

# Warriors hope to improve on best record in school history

By DWIGHT FRADY  
Staff Writer

East Gaston's Warriors are coming off their best record in school history (19) wins, including a 11-3 Big South record in 2004, and should have another good year led by seven seniors, including all-conference second baseman **Justin Moore**, who hit .405 last year.

The previous most wins came in 1984 when the Warriors won 18. Coach Darrell Van Dyke, a Gardner-Webb graduate, has been at the helm of the Warriors since 1979 and his teams have made the state playoffs every year since 1998. The former Kings Mountain High and G-W standout is starting his 26th year with the Warriors.

The biggest loss due to graduation was catcher Jay McConnell, now at Gardner-Webb. He was the school's first All-American with a hefty .542 batting average. He holds school records in at-bats (258), hits (96), doubles (29) RBIs (73) and home runs (13).

Moore and pitcher-outfielder **Matt Dameron**, both battle-tested seniors, have already earned college scholarship, Moore to Gardner-Webb and Dameron to Mars Hill. As a pitcher, Dameron was 2-0 as a junior with a 1.95 ERA in 28 innings. He was a stellar

defender as a starting outfielder.

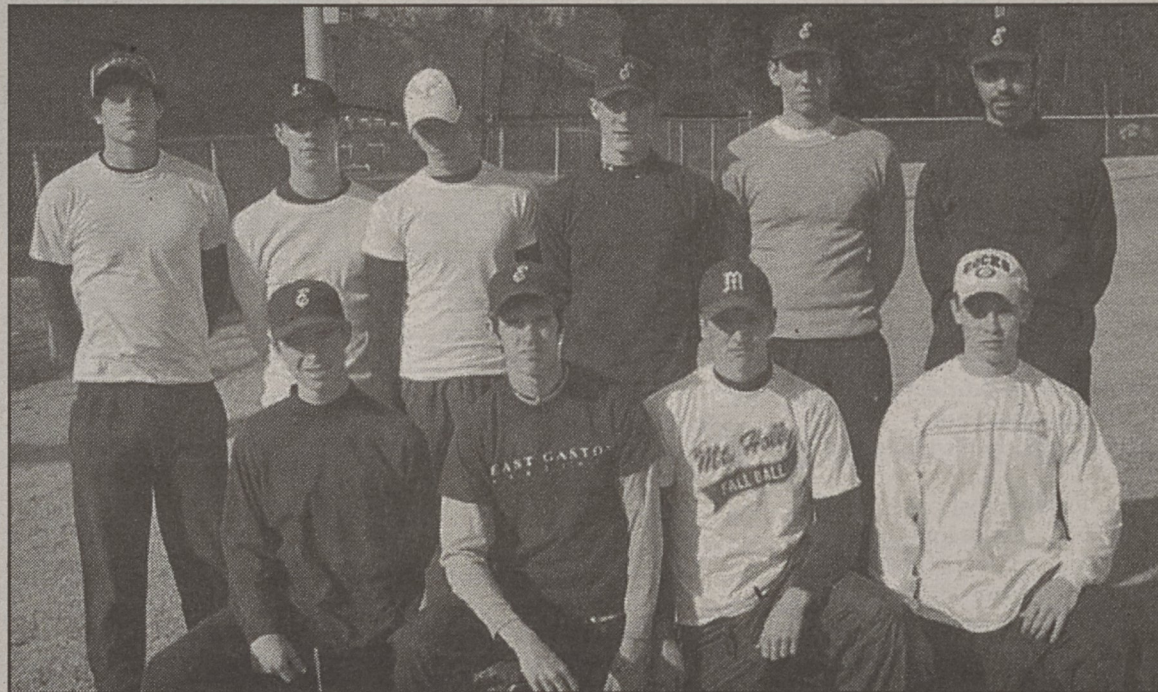
Pitcher-infielder **Brody Heffner**, pitcher-infielder **Brandon Washington**, catcher **Ryan Raymond**, pitcher-outfielder **Clint Gamage**, and catcher-outfielder **Jake Clements** are other key senior returnees. Washington batted .310 (18-for-58) as a junior and scored 16 runs.

The top junior returnee is pitcher-outfielder **Derek Yow**. He batted .311 as a sophomore (28-for-90), scored 25 runs and batted in 20 runs. Other junior returnees are infielder **Mark Frady**, pitcher-infielder **Evan Jonas**, catcher **Zach Jonas**, pitcher-outfielder **Kelly Scott**, infielder **Andrew Vernon**, pitcher-outfielder **Justin Walker**, and outfielder **Cameron Wilson**.

The Warriors were Big South tournament champs in 2002. In 2001 as a MEGA 7 Conference team they were conference champs with records of 8-4 and 14-14.

When East Gaston was the state 3A runner-up in 1978-79, Van Dyke was an assistant to head coach Jerry Adams. That team was Southwestern 3A champs and finished with a 17-8 record. Van Dyke took over the following spring and since then his Warrior teams have won 334 games.

Van Dyke says the Big South



On the mound for East Gaston this spring will be, front row, from left, Justin Walker, Justin Greene, Kelly Scott and Clint Gamage. In back, from left, are Jake Clements, Derek Yow, Evan Jonas, Matt Dameron, Brody Heffner and Brandon Washington.

is full of good teams and good players with Ashbrook, North Gaston and South Point as the top three.

He lists Ashbrook's **Drew Martin** and **Devin Harris** as top players, along with South Point's **Aaron Horne** and **David Bumgardner** and North Gaston's **Brett Williams**.

"We have some big shoes to fill, but in early drills, I like our attitude and effort," Van Dyke said. "We had an early scrimmage at East

Mecklenburg and Heffner, Yow, Evan Jonas, Washington, Justin Walker and Gamage looked good."

Warrior assistants for 2005 are Dale Starnes, Josh McSwain, Brandon Mills, Andy Leigh and Chad Brown. Randy Sellers returns as the head junior varsity coach.

Brown is the pitching coach and a former Stanley Post 266 player for Van Dyke. Brown played Triple-A baseball in the

Toronto Blue Jays organization.

The Warriors open their season against nearby rival South Point on March 15 at Choctaw Field. That will also be the first night game (7 p.m.)

The Warriors will host the annual Observer Easter Tournament March 28 through April 2. Ashbrook, which won the state 3A championship in 2003, won the tournament last year by downing South Point in the title game.

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