



LEADING RUSHER - Kings Mountain running back Joseph Bell (9) had the biggest game of his career Friday night at John Gamble Stadium in the Mountaineers' 26-21 nonconference loss to Freedom. Bell carried the ball 21 times for 228 yards and three touchdowns, raising his season's

rushing total to 624 yards in 81 carries, an average of 7.7 yards per carry. Bell and the Mountaineers open Southwestern 3A Conference play Friday night at 7:30 at Burns.

Mountaineers at Burns Friday

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers open defense of their Southwestern 3A Conference crown Friday night when they travel to Lawndale to take on a big and experienced Burns team.

It is one of three SWC games this week featuring county rivals, and the three winners will have the inside track on the conference's two state playoff berths.

Even though Burns has three-year starters at 17 of its 22 positions, the Bulldogs and Mountaineers are similar in most areas of the game and it appears the team that executes the best will come out the winner.

"Burns is a good football team," says KM Coach Ron Massey. "They beat Freedom in double overtime, beat Alexander Central and beat McDowell (all from the Northwestern 4-A Conference) and lost to Shelby and Crest.

Kings Mountain also lost to its county rivals (Shelby and Crest), and the Mountaineers fell last week 26-21 to a Freedom team which is coming on

like gangbusters after getting several injured players back in action.

This week's game should be physical as both teams are huge on the offensive and defensive lines. Thomas Prueitt (6-3, 265), Jeremy Queen (6-5, 250) and John Bridges (2-3, 240) are all three-year starters up front for Ron Greene's Bulldogs.

"I think they are physically as big and strong as we are," says Massey, "and they've got 17 starters back from last year which probably gives them to edge as far as experience. But I don't want our kids to play with a lot of pressure on their shoulders. We've got to go out there and compete and play hard, and if we do that we will be alright."

The Bulldogs, who fell to Crest 42-2 last week after waltzing past Alexander Central 24-7 a week earlier, are still basically a running team featuring junior tailback John Logan, but they have the ability to throw the ball. Senior quarterback Wesley Greene, a southpaw, is

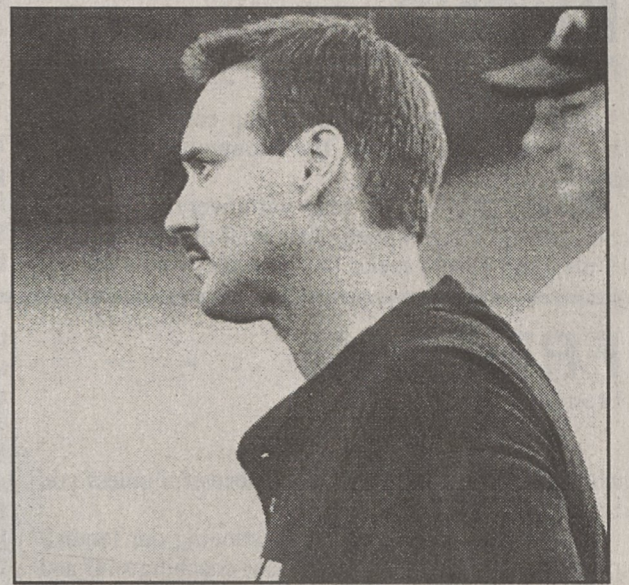
starting for the third straight year and has had several 100-yard passing games.

"They're probably about like us," Massey said. "They're going to run the ball 65 to 70 percent of the time and throw it 30 percent. But the Greene kid is a good quarterback. He has had two years back there, and that gives them a little bit of an edge back there. But I think their philosophy is to try to run the ball at you."

The Mountaineers will go into the contest at less than 100 percent as starting center Julius Curry fractured his arm in last week's loss to Freedom and is questionable.

"We've got to step it up a little bit," said Massey. "If we can we'll put a soft cast on it and see how much pain he can tolerate. The doctor gave him the okay to play if he feels like he can."

See Burns, 2-B



LOOKS TO SWC RACE - KMHS football coach Ron Massey looks forward to the challenge of the Southwest Conference season beginning Friday night at Burns.



Gary Stewart
Editor

'Second season' begins Friday

One of the good things about sports - and life, too - is that no matter how many times you get knocked down you always have the opportunity to get back up and try again.

Local high school football teams, despite their record or what happened last week, all start out 0-0 Friday night as Southwestern 3A Conference play gets under way.

Before the season started I felt like - and if you recall, predicted - that the SWC this year would be as well-balanced as it has been in years. With Shelby gone to the 2A ranks, all six SWC teams appear about equal in talent and on any given Friday night any team can beat the other.

All six teams have winning records going into conference play. The opening night schedule features all county rivalry games with Kings Mountain at Burns, North Gaston at South Point and East Rutherford at R-S Central. With only two playoff spots available to the SWC this year, every game is going to be crucial and it appears the teams that win will be the ones that execute their game plan the best and hang on to the football. The three winners Friday night will have the inside track at the playoffs and the three losers will be put in the position of having to win their last four games to qualify.

The race for conference and state championships is what makes high school football so exciting. Last week's defeats and heartaches fade like ripples on a lake when all the coaches, players and fans are focused on bringing home the big prize.

Get out this week and support your local team.

PREP PICKS - The high school winners this week will be Kings Mountain over Burns, South Point over North Gaston, East Rutherford over R-S Central, Ashbrook over Olympic, East Gaston over Hunter Huss (upset special), West Lincoln over Bessemer City, Shelby over Cherryville, Maiden over Chase, Crest over Freedom, McDowell over Alexander Central, and East Burke over Watauga. (Last week 6-2, season 42-13).
See Gary, 3B

Pats' air attack tops KM 26-21

Joseph Bell scores three, gains 228 yards for KM

Things looked good for Kings Mountain's Mountaineers when Joseph Bell went around left end for a 46-yard touchdown on their first play from scrimmage against Freedom's Patriots Friday night at John Gamble Stadium.

But the improving Patriots, who are back at full strength following early-season injuries to key personnel, adjusted and came back to score an impressive 26-21 victory and set up a meeting this week with defending state champion Crest for what should be a game to determine the Northwestern 4A Conference championship.

The loss, KM's third straight against tough opposition, left the Mountaineers with a 3-3 overall record heading into the start of Southwestern 3-A Conference play this Friday at Burns.

Freedom showcased some of the top talent in Western North Carolina, including tailback Terry Sheffield, North Carolina bound defensive back Marco Bryant, and a passing combination featuring quarterback Jake Watson and 6-5 receiver Cory Largent, the latter a basketball star who is being highly-recruited.

The Mountaineers were well aware of Sheffield, who gained over 1,100 yards last year and had 326 in a big win over South Point a week earlier, and they did a decent job on him, holding him to 95 yards rushing. But Watson, who had been averaging less than 100 yards passing per game, hit 10 of 20 passes for 221 yards, including seven throws to Largent for 168 yards.

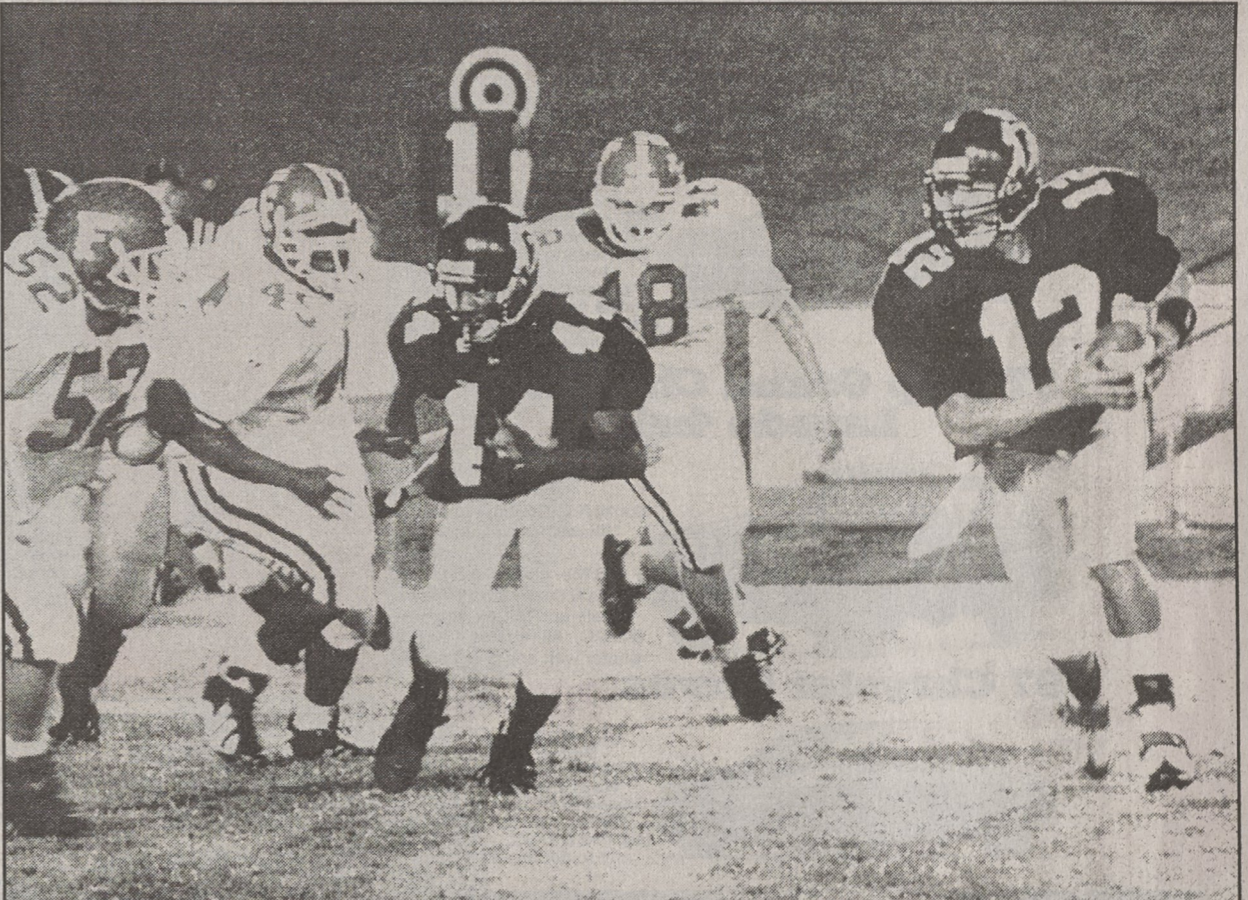
That duo also hooked up for the winning touchdown late in the third quarter - a 25-yard strike which came after a controversial call by a line judge took a pass interception away from Kings Mountain and gave the ball back to Freedom.

The big gun for the Mountaineers was Bell, who had a career high 228 yards rushing and scored all three KM touchdowns.

KM's Joe Williamson almost broke the opening kick-off for a touchdown but was hauled down from behind at the Freedom 46 yard line. On the first play from scrimmage, Bell took a pitch from quarterback Anthony Ash, circled left end and left all of the Freedom defenders in his dust to go into the end zone untouched. Collin Goforth's PAT gave the Mounties a 7-0 lead with just 19 seconds gone off the clock.

Freedom, which converted nine third and fourth down and long situations during the contest, drove 48 yards in seven plays to tie the score with 2:29 left in the quarter. Sheffield got off runs of 7, 13, and 11 yards and also caught a 13-yard pass from Watson. Watson scored from four yards out.

A big defensive stand by the Patriots stopped the Mountaineers on a fourth and two at the 13-yard line, and the visitors from Morganton drove 87 yards in 12 plays to take a 14-7 lead in the second quarter. Largent caught three passes during the drive, including one 11-yard grab on a third and nine situation and a 31-yard reception on a third and 20. Sheffield got loose on a



LOOKING FOR RUNNING ROOM - Kings Mountain quarterback Anthony Ash (12) keeps the ball on an option play in Friday's game with Freedom at John Gamble Stadium. Blocking for Ash is Joe Williamson (44). Freedom shut down the Mountaineer offense in the second half and came from behind for a 26-21 win.

17-yard touchdown run with 5:23 remaining in the half.

Kings Mountain came right back as Bell returned the kickoff to the Freedom 43, and then went around left end on the first play from scrimmage to tie the score at 14-14 with 5:13 remaining.

Late in the first half, Mark Roper recovered a Sheffield fumble at the Freedom 25, and on the third play from scrimmage Bell cracked off left tackle for a 13-yard touchdown run to put the Mountaineers on top 21-14 at halftime.

On the first play of the second half, Largent got behind the KM defense for a 67-yard reception to the KM four, and Sheffield scored two plays later. The extra point kick was wide, however, and KM held to a 21-20 lead.

Kings Mountain's offense had trouble moving the ball in the second half as Bell was the only factor with 56 yards rushing. The Patriots did a good job stretching out the Mounties' outside attempts, and held fullback Anthony Hillman to just 16 yards in seven carries inside.

With Freedom assaulting through the air on a third period drive, the KM coaches inserted Bell into the defensive secondary, and he responded by intercepting a pass to apparently kill a Freedom drive at the two-yard line. But a Freedom player did not have his mouth-

piece in and the official who spotted it declared it a dead ball foul even though the play was already in progress. The Patriots were penalized five yards to the 25, and on the next play Largent out-leaped a KM defender to catch a 25-yard touchdown pass from Watson to account for the winning points.

Kings Mountain's defense rose to the occasion after that, stopping Freedom on every possession, but the Mountaineers were unable to dent the scoreboard. The Mountaineers drove to the Freedom 33 late in the fourth quarter but a fourth down pass intended for Williamson was batted away at the goal line.

Mountaineer Coach Ron Massey said he expected three tough games when he scheduled Shelby, Crest and Freedom for his final three nonconference games, and he hopes despite the losses that playing strong competition helped prepare his team for the conference schedule.

"I think there is a lot of frustration right now on the part of everybody," he said. "That was a game that we felt like we could have won and didn't. But they are a good football team. They made some plays when we didn't, and I think that was the difference in the game."

"I thought Joseph Bell had an outstanding game, but we are still very inconsistent in some areas on offense and we are having problems stopping people on third

See Freedom, 2B