

About This Issue

Republic Newspapers is happy to bring area football fans this comprehensive pre-season report on teams in its coverage area, and other teams that compete in their conferences.

The publication is a joint effort of the editorial and composing staffs of The Kings Mountain Herald, Bessemer City Record, Cherryville Eagle, Belmont Banner, and Mount Holly News.

Contributing writers include Todd Hagans, editor of The Bessemer City Record; Ronald Kiser, sports editor of The Cherryville Eagle; Gary Stewart, Editor of The Kings Mountain Herald, and Dwight Frady, sports editor of The Mount Holly News and The Belmont Banner.

Coordinator and composer of the publication was Gary Stewart, editor of The Kings Mountain Herald.

The front cover was designed by Todd Hagans, editor of The Bessemer City Record and The Cherryville Eagle, and Shelley Campbell and Robert Ward, graphic artists for Republic Newspapers.

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For the best in high school football coverage of the local teams in the Big South 3A, Southwestern Foothills 3A, and Southern Foothills 1A, subscribe to your local weekly newspaper.

A New Beginning

Realignment places all area teams in new conferences

By TODD HAGANS
Editor of The Eagle-Record

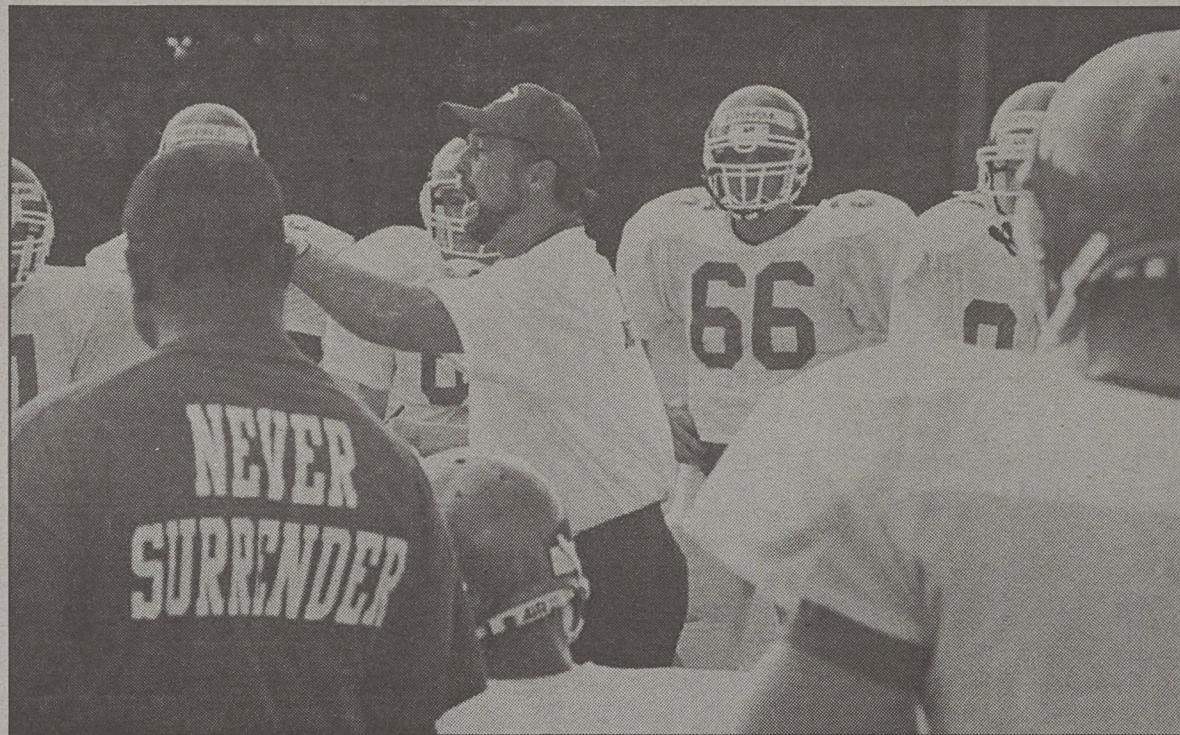
The upcoming grid season sees all of the area's high schools making new homes in new conferences.

With realignment by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) complete, teams across Gaston, Cleveland and Lincoln counties will play in four different conferences - the Southern Foothills 1-A, the Midwest 2-A, the Big South 3-A and the Southwestern Foothills 3-A.

For the first time ever, Gaston's smallest schools - Cherryville and Bessemer City - see play in an all 1-A conference. The Ironmen and the Yellow Jackets join Hendersonville, Polk County, Maiden and Highland Tech to form the new Southern Foothills 1-A.

Pre-season talk identifies Maiden and Hendersonville as the teams to beat in the Southern Foothills with Bessemer City, Cherryville and Polk County questionable. Mike Crawford at Bessemer City and Steve Wilson at Cherryville are expected to field young, but improved teams while Polk could experience an off year. The Wolverines of Jeff Wilson lost nearly a dozen seniors to graduation.

Coached by former West Lincoln star Lanny Ford, Highland - Gaston's newest school -



Cherryville head coach Steve Wilson gives a pep talk to his Ironmen during a recent workout. Wilson will start his second year at Cherryville when the Ironmen open on August 24 at Bunker Hill.

will field only a junior varsity squad this year with the varsity seeing play in 2002.

That Maiden at Hendersonville game on October 12 should be a mountain showdown for first place in the Southern Foothills. In the post-season coaches and media poll from last year, Maiden finished third and Hendersonville fourth among

the state's 1-A ranks.

Gaston County's remaining high schools form the new Big South 3-A Conference.

Ashbrook, East Gaston and Hunter Huss fall from the 4-A ranks to join 3-A teams North Gaston, Forestview and South Point to create one of the most competitive conferences in the state. East Lincoln's Mustangs make up the seventh member of the Big South 3-A.

At first glance, South Point is the team to beat in the Big South 3-A, but East Lincoln, Forestview and North Gaston could be a handful for the Red Raiders. Ashbrook could be a surprise contender and East Gaston and Hunter Huss should be improved.

Kings Mountain - a former member of the storied Southwestern 3-A loop - will play county rivals Burns and Crest along with R-S Central, Hickory, Fred T. Foard and St. Stephens in the new Southwestern Foothills 3-A.

Crest will surely be the team to beat in the Southwestern Foothills as the Chargers have made a name for themselves over the past several years in the tough 4-A ranks. Crest won state 4-A titles in 1994 and 1996 and dominated play over the past four seasons in the Northwestern 4-A.

Lincolnton and West Lincoln join one of the most competitive 2-A loops in North Carolina.

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THE CONFERENCES

Here's a look at the four new conferences that Gaston County area teams call home this year.

SOUTHERN FOOTHILLS 1-A

Bessemer City
Cherryville
Hendersonville
Maiden
Polk County
Highland Tech

BIG SOUTH 3-A

South Point
Forestview
East Gaston
Hunter Huss
Ashbrook
North Gaston
East Lincoln

SOUTHWESTERN FOOTHILLS 3-A

Kings Mountain
Burns
Crest
R-S Central
Hickory
Fred T. Foard
St. Stephens

MIDWEST 2-A

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West Lincoln
Shelby
East Rutherford
Bandys
Bunker Hill
Newton-Conover

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