

Sports

State Champion 1993 KM baseball team to enter Sports Hall of Fame

(Fourth in a four-part series of the 2011 inductees into the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame. The ceremony is Saturday, May 7 at 6 p.m. at Central United Methodist Church. Tickets are \$10 each and are available from Hall of Fame committee members).

GARY STEWART
Sports Editor

From 1989-1993 Coach Bruce Clark's Kings Mountain High baseball team had its most spectacular run in school history.

During that five-year period the Mountaineers compiled a 100-30 overall record, won three conference championships and two state championships. With a different bounce of the ball here and there, the Mountaineers could have won four state titles because two of his other three teams advanced to the quarter-finals.

The championships came in 1989 and 1993. The two teams took entirely different routes to the crowns.

The 1989 team featured a crushing home run attack never seen before - or since - at KMHS. The Mountaineers actually finished second in the Southwestern 3A Conference to South Point but caught fire late in the season and rolled to the state title. The team hit 55 home runs, led by slugging first baseman Paul Brannon with a KMHS and what was then a state single season record of 20.

The 1993 team hit only 10 home runs, but it featured a pitching staff and defense as good as any team in the school's history.

Stephen Fisher, now an administrator in Cleveland County Schools, was an All-State pitcher and State Player of the Year. He won 12 straight games his senior season and 24 straight over his final two seasons before losing 5-2 to Asheboro in the first game of the best-of-three state championship series at KM's Lancaster Field.

Fisher had a hard fast ball, but more importantly could throw the baseball where he wanted to just about every time.

David C. Jenkins, more of a low curve type pitcher who worked spots, compiled a 7-1 record and pitched a masterful three-hitter in a 2-1 victory in game two that tied the series at 1-all.

The defense was rock solid, and showed it in the

state series by time and again turning double plays and individuals making game-saving plays in key situations.

Although they didn't have a superstar at the plate, the Mountaineers had consistent hitters. Five players (state MVP catcher Chris Rider .348, second baseman Mike Smith .338, Fisher .338, right fielder Caja Ormand .333 and sophomore backup catcher/designated hitter Kevin Melton .324) all topped the .300 mark.

Several other players like Robert Wingo, TG Goforth, Todd Ware, Rick Marr, Robbie Ruff, Johnny Bunch, Damon Putnam, Doran Moore, Sharee Hopper, Benji Ingle, David R. Jenkins, Sheldon Smith, Lewis Nantz and Shane Webb made valuable contributions.

Unsung heroes were never more evident than in the third and deciding game of the state championship. Fisher and Jenkins didn't have enough rest or innings left to start game three but the Mountaineers got outstanding contributions on the mound from sophomore lefty Robert Wingo, relief pitchers Sharee Hopper and Shane Webb and Fisher, who came on in the fifth inning to save the game in a 9-5 Mountaineer victory.

The Mountaineers (the visiting team) scored five runs in the top of the second to give Wingo the early lead but he became shaky in the bottom of the second when the Blue Comets scored twice.

Clark went with Hopper, who gave up only one hit over the next 2 2/3 innings to get the win. When Asheboro cut the score to 6-5 after four innings Clark called on Fisher to put out the fire. KM tacked on three runs in the top of the seventh to win going away.

Clark, now head football coach at Boiling Springs, SC, High School, said the '93 team played under intense pressure all year long because people all over the state were picking them to win the state championship. The year before the Mountaineers won the SWC and went three rounds in the state playoffs before falling to West Henderson.

West Henderson was one of the Mountaineers' victims in the third round of the 1993 state playoffs. They also defeated Central Davidson, Central Cabarrus and South Point to take the Western Re-



Kings Mountain's state championship 1993 baseball team. Front row, left to right, Chris Rider, Caja Ormand, Mike Smith, Kevin Melton, Robert Wingo and Sheldon Smith. Second row, Robbie Ruff, Todd Ware, Doran Moore, TG Goforth, Stephen Fisehr and Rick Marr. Back row, Shane Webb, Damon Putnam, David R. Jenkins, Benji Ingle, Sharee Hopper, Johnny Bunch, David C. Jenkins and Lewis Nantz. Coaches, not pictured, included Bruce Clark, head coach, and assistants Ronny Funderburke, Richie Gold, Dean Brannon and Rusty Bumgardner.

gional title, with Fisher getting the victory in every game.

"It was unique group," Clark said of the players, 18 of whom returned from the previous season. "They were really close but it was a very diverse group at the same time. There were a lot of different personalities. It is amazing what they were able to do. They basically all grew up on the same team."

"They were all good ball players but they have also succeeded off the field. When I was coaching at Southern Guilford Damon Putnam was driving an 18-wheeler and stopped in and saw me. We had the hard-nosed blue collar type; on the other hand you have guys like Stephen Fisher who is high up in school administration, Michael Smith is in the medical field and Todd Ware is a lawyer."

"It was such a variety of personalities. All of them could play anywhere you asked them to play. The number one reason for our success was how they played defense. It the ball was on the ground or a pop fly, they'd get it."

The ability to play many positions paid off for the Mountaineers in the championship game. Shortstop Rick Marr injured his shoulder when he dove for a ball behind second base and Clark had to move players around, including sending Ware from third to short, Putnam from first to third and putting Benji Ingle in at first.

"And, of course, Stephen came in to pitch and saved the game for us," Clark said. "The unique part was that

so many of them could do so many things," Clark said. "Wingo was going to be our next really good pitcher and would have started more games that year but we had two seniors (Fisher and Jenkins) that were such good pitchers. Stephen was undefeated and had won 24 straight games, which we thought at the time was a state record. Then someone documented that someone years earlier had won more."

"Little David (Jenkins) threw the best game he ever pitched in the second game. He didn't overpower anybody, he was just a good solid pitcher."

"Fisher pitched about 82 or 83 miles per hour and could put it anywhere he wanted to," Clark noted. "Jenkins threw about 80 and his curve ball was about 60 and he kept people off balance all the time."

"Wingo pitched a good game in the championship game, and so did Hopper and Shane Webb. We got up early and then Marr got hurt and we had to make some adjustments. A lot of different players made some outstanding plays on defense. I remember Chris Rider making a heck of a catch near the dugout to end an Asheboro rally."

"Shane Webb could throw the ball 90-plus and was a great kid. Hopper was long and threw it pretty well. We had Wingo and Hopper coming back the next year and they would have been our main pitchers, but I left after that season."

Kings Mountain's outfield time and again came up with the big plays, including the state championship games.

Caja Ormand made one catch of a long drive to right field on which he banged into the fence and held on to the ball to end an Asheboro rally. In the seventh inning of game two, the Blue Comets loaded the bases with two outs and Putnam fielded a shot down the first base line and stepped on the bag to save the game.

Defensively, the outfield was probably as strong as any in the school's history. Robbie Ruff in left could fly. TG Goforth in center and Ormand in right started most of two years and didn't let balls past them.

"Caja could hit the ball a long way and had a great arm and great defensive skills," Clark said.

Because of the vast amount of talent, it was sometimes hard to get everybody playing time but Clark said the players never complained and understood their roles.

"I guess the hardest thing about that year was that we had 18 very good players that would have started anywhere else, but you can only play nine at a time," he said.

"Johnny Bunch was one of my all-time favorites. He was the hardest worker on the team. I told him his sophomore year as long as I was coaching he'd have a spot on the team. All the kids were good role players."

"Benji Ingle, the year I left he went to Holy Cross and played in the band. He called me one Saturday and said he was 10 feet away from Lou Holtz. He got to play in the Notre Dame stadium. He was a great kid."

"It was a great bunch of young men," Clark added.

"We went 100-30 and I would say that was the winningest baseball teams that came through Kings Mountain. The year before we finished fourth in the state and our number one goal coming in was to win the state championship."

The Mountaineers finished 23-4 overall, tying the 1989 team (23-7) for the most single season wins in school history. But the 1992 (20-5) and '93 teams were the only two baseball teams in school history to win back-to-back conference championships. Clark's 1990 team finished 20-5 and the '91 team was 14-7.

Sports this week:

Wednesday, April 27
11 a.m. - High school track, Kings Mountain in Ashbrook Relay Invitational.

Friday, April 29
4:30 - High school baseball, Kings Mountain at Crest (JV/V DH).
6 p.m. - High school softball, Crest at Kings Mountain.

Saturday, April 30
1 p.m. - High school soccer, Fred T. Foard at Kings Mountain (JV/V DH).

Monday, May 2
TBA - High school golf, Western Regional Tournament at Riverbend.
6 p.m. - High school soccer, North Gaston at Kings Mountain (varsity only).

Tuesday, May 3
6 p.m. - High school softball, Kings Mountain at North Gaston



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