

NC Hopes To Rock In Cleveland



NASH CENTRAL'S ZACCAI ALLEN IS ON THE MOVE VS. NORTHERN NASH (Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Young Bulldogs surging under Coach Thomas

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

ROCKY MOUNT -- A well-rested Nash Central High School boys basketball team returns to action this Saturday in the John Jacobs Christmas Classic, with the Bulldogs' first-round matchup against West Johnston its first outing in 15 days.

Central will be squaring off against the Wildcats on the campus of Johnston County's Cleveland High School in the three-game, eight-team tournament's



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SOUTHERN NASH'S ZAMIR CANNADY

Nash Co. clubs set for action

From Staff Reports

BUNN -- Southern Nash's boys and Northern Nash's girls will take part in the annual Bunn Holiday Basketball Tournament, slated for December 27-30 at the historic Bunn Dome in Franklin County.

The SN boys will be part of an eight-team field that also features Vance Charter, Louisburg, Wake Forest, Henderson Collegiate, Corinth Holders, Vance County and, of course, the host Bunn Wildcats.

SN's first game will be this Saturday at 2:30 p.m. against Wake Forest. The semifinals and consolation rounds will then be staged December 29, followed by the championship on December 30 at 7 p.m.

Northern Nash's girls will be part of a four-team field that also includes Vance County, Franklin Academy and Bunn.

The Lady Knights will open their tournament quest December 27 at 11:30 a.m. against Vance County.

The girls title contest will

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2025-26 NORTHERN NASH HS GIRLS SWIMMING A POWER POOL PLAN



NORTHERN NASH'S ERIN WILSON HAS BEEN A STANDOUT THIS SEASON FOR THE KNIGHTS (Photos Submitted by Meryn Johnson)

Northern girls building into an area swim titan

By CHANCE PUCKETT Correspondent

RED OAK -- The Northern Nash girls swim team has experienced some early success that hasn't been seen for a long time among the Lady Knights program, with head coach Tracy Dodrill's squad a serious contender to claim the conference crown in the inaugural year of the Class 5A/6A Big East.

Northern has kicked off its swim season by winning three of its first four meets, most recently scoring a season-high



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL SWIMMER CASIYA LYNCH



NNHS' GABRIELLE MCCALSTON

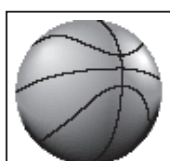
MEMORY MAKERS NCHS returning to holiday event

From Staff Reports

ROCKY MOUNT -- Nash Central's girls have made plenty of memories -- including a championship -- during the program's 15-year-long annual trip to Johnston County to participate in the John Jacobs Christmas Classic at Cleveland High School.

Central will hope to add to that lofty list when tourney play begins Saturday at the CHS Gymnasium.

And there's a twist to this year's event as the Lady Bulldogs, loaded with a nice mix of veterans and young standouts, will possibly enter the



COACH TERRI CASH

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NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR VETERAN JAKAYLA GAY



NASH CENTRAL HEAD COACH COACH BRIAN 'BT' THOMAS

NC BOYS

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opening round, heading into the event with a 2-3 record having most recently suffered a 62-32 home loss to South-West Edgecombe.

Despite some early-season woes, the Bulldogs have seen some real improvement from previous seasons and even the early part of this year. Central has already swept county foe Southern Nash, with its November 25 win over the Firebirds resulting in the team's first win over a fellow Nash County opponent in 22 months.

Additionally, after a season-opening 29-point loss to Northern Nash, a game where the Bulldogs trailed by as many as 40, Central took the Knights to the wire in the second leg of the two rivals' home-and-home.

The Bulldogs dropped a 65-62 heartbreaker to Northern, and while disappointing, it was a huge step forward and the closest that Central has come to beating Northern since their last win over the Knights, which came in February of 2016.

"Practice, practice and more practice," said Nash Central head coach Brian Thomas of his team's improvement, stating that a lot of his younger players have now had opportunities to see live action and get weekly habits under their belt now that the season has started.

"I have been impressed with their ability to pick up things fairly quickly," remarked Thomas of his roster. "They are capable of making plays in chaos and are extremely talented."

This week's upcoming tournament is another chance for the Bulldogs to showcase their talent, as Central is joined in the John Jacobs Christmas Classic by Cape Fear Christian, Ravenscroft, Rocky Mount, Terry Sanford, Wake Christian, tournament host Cleveland and first-round opponent West Johnston.

The Bulldogs will face whoever matches their Saturday result between Cape Fear Christian and Cleveland on Monday, and will face whoever

matches both their Saturday and Monday results between Ravenscroft, Rocky Mount, Terry Sanford and Wake Christian on Tuesday.

A 7-2 Cleveland club appears to be an early favorite to take the tournament title on their home floor, while West Johnston proves to be a strong test for Central as well.

The Wildcats, who started league play on December 12, enter this week at 5-3 fresh off a one-point loss to Lee County. West Johnston has already secured wins over Smithfield-Selma, Gray's Creek, Corinth Holders, Midway and Union Pines, proving to be a tough out for the Bulldogs.

Of course, while Thomas and his staff will plan to take things game-by-game, tournaments like this where opponents are unknown until shortly prior to tipoff are always difficult when it comes to preparation.

"We are very big on scouting," said Thomas off his staff. "We have spent plenty of time studying film and the tendencies of the teams to come."

Having already made some serious improvements and with some quality opponents on the docket, this week could be the perfect opportunity for Nash Central to boost its résumé before beginning Quad County Conference play on January 16.

While the staff is still figuring some things out rotationally, don't be surprised if the Bulldogs make a run this week and during its league slate.

"I think we have played nine to 11 guys in every game this season," remarked Thomas. "We prepare each of them to be ready for any situation," and the Bulldogs have already seen a lot of different situational circumstances thus far, trailing big, close games, and winning big.

Central's December 27 tilt against West Johnston is slated for a 5:30 p.m. tipoff on the campus of Cleveland High School, just after the conclusion of its girls game against the Wildcats which is set for a 4 p.m. tip.



NORTHERN NASH HIGH SCHOOL SWIMMER PAYSEN BROWN

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139 while doubling-up second-place SouthWest Edgecombe on Thursday, December 11.

"The girls work hard for each other and are willing to step in and help out wherever they are needed," said Dodrill, who coaches both the boys and girls teams at Northern Nash.

"The results have shown in times dropping and several regional consideration times met."

The Lady Knights also won their meets on November 20 and December 4, edging North East Carolina Prep of Tarboro in both contests, defeating the Huskies by six points in the former outing and four points in the latter.

A key piece of Northern's early success has been junior Erin Wilson, who won the 200-yard individual medley (IM) and 500-yard freestyle races events, all while competing on the Lady Knights' first-place 400-yard freestyle relay team in her most recent meet.

Wilson has already racked up an impressive

11 first-place finishes for Northern so far this season, proving to be a valuable asset both in and out of the pool.

"She recruited several of the girls and works individually with them to improve strokes, turns and dives," said Dodrill of her standout junior. "She keeps them motivated and believing in themselves."

Wilson has been a key contributor not just in terms of improving the roster, but bringing out new swimmers to the team as well.

"The team has grown in numbers since last season," remarked Dodrill of her 2025-26 squad. "They don't back down on the hard practices and keep a positive attitude which has shown in the early success they are seeing."

Additional winners for Northern in its most recent meet included Abigail Chandler in the 100-yard backstroke as well as Charlyze Bunn, Gaia Di Taranto and Kirstyn Sartin alongside Wilson in the 400-yard

freestyle relay.

There may still be some meat remaining on the bone for the Lady Knights, but goals are already starting to take shape for Dodrill and her team as the postseason draws nearer.

The conference championship meet is scheduled for January 15, with Northern's eyes on the ultimate prize of a conference crown.

A win in the conference championship meet would be the school's first in more than 30 years, but that isn't just all. The Lady Knights are in serious contention to win the league alongside their male counterparts, and if both squads won the conference championship, it would be the first time in school history that both the boys and girls teams won the league title in the same season.

Outside of the conference championship meet, this year's swimming regionals will be held from January 29-31 with the state championships the following week.

TOURNEY

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be December 30 at 5:30 p.m.

The complete tournament schedule is as follows:

Bunn Holiday Tournament At The Bunn Dome December 27

- Game One, 11:30 a.m. -- Vance County vs. Northern Nash (Girls)
- Game Two, 1 p.m. -- Vance County vs. Louisburg (Boys)
- Game Three, 2:30 p.m. -- Wake Forest vs. Southern Nash (Boys)
- Game Four, 4 p.m. -- Henderson Collegiate School vs. Corinth Holders (Boys)
- Game Five, 5:30 p.m. -- Franklin Academy vs. Bunn (Girls)
- Game Six, 7 p.m. -- Vance County vs. Bunn (Boys)

December 29

- Game Seven, 1 p.m. -- Loser Game One vs. Loser Game Five (Girls Third Place)
- Game Eight, 2:30 p.m. -- Loser Game Two vs. Loser Game Four (Boys Consolation Round)
- Game Nine, 4 p.m. -- Loser Game Three vs. Loser Game Six (Boys Consolation Round)
- Game 10, 5:30 p.m. -- Winner Game Two vs. Winner Game Four (Boys Semifinal)
- Game 11, 7 p.m. -- Winner Game Three vs. Winner Game Six (Boys



COACHING LEGEND STERLING LEONARD

Semifinal)

December 30

- Game 12, 1 p.m. -- Loser Game Seven vs. Loser Game Eight (Boys Seventh-Place Game)
- Game 13, 2:30 p.m. -- Winner Game Seven vs. Winner Game Eight (Boys Fifth-Place Game)
- Game 14, 4 p.m. -- Loser Game 10 vs. Loser Game 11 (Boys Third-Place Game)
- Game 15, 5:30 p.m. -- Winner Game One vs. Winner Game Five (Girls Championship Game)
- Game 16, 7 p.m. -- Winner Game 10 vs. Winner Game 11 (Boys Championship Game)

Admission will be \$15 per day, which will be good for every game on that day.



NASH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL'S MALANA RICHWINE

NC GIRLS

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tournament with an unblemished record.

That's because Central carried an impressive 5-0 worksheet into Tuesday's road contest South Central.

If the Lady Bulldogs earn a victory in that much-anticipated event, they will be perfect heading into their tourney opening-round showdown on Saturday at 4 p.m. against the West Johnston Wildcats.

Certainly, Central will be tested at the tournament by a strong eight-team field that also includes Rocky Mount, Corinth Holders, Grace Christian, Clayton, Millbrook and host Cleveland High School.

But those tests as something NC veteran head coach Terri Cash always craves, especially when preparing the Bulldogs for their upcoming schedule in the newly formed Quad County Conference.

If Central gets past West Johnston, the Lady Bulldogs would play again next Monday at 7 p.m. versus the winner of the Cleveland-Millbrook game.

A loss to WJ would send Central into the consolation bracket versus the Cleveland-Millbrook loser on Monday at 1 p.m.

The women's championship showdown is slated for next Tuesday at 7 p.m.

Following the tournament, Central will resume its regular season ledger with an expected doozy on January 7 on the road against long-time hoops rival Rocky Mount High School.

Of course, there is also the possibility that Central could meet Rocky Mount in the third and final day of the Cleveland Tourney, depending on how the brackets play out.

Nash Central's QCC schedule will begin January 16 at home against the Louisburg Lady Warriors.

The Cleveland Tourney will also feature Nash Central's boys as part of an eight-team field that will also include Cleveland, Rocky Mount, Fayetteville Terry Sanford, Wake Christian, Ravenscroft, West Johnston and Cape Fear Christian.