

OPINION

SPORTS

GARY
From 4A

Shooters who go around the community all night long shooting their muskets and chanting new year wishes of good health and good fortune. A Kings Mountain Idol contest would be good.

A national championship playoff for NCAA Division I football. Believe it or not, I didn't watch an entire bowl game this year. Most of the bowl games used to be played on January 1. Because of TV's big bucks, the bowl season is now spread out from before Christmas until January 4. Why not spread them out even more, beginning the week after the regular season, and include the bowl games in an elimination process which concludes with the national championship either on January 1 or the Saturday before the NFL's Super Bowl?

HEFFNER
From 4A

For years?

Remember the dizzy dame who told Al Bore he needed to change from a beta male to an alpha and become more aggressive? She was a feminist author named Naomi Wolf who was paid thousands of dollars a month to help him figure out how to become top dog.

She convinced Bore that he must become the leader of the pack before the public would accept him as president. He took Wolf's advice and sidled across the stage, audibly sighing, during his debate with George Bush.

Instead of a beta male, he appeared to be nothing more than an also-ran, a pound puppy who became a whipped puppy you might say.

How about the brilliant female, Mary Beth Cahill, who advised John Kerry to ignore the Swift Boat Veterans? That bad advice probably cost him the presidency.

Of course, being an attorney, Kerry knew better than to put a guilty party on the witness stand.

Former Texas governor Ann Richards is the Democrat other Democrats need to listen to. She disdains advice from media advisors.

"For a mere half million dollars they will advise you not to drool on TV," she said.

President Bush has some kind of nerve, assembling a cabinet whose thinking parallels his own, without even consulting Democrats, or even the Washington Post.

Opinion
Page Policy

The Herald welcomes your letters to the editor for publication in each Thursday's paper. All letters must be signed, and for verification purposes include the address and phone number. Letters should be limited to 500 words.

Mail your letter to Editor, The Herald, P.O. Box 769, Kings Mountain, NC 28086; fax to (704) 739-0611; or e-mail to KMH Letters@kingsmountainherald.com. Letters sent by fax and e-mail must also include name, mailing address and phone number for verification purposes. Letters may be edited.

Death of coaches made 2004 a sad sports year

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

Kings Mountain's biggest sports stories of 2004 didn't occur on the field.

The community was saddened by the death of two former coaches who gave most of the years of their lives helping young people achieve on the athletic field and in life.

Donald Lee Parker, who spent over 30 years in education in Kings Mountain, including 23 years as head men's basketball coach, died at his home in Tennessee in July at the age of 91.

Two weeks later, while Coach Parker's memorial service was being held at Central United Methodist Church, former Mountaineer baseball coach Fred Withers died at Kings Mountain Hospital.

Parker was probably the most beloved coach ever at KMHS. He came to the school in 1943 "on loan" from Fletcher High School in western North Carolina. At the end of the school year he decided to remain in KM.

When he first came to KM the nation was at war, so he served as head coach of all varsity sports including football, baseball and basketball. After the war he concentrated on basketball but still served as an assistant in football. In the 1950s and the early 1960s he also coached the Mountaineer golf team.

In 23 years, Parker's basketball teams won 247 games and four conference championships. His first three basketball teams had a combined 47-1 record. He coached the Mountaineers to Southwestern Conference titles in 1965 and 1967, the latter his final year as coach. That team featured 6-5 superstar George Adams, who would become the school's first Prep All-American. Adams went on to become the all-time leading scorer and rebounder at Gardner Webb University and played several years in the ABA. Parker coached the 1965 golf team to the Western N.C. High Schools Activities Association crown.

From 1967 until his retirement in 1975, Parker served as director of the Exceptional Children's program for Kings Mountain District Schools.

Because of declining health, he moved to Tennessee in late 1998 to be near his son, Punch, but as late as a few weeks before his death continued to make frequent trips to Kings Mountain.

Withers, a native of Gaston County, came to Kings Mountain in 1954 as head baseball coach. In the early 1950s he was head coach at Sumter, SC High School where he honed the skills of future New York Yankee second baseman Bobby Richardson.

After two years as principal at Bessemer City High, he came to KM as head baseball coach and assistant football coach. He rebuilt the struggling baseball team into a Southwestern Conference champion.

Withers also was a successful coach for the Kings Mountain and Gastonia American Legion teams. His 1959 Kings Mountain team was possibly the best legion team ever in KM, sharing the regular season Area IV crown and taking Mount Holly-Paw Creek seven games in the Area IV championship series.

After retiring from baseball because of health reasons, Withers became a successful principal at Central School and Kings Mountain Junior High (now Kings Mountain Middle School). He helped plan the sports complex at KMHS and committed countless volunteer working hours making it a reality.

During their playing days, both Parker and Withers were super athletes in their own right. Parker played all three major sports in high school and college and was a professional pitcher for several years before becoming a full-time educator. Withers was an outstanding infielder and hitter in local semi-pro baseball leagues.

Other top sports stories of 2004:

Mountaineer threeppeat

Kings Mountain High's men's basketball team won its third straight Southwestern Foothills Conference championship. All five starters made the All-Conference team, including Derrick Smith, Dashawn Young, D.J. Byrd, Ta Tae Roebuck and Gabe Blair. Smith was SWFH Player of the Year.

The Mountaineers also won their second straight Sectional championship and played in the Western Regionals, where they lost to eventual State Champion Trinity.

Young later signed to play basketball at Tusculum College and Smith signed to play with Catawba Valley Community College.

Early in the current season, Coach Danny McDowell confirmed that he would be retiring at the end of the school year.

Hall of Fame

Numerous former Kings Mountain athletes were named to Halls of Fame during 2004.

Former Kings Mountain mayor John Henry Moss and major league pitching great Tony Cloninger were inducted into the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in Raleigh.

Former Bethware High and Wake Forest pitcher Bobby Biddix, former KMHS and Lenoir Rhyne football standout Guy Fisher, former KMHS

and Pan American basketball standout Ken Mitchem, and the 1990 KMHS men's basketball team, which was Western Regional champion, were inducted into the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame.

KMHS softball

Kings Mountain High's women's softball team won the SWFH championship and advanced three rounds in the State 3A playoffs before losing to Enka 6-4 when the Sugar Jets scored five runs in the last inning.

The Lady Mountaineers started the year with a bang when freshman pitcher Morgan Childers hurled a perfect game in the season opener against East Burke.

Childers became the only freshman in KMHS history to be named the conference player of the year. She was joined on the All-Conference team by teammates Brooke Blackburn, Kristyn Funderburke, Brittney Thornburg, Jessica Yarbro, Casey Camp, Kala Buchanan, and LaRonda McClain. KM's Suzanne Grayson was named conference coach of the year.

KMHS soccer

Kings Mountain High's women's soccer team also made some noise in the western end of the state this year.

The Lady Mountaineers saw their three-year reign as conference champion come to an end, finishing second to R-5 Central. But they caught fire in the playoffs and went four rounds before falling to T.C. Roberson 1-0 (7-6 on penalty kicks) in the Western Regional semi-final.

KM's Blair Heffner was named conference player of the year and was joined on the all-conference team by Bennett Suber, Candace Campion, Susie Potter, Emily Edwards, Kara Fujita, Jennifer Lingg and Vanessa Sidavong.

KMHS volleyball

Kings Mountain High's women's volleyball team barely missed its third trip to the State Championship in the past five years, losing to undefeated Mooresville in the Western Regional championship game.

The Lady Mountaineers finished second to defending state champion Fred T. Foard in the regular season race in the SWFH, but won three straight playoff games before falling to Mooresville.

Kings Mountain's Alex Dawson was voted SWFH Player of the Year for the second straight season and was joined on the All-Conference team by teammates Kala Buchanan, Jessica Yarbro, Kristyn Funderburke and LaRonda McClain.

Other sports items of note:

Kings Mountain High's men's swim team finished second in the state championship meet and Michael Allen was state champion in the 500 yard freestyle.

Mountaineer assistant football coach Stephen Braggs, a former NFL player, was named head coach at 5A Pine Ridge High School in Deltona, FL.

Kings Mountain's Dremiel Byers defeated reigning Olympic champion Rulon Gardner 3-1 to win his fourth U.S. National Greco-Roman Championship and nail down the #1 seed for the 2004 Olympic Trials. (Gardner edged Byers by one point in the Olympic Trials finals to earn the Olympic berth).

Kings Mountain's Shonda Cole, a sophomore at the University of South Carolina, made the All-Southeastern Conference volleyball team.

Kings Mountain's Orlando Curry won the Western Regional heavy-weight championship. Josh Yon finished second at 215 pounds and Isaac Proctor was fourth at 125. All three qualified for the State tournament. Curry later signed to play football at Tusculum College in Tennessee.

Kings Mountain High's baseball team finished second in the SWFH but was bumped from the State playoffs after being upset by Burns in the SWFH tournament. Infielder C.J. Austin signed a baseball scholarship with Erskine College and junior pitcher-first baseman Tyler Leach made the All-State team. Leach later signed a national letter of intent to play baseball at Virginia Tech. Leach led the Mountaineers with a .457 batting average, 32 hits, eight home runs, 24 RBI, and a 6-3-2 pitching record with 103 strikeouts and a 2.03 ERA in 65.1 innings of work.

Kings Mountain's Chad Pearson, a track star at NC State, was named to the All-American team by finishing fifth in the 10,000 meters in the 2004 Outdoor NCAA Championships in Austin, TX.

Kings Mountain's Roxanne Brown, daughter of former NFL player Kevin Mack, earned a spot on the Carolina Panthers Top Cat team.

Dr. George Plonk's horse Castile, a four-year-old Paso Fina breed, won the Grand Championship in the National Show in Perry GA.

Kings Mountain High's football team ended a 4-8 season with a 77-21 loss to T.C. Roberson in the first round of the state playoffs. The 77 points were the most ever scored against a KM team in 82 years of football.

KM second in Big I Classic

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers finished second to host Independence in last week's Big I Classic in Charlotte.

Danny McDowell's Mountaineers defeated Waddell 85-82 in double overtime in Tuesday night's opening game, and lost to Independence 78-69 in Wednesday's championship game.

The results left the Mountaineers with a 6-6 overall record heading into a Southwestern Foothills Conference game last night at Crest.

The Mountaineers are home for their next two SWFH games, Friday against R-S Central and Tuesday against St. Stephens.

Kings Mountain's inside men played their best overall game as a trio in Tuesday's win over Waddell. David McClish scored 22 points and Antonio Feaster had his seventh

straight double double with 21 points and 19 rebounds. D.J. Byrd added 21 points and Heath Walker scored 14 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for his first career double double.

The Mountaineers grabbed 46 rebounds and hit 52 percent from the field, but missed 13 rebounds.

"We played really well, probably the best game we've played against a big 4A school when we actually played four quarters," Coach McDowell said. "We were in the game all the way. Our three big men played exceptionally well on the offensive end of the floor. When you have 85 points and they get 64 of them, it's a great night."

In the championship game against Independence, the Mountaineers got off to a slow start and were behind

by 30 points in the third quarter. But they mounted a comeback that cut the Patriots' lead to six points with three minutes to play, but never could get any closer.

Byrd had his first double double with 18 points and 11 rebounds. Feaster added 18 points and seven rebounds, and Darik Gary scored 14 points.

"We played well in the second half," McDowell said. "We just had a lapse in the second quarter. Then, in the final minute we had to foul to try to get the ball and they stretched the final lead from six to nine."

Again, KM shot well from the floor, hitting 47 percent, but missed 10 free throws.

"If we hit our free throws it wouldn't have been that close," he said. "It's tough when you miss 23 free throws in two games against big

4A schools. But our kids played exceptionally hard and I was proud of their effort. Usually when you get down 25 or 30 points you quit, but the guys just sucked it up and kept coming."

TUESDAY GAME

KM (85) - McClish 22, Feaster 21, Byrd 21, Walker 14, Marable 3, Gary 2, Smith 2.

Waddell (82) - Heffner 24, Carrier 20, Holton 16, Ison 9, Manning 6, David 5.

WEDNESDAY GAME

KM (69) - Byrd 18, Feaster 18, Gary 14, McClish 7, McClain 7, Marable 3, Smith 2.

Independence (78) - Tomiko 26, Frazier 11, Tomiko 6, Witherspoon 5, Howard 4, Streeter 4, Nix 2, Rogers 1.

Because You Care....

You owe it to yourself and your family to remember us when considering a quality funeral home for advanced planning or services at the time of need.



2916 Union Rd., Gastonia, NC 28054 • 704-865-0355

Your Professional Modular Housing Builder



1-800-TALK-121

General Contractor across from Franklin Square in Gastonia

Personalized Service from Hometown People



Mortgage Concepts, Inc. 704-867-7200
1562-C Union Road, Gastonia, NC