

## Mounties Eliminated From 3-A Playoffs

### Both Teams Are Fourth In Conference Tourney

Everything went "according to Hoyle" for Kings Mountain's teams in the annual Southwestern 3-A Conference basketball tournament last week at Gardner-Webb College.

Both Kings Mountain teams won their opening games against lower-seeded teams but then lost out in the semi-finals to the teams that won the regular season championship.

Kings Mountain's girls won their opening game over Chase but then dropped a tough 45-39 decision to regular season champ East Rutherford in Thursday's semi-finals. East went on to defeat North Gaston Saturday night for the tournament championship.

Kings Mountain's boys won their first round match over South Point Thursday, 69-59, but then lost to regular season champ Shelby in Friday's semi-finals, 85-76. Shelby went on to defeat East Rutherford Saturday for the championship.

The Mountaineers used a triangle and two defense in the fourth quarter to key Thursday's victory over South Point's Red Raiders. With their leading scorer Mikgen Bakalli having a field day over the first three periods, the Red Raiders appeared on the verge of upsetting the Mountaineers after having lost twice to KM during the regular season. But KM's fourth quarter defense completely shut down Bakalli and the Mountaineers outscored the Raiders 22-9 to grab the win.

"We finally had good success against Bakalli," noted KM Coach Larry Sipe. "We were down 47-42 when we went into the triangle and two and we took him out of the game."

Bakalli scored all 20 of his points in the first three quarters. Stephon Cathcart added 14 points for the Raiders.

Patrick Jones scored 21 points and Jeff Ross 18 for the Mounties, and they combined for 18 points in the fourth quarter.

Patrick Odem, who had been KM's big rebounder all year and one of the top scorers, drew three quick fouls and sat out all but two minutes of the first half. He grabbed eight rebounds in the second half to lead the Mounties in that department, and Mark Byers added five. Jason Norris had eight rebounds and Demond Alexander five for South Point.

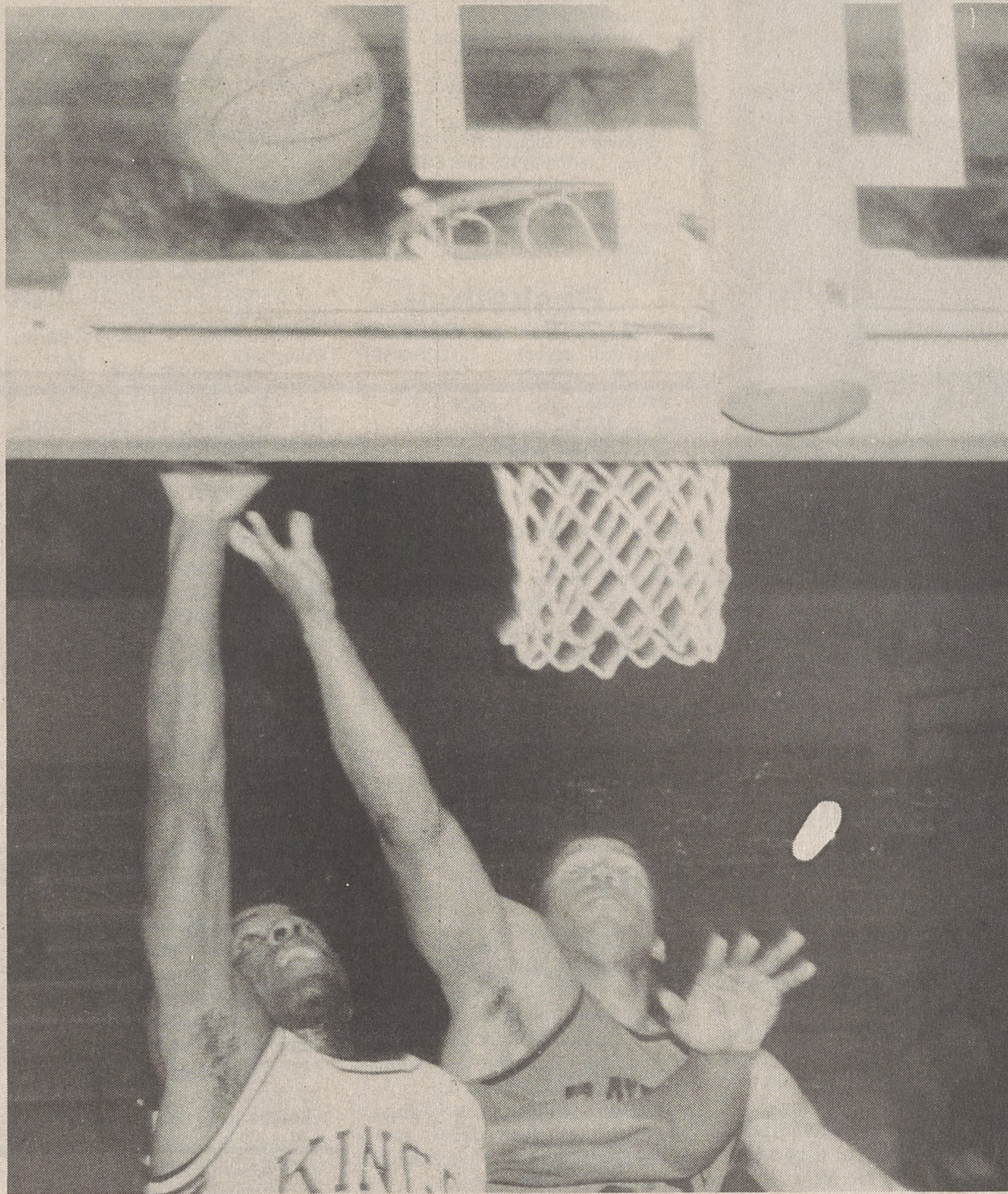
"Quan Smith and Darren Hager came off the bench to give us a big lift when Odem was out in the first half," Coach Sipe said. "Overall, we gave a great effort and we handled things well down the stretch."

Kings Mountain fell behind early against Shelby in Friday's semi-finals game and the Lions kept the heat on all night. In three previous meetings with Shelby, the Mounties had led most of the games only to see Shelby come from behind in the fourth quarter to win. But, this time, the Lions were in command over the final three quarters.

Kings Mountain held a 22-20 lead after the first period but Shelby's three-point shooting and board strength took command in the middle two quarters. The Lions held a 43-36 lead at halftime and a 62-50 lead going into the fourth quarter.

Tyrone Finney led the Shelby attack with 24 points, Shawn Colquiett added 18 and Chad

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BASKETBALL ACTION- Quan Smith, left, of Kings Mountain battles South Point's Willie Strain for a rebound in last week's Southwestern Conference basketball tournament at Gardner-Webb. Mounties won this game, but were eliminated the next night by Shelby.

### Owen Ousts Mountaineers Tuesday Night

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers fell behind 8-0 and never caught up and dropped a 74-67 decision to Owen High School in an opening round game in the state 3-A basketball playoffs Tuesday night in Swannanoa.

The loss ended Kings Mountain's season at 17-8. Half of the Mountaineers' eight losses were to Southwestern 3-A Conference champion Shelby.

The Mountaineers played without the services of their leading rebounder and one of their top scorers, Patrick Odem, who has an injured ankle, and the tough man-to-man Owen defense held KM's leading scorer, Patrick Jones, to just two points.

The Owen victory kept alive a streak of playoff victories for Owen High teams against the Mountaineers. In three post-season appearances against Owen in recent seasons--one in football and two in basketball--the Mountaineers have yet to taste victory.

After grabbing their 8-0 lead Tuesday, the War Horses went on to lead by 21-11 at the half. Kings Mountain finally put things together midway of the second period and cut the halftime difference to 34-31, and Larry Sipe's charges got the margin to within one, 53-52, going into the fourth quarter.

Four players scored in double figures for Owen, led by Chad Ledford with 20 points. Kevin Wagner had 15, Keith Lambert 11, and Ray Watkins 10.

But the big story of the game was Owen's defense, which held the KM guard duo of Jones and Jeff Ross to a combined total of

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### KM Girls Softball Team Young But Has Talent

Kings Mountain High's girls softball team will be young but hopes to be very competitive in the Southwestern 3-A Conference this year.

First-year coach Tony Leigh, a Kings Mountain native who built a strong softball program at Canton Pisgah, says the inexperience may show early, but he hopes to someday see the same type program here as he had in Canton.

"We're young, very young," he says. "We have only three seniors and Robyn Watterson (an infielder) is the only senior with experience. But the girls have really been hustling and working hard. They understand the type teams I had up at Pisgah and they're really trying to be like that. And I appreciate it."

Leigh's girls haven't had many opportunities to get outside because of the weather, but they've practiced in the gym on bad days.

He has a limited roster now but hopes to add at least five players after the basketball season is over.

Joining Watterson as the only seniors right now are Alice Owens and Sandra Grant. They both started at times last year.

Other returning starters are infielders Carmen Smith, Paula Morris and Tessie Ruff and outfielders Ashley Champion and Velma Degree, but at this point Champion is the only one working with the team. Smith and Degree are on the basketball team and Ruff is nursing an injury that she suffered early in the basketball season.

"We've had to shuffle girls around in the infield because of Tessie's injury," Leigh said. "When she returns she'll be at shortstop and be the anchor of the infield, but it may be a couple of weeks in-

See Softball, 6-A



RETURNING PLAYERS - New KMHS softball coach Tony Leigh, right, is pictured with three of his returning players. Left to right, they are Sandra Grant, Alice Owens and Robin Watterson.

### Buncombe Team Ousts KM Ladies

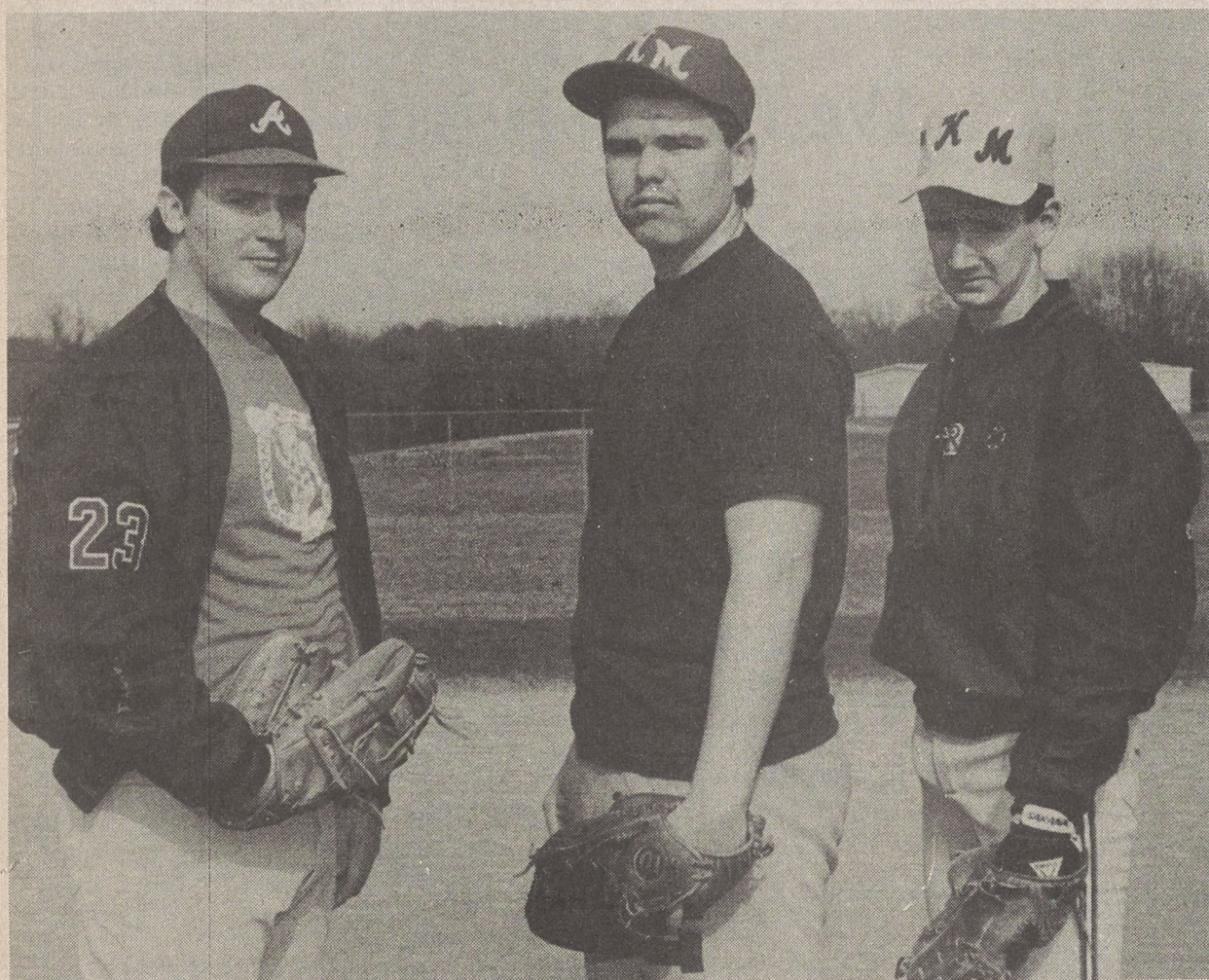
Kings Mountain High's girls basketball team took an early exit from the state 3-A playoffs Monday night, losing 41-38 in a first round game at North Buncombe High School in Weaverville.

The Lady Mountaineers, in their first year playing for Coach Ronny Funderburke, finished with an 11-14 overall record. They were fourth in the Southwestern 3-A Conference.

Kings Mountain led early and was in the game all the way, but North Buncombe's depth was the big difference down the stretch. Kings Mountain led 21-18 at halftime but trailed 29-28 going into the fourth quarter.

Christy Maney scored 20 points--including eight of her teams 13

See Girls, 6-A



PATRIOT PITCHERS - Kings Mountain Junior High baseball coach Tommy Wease will be counting on pitchers Benji Ingle, David Jenkins and Steven Fisher, left to right, as his Patriots try to win the Bi-County Middle School Conference this spring.

### Junior High Baseballers Should Contend For Title

Kings Mountain Junior High's baseball team hopes to contend for the Bi-County Middle School Conference this year.

Veteran Coach Tommy Wease has most of his players back from last year's team, which lost its first five games but then won seven in a row to finish in second place.

The Patriots, a seventh and eighth grade team, will have a strong pitching staff and good defense.

The Patriots have won two conference championships and finished second twice in their first four years under Coach Wease.

"This is really a talented group," says Wease. "I've been real impressed with their work habits. They have a lot of desire and determination to improve every time they go out on the field. This is probably the hardest working group I've ever had."

Wease's pitching staff includes 215-pound David Jenkins, who won six games last year as a seventh grader, and Steven Fisher and Benji Ingle. Jenkins and Fisher

were the aces of last year's Dixie Youth team which won the district title and competed in the state tournament.

The Patriots will be strong up the middle. Robbie Ruff and Chris Rider give them experience behind the plate, and newcomers Johnny Stewart and Sheldon Smith have also looked good in early spring drills.

Wease has a veteran group at second base which includes returning starter Doug Bridges, Mike Clark and seventh grader Dean Clark. Fisher will start at shortstop when he's not on the mound, and when Fisher's pitching Wease will start either Caje Ormand or move veteran Todd Ware from third base.

Ware will be the regular at third, but Brandon Putnam, a seventh grader, will also see a lot of action at that position.

At first base, Damon Putnam returns and Chris Blanton has also been impressive. Ingle will also see a lot of action at first when he's not pitching.

Outfielders include returning starter Tee Gee Goforth in left,

Ruff, Smith, Ormand and newcomer Rick Marr.

"We'll have pretty decent speed overall," says Wease. "We hope to be able to run. We have pretty good hitting. Jenkins is the only long ball hitter we have but we have several other guys like Goforth, Smith, Ruff, and some others who are good, consistent hitters. We hope we can get them on base and look to Jenkins to hit some long balls."

Wease hopes the confidence the team built late in the season last year will carry over. "If so, we'll have a good season," he said.

#### THE SCHEDULE

**MARCH**  
13 - Burns; 15 - Crest; 20 - East Lincoln; 23 - at Crest.

**APRIL**  
3 - at Lincolnton; 10 - at West Lincoln; 13 - Shelby; 17 - Burns; 20 - at East Lincoln; 26 - Crest; 27 - Lincolnton.

**MAY**  
4 - West Lincoln; 8 - at Shelby; 11 - at Burns.