

The Field Expands...

Twenty-four candidates file for local elections as the deadline day draws near. The list so far is on Page 10-A.

Ready For The Grid

A new West Brunswick football team takes to the practice field. Page 9-B.



Reaching Their Limits

Offshore anglers are coming home with lots of king mackerel, including some citation-size fish. Page 12-C.

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Polk, Seay Cleared Of Recruiting Charges

BY DOUG RUTTER

Polk County High School and its head football coach, Marshall Seay, have been cleared of charges that the school tried to recruit football players from West Brunswick High School.

The N.C. High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) announced its ruling Tuesday following an investigation that began when West Brunswick officials filed a complaint against the Polk County school.

"The long and short of it is there was a long investigation..." said Rick Strunk of the NCHSAA. "Even though there were questionable circumstances, there wasn't enough data to prove undue influence."

Strunk, associate executive director of the NCHSAA, said no violations were found even though two high school football players have moved from West Brunswick to Polk County in the last two years.

West Brunswick filed a formal complaint with the NCHSAA July 20 alleging that Seay, head football coach at West from 1986 to 1991, tried to illegally recruit two local student-athletes to play football at Polk High.

West Brunswick Principal Ed Lemon said Tuesday the school will accept the NCHSAA's ruling.

"It was our opinion the whole time if they didn't feel there was enough evidence that would be the end of it..." he said. "That's our governing organization for athletics, so we just move on."

However, Lemon added that school officials believed they had enough evidence to prove wrongdoing. "We thought we did or we wouldn't have taken those steps," he said.

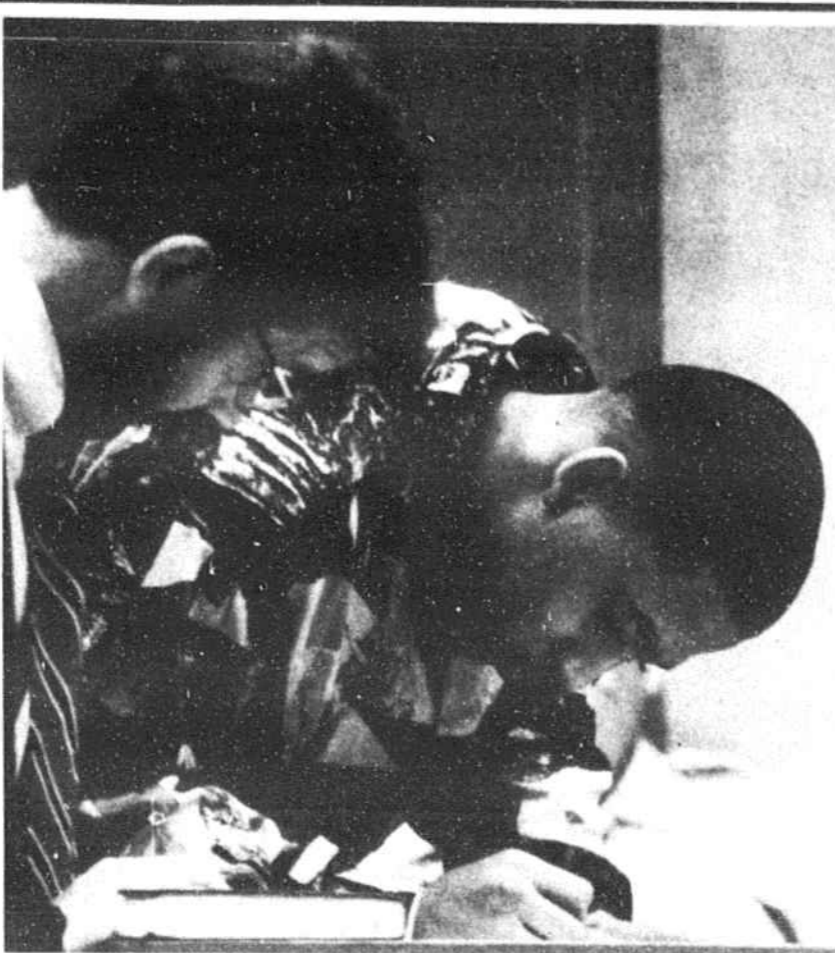
Dick Knox, deputy executive director of the NCHSAA, conducted the investigation. He was out of town teaching football clinics this week and was unavailable for comment.

"A lot of people were talked to from both sides," Strunk said. "Dick talked to a large number of people involved in this thing and had written affidavits and gave it a thorough look."

Although the investigation has been closed, Strunk said the NCHSAA will continue to "monitor" the relationship between West Brunswick and Polk County high schools.

"We'll just make sure there won't be an influx of students from one school to another," he said. "West Brunswick presented this in a very professional way and Polk County responded. I hope we can just move on from here."

The NCHSAA does not allow (See COACH, Page 2-A)



BRADLEY TYRONE KING signs a plea agreement confessing his guilt in the first-degree murder of Ronald Everett Evans as defense attorney Michael Ramos looks on.

King Gets Life Sentence In Ronald Evans Murder

BY ERIC CARLSON

Ronald Everett Evans begged for his life and was sentenced to death by a teen-ager who wanted to steal his car.

Bradley Tyrone King said he was sorry for killing Evans and was spared the death penalty by a jury that sentenced him to life in prison Tuesday.

The panel of eight men and four women took just under an hour to agree that King should be granted the mercy he failed to show Evans before shooting him in the back on a deserted logging road outside Shallotte last October.

Moments before the jury left the courtroom to decide his fate, King rose from the seat he had occupied throughout the three-week trial.

Gone was the colorful print shirt he had worn while still professing his innocence last week. This time, five days after pleading guilty to first-degree murder and armed robbery, King faced the jury in a clean, white, hooded sweatshirt.

"I am sincerely sorry for one senseless act that has ruined two families," King said. "I realize what I have done is wrong. To the family of Ronald Evans, I'm sorry. I wish it had never happened."

The victim's mother, Marian Evans, lowered her head and covered her eyes as King sat back down. Friends and relatives in the row of seats beside her stared sternly toward the defendant, apparently unconvinced.

Judge Orlando Hudson told the jurors that they had only two choices to make in sentencing King: death by lethal injection or life in central prison.

As required by law, the judge also read a lengthy list of factors they could consider in favor of imposing the lighter sentence, including King's age of 17 at the time of the murder, his lack of a criminal record, his alleged spiritual conversion after being arrested and his relationship with his parents, his daughter, his sister and his disabled grandfather.

Only one aggravating factor could be considered in support of giving King the death penalty, Judge Hudson said: the fact that King killed Evans "for pecuniary gain;" in other words, for his newly purchased 1987 Honda Accord.

Testimony in the trial indicated that King and a friend, William Earl Hill, abducted Evans in a Shallotte parking lot and forced him into the trunk of his car at gun point. Together they drove to a dirt road on the edge of the Green Swamp, shot Evans in the back and dragged him into a ditch, where he choked to death on the blood hemorrhaging into his lungs.

King agreed to a plea bargain Thursday after learning that the jury had found him guilty of first degree murder. Under the arrangement, King agreed to plead guilty to the murder and armed robbery charges and to testify against Hill in a trial scheduled for next month. In exchange for his cooperation, District Attorney Rex (See JURY, Page 2-A)

High, Shifting Winds Push Blaze Out Of Control

BY SUSAN USHER

It was nearly 6 p.m. Tuesday before Carol Richards shut off the gas pumps at Midway Trading Post, grabbed her checkbook and dog, and evacuated.

Less than two hours earlier, at 4:30 p.m., stray embers from a backfire set to gobble up fuel in the line of a major woods fire jumped N.C. 211 just below its intersection with Midway Road, where the store is located. Pushed by winds in excess of 20 mph, the blaze temporarily threatened nearby homes and businesses.

High, shifting winds kept firefighters off balance as they raced to respond to changing conditions. Earlier Tuesday night the fire was burning away from N.C. 211 toward uninhabited woodlands, but erratic winds accompany-

ing a thunderstorm shifted its direction to the southwest—toward N.C. 211 and populated areas to its west, including Boiling Spring Lakes.

At 10:30 p.m. planners were outlining their proposed assault on the fire, which by then had blackened between 1,500 acres and 1,600 acres.

"We're going to try to take a stand on some of the dirt lanes off N.C. 211," said Alison Davis, a state spokesman. "We don't want to alarm anyone, but if that doesn't work, we're making plans in the event further evacuations become necessary."

With nightfall, darkness and thunderstorms moving into the area joined heavy smoke as obstacles.

"You can't see anything because the smoke

is so thick and the wind is blowing so hard," Richards explained earlier as her neighbors to the south of the intersection were being evacuated. She and her husband were keeping the store open for the firemen, who needed gasoline for their trucks.

As she spoke a Civietown Volunteer Fire Department truck positioned itself outside the store, on stand by.

Brunswick County Sheriff's deputies, assisted by volunteer firefighters, evacuated 10 homes along N.C. 211 between St. James Plantation and Midway Road, and warned Midway Road residents up to Antioch Baptist Church to be prepared to evacuate.

As of 10:30 p.m. no injuries had been reported, the threatened homes were safe and no additional evacuations were anticipated at that

time. Thirty-two N.C. Division of Forest Resources employees were working to keep the fire from spreading, using eight tractor crawlers, six equipped with blades and two with plows, to widen fire breaks to 50-foot widths and scrape down to mineral soils.

Abundant organic, peat-rich soil several feet deep in places and dry from the lack of rainfall was fueling the smoldering ground fire, keeping the blaze alive.

"Two-thirds of the area is organic soil. Without a good rain we could be here the rest of the summer," said Laura Barston, an N.C. Division of Forest Resources spokesman.

From Tuesday afternoon until released at 11 p.m., volunteer firefighters manned trucks po- (See 14 SQUADS, Page 2-A)

SCHOOL BOARD APPEAL HEADS TO MEDIATION

Commissioners Flex Budget Control Muscles

BY SUSAN USHER

As Brunswick County's two most powerful governing boards prepare to meet next week behind closed doors in a court-directed attempt to resolve differences over school funding, county commissioners moved Monday to exert more oversight over how the school system spends its money.

Commissioners unanimously adopted a tentative resolution that would require the school board to gain commissioners' advance approval if the school board wants to change the way it spends large chunks of its local allocation once its budget has been adopted.

County Manager Wyman Yelton said Tuesday he is drafting a budget amendment resolution for

commissioners to consider approving at their next regular meeting, Aug. 16. "That was their intent last night," he said.

State law provides that the county commissioners can set limits of 10 percent to 25 percent on what proportion of funds the county board of education can transfer from one "function level" to another in its budget without commissioners' advance approval.

"We're talking about going to the maximum control, the 10 percent," said Yelton. "Based on the scenario so far, it appeared to us that we needed a closer degree of control by the county commissioners."

The move would not give commissioners control of line item spending, as the school board

budget is subdivided by programs, functions, object codes and then line items.

Rudi Connor, finance officer for the Brunswick County Schools, said she doesn't anticipate the change in procedure as making much difference in operations.

The school board by law must seek commissioners' approval of any changes in how it spends its local allocation for construction and repairs, equipment and vehicles.

And Connor already sends documentation on transfers of any sum from one function to another function in the current expense (day to day operating) budget to the county commissioners, as a matter of information.

(See COUNTY, Page 2-A)

Suit Says Districts Hinder Blacks' Participation In Political Process

BY ERIC CARLSON

Attorneys for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have joined a Wilmington legal services group in asking the federal courts to prohibit Brunswick County from electing a new board of commissioners until the county alters its election methods to improve the chances of black candidates.

A lawsuit filed Friday in Wilmington's U.S. District Court asks for a permanent injunction that would delay the 1994 commissioners' election until the county either creates a black majority voting district or changes the way it nominates and elects commissioners.

The suit, signed by lawyers from the ACLU and Legal Services of the Lower Cape Fear, was brought on behalf of seven black men who are registered to vote in Brunswick County. They include Brunswick County Board of Education Member Thurman Gause, former County Commissioner Willie Sloan, John Frink, Henry Bryant, Edward Thomas, Roscoe Butler and Willie Fullwood, who was recently appointed to the Brunswick Community College board.

Its filing came less than a week after the 90-day deadline passed on an ultimatum made to the county commissioners by law-

yer James Wall of Legal Services of the Cape Fear last April.

The lawsuit contends that Brunswick County's present system of electing commissioners from individual districts in countywide voting "has resulted in diluting minority voting strength and denying members of the black community an opportunity equal to that of white citizens to elect representatives of their choice."

Although the county selects its school board members in the same way, those procedures were not challenged in the suit. Gause, the only black candidate in the 1992 election, was elected to the school board.

County Commissioners' Chairman Don Warren said Monday that the results of that election strongly indicate that there is nothing wrong with Brunswick County's voting districts or election procedures. He noted that the county had voted to approve new district lines in 1991.

"They're going to have a tough time making a case after the first test of re-districting resulted in a black candidate being elected," Warren said. "You can't say you got wiped out by the system when no blacks ran for county commissioner and the only one who ran for school board won. Maybe that's why they left the school board elections out of

"You can't say you got wiped out by the system when no blacks ran for county commissioner and the only one who ran for school board won."

—Don Warren

the suit."

Warren said the county plans "to stand firm by the districts and see what happens."

County Attorney Michael Ramos said a recent U.S. Supreme Court opinion on North Carolina's attempt to create a black majority congressional district might have a bearing on the case. The high court voiced strong disapproval of a new district that meanders across the state in an attempt to include black voters.

In his presentation to the commissioners last April, Wall proposed a similar black ma-

jority district for Brunswick County. It would follow the western bank of the Cape Fear River from the Columbus County line to Southport, then zig-zag across U.S. westward almost to the South Carolina border.

Wall has said the two cases are not related because his suit against Brunswick County is based on an alleged violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which he said was not an issue in the Supreme Court opinion.

The suit says blacks constitute 18.1 percent of the total population of Brunswick County and constitute a "politically cohesive" group of voters. It notes that it is possible to create one election district out of five in such a way that blacks are a voting majority in at least one district.

The county is accused of having "a history of discrimination based upon race which has affected the rights of black residents to register, vote and otherwise participate in the governmental election process." As a result, the suit claims that blacks have been discouraged from participating in the political process, "including registering to vote, voting and electing representatives of their choice."

Black residents "bear the effects of discrimination in education, employment,

health and housing, all of which hinder their ability to participate effectively in the political process," the suit states. It notes that no black person currently serves on the board of commissioners, nor has a black person been elected to the commission in the past 10 years.

The lawsuit asks the federal courts to enter a permanent injunction preventing the county from holding any elections for county commissioners under the current system. School board elections, which employ the same system, are not included in the request.

The suit further asks the court to require Brunswick County to implement a method of nominating and electing members to the board of commissioner that gives blacks "an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice and which does not dilute minority voting strength."

Ramos said voting cases such as this commonly move quickly through the federal court system. The suit could be heard within a year, he said.

The lawsuit is filed against Brunswick County and its five current commissioners, which it notes are all white. Also named are the three members of the county board of elections. But the suit fails to note that one of its members, Orrie Gore, is black.

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