

■ See "KM Swat Team"
On Pages 8-9B

SPORTS

1-B

Mounties Win Western 3-A Title

Mountaineers Bomb Owen Wednesday

Kings Mountain brought out the heavy artillery again and senior righthanders Stuart Spires and Todd McDaniel combined to hold a powerful C.D. Owen offense to just two hits as the Mountaineers defeated Owen 11-1 in the quarter-finals of the State 3-A baseball playoffs Wednesday night at KM's Lancaster Field.

Kings Mountain batters ripped Owen pitching for 11 hits—including home runs by Paul Brannon and Dale Greene—to eliminate the number two team from the Mountain Athletic Conference.

The victory was the first playoff win ever for a Kings Mountain team over Owen. Owen had ousted the 1986 football team and the 1987 KM basketball team from the state playoffs.

Spires worked the first five innings to notch his ninth victory in 11 decisions. He gave up only two singles, with Chico Kemp's single to left scoring the only Owen run in the fourth inning. McDaniel came on in the top of the sixth and held the Warhorses hitless over the final two innings. Owen had scored 29 runs in its first two playoff games.

Brannon clubbed his state-record 16th home run of the year in the first inning to give the Mounties a quick 3-0 lead. Toby Deaton had reached on an error and Chris Henson singled before Brannon cleared the bases.

Kings Mountain, which scored in each of the first five innings, built a 6-0 lead before Owen finally got on the scoreboard.

KM scored two runs in the second as Chad Plonk singled, moved to second and third on passed balls and scored on a double by Toby Deaton. Deaton later scored on a wild pitch.

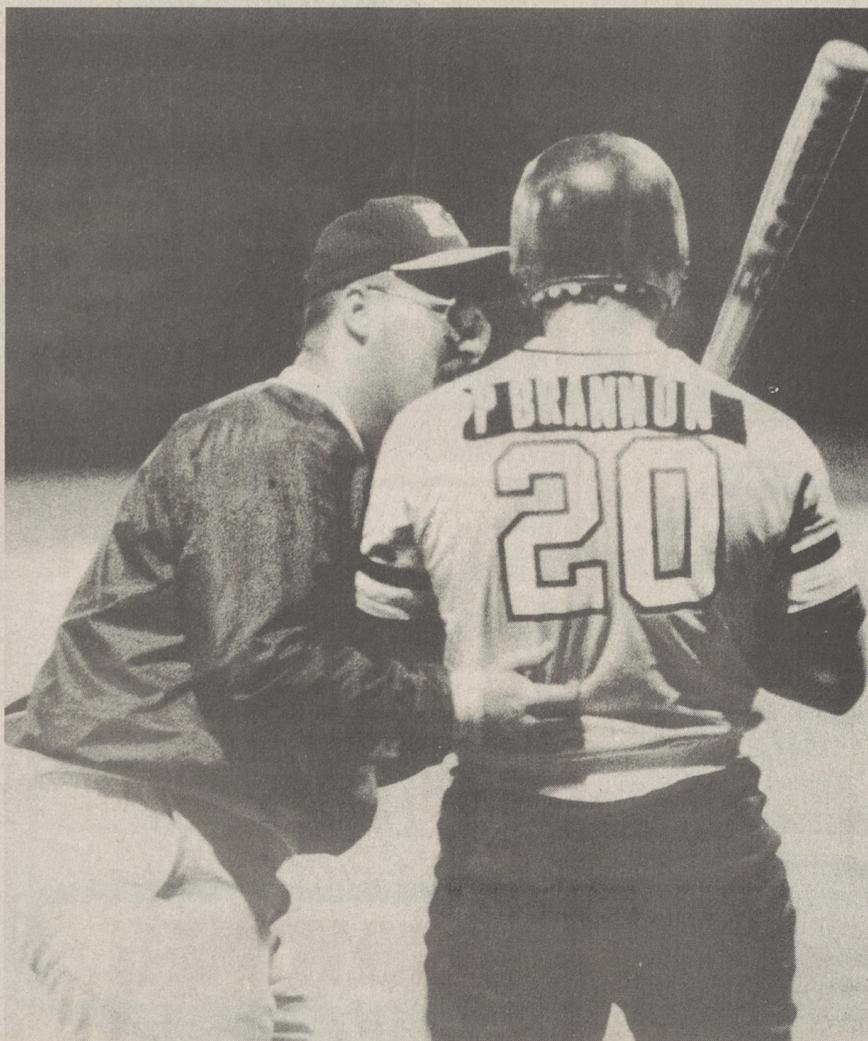
Owen got two men on base in the top of the third on errors but Spires got out of trouble when rightfielder Chip Cash chased down a long fly ball to end the inning.

KM was back in business in the bottom of the inning, scoring its sixth run on Greene's single, Plonk's double and an infield out by Chris Bullock.

See Owen, 4-B

THE LINESCORE

Score by innings: R-H-E
SO 000 100 0 1-2-4
KM 321 410 x 11-11-3
Allen, Mease (3) and Stewart; Spires, McDaniel (5) and Crook.



HIT ME A LONG ONE - Kings Mountain High coach Bruce Clark urges slugger Paul Brannon to take a good cut at the first pitch in bottom of the seventh inning in Saturday's state semi-finals playoff game with Statesville at Lancaster Field. Brannon slugged a two-run homer to give the Mountaineers a 3-1 victory.

7th Inning Homers Beat Statesville 3-1

The Hollywood script writers couldn't have come up with a better finish!

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers, trailing visiting Statesville 1-0 going into the bottom of the seventh inning in Saturday's western state championship game, were facing elimination from the state 3-A baseball playoffs.

Gary Davis, a good, hard-throwing righthand pitcher who had won 11 games for the Foothills Conference champions this year, had kept most of the Mountaineer sluggers in a hole all night with a moving fastball and good-breaking curves.

But, as the Mountaineers came in for their final inning at bat, the hundreds of Mountaineer fans who lined the banks of Lancaster Field began to work into an uproar, clapping and yelling for their Mountaineers to bring out the heavy offense and win their way into the state championship series.

All night long, head Coach Bruce Clark had urged his hitters to go after the first pitch, which Davis was putting over for strikes to almost every batter. The KM batters, who seemed almost frozen by the moving first pitch, had taken it all night.

But shortstop Chris Plonk, batting eighth in the lineup, jumped on Davis's first pitch in the bottom of the seventh and sent it sailing over the right-center field fence for his fifth homerun that tied the score at 1-1. He made sure Kings Mountain would at least make it an extra inning game.

Davis bowed his neck and fanned pinch-hitter Keith Allen and leadoff batter Toby Deaton for two outs.

Everyone in the stadium could sense that the Mountaineers wanted their slugger, junior first baseman Paul Brannon, at bat. Brannon had already clubbed 16 home runs this year and had hit at least one in each of the Mountaineers' last five ballgames. He had a double and single to his credit in three previous trips Saturday.

But for Brannon to get to bat in this inning, Chris Henson would have to get on base. Davis worked a 1-2 count on the Mountaineer second baseman, but he fouled off a couple of pitches and then sent a Davis curve into left-center for a base hit to keep the hopes alive.

The Mountaineers and their fans could sense the end as Brannon dug his spikes into the batter's box. He didn't lift the bat off his big right shoulder until Davis let go with the first pitch, a knee-high fast ball. With one quick flick of his big wrists the Mountaineer homerun king sent the ball sailing high over the centerfield fence for his 17th homer of the year to give the Mounties a 3-1 victory and propel them into the championship series beginning here tonight.

Needless to say, the Mountaineer players and fans went wild. The team not only greeted Brannon as he crossed home plate, but tackled him in front of the backstop and they stayed in a huge, football-like huddle for several minutes as fans poured onto the field to congratulate the coaches and players with hugs and handshakes.

The victory moves the Mounties into the best-of-three championship series against eastern champ Rockingham County beginning tonight at 7:30 at Lancaster Field. The second game will be Thursday at 7:30, and the third, if needed, will be Friday at 7:30. It will be the first time Kings Mountain has hosted a state championship game in any high school sport.

Although the heavy hitters—Plonk, Henson and Brannon—brought the victory in the bottom of the seventh, Coach Bruce Clark could point to a superb pitching performance by senior Stuart Spires and a perfect defensive game by his other starters as the keys to keeping the Mounties in the game.

Spires, winning his 10th game in a row after losing two early-season non-conference games, pitched the

See Comeback, 4-B

THE LINESCORE

Score by innings: R-H-E
St 000 100 0 1-4-0
KM 000 000 3 3-8-0
Davis and Stevenson; Spires and Crook.

See Records, 2-B

Winning No Surprise To Clark

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

All Bruce Clark wanted to do in his first year as head baseball coach at Kings Mountain High School was to "get the program back on its feet."

Once a perennial power in the Southwestern 3-A Conference, the Mountaineers had struggled a lot in the decade of the 1980's. They had opened the decade by winning their last conference title and going all the way to the state championship series, where they lost to Greene Central in Snow Hill.

Since then, the talent wore thin and it was a struggle to even finish in the top division of the conference.

Clark was named head coach last fall and immediately began to involve the community in the baseball program. With the help of the school administration, and a number of loyal baseball fans in town, the playing facility was upgraded and is once again one of the top playing facilities in the state.

After all those improvements were made, Clark surrounded himself with some good coaches. Ronny Funderburke and Rusty Bumgardner, along with Clark, brought youth, energy and motivation to the staff, and Bud Bumgardner, who assisted Coach Barry Gibson with the championship 1980 team, returned to bring maturity and knowledge of the game.

Then, the coaches took some young, talented players, and were able to blend them in with a handful of

seniors who have provided great leadership.

"When we started, we said we weren't going to worry about winning and losing," said Clark. "We wanted to get the program back on its feet. After the players realized what was expected of them, they responded well and the wins took care of themselves."

The Mountaineers started the season slowly, going 3-2 in their first five non-conference games. They finished second to South Point in the highly-competitive Gaston Neighbors Tournament, and went on to finish second to South Point in the Southwestern 3-A Conference race.

But, the Mounties began peaking at the right time. At one time they were three games behind the Raiders and battling East Rutherford and North Gaston for an automatic state playoff berth. In the next to last regular season game, the Mounties handed South Point its first loss. They fell to East Rutherford in the semi-finals of the conference tournament, but then began to jell again and won four straight playoff games to win a berth in the state championship series.

"I feel like beating Bessemer City in the Gaston tournament was what turned our program around," said Clark. "We lost to South Point in the finals but we were able to come back the next week and win three straight ballgames. We never lost two games in a row

See Clark, 3-B

Record-Breaking Year For KM Mountaineers

It's been a record-breaking year for the Kings Mountain High baseball team, and if the Mountaineers can defeat Rockingham County for the state 3-A championship this week, even more school marks will fall.

Bruce Clark's first team at KMHS will be one he'll long remember. Heading into tonight's opening game of a best-of-three state championship series with Rockingham County, Clark's Mountaineers have clubbed 45 homeruns, and junior first baseman Paul Brannon has 17. Both of those marks are not only school—but state high school—records. The team figure bettered the previous mark of 38 set by 4-A Greenville Rose High School, and Brannon's figure of 17 broke the old mark of 11 held by five different players, including David Lancaster of Kings Mountain, who hit his 11 in 1975.

Almost every school hitting record has—or will—fall before the end of the week. In addition to his homerun mark, Brannon also has 42 hits, breaking the old mark

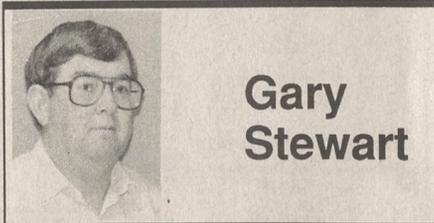
Remembering Champions

The 1989 Kings Mountain High School baseball team did not win the Southwestern 3-A Conference championship. Only seven teams in the school's history have accomplished that feat. But, this current team can do something none of the others have done when they host Rockingham County Wednesday through Friday at Lancaster Field. It can win the North Carolina High School Athletic Association 3-A championship.

Some of the other teams went as far as they could go in their time. The 1935 and 1941 teams won the old Western Conference championship. In those days, the Western Conference included 15 schools in this end of the state but conference champions did not advance to play other conference champions in a state playoff.

The 1969 team won the Western N.C. High School Activities Association championship, beating Statesville 2-0 in the championship game. That was the state championship for that particular association. At that time, there were two state associations and the winners of the different groups did not go on to play each other for a true North Carolina championship.

A true state champion in any sport was not possible until the late 1970's, when the WNCHSAA, which included 39 schools in the western end of the state, and the larger NCHSAA merged. Since that merger, Kings Mountain has played for only one major state championship. The 1980 baseball team lost that best of three series to Greene Central.



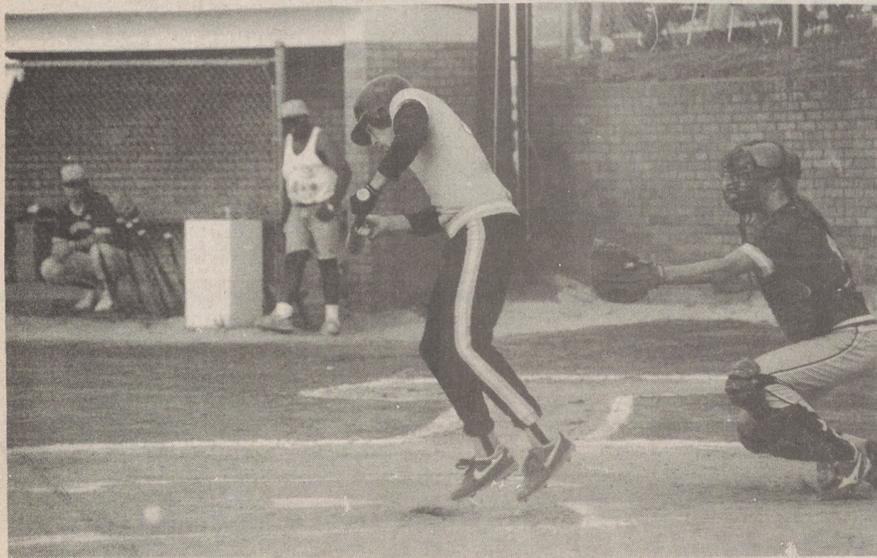
Gary Stewart

This week will be the first time Kings Mountain has hosted a high school state championship game in any sport.

Kings Mountain won conference championships in 1935, 1941, 1963, 1967, 1969, 1975 and 1980. All of the teams had a lot in common. Most of them had good pitching, hitting, and defense and the teams were made up of the finest young men Kings Mountain had to offer.

The 1935 team was Kings Mountain's first conference champion in any sport. It included three men who went on to play professional baseball and one, the late Jake Early, played 10 seasons in the major leagues and was an American League all-star catcher for the Washington Senators. Eugene Goforth, who still lives in Kings Mountain, played AAA ball in the St. Louis

See Champs, 4-B



A BULLOCK BUNT - Chris Bullock of Kings Mountain pushes a bunt down the third base line in Saturday night's playoff game with Statesville at Lancaster Field. The Mountaineers won 3-1 and will host Rockingham County in the state 3-A championship series tonight, Thursday and Friday.