

Hollifield going into KM Hall of Fame

(Last in a four-part series on the 2003 inductees into the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame. The induction ceremony is Saturday, May 17 at 6 p.m. at the H. Lawrence Patrick Senior Life and Conference Center. Tickets are \$10 each and available at McGinnis Department Store or from any member of the Hall of Fame).

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

When Dale and Diane Hollifield's children were small, Mrs. Hollifield probably considered trading her career in education for a black hat and limousine.

For as long as anyone can remember the Hollifield boys - Aubrey, Ryan and Andy - have been involved in sports, just like their father before them.

"Everything that was out there, we played it and our mother basically chauffeured us around," says Aubrey, the older of the three brothers. He will be inducted into his hometown's Sports Hall of Fame

on May 17.

Hollifield began playing baseball, football and basketball in the local youth leagues and got involved in track in the seventh grade at Kings Mountain Junior High.

As a high school athlete, he played football, basketball and track and excelled on the gridiron, where he was an All-State linebacker, Area Player of the Year and a Shrine Bowl participant his senior year of 1986.

He went on to play football for four years at Wake Forest University under Coach Bill Dooley and is now an assistant football, basketball and track coach at A.L. Brown High School in Kannapolis.

Following in his mother's steps as a school teacher never entered his mind until he graduated Wake Forest. He was living in Chapel Hill and doing graduate work at N.C. Central when he came home one weekend to watch the Mountaineers play in the Western Regionals Basketball Tournament in Hickory.

Denny Hicks, Hollifield's

high school football coach and the KMHS athletic director, was sitting in the stands and Hollifield sat down beside him.

"I had always wanted to be an FBI agent," Hollifield recalled. "But Coach Hicks told me that Coach (Chuck) Gordon was going to Dorman and asked if I wanted his job. I was tired of writing papers and doing school work, so I said 'heck, yeah!' and he told me the steps to go through to get certified."

Hollifield did his student teaching at Winston-Salem Carver and actually took an interim job as a history teacher at KMHS for the latter part of the 1992 school year. He was hired full-time beginning in the fall of 1993.

He taught and coached at KMHS through the 1999-2000 school year and then followed head football coach Ron Massey to Kannapolis.

Hollifield started on both offense and defense for the Mountaineers from 1984-86 and in '86 helped the Mountaineers win their first Southwestern 3A Conference title in 22 years. The team knocked off the top-ranked team in the State, Brevard, 17-14 in the opening round of the State playoffs before losing to Brad Johnson and Owen High in the second round.

Johnson was also largely responsible for the Warriors eliminating Hollifield and the Mountaineers in the Western Regionals Basketball Tournament the following winter.

"That's one of the big things I remember from my

high school career," Hollifield said. "Now Johnson's the quarterback of the Super Bowl champions."

During the '85 season Hollifield was part of KM's first playoff team since 1964. The Mounties defeated a powerful Canton Pisgah team 14-13 in the first round when Calvin Stephens, who went on to make All-American at South Carolina and play in the NFL, blocked a late field goal attempt with less than three minutes to play. Hollifield, who was always big and strong, was playing fullback and carried the ball right up the middle on the last six plays of the game to preserve the win.

"I took some cheap shots," he said with a laugh.

The next week the Mountaineers stunned their arch rival and SWC champion Shelby 7-0 before being eliminated in the third round by Brevard, 3-0 in the rain at KM's John Gamble Stadium.

The Mountaineers finished 11-3 overall and Hicks, whose club went 1-9 the year before, was named the NC Coach of the Year.

Hollifield said Kings Mountain was blessed with a lot of great athletes during those two seasons.

"The thing I remember most about playing football in Kings Mountain is that it was very competitive," he said. "There were a lot of talented athletes in my class. If you didn't work hard in practice you'd lose your spot quickly. That's one of the main things that helped me. There was always someone there to push me.

"The coaches might have done a good job of fooling us, but that's how I perceived it. If you weren't on the top of your game someone would take your spot."

Hollifield and his Mountaineer teammate, Rusty Bumgardner, signed with Wake Forest and had some good years there. Bumgardner started as a true freshman. Hollifield was red-shirted in '87 but started from 1988-91.

His entire career at Wake, and now his entire coaching career, have been on the defensive side of the ball.



Former Wake Forest University football player Aubrey Hollifield will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame on May 17.

Hollifield was a "rush end" and defensive lineman for the Deacons. He coached the defensive line at KMHS from 1993-99 and at A.L. Brown from 2000-2001. He is currently coaching linebackers.

About the only major adjustment Hollifield had to make at Wake was getting away from a smash-mouth brand of football. With Steve Spurrier at Duke, ACC teams were going more to a passing game, but Hollifield knew that "first down was still going to be a run down" and he developed quite a reputation for stopping runners dead in their tracks and forcing subsequent plays longer.

Hollifield said Wake Forest was the ideal place for him to go to college.

"It was small enough that you wouldn't get lost, but big enough that you were playing ACC football," he said. "It was probably the best move I ever made.

"Coach Dooley was a lot like Coach Hicks, so there wasn't a whole lot of adjustment for me."

Hollifield still commutes every day from his home in Kings Mountain to Kannapolis, and hasn't tired of it. Massey, who is the

Warriors' AD in addition to his head football duties, has arranged Hollifield's practice schedules so he only has to stay late on game nights.

"Except for game nights, I'm usually at home by 5:30, which is about the same time I got home when I was coaching at Kings Mountain," he said.

A head coaching job may be in Hollifield's future, but he said he is content now as an assistant. He wants to spend as much time as he can with his wife Jenny and their three small children - Dax, Isabelle and Jack.

"I know I'd like to be a head basketball coach, but if a football job came along and things were right I may consider it," he said. "A head football coach has a lot of people to deal with. I like dealing with a close-knit group of guys.

Being notified that he had been selected to the Sports Hall of Fame hadn't entered his young mind and was a shock, he said.

"I've been to about every one of the banquets," he noted. "I love to go and watch and listen to people talk about what they've done. I didn't feel like I was quite up to the standards of those people yet."

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