



Stewart's Slants

By
Gary Stewart

From Here It Looks Like Shelby-KM Finish

With another football season beginning Friday night, it's again time for ye olde prognosticator to give his yearly opinion on who'll win and lose in the area high school and college races this fall.

The only thing that can be correctly predicted is that most of the predictions in this column will not come true. However, I must say, I did pick the Southwestern 3-A Conference winner (Crest) last year.

High school races are hard to pick, because injuries and attitude play a big part in winning and losing. Teams that sometimes appear strong on paper turn out to be weak because some or all of the players have a don't-care attitude. I can remember several instances in past years when teams that were loaded with talent experienced losing seasons because players didn't care whether they won or lost.

Most of the teams in the SWC this year appear to be improved, and if they were playing in most other leagues, their record would probably be better. The only two teams that don't look better on paper are Crest and East Rutherford (they were 1-2 in the SWC last year) but don't let this statement fool you. Both teams have some talented players returning, plus both have outstanding junior varsity teams coming up.

At this point in time, it appears that the teams that finished in the top four last year (Crest, East Rutherford, Shelby and Kings Mountain) have the best shot at winning the conference this year. But other teams like Chase, East Gaston, South Point and North Gaston, R-S Central and Burns, should be much-improved.

Many years ago, the SWC championship always came down to the Kings Mountain-Shelby game. Those two teams will stand good chances of letting their fans relive those good old days this year. Should the title come down to that game, it would be a Hollywood finish to the SWC season as that contest is slated for the final Friday night of the season in Kings Mountain. John Gamble Stadium would never hold the fans.

After looking over last year's rosters and the number of people coming back at each school, I've finally settled on the final predictions:

1. Shelby. To win a championship in football, a team must have a good quarterback. Shelby has the best one in the conference in All-Conference standout Billy Gamble. He's smart, is a good passer and runs the option play well. The Lions also have an outstanding group of running backs, and have some big, experienced linemen.

2. Kings Mountain. The Mountaineers will have to do a lot of improving to make this prediction come true. Fans are talking a lot about the KM running backs, and first-year coach Denny Hicks is blessed with some outstanding runners. They're not only quick, but are big and can run over people. But I recall a statement that the veteran Lincoln Coach, Von Ray Harris, told me years ago when I was a young sportswriter. I asked him his opinion on why he thought his best runner, Bobby Joe Easter, was left off the Shrine Bowl team, and he said, "The world is full of good running backs. If you have a good line, you can hand any fast runner the football and he can pick up yardage." The line will be the key to the Mounties' success. If the line does its job, and the KM secondary can stop the pass, the Mounties will win the SWC.

3. Crest. Crest, under former Gardner-Webb assistant John Taylor, has won the SWC the past three years. The Chargers' only close game in the conference last year was against Kings Mountain, a game the Chargers won 9-2 after stopping Kings Mountain on downs inside the five yard line. Taylor lost a lot of good players off that team, but he also has 15 lettermen and seven starters back, including halfback Chris Poston. Some good players coming up from the jayvee team will fill most of the graduation losses. If Crest survives its early games, it could win the SWC again.

4. East Rutherford. The Cavaliers have one of the best running backs in the conference in Eric Starr, and Coach Rodney Nobles has the players off an undefeated junior varsity team. When those young players get a few games under their belts, the Cavs will be hard to handle. Here's another team that will have to be beaten early. As the year goes on, they'll get better.

5. East Gaston. The Warriors could finish much higher than this, depending on how well they adjust to Coach Jerry Adams' new wishbone offense. Adams always has some outstanding backs and big linemen. He has a good quarterback in Larry Wallace and some good running backs in Mike Lucas, Robert Conner and Duncan Dill, whose brother Richard led the Warriors to a SWC title four years ago.

6. South Point. It seems strange to pick a Jim Biggerstaff-coached team to finish lower than first or second. Biggerstaff is the most successful coach in the SWC, but South Point's been shy on talent the last few years. The Raiders have a good, experienced quarterback in junior Mark Young, but he'll be playing with a lot of inexperienced people. Here's another team that will pick up steam as the season progresses.

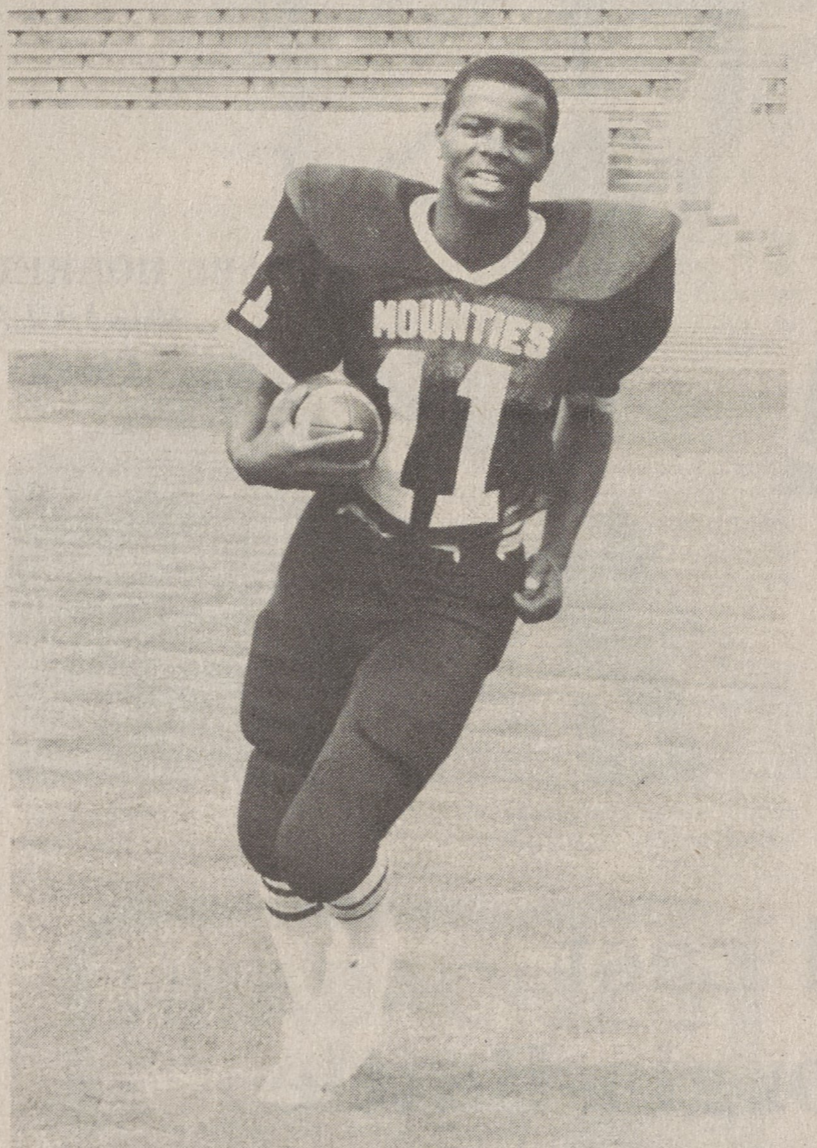
7. Chase. Chase is the smallest school in the conference and its success or failure usually depends on numbers. For the past several years, John Keeter has had 25 players or less. This year, he has 36, so if he can keep most of them healthy, he'll have a good year. The Trojans were 2-8 last year but played some good teams close ballgames. With 13 starters returning, the Trojans should be much better.

8. North Gaston. The Wildcats have some of the best talent they've had since joining the 3-A ranks. They were 4-6 a year ago and suffered very few losses. Coach Roger Dixon's biggest problem will be numbers. He has 12 starters back but has only a 25-man roster. Tailback Thaddus Benton is one of the best runners in the SWC and the 'Cats have several returning linemen.

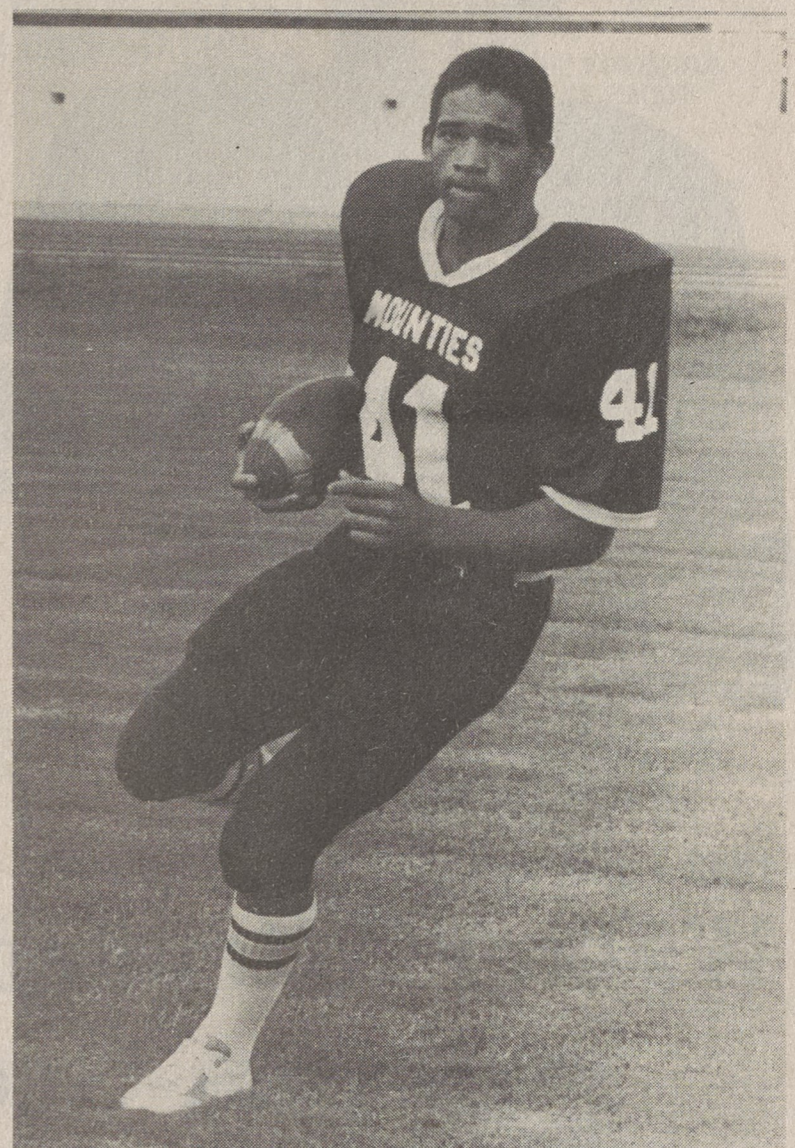
9. Burns. The Bulldogs have made big strides the past several years under Coach Eddie Greene, and they could finish much higher than this. This could be a building year for Burns as Greene is keeping several sophomores on the varsity. As they mature, Burns will get better.

10. R-S Central. The Hilltoppers have 11 starters back, but they were 1-9 last year. Half of Ken Sanford's roster is filled with sophomores. That will make for a good future.

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KM RUSHERS - Curt Pressley, left, and Tracy Johnson, Kings Mountain's leading rushers last year with over 1,600 yards between them, will give Mountaineer fans a lot to cheer about



Photos by Gary Stewart

this fall. When they aren't picking up big yards on offense, they'll be racking opponents on defense. They'll lead the Mounties into action Friday night at Burns.

Mountaineers Open Season Friday Night At Burns

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers open what they hope will be one of their most successful football seasons in recent years Friday night when they travel to Lawndale to take on Burns' Bulldogs.

First-year coach Denny Hicks is hoping to see the Mountaineers break a four-year losing jinx. The Mountaineers' last victory over Burns was by a 32-0 score in the final game of the 1978 season. The past four season-openers saw Burns win by scores of 16-6, 27-8, 6-0 and 24-18.

The Mountaineers, sporting one of the best crops of running backs around, are regarded as one of the favored teams in the SWC this season. Burns, which has a lot of young players, is said to be in a rebuilding year.

But, cautions Hicks, don't take the Bulldogs lightly.

"I saw them scrimmage recently and they looked much better than what people are predicting," said Hicks. "I'd say they're comparable to the same type team they were at the start of last year."

The Bulldogs, who have made great strides in football since Eddie Greene took over as head coach four years ago, got off to a fast start last year. They came from two touchdowns behind in the fourth quarter to tie the Mountaineers 18-all and force a playoff in the season's opener. Burns went on to win the game 24-18. Eventually, that loss kept the Mounties out of the state playoffs.

"They have a real fine fullback (Ben Broome) and their quarterback (Steve Edwards) throws the ball well and operates the team well," Hicks said. "Their tight end (Randy Clark) is 6-2, blocks well and is a good pass receiver. Their line is big across the front. They're just a good, solid high school football team."

To win the ballgame, Hicks feels the Mountaineers will have to control the tempo of the game, something they've failed to do over the past four seasons against the Bulldogs.

"We have to keep the football," Hicks says. "They have a lot of talent. If you keep turning the ball over to them, eventually they'll score on you. That's what they did to us last year. They have good speed and are well-coached."

"We'll have to not beat ourselves with penalties," he added. "That's been a real problem for us in the past. And we'll have to stay after them. We have

good enough people that, if they'll keep after it, can be successful."

The Mountaineers have only a 31-man roster, but Hicks has been well-pleased with their progress to date. Most of the 31 are good football players who, barring major injuries, can lead the Mounties to much improvement over last year's 6-4 record.

The Mountaineers had a good scrimmage against 4-A East Burke last Thursday night at Gamble Stadium. The KM coaches have been working hard this week ironing out the kinks.

"We felt pretty good about our scrimmage," he said. "Our execution was shy of what we're hoping for, but we were satisfied with our intensity. We gang tackled very well and had their backs looking for us."

Hicks used the game to get a good look at all of his players.

"Offensively, we had two or three good, ball-controlled drives," he said. "We still had some letdowns and that's been a problem for us in the past. The last two years we've played good

enough to win in every ballgame, but had some breakdown along the way to cause us to lose. We still saw some of that. Toward the end of the first half, we rested and they pushed us all over the field. We came back in the second half and controlled the scrimmage."

East Burke, regarded as one of the top three teams in the Western 4-A Conference this year along with Asheville and Hickory, played a lot of different defenses against the Mounties.

"We played in our basic defense all night, and they stunted on us from the snap of the ball. We made up our minds before the game that we'd stay in our six basic running plays and two or three basic pass plays. We were tempted to change, but felt like we needed to see what we could do with our basic plays."

"Eric Odum played very well," he added. "He showed us what we thought he could do all along. He ran real hard."

"Shawn Rainey did a good job," he went on. "He was getting off the ball so quick the

referees were flagging him. But we took a close look at him and he was just getting off the ball a step quicker than everybody else.

"Curt Pressley did a super job at safety. When they got into our secondary, he made them pay the price. Shane Burton and Thurndon Brown did a good job both ways at tackle and Gerald Gladden and Brad Reynolds played well at defensive end. David Parker did an excellent job of blocking from his fullback position and picked up some crucial first downs."

Hicks got an early Christmas present last week when last year's leading rusher Tracy Johnson moved back to town. He did not participate in the scrimmage but will be in the lineup Friday night. Timmy Elder, a quick back who played at Shelby last year, has also transferred to Kings Mountain, adding even more strength to the already-strong KM backfield.

All of the KM backs are learning two different backfield positions, and many of them are also among the team's best defensive players.

Fearless Picks KM

By FEARLESS

Well, it's another year for Fearless. I know you're all giggling already - not at my jokes, but at the games I'll probably miss this week during the first full week of the football season.

We're looking forward to this prep season. East Gaston was impressive in a 28-21 win last week over Ashbrook, and the Warriors with their new look will undoubtedly sweep past "Open Date" this week too.

A friend of mine said he was late for school only once. That was when the patrol wagon came for his daddy...and he wanted to see him off.

Anyone in my old neighborhood with teeth and ears was a sissy.

"Don't be discouraged, Lulu," said Lulu's mom. "In this world there's a man for every girl. It's a wonderful arrangement."

"I know, Mamma," said Lulu. "I don't want to change it, I just want to get in on it."

In the old days a siren was a girl who lured men to the rocks. Today she lures rocks to the men.

Love comes once to every woman...but that doesn't prevent her from getting married

three or four times.

"Have you entertained my proposition?" the boss asked his new secretary.

"No," she said. "But your proposition entertained me."

Gordon was going to driving school and the instructor was

briefing him on the type of question he might be expected to answer in the oral examination.

"Now, Herb," said the instructor, "if your wife were driving ahead of you and she put her hand out and gestured with the

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