

Thursday,

October 26,  
1989

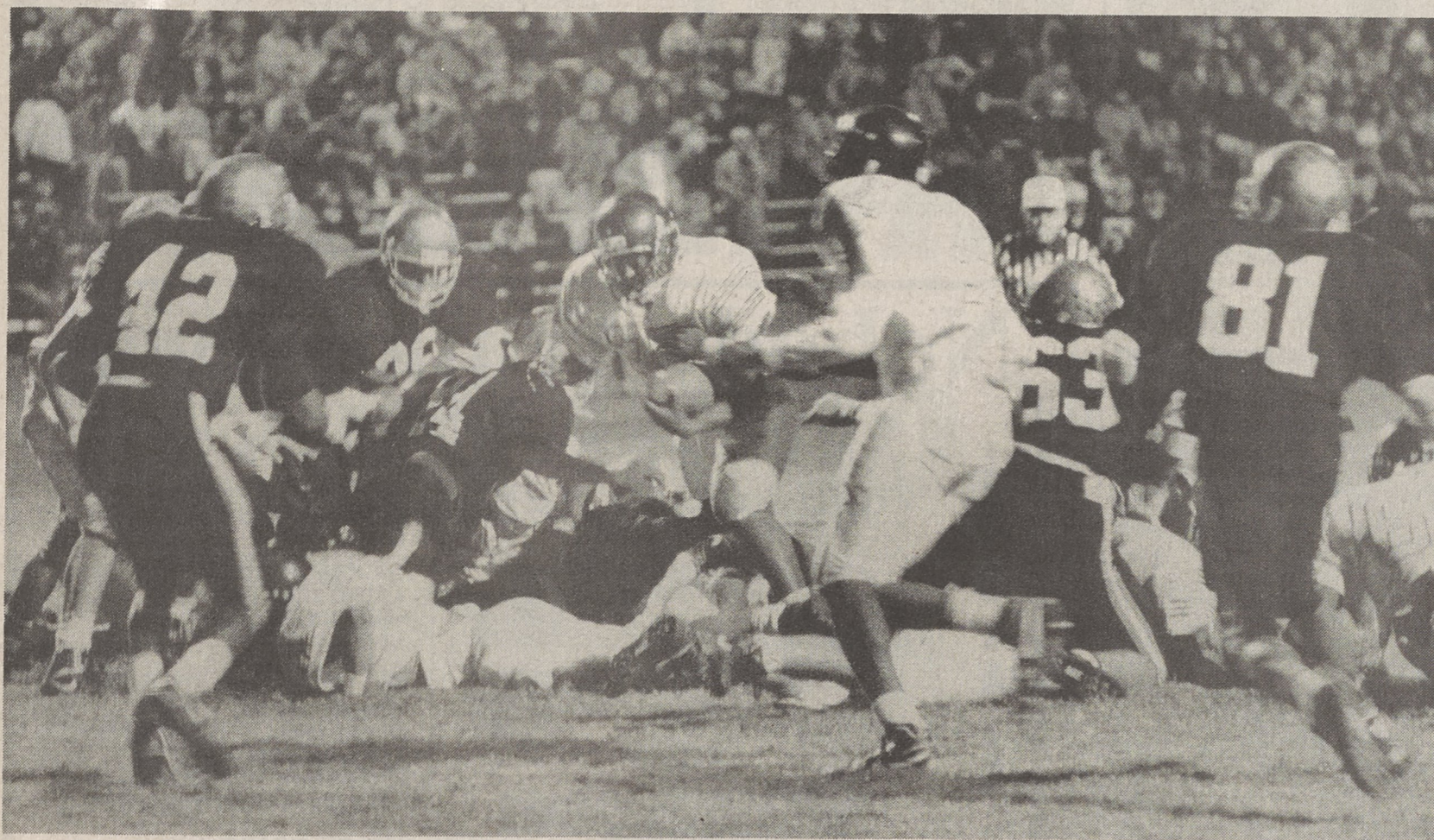
Kings Mountain Herald

# SPORTS

Section

B

## North Gaston Here For Final Home Game



SO CLOSE...And yet so far away. Kings Mountain fullback Jeff Lockhart (35) tries to find a way to get over a heap of KM tacklers and Shelby tacklers inside the one yard line in Friday's

Southwestern 3-A Conference football game at Shelby. The Lions held the Mountaineers on this scoring drive and came back with two fourth quarter touchdowns to win 14-6.

## KM Can Clinch Playoff Berth

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers, disappointed after last week's 14-6 loss to Shelby, will get another chance to wrap up a state playoff berth Friday night when they host North Gaston's Wildcats in their final home game of the regular season.

The Mountaineers, 3-1 in the SWC and 5-3 overall, can do no worse than finish third if they defeat North Gaston, which is 0-4 and 2-6.

Even though they've won only two games, KM Coach Denny Hicks says North Gaston is dangerous.

"They can create a lot of problems for your defense," he said. "They produce a lot of yardage and basically give you 27 different offensive formations. They run everything from a basic I formation to a shotgun and polecat."

The Wildcats have one of the best passing quarterbacks in the conference in senior Mike Patton, who is the son of North Gaston's head coach, Bob Patton. He's a three-year starter and has some talented receivers in wideout Ivan Brooks and running backs Scott Littlejohn and Larry Traywick. The Wildcats have several backs who run the 40-yard dash in 4.7 seconds or better. They're not very big up front but get off the line of scrimmage quickly.

The Wildcats, who defeated Bessemer City 7-6 and East Gaston 14-0 in their first two games, have lost six in a row but have played some close games against some good opponents.

North Gaston played one of its best games of the season last week in a 28-14 loss to a strong East Rutherford eleven. Earlier in the year they lost to 4-A Gastonia Ashbrook by only 14-7 after holding an early lead. They gave up three quick first quarter touchdowns against Shelby and then held the powerful Lions scoreless until late in the fourth quarter.

"They have the best talent they've had since we've been playing them," said Coach Hicks. "North Gaston's a very dangerous football team. They've got the talent and they're very physical. They've just had a real difficult time putting everything together. Every coach I've talked to warns us not to underestimate them. They have the ability to beat you."

"If we beat North Gaston we'll be in the playoffs, and that's our full and only concern at this point."

-Denny Hicks

Hicks said the Wildcats have gone into each game with a different concept. "Some games they come out wide open and give you all the unorthodox formations. Some games they'll settle back into the more basic type football and open up in an I formation. Basically, they go into a game doing what they need to do to move the football against that week's opponent. They've done well against everybody they've played. They've just had a difficult time getting the ball in the endzone."

Defensively, Hicks said the Wildcats are also impressive and have a lot of quick athletes.

"They create a lot of problems for your blocking scheme," he said. "They try to get a lot of penetration and they've got enough speed that you have to block them if you're going to move the football. You can't just pitch the ball and out-run them. They have good team speed."

Hicks said the Mountaineers will continue to go with their same attack but he hopes to get a better job of blocking and running from his offense this week.

If the Mountaineers beat North Gaston Friday, they can claim a share of the SWC title by defeating East Rutherford in their regular season finale next week in Forest City.

"If we beat North Gaston we'll be in the playoffs, and that's our full and only concern at this point," he said. "That has to be our total concentration. We can't worry about conference championships or co-championships right now. But we can control whether or not we're going to the playoffs and we feel like we have to do it in this football game."

The Mountaineers may have the services of senior quarterback Ryan Hollifield this week. Hollifield was injured in the third game of the season against East Lincoln. He was released by the doctor last Thursday. Coach Hicks said he may let him play briefly this week and hopes he'll be at full speed by next week.

## Lions Awake For 14-6 Win

Moments after it was seated, Kings Mountain High's band went into its version of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" Friday at Shelby's Blanton Memorial Stadium.

But the Lions aroused from their slumber late in the third quarter and took control of their own den and defeated the Mountaineers 14-6 in a game which could have clinched a state playoff berth for the Mountaineers.

It was the first conference loss for the Mountaineers, who are 5-3 overall heading into the final two games of the Southwestern 3-A Conference season. Shelby improved to 3-1 in the SWC and 6-2 overall.

The Shelby victory allowed Burns to regain the lead in the SWC. The Bulldogs, who had led the race since the starting gun, are now 4-1 in the SWC and 8-1 overall heading into their final regular season game Friday night at South Point.

Kings Mountain got the upper hand early Friday night at Shelby, just as it had in three previous victories over R-S Central, South Point and Burns. But, unlike those previous games, the Mountaineers couldn't take advantage of their breaks against Shelby.

The Mountaineers drove the opening kickoff to the Shelby 13 yard line and then scored on a 30-

yard field goal by Scottie Hopper. Late in the second period, the Mountaineers drove to the Shelby 14 and scored with two seconds left on a 31-yard field goal by Hopper to make it 6-0 at intermission.

However, in between those two field goals, the Mountaineers missed a pair of golden scoring opportunities, and early in the third quarter they had a 29-yard field goal effort blocked. After that, Shelby's line blew Kings Mountain off the ball, both offensively and defensively, and took control of the game.

"Quite obviously, it was a real disappointing loss for us," said KM Coach Dennis Hicks. "We thought in the previous three weeks we had played three games as good as we could ask. We had gotten a tremendous amount of effort and made a lot of good things happen."

"The first thing I asked our people Monday at practice was for somebody to explain to me why Friday's game wasn't a total wipe-out. We moved the ball very well in the first half and just couldn't get it into the endzone. We had the chance to put them away but let them back into the ballgame."

The Mountaineers were just inches away from a touchdown on several plays early. On the first play from scrimmage, tailback D.J.

Williams took a pitchout from quarterback Timmy McClain and sailed down the KM sidelines for a 46-yard gain into Shelby territory. On the next play, McClain hit wideout Darius Ross for 26 more yards and all of a sudden the Mounties were on the Lions' 17. Shelby's defense settled down after that and held KM at the 13 but Hopper's field goal attempt was right through the middle of the up-rights and the Mountaineers led 3-0.

After the kickoff, Kings Mountain's Jeff Lockhart recovered a Shelby fumble at the 27. Lockhart, behind good blocking by the middle of the KM line, pounded the Shelby defense and gave the Mounties a first and goal at the five. On second down, Lockhart was stopped six inches shy of the goal line and the KM sidelines could sense a 10-0 lead.

But, on third down McClain and Lockhart got tangled up on the handoff and Lockhart was thrown for a loss back to the three. On fourth down, the Mountaineers opted to go for the touchdown rather than another field goal and Shelby held Lockhart again.

"A lot of people asked after the game why we went for the touchdown rather than the field goal," Hicks noted. "But you have to make your judgment on how the

game's progressing. We felt like we were moving the ball well enough to score. We just had a mix-up in execution. We set our formation to the right and then flipped it at the line and Shelby didn't make an adjustment. Shelby lined up exactly the way we wanted them to and the play was there for us to score. But we had a missed blocking assignment on the line and another one in the backfield.

"I never thought that we wouldn't score," he went on. "We were moving the ball well enough. Our kids had gone three weeks showing that they could play four solid quarters of football and that's what we made our judgment on. We had no idea we'd lose our intensity."

Hicks said, despite the failure to score, the Mountaineers were still in great field position. In fact, on Shelby's second play from scrimmage following their big defensive stand, the Lions fumbled at the seven and three different Mountaineers touched the ball before Shelby retained possession.

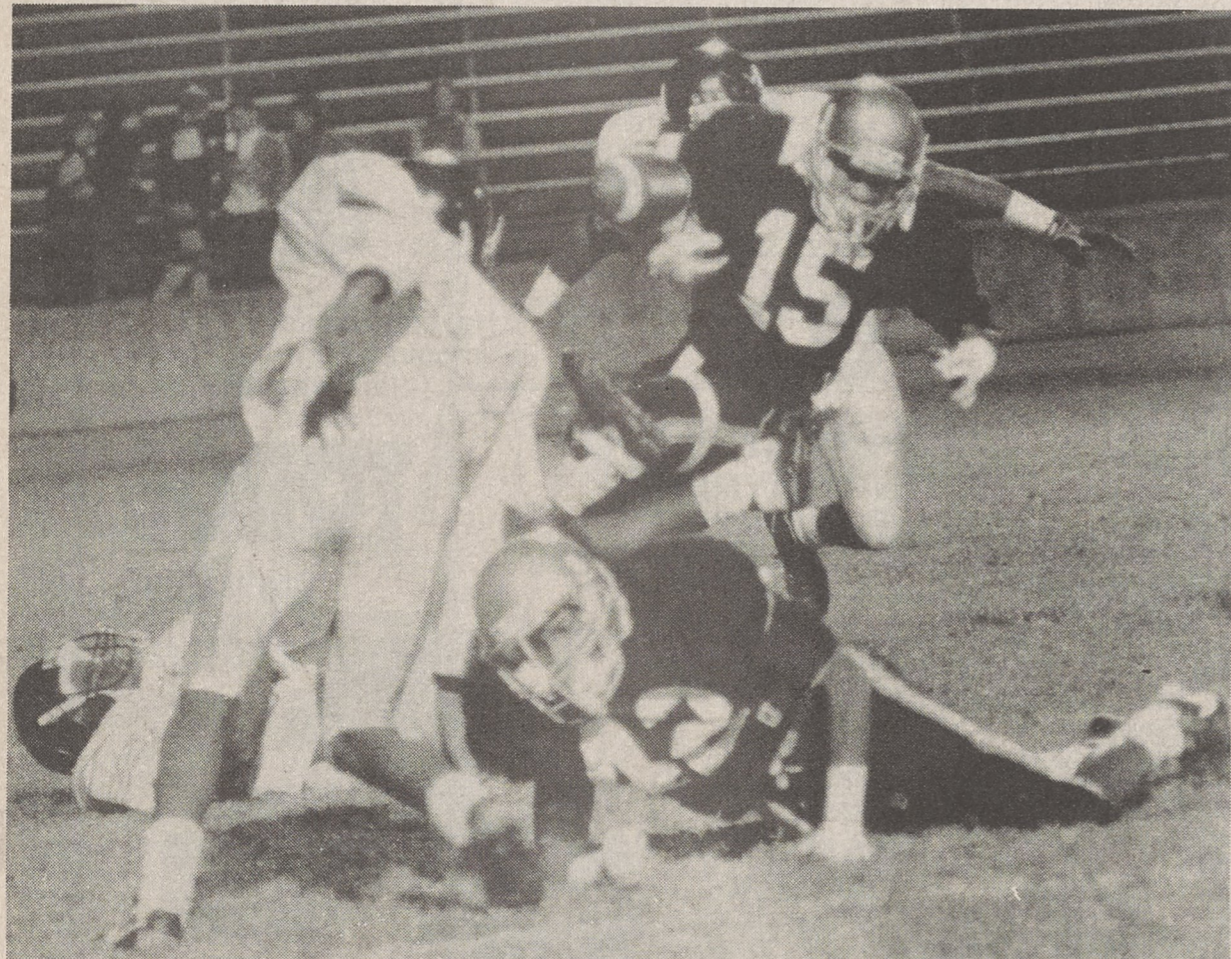
The Lions were able to get out of the hole and drove for a first down to the Kings Mountain 13. But Mountaineer defensive back Petie McNeal, who had two interceptions to give him five in the last two games, picked off a Paul Jeffords pass in the endzone and returned it to the 42.

Kings Mountain's final scoring drive came in the final minutes of the half after a Shelby punt was downed on the KM 45. With Lockhart doing most of the damage, the Mounties moved to the 23 where they faced fourth and two. McClain faked Lockhart into the line but hit tight end Brenton Wilson on a pop pass which carried nine yards for a first down at the 14. McClain threw two incompletions, one of which was out of the back of the endzone and another which Ross just missed making a leaping catch of, and then Hopper came on to boot his second field goal to give KM a 6-0 advantage with two seconds left in the half.

On the kickoff, Hopper kicked a short roller in an attempt to keep the ball out of the hands of the Shelby speedsters, and the Lions recovered at midfield. However, no time ran off the clock and after a lengthy discussion, the officials left the clock at two seconds. Jeffords tried a Hail Mary pass to the endzone, which McNeal intercepted and returned to the 40 before Shelby could catch him.

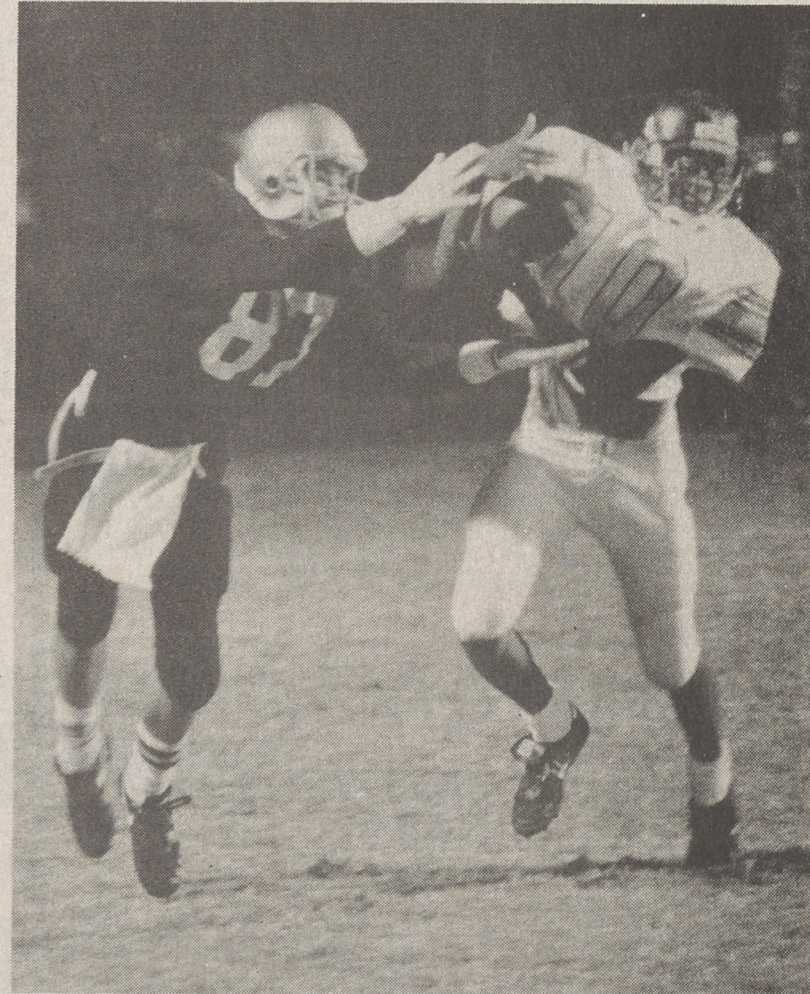
"I was really surprised to go into the locker room and see most of our kids looking like we were behind rather than ahead 6-0," Coach Hicks said. "We just couldn't put our finger on the problem. We played defensive football after that and let them back into the game."

See Lions, 3-B



Photos by Gary Stewart

SHELBY FUMBLE - Kings Mountain defenders deliver a hard hit to Shelby running back Eric Littlejohn (15), causing him to fumble the football in Friday's Southwestern 3-A Conference game at Shelby. The Mountaineers recovered and drove the ball to the one-foot line but the Shelby defense held. The Lions came back with two touchdowns in the fourth quarter for a 14-6 victory.



KM INTERCEPTION - Kings Mountain's Petie McNeal (10) intercepts one of his two passes in Friday's Southwestern 3-A Conference football game at Shelby. McNeal has five interceptions in the last two games.