# **1990: A Look Back At Kings Mountain Sports' Memorable Moments** Paul Brannon Was King Of N.C. Prep Baseball

Kings Mountain enjoyed another banner year in sports in 1990.

Two teams--one from the high school and another from youth recreation--won state championships, several other teams came close to winning state titles and individuals continued to make their marks on the sports scene.

The top sports story of 1990 was Paul Brannon, the slugging catcher for Kings Mountain High's baseball team who was the top home run hitter in North Carolina high school baseball history.

Brannon clubbed 16 home runs his senior year--giving him 41 for his career--in leading the Mountaineers to the Southwestern 3-A Conference title. Their quest for a second straight state championship ended in the third round of the playoffs when they were upset by North Gaston, a team they had beaten four straight times during the regular season.

Brannon was Southwestern 3-A Conference Player of the Year and was also named 3-A Player of the Year in North Carolina.

Brannon signed a college scholarship with Wake Forest University but turned pro after being selected in the third round of the major league draft. Brannon signed a hefty bonus with the Seattle Mariners and was making great strides in their rookie and instructional leagues before being sidelined with injuries.

Although he wasn't hitting home runs like he did in high school, Brannon was carrying a solid .296 batting average when his Rookie League season ended with a shoulder injury. After a brief healing period, he rejoined the Seattle chain for Instructional League and was tearing the cover off the ball when he suffered a serious elbow injury. He recently underwent surgery in Boston and hopes to be ready to play when spring training begins in February.

Several of Brannon's teammates at KMHS also enjoye I banner seasons. Pitcher Keith Allen, pitchers-infield rs Chris and Chad Plonk, infielder Chris Henson and cutfielders Chip Cash and Eric Peppard all earned college scholarships. Allen and Brannon were named to the All-State team and were joined on the All-Conference team by Henson, Cash, Peppard and Chad Plonk.

# **LEGION BASEBALL**

All of the above-named standouts, along with Chris Bullock, Daniel Honeycutt, Tommy Payne, Donald Bell, David Jenkins and others, also helped form Kings Mountain's first American Legion team in several years and led the team to the Area IV Western Division finals before losing out to Caldwell County. Caldwell County went on to win the state championship and finished second in the Southeastern Regionals in Cherryville.

Bruce Clark, who coached the high school team to its first SWC title since 1980, also handled the coaching duties for Post 155, which finished 16-8 overall. Jimmy Littlejohn was athletic officer. DIXIE YOUTH

Kings Mountain's 15-16 Dixie Boys Pre-Majors won the state tournament and finished fifth in the DYB World Series in Shreveport, La. Todd Fleming, Chris Henson and Terry Buliock handled the coaching duties and members of the team were Mike Smith, Todd Ware, T.G. Goforth, Chris Rider, Rick Marr, Stephen Fisher, Brent Turner, Doran Moore, Doug Bridges, Mark Ross, Damon Putnam, and Shane Webb.

Many of those players were also members of the



HOME RUN KING - KM High's Paul Brannon is congratulated by teammates at home plate after smashing one of his 41 career home runs last spring. Brannon was drafted in the third round of the major league draft and is now the property of the Seattle Mariners.

In his seventh season at KMHS Sipe molded a close-knit unit which included eight men with varsity playing experience. Daniel Honeycutt led the team in scoring with 18 points per game and Era Vaughn averaged 11, then there were six players with averages ranging from seven to nine points.

The Mountaineers won a balanced SWC, which included several strong teams, but were upset by East Rutherford in the SWC tournament finals at Gardner-Webb. The Mountaineers bounced back to defeat Smoky Mountain and South Point for the Sectional championship, and then outscored West Rowan and Concord for the Western championship.

Honeycutt earned a basketball scholarship to Limestone College and center Darian Hager signed with Wingate. Vaughn, a junior, transferred to Oak Hill Academy in Virginia prior to the start of his senior season. Oak Hill is ranked as the #1 high school team in the nation.

Some other standouts on Sipe's first championship team were Darius Ross, Tony Currence, Scottie Hopper, Kevin Moss, Petie McNeal, Ryan Hollifield and Rodgerick McClain.

#### WRESTLING

The Mountaineers also barely missed a state championship in wrestling. Steve Moffitt's charges had their best overall record ever (18-2), losing only to 4-A state champion East Gaston in a regular season match and to 3-A state champion High Point Andrews in the state finals.

Moffitt lost only three men off that team--Tee Cole, Chris Henson and Scott Belcher. All three were All-Conference and Cole and Henson both competed in the state individual tournament. Henson was SWC Wrestler of the Year and made All-Conference in all four sports in which he participated during his senior season--wrestling, baseball, cross country and soccer.

Timmy McClain finished second and Victor Bell fourth in the state individual tournament. Eleven of the Mounties' 13 wrestlers made All-Conference and all 13 placed in the conference tournament, which KM won over R-S Central. All-Conference wrestlers were Henson, Cole, Belcher, Bill Foard, Bo Phongsa, Robbie Ruff, Andy Hollifield, D.J. Williams, McClain, Bell and Tony Young. Moffitt was Coach of the Year. at KMHS during the winter of '90. Gordon Edwards coached the girls to a third place finish and the boys to a fourth place finish in the SWC and several swimmers participated in regional competition in Hickory.

KM's soccer team had a losing record, overall, but finished third in the SWC behind Shelby and South Point and qualified for the state playoffs for the first time ever.

The varsity football team had high hopes of winning the SWC but finished fourth in a strong league that was well-balanced. The Mounties were 6-4 overall. An early-season 27-0 loss at R-S Central put their backs against the wall and then a hard-fought 16-13 loss at Burns eliminated them from the state playoff picture.

# **KM PLAYERS ELSEWHERE**

Former KM athletes continued to make their marks on the college and pro scene in 1990.

Four former Mountaineers played football on the Division One level. Brent Bagwell helped lead N.C. State's Wolfpack to a 6-5 regular season record and an All-American Bowl win over Southern Mississippi; Rusty Bumgardner and Aubrey Hollifield started for Wake Forest and Calvin Stephens started for his fourth straight season at offensive guard for South Carolina's Gamecocks. Stephens was voted USC's most valuable offensive player, was selected to play in the Blue-Gray all-star game Christmas Day in Montgomery, Ala., and has been invited to participate in a pro training camp in January.

Kevin Mack returned to his old form with the Cleveland Browns, even though the perennial AFC Central Division champions slipped to a 3-13 finish. Mack led the team in rushing and also became one of the team's leading pass receivers.

Tracy Johnson was traded from Houston to Atlanta during the off-season and became a key to Jerry Glanville's offense. A fullback, Johnson is developing into one of the game's best blockers and is also running the ball a lot more than he did in Houston. ship with Wingate...Tony Leigh named KMHS girls basketball coach...

Mountaineer baseballers won Gaston neighbors Tournament. Paul Brannon clubbed 30th career home run in 8-1 win over Gaffney...KM JV team clinched SWC title with 7-2 win over East Rutherford...Brent Bagwell moved from tight end to guard in N.C. State spring drills...

#### MAY

KMHS golfers won fourth straight SWC title...KM golfers second in Western Regionals at Cleghorne near Rutherfordton...

KM whipped R-S 14-1 to clinch tie for first SWC baseball title since 1980...Paul Brannon hit three home runs in 21-4 win over Burns, giving him 37 for his career. Keith Allen pitched his eighth straight victory...

Carmen Smith and Daniel Honeycutt named KMHS athletes of the year...KMHS won SWC Wachovia Trophy for second year in a row...Paul Brannon hit his 40th home run in SWC tournament victory over North Gaston...

Six-run sixth inning sparked KM over West Henderson 8-0 in opening round of the state 3-A playoffs...Mounties defeated Brevard 10-7 in the second round. Keith Allen hurled his 11th straight victory and Brannon hit his 16th homer of the season and 41st of his career...

John Bumgardner voted SWC Coach of the Year and Ryan Hollifield named Player of the Year in track...

# JUNE

Paul Brannon selected in the third round of the major league draft by the Seattle Mariners...Mounties lost to North Gaston 5-3 in third round of state playoffs. North Gaston Coach ordered pitcher to intentionally walk Brannon every time he came to bat...Post 155 opened legion play with 17 games in 19 days...Brannon signs with Mariners...

Daniel Honeycutt signed college scholarship with Limestone...Stuart Spires signed baseball contract with Atlanta Braves and reported to Bradenton team in Florida's Gulf Coast Rookie League...

Mickey Powers and Ray Adams won Kings Mountain Country Club Member-Guest.

JULY

KM knocked off regular season champ Taylorsville in semi-finals of Area IV Western Division playoffs but lost to Caldwell County in finals...Mary Leigh Broadwell won KM Ladies Golf Invitational...Charles Greene named wrestling coach at Hunter Huss...

Jackie Houston won the Gary Johnson Summer Classic Tennis Tournament at Hendersonville...Audrey Falls and her American paint, Cowboy Dancer, won the World Champion Junior Gelding Horse Show in Fort Worth, Texas...Chip Cash and Keith Allen signed with Montreat-Anderson...

# AUGUST

Dixie Boys 15-16 year old team won state title and finished fifth in World Series in Shreveport, La...Dixie Majors won district title but lost two straight in state tournament in Wilmington... KM fell to Canton Pisgah 13-8 in opening season

football game... Ryan Broadwell won both the City and County Junior Golf Tournaments...13-year-old AAU basket-

ball team from Kings Mountain Boys Club finished third in the nation... Mitch Howze became the first Kings Mountain golfer to win the Cleveland County Golf Tournament and KM's Stoney Jackson finished second...

KMHS junior varsity team which won the SWC regular season and tournament titles. Ronny Funderburke coached the team, which finished 11-1 overall and defeated Funderburke's alma mater, East Rutherford, in the SWC title game.

#### **KMHS GOLF**

Denny Hicks' high school golf team handed him his first state championship in the annual two-day tournament at Chapel Hill's Finley Golf Course in May.

The Mountaineers came from 10 strokes down to win the title by four shots over Reidsville. KM had played in the state tourney three of the past four years.

Members of the championship team, the high school's second state title team in two years (the '89 baseball team won the state crown), were Brady Goforth, Robbie Wilson, Ryan Broadwell, Matt Heavner and Mitchell Morrow. Goforth earned a scholarship to Catawba /aliey Community College, which is the defending national junior college champion.

Kings Mountain, which had won the Western Regionals the year before, finished second in the West to qualify for the state.

#### BASKETBALL

Another outstanding team at KMHS during 1990 was the boys basketball team, which won the Western Regionals over a powerful Concord team but lost the state championship game to D.H. Conley at the Dean Dome in Chapel Hill.

The Mountaineers, coached by Larry Sipe, finished 29-3 overall. The 29 wins were a school record for most wins in a single season and the Mountaineers also set a single game scoring record in a 109-54 win over arch rival Shelby.

# OTHER WINNERS

The KMHS girls tennis team won its third straight SWC title under Coach Diane Dooley and the boys finished third under Steve Lazenby, who later resigned as both boys tennis and cross country coach. Gordon Edwards took over his cross country duties and Chris Cole will become tennis coach in the spring of '91.

Tony Leigh coached the KMHS girls softball team to their second straight SWC title. They finished 16-2 overall after being upset in the first round of the state playoffs by East Henderson. Top players included Carmen Smith, Ashley Champion, Paula Morris, Nicole Barnes, Tandra Leftwich, Velma Degree and Tracie Johnson.

The KMHS girls volleyball team finished third in the SWC with a 7-5 record but had its first losing season in five years under Dianna Bridges.

John Bumgardner coached two winners at KMHS. In the spring he led his boys track team to a third place finish but they won several meets during the year. They unseated Shelby as the Cleveland County champion, winning the county meet by a half-point over the Lions.

In the fall Bumgardner's JV football team finished 6-2 overall, losing to East Rutherford 15-14 in the SWC championship game. KM and East have played for the JV crown for the past three years. KM won it in '88 but lost to East in '89. However, in '89, East was knocked off by Shelby and those three teams shared first place.

A competitive swimming program was introduced



STATE GOLF CHAMPIONS - The KM High golf team won the state championship in May, 1990. Left to right, Robbie Wilson, Matt Heavner, Brady Goforth, Coach Dennis Hicks, Ryan Broadwell and Mitch Morrow.

# **OTHER SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS**

# **JANUARY:**

KM defeated East Lincoln 105-43...Quan Smith rebounded a missed shot with a second left to insure KM's 73-72 win over East Rutherford in the opening SWC game at Forest City...KM edged Burns 66-63 in overtime...Mountaineers went to 3-0 in league with a 72-65 win over North Gaston at the KMHS gym in the first SWC game decided by more than three points...

KMHS swim team hosted its first annual Kings Mountain Invitational Relays at Neisler Natatorium. South Mecklenburg finished first and KM was seventh...

Mounties broke school scoring record in 109-54 win over Shelby, the team's 13th straight victory...KM lost its first conference game at R-S Central 73-66.

Wrestlers clinched tie for SWC title with 38-22 victory over R-S...Velma Degree signed a volleyball and softball scholarship with Elon...

# FEBRUARY

Wrestlers defeated South Point 70-3 to win SWC for sixth time in 11 seasons...Basketball team nipped Burns 55-53 in OT and whipped East Rutherford 73-66 to regain SWC lead. KM girls upset East Rutherford for their second win of the season...KM wrestlers won SWC tournament...Basketball team came from behind to edge last place Shelby 65-58...KM almost blew a 25-point lead but held on to beat North Gaston 84-72...

The KM boys finished third and the girls fourth in the SWC swim meet at Neisler Natatorium. Aaron Allen won the conference championship in the 100 yard free style, earning All-Conference honors along with Paula Eckard and Marie Mayse...

Wrestlers won their first Western Regional championship at Enka. Seven placed in the finals and four of them won their weight class...

Carmen Smith signed volleyball scholarship with Appalachian...KM edged R-S Central 75-72 for the SWC title, KM's first in seven years under Larry Sipe and first for the school since 1982. Honeycutt and Hollifield each hit two free throws in final 34 seconds and R-S Central's Brian Wilkerson missed a threepoint field goal with three seconds left...

MARCH

KM girls eliminated in first round of SWC tournament. Boys lost to East Rutherford in championship game...Wrestlers lost to High Point Andrews in state championship match...Ronny Funderburke resigned as KMHS girls basketball coach...

Mounties won sectional title, 91-70 over Smoky Mountain and 93-68 over South Point, then defeated West Rowan 72-56 and Concord 80-74 for Western Regional title...

KM lost to Conley 75-54 in state title game at Chapel Hill. Five Mountaineers named All-Conference: Daniel Honeycutt, Era Vaughn, Darian Hager, Carmen Smith and Suzette Feemster. Larry Sipe named SWC Coach of the Year...

## APRIL

Paul Brannon signed baseball scholarship with Wake Forest...Darian Hager signed basketball scholar-

#### SEPTEMBER

Stoney Jackson won KMCC Club Championship...Mountaineers won three straight games over Bessemer City, East Lincoln and Crest...David Bolin was named head football coach at Hunter Huss...

# OCTOBER

Losses to R-S Central and Burns eliminated KMHS from football playoff picture...Mounties won home-coming game, 17-7 over Shelby...

# NOVEMBER

Phil Weathers resigned as KM Junior High wrestling coach after winning 11 straight conference championships...

Ronny Funderburke returned as boys JV coach at KMHS...D.J. Williams named football MVP at KMHS fall sports banquet.

# DECEMBER

Six Mountaineer football players named All-Conference: Eugene Morgan, Kevin Moss, Victor Bell, D.J. Williams, Jeff Lockhart and Jermaine Grier.

Calvin Stephens of Kings Mountain and the University of South Carolina Gamecocks played in the Blue-Gray Game.

KMHS wrestlers second in Gaston Tournament, first in Burns and Crest tournaments...Boys basketball team won its second straight Shelby Star Holiday Tournament at the KMHS gym. John Henry Moss named "King of Baseball" at National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues winter meeting in L.A.



BASKETBALL STAR - Daniel Honeycutt led Kings Mountain's Mountaineers to the state finals in 1990 and earned a scholarship to Limestone College.