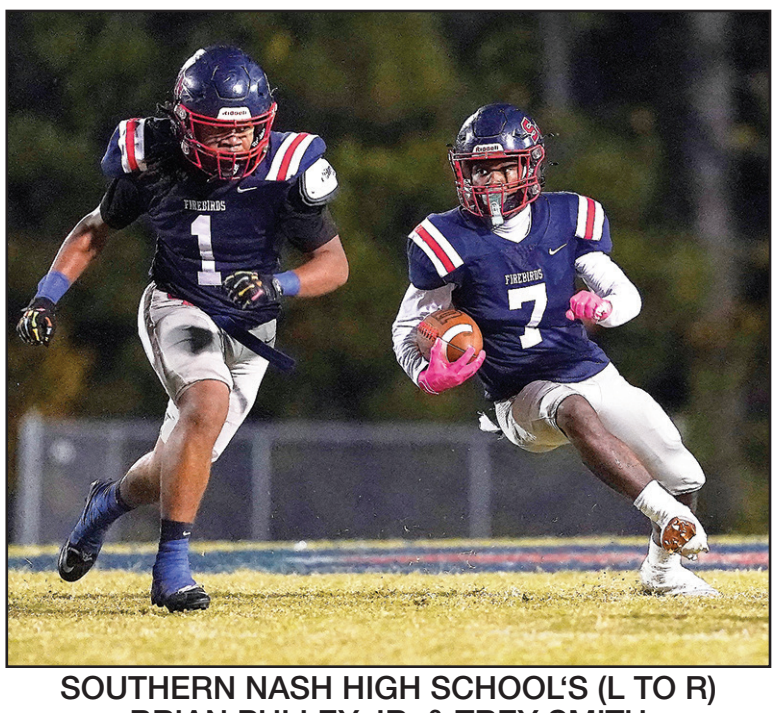
RED OAK --- Round Three of the NCHSAA'S Class 6-A State Football Playoffs awaits the Northern Nash High gridiron squad on Friday evening after the Knights thumped Fayetteville Westover by a 33-6 margin last week, improving to 9-2 on the season while picking up the team's eighth straight victory.

It was the first postseason tilt of 2026 for Northern, who was awarded the No. 3 seed in the Class 6-A East after winning

See KNIGHTS, Page 2B



NORTHERN NASH'S
JULIAN CAUDLE



SOUTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL'S (L TO R)
BRIAN PULLEY JR. & TREY SMITH
(Photo Submitted by Carl Copeland)

Southern Nash closes out season with road setback

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

JACKSONVILLE -- A valiant effort was given by the football team at Southern Nash High School in Round Two of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association's Class 5-A State Football Playoffs, but it wasn't enough to upend No. 2 Northside-Jacksonville last Friday night in Onslow County.

The Firebirds, who advanced to the second round after a 16-point victory over Rockingham County on Nov. 5, gave the Monarchs all they could handle — threatening late in the game with the score knotted at 35 apiece in the fourth period.

See BIRDS, Page 2B

SN's Pace nabs state award

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- Nash County Public Schools has announced that Southern Nash High School Coach Chris Pace has been named a Girls Flag Coach of the Week, presented by Whataburger, through a recognition program with the Carolina Panthers.

This recognition celebrates Coach Pace's dedication to supporting student-athletes and helping grow opportunities for girls in flag football at Southern Nash High School.

As part of the recognition, Southern Nash High School's girls flag football program

See PACE, Page 2B

PLAYOFFS

continued from page 1B

• Burns 49, Bunker Hill 14
• West Iredell 51, West Stanly 0
• West Stokes 37, South Rowan 16
• Stuart Cramer 52, Fred T. Foard 13
• Tuscola 28, Maiden 27

Third Round
This Week

• Lake Norman Charter (8) at Hibriten (1)
• Wilkes Central (12) at Burns (4)
• West Stokes (6) at West Iredell (3)
• Stuart W. Cramer (7) at Tuscola (2)

Class 5-A
East Regional
Second Round
Last Week

• Southeast Alamance 49, West Carteret 21
• Havelock 43, Rocky Mount 8
• Seaforth 35, South Granville 28
• Croatan 42, Western Alamance 22
• Wilson Hunt 39, Montgomery Central 34
• Wilson Fike 28, St. Pauls 17
• Eastern Alamance 42, Hillsborough Orange 21
• Northside-Jacksonville 43, Southern Nash 35

Third Round
This Week

• Havelock (8) at Southeast Alamance (1)
• Seaforth (5) at Croatan (4)
• Wilson Fike (6) at Wilson Hunt (3)
• Eastern Alamance (7) at Northside-Jacksonville (2)

West Regional
Second Round
Last Week

• Shelby Crest 42, Parkwood 14
• Oak Grove 25, Hickory 3
• Monroe 56, North Lincoln 13
• South Point 40, Smoky Mountain 0
• Jay M. Robinson 40, North Davidson 7
• West Rowan 41 Enka 33
• East Lincoln 49, Forest Hills 16
• Franklin 42, West Henderson 21

Third Round
This Week

• Lak Grove (8) at Shelby Crest (1)
• Monroe (5) at South Point (4)
• West Rowan (6) at Jay M. Robinson (3)
• East Lincoln (7) at Franklin (2)

Class 6-A
East Regional
Second Round
Last Week

• Greenville Rose 48, South Johnston 0
• Middle Creek 35, Fayetteville 71st 26
• Union Pines 48, Terry Sanford 19
• Scotland 49, Swansboro 7
• Northern Nash 33, Fayetteville Westover 6
• Southern Alamance 42, Harnett Central 33
• Burlington Williams 35, Erwin Triton 14
• Jacksonville 48, Gray's Creek 7

Third Round
This Week

• Middle Creek (8) at Greenville Rose (1)
• Union Pines (5) at Scotland (4)
• Southern Alamance (6) at Northern Nash (3)
• Burlington Williams (7) at Jacksonville (2)

West Regional
Second Round
Last Week

• Asheville 43, AC Reynolds 6
• Greensboro Dudley 50, Sun Valley 28
• Gastonia Ashbrook 29, Winston-Salem Mount Tabor 28
• Kings Mountain 42, Watauga 0
• Asheboro 17, Eastern Guilford 7
• Northern Guilford 62, Alexander Central 38
• Charlotte Catholic 18, Morganton Freedom 14
• TC Roberson 31, Jamestown Ragsdale 13

Third Round
This Week

• Greensboro Dudley (8) at Asheville (1)
• Ashbrook (12) at Kings Mountain (4)
• Northern Guilford (11) at Asheboro (3)
• Charlotte Catholic (10) at TC Roberson (2)

KNIGHTS

continued from page 1B

a third straight Big East Conference Championship — in addition to a first-round bye.

That extra week of prep gave the Knights more-than-ample time to prepare for a pesky Wolverine squad, one which throttled West Johnston 44-0 in the opening round.

It didn't take long for Northern's offense to find its groove, picking up right where it left off in the regular season.

Quarterback Jaice Johnson broke the ice on a one-yard keeper immediately after he dialed up a bomb to star receiver Kamren Freeman that put Northern inside the five yard-line, giving the Knights an early lead that the team wouldn't give up for the remainder of the contest.

As for a more non-traditional method of scoring, Northern's next points came courtesy of a blocked punt that was returned for a touchdown by Zephaniah Queen — extending the Knights' first-quarter lead to an early 12-0.

It was then Jamarcus Robinson's turn to cross the goal line in the second period, pushing the lead to 20 points before a Johnson bullet to Hassan Davis-McKinney in the waning minutes of the first half resulted in the Knights taking a commanding 27-0 edge into halftime.

Johnson rushed for yet another touchdown in the fourth period, and Westover found the end-zone on a touchdown pass delivered by senior quarterback Eric Kline in the third frame — the first points surrendered by Northern since Sept. 25 in the team's conference opener against Wilson Fike.

As the final bell tolled, it was a 33-6 decision in the Knights' favor that advanced Northern to the third round of the playoffs — with this week's matchup set to be held at Death Valley once again.

Andrew Farriss' squad will now turn its attention to Southern Alamance club which, like the Knights, received a first-round bye and then advanced via a 42-33 victory over Harnett Central.

The sixth-seeded Patriots will make the trip to Nash County from Graham on Friday night, riding an impressive win streak of their own.

Southern Alamance has won its last five games, all by at least nine points or more, and sit at 9-2 with its only two losses being three-point thrillers against unbeaten Southeast Alamance and seventh-seeded Williams out of Burlington — who faces No. 2 Jacksonville this week.

Ironically, the winner of the matchup between Williams and Jacksonville will face the winner of Northern Nash's matchup against the Patriots in a game that will serve as the state quarterfinal matchup.

The Patriots are a run-heavy team that's led by star running back Sincere Thompson — a junior that's compiled a whopping 2,531 yards on the ground this season.

Thompson's rushing totals rank third in the state — behind Teo McPhatter or Princeton and Sebastian O'Keefe of Fayetteville Terry Sanford, both of which have played 12 games to Thompson's 11.

He ranks seventh in the state in rushing touchdowns with 32, and perhaps most impressively — he's only fumbled once this season. Thompson totaled a career-best 414 yards against Southeast Guilford earlier this season, scoring five touchdowns in that same outing, good for one of the best performances of the season around the country. He ranks 22nd in the nation in rushing yards, as well.

Friday's highly-anticipated matchup between Northern Nash and Southern Alamance will be played at Death Valley on Northern's campus, with kickoff slated for 7 p.m.

PACE

continued from page 1B

will receive a $1,000 grant to support the team's continued growth and development.

Coach Pace will also receive a special gift from Whataburger and be recognized during an upcoming Carolina Panthers home game at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

Girls flag football continues to provide opportunities for female student-athletes to develop their skills, build teamwork, and experience the benefits of participating in competitive athletics.



SOUTHERN NASH'S CHRIS PACE

HOOPS

continued from page 1B

Championship in each of the past two years under Cash's direction -- and are favored to repeat this time around thanks to several key returnees.

Southern Nash's season will begin a little later than its other county foes as the Firebirds will travel to Nash Central on December 1 for its inaugural event.

This will be the second year as head coach for SN's esteemed boys skipper Sterling Leonard -- and the first for new girls coach Lovelle White, Sr.

(Home Games Listed In CAPS):

NASH CENTRAL

• November 18 -- NORTHERN NASH
• November 21 -- vs. Washington County (at Farmville Central, girls only)
• November 23 -- at Northern Nash
• November 30 -- ROCKY MOUNT
• December 1 -- SOUTHERN NASH
• December 8 -- at Rocky Mount
• December 11 -- at SW Edgecombe
• December 19 -- SOUTH CENTRAL
• December 23 -- at Southern Nash
• December 28-30 at Smithfield-Selma Holiday Tournament
• January 9 -- NORTHWOOD
• January 15 -- at Louisburg*
• January 19 -- ROANOKE RAPIDS*
• January 22 -- BUNN*
• January 26 -- WAKE PREP ACADEMY*
• January 29 -- at American Leadership Academy of Johnston County*
• February 2 -- LOUISBURG*
• February 5 -- at Roanoke Rapids*
• February 9 -- at Bunn*
• February 12 -- at Wake Prep Academy*
• February 16 -- AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY OF JOHNSTON COUNTY*

* -- Denotes Quad County Conference Games

NORTHERN NASH

• November 18 -- at Nash Central
• November 23 -- NASH CENTRAL
• November 30 -- EAST WAKE
• December 3 -- MARTIN COUNTY
• December 4 -- KINSTON
• December 11 -- at Kinston
• December 18 -- WILSON FIKE*
• December 19 -- at Greenville Rose
• January 5 -- at CB Aycock*
• January 7 -- SOUTHERN WAYNE*
• January 9 -- BTW Classic at Washington High School (Boys Only, TBA)
• January 12 -- at Wilson Hunt*
• January 15 -- SOUTHERN NASH*
• January 19 -- at Rocky Mount*
• January 20 -- at Martin County*
• January 26 -- at Wilson Fike*
• January 29 -- CB AYCOCK*
• February 2 -- at Southern Wayne*
• February 5 -- WILSON HUNT*
• February 9 -- at Southern Nash*
• February 12 -- ROCKY MOUNT*

* -- Denotes Big East Conference Games

SOUTHERN NASH

• December 1 -- at Nash Central
• December 2 -- at Wilson Beddingfield
• December 4 -- WEST JOHNSTON
• December 8 -- at DH Conley
• December 9 -- at Bunn
• December 11 -- at Southern Wayne*
• December 18 -- CB AYCOCK*
• December 19 -- DH CONLEY
• December 22 -- BUNN
• December 23 -- NASH CENTRAL
• January 4 -- TARBORO
• January 5 -- at Wilson Fike*
• January 8 -- WILSON HUNT*
• January 12 -- ROCKY MOUNT*
• January 13 -- NORTH EDGECOMBE
• January 15 -- at Northern Nash*
• January 18 -- MLK Invitational at Farmville Central (TBA)
• January 22 -- SOUTHERN WAYNE*
• January 26 -- at CB Aycock*
• January 27 -- at Tarboro
• January 29 -- WILSON FIKE*
• February 2 -- at Wilson Hunt*
• February 5 -- at Rocky Mount*
• February 9 -- NORTHERN NASH*

* -- Denotes Big East Games

BIRDS

continued from page 1B

While Southern was forced into playing catch-up for most of the evening, a fourth-quarter touchdown courtesy of junior running back DJ Baker — his fifth, yes fifth, trip to the end zone of the night — followed by a successful two-point conversion leveled the score at 35-35 in the final period of play.

Things got even more interesting when the 15th-seeded Firebirds recovered a Northside-Jacksonville fumble in plus territory on the ensuing drive, with the possibility of an upset starting to seem like reality for head coach Brian Batchelor's squad.

Unfortunately for Southern, though, the Firebird offense — which played arguably its best game of the season — could only muster a turnover on downs, which led to Monarch quarterback Reginald Gray sealing the contest on a one-yard keeper just a few minutes later.

The 43-35 final to close out the season was highlighted by a stellar night from Southern's offense — matching its season-high point total at 35.

The talented Baker, who registered an aforementioned five whopping touchdowns led the way for the Firebirds, posting a game-high 150 rushing yards as well.

Freshman phenom Kee'Brion Smith totaled 128 yards on the ground as well, while Southern finished with an impressive 357 rushing yards as a team.

Closing the year at 5-7 overall, 2026 marks the first season since the 2021 spring campaign that was impacted by COVID-19 in which the Firebirds have finished the year below .500, and the first traditional season Southern has fallen below that mark since 2008.

A young squad that was littered with inexperience throughout the regular year, there was a lot to like and be optimistic about from the Firebirds, however.

Southern of course won two of its league games — topping Southern Wayne and C.B. Aycock while serving as a tough out for both Hunt and Fike, two of the top teams in the 5A classification — both of which are still alive in the postseason.

The Firebirds added a dramatic come-from-behind victory over Quad County Conference champion Southern Nash to their résumé as well, while also holding decisive victories over Knightdale to kick off the season and Rockingham County in the playoffs.

While it may not have been a banner year for the 'Birds, the reps taken this year by so many young players are bound to have a positive effect in the near future and coming seasons, perhaps as soon as 2027.

The last time SN was under .500 back in 2008, the Firebirds advanced all the way to the State Final Four the next campaign.

Wesleyan closes with tough loss

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- The North Carolina Wesleyan Football Team closed out its 2026 season with a hard-fought Senior Night battle last Saturday evening at Stallings Field at Vernon T. Bradley Jr. Stadium, coming up just short in a 24-20 contest against Brevard.

The Battling Bishops took the lead with just over one minute remaining and battled until the final seconds in a memorable season finale in front of the home crowd.

Before kickoff, North Carolina Wesleyan honored its senior class and recognized their contributions to the Battling Bishops football program. The group then took the field for one final game at home, helping Wesleyan go toe-to-toe with an eight-win Brevard team throughout the evening.

The Bishops put together a strong opening possession, moving from their own 25-yard line deep into Brevard territory. Wesleyan converted a fourth down when Braden Selvage connected with Tyson Resper for 19 yards to reach the Brevard nine-yard line before the Tornados eventually forced a turnover.

North Carolina Wesleyan's defense answered by keeping Brevard off the scoreboard. Zion Wright came up with a key stop on fourth-and-one, dropping the ball carrier for a loss and giving the Bishops possession back at their own 35-yard line.

The defense created another opportunity early in the second quarter. Michael Wallace forced a Brevard fumble, and Luke Wesolowski recovered it at the Tornados' 36-yard line.

Wesleyan capitalized on the turnover with a six-play scoring drive. Jaylen Solomon carried the Bishops into the end zone with a 17-yard touchdown run, while Braxtyn Green added the extra point to put Wesleyan ahead 7-0 with 7:18 remaining in the half.

Brevard answered late in the second quarter to tie the score of the contest at 7-7, sending the two teams into halftime even after a competitive opening 30 minutes.

North Carolina Wesleyan regained the momentum in the third quarter.

After Brevard missed a 49-yard field goal, the Bishops put together an 11-play, 68-yard touchdown drive that took nearly six minutes off the clock.

Selvage connected with Ethan Fay for a 49-yard gain to move Wesleyan deep into Brevard territory before Solomon finished the drive with a two-yard touchdown run, giving the Bishops a 13-7 advantage.

Brevard responded with a touchdown later in the third quarter and added a field goal early in the fourth to take a 17-13 lead.