

## Despite loss, Panthers were super

By GARY STEWART  
Editor of The Herald

Just two years ago the Carolina Panthers were 1-15 and the Charlotte Hornets, disappointed that the Queen City voters did not approve bonds for a new coliseum, were looking to move.

One of the favorite sayings around these parts were "Go Hornets, and take the Panthers with you."

But now Kings Mountain and North Carolina football fans are going crazy over the Panthers.

And their 3-point loss to the New England Patriots in Sunday's Super Bowl in Houston, TX, which came in the final seconds, did nothing to curb the excitement that has been generated by second-year head coach John Fox and his talented athletes.

While most folks were watching the game in their living room, several Kings Mountain people went to Houston for the big game.

Among them were Jim and Wanda White and Timmy and Vickie Spangler. They flew out on Wednesday before the game and returned home Monday.

White, a lifelong sports fan and former youth sports coach, owns W&B Trucking in Kings Mountain. Mrs. Spangler is also employed at the business.

Jim and Wanda White have owned PSLs and season tickets since the Panthers' inception. Several years ago they also acquired seats in owner Jerry Richardson's Suite 87, thus they had two opportunities for Super Bowl tickets. All suite seat owners had the opportunity to buy two tickets. All other PSL owners were placed in a lottery with one chance in 18 to get a shot at two tickets. The Whites' names were picked in the random draw so they ended up with four tickets.

The trip and the game were unbelievable, said Jim White, who was attending his first Super Bowl.

"The atmosphere was great," he said. "The people were nice. They treated us like we were kings out there."

The Kings Mountain couples were among over 200,000 people that took part in pre-game hoopla. They also used the trip to tour many interesting places around Houston, including the NASA Space Center.

"We truly enjoyed it," White said. "It was a once in a lifetime deal."

As for the game, White knew all along that it would be a nail-biter. In fact, before the game began he told his wife and some Patriot fans that were seated nearby that the game would be decided by a field goal.

"I told them to mark it down," White said of his prediction. "It would be won by a field goal. If I'd been a gambler I'd be a rich man today because the Patriots were favored by seven."

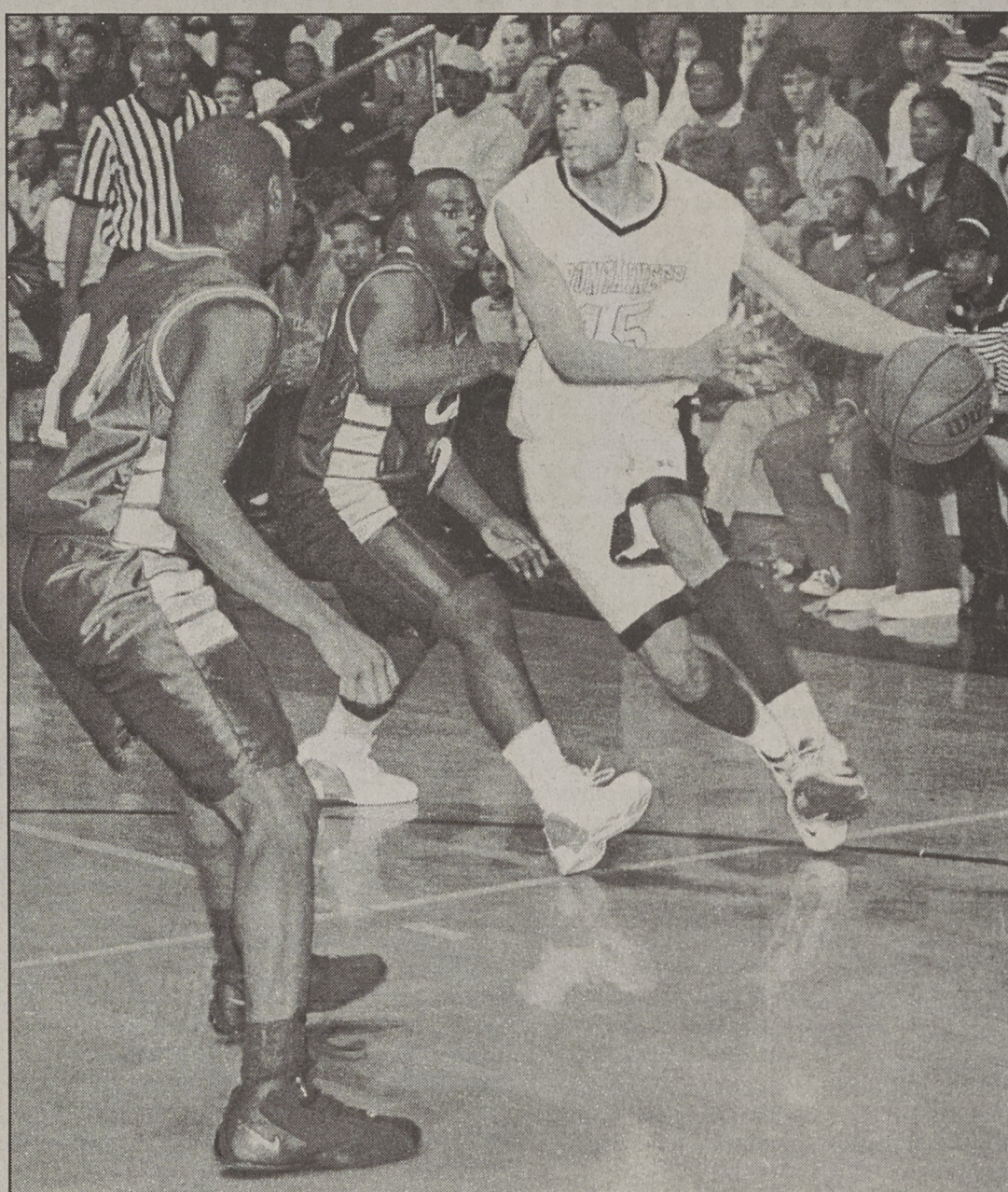
White hasn't missed a game since the Panthers came to Charlotte, even during the misery of that 1-15 season.

"It's like we told them out there in Houston, we never let them down," he said. "We went through the bad times and now we're going through the good times. (Two years ago) it was very disgusting. Sometimes you could count the people versus the seats. It was slim pickings."

But White is confident that type of season won't re-occur anytime soon. He fully expects the Panthers to continue to be a force in the NFL.

"I don't think they will lose many players, although I do think John Kasay will retire. I don't know how the man walks, much less kicks a football. He's got all kinds of pins in his knee."

"Other than that I don't think you'll see that much change. They'll be very competitive next year. Jake Delhomme is just going to get better and better. That young kid was wild!"



GARY STEWART / HERALD  
Ta Tae Roebuck, right, makes a strong move from the wing for Kings Mountain's Mountaineers. Below, Candace Springs drives the lane.

## KM stays unbeaten with win over R-S

By GARY STEWART  
Editor of The Herald

Kings Mountain fell behind 6-0 but came storming back to defeat third place R-S Central 94-55 in Southwestern Foothills Conference basketball action Tuesday night at Donald L. Parker Gymnasium.

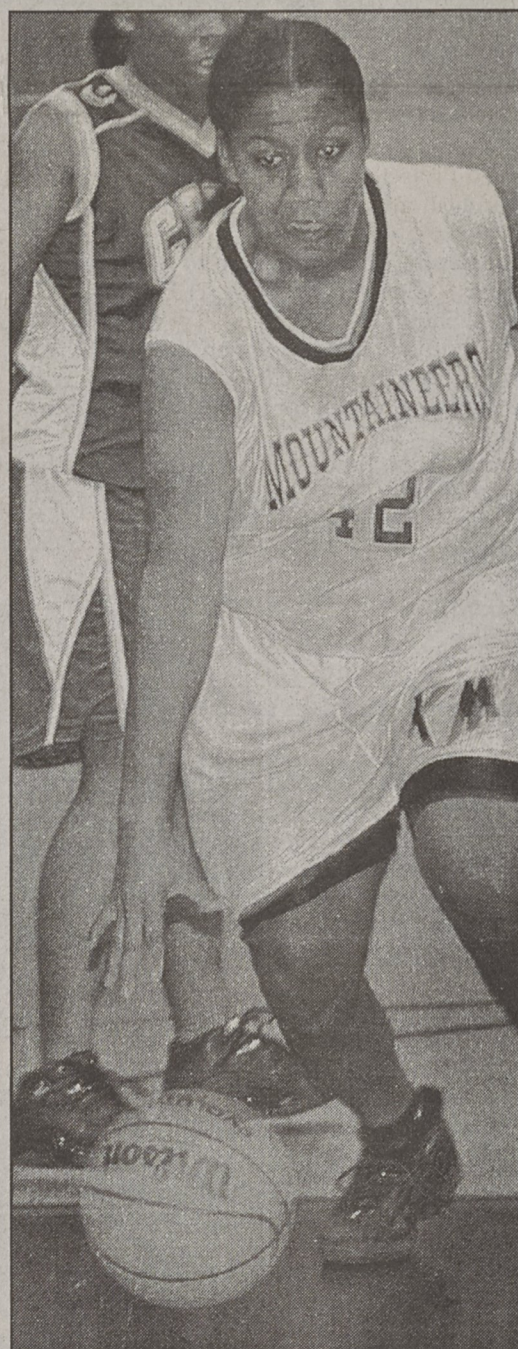
The victory was the eighth straight in the conference for the Mountaineers, who hold a one-game lead over Crest going into the final week of the season. The Mountaineers host St. Stephens in their final regular season home game Friday and end the regular season next week with games at Hickory on Tuesday and Crest on Thursday.

Kings Mountain's pressure cooker defense in the third quarter forced the Hilltoppers into numerous turnovers and resulted in a 33-point KM outburst that turned a close game into a rout.

The Mountaineers had rebounded from their early deficit to grab an 18-16 first quarter lead and a 36-28 halftime advantage. The lead stretched to 69-48 going into the fourth quarter. Coach Danny McDowell then took his first team out of the game and the second unit played the entire fourth quarter, outscoring R-S 25-7.

"I was thrilled that my second unit played so well," McDowell said. "It was just unbelievable the way those guys played. To me that was the most pleasing aspect of the game. Those guys come to practice every day and go hard against that first team. I think it meant more to the first team than it did to the second team, because those guys (first unit) were over there on the bench just cheering them on."

All ten of McDowell's players scored. Gabe Blair led the way with 18 points, 14 rebounds, five steals and three blocks. Derrick Smith had 15 points and seven assists, Dashwn Young 13 points and five assists, Ta Tae Roebuck 11 points and seven rebounds, See R-S, 7A



## Mounties top Bulldogs in makeup game

By GARY STEWART  
Editor of The Herald

Kings Mountain High basketball coach Danny McDowell didn't know how sharp his team would be Monday night at Burns after a week's layoff because of bad weather.

The Mountaineers started slowly but came on strong to defeat the Bulldogs 67-43 for their eighth straight Southwestern Foothills Conference win. The game had been postponed from last Tuesday because of ice.

Burns, which had played a game Saturday night against R-S Central, jumped out to a quick 7-0 lead before Kings Mountain got untracked and built a 15-11 first quarter lead. They increased the margin to 33-24 at halftime and went on a 20-6 scoring run in the third quarter to break the game open.

"This was a big win for us," said McDowell, whose team maintained a one-game lead over Crest in the race for the regular season championship. Those two teams had their scheduled game Friday postponed, and now they will play each other in the Mountaineers' last regular season game on Thursday, Feb. 12 at Crest.

"We didn't know how we were going to play after being off a week," McDowell said. "We got off to another slow start but the kids sucked it up again."

The Mountaineers had a poor shooting night from 3-point range, hitting only 18 percent. But they hit 42 percent from the 2-point range and 80 percent from the foul line.

The big story, as usual, was defense. Kings Mountain's full-court press forced Burns into 28 turnovers and the Mountaineers held the Bulldogs' top three scorers - John Izokovic, Antonnio Goolsby and Josh Briscoe - to a combined total of 13 points.

"The defense really played well from the second quarter on," McDowell said. "I didn't realize it until I looked at the boxscore that we held their top three players to only 13 points. I was really proud of Dashawn (Young), Derrick (Smith) and Gabe (Blair) for their defensive play. They did an outstanding job."

Smith led the Mountaineers in scoring with 16 points. David McClish had his best overall game of the year with 12 points, five rebounds and two blocked shots, and Blair had his usual strong overall effort with 11 points and 11 rebounds.

"A double-double is becoming routine for Blair," McDowell said. "But I was also proud of the other big men. Their interior passes were tremendous. It's just nice to have that nice inside passing game from those big kids."

McDowell played all ten of his players, and eight of them took part in the scoring.

"We talked beforehand that our offensive game might not be there because of the layoff, but that we could always play good defense," McDowell said. "We knew those Burns kids could shoot the ball and the kids took it on themselves to play good at the defensive end. To hold their three top scorers to 13 points was exceptional."

■ Kings Mountain's girls dropped their eighth straight conference game in the opener, 54-37. Burns jumped out to a 13-8 first quarter lead and led by 33-14 at halftime and 42-24 going into the fourth quarter.

India Lewis led Burns with 20 points and Candace Springs had 13 for KM.

**GIRLS GAME**  
KM (37) - Petty 6, Jarvis 2, Welsh 6, Springs 13, Butler 8, Vinson 2.

Burns (54) - Lewis 20, Sanders 6, McKissick 5, Thompson 5, Hemphill 12, Crosby 3, Hector 13.

**BOYS GAME**  
KM (67) - Smith 16, McClish 12, Blair 11, Young 9, Roebuck 8, Gary 5, Byrd 4, Walker 2.  
Burns (43) - Houze 20, Clark 8, Alcide 6, Goolsby 6, Izokovic 4, Briscoe 3, Trice 2, Beam 2.

## Mountaineer diamond men eager to get outside

By GARY STEWART  
Editor of The Herald

Kings Mountain High's first-year head baseball coach Eric King and his Mountaineers are anxious for some warm weather.

The team officially begins pre-season practice on February 16, but in the meantime King can work with up to eight players at a time, and at this point he's been concentrating mostly on pitchers and catchers.

At 6 a.m. each weekday, those players arrive at the KMHS mini-gym to get in some work before the start of the school day. On a couple of occasions when the weather hasn't been so bad, some players have even ventured out on the baseball field.

King is a strong believer that pitching and defense win high school baseball games, so he is putting a lot of emphasis on those skills.

"I've seen throughout my career that that's what's going to win a lot of games," he said. "Naturally, we have to be able to hit the ball or manufacture some runs, and I think we can do that."

King, a Cherryville native who won three state championships in Virginia before returning to North Carolina as head coach of North



ERIC KING

Gaston in 1996, will have a good mixture of experience and youth on his first Mountaineer team.

He lost some outstanding players like All-Conference outfielder Ross Ellis and pitcher Hunter Gaffney, but he's very pleased with the current talent level.

"I'm looking forward to our season," he says. "I think we've got some guys that can get it done if they stay focused on what they're doing."

Some of the players that have been working out thus far include pitchers Tyler Leach, Brandon Bridges, Ronnie Wilson, Josh Hendricks, Ryan Leach, Chris Clearman, Phillip Bunch and Phillip Ruff, and catchers Brad Moffitt and Matt Echols.

"We've been looking at some of

the younger kids, giving them a chance to show what they can do," he said. "Even though some of them may not be on the varsity, we want to make sure we see everybody throw."

King hopes to get the team outside soon and begin working on hitting skills.

"We've worked on our defense outside," King said. "Our focus is on defense first. I know we need to hit but usually your pitching's ahead of the hitting anyway. Plus, I've got a whole new coaching staff and trying to get them familiar with the kids."

King's varsity assistant is Kenneth Paysour, former North Gaston player who will concentrate on middle infielders. The JV head coach is John Warlick, who

played on Cherryville's state championship high school and American Legion teams in 1983, and his assistant is KMHS teacher Jeff Melton.

In all, King has nine returning varsity players, including seniors C.J. Austin, Matt Echols, Ronnie Wilson, Brandon Bridges and Weston Taylor.

King hasn't even begun to think about a possible lineup. He says he is "still evaluating people right now," and after the official start of practice he plans to have a tryout for JV players that hope to play on the varsity level.

"I promised them I would do that," he said. "We're going to be fair."

The Mountaineers will see action See Diamond, 7A