

Patriots to play for title

Kings Mountain Middle School's Patriots won their ninth straight Tri-County Conference game Thursday at Crest, 56-51 in overtime.

The victory sets up a showdown with Burns for the conference championship on Thursday afternoon at Kings Mountain. Going into a game yesterday against Shelby, the Burns team was tied with KMMS for the league lead with 9-1 records.

Caleb Williams, Cortney Smith and Brandon Houze scored 13 points each, and Derek Smith added 12 to lead Monty Deaton's Patriots to victory at Crest.

The game started slowly, with Kings Mountain on top 7-5 after one quarter and the score knotted at 19-all at half-time.

The Patriots held a one-point advantage, 32-31, going into the fourth quarter but Crest came back to force an extra three-minute period.

Cortney Smith hit a 3-pointer to break the tie early in overtime, and he scored 7 of the 9 KM points during the extra period.

"That was a big shot and sort of put a damper on things," said Deaton. "Once you get a lead like that in a three-minute overtime the other team has to press and do things they don't normally do. We went to the foul line and hit some big free throws."

Deaton said Crest took the Patriots out of their normal game in regulation.

"They came out real aggressive and got a lot of the loose balls and rebounds that we normally get," he said. "But I think the difference was that we had more talent on the floor and could do more things than they could."

Thursday's game with Burns is the final game for both teams. Girls action gets under way at 4 p.m. and boys action usually starts around 5:30.

"This is going to be a big game for us," Deaton said. "But I think if we go out and execute like we're capable of doing we should take care of things."

Mounties end season with loss

Kings Mountain High's men's basketball team saw its season come to an end Wednesday in the first round of the Southwestern 3A Conference tournament at R-S Central High School.

Larry Sipe's Mountaineers fell to South Point 62-48 to complete a 7-14 season.

The Mountaineers got off only 14 shots and committed 15 turnovers as the Red Raiders rolled to a 26-14 half-time lead.

"We were our own worst enemy," said Coach Sipe of the first half performance. "But South Point's playing well. They have a lot of options they can go to."

In their last two games against the Raiders, the Mountaineers managed only 37 and 48 points.

"We just couldn't seem to put the ball in the hole against them," Sipe said. "It was always either a turnover or a missed shot."

In 14 of their games this year, the Mountaineers held their opponent to less than 65 points, but won only seven of those games.

"We had only one senior on this team," he said. "We have 10 kids coming back. Hopefully they will get better over the summer and we'll play better as a team next year."

Score by quarters:	T
SP 11-15-21-15	62
KM 8-6-8-26	48

SP - Blair 8, Beck 8, Alexander 8, Lowery 8, Horton 5, Mitchell 6, Ensley 7, Ja. Jackson 7, Jackson 5

KM - Thompson 10, Goode 10, Henderson 4, Adams 2, Williamson 5, Odoms 6, Odell 3, Cureton 4, Young 4.

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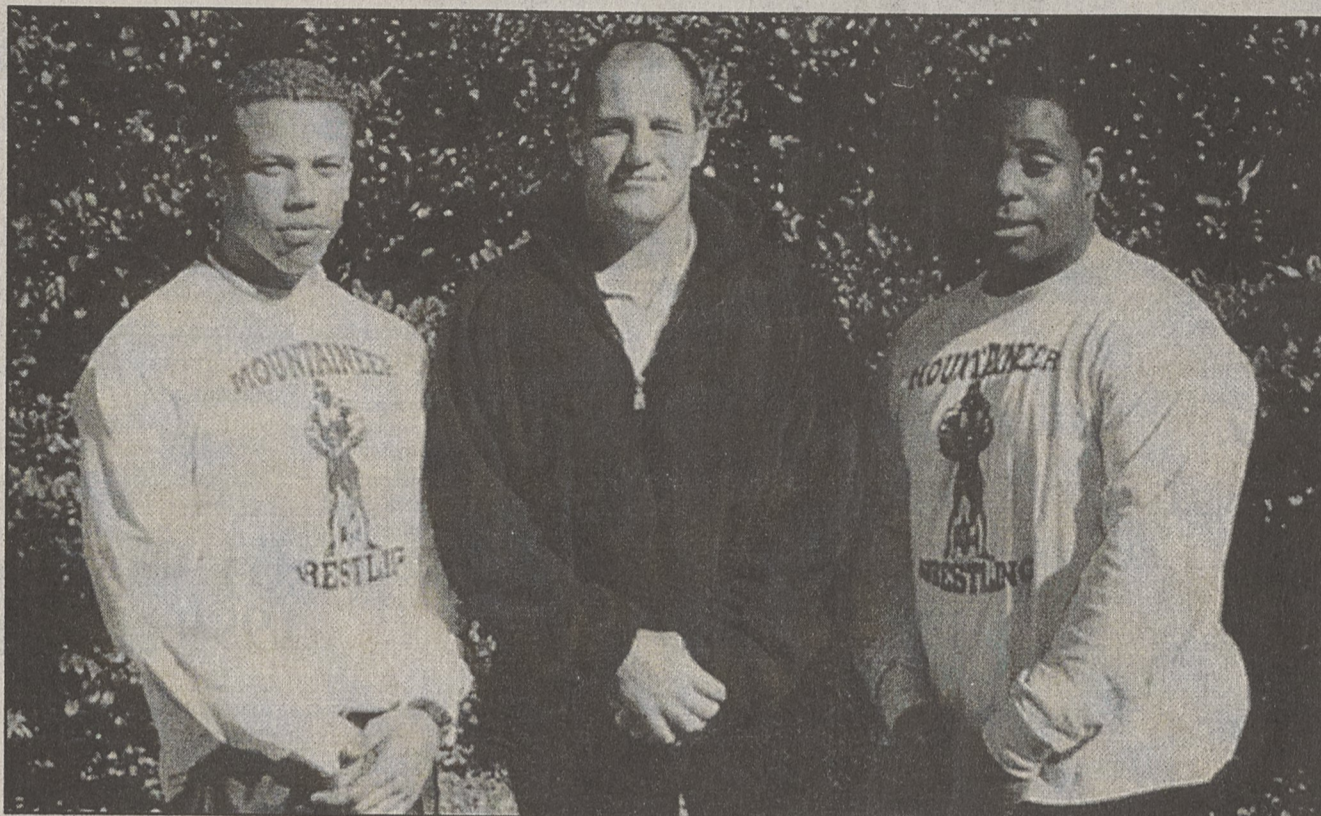
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Thursday, February 25, 1999

State Champs!



KMHS wrestling coach Dave Farquharson, center, with state champs Anthony Ash, left, and Julius Curry

Curry repeats as state heavyweight wrestling champ, Ash wins state title just like his father did in 1973

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

Kings Mountain High wrestlers accomplished several firsts in last weekend's state championship tournament at Charlotte's Independence Arena.

Two grapplers - 189-pound Anthony Ash and heavyweight Julius Curry - won state championships, marking the first time in the school's history that two wrestlers have won the state in the same year.

Curry became the first repeat champion for the Mountaineers, successfully defending the heavyweight crown he won last year as a junior.

And, Ash carried on a family tradition as he and his father, assistant KMHS Coach Alfred Ash, became the first father-son duo to win state championships. Alfred won the Western N.C. High School Activities Association crown at 185 pounds in his senior year of 1973.

As a team, the Mountaineers placed eight wrestlers in the state finals and brought home a fourth place team finish. Eden Morehead won the event with 114 points, followed by Tuscola with 85, East Rowan 83 and KM 72. Seventy-nine schools qualified wrestlers for the event.

Curry and Ash were the only Mountaineers to reach the championship round, and both turned in some of their most impressive performances of the year to win.

For Ash, who finished 25-1 this year and 91-17 for his four-year career, winning the state carried a lot of mixed emotions.

"It was kind of redemption from the (football) game at Chapel Hill," he said. "At the same time it was a good feeling because it was something we were really working for."

Two recent occurrences probably helped propel Ash to the championship.

In the recent Western Regional Tournament at Enka High School, he was upset in the championship match by Matt Parkhill of East Henderson. That cost him his #1 state ranking and made him re-focus for the state tournament.

Then, prior to his semifinals match in the state event, one of his teammates, Shane Short, relayed a conversation he had with his opponent, Michael Lowe of Winston-Salem Carver, who was a member of the Yellow Jackets' football team which defeated the Mountaineers in the state championship game.

"He was talking junk before the match about how they'd won the state championship," Ash noted. "Shane told him his opponent was our quarterback in that game, and he said 'yeah I know our quarterback' and told Shane how he'd tackled me on certain plays. But I think I got my justification. I bloodied his nose."

With an impressive 9-2 victory over Lowe, Ash advanced to the title match against Troy Roberts of Oxford Webb, and defeated him 5-0.

All of Ash's wins at Charlotte came rather easily. He didn't trail in a single match, and pinned one of his opponents.

After finishing third last year at 171 pounds, and then suffering the upset loss to Parkhill at Enka, Ash was ready for the state meet.

"I think losing in the regions made me realize that I couldn't get too far from reality," Ash said. "I had to work as hard as the next person. That loss helped me get more focused for the state."

Prior to the title match, he said he thought briefly of possibly following in his father's footsteps.

"I wanted him to be proud of me and everything, but I didn't let that be my motivation," he said. "It kind of made me feel good to carry on a tradition."

He said the only advice his father gave him was to do his best.

"He said, 'it's all on you, leave it on the mat,'" Ash said. "He's never really reprimanded me for my actions in sports. He's always supported me. He didn't make me do anything, he just told me to go out and give it my all because it's something I had been wanting."

"It's ironic that we wrestled the same weight class and won the state our senior year," he added.

One bit of advice that his father gave him earlier in the season paid off in the state.

"He taught me there's specific techniques you can use your legs for," he said. "I waited until the state to use them. People really didn't know I could do that, so that helped me a lot."

Ash said switching gears from football to wrestling was a little tough early-on because most other wrestlers had been working out and having matches for several weeks, but he said it didn't take long to adjust.

"I guess you have to change your mind-set," he said. "You have to get prepared for more self-discipline. In football, there are a lot of people telling you a lot of different things about how to be successful. In wrestling you have to make yourself go that extra mile when you think you can't go any farther."

Ash said winning the championship this year was a great feeling of accomplishment, but one that he could have experienced last year.

"I felt like I could have won it last year, too," he said. "I was beating a guy in the semifinals until the third period. And the guy that came in second, I was beating him in regulation and ended up giving up two points in the last few seconds. I didn't feel like I accomplished what I should have."

See Curry, 3B

Leigh to play for Lions

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

A fifth member of Kings Mountain High's 1998 Western 3A Championship football team has signed a letter of intent to play college football.

Center-punter Andy Leigh announced Monday that he will continue his career at Mars Hill College.

A three-year starter, Leigh helped lead the Mountaineers to three straight Southwestern 3A Conference championships and a 33-8-1 record. Last year the Mountaineers finished 14-2 and made it all the way to the state championship game at Chapel Hill.

Leigh was highly recruited by the Lions' coaching staff, and he said the main factor in his decision is that there's a possibility he will start as a true freshman. Coach Tim Clifton has indicated he will play Leigh at either guard or center, and that he may also handle the punting chores. Leigh averaged 37.3 yards per kick as a senior and 38 as a junior, including a 67-yard punt in a game against East Gaston.

Leigh said there's a possibility he may also play baseball for the Lions. He is a three-year varsity starter for his father, Tony Leigh, at first base and last year hit .350 and made All-Southwestern Conference.

Leigh, who visited the Mars Hill campus three weeks ago, said he was impressed with the football program and the academics. He plans to major in education and pursue a career in teaching.

"Their football team had its first losing season in about six years last year," he noted. "They have a lot of new coaches and are rebuilding."

The Lions compete in the SAC-8 Conference with teams like Gardner-Webb, Wingate, Newberry and Presbyterian.

"The coaching staff is pretty down to earth," he said. "That impressed me."

Kings Mountain High Coach Ron Massey predicted Leigh, a 6-3, 260-pounder, will be a good college football player.

"I think his best years are in front of him," Massey said. "He's starting to really get stronger. He did a good job for us at center and in handling our punting, too. The coaches feel he'll go in and play early at Mars Hill."

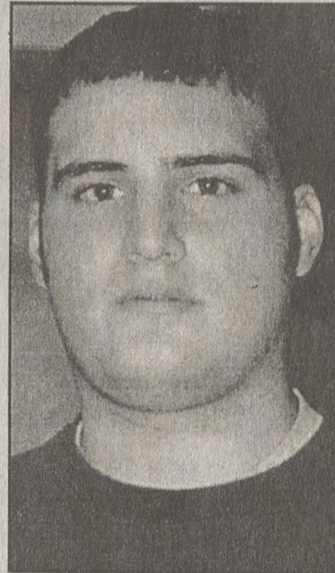
Leigh started at defensive end and tight end his sophomore year at KMHS, and moved to center for his final two seasons. He said he enjoyed playing for the Mountaineers.

"I loved it," he said. "Coach Massey is a real good coach and I really enjoyed playing football for him."

He said he loved the family atmosphere on the football team, and especially the friendship among the offensive linemen.

"We all knew each other from elementary school in Grover," he noted. "All of us started school together down there in kindergarten and went all the way through school together."

Leigh said his time between now and the start of preseason practice in August at Mars Hill will be consumed with high school and legion baseball and going through a late summer workout schedule which will be supplied by the Mars Hill coaching staff.



ANDY LEIGH

Jeff Smith making his own tracks in racing

But he still doesn't mind being called the son of Freddy Smith

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

Jeff Smith can't remember when he wasn't around a race car.

The 33-year-old son of Kings Mountain dirt track legend Freddy Smith was always tinkering with a car at his grandfather, the late Grassy Smith's garage, or following the family on one of their weekend racing trips all over the southeast.

After he began his dirt track career shortly after graduating from Kings Mountain High School in 1984, it was a long time before people knew his first name. He was always referred to as "Freddy Smith's son."

That never bothered him, and it doesn't today. But Jeff has made his own tracks on both the racing circuit and in the business world.

See Smith, 3B



Jeff Smith prepares a customer's race car at J&J Race Cars in Bessemer City