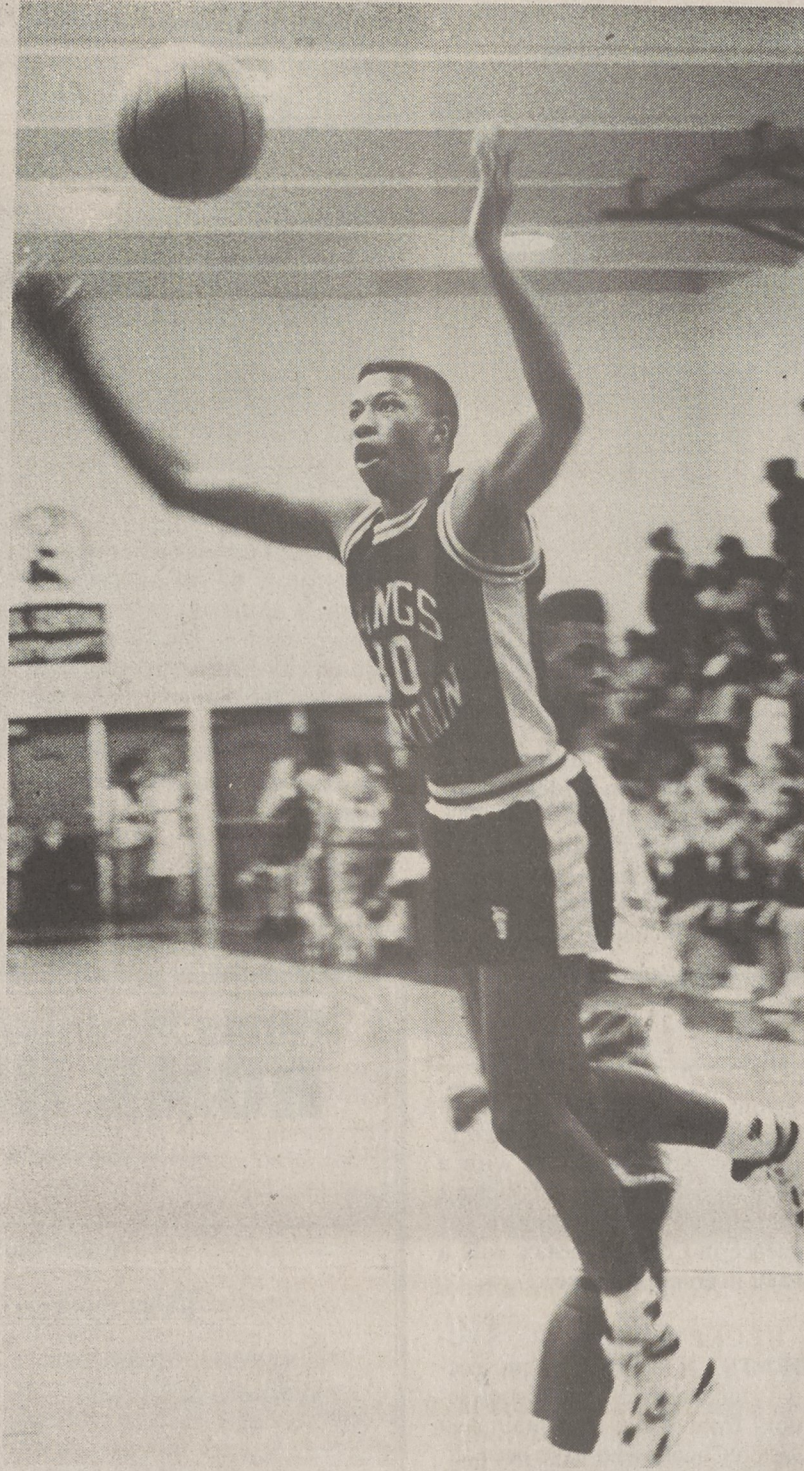


HELP LEAD KM WINS - Everly Hutchinson (24, left photo) and Mark Byers are pictured above helping lead their teams to overtime victories over Burns in Southwestern 3-A Conference basketball action Friday night at the KMHS gym. The girls went two overtimes to post their first conference win and the boys went one extra period to nail down their second league win. Kings Mountain has two big SWC games coming up during the next week and both will be played at Kings Mountain. The Mountaineers host Shelby Friday and the state's third-ranked 3-A boys team, R-S Central, comes to KMHS Tuesday night. Girls action begins at 6 p.m. (or immediately following completion of the JV boys game) and boys action begins around 7:30.



Paul Ready For Spring

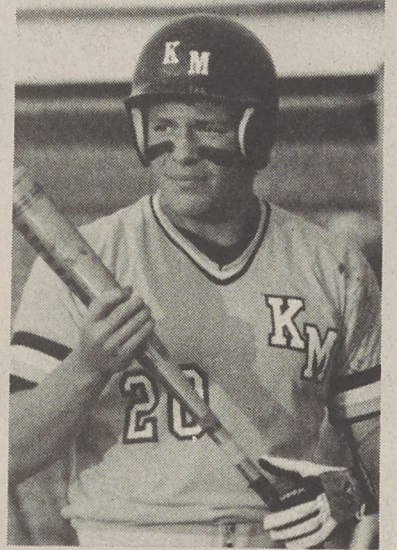
Kings Mountain baseball star Paul Brannon had a few setbacks in his first year of professional baseball last summer, but the North Carolina high school home run king is rearing to go as the date for spring training draws closer.

Brannon's Rookie League season, in which he hit .297 with one home run and 23 runs batted in, was interrupted by a shoulder injury. After nursing it back to health, he reported to Instructional League and was tearing the cover off the ball with a .397 average before being sidelined with an ulna nerve injury.

That stopped the first year of his pro career, and he had some anxious moments wondering if he'd be able to play again. But recent surgery corrected the problem and Brannon is already working out for his second season. Brannon's ulna nerve in his throwing arm was "jumping out of the groove" and surgeons stapled it to the bone.

"I've had no more trouble with," he said. "I started throwing last Thursday and it feels better than it has in a long time."

When spring training opens March 8 in Arizona, Brannon will be assigned to the Seattle Mariners' class A team in Bellingham, Wash., but all of Seattle's teams will be training in Arizona. He hopes to be in Double A before the end of the season and then progress on to Triple A and then the majors within three years.



PAUL BRANNON

Brannon works out every afternoon with his father, Dean. Throughout his high school career, in which he hit 41 home runs, Paul and his dad spent most of their afternoons at Lancaster Field with Paul swatting home run after home run over the outfield fence and Dean chasing down the balls and throwing them back for another blast.

"I'm throwing a little bit and working with light weights to try to get the arm back in shape," Brannon pointed out. "The doctors told me it would be about 95 percent by the time spring training opens."

Because of the injury, Brannon
See Brannon, 8-A

KMHS Teams Go Overtime To Defeat Bulldogs Friday

Kings Mountain's girls won their first conference game and the boys won their second in a row Friday night against Burns at the KMHS gym.

But, it wasn't easy. Tony Leigh's ladies had to go double overtime to defeat the Burns five 63-60, and the Mountaineers went one extra period before taming the Bulldogs 63-64.

The games were originally scheduled for Burns but were moved to Kings Mountain because of leaks in the Burns gym.

The Mountaineers, who improved to 10-2 overall, opened like they would blow the Bulldogs away. KM streaked to a 15-2 lead but, sparked by two powerful dunks and a couple of blocked shots by Shion Strong, the Dogs went on a tear and cut the margin to 15-13 at the quarter break.

After that, it was close throughout. Burns never was able to take the lead but the Bulldogs were always within biting distance.

Kings Mountain led 27-25 at the half and 40-39 going into the fourth quarter. The Mountaineers built a 50-45 lead with 3:30 to play but two long three-pointers by Melvin Montgomery brought the

Bulldogs back.

Montgomery's second three-pointer cut the margin to 53-51 with a minute remaining. After several turnovers and time outs, the Bulldogs held for a last shot and Strong drew a two-shot foul with three seconds left. He canned both shots to tie the score at 53-all and force an extra period.

Scottie Hopper stole the ball and went in for a layup to give KM a 56-53 lead with 1:39 to play and Marquiz Williamson hit a three-point play to make it 59-55 with 44 seconds left. Tony Currence and Marquiz Williamson each hit two foul shots to give KM a 63-58 advantage with 10 seconds left. Gerard Lee hit a three-pointer for Burns with five seconds left to cut the margin to 63-61 but that's as close as the Bulldogs could come.

Williamson led the KM scoring with 28 points. Tony Currence added 11 and Darius Ross 10. Strong led the Bulldogs with 23 and Mark R. Hush added 10.

Suzette Feemster's free throw with two seconds left tied the girls game for KM and forced the first overtime. Burns, which had beaten KM in the County Christmas Tournament, had led by 35-32 at halftime and 48-43 going into the

fourth quarter. The score was 54-all at the end of regulation.

Amy Meade's long three-pointer put Burns up by 57-54 early in the first OT and the Lady Bulldogs held the lead until the final two seconds when Tasha Tate rebounded a missed shot to tie the game again at 58-all.

Burns grabbed the lead again early in the second OT but Suzette Feemster scored on a fast break layup to put KM on top 61-60 with 1:45 left. Nicole Barnes hit two pressure free throws with six seconds left to ice the game for the Mounties.

KM, which improved to 6-6 overall, got 23 points from Feemster and 19 from Barnes. Meade scored 17 for Burns.

GIRLS GAME

B (60) - Meade 17, Gullatte 13, Richards 10, Webber 9, McIntosh 9, Earl 2.

KM (63) - Feemster 23, Barnes 19, Tate 9, Hutchinson 8, Hardin 4.

BOYS GAME

B (61) - Strong 23, M.R. Hush 10, Lee 9, Montgomery 9, Byrd 4, Vinson 4, Phelps 2.

KM (63) - Williamson 28, Currence 11, Ross 10, Hopper 8, Byers 4, Bell 2.

Mounties Host Shelby Friday, R-S Tuesday In Big SWC Games

Kings Mountain's small but quick Mountaineers are beginning to open some eyes in the Southwestern 3-A Conference basketball race.

Larry Sipe's charges, defending SWC champions, lost their top three scorers and top two rebounders off last year's 29-3 team but midway through the first round of conference play they're leading the league with a 3-0 record.

The Mountaineers, 11-2 overall with their only losses coming to the state's top-ranked 3-A team, Concord, knocked off North Gaston 74-59 in a big SWC game Tuesday night in Dallas. Going in to the game, the teams were tied for first place along with R-S Central.

Kings Mountain appears headed for a showdown with the third-ranked Hilltoppers (2-0 in the SWC) next Tuesday night on the KM court. But the Mountaineers must first deal with Shelby, a team which has improved tremendously since Chad Lavender, who had earlier transferred to Oak Hill, Va., rejoined the team.

"We have to stay focused on Shelby and let next week take care of itself," says Coach Sipe. "Anytime Kings Mountain and Shelby gets together it's going to be a big rivalry. We've got to make sure we don't have a letdown."

The Mountaineers played one of

their better games Tuesday night at North. The Mounties raced to a 22-12 first quarter lead and led by as many as 16 points in the second quarter before the Wildcats cut the margin to 44-36 at the half.

"We were doing a good job of breaking their pressure but weren't getting in a half-court set," said Sipe. "That's about the only negative thing I can say about our performance."

Otherwise, Sipe was highly pleased, especially with the play of his point guard, Jerry Black, the inside strength of Marcus Byers, Brent Wilson and Scottie Hopper, who out-rebounded a much taller North Gaston team, and the poise and leadership of Tony Currence and Marquiz Williamson.

"We were really expecting a little tougher game than we had," said Sipe. "North Gaston is big and strong inside, but our kids out front just controlled the pace of the game. Jerry Black did an outstanding job running the offense for us. Darius Ross was sick and couldn't play. Jerry is just a sophomore and his playing time has really been limited because of the role he's having to play with a senior point guard. But he had only three turnovers against North Gaston's pressure defense."

The Mountaineers hit 55 percent from the floor and 76 percent from the foul line and out-rebounded the

taller Wildcats 31-22. Byers led the way with 11.

Sipe's men starting playing the clock in the final four minutes and with 2:30 left began holding the ball. Williamson and Currence hit 10 straight free throws down the stretch to ice the victory.

Currence finished with 24 points, Byers 20 and Williamson 17 to lead the KM attack. Herman Bratton scored 17, William Stewart 14 and Tank Allison 12 for the Wildcats.

Looking to the rest of the season, Sipe said his team's goal is to finish in the top four and make the state playoffs. "I've told the kids that in this league you have to win all of your home games and then steal a couple of wins on the road. If you do that you're pretty much assured of a playoff spot."

"The schedule has been kind to us early in the season," he said. "We've played only one conference game on the road and will end up playing four of our first five conference games at home. The second round we're going to have to pack our traveling bags."

Kings Mountain's girls ran into one of the top teams in the area Tuesday night. Tony Leigh's ladies played a good game but fell to a much stronger North Gaston five, 51-42.

See Mounties, 7-A

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