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Sports

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Fourth and Long



David Friedman

Lessons from NFL playoffs

With the NFL's divisional round now complete, we have learned a few things heading into both the conference championship games and the 2017 football season.

We all knew the Atlanta Falcons had a high-powered offense and they did not disappoint in a 36-20 win over the Seahawks.

Despite having the league's second-most productive offense, even I was surprised with the ease with which they seemed to move the ball against Seattle's legendary defense.

Matt Ryan, Julio Jones and Devonta Freeman will get the majority of the credit for Atlanta's offensive efficiency, and understandably so.

I think it should be noted, however, that Earl Thomas' absence was, has been and will be, a major loss to the Seahawks defense. They may have once been named the "Legion of Boom" but without Thomas, they more often resemble the "gaggle of pop."

I was also shocked to see how effective the Atlanta's pass rush was. The Falcons' defense lived in Seattle's backfield, sacking Russell Wilson three times and hurrying him on 19 other plays. If their defense continues to play as good as their offense, Atlanta will be very tough to beat.

The team tasked with that challenge are the Packers. There were no new surprises surrounding Green Bay, at least for most people.

Aaron Rodgers has been lauded as one of the best quarterbacks in the league, if not history, and very little about his performance against Cowboys would contradict these beliefs. I was not one of these people though. At least not until Sunday.

There was a play with about 11 minutes left in the third quarter that convinced me that he was the real

See **FOURTH, B6**

Falcons' lineman is all-state

WINDSOR - A Bertie High School football player has earned a high honor for the 2016 season.

James Thomas was named a Class 2A all-state selection by NCPreps.com as an offensive lineman.

Thomas, a 6-foot-4, 290-pound senior, was only in his second year of football and was not a shoo-in for right tackle when the Falcons started practice back in

August. But through a tireless work ethic, he made himself into a starter.

"James did not start out in the starting lineup," Bertie football boss Grantley Mizelle said. "He worked very hard and earned the starting position at right offensive tackle.

With Mizelle's penchant for having a solid ground game, he leaned on Thomas and fellow

senior Devontrai Sessoms to anchor the offensive line.

"James got better every week," said Mizelle, whose squad averaged 200 yards per game rushing and finished the season with 2,414 yards and 24 touchdowns, a marked improvement over the previous two seasons.

One of the biggest things about Thomas, according to Mizelle,

was his ability to finish blocks.

"He not only would block you, but he wanted you to end up on your back," Bertie's head coach said.

"He is a great kid and the future is bright for him."

Thomas is Bertie's first all-state football selection since Thomas Perry in 2010.

Bertie finished 5-6 in the 2016 season.



James Thomas

Bertie rolls along

AHOSKIE - They just keep rolling along.

Bertie High School's varsity girls basketball team remained unbeaten with two victories last week.

The Lady Falcons improved to 14-0 overall and 5-0 in the Northeastern Coastal 2A Conference with a 65-27 win over neighboring rival Hertford County on Friday.

Bertie jumped out to a 20-5 lead in the first quarter and never looked back. The Falcons outscored the Bears 14-7 in the second stanza, 19-7 in the third and 12-8 in the fourth session.

Akyia King continued her recent torrid scoring pace with 26 points on 12 of 16 shooting from the field. She added three rebounds, an assist and seven steals.

Autum Mornings added 13 points on 6-for-9 shooting. Mornings pulled down 14 rebounds and added seven steals as well as four blocks.

Carlisa Spivey and Jomiya Early added eight and seven points, respectively for Bertie, which shot 54 percent (26-48) from the field.



ANDRE ALFRED / 2nd Chance Productions

Bertie's Akyia King (No. 24) goes to the basket against Hertford County Friday.

Early had two of the Falcons' four 3-pointers, while King and Nyasia Barnes added the others.

The day before (Jan. 12), Bertie stepped out of conference play and

handed Class 4A J.H. Rose a 53-35 defeat at home.

Again, the first quarter was the best for the Falcons, who outscored the Rampants 20-9.

Bertie extended its

lead to 35-17 at halftime with a 15-8 edge in the second session.

Bertie shot 51 percent from the field (20-for-39) as King led the

See **BERTIE, B6**

LAWRENCE ACADEMY 52, NORTHEAST 26

Lady Warriors turn close game into rout

BY THADD WHITE
Bertie Ledger-Advance

MERRY HILL - It was close.

Then it wasn't.

Tarheel Independent Conference leader Lawrence Academy struggled with a tough defensive effort from Northeast Academy

through the first quarter Friday night. The Lady Warriors then used a solid offensive performance to counteract the Eagle attack and pull away for a comfortable 52-26 victory.

Northeast jumped to an early 2-0 lead, and it held for the better part of the first four minutes.

Lawrence finally scored when Lauren Baker got free and found the bottom of the next at the 4:29 mark of the first quarter.

Gracen Rogers gave the Warriors the lead with a bucket just 12 seconds later. Katelynn Stotesberry added a free throw and put Law-

rence ahead 5-2 with 51 seconds left in the first quarter.

The two teams exchanged free throws to establish the 6-3 score at the end of the first quarter.

Baker sparked a 10-2 run for the Lady War-

See **GIRLS, B6**

LA BOYS 50, NORTHEAST 45

Rarely pretty, but a win

BY THADD WHITE
Bertie Ledger-Advance

MERRY HILL - It wasn't always pretty.

In fact, it rarely was. Still, Lawrence Academy's varsity boys did enough to hold off rival Northeast Academy 50-45 Friday night.

The Warriors trailed much of the first quarter, rallied to take a halftime lead and then trailed again after three despite the visiting team scoring just twice from the floor.

In the fourth quarter, Lawrence rallied to put the Eagles away and claim its fourth Tarheel Independent Conference victory in as many outings. They did so without Jarrett Harrell, the team's top scoring threat, who sat out due to injury.

Northeast opened the game on a tear, hitting eight straight - two scores coming off three-pointers - before Lawrence even got on the board.

A triple off the hands of senior Austin Wynne was followed by a pair of free throws from DaQuan Wilson. That put the Warriors back within three (8-5).

Northeast stretched it back to three before Miller Trowell scored from behind the arc to close the gap to 16-14 at the end of the first period.

There wasn't a lot of scoring in the second quarter, but the home-standing Warriors did most of it.

Wood Trowell and Nixon Rascoe started the second period with back-to-back trips to the charity stripe and sank all four shots, but

See **BOYS, B6**



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