

BELL

From 1B

"But we were so far ahead they let everybody play," he recalled. "And I didn't mind it."

That game ended Bell's football career, but he passed on his talent to his son, Kendrick, a senior wide receiver at KMHS who has already entered the school record books and will pad his total every time he catches a pass this year.

In his first two varsity seasons, Kendrick caught 50 passes for 792 yards and 11 touchdowns. During the Mountaineers' playoff run last fall, he broke Marcus Smith's career receiving record of 696 yards, and even though he has been slowed at this start of this season because of an intestinal virus which ended in a hospital stay, he says he's ready to accomplish some more goals.

First, he wants the Mountaineers to win their third straight Southwestern 3A Conference championship and their first-ever state 3A crown. Personally, he wants to become the first KMHS player to gain over 1,000 yards in a single season.

That's a lofty goal, but one that is very attainable for the All-Conference star who is being recruited by all of the Division I schools in the Carolinas as well as other perennial national powers such as Penn State. Many of the schools are recruiting him as a defensive back, and the Mountaineers plan to play him on defense some this year to give other players a breather and also to take advantage of Kendrick's quickness.

"Carolina is looking at me as a defensive back," he noted. "Actually, when I came to the high school the coaches were talking about putting me at defensive back. Lance McClain was the quarterback then and we were scrimmaging East Lincoln and they put me in at wide receiver. It was a situation where they had to go to me, and the first pass I caught I went 75 yards down the sideline for a touchdown."

That settled the question about where he would play.

But Kendrick plans to wait until the season is over to make his decision about college. He is also an outstanding baseball

player, having made All-Conference as an outfielder since his freshman year and carrying a career batting average close to .400.

"I don't know which way I'm going to go yet," he says.

Kenny, who says "I could never catch a football," wonders where Kendrick got all of his receiving talent. But, after thinking back, perhaps it is because he has had a football in his hand since he's been big enough to walk.

"I had a big, talented offensive line - kind of like what they have now."

-Kenny Bell

"I remember when he was born," Kenny says. "Coach (Bob) Jones, who was my high school coach, was in the hospital and I told him, 'here's you another football player.'" He said, 'Kenny, I doubt if I'll still be in coaching when he's old enough to play.'"

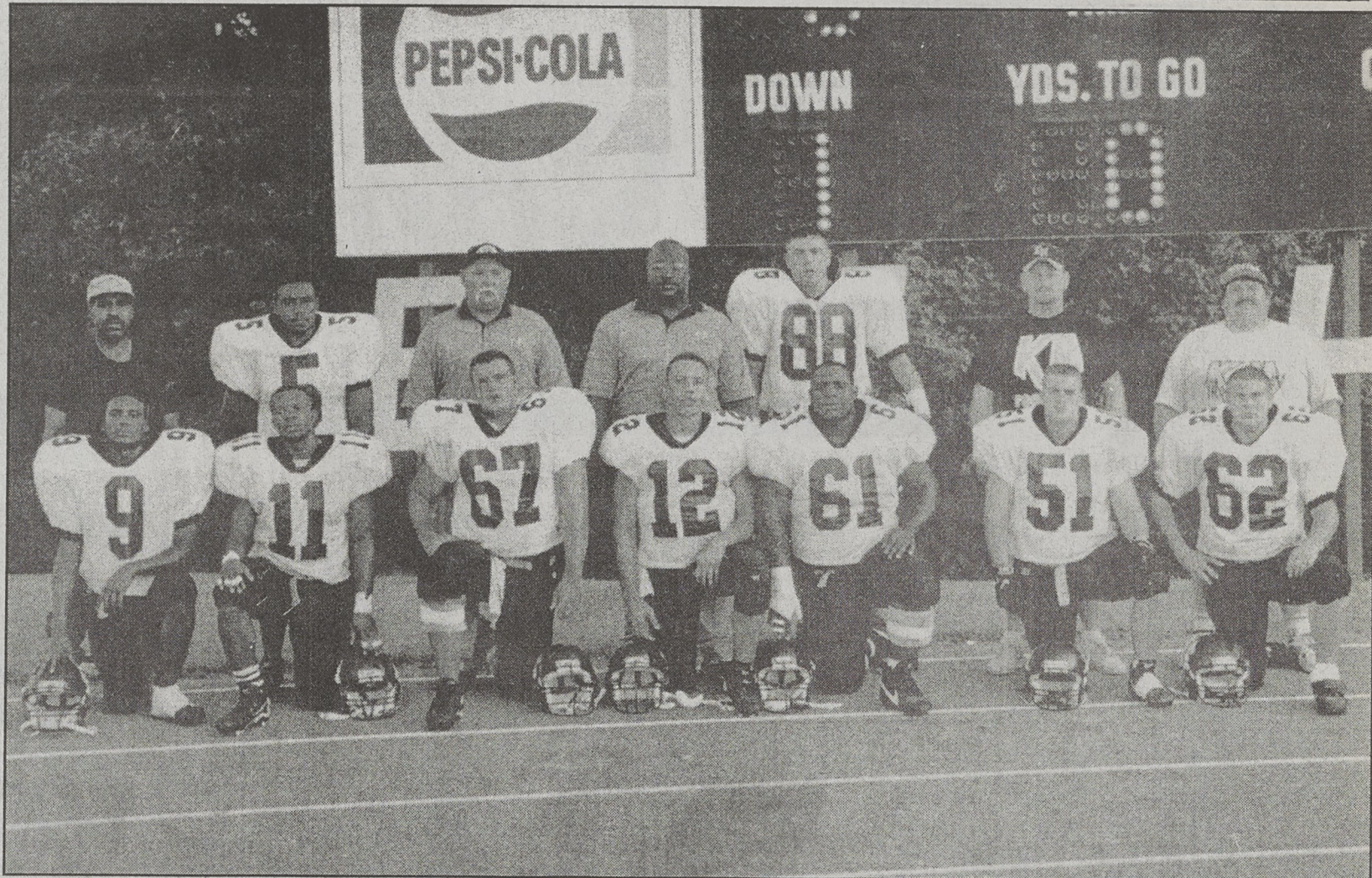
Kendrick played youth sports beginning at age 5 under his father at Kings Mountain Parks and Recreation, but Kenny said he "let him go" when he entered the seventh grade and started playing for Kings Mountain Middle School.

Both Bells give the credit for their success to the offensive lines of '77 and '98 that are incredibly similar.

"I had a big, talented offensive line - kind of like what they have now," Kenny recalled. "We had people up there like Bruce Valentine, Scott Ellis, Kelly Land and Chuck Gordon. You could have driven a truck through the holes they made."

Kendrick and other Mountaineers this year owe their success to an experienced line that includes major college prospects such as Julius Curry, Kareem Marshall, Mariko Feemster and Andy Leigh. With that type of talent leading the way, Kendrick Bell says it wouldn't surprise him at all to see his five-touchdown record fall this year.

And, if it's Kendrick who breaks it, that would be just fine.



FAMILY TIES - Several members of this year's Kings Mountain High football team have fathers who played for the Mountaineers in the decade of the seventies. Kneeling left to right are 1998 players Landon Benton, Kendrick Bell, Andy Leigh, Anthony Ash, Julius Curry, Freddy Gladden and Richie

Wells. Back row, left to right, are Frankie Stones (Landon Benton's father), Rocky Ingram, Tony Leigh (Andy Leigh's father), Alfred Ash (Anthony and Matt Ash's father), Bryan Thornburg, Freddy Gladden (Freddy Gladden's father), and Scott Wells (Richie Wells' father).

FAMILY

From 1B

Except for Kenny Bell, none of the first generation players entered the record books but most of them were consistent, dependable players and some of them excelled in other sports as well.

His senior year, Alfred Ash, a 185-pounder, won the Western North Carolina High School Activities Association wrestling championship - the first and only Mountaineer to ever accomplish that. A few years later KMHS joined the North Carolina High School Athletic Association, and beginning with Chuck Gordon in 1978 several men have won state wrestling titles since. Ash's two sons, Anthony and Matt, both have experience in state tournament wrestling and could possibly follow in their dad's footsteps.

Unlike now, when Kings Mountain is basically a two-platoon system, the first generation players played on both sides of the ball. And with coaching technique changing almost every year, the game is not very similar to what it was a generation ago.

"Now you're playing two or three defensive coverages and all of these multiple offenses," Coach Leigh noted. "When we played it was usually one offense against one defense - brute strength against brute strength. I don't remember every lifting weights. Now you have people in weight rooms. If they're strong it's because they've worked hard to get strong. There weren't any weight programs around in the sixties."

Leigh doesn't mind being honest with people about his football ability - in fact, he gets a little chuckle when he tells you he was a "slow, white guy."

"When I played integration had just come in," he recalled. "I wasn't very good, anyway, but I may have had a chance to play a little bit. But when those guys from Compact came up here they quickly moved ahead of me on the depth chart."

Leigh recalled playing third string behind Steve Spencer and Dennis Smith, and said the closest he came to starting was when Smith broke his finger.

Leigh's best sport was baseball. He made All-Conference and hit .355 to help lead Bob Hussey's '67 Mountaineers to the SWC championship and within one win of the Western N.C. crown.

"Football has changed a lot," he says. "That's much more concern about watching out for injuries and watching out for the heat. We didn't go after water like they do now. I'm not saying that's bad, but times have changed as far as coaching style and coaching strategy. Back then it was just rough and tough and fight it out in the trenches."

Both Leigh and Ash say they enjoy being around their children in a football environment, and they admit their sons have more football potential than they did.

"I can tell you honestly that Andy is a much better player

than I was," says Leigh. "He's being approached by several schools so I think if he has a good year and things work out well for him that some people may approach him about playing on the Division I-AA level. And there could always be somebody in the stands looking at our other guys, and that will be great for him also."

Leigh, 6-3, 245, could play college ball as a lineman or as a punter. He averaged 38 yards per kick as a junior and has had one punt to go 64 yards.

Anthony Ash came on strong at quarterback last year, finishing with over 1,000 yards passing. He also developed into an outstanding option runner. Matt Ash, just a sophomore, was impressive in the JV's opening win over East Gaston and he could be ready to step

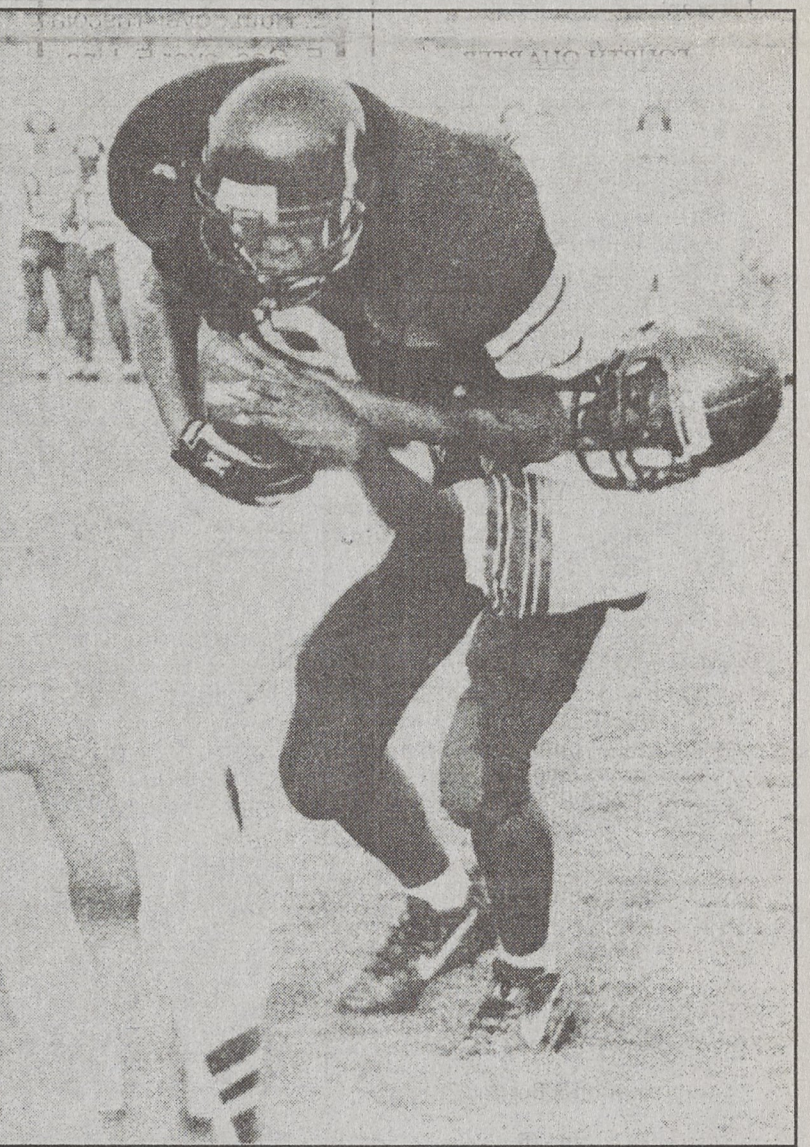
right in as varsity QB when Anthony graduates.

"I've been enjoying being a part of what they're doing in football," says Alfred, who helps coach the offensive line and serves as head JV coach. "Watching them get better has been enjoyable for me."

Coach Ash said there's no sibling rivalry between the two at home. "In fact," he said, "they kind of help each other out. What tips I give them are more character related, because I'm not a quarterback."

Ash said he lessons his sons learn on the football field also carry over to other activities.

"They're pretty active in church and I see them doing a lot of good things," he said. "I'm pretty proud of them. For the most part they are making good choices."



JV ACTION -Kings Mountain running back Jamal Byers (9) fights for extra yardage in recent victory over East Gaston. The JV Mountaineers host Charlotte Butler Thursday at 6:30 p.m.

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