

WITHERS

From 1A

As a coach Withers planted the seed in the mid-fifties that many other coaches saw to fruition in the sixties and later years.

When Withers first came to KM as baseball coach, the Mountaineer program had been weak for years. In fact, they hadn't won a conference championship since 1941.

During his first season only 13 boys showed up for practice. They won their first game and lost the rest.

But it wasn't long before the Mountaineers were competing with the other strong teams in the conference and in 1963 they won the Southwestern Conference championship. Ironically, Withers had to retire from coaching after that season because of health reasons.

Barry Gibson, who pitched for that '63 team and later was KM's head coach, said Withers had a tremendous influence on his life and his

coaching. "I always wanted to please him," Gibson said. "I wanted to show him I loved the game as much as he did. He was very dedicated to the game. He was strong in fundamentals and was a strict disciplinarian."

Gibson recalled that some "pretty good baseball players" at KMHS during that time either ran track or worked in the afternoon because of Withers' demand to give baseball a hundred percent effort.

"If you went out there you'd better be dedicated," he said.

Gibson coached several championship teams at KMHS in the 1970s and 1980s and his 1980 team played for the State Championship. His coaching philosophy was simple:

"I just passed along what I had learned from Coach Withers," he said.

Gibson first became acquainted with Withers as an eighth grader. He was too young to play for the high school team but served as

one of the team managers. "I would pick up pointers from him," Gibson said. "I was always right there listening. It wasn't until I left high school that I learned that he wasn't just teaching about life."

Gibson described Withers as "an old school" coach.

"He was just like Coach (Don) Parker and Coach Bates and Coach (John) Gamble," Gibson said. "We miss some of that today."

Bates and Gibson pointed out that the community owes a lot to Withers for helping develop the KMHS sports complex, even though many people at the time or since don't realize how much hard work he put into the facilities.

"He was real instrumental in developing the complex," Gibson said. "He put in a lot of volunteer hours out there. But he was the type person that was always in the background and giving the credit to others."

"He was a licensed surveyor," Bates recalled, "and

he did every survey out there on his own." Bates also recalled when he, Withers and the late Alex Owens "got down in the red mud" to lay over 1,000 yards of water pipe to the fields.

Bates served as Withers' assistant coach on the 1959 KM American Legion team which played for the Area IV championship, losing to Mt. Holly-Paw Creek in seven games. The KM Legion Post didn't intend to sponsor a team that year, but three men got together and told Withers, Bates and John Gamble that if they would organize and run the program and didn't make any money they'd guarantee them \$50 a week each.

"We did it and turned over quite a bit of money to the legion after the season was over," Bates noted.

Bates, who was a teammate of Withers on a semi-pro baseball team in Lincolnton in the fifties, said Withers was one of the most knowledgeable baseball people he's ever known.

"He was a good baseball man," he said. "Today you

can watch a game on TV and all the experts will call about every pitch. Fred could do that. He could tell you about what everybody was going to do. He had a good feel for what was coming up. I don't think we ever had a bad ball club when he was coaching."

Although Gibson was a member of some of Withers' best teams, he said the life lessons are what he will remember most.

"If you were looking for a man of principle and integrity you didn't need to look any further than Fred Withers," he said.

Coach Withers' funeral was held Sunday at Central United Methodist Church and he was buried in a cemetery in his hometown of High Shoals.

Located right beside the cemetery is a baseball field, and Gibson said while the graveside service was being conducted a coach was working with some youngsters.

"I think that was very appropriate," he said.

SCHOOL

From 1A

Mountain said the legislature did not seem willing to stand behind redrawing county lines. She also said it would be difficult to do in one year's time and that Gaston County would have to be more cooperative.

"It's hard sometimes to let things drop. We tried hard

to stop the merger," Miller said. "Once the board makes a decision we need to stand behind it no matter how hard it is."

Parent Jonathan Merrill told the board he had paid the tuition so his daughter can attend East but called the price "kind of high for me."

Merrill lobbied on behalf of families which can't afford the bill.

"I'd like to see something resolved," he said.

As of Monday, 50 students from Kings Mountain had enrolled paying the \$1,414 tuition, officials say. East was down 25 students from last year's first day.

The affected area contains a public housing community and many other residents in a low income bracket. Some 65 percent of East's students receive free or reduced

lunch, according to Smith. A moderately priced housing development is also part of the Gaston County portion of Kings Mountain.

Despite the economic level, test scores at East have been consistently high. Many attribute that to staff holding after school tutoring and creating a welcoming environment for parents regardless of skin color and economic status. The school's proximity to the children it serves also allows parents with limited access to transportation to still be part of the campus.

Smith brought up East Elementary's end-of-grade

test scores which are 94.9 percent, the highest in the county with the exception of North Shelby which serves developmentally delayed children.

Miller agreed. "I feel for these families. The facts are there. The test scores are better than the ones they're being sent to," she said.

Dr. Larry Allen told the board that the Kings Mountain Educational Foundation will keep its funding separate from the Cleveland County Schools Educational Foundation for now.

PRIMARY

From 1A

directors for the Upper Cleveland Chamber, Upper Cleveland Rescue Squad and teaches Sunday school at Polkville Baptist.

He owns Cleveland Staffing and Business Development, a management recruitment company.

A Vietnam veteran, he is a member of the VFW.

Democrats and unaffiliated voters who voted in the Democrat primary can vote in Tuesday's election. Regular polling places are open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

"No excuse" early voting takes place Thursday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to

1 p.m. at the Cleveland County Board of Elections office. The office is now in the former Red Cross building at 215 Patton Drive behind the Shelby Star.

Republican contenders Patrick McHenry and David Huffman also face a run-off for the 10th Congressional District. That seat has been held by Cass Ballenger who has announced his retirement.

HEFFNER

From 4A

Kerry, although I am open for suggestions.

Some others I've named are Bill "Bobble-Head" Frist, John "Smilin" Jack" Edwards, Teddy "Lifeguard" Kennedy, Jimmy "Boring" Carter, Madeline "Buddha" Albright and Gerald "Bumbler" Ford.

I want everyone to keep an eye on the Kerry campaign, and every time his Viet Nam service is mentioned, remember he was just there for four months. Jeremiah Denton was in a Viet Nam prison for seven years, and some volunteered for several tours of duty over there.

Kerry is the only one I can think of who came back and immediately began trashing his fellow soldiers and

sailors. I'm convinced, everything he has done since his high school graduation has been geared for a run at the presidency. He blows with the wind. The country is at war, volunteer for Viet Nam. Lots of people don't like the war, become an activist against it. The country goes to war, vote for it in the Senate, but wait, some people don't like the war, vote against the funding.

GARY

From 4A

off from coaching to have them stripped, but the situation turned out to be worse than first diagnosed and he had to retire from coaching.

Withers became principal of Central School, which at that time was a sixth and seventh grade school, and he later became principal of Kings Mountain Junior High when that new facility was built on Phifer Road.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Withers and Bill Bates were very instrumental in the building of the KMHS sports complex. They didn't seek or expect any recognition for it, but they spent countless hours at no pay laying off every facility from the tennis courts at KMHS and KMMS to the baseball, softball and football fields at what is now John Gamble Stadium and Lancaster Fields.

And, although he was officially absent from the game of baseball he continued to keep in close contact with the program, attending games as a fan and always willing to offer advice to coaches and players. When his health deteriorated to the point that he was not able to attend games in person, he listened to them on the radio.

After his retirement from the school system he had to have his legs amputated. A fierce competitor during his playing and coaching days, he wouldn't let it keep him down. He could often be seen around town, and even

at ball games, in his motorized wheel chair or driving a specially-equipped truck. He enjoyed riding along country roads and would often drive up to a former player or friend's house and

just sit and talk. He will be missed.

Contact Gary Stewart at 704 739-7496 or e-mail gstewart@kingsmountain-herald.com.

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Outpatient dental imaging services are now available at Kings Mountain Hospital. If you are experiencing dental pain from an abscessed tooth, broken tooth or impacted wisdom teeth, please call for an appointment.

- For an appointment, call 704-730-5459
- Medicaid and private pay only
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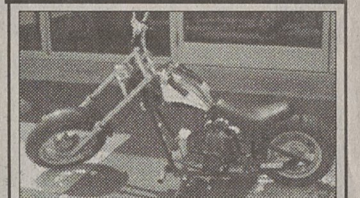
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