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Aulander travel team are champions

BENSON - In its first tournament as a new travel ball team from Aulander, the HotShots won a championship.

Playing four games back-to-back, equaling close to 5 hours of straight playing time, the HotShots won first place at a Top-Gun invitational tournament in VYAS Park in Benson, on Aug. 14.

The HotShots are a new 8U team with the Tri-County Travel League. They were invited at the last minute to join an invitational tournament with Southeastern TopGun when a team backed out.

The journey could truly be the plot of a Disney movie. With the team being new and participating in its first tournament originally not scheduled until the following weekend, they did not have their team uniforms.

Head coach Michael Vaughan contacted the parents after receiving the invitation the day before the tournament. Surprisingly, enough players (parents) committed to make it possible.

The coach was told we



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The HotShots team: (front row, from left): Allyson Vaughan, Eva Davis, Kayla Mizelle and Casey Piland. In the middle row are: Avery McGee, Cheyenne Simone, Colleen Jones, Cally Piland and Mary Welch Gallop. The back row consists of Mark McGee, Michael Vaughan (head coach), Kaylee Jones, Carly Piland and Tammy Piland.

could still play in the tournament without matching uniforms, but how would the girls look and feel like

a team without matching uniforms.

Coach Tammy Piland offered to make the girls

and coaches some matching shirts. "HotShots" was hand painted on the uniform shirts and numbers

were ironed on the back for the players. The coaches had "HS" hand painted on the front of their shirts and coach on the back.

Matching socks and belts fell into place with others pitching in to complete the uniform. Everyone was excited and yet nervous as they embarked on this new journey.

There were two other teams playing in the tournament, Lady Venom from Roanoke Rapids and Cleveland Angels from Garner.

Two games were played in the Pool Play. HotShots beat Lady Venom in the first game 13-8, while losing to the Cleveland Angels 9-2 in the second consecutive game.

Therefore, HotShots began their third consecutive game of the tournament, yet first game of the Gold Bracket as Seed No. 2 playing Seed No. 3 (Lady Venom).

The Cleveland Angels got a break while the first game of the Gold Bracket was played. Lady Venom took a break while HotShots played Cleveland Angels, but the HotShots

were unable to break because of the way the cards fell.

Now playing their third consecutive game with maybe a ten minute break in between games, HotShots beat Lady Venom 5-2.

Since HotShots won game 3, that put them playing Seed #1 (Cleveland Angels), for the fourth consecutive game of the tournament. The HotShots persevered, winning 17-5 to bring the Championship home.

The first hit of the game, Kayla Mizelle led off with a home-run. She received a medal for this hit.

Two players received MVP recognition during the tournament. Mary Welch Gallop earned MVP during the first Gold Bracket game against Lady Venom and Avery McGee earned MVP during the Championship game against Cleveland Angels.

The team was awarded a Championship banner and plaque. All girls were awarded with a medal and TopGun visor. The banner will be displayed at the John Asa Drew, Jr. Field of Dreams in Aulander, where the HotShots practice.

Pirates unleash flurry of TDs vs. Campbell

PATRICK MASON
The Daily Reflector

To say the East Carolina offense wasn't bashful would be an understatement.

The Pirates' receivers outplayed the Campbell defense all game and running back Keaton Mitchell turned in another game-breaking performance on the ground as the Pirates rolled up a 49-10 football win on Saturday in Greenville.

ECU only had eyes for the end zone as it routinely passed up field goal attempts for touchdowns and buried the Camels in a flurry of second-half scores. The Pirates converted twice on fourth down, including a fourth-and-eight try where quarterback Holton Ahlers found Jaylen Johnson wide open for a 28-yard touchdown.

That score came on the first series of the second half and it was a dagger to Campbell's comeback hopes as ECU went on to score 42 unanswered points after trailing

10-7 in the first quarter.

The Pirates (2-1) faced a fourth-and-three, but a false start pushed the offense backward. Coach Mike Houston wasn't deterred from the original plan and went with the same play call.

"The fourth down call, Ryan (Jones) had a false start and set us back and we stayed with it because we trusted our offensive line," Houston said. "I thought Jaylen had a great matchup and Holton knew right where he was. So it was really good to see us win those 1-on-1 matchups down the field because we're going to have to do that throughout the year because people are going to load up on Rahjai (Harris) and Keaton. So we're going to have to throw the football the way we did tonight."

In his session with reporters this week before the game, Campbell head coach Mike Minter detailed the challenges of defending all of the Pirates' playmakers on offense. His fears were realized

as ECU got just about everyone involved in the demolition of the Camels.

Eleven different players caught passes for ECU, while Ahlers was near perfect on a night where he became the American Athletic Conference's all-time leader in passing yards and ECU's all-time leader in total yards gained.

Ahlers finished 17-of-20 passing for 263 yards with three touchdowns and added a two-yard touchdown run. Receivers Jaylen Johnson, C.J. Johnson and tight end Jones all caught touchdown passes. Isaiah Winstead led all receivers with 112 yards as the Toledo transfer recorded his first 100-yard game with ECU.

"It's almost hard to get them the ball sometimes because there's so many of them," Ahlers said. "But I mean, everyone's going to have their game. Just super proud of the guys."

Mitchell turned in the eighth 100-yard rushing game of his career and finished

with 185 yards and an 18-yard touchdown run. Mitchell averaged 14.2 yards per carry, buoyed by a 42-yard run up the sideline that was made possible by great downfield blocking by Jaylen Johnson.

Winstead said the receivers made it a point to focus on run blocking because the talent in the backfield has the ability to break a big play at any moment.

"A lot (of pride) because basically if they score we feel like we score too," Winstead said. "We're a team, so when we spring a block for them our coach is happy for us, but I think it's just as important as catching passes. I will say it's easier (to block for Mitchell) because he is so fast. So really, I don't have to make the best block, I just have to get in their way and he's gone."

Ahlers compared playing with Mitchell to growing up watching former ECU running back and NFL star Chris Johnson tear apart defenses.

"It's the same as me as a kid watching Chris Johnson,

and then handing it off to like, literally, Chris Johnson in my eyes now," Ahlers said. "It's pretty cool."

Harris joined the touchdown party in the third quarter with a nifty 17-yard run where he planted his foot for a cutback that left the Campbell defense in shambles. His score pushed the lead to 42-10 and the rout was officially on.

Harris later ran for his second touchdown of the game, this one a one-yard stretch to the outside with 11:11 remaining in the game to push the ECU lead to 49-10.

Campbell quarterback Hajj-Malik Williams gave the ECU defense all it could handle early as the dual-threat junior racked up 300 passing yards and 16 rushing yards, though his rushing total took a hit on several long losses.

It took some time for the Pirates to figure out Williams, who directed an 11-play, 65-yard scoring drive on the game's first series which ended with a 31-yard field goal.

Later in the opening quarter, Williams found receiver Jalen Kelsey for a 61-yard touchdown pass which gave the Camels a 10-7 lead.

"You guys could see what kept me up all week in Hajj-Malik Williams," Houston said. "Just an incredible athlete. I don't know if you're going to see a more athletic kid all year."

ECU safety Teagan Wilk said it took some time to figure out Williams, as his athleticism extended plays and made him tough to contain. But once the Pirates got into the flow of the game, the defense settled in and was able to limit the Camels' offense.

Williams made his first mistake of the game in the third quarter when he threw a pass over the middle of the field that Pirates' linebacker Chance Bates picked off. Bates' first interception with ECU led to a two-yard Ahlers touchdown run.

ECU will open AAC play at home game against Navy at 6 p.m. on Saturday.

Football has definitely evolved over the years...

DAVID FRIEDMAN
Columnist

Evolution cannot be denied. Before anyone gets too emotional, you should know I'm not referencing the Bible though there will be mention of a man with what many dubbed "the voice of God."

I am certainly no stranger to discussing how the business of sports or the social impact of those who make a living in it have changed.

What stands out to me after another weekend of football is just how much the sport itself has evolved in my nearly 40 years of fandom.

I grew up re-watching NFL highlight films on VHS cassette narrated by the

forementioned John Fawcett or the "voice of God." They featured highlights of



DAVID FRIEDMAN

FOURTH & LONG

men like Dick "Night Train" Lane and Lyle Alzado regularly doing things that would get players ejected and fined in today's game.

Night Train Lane would tackle opponents with a clothesline-style wrestling move that would have made Nikita Koloff proud. I'm fairly certain that's now labeled as a no-no in NFL rules.

Teams back then often

utilized a tight end and full back. Both were there almost exclusively to block and served as much more mobile versions of offensive linemen.

Most NFL teams today don't use full backs anymore and the responsibility of a tight end is no longer primarily blocking. They are tall, athletic and when combined with a good quarterback, seemingly impossible to stop. See Rob Gronkowski for details.

When I grew up watching football, if a team ran a play on third down and came up a few inches short of a first down, they left the field and punted the ball back to the other team. This was done largely without exception unless the offense was in field goal range.

Now teams use math and statistics to help make decisions. Going for it on fourth down, depending on field position, is no longer seen as the risky move it once was, but the right one whether it's successful or not.

As a former offensive lineman, I am admittedly most awed at the change here. The famed offensive line of Vince Lombardi in Green Bay averaged approximately 6-foot, 3-inches and 253 pounds. That's essentially the size of Aaron Rodgers if he didn't work out in the off-season.

Offensive linemen now are about three inches taller and 65 pounds heavier. Somehow they are also more athletic, which really blows my mind.

It's the evolution of the quarterback that makes me chortle the most. Those old videos I watched featured guys like Roger Staubach and Johnny Unitas. Fellas like Bart Starr, who were basically 6 feet tall and 190 pounds. These men were legends of their time.

Fast forward a few decades and the league was filled with players that look more like Peyton Manning and Tom Brady. Contrary to common belief, Brady did not play in the 70s and 80s. At 6-foot, 4-inches and over 225 pounds, they might have put him on the offensive line.

What's funny is watching games this past week and seeing players like Jalen Hurts and Tua Tagovailoa and Kyler Murray

run around and make the most amazing plays with their athleticism. They are approximately the same height as quarterbacks from the 60s when quarterbacks were known for their ability to run the ball.

For what it's worth, they are approximately 20 pounds heavier, throw the ball much, much better and are faster than those quarterbacks ever dreamed of being. Still, it's good to know that even in football, some things are cyclical. That's a column for another day though.

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Athlete of the week

Alexia Dickerson
Sophomore
Bertie High School

