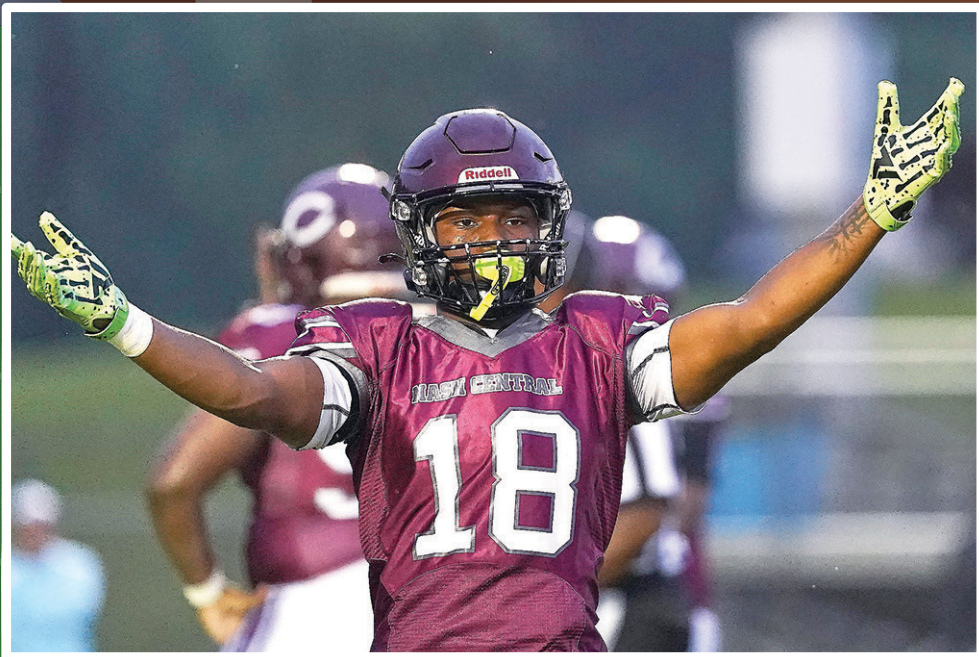


THE NASHVILLE GRAPHIC

PIGSKIN

2026

PREVIEW



**NASH CENTRAL
BULLDOGS**



**SOUTHERN NASH
FIREBIRDS**



**ROCKY MOUNT
GRYPHONS**



**NORTHERN NASH
KNIGHTS**



NASH CENTRAL

BULLDOGS



THE NEW-LOOK 'DOGS

Varnell will oversee NC building process

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- It's been a year of first to say the least for the Nash Central High School Bulldogs -- a program that's navigating Year One of the Carter Varnell Era this fall.

Despite an 0-3 start that has included losses to county rivals Northern Nash and Rocky Mount, Central has shown some early signs of positivity that could have long-term effects on the program as a whole.

"Our energy has been really good," Varnell stated of his locker room, one that had to adjust quickly after the school's former head coach Chris Lee announced his retirement in the spring and his successor was named in May.

Just two weeks after Varnell took on his new role with the Bulldogs, he guided the team through an overnight camp at North Carolina Wesleyan in Rocky Mount, an event that gave him a major look into the roster and an opportunity to connect with the team he'd be leading in the fall.

"It was a lot of team bonding and activities," Varnell remarked of the event as Wesleyan, one that largely included seven-on-seven scrimmages and drills aimed at players in the trenches as well.

The first-year Bulldog skipper is taking over a roster that dealt with a lot of adversity last season, as injuries ran through the Central locker room as if they were contagious.

Last year's Nash Central squad registered a 3-8 record and lost in the first round of the playoffs, but didn't go down in the back half of the season without a fight.

The team lost three games in league play as well as a playoff matchup against Roanoke Rapids by single digits, showing resilience despite more-

NASH CENTRAL BULLDOGS

CARTER VARNELL

Years at School: 1

Last Season: 3-8

Record at School: 0-0

Starters Returning: 0-4, D-6

OUTLOOK

Following the retirement of long-time skipper Chris Lee, Nash Central is turning to former SW Edgecombe coach Carter Varnell to help rebuild the program. Varnell hopes to lay a foundation this fall with a young, inexperienced roster filled with potential for the future.

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 21	SW EDGECOMBE
Aug. 28	NORTHERN NASH
Sept. 3	at Rocky Mount
Sept. 11	at Southern Nash
Sept. 19	at Warren County
Oct. 2	at Louisburg*
Oct. 9	ROANOKE RAPIDS*
Oct. 16	at Bunn*
Oct. 23	WAKE PREP*
Oct. 30	at ALAJ*

* Denotes GCC Games



ELIJAH HORTON CARRIES THE BALL FOR THE NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL BULLDOGS DURING PRESEASON JAMBOREE ACTION (Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson and Carl Copeland)

than-difficult circumstances on the field.

While the results may not have been what Varnell and his roster had hoped for so far this season, those similar traits are appearing thus far for the Bulldogs once again.

Nash Central opened the year by facing off against Varnell's former school - South-West Edgecombe - a game which the Bulldogs dropped 36-8. After that, the Bulldogs kicked off three-straight games against Nash County opponents by falling to Northern Nash 43-0 and then suffering a 27-0 loss

to Rocky Mount.

That said, the energy around Nash Central's program has remained positive and optimistic ahead of Quad County Conference play, with the Bulldogs' league slate scheduled to begin on Oct. 2 at Louisburg.

On the field, there have been positives as well. Central has multiple different players spending time on both sides of the ball and making key contributions, such as running back Elijah Dunn who also holds down a spot in the Bulldog secondary.

Tristian Whitley has also been going both ways for Central, playing

See NCHS, Page 9



NASH CENTRAL'S TRISTIAN WHITLEY MAKES AN AMAZING RECEPTION



NASH CENTRAL HS QUARTERBACK EMORY BYNUM



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NORTHERN NASH

KNIGHTS



TRADITION BUILDERS

Northern becoming a power in the East

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

RED OAK -- It's been rather impressive to watch the rise of the Northern Nash football program in recent years.

The Knights have catapulted themselves from a decade of milquetoast football during the 2010's into one of the top programs in the East in the 2020's, highlighted by an appearance in the Class 3-A State Championship Game in 2022.

Now a member of the NCHSAA's 6A classification, it's apparent that head coach Andrew Farriss' squad will once again threaten to take home the Big East Conference crown as well as serve as a contender in the 6A East.

This year's Northern Nash team has already taken the field three times, dealing with some early injuries they're hoping to work back from throughout a tough nonconference schedule.

The Knights opened the season by dropping its 2026 gridiron introduction at J.H. Rose -- the first week one loss of the Farriss era -- by a nine-point, 20-11 margin.

From there, Northern walloped county foe Nash Central 43-0 on Aug. 28 in the annual Battle of the Bridge, picking up a program-record ninth straight victory over the Bulldogs as Farriss maintained his spotless record against the school's crosstown rival.

Week three was less kind to the Knights, though, with Cleveland thumping Northern 36-12 in the first game at Death Valley this fall.

The Knights now have just one non-conference tilt remaining, with Northern set to face South Central at home on Sept. 18 before jumping into league play on Sept.



NNHS COACH
ANDREW FARRISS



NORTHERN NASH'S
KAMREN FREEMAN

NORTHERN NASH
KNIGHTS

ANDREW FARRISS

Years at School:
9
Last Season:
11-2
Record at School:
75 - 22
Starters Returning:
0-6, D-6



OUTLOOK

With success comes expectation, and it's almost become a given in Red Oak that Northern Nash will compete for Big East Conference supremacy and beyond. NN is blessed with a wealth of skill-position options, so the development of the Knights' front will be a key.

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 20.....at Greenville Rose
Aug. 28.....at Nash Central
Sept. 3.....CLEVELAND
Sept. 18.....SOUTH CENTRAL
Sept. 25.....WILSON FIKE*
Oct. 2.....at CB Aycock*
Oct. 9.....SO. WAYNE*
Oct. 16.....at Wilson Hunt*
Oct. 23.....SOUTHERN NASH*
Nov. 1at Rocky Mount*

* Denotes Big East Games

25 against Fike.

After that, the Knights will hit the road for the first time in over a month as they travel to C.B. Aycock on Oct. 2, followed by facing a second straight Wayne County opponent on Oct. 9 as the Southern Wayne Saints will visit Death Valley for Northern's annual Homecoming game.

The back half of the league schedule presents a brutal stretch, with last year's Class-5A State Runner-Up Hunt playing host to the Knights on Oct. 16, followed by Northern closing the year against a pair of longtime rivals in Southern Nash on Oct. 23 and Rocky Mount on Oct. 30, with the former at home and the latter on the road.

As the Big East slate draws nearer, Farriss is still focused on getting his full roster healthy and working out some early kinks within the roster.

Key contributors Kam Freeman -- a star receiver, utilityman Chase Morgan, secondary member Zephaniah Queen and two-way player Micah Andrews each dealt with crucial



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL CAPTAINS (L TO R) HOLTON WESTBROOK, MYLES EATMON, CALEB MAYFIELD AND JESSIE WADE

injuries during the off-season, with that group slowly starting to get cleared for competition as the season progresses.

Additionally, injuries have played a role in the Knights' quarterback room as well.

Brayden English started the season under center against Rose, but was banged up after the opener and the Knights then opted for Jaice Johnson -- a transfer from Nash Central -- to take over the reins at quarterback.

Paired with Johnson in the backfield has been a quartet of



CENTER AVION GINTY (54) LEADS NN'S OFFENSIVE FRONT

See NNHS, Page 8



CALEB MAYFIELD WITH A BIG HIT



NORTHERN NASH'S CHASE MORGAN

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ROCKY MOUNT



GRYPHONS

CONSISTENCY COUNTS

Gryphs will always be in Big East hunt

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- Few programs in Eastern North Carolina have enjoyed the consistent success the Rocky Mount Gryphons have enjoyed over the past three decades -- a stretch that includes one state championship and one state runner-up finish.

Players come and go, and graduation losses often seem to daunting of a task to overcome.

But the Gryphons always seem to find a way to remain competitive among the top teams in the strong Big East Conference.

That assessment doesn't appear to be in danger of ending anytime soon as RM continues to excel under the direction of veteran head coach Jason Battle.

Despite losing some key performers from last year's club, including East-West All-Star Game participants Tavoris Parker and Micahis Jones, the Gryphons are still blessed with plenty of talent -- and should once again be a major factor in conference action.

Rocky Mount has flashed its potential through three games, going 2-1, with the lone loss coming in heartbreaking fashion against small-school state powerhouse and long-time rival Tarboro.

RM followed that tough setback with convincing victories over East Wake and Nash Central as the Gryphons

ROCKY MOUNT GRYPHONS

JASON BATTLE

Years at School: 17
Last Season: 9-4
Record at School: 110 - 58
Starters Returning: 0-4, D-4



OUTLOOK

Rocky Mount has been a model of consistency during Jason Battle's storied tenure, with the three-victory campaign in 2023 certainly being an outlier. RM always find a way, even after heavy graduation losses such was the ones the Gryphons will have to overcome this fall.

2026 SCHEDULE

- Aug. 20.....at Tarboro
- Aug. 28.....at East Wake
- Sept. 3.....NASH CENTRAL
- Sept. 11.....VANCE COUNTY
- Sept. 18.....at Wilson Fike*
- Oct. 2.....at So. Wayne*
- October 9.....CB AYCOCK*
- Oct. 16.....at Southern Nash*
- Oct. 23.....WILSON HUNT*
- Oct. 30.....NORTHERN NASH*

* Denotes Big East Games

continue to make progress toward their Big East Conference opener on September 18 against the Wilson Fike Golden Demons.

One starter for the Gryphons certainly has a familiar name as Coach Battle's son -- also named Jason -- is now RM's starting quarterback.

And the younger Battle is doing quite well as he has already thrown for 279 yards and three touchdowns, with Ur'Hynus Pierce and Kemori Sharpe serving as his top targets.

At the running back position, Jamari Knight, Kayden Durham and



ROCKY MOUNT HIGH SCHOOL GAME CAPTAINS (L TO R) AYDEN HARRIS, KILEAK PITTMAN, JACKSON HARRIS AND JASON BATTLE

Braylen Fox all have eclipsed the 100-yard mark as part of a diversified, balanced ground attack.

And here's the best part for the RM faithful -- of the aforementioned players, only Sharpe is a senior as the Gryphons are loaded with underclassmen at the skill positions and beyond.

Up front, RM's offensive line will lead the way and will be paced by team captain Ayden Harris at left tackle.

Other O-line starters for the Gryphons are Haden Richardson, Gerald Hunter, Joshua Williams, Taz'meek Jones and tight end



ROCKY MOUNT'S JASON BATTLE COACHED IN THE EAST-WEST GAME LAST DECEMBER IN GREENSBORO

See RMHS, Page 8



ROCKY MOUNT'S JAMARI KNIGHT HAS RUSHED FOR 167 YARDS THROUGH THREE GAMES TO DATE THIS SEASON



ROCKY MOUNT HIGH SCHOOL'S KILEAK PITTMAN (L) MAKES A TACKLE AGAINST NASH CENTRAL (Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Faith Christian School Patriots

Nash Central High School Bulldogs

NC Wesleyan College Battling Bishops

Northern Nash High School Knights

Rocky Mount Academy Eagles

Rocky Mount High School Gryphons

Southern Nash High School Firebirds

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SOUTHERN NASH

FIREBIRDS



A RARITY AT SOUTHERN

SNHS loaded with young performers

From Staff Reports

STANHOPE -- When discussing statistical high school football improbabilities in the area, the thought of Southern Nash experiencing a rebuilding season would be right up there with the most unlikely scenarios -- especially over the Firebirds' glorious run over the past 20 years.

But that's exactly what Southern Nash will be undertaking this fall as the Firebirds will be fielding one of their youngest-ever groups -- a roster loaded with potential-rich underclassmen, most notably from the sophomore class.

So while Southern's win-loss record this fall might not live up to the program's usual lofty standards, there is still a tinge of excitement around the SNHS campus.

"I've really enjoyed coaching this group," said veteran SN coach Brian Batchelor -- a one-time Firebird playing legend in his own right. "They show up to practice every day, work hard and listen. They want to learn and get better."

And if all goes to play, the 'get better' portion of Batchelor's assessment could begin this season, especially later on as the Firebirds hit the most important portion of their Big East Conference schedule.

If not, that's something

SOUTHERN NASH FIREBIRDS

BRIAN BATCHELOR

Years at School: 6

Last Season: 7-5

Record at School: 43 - 16

Starters Returning: 0-2, D-1

OUTLOOK

Southern Nash is basically replacing its entire team this fall, but the Firebirds' young roster has Coach Brian Batchelor excited for the future. This might be a rare rebuilding season in Stanhope, but a long-term core is being established under Batchelor's direction.

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 20.....at Knightdale

Aug. 28.....CLAYTON

Sept. 4.....at James Kenan

Sept. 11.....NASH CENTRAL

Sept. 18.....at Southern Wayne*

Sept. 25.....CB AYCOCK*

Oct. 2.....at Wilson Fike*

Oct. 9.....WILSON HUNT*

Oct. 16.....ROCKY MOUNT*

Oct. 23.....at Northern Nash*

* Denotes Big East Games

the veteran SNHS coaching staff is prepared for as their is an overall mood toward improving for the future -- and if that happens sooner than later, that's all for the better.

SN's youth movement begins at quarterback, where Lovelle White, a 10th-grader, takes over behind center to run the Firebirds' trademark double-wing offense.

White has skill, leadership ability and a desire to hone his craft -- all of which make him a potential three-year starting



SOUTHERN NASH'S SAMUEL FINN LEADS THE FIREBIRDS ONTO THE FIELD



SOUTHERN'S EVAN BAILEY

signal-caller. SN's romper room backfield continues behind White with a pair of backs who certainly have the potential to be elite -- junior DJ Baker and freshman Kee'Brion Smith, who combined to rush for over 500 yards and seven touchdowns through the first two contests of the 2026 campaign.

On the defensive side of the ball, Southern Nash has a bit more of a veteran look with the likes of Brian Pulley, Josiah VanDunk, Samuel Finn, Demetrius Shepard and Ashton Holland --



DJ BAKER USES A BURST OF SPEED FOR A GAIN VS. CLAYTON

all seniors -- expected to make key contributions. Still, the Firebirds have only 11 seniors on their varsity roster and return just three of 22 starters from last year's group, which battled through injuries to go 7-5 overall and reach the second round of the state playoffs.

With such a young lineup this fall, growing pains are to be expected, along with a few flashes of brilliance.

See SNHS, Page 8



SOUTHERN NASH'S ZAVAD CURTIS



SOUTHERN NASH'S LOVELLE WHITE HANDS OFF TO DINYATRAL BLACKWELL



SOUTHERN NASH'S DEMETRIUS SHEPARD RUSHES THE PASSER



QUARTERBACK LOVELLE WHITE LEADS THE SOUTHERN NASH OFFENSE

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SOUTHERN NASH'S JACKSON VICK IS BACK FOR ANOTHER SEASON AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE
(Photo Courtesy NC State Sports Info)

COLLEGE FOOTBALL
GRID SCHEDULES

APPALACHIAN STATE
Coach: Dowell Loggains
• September 5 -- MAINE, 3:30 p.m.
• September 12 -- at East Carolina, Noon
• September 19 -- CHARLOTTE, 6 p.m.
• September 26 -- at North Carolina State, TBA
• October 10 -- OLD DOMINION, TBA
• October 16 -- at Coastal Carolina, 8 p.m.
• October 22 -- JAMES MADISON, 7 p.m.
• October 31 -- at Georgia Southern, TBA
• November 7 -- GEORGIA STATE, TBA
• November 14 -- at Marshall, TBA
• November 21 -- LOUISIANA-MONROE, TBA
• November 27 -- at South Alabama, 3 p.m.
BARTON COLLEGE
Coach: Chip Hester
• August 27 -- at Virginia State, 6 p.m.
• September 5 -- SHAW, 7 p.m.
• September 12 -- BLUEFIELD, 2 p.m.
• September 19 -- at Chowan, 6 p.m.
• September 26 -- WEST ALABAMA, 4 p.m.
• October 3 -- FERRUM, 2 p.m.
• October 17 -- UNC-PEMBROKE, 4 p.m.
• October 24 -- NORTH GREENVILLE, 2 p.m.
October 31 -- at Shorter, Noon
• November 7 -- at Erskine, 1:30 p.m.
CAMPBELL
Coach: Braxton Harris
• August 29 -- at East Tennessee, 5:30 p.m.
• September 5 -- WESTERN CAROLINA, 3:30 p.m.
• September 12 -- at



SN'S DAE'ONE WILKINS IS NOW AN ASSISTANT AT FLORIDA
Florida, 5:30 p.m.
• September 19 -- NORTH CAROLINA A&T, 6 p.m.
• September 26 -- at Hampton, 6 p.m.
• October 3 - at North Carolina Central, 6 p.m.
• October 17 -- TOWSON, 3:30 p.m.
• October 24 -- at Maine, 1 p.m.
• October 31 -- at Albany, Noon
• November 7 -- STONY BROOK, 1 p.m.
• November 14 -- at Elon, 2 p.m.
• November 21 -- MONMOUTH, Noon
DUKE
Coach: Manny Diaz
• September 5 -- TULANE, 3:30 p.m.
• September 12 -- at Illinois, 3:30 p.m.
• September 19 -- STANFORD, 4 p.m.
• September 26 -- WILLIAM AND MARY, 3:30 p.m.
• October 10 -- at Georgia Tech, TBA
• October 17 -- NORTH CAROLINA, TBA
See SKEDS, Page 3•



NASH CENTRAL'S JAVARIS JONES IS A SPECIAL TEAMS ACE AT FURMAN
(Photo Courtesy Furman Sports Info)



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL ALUM RANDALL KING IS MAKING AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT AT ALABAMA STATE UNIVERSITY
(Photo Courtesy Alabama State Sports Info)

Stars Make Their Mark
Nash County players excelling on college level



NNHS LEGEND RANDALL KING
By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

NASH COUNTY -- One of the most fun wrinkles that comes with following high school football is watching players take their talents to the next level.
Nash County has been fortunate to have many such cases of student-athletes continuing their athletic careers within the collegiate ranks, and this fall will be no different.
Perhaps the most notable of any former Nash County football player is Jackson Vick, a 2022 Southern Nash High School graduate who enrolled early at NC State



NC STATE'S JACKSON VICK
See STARS, Page 9



SOUTHERN NASH ALUM MALAKI DOBBINS IS HAVING A SOLID START TO THE 2026 SEASON AT FURMAN
(Photo Courtesy Furman University Sports Info)

and has already kicked off his fifth season with the Wolfpack.
Vick started his season on Aug. 29 at Virginia, registering three tackles in a game he entered by holding the top spot on NC State's depth chart at nickel.
The former Firebird who the Wolfpack's long-time head coach Dave Doeren has spoken very highly of throughout this career is expected to maintain a key role within NC State's defense as the season progresses, his next outing set for Friday, Sept. 11 as the Wolfpack takes the field at Carter-Finley Stadium for the first time this season against Richmond.
Two other key defensive players with Nash County roots both reside at Furman University in Greenville, S.C., having just received some time in the national spotlight as the FCS-level Paladins faced national



DAE'ONE WILKINS IS MOVING UP THE COACHING LADDER AT FLORIDA
(Photo Courtesy UF Sports Information)

NC Wesleyan picked fifth in conference

From Staff Reports

ROME, GA. -- The USA South Athletic Conference's football coaches have released their 2026 preseason poll.
Head coaches do not vote for their own teams in the balloting.
LaGrange College, the defending league champions was placed atop the rankings for the first time in program history thanks to receiving 48 total points and six of the possible eight first-place votes.
The Panthers posted an undefeated 7-0 record last year in conference play, capturing the program's first championship.
Huntingdon was in the second spot in the poll with 40 points and one first-place vote, while Belhaven came in third with 35 points.



Brevard rounded out the top-half of the rankings in fourth with 34 points and the final first-place vote.
North Carolina Wesleyan was selected for the fifth overall position with a total of 23 points.
The Bishops, coached by veteran skipper Jeff Filkovski, went 4-6 overall last fall to go with a 2-5 ledger in USA South Athletic Conference gridiron action.
The preseason poll order is as follows:
1) LaGrange (6) 48
2) Huntingdon (1) 40
3) Belhaven 35
4) Brevard (1) 34
5) North Carolina Wesleyan University 23
6) (tie) Greensboro and Southern Virginia, both with 18 points

8) Methodist 8
North Carolina Wesleyan's 2026 schedule is as follows:
• September 5 -- at Averett University, 6 p.m.
• September 12 -- NEWPORT NEWS APPRENTICE SCHOOL, Noon
• September 19 -- at Sewanee, 1 p.m. (Central Time)
• October 3 -- LAGRANGE COLLEGE, Noon
• October 10 -- at Belhaven University, Noon (Central Time)
• October 17 -- HUNTINGDON COLLEGE, Noon
• October 24 -- METHODIST UNIVERSITY, 6 p.m.
• October 31 -- at Southern Virginia University, 1 p.m.
• November 7 -- at Greensboro College, 1 p.m.
• November 14 -- BREVARD COLLEGE, Noon



PRESTON MCDANIEL AND THE NORTHERN NASH KNIGHTS ARE PICKED TO DEFEND THEIR BIG EAST FOOTBALL TITLE

The Defense Begins

Northern picked to repeat in Big East

From Staff Reports

NASH COUNTY -- Big East Conference head football coaches didn't go out on much of a limb when participating in a poll at the annual league preseason meeting in early August at Southern Nash.

Instead, status quo was the main factor in the predictions as defending champion Northern Nash was picked as the favorite to repeat once again as the Big East gridiron champion.

But the rest of the picks were in the exact same order as last year's overall finish.

Wilson Hunt, which ended up reaching the state finals in its classification in 2025, was selected as the runner-up, followed by Rocky Mount, Southern Nash, CB Aycock and Southern Wayne.

Whether those predictions are accurate will start to come to fruition when league play officially begins on September 25.

Still, it's difficult to bet against the Fighting Knights, who are the two-time defending champion and reached the state quarterfinals to cap off an 11-2 worksheet last fall.

No other Big East club came within 13 points of the Knights in 2025, which was the first year of the newfangled league



SOUTHERN NASH'S TREY SMITH SCORES A JAMBOREE TOUCHDOWN

after the latest realignment by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association.

Long-time members Southern Nash, Northern Nash and Rocky Mount welcomed back former rivals Fike and Hunt after a four-year absence, while Southern Wayne

and CB Aycock joined up to make for a competitive conference in just about every sport -- including football.

Northern and Hunt stole the show in 2025, and the showdown between the teams

See BIG EAST, Page 8



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL'S TOMARI TUCKER

Central Looking To Make Noise In The Conference

By CHANCE PUCKETT
Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- Last year marked the first full season of Quad County Conference athletic action on the field, court, mat and much more.

With one year of experience now under the belt of each member school, season two is now officially underway headlined by a six-team gridiron schedule for the 2026 campaign.

The league table obviously includes the hometown Nash Central Bulldogs, as well as the Bunn High School Wildcats -- who completed a spotless 5-0 run in league play last season prior to a second-round playoff appearance.

See QCC, Page 8



CARTER VARNELL IS THE NEW HEAD FOOTBALL COACH AT NASH CENTRAL

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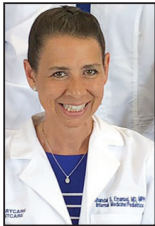
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NASH CENTRAL'S ELIJAH DUNN BREAKS A TACKLE

NCHS

continued from page 2

both receiver and defensive back while Zaccai Allen – who hauled in the team’s first touchdown of the season – is doing the same.

Avery Flowers and Braylon Whitley are both settling into new roles on both sides of the ball, with Flowers adjusting into a more dynamic, tight end-esque calling while Whitley has shown a high level of maturity as a sophomore.

Emory Bynum, who saw action at quarterback last season due to the hoard of injuries suffered at the position, is holding down the duties under center for Central as the quarterback and signal caller, his first full season in the position.

The team has two nonconference games remaining before jumping into league play, with a roadie at Southern Nash scheduled for Sept. 11 followed by a Saturday tilt at Warren County slated for Sept. 19.

From there, conference play will begin at Louisburg on Oct. 2, with the Bulldogs then returning home on Oct. 9 against Roanoke Rapids in their first home game since the Aug. 28 matchup against Northern Nash.

QCC

continued from page 7

In between conference champion Bunn and fourth-place Nash Central last season sat Wake Prep Academy and Louisburg, both of which ended the year with winning records and received bids to the playoffs.

Rounding out the league included Roanoke Rapids and American Leadership Academy - Johnston (ALAJ), the two teams that the Bulldogs clipped during the regular season a year ago.

Despite recording just a 2-3 record in league play, last year’s conference slate was an exciting one to say the least for Nash Central.

The three losses suffered by the Bulldogs came by just 15 combined points, with nearly every game coming down to the wire in a year that Central struggled mightily with injuries and a reshuffled roster.

This year, under the direction of first-year head coach Carter Varnell, the Bulldogs could be an early favorite in the league despite their 0-3 start in their nonconference slate.

Central has two games left outside of league play before jumping into its Quad County Conference schedule, with road trips to Southern Nash on Sept. 11 and Warren County on Sept. 19 yet to be played.

From there, the Bulldogs are slated to face two of the top performers early once league play begins.

Central opens its conference schedule at Lou-



NASH CENTRAL'S KHALIQ SHERROD

isburg on Oct. 2 followed by returning home for a matchup against Roanoke Rapids on Oct. 9 – both teams off to hot starts in 2026.

The Louisburg Warriors improved to 2-0 after a Thursday-evening victory over Northampton County last week, a week after dropping Southeast Collegiate Prep Academy (formerly Southeast Halifax) on Aug. 28.

As for Roanoke Rapids, the Yellow Jackets also knocked off Northampton County, dropping the Jaguars 33-8 in week one.

A week later, Roanoke Rapids thumped KIPP Pride 48-0 to move to 2-0, with a road trip to Pasquotank County, which is set for Sept. 11.

Wake Prep Academy is slated to be one of the first schools in the league to kick off its league schedule, as the 2-1 Guardians host ALAJ on Sept. 11.

Wake Prep started the year with a loss at North Raleigh Christian Acad-

emy, later picking up its first win of the year in dominant fashion over North Moore.

Most recently, the Guardians routed Pamlico County by a dominant 55-14 margin in non-conference gridiron action.

As for ALAJ, the Patriots started the year with an 8-6 rockfight loss to Bartlett-Yancey, followed by picking up win No. 1 of the season over North Wake.

ALAJ’s next league game after its matchup against Wake Prep will be against Bunn — last year’s league champ who started the year by losing back-to-back games against South Granville and high-potential Franklinton.

The Wildcats got its first win of the season over J.F. Webb of Oxford on Friday night, with a matchup against East Wake on Sept. 11 serving as the penultimate non-conference game of the year for Bunn.

BHS is coached by Jesiel Romero, a former player at the school who has returned home to coach at his alma mater.

Despite a slow start, Bunn will still be considered a threat in the league as the season moves forward, with Roanoke Rapids and Louisburg making early impressions as well.

Of course, Nash Central will likely be a team that poses an issue for opponents in the league title race as well as the hunt for the playoffs as well.



NORTHERN'S MYLES EATMON HAS RETURNED FROM INJURY

NNHS

continued from page 2

ballcarriers that have each earned reps carrying the rock as well as seeing their number being called as a pass-catcher as well.

Myles Eatmon is of course the bellcow for Northern, with the feature back primed for a massive senior campaign after amassing over 1,600 yards on the ground a season ago. Both Jamarcus Robinson and Preston McDaniel have seen their roles increase as well, while transfer Camron Lyons has made a positive impact for the Knights offensively as well.

On the defensive side, the linebacker duo of Jessie Wade and Jaquaye Arrington have led the way for the Knights, compiling 14 tackles apiece through the first two games of the season. Tollie West IV and Holton Westbrook have clogged running lanes for opposing teams on the defensive line, while Lyons, Queen and Caleb Mayfield have all picked off passes in the secondary.

While a 1-2 certainly isn’t what Northern had hoped it would be sitting at through three weeks of action, the team is still perceived as a favorite in the league. On top of that, as the roster gets healthier and the team continues to gel, the results on the field are only going to get prettier for a program

that’s established itself to preserve high expectations in recent years.

“There’s a lot of room for growth with this team,” remarked Farriss of his roster – eager to get his weapons back and fully healthy before the sprint that is conference play begins.

The Knights next time out will take place on Friday, Sept. 18 within the friendly confines of Northern Nash High School as South Central comes to town in the final tuneup before Big East action begins.

Kickoff for next Friday’s matchup between the Fighting Knights and Falcons is slated for 7 p.m.

BIG EAST

continued from page 7

on October 16 in Wilson will certainly go a long way toward determining this season’s grid champion.

But other clubs are expected to have a say in the process. Southern Nash and Rocky Mount will both be young, but are still blessed with plenty of talent and potential -- though it might take beyond 2025 for those attributes to take place.

Fike has one of the league’s best players in quarterback Sam Finch, who has the Golden Demons off to an impressive 3-0 start.

The talented Finch has verbally committed to continue his football career at Elon University, located in Alamance County.

Rounding out the Big East mix are CB Aycock and Southern Wayne, who combined for just one victory in their inaugural stint in the conference.

The latest installment of the Big East was expected to be a competitive one when it began in 2025, and that’s exactly what happened as Northern Nash and Hunt

both made deep playoff journeys, while Southern Nash, Rocky Mount and Fike were also solid on the gridiron.

Whether that scenario replays itself this fall is yet to be seen, but the conference coaches certainly seemed to think so, judging by the pre-season poll.

Big East Preseason Poll

- 1) Northern Nash
- 2) Wilson Hunt
- 3) Rocky Mount
- 4) Southern Nash
- 5) Wilson Fike
- 6) CB Aycock
- 7) Southern Wayne

RMHS

continued from page 4

DeAndre Morrison.

Rocky Mount has also gained a reputation for its strong defense through the years, and look for the Gryphons to be stingy once again in 2026.

Durham and Chandler Stewart hold down the defensive end spots, while Austin Parten and Jackson Harris are strong in the middle.

The Gryphons always seemed to produce quality linebackers, and this season’s group is no different, led by

senior key returnee Kileak Pittman, along with Kamari Boulware and Kavion Mayfield.

Jaden Farmer, a senior veteran, will spearhead a secondary that also includes Pierce, Sharpe and Delonte Smith.

It will be interesting to see how the Gryphons develop ahead of conference play, but it’s almost a given that RM will be among the contenders in the end.

That never seems to change.

SNHS

continued from page 5

Flash No. 1 of the season began in the opener when the Firebirds routed Knightdale on the road.

But over the next two weeks, Southern Nash dropped a pair of decisions, albeit to elite-

level state powerhouses in Clayton and Warsaw James Kenan.

After hosting Nash Central this week, the Firebirds will open their challenging Big East Conference ledger September 18 on the road against the

Southern Wayne Saints in Dudley.

SN was picked to finish fourth in the Big East in the preseason coaches’ poll -- the same position the Firebirds closed in during 2025.

THIS SECTION IS DEDICATED TO CHRIS FELDER



NOW AT BARTON COLLEGE, ASHTON RHODES WAS THE RECIPIENT OF PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT TD PASS IN NORTHERN NASH GRIDIRON HISTORY (Photo Courtesy Barton College Sports Information)



NORTHERN NASH'S KENO JONES WAS STERLING LAST WEEKEND FOR THE TROY UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM (Photo Courtesy Troy University Sports Information)

STARS

continued from page 6

SKEDS

continued from page 6

- October 23 -- at Virginia, 7 p.m.
- October 31 -- BOSTON COLLEGE, TBA
- November 7 -- at North Carolina State, TBA
- November 14 -- at Miami (Fla.), TBA
- November 20 -- CLEMSON, 7:30 p.m.
- November 28 -- at Wake Forest, TBA
- EAST CAROLINA Coach: Blake Harrell
- September 5 -- at Alabama, Noon
- September 12 -- APPALACHIAN STATE, Noon
- September 19 -- at Old Dominion, 6 p.m.
- September 26 -- NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL, 4 p.m.
- October 10 -- RICE, TBA
- October 15 -- at UAB, 7:30 p.m.
- October 22 -- at Memphis, 7:30 p.m.
- October 31 -- TEMPLE, TBA
- November 6 -- SOUTH FLORIDA, 7:30 p.m.
- November 14 -- at Charlotte, TBA
- November 21 -- at Army, Noon
- November 27 or 28 (TBA) -- FLORIDA ATLANTIC, TBA
- NORTH CAROLINA Coach: Bill Belichick
- August 29 -- vs. Texas Christian (Dublin, Ireland), Noon
- September 12 -- EAST TENNESSEE STATE, Noon
- September 19 -- at Clemson, Noon
- October 3 -- NOTRE DAME, TBA
- October 10 -- at Pittsburgh, TBA
- October 17 -- at Duke, TBA
- October 24 -- SYRA-



FURMAN'S MALAKI DOBBINS

- CUSE, TBA
- October 31 -- MIAMI (FLA.), TBA
- November 7 -- at UCONN, Noon
- November 14 -- LOUISVILLE, TBA
- November 21 -- at Virginia, TBA
- November 28 -- NORTH CAROLINA STATE, TBA
- NC STATE Coach: Dave Doeren
- August 29 -- at Virginia, 3:30 p.m.
- September 11 -- RICHMOND, 7 p.m.
- September 19 -- at Vanderbilt, 12:45 p.m.
- September 26 -- APPALACHIAN STATE, TBA
- October 3 -- LOUISVILLE, TBA
- October 10 -- WAKE FOREST, TBA
- October 23 -- at Stanford, 10:30 p.m.
- October 31 -- CALIFORNIA, TBA
- November 7 -- DUKE, TBA
- November 14 -- SYRACUSE, TBA
- November 21 -- at Florida State, TBA
- November 28 -- at North Carolina, TBA

- NC WESLEYAN Coach: Jeff Filkosvki
- September 5 -- at Averett University, 6 p.m.
- September 12 -- NEWPORT NEWS APPRENTICE SCHOOL, Noon
- September 19 -- at Sewanee, 1 p.m. (Central Time)
- October 3 -- LAGRANGE COLLEGE, Noon
- October 10 -- at Belhaven University, Noon (Central Time)
- October 17 -- HUNTINGDON COLLEGE, Noon
- October 24 -- METHODIST UNIVERSITY, 6 p.m.
- October 31 -- at Southern Virginia University, 1 p.m.
- November 7 -- at Greensboro College, 1 p.m.
- November 14 -- BREVARD COLLEGE, Noon
- WAKE FOREST Coach: Jake Dickert
- September 3 -- AKRON, 7 p.m.
- September 12 -- at Purdue, Noon
- September 18 -- MIAMI (FLA.), 7:30 p.m.
- September 26 -- at Louisville, TBA
- October 3 -- STANFORD, TBA
- October 10 -- at North Carolina State, TBA
- October 17 -- at California, TBA
- October 31 -- VIRGINIA, TBA
- November 7 -- MERRIMACK, TBA
- November 14 -- at Southern Methodist, TBA
- November 21 -- at Georgia Tech, TBA
- November 28 -- DUKE UNIVERSITY, TBA

power Tennessee on September 5.

Former Southern Nash Firebird Malaki Dobbins and former Nash Central Bulldog Javaris Jones are each holding down key spots on the defensive side of the ball for Furman, both recording three tackles each in the team's second game of the season.

Now 1-1 after opening the year with a win over Division II Anderson University, Furman will next be in action on Sept. 12 at Mercer.

Saturday, Sept. 12 will also boast quite the exciting matchup between two former teammates and Northern Nash High School legends as the Sun Belt Conference's Troy hosts Alabama State.

Former Northern Nash quarterback Keno Jones – who is in his first year with Troy after playing at nearby Barton College in recent years – is now a key piece of the Trojans' defense upon flipping his position to linebacker upon entering the collegiate ranks.

Jones is one of the top tacklers in Barton College history, and those efforts were enough to help him make the jump to the Division I level, finding a home at Troy.

Jones took the field for the Trojans for the first time on Sept. 5, helping the team to a week-one victory over Sam Houston State in dramatic fashion, holding off a late Bearkat rally in a 24-21 victory.

Having now undergone a change of scenery, King opened his 2026 season by tabbing a team-high 77 receiving yards in the Hornets' Aug. 29 season opener against Southern University.

King hauled in a nine-yard touchdown reception in Alabama State's 30-17 victory, and followed that performance up by posting 18 receiving yards in a Sept. 5 contest against Division II Lane College.

While there are going to be many fun games that include Nash County connections this fall, few will be more fun than the Sept. 12 matchup between Troy



FORMER NORTHERN NASH STANDOUT CARSON JENKINS IS NOW A SENIOR FOR THE BARTON COLLEGE BULLDOGS

He was named a Freshman All-American after the 2024 season and was a National Freshman Third-Team honoree, even chosen as a Coastal Athletic Association (CAA) Honorable Mention selection after his sophomore campaign.

King hauled in a nine-yard touchdown reception in Alabama State's 30-17 victory, and followed that performance up by posting 18 receiving yards in a Sept. 5 contest against Division II Lane College.

While there are going to be many fun games that include Nash County connections this fall, few will be more fun than the Sept. 12 matchup between Troy

and Alabama State, and thus Jones and King.

Saturday's tilt between the Trojans and Hornets is set to kickoff at 4 p.m. (EST) at Veterans Memorial Stadium on the campus of Troy University, with the game streamed on ESPN+.

The collegiate success isn't just limited to players, however, as former Southern Nash standout Dae'One Wilkins is now a defensive backs coach at the University of Florida.

After wrapping up his playing career at Furman (and helping recruit Dobbins and Jones), Wilkins spent time on the graduate level as an apprentice at Kentucky and Florida before earning a full-time role with the Gators.

Wilkins and the Gators are off to a 1-0 start to their campaign after opening last week with a convincing home decision against Florida Atlantic.



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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL
2026 SCHEDULE

August 20.....at J.H. Rose L, 20-11

August 28.....at Nash Central W, 43-0

September 3.....Cleveland L, 36-12

September 18.....South Central

September 25.....Fike

October 2.....at C.B. Aycock

October 9.....Southern Wayne

October 16.....at Hunt

October 23.....Southern Nash

October 30.....at Rocky Mount

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2026 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Date

Opponent

Aug. 29

Sept. 12

Sept. 19

Oct. 3

Oct. 10

Oct. 17

Oct. 24

Oct. 31

Nov. 7

Nov. 14.....

Nov. 21

Nov. 28.....

TCU (W 15-10)

East Tennessee State

at Clemson

Notre Dame

at Pittsburgh

at Duke

Syracuse

Miami

at UConn

Louisville

at Virginia

NC State

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NORTH CAROLINA
WESLEYAN

2026 FOOTBALL
SCHEDULE

Sep 5

Sep 12.....

Sep 19.....

Oct 3.....

Oct 10.....

Oct 17

Oct 24

Oct 31

Nov 7

Nov 14

at Averett University (W 27-13)

vs. Newport Apprentice School

at Sewanee

vs. LaGrange College (Homecoming)

at Belhaven University

vs. Huntingdon College

vs. Methodist University

at Southern Virginia University

at Greensboro College

vs. Brevard College

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SOUTHERN NASH
FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Aug 20

Aug 28.....

Sept. 4

Sept. 11.....

Sept. 18

Sept. 25.....

Oct. 2

Oct. 9

Oct. 16

Oct. 23.....

at Knightdale High School W, 33-13

Clayton High School L, 56-13

at James Kenan High School L, 39-7

Nash Central High School

at Southern Wayne

C.B. Aycock

at Fike*

Hunt

Rocky Mount

at Northern Nash

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ROCKY MOUNT HIGH 2026 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

AUG 20

AUG 28

SEPT 3

SEPT 11

SEPT 18

at Tarboro (L 38-34)

at East Wake (W 42-20)

Nash Central (W 27-0)

Vance County

at Fike

OCT 2

OCT 9

OCT 16

OCT 23

OCT 30

at Southern Wayne

C.B. Aycock

at Southern Nash

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NASH CENTRAL 2026 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

AUG 21

AUG 28

SEPT 3

SEPT 11

SEPT 19

at Southwest Edgecombe (L 36-8)

at Northern Nash (L 43-0)

at Rocky Mount (L 27-0)

at Southern Nash

Warren County

OCT 2

OCT 9

OCT 16

OCT 23

OCT 30

at Louisburg

Roanoke Rapids

at Bunn

Wake Prep Academy

ALAJ