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High School Sports Report

Our Goal: Recognizing The Achievements Of Young Athletes

XXXVIX No. 11 - July 31, 2026

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64 Pages

SCACA Clinic has new name: Coaching Academy

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Anderson – Whether it be transfer rules, NIL, or region realignments, the high school athletics landscape is in a state of constant change these days.

One of the primary responsibilities of the South Carolina Athletic Coaches Association is to help the Palmetto state's coaches to navigate the changes.

As he enters his fourth year as the Executive Director of the SCACA, Scott Earley spends much of his time traversing the state to listen to concerns from coaches. He also visits other states to get ideas and gain know Much like the changes that the SCHSL is working through, there also are changes for the SCACA on the horizon. The biggest changes will be the future scheduling of the annual coaches clinic as well as a name change for the event.

"We are now calling it the Coaches Academy so this is the first annual," Earley said.

For years the clinic has run Sunday through Wednesday in late July. Starting this



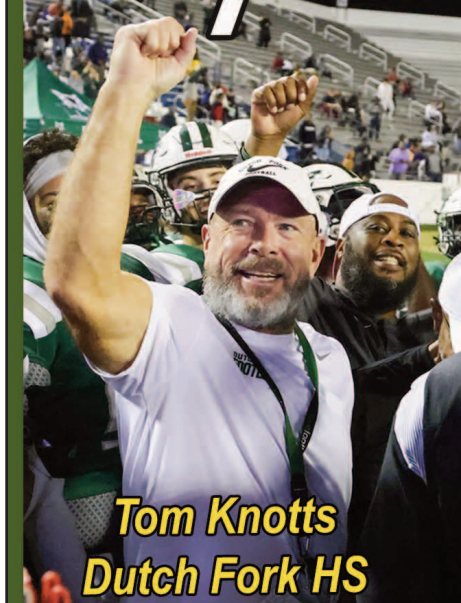
SCACA
Exec. Director
Scott Earley

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Inspiring Excellence



Tom Knotts
Dutch Fork HS



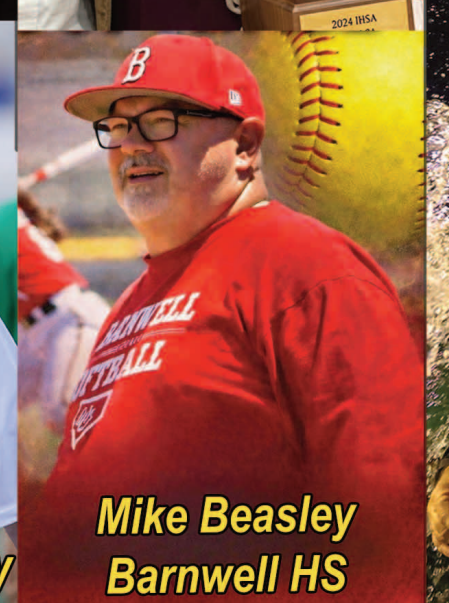
Callie McClure
Dorchester Academy



Joshua Staley
Ridge View HS



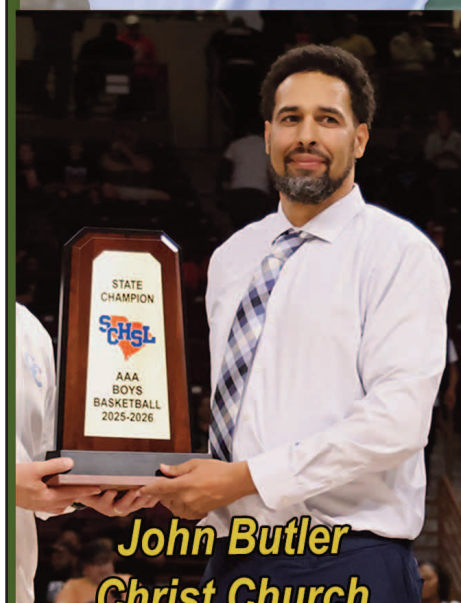
Will Furse
Williamsburg Academy



Mike Beasley
Barnwell HS



Johnny Waters
Northwood Academy



John Butler
Christ Church



Hannah Towery
Saluda HS



Brent LaPrad
Oceanside Collegiate

Mentors to Greatness!

A Message From The
Publisher
Billy G. Baker
email: bilrecruit@aol.com



The annual SCACA Coaches Clinic presents opportunities for all coaches across South Carolina

Greenville—The mission of the SCACA is a noble one with these words appearing at the top of their web site: “Supporting, Developing and Honoring Coaches Across South Carolina.”

Thus, the weekend of July 24-26 is the time the state’s coaches gather at the Greenville Convention Center to embrace the aforementioned, as everyone gets tuned up for the competition awaiting their respective teams during the 2026-27 school year.

This SCACA Clinic is the 40th straight year the *HSSR* has attended this great event as a vendor in support of an organization boasting over 6,650 members (and counting). This is the time to reacquaint with fellow coaches, share or steal ideas, or just relax and enjoy some quiet time as you get ready mentally for what is ahead.

I believe coaches are difference makers, and I want to share such a wonderful and positive story with you that verifies this statement. It is 100 per cent true and it involves a phone call I received from **Jerome Singleton**, when he was the head football coach at **Burke High School** in the late Spring of 1991.

The phone call went something like this as I recall: “Hey, Billy Coach Singleton from Burke High here. I need a favor.”

My reply: “How can I help you Coach?”

Coach Singlton: “The other night walking home from the prom, that we held in the Burke High gym, one of our top freshman student athletes was shot at on the street walking home with his cousin. The bullet missed the player, but it hit his cousin, and he is still in the hospital and may not walk again.

“The young man made your all-state basketball team as a freshman and he plays in the band at Burke High with his girlfriend,” said Coach Singleton. “I am trying to get him involved with football because I think he is about to get associated with the wrong crowd if you know what I mean. The bullet was meant for him and it involved a dispute over a girl at the prom.

“I have an idea that might get him to join my football team, where I can keep an eye on him, and help his life move towards a more positive direction,” said Coach Sin-

gleton.

My response: “Coach, I am with you. Tell me what I can do to help you.”

Coach Singleton: “In your next issue of the Sports Report I need you to make up a list of your Top 10 rising sophomore football players in the state of South Carolina, and I would like for you to put the name of **Zola Davis** number one!”

My response, after giving his request some thought: “I have never printed a Top 10 Sophomore list before and he has never ever played junior varsity football, right?”

Coach Singleton: “He has been in the band, so he could not play a Fall sport. He is a great athlete, and he made your all-state team as a freshman basketball player. You doing this will be a key to me getting him out for the football team, but the most important thing is I need to keep him focused on being a good person and avoiding gangs. I promise you he will be a great football player also.”

My response: “Okay, Coach you got it. I am all-in. I might put this list in the back of the paper but it will be in the next issue promise.”

Zola Davis saw his name “number one” a week later in the *HSSR*. Coach Singleton told me he was excited, focused and ready to go. By his senior year, Davis was a Parade All-American, and he signed a football scholarship to **South Carolina**. While a Gamecock he caught 164 passes for 2,354 yards and 17 touchdowns. He even played one year in the NFL after college.

In 2014, Davis was elected into the South Carolina Athletic Hall of Fame. Coach Singleton told me a couple years ago that Davis was a regional manager for Walmart, living in Atlanta while leading a highly productive life. (There was a rumor Davis was earning \$200,000 a year in leadership role with the retailer).

At the time, I had no idea that Jerome Singleton would eventually become the Commissioner of the South Carolina High School League, and our friendship is still strong even as you read this. We should all be thankful for the truly caring coaches amongst us who occasionally have to thank “out of the box” to help save the future of

those athletes they are entrusted to.

From 1987 to the year 2000, the *HSSR* produced a 96-page issue during football season, each and every week between mid-August and mid-December. We often didn’t know if we were going or coming but that proved our commitment to high school football and other fall sports without a doubt.

Well, **Jewell McLaurin** of **Lake View** came up with a novel idea. He would call me every Monday morning for years during the football season to tell me which offensive and which defensive player’s picture to put on the Lake View page, and these two athletes were “The Players of the Week”. He said that his players competing for this honor every week like they were going to be given the key to the local bank. I recall Coach McLaurin won like 286 games, all at Lake View!

In conclusion, let me share with you that the companion web site of the *HSSR*, known as hssr.com, was recently verified by Google analytics as receiving one million home page views a year between April, 2025 and April, 2026. Google also verified that 40,000 unique viewers go to hssr.com as least once a month for information.

Please do not shed on these facts lightly if your goal is to truly bring recognition and honor to the hard work of those student athletes you are charged to help as Mr. Singleton and Mr. McLaurin did back in the day. We upload our entire sponsored publication to our web site hssr.com every month free of charge with no pass word needed! (Do you know any weekly or daily newspapers doing this in South Carolina?)

If your school is not listed in our sponsored index box on page 71 of this issue, and you are an athletic director, Principal, Booster Club President, or caring head coach, we need to have a conversation.

You just never know where that conversation might lead!

Let’s all work together to further the great potential in all our student athletes. Please contact me at 843-200-9555.

Barnwell, continued from pg. 50
boy’s coach. The girls’ basketball coach is **William Hammonds** back for his 5th season.

Luke Catoe directs the boy’s and girl’s cross-country teams. **William Barnes** directs the boys’ soccer program. Coach Garrick heads up the golf team. **Ashleigh Anderson** pulls double duty as the head volleyball and softball. Anderson played softball at Newberry College. Her volleyball coach is **Mindy**

Sandifer and her softball assistants are **Jerry Raines** and **Mike Beasley**.

Jeff Miller just retired from working with the boy’s and girl’s track program. Miller also works the clock operator at football games.

Coach Youngblood says he enjoys being the athletic director at Barnwell High because there is a strong awareness of high school athletics in the com-

munity. “I enjoy going to events and meeting the parents and all of our fans who come out to support our student athletes,” said Coach Youngblood. “We have a great collective group of coaches here and we all try to be good role models to all our athletes. All our coaches are top notch people.”

Coaching Records, continued from pg. 3

SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD	PORTER-GAUD	MATT NEIGHBORS	FIRST YR	SCISIA REGION 1-A		
ALLENDALE-FAIRFAX	TRAVIS LEWIS	FIRST YR	SCISIA REGION 1-AAA			SCISIA REGION 1-A		
BAMBERG-EHRHARDT	COREY CROSBY	38-11				SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD
DENMARK-OLAR	WILLIAM RAYSOR	4-7				CAROLINA ACADEMY	DAVID RANKIN	249-197
HARDEEVILLE	ARTHUR GARDNER	FIRST YR	SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD	DORCHESTER ACADEMY	MICHAEL NELSON	53-6
RIDGELAND	JAMIE ISSAC	5-5	FIRST BAPTIST	KEVIN MAPP	FIRST YR	LEE ACADEMY	JUSTIN LOGAN	6-5
			HILTON HEAD CHRISTIAN	RON PEDUZZI	123-75	WILLIAMSBURG	WILL FURSE	22-14
			JOHN PAUL II	SHAYNE MILLIGAN	3-20			
REGION 5-A			PINEWOOD PREP	DEVONTE HOLLOMON	59-21			
SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD	SCISIA REGION 2-AAA			SCISIA REGION 2-A		
BAPTIST HILL	MARION BROWN	108-94				SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD
BETHUNE-BOWMAN	CODY MCNEAL	4-27				ANDREW JACKSON	ANDY PALMER	128-113
BRANCHVILLE	SANDY DUKE	41-32				BEAUFORT ACADEMY	NIC SHUFORD	130-62
CROSS	SHAUN WRIGHT	95-53	SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD	COLLETON PREP	GREG LANGDALE	73-63
MILITARY MAGNET	DERRELL PRINGLE	9-21	CAMDEN MILITARY	WILL RICE	2-22	FAITH CHRISTIAN	BEN GREENE	25-44
SCOTTS BRANCH	PATRICK FLEMING	4-7	FLORENCE CHRISTIAN	NEIL MINTON	109-68	PATRICK HENRY	JOE GRAY PEEPLES	21-13
ST. JOHNS	ERIC BROWN	0-10	NORTHSIDE CHRISTIAN	DEAN HOWELL	104-66	THOMAS HEYWARD	DANIEL BRYAN	FIRST YR
			TRINITY COLLEGIATE	SHAWN FAGAN	6-19			
REGION 6-A			WILSON HALL	ADAM JARECKI	148-127			
			SCISIA REGION 1-AA			SCISIA 8-MAN REGION 1		
SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD				SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD
CARVERS BAY	MATTHEW RICHARD	30-31	BETHESDA ACADEMY	ANTWAIN TURNER	103-106	LAURENS ACADEMY	JOLLY DOOLITTLE	112-104
GREEN SEA-FLOYDS	PATRICK MARTIN	3-18	CHRISTIAN ACADEMY	LEE GAINEY	0-8	NEWBERRY ACADEMY	BENJI SEASE	16-61
HANNAH-PAMPLICO	JAMES JOHNSON	46-47	DILLON CHRISTIAN	CHRIS ALPHIN	FIRST YR	RICHARD WINN ACADEMY	PAUL BRIGMAN	42-10
HEMINGWAY	MIKE DONALD	0-10	HILTON HEAD PREP	DOUG MCFADDEN	3-7	WARDLAW ACADEMY	MARK RODGERS	150-101
JOHNSONVILLE	KEN CRIBB	169-98	PEE DEE ACADEMY	JOANATHAN KING	80-41	W.W. KING ACADEMY	BRIAN KNEECE	FIRST YR
LAKE VIEW	DARYL KING	150-63	ST. JOHNS CHRISTIAN	SHAUN WELCH	4-7			
LATTA	BRANDON ISEMAN	56-49						
			SCISIA REGION 2-AA			SCISIA 8-MAN REGION 2		
SCISIA AAAA						SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD
			SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD	CATHEDRAL ACADEMY	RICHARD GIBSON	8-3
SCHOOL	COACH	RECORD	CALHOUN ACADEMY	TODD LAYTON	58-62	CROSS SCHOOLS	RICO MCCOY	FIRST YR
AUGUSTA CHRISTIAN	BRANDON COMPTON	FIRST YR	CLARENDON HALL	SHANE WALLACE	FIRST YR	PALMETTO CHRISTIAN	WILL OWENS	6-41
BEN LIPPEN	STEPHEN CAGLE	18-25	GREENWOOD CHRISTIAN	WILL ROONEY	12-10	HOLLY HILL	STRATFORD HYDRICK	FIRST YR
CARDINAL NEWMAN	JARED SHAW	2-19	ORANGEBURG PREP	BROOKS SMITH	FIRST YR	JEFFERSON DAVIS	ANTHONY REITENOUR	66-28
HAMMOND	JON WHEELER	80-46	SPARTANBURG CHRISTIAN	SEAN ROGERS	31-63	KING'S ACADEMY	KEITH ROGERS	19-97
HEATHWOOD HALL	TYMERE ZIMMERMAN	2-8	THOMAS SUMTER	STACY BELL	12-32			
LAURENCE MANNING	JIMMY NOONAN	130-132						
NORTHWOOD	JOHNNY WATERS	113-62						

Midlands, continued from pg. 32

field fence.

Ruiz’s second homer, a solo drive that also carried over the fence in right, gave Chapin a 3-2 lead in the fourth inning.

The Eagles made it 4-2 before the close of the fourth on Luke **Cromer’s** base hit that drove in **Mason Reeves**.

Reece Oakley singled in **Cesar Ochoa** with one out in the fifth inning for T.L. Hanna, but Chapin starting pitcher Griff Harper closed out the fifth inning getting Manning to pop out and Stuart to ground out to end the inning.

Harper got the win, and relief pitcher **Brewer Haggard** pitched 1 2/3 innings for the save.

“(This is) emotional for me,” Ruiz said. “My last high school game. It’s the best feeling ever.”

Softball

With little drama, the **Gray Collegiate** softball team made a big statement May 29 at the A.C. Flora softball field.

Sophomore **Mackenzie Sease’s** home runs in the first and second inning helped boost the War Eagles to a 6-0 lead, while junior **Peyton Hendrix** took the circle for the second time in the best-of-three series to close out a 11-1 victory and secure Gray’s second straight 4A state championship and third straight state title.

Add to that, **University of South Carolina** signee **Aspen Boulware** finished off her career with the War Eagles with a solo home run in her final at-bat, the 60th of her career.

“We set a goal this year to go undefeated,” head coach **Doug Frye** said. “I know that sounds crazy, but we’d take it one game at a time. These girls bought into it and they stayed focused on what we were doing the whole year. It’s amazing, 34-0. It’s incredible.”

The War Eagles beat the Falcons 7-1 in the first game of the series that was disrupted by rain.

Gray held a 3-1 lead going into the fourth inning before the weather forced a suspension Wednesday night. When play resumed Thursday the War Eagles scored two more runs in the fourth inning on Sease’s 2-out double that drove in Wright and Boulware to make it 5-1. Gray scored a run in the fifth inning and another in the sixth, and Hendrix closed out her first complete game this week in the circle by shutting out the Falcons in the seventh. Hendrix scattered six Flora hits and struck out 10.

“It was just staying focused. All the preparation we’ve done before this season, that’s really what our strategy was,” Hendrix said Thursday. “We’ve all worked very hard this season and it’s trusting that process.”

Girls track and field

For the past four years, no 5A Division 1 school has mustered a girls track and field team to match up with **Blythewood’s girls team**.

The Bengals made that fact plainly evident when they closed out their fourth straight state championship with a first-place 125 points in the 5A Division 1 meet

Recruiting, continued from pg. 33

in the state right now. Major colleges not evaluating him because he is barely six-foot tall are making the same mistakes as colleges made with former Macedonia QB **Joe Hamilton** when he was out of high school.

In two seasons Manavian has completed 477-of-687 passes for 7,497 yards and 83 TD’s leading the Sharks to back-to-back state championships. He should go over 10,000 passing yards by the end of his senior season. How tall was **Drew Brees** during his outstanding NFL career? (google it for sticker shock)

Okay, **Bill Belichick** of **North Carolina** has come into South Carolina the past two seasons and plucked four receivers to the Tar Heel program for good rea-

at **Spring Valley’s Harry Parone Stadium** May 14.

“It means a lot,” Blythewood girls head coach **Aleshia Hawkins** said. “It just shows that we never back down. Even after the first one we just kept going and we let our younger ones lead the way and they just kept going.”

Bengals senior **Hayley Hightower**, who heads to Purdue with a track scholarship in the fall, and her sister Peyton, both earned individual gold medals, with Peyton winning the 400-meter dash with a time of 53.32 seconds and Hayley taking gold in the 800 with a time of 2:13.66.

Peyton Hightower was part of the 4x100 team with **Jordan Balance**, **Alexandra Francique** and **Brooke Bramlett** that took first place with a time of 46.35 seconds. She also ran a leg in the 4x400 team that took gold with a time of 3:49.92 and included **Hayley Hightower**, Francique, and **Cailyn Dawson**.

With golds in four events that gave the Bengals 40 points, Blythewood got the rest of its points by stacking up high placings in other events.

Girls soccer

The A.C. Flora girls earned their second straight 4A state championship following a 1-1 tie with **Bishop England**. After two overtime periods, the Falcons won 5-3 on penalty kicks at **Memorial Stadium** May 22.

Evan Dampier put A.C. Flora on the board with a goal just before intermission. The Bishops scored the tying goal on **Sophia DeMarco’s** shot in the 76th minute.

When it came to PKs, **Charlotte Cline** and **Ava Delpino** scored for Bishop England, and **Mary Elizabeth Riddle** and **Lauren Holloway** scored PKs for the Falcons in the first two rounds.

In the third round Dampier made her shot, and Falcons goalkeeper **Kennedy Bagley** stopped Bishop England’s **Liz Brady’s** shot.

DeMarco scored the Bishops’ final PK in the fourth round, but A.C. Flora’s **Sammi Lawther** kicked her shot in, and Rachel **Britt’s** shot—the Falcons’ fifth in the PK round—clinched the win.

“Early in the season we weren’t sure what we would have,” A.C. Flora head coach **Eric Navarro** said. “Coming into the season itself, we had a number of starters to replace, and then we had some injuries early on. We replaced a lot of the core of our team early in the season. As players got healthy, you could see the playing time other players were able to get really pay dividends as we got later in the season. We had strong games against Dreher and in the playoffs. You saw that tonight.”

A.C. Flora beat the Bishops 1-0 to win the state championship last year.

While the Falcons played tight with their arch rival Bishop England, the **Chapin girls** dispensed with the drama.

The Eagles, who finished as state runners-up in the last two years, finally broke through with a 4-0 victory over **Eastside** for the 5A Division 2 state championship at Memorial Stadium May 23.

Sydney Stoner headed in a corner kick in the 14th minute for the first score, and two minutes later sister **Avery Stoner** scored to make it 2-0. Just after intermission Avery Stoner scored again, and **Liz Kujawa** put in the Eagle’s fourth goal in the 56th minute of play to close out the win.

son. Did you know that the all-time leading receiver for the New England Patriots is former Blackville-Hilda and **Marshall** stand-out **Troy Brown** (5-10,195) who caught 557 passes for 6,366 yards and 31 TD’s in 15 seasons in the NFL?

Belichick admired the work ethic and talent of Brown, and he is very partial to similar type receivers at the prep level in South Carolina. From this years 2027 class the Tar Heels have a commitment from Oceanside Collegiate WR **Anthony Williams** (6-1, 170) who we rank as the number seven overall prospect in the state right now. Also, North Carolina has a commitment from **Bluffton** WR **Amare Patterson** (6-1, 190) who the HSSR ranks as the number 12

“I am glad these girls get to see the other side and what it means to win a state championship,” Chapin head coach **Chad Bridges** said. “This has been a three-year run trying to play for the girls who graduated. I am so thankful we got back here and got the gold medal, not the silver. It is very satisfying and so happy for the girls.”

Boys soccer

The **Cardinal Newman** soccer team wrapped up its seventh straight state championship with a 1-0 victory over **Porter Gaud** May 9 at Cardinal Newman.

In the 35th minute of play, **Quade Wilson** fed a shot to **Jasper Westfall** near the middle of the box. Westfall drove a shot into the back of the net for the game’s only score.

“I think this feels the same way,” Cardinals head coach **Will Eudy** said after winning his 12th title. “This is a different group of kids, a different team, a different mentality. At the beginning of the year, this group was winning a lot of games 1-0, big games. Then we hit a little rough patch and made some changes. The team adapted to them.”

Boys tennis

A.C. Flora may have lost six seniors from last year’s state championship win, but that didn’t deter the Falcons from returning to the state final—or losing any game, for that matter.

The Falcons breezed past **Bishop England** 6-0 to repeat as 4A state champions and continued their 49-match winning streak that dates from May 1, 2024. The boys joined the A.C. Flora girls, who won their second state championship last fall, at the top of the 4A heap.

“You never discount BE or any of the schools on the coast,” said Falcons head coach **Amy Martin**, who has led the boys to five state championships and the girls team to two state titles. “Going into this state finals undefeated was a huge mark, an exclamation point to close it out with one more win. Did I expect a 6-0 sweep, no. Will I take it, absolutely.”

Three of A.C. Flora’s five wins in singles went down as shutouts. **Silas Cecchini** defeated **Dante Nava** 6-2, 7-6 at No. 1, **Jude Smyth** defeated **Roland Wier** 6-3, 6-4 at No.2, **Vijay Sinha** defeated **Ben Burnette** 6-0, 6-0 at No.3, **Will Hewitt** defeated **Ryland Shaw** 6-0, 6-0 at No.4, and **Will Bryan** defeated **Kieran Sharpe** 6-0, 6-0.

In No.2 doubles, **Sam McCormick** and **Reid Denemark** defeated **Declan Finley** and **Andrew Hamilton** 6-1, 6-1.

Girls Lacrosse

Heathwood Hall scored three goals in the closing minutes of the first half and went on to defeat **Porter Gaud** 8-6 May 8 at Heathwood Hall.

Sophia Turner led the team with three goals, and **Juliana Angus** and **Everette Pope** scored two goals apiece. **Sophia Genovese** added a goal.

“I’m really proud of them,” Heathwood Hall acting head coach **Kristen Austin** said. “I’m super humbled to be able to coach these girls. It’s truly been an honor. They are an amazing group, and it’s truly amazing for us.”

overall prospect entering the 2026 season.

As a junior, Williams caught 61 passes for 1,066 yards and 12 TD’s. During the same season Patterson caught 51 passes for 912 yards and 10 TD’s. Last year the Tar Heels signed WR’s **Carnell Warren** of **Bluffton** and **Zay Robertson** of **Dillon**. Who’s next? Rounding out the *HSSR’s* top 10 are Woodruff RB **Aiden Gibson** (6-1,212) headed to **Auburn**, **Dutch Fork** DL **Jaden Werth** is headed to **Clemson**, and **Hammond** LB **Jackson Ross** (6-4, 215) is headed to **South Carolina**.

Please see entire HSSR 2027 Top 100 list on page 49 of this issue.

All-Time Coaching Records														
REGION 1-A-A-A-A-A			GREER PICKENS SENECA TRAVELERS REST			WILL YOUNG JAMES REYNOLDS DAVID CRANE CHRIS GOODMAN REGION 3-A-A-A-A			OR'BURG-WILKINSON CHRIS CARTER 58-82					
SCHOOL EASLEY GREENVILLE GREENWOOD HILLCREST J L MANN MAULDIN T L HANNA WOODMONT	COACH SAM R. HOUSTON STEVE WATSON CHRIS LINER BENNETT SWYGERT BRYCE SMILEY ANDRE COOK JASON TONE SC 54-13 GA 24-20 MALCOLM BOYD	RECORD 1-9 32-24 109-85 18-7 FIRST YR 4-27 24-20 FIRST YR	REGION 2-A-A-A-A-A			REGION 4-A-A-A-A			REGION 1-AA					
SCHOOL BOILING SPRINGS DORMAN EASTSIDE GAFFNEY BYRNES RIVERSIDE SPARTANBURG WADE HAMPTON	COACH MATT REEL JAKE MORRIS ANDRE WOOLCOCK DONNIE LITTLEJOHN REGGIE SHAW MATTHEW ROCHESTER MARK HODGE REUBEN WRIGHT	RECORD 53-36 9-12 37-47 FIRST YR 129-78 22-22 130-67 11-40	REGION 3-A-A-A-A-A			SCHOOL AIKEN AIRPORT BROOKLAND-CAYCE GILBER GRAY COLL. MIDLAND VALLEY NORTH AUGUSTA SOUTH AIKEN			COACH KEN FLOYD BRIAN RIMPF TREIGH SULLIVAN MARCUS SURRATT WALTER WILSON BOBBY COLLINS DEAN BOYD	RECORD 25-12 71-30 50-67 15-41 101-94 55-53 240-134	SCHOOL BLACKSBURG CHESNEE CLINTON LANDRUM LIBERTY			
SCHOOL CATAWBA RIDGE CLOVER FORT MILL INDIANLAND NATION FORD NORTHWESTERN ROCK HILL	COACH ZAC LENDYAK PERRY WOOLBRIGHT ROB MCNEELY ADAM HASTINGS JAKE BENTLEY PAGE WOFFORD LEON BOULWARE	RECORD 33-31 95-73 8-56 27-24 FIRST YR 58-15 4-7	REGION 4-A-A-A-A-A			REGION 5-A-A-A-A			COACH JOSH BATCHER BRETT CHAPPELL COREY FOUNTAIN MIKE REID PAUL SUTHERLAND	RECORD 6-24 6-6 109-31 FIRST YR 153-112	REGION 2-AA			
SCHOOL CHAPIN DUTCH FORK IRMO LEXINGTON RIVER BLUFF WHITE KNOLL	COACH RYAN COLE TOM KNOTTS AARON BRAND STEWART YOUNG PERRY PARKS NICK PELHAM	RECORD 6-6 178-28-1 48-23 93-38 54-46 30-20	REGION 5-A-A-A-A-A			REGION 6-A-A-A-A			SCHOOL AMERICAN LEADERSHIP BATESBURG-LEESVILLE NINETY-SIX PELION SALUDA STROM THURMOND	COACH KEMPER AMICK GARY ADAMS MATTHEW BENNETT CORY HELMS GREG WOERNER ANDREW WEBB	RECORD 109-79 46-39 11-11 6-18 FIRST YR 40-38	REGION 3-AA		
SCHOOL BLYTHEWOOD LUGOFF-ELGIN RIDGE VIEW SPRING VALLEY SUMTER WESTWOOD WEST FLORENCE	COACH JAMES MARTIN JARVIS LITTLEJOHN DEREK HOWARD II NORMAN WASHINGTON MARK BARNES STEPHEN BURRIS CHAD WILKES	RECORD 19-21 19-20 48-28 FIRST YR 98-20 18-8 62-22	REGION 6-A-A-A-A-A			REGION 1-AA-A			SCHOOL CHESTER COLUMBIA EAU CLAIRE FAIRFIELD CENTRAL MID CAROLINA	COACH VICTOR FLOYD JASON BUSH SHAQUILLE HILTON DEMETRIUS DAVIS CHRIS ARNOULT	RECORD 153-116 27-74 1-35 17-52 46-66	REGION 4-AA		
SCHOOL BERKELEY CANE BAY GOOSE CREEK LUCY BECKHAM STRATFORD WANDO	COACH ERIC LODGE RUSSELL ZEHR JASON WINSTEAD JAMEL SMITH DENNIE MCDANIEL ISAIAH PERRIN	RECORD 12-12 63-48 40-34 20-15 40-52 5-6	REGION 7-A-A-A-A-A			REGION 2-AA-A			SCHOOL ANDREW JACKSON BUFORD CENTRAL CHERAW CHESTERFIELD NORTH CENTRAL	COACH TODD SHIGLEY ED SUSI JOHNATHAN EASON ANDY POOLE NICK DIXON TYROONE DRAKEFORD	RECORD 50-36 63-97 22-26 60-42 FIRST YR 29-50	REGION 5-AA		
SCHOOL ASHLEY RIDGE FORT DORCHESTER JAMES ISLAND R B STALL SUMMERVILLE WEST ASHLEY	COACH ASHLEY HASKINS SHAUN LORENZANO JAMAR MCKOY KEN FREEMAN IAN RAFFERTY RASHAD GRAHAM	RECORD 64-90 6-6 42-15 0-9 45-14 FIRST YR	REGION 1-AA-A-A-A			REGION 3-AA-A			SCHOOL ACADEMIC MAGNET ANDREWS BURKE PHILIP SIMMONS TIMBERLAND WOODLAND	COACH AUSTIN MILLER SCOTT DURHAM ANTHONY STERLING ERIC BENDIG GREG WRIGHT EDDIE FORD	RECORD FIRST YR 86-45 36-103 46-31 32-31 104-43	REGION 6-AA		
SCHOOL EMERALD FOUNTAIN INN LAURENS SOUTHSIDE WESTSIDE WREN	COACH TAD DUBOSE BRETT NICHOLS GREG PORTER A J MILLIS BRIAN LANE ANTHONY FRATE	RECORD 15-36 9-22 122-79 FIRST YR 143-69 40-21	REGION 2-AA-A-A-A			REGION 4-AA-A			SCHOOL ATLANTIC COLLEGIATE EAST CLARENDON KINGSTREE LAKE CITY MANNING MARION MULLINS	COACH ANTOINE RIVENS LARRY CORNELIUS BRANDON CANTRELL RONNIE BAKER REGGIE KENNEDY BRIAN HENNECY MARC LOWERY	RECORD 2-9 64-92 31-63 197-148 28-15 7-4	REGION 7-AA		
SCHOOL BERE A BLUE RIDGE DANIEL	COACH DREW CHISHOLM JOHN BOGGS CHRIS STONE	RECORD 39-57 50-117 10-12	REGION 1-AA-A-A-A			REGION 3-AA-A			SCHOOL ABBEVILLE CALHOUN FALLS DIXIE MCCORMICK WARE SHOALS WHITMIRE	COACH JAMIE NICKLES ZAK THEUS MARK SORROW LEROY COLLIER CHRIS JOHNSON ANDREW CAMPBELL	RECORD 235-46-1 5-27 13-30 5-17 43-68 14-18	REGION 1-A		
SCHOOL BATTERY CREEK HANAHAN NORTH CHARLESTON OCEANSIDE COLLEGIATE	COACH TERRANCE ASHE MILAN TURNER ADRIAN GRADY BRENT LAPRAD	RECORD 10-36 125-54 4-6 FIRST YR	REGION 6-AA-A			REGION 2-AA			SCHOOL C A JOHNSON GREAT FALLS LAMAR LEE CENTRAL LEWISVILLE MCBEE	COACH RODNEY BARR SYVELLE NEWTON TYLER BOYD JUSTIN DANNER TRENT USHER ANDY KARCHER	RECORD 30-54 2-8 22-3 53-72 35-28 11-11	REGION 2-A		
SCHOOL BLACKVILLE-HILDA CALHOUN COUNTY HUNTER-KINARD-TYLER RIDGE SPRING-MONETTA WAGENER-SALLEY WILLISTON-ELKO	COACH KEVIN JONES WAYNE FARMER WILLIE FELDER JERRY BRANNON BLAZE GILLESPIE KENNY LIPSEY	RECORD 20-14 160-143 27-21 7-16 2-7 33-46	REGION 4-AA			REGION 5-AA-A			REGION 6-AA-A			REGION 7-AA-A		

HSSR All-State Baseball Team

2026 HSSR-SCHSL Baseball Superlatives:
2026 HSSR-SCHSL Co-Mr. Baseball—Taj March-land-James Island
2026 HSSR-SCHSL Co-Mr. Baseball-Carson Bole-man-Southside Christin
2026 HSSR-SCHSL AAAAA Div. I Baseball Player of Year— Trip Ostergard-James Island
2026 HSSR-SCHSL AAAAA Div. II Baseball Player of Year—Mac Berry-Chapin
2026 HSSR-SCHSL AAAAA Baseball Player of the Year— Charlie Scott-AC Flora
2026 HSSR-SCHSL AAA Co-Baseball Player of Year-2026- Hank Grider-Dillon
2026 HSSR-SCHSL AAA Co-Baseball Player of Year-2026- Bo Lowrance-Christ Church
HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class AA Baseball Player of Year— Luke Young-Clinton
HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class A Baseball Player of Year—BW Berry-Latta
2026 HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Div. I AAAAA Baseball Coach of the Year-Matt Spivey-James Island
2026 HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Div. II AAAAA Baseball Coach of Year— Dell Lever-Chapin
2026 HSSR-SCHSL 2026 AAAA Baseball Coach of the Year—Andy Hallett-AC Flora e
2026 HSSR-SCHSL 2026 AAA Baseball Coach of Year— Scott Freman-Southside Christian
2026 HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class AA Baseball Coach of Year—Peyton Spangler-Clinton
2026 HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class A Baseball Coach of Year— Robbie Brown-Latta

HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class Div. I AAAAA All-State Baseball
Palmer Hornick-Dorman
Connor Wells-Dorman
Brennan New-Dorman
Christian Spivey-Lexington
Parker Reavis-Carolina Forest
Ethan Offing-Dutch Fork
Connor Dantzler-James Iisland
Marion Davis-Sumter
Banks Alexander-River Bluff
Banks Wickersham-Fort Dorchester
Cooper Jones-James Island
Aiden Spivey-James Island
JD Moore-Boiling Springs
Ethan Cooker-Mauldin
Johnny Collins-Blythewood
States Farr-Dorman
Ashley Shiffer-JL Mann

HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class Div. II AAAAA All-State Baseball
Hudson Clark-Berkeley
Sawyer Smith-North Myrtle Beach
Kobe Thomas-Berkeley
Alex Smith-Ntion Ford
Garrett Shipman-Hillcrest
Logan Crain-Lugoff Elgin
Gabe Priest-North Myrtle Beach
Dillon Woods-White Knoll
Mac Berry-Chapin
Bryce Meil-Catawba Ridge
Rome DeRenzo-St. James

HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class AAAAA All-State Baseball
Roper Wentzy-AC Flora
Thomas Bishop-Camden
Daniel Butts-Airport
Carter Kelly-Fountain Inn

Beau Hite-Emerald
Tyler Vassey-Seneca
Brandon Anderson-Hartsville
Tyler Hernandez-AC Flora
Rylan Bulls-Airport
Mark Law-Wilson
William Cutshall-Seneca
Grayson Austin-Wren
Grant Royer-Gilbert
Kaden Jones-Travelers Rest
Landon Jeffcoat-Airport
Zak Perry-Gray Collegiate

HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class AAA All-State Baseball
Will Fountain-Fox Creek
Chris Polm-Hanahan
Finn Kucaba-Oceanside Collegiate
Xavier Dukes-Aynor
Tymone Abrams-Newberry
Kayden Barnaby-Woodruff
Cam Brown-Mountain View Prep
Lewis McAlister-Chaman
Quinn Walsh-St. Joseph’s
Kendall Wright-Swansea

HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class AA All-State Baseball
Cody Branham—Central
Eli Chowning-ACA
Jaxon baker-Andrews
Nolan Collins-Landrum
Barnes McConnell-East Clarendon
Anthony Strong-Cheraw
Nick Gordon-Cheraw
Layton Tilotson-Bridges Prep
TJ Borow-Liberty
Luke Milling-Mid-Carolina
Hunter Morris-Woodland
Luke Young-Clinton
Zaiden Hammett-Chesnee
Parker Sutley-Ninety-Six
Amar Hanna-Lake City
Max Gullede-Chesterfield

HSSR-SCHSL 2026 Class A All-State Baseball
Cody Barr-Lamar
Trey Deason-Abbeville
Will Carter-Dixie
Landon King-Lake View
JJ Melton-Lake View
Bryce King-Lake View
Bryson Shaver-Lewisville
Fischer Richardson-Latta
BW Berry-Latta
Dylan Good-Lewisville
Nasi Singleyon-Bamberf-Ehrhardt
Staylon Johnson-Dixie
Bryce Gunter-Horse Creek
Kamden Wood-Great Falls
Jonah Poston-Hannah-Pamplico
Keegan Snipes-Dixie
Mason Weatherford-Latta

HSSR Statewide All-Rookie 2026 Baseball Team

2026 HSSR-SCISA Mr. Baseball-Slade Burd
2026 HSSR-SCISA AAAAA Player of Year— Roman Colella-Hilton Head Christian
2026 HSSR-SCISA AAA Player of Year— Crews Felder-Calhoun Academy
2026 HSSR-SCISA AA Player of Year—Reed Almers-

Dorchester Academy
2026 HSSR-SCISA Class A Player of Year— Parker Kiser-Holly Hill Academy
2026 HSSR-SCISA AAAAA Coach of Year—Jay Scarbro-Hilton Head Christian
2026 HSSR-SCISA AAA Coach of Year— Todd Layton-Calhoun Academy
2026 HSSR-SCISA AA Coach of Year- Brent Jackson-Dorchester Academy
2026 HSSR-SCISA Class A Coach of Year—Andy Green-Holly Hill Academy

2026 HSSR-SCISA AAAAA All-State Baseball
Colt Spargur-Hilton Head Christian
Chip Hetzel-Hilton Head Christian
Tucker Nelson-Hilton Head Christian
Jackson Richardson-Hilton Head Christian
Grady Fuller-Pinewood Prep
Brooklyn Ellis-Porter Guad
Coluy Babie-Hammond
Maddox Nuckols-Augusta Christian
Josh Niwonger-LMA
Charlie Davis-Augusta Christian
Connor Hooks-Cardinal Newman
Charles Morrow-Heathwood Hall
Will Sports-Cardinal Newman
Benson Elmore-Wilson Hall
Ty Fajardo-Ben Lippen
Stewart Miske-John Paul II
Logan Cotter-John Paul II
Garrison Copeland-Trinity Collegiate
Zander Duncan-Camden Military

HSSR-SCISA 2026 AAA All-State Baseball
Wil Struck-Calhoun Academy
Austin Summers-Calhoun Academy
Colt Layton-Calhoun Academy
Caden Morris-Williamsburg Academy
Connor Morris-Williamsburg Academy
Cullen Sightler-Calhoun Academy
Brycen Moore-Greenwood Christian
Leland Reed-Greenwood Christian
Marshall Livingston-Orangeburg Prep
Tristen Heckman-Pee Dee Academy
Riley Minton-Florence Christian
Tyler Britschge-Hilton Head Prep
Joey Hatchell-Clarendon Hall

HSSR-SCISA 2026 Class AA All-State Baseball
Walker Terry-Andrew Jackson
Warren Judy-Dorchester Academy
Andrew Bowers-Lee Academy
Landon Olsen-Lee Academy
Landon Holly-Dorchester Academy
Joey Hatchell-Clarendon Hall
Landon Johnson-Andrew Jackson
Channing Terry-Colleton Prep
Walker McCutcheon-Carolina Academy
Landon Edge-Marlboro Academy
Beckham Jacobs-Marlboro Academy
Brayden Burke-Laurens Academy

HSSR-SCISA 2026 Class A All-State Baseball
Tucker McGinty-WW King
Elijah Hutto-WW King
Tyler Green-Holly Hill Academy
Brady Johnson-Wardlaw Academy
Charlie Bonds-Richard Winn
Richard Bonds-Richard Winn
Jake Kirven-Holly Hill Academy

Earley, continued from **Cover**
year, the event will run Friday-Sunday. The following week will be a “dead week” for high schools, allowing coaches to spend time with family before the fall sports season begins.

The changes will affect the number of individual sport clinic speakers but Earley feels the new format can work.
“We will still have speakers but the setting will be more of general assembly format,” he said. “There will be meetings of individual sports but not as many. We’ve have input that maybe the clinic has become stale so we want to look at things that may energize the coaches and the clinic. Sometimes change is needed.”

The clinic will remain in Greenville for the next two years before moving to Charleston in 2028 and 2029. Earley prefers using Charleston again in 2030. Here is the upcoming schedule.

2026 – Greenville, July 24-26
2027 – Greenville, July 23-25
2028 – Charleston, July 24-26
2029 – Charleston, July 21-23
2030 – TBA, July 20-22

This year’s Academy kicks off on Thursday (July 23) with a scholarship golf tournament at the Greer Country Club .There are 32 foursomes already in the field and the money raised directly

Spartanburg Day, continued from pg. 18
tioning Specialist with Distinction and a USA Weightlifting Level 2 coach. Holman is a former member of the USA Under-18 national volleyball team and went on to become a three-letter winner at Baldwin-Wallace.

“For nearly 15 years she has coached elite club volleyball and helped athletes grow in confidence, discipline, and teamwork,” said Coach Cerino. “Her energy and commitment to young people make her an outstanding addition to the SDS community.”

Maggie Cubitt Watson is the new boy’s and girl’s Tennis Head at the SDS.

“Maggie brings D-1 playing experience and a passion for developing the next generation of tennis players,” said Coach Cerino. “She competed at both LSU and the **College of Charleston**, earning four varsity letters during her collegiate career. Her experience reflects the discipline and commitment required to compete at a high level, both academically and athletically.

“Maggie currently serves as an assistant tennis pro at Mountain Brook Swim and Racquet Club where she works with players of all ages through private lessons, clinics, camps and group programs. She focuses on helping athletes build confidence, improve technically, and develop a lifelong love for the game.”

Coach Watson holds a Master’s degree from the C of C, and a degree in Digital Marketing

Camden, continued from pg. 50
Beckley will be back as the baseball coach. He guided Camden to the state playoffs for the 23rd time in his 26 seasons in charge. The Bulldogs won district championships in both of the years they competed at the AAAA level.

Sterling Council is returning for his sixth season as boys basketball head coach, while **Lewis Mungo** is back for his third year heading up girls basketball.

Matt Spolski returns as the boys cross country

benefits the Travis Perry scholarship fund and the Herlong scholarship of the SCACA. Both provide financial assistance to the children of high school coaches.

“I think the new weekend format with the following week allowing for coaches to reset and spend time with family is going to work out great,” Earley said.

Earley has plenty of knowledge and experience with the ins and outs of the coaches association. He became actively involved with former director **Keith Richardson** in 2000 and has been a major force in making the Touchstone Energy North-South all-star football game and major event every December.

“I learned from the best.” Earley says. “I became more and more involved in the mission of the coaches association. Then, since January (2023), I have been working with coach (**Shell**) **Dula**. It has been a smooth transition period. I have a much greater appreciation for the job.”

One thing Earley has noticed is that this state’s coaching association is as productive and hands on as any state in the country. He knows the importance of a strong coaches association.

“This business is not what it used to be. It’s a scary time in many ways,” he said. “We’ve got a lot of issues to deal with.

“Our coaches, and our kids, need an advocate.

from LSU. “We are excited for the positivity, energy, and competitive spirit she brings to SDS tennis,” said Coach Cerino.

Barrett Rowe is the new Lacrosse Program Head at the SDS school. “Barrett Rowe represents a new generation of coaches and leaders in high school athletics,” said Coach Cerino. “A standout defender at **Wofford College**, she built one of the most accomplished defensive careers in program history while excelling academically.”

Rowe is a psychology major with a minor in Education and Medicine and Liberal Arts. In college Rowe was a member of the Presidential Honor roll, Dean’s list, including the IWLCA Academic honor roll. On the field she has been named first team all-conference, Preseason Defensive POY, and has set multiple records in caused turnovers and ground balls.

“Just as important, Barrett has already shown a strong commitment to mentoring young athletes,” said Coach Cerino. “She has coached youth Lacrosse through private training and club programs all while gaining classroom experience as a teaching assistant in elementary education.”

Barrett also serves as President and Ambassador for Morgan’s Message, supporting student-athlete mental health, and is active in SAAC, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and community service work.

“We are excited to see her build a girl’s

They need representation and the association has taken on that role and run with it. This organization is growing every year. We have set records for coaches registration this year. It’s an exciting time. There’s a lot going on in the world of athletics and that makes the coaches association even more important.”

Earley reports that the association has grown to a record of more than 8,000 registered coaches. Revenue intake also is on the rise, which will allow the association to expand its scholarship program for children of coaches.

“That is very important and we want to see that continue to grow,” Earley said. “We were able to award 129 kids of coaches with some scholarship money in the last year. Let’s keep growing that number each year.”

A major concern of high school coaches is the increasing number of athletes that are transferring to other schools, both in-state and out-of-state schools.

“Coaches now have to recruit their own players to stay,” Earley said. “There is an increasing number of our athletes leaving the state for the sports academies. For some, it works out ok, but we need to convince our kids they can get the same coaching and competition right here.”

Lacrosse program at SDS, grounded in excellence, character, and opportunity,” said Coach Cerino.

Other outstanding coaches at SDS who all return for the 2026-27 school year include: Golf Program Head **Todd White**, Soccer Program Athletic Coordinator, **Graham Brewer**, Cross Country Program Head, **Joel Sansbury**, Swimming Program Head, **Molly Duesterhaus**, Baseball Program Head, **Travis Dawkins**, Track & Field Program Head **Isaiah Michl**, and Cheerleading Program Head, **Jennifer Spearman**.

Coach Cerino concluded his comments by saying: “Looking ahead to the 2026-27 school year, as we begin this next chapter, our focus is clear,” he said. “Whether on the football field, volleyball court, basketball court, tennis court, baseball field, or Lacrosse field our goal is to provide meaningful experiences for every student athlete.

“At Spartanburg Day success is measured by more than championships,” said Coach Cerino. “It is also seen in the confidence students gain, the relationships they build, the resilience they develop, and the character they carry with them with long after graduation.

“With the return of football and this outstanding group of new coaches, the future of SDS athletics is full of energy and opportunity,” said Coach Cerino.

tive cheer team, and Paul Ahern will be the girls soccer head coach. **Tristany Radford** will return for her second year as the leader of the volleyball program.

Former girls basketball head coach **Natalie Norris** is the assistant athletic director.

Tiffany Ellis will be in charge of the competi-

Baseball Champs, continued from pg. 6

Class AAA

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher

Simpsonville - Carson Boleman was not on the mound, but his two-run homer in the third inning, helped Southside Christian earn a hard-fought 8-7 win over Oceanside Collegiate on May 28 as the Sabres won their 5th straight state championship under head coach Scott Freeman.

Only two other teams in Palmetto state history have won five or more consecutive baseball state titles. Lake View won five straight under Kip Herlong between 1997 and 2001 while David Horton’s Bamberg Ehrhardt teams won 8 straight between 1974 and 1981.

Boleman, considered a top 10 first round major league draft pick this July, is without a doubt the best pitcher ever in the prep ranks in South Carolina. He is 35-0 since his 8th grade season on the Sabres varsity, and he was injured his freshman season and did not pitch.

In his career, Boleman faced 688 batters and he had an incredible 445 strikeouts as a varsity pitcher with a .033 ERA. Boleman’s (6-4, 210), fastball hit 94 mph during his final outing for the Sabres, in a 7-1 win over the Landsharks, in game one. Boleman has superb

Softball Champs, continued from pg. 7

CHS field to sweep the best-of-3 AA state championship series.

“It just means everything to bring it back to Saluda,” said Tigers head coach Hannah Towery. “It’s been a tough ride after last season (getting swept by East Clarendon in the AA title series), and to me it means everything to give the girls this opportunity.

“I’ve always wanted to give the girls this experience because I never had this chance. I played on a lot of teams that came up short. It just means everything to make history for a third year in a row.”

SHS finishes the year with a 29-3 record. The Rams finish 17-10.

Sophomore pitcher Miller Martin and junior center-fielder Amy Sorcia said it was sweet to get the title after coming up short last season.

“It feels really good because we’ve really grown from last year,” Martin said. “It means a lot to me because this is my sister’s (senior second baseman Ava Martin) last year, she’s a senior and she’s graduating, and it just feels good to come out here and play good and win it.”

“We worked hard last year and sadly we fell short,” Sorcia said. “I think we definitely knew what we wanted to accomplish and we did it.”

Towery decided to throw both of her pitchers on Thursday, and the move worked like a charm, not that Towery expected anything else.

Left-hander Kyle McGlohorn started in the circle and worked the first three innings. She allowed three hits and struck out two while walking none.

Righty Miller Martin came on in the fourth. Martin, who allowed just two hits while striking out 13 in a complete game in the Tigers’ 7-1 win on Wednesday, allowed three hits on Thursday while striking out seven and walking none.

“I told them before the game we were going to play this game like we’ve done the whole entire year,” Towery said. “They’ve been our rock the whole entire year, both pitchers, and we were going to finish the year just how we started and ride what got us there, which was the two of them. I couldn’t be more proud of them.”

Freshman Ashton Cassidy had a strong pitching performance for Chesterfield. She went the distance, allowing six hits while walking two and fanning four. Only two of the runs were earned.

“She is an awesome pitcher,” second-year head coach Graham Harpe said of Cassidy, one of just two starters from last season at the same position. “ She has carried us. She is definitely one of the MVPs (most valuable players) on this team.”

The game was scoreless through the first four in-

command of four pitches of the series with a dozen scouts watching from the stands.

After the big win, Coach Freeman talked about many things. “Once we got into the playoffs we were really locked into finishing out this way,” said Coach Freeman. “They knew the goal that we had, and that we wanted to finish out this way, and this game today was the toughest game we have had in the playoffs.

Coach Freeman talked about just how special it has been to coach a player like Boleman. “He is a once in a lifetime talent,” said Coach Freeman. “He is an incredible kid to coach. He is the hardest working player I have coached, and he is such a leader as an example person on and off the field. I have no doubt that he will be voted as one of four captains for the season when the votes in a couple days.

Coach Freeman cited all the senior starters on the team. “Our right fielder CJ Aubuchon got the game winning hit today in the bottom of the 6th and he came through for us time-after-time throughout the season,” said Coach Freeman. “Will Fulcher had a great game on the mound tonight throwing three solid innings. Both guys might not have had a great start to the season, but they came on very strong with key moments in the playoffs.

Oceanside Collegiate is coached by Britt Reames and the Landsharks were playing for their third state title in a row, after winning a title in

nings. SHS final broke through with a run in the top of the fifth.

Reese Shaw started the inning with a single, and Kamryn Campbell drew a walk. After an out, Ashlynn Vereen hit into a fielder’s choice to leave runners on the corners with two outs.

Vereen took off for second on the first pitch to Nyla Jordan, and catcher Madison Vanderpool sailed her throw into center field. Shaw easily scored to make it 1-0.

Saluda made it 2-0 in the sixth. Zoey Springs singled with one out before Ava Martin drew a walk with two outs. Aubrey Marnati then delivered a single to score Springs.

The Tigers got a big insurance run in the seventh. With one out, Sorcia sent the ball over the left field fence for a home run to make it 3-0.

“When I went up to hit the first two imes, I got it right down the middle both times,” said Sorcia, who was 2-for-3 with a triple and four runs batted in in the opener. “That’s what I was looking for and, yes sir, that’s what I got.”

Miller Martin retired the side in order in the bottom of the inning to set off a big celebration, not only by the players, but by the Saluda faithful as well.

“I wasn’t really stressed, but I was dialed in to make sure they didn’t score,” Miller Martin said of taking over a scoreless game.

Class A Softball

By Billy G. Baker
Editor

Pamplico -- Home teams from rural areas in South Carolina seem to always celebrate state championships a little longer after the hard-fought battle is over. That was the case in Hannah-Pamplico High School’s highly competitive 4-3 win over Whitmire in Game 2 of the the Class A softball state championship series on Friday that gave it the state title.

It was the Lady Raiders’ second state title since 2023 under head coach Amber Knight. Knight first complimented the Whitmire team.

Turning to her own team, Knight talked about the four seniors who started in the game who also played in the 2023 state title game. They are catcher Meredith Stone, headed to USC Upstate, pitcher Kadence Poston, headed to Western Carolina, along with shortstop Chloe Cooper, and centerfielder Savannah Owens.

Stone and Poston will represent the Lady Raiders in

Reame’s first year as coach in 2024. It was the second straight year losing to the Sabres.

In the title game the Sabres were led at the plate by LF Kaden Graham’s two hits and one RBI, along with Boleman’s two run homer. Also, third baseman Jacob Wiggs, DH Beckett DeSario (7th grader), contributed one hit each. Aubuchon’s hit and three RBI’s were major factors in the win. Junior SS Reeves Israel had a hit also.

OCA was led at the plate by Crone who had two hits and two RBI’s. Johnson contributed a hit along with DH Barrett Svagerka. Third baseman Tanner Fleming had a hit and two RBI’s also. LF Christopher O’Leary contributed a hit and one RBI.

SC used four pitchers in the championship game. Senior LHP Bennett Candler started and went 3.2 innings allowing four hits and striking out three. Fulcher went three innings allowing two hits and striking out four and Wiggs closed out the game with one strike-out.

OCA started with the talented LHP Reames who went five innings, allowed five hits, and had four strikeouts. Hank Griffith worked 1.2 innings allowing a hit with one strike out and Johnson closed the game allowing one hit with one strikeout.

the upcoming annual North-South All-Star Game. Poston was also named to the Class A All-State team. Stone and Poston were All-Region players along with Cooper and Lee.

In the team huddle prior to the game, Knight said she issued this charge to her team.

“I told them to not to make the ball game bigger than it is,” she said. “It’s our nine girls against their nine girls, and we are at home, with our fans, so do not make anything bigger than it is. Have fun and leave it all on the field.”

After the game, Whitmire head coach Andrew Campbell was upbeat about the future of his young team. “We will have 13 of 15 players back for next season, and our two seniors were contributors, but not starters,” he said. “I just told the girls that it was an honor for them to be the first team from Whitmire to ever play for the state title. We lost two very competitive games by one run (4-3 both times).

“I am so proud of these girls,” said Campbell. “They’ve accomplished something we have never accomplished in Whitmire softball history. They did not lay down in either game. They kept fighting and I love them all.”

The team’s five All-Region candidates, when they are officially announced in a few days, are expected to be junior centerfielder Chole Hix, sophomore short-stop Autumn Gilliam, junior pitcher Kenleigh Epps, sophomore catcher Alleigh Corley, and freshman third baseman Ariana Jenkins.

With the score tied 3-3, H-P came to bat in the bottom of the seventh. Owens led off with a walk. Poston crushed a single to advance Owens to second. Stone’s fly out to center advanced Owens to third base. Cooper was intentionally walked. Then Lee singled to center, scoring Owens for the walk-off 4-3 win.

For the game, H-P collected eight hits. Poston, Stone, and Lee each had two hits. Leftfielder Alexa Wenger and Kaylie Avant contributed one hit each.

In the circle, Poston worked all seven innings, giving up nine hits and one earned run while compiling seven strikeouts.

Whitmire was led at the plate by Gilliam with two hits and one RBI. Epps also had two hits. Corley joined five other Wolverine hitters with one hit each. The others were leftfielder Holly Robertson, first baseman Raylin Vicars, rightfielder Brielle Whitmire and sophomore infielder Kinsley Hood.

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2026 Baseball Championships Wrap Up

SCHSL crowns its newest baseball state champions

**** These are shortened versions of the championship stories. For the full versions and to see the championship photos, please visit us online at www.HSSR.com**

Class A

By Dennis Brunson
Hssr.com Associate Editor

Florence – After being within two outs with no one on base from winning the Class A baseball state championship, **Latta** watched **McBee** score eight runs in the top of the seventh inning for a 12-5 victory in Game 2 of the best-of-3 title series on Wednesday. To add insult to injury, the Vikings coughed up the lead on their home field — **Buddy Johnson Memorial Baseball Stadium**.

So what words of wisdom did LHS head coach Robbie Brown impart upon his players to help prepare them for a winner-take-all Game 3 after such a devastating loss?

“It’s a series,” Brown said. “We can’t worry about the first win and the first loss. This is why you get to play three games.”

And it took all seven innings of Game 3 to truly determine a winner. Scoreless for 4 ½ innings, Latta broke the tie with one run in the bottom of the fifth only to see the Panthers score twice in the top of the sixth.

However, the Vikings used a 2-out, 2-run bloop double from sophomore **Caden Hyatt** in the bottom of the inning to regain the lead, and senior **BW Berry** struck out the side in the seventh for a complete-game, 3-2 victory on Saturday at a packed **South Florence High** field that likely held close to all of the residents from both Latta and McBee.

The title is the 10th in program history for LHS, the first since 2018. Latta finishes the season with a 27-10 record, while McBee closes out at 22-13-1.

“We knew we had new life coming in on Saturday,” Hyatt said. “It was a different ball game. We just flipped the script. We knew if we played our ball game we would win this game.”

As stated earlier though, it was not easy.

The Vikings’ **Logan Byrd** was hit by relief pitcher Peyton Brigrman to open their half of the sixth. Courtesy runner **Danny McDowell** made it to third on a pair of groundout soft rollers to third baseman **Zane Boykin**. **Zach Lane** drew a walk to set the stage for Hyatt.

He hit a sinking liner toward right field. Instead of conceding the run, rightfielder **Lucas King** tried to make an inning-ending catch. He was unable to do so and both McDowell and Lane scored to make it 3-2.

“I knew we were going to tie it at a minimum, if not go ahead,” Brown said in regards to his thoughts as Hyatt stepped in the batter’s box. “They’ve done it all year. They’ve been resilient

and I’m honored to coach these guys.”

“I was like the team needs me,”

Hyatt said. “I’ve got to come through here, I’ve got to be big. I just wanted to focus on the at-bat and put the ball in play.

“I was real nervous (when I hit it). I thought he might catch the ball. I just kept running and the ball fell.”

Berry fanned **Cooper Rollings**, King and McBee leadoff hitter **Chris Stone** to close out the game and set off a big celebration. It was the second complete game of the series for Berry, who scattered four hits in an 11-1, 6-inning Game 1 victory the previous Saturday. He again allowed just four hits while striking out 10, nine coming over the final four innings. He walked two, one intentionally, and hit a batter.

AAAAA Division II Baseball

By Thomas Grant Jr.

Special to HSSR

Chapin — Early in **Dell**

Lever’s first season as **Chapin High School** baseball head coach, he jokingly referred to his team as “the master of 1-run games.”

Fittingly, the Eagles’ final game of the season was their 11th decided by one run. Holding a 4-3 lead at home on Thursday against **T.L. Hanna** in Game 2 of the AAAAA Division II state championship series, reliever **Brewer Haggard** allowed a leadoff single to **Jackson Robinson**.

It only took three pitches for Chapin to shut down the Yellow Jackets’ final threat. After starting a double play after fielding a **Reece Oakley** groundball, shortshop **Caden Guy** threw out **Tatum Manning** at first base for the final out.

“It’s kind of how it’s been all year,” said Lever, who became the first Chapin head coach to win a state baseball title. “It always came down to one run near the end whether we won or lost.

“But we really started preaching a month ago about moments. That’s kind of been our mantra up until this point is just moments. We never know what moments are going to make or break a game. So, if we can stay calm and just relax in said moment, more often than not, we’re going to be successful and then once we got into this playoff run, our mantra became “one more” — one more pitch, one more play and so forth. If we can just relax and play ‘one more, one more,’ we’re more likely than not going to have a positive ending on the scoreboard.”

AA Baseball

By Monte Dutton

Special to HSSR

Clinton – Clinton High School’s fourth baseball state championship — and second in the past four seasons — occurred at the right time, in the right place, by the right young man.

With the score tied in the bottom of the eighth inning at Clinton’s home park

on Friday in Game 2 of the best-of-3 AA state championship series,, catcher **Luke Young** hit **Logan Newcomb’s** first pitch over the fence in left-center field, giving the Red Devils a 5-4 victory over **Atlantic Collegiate Academy** and a sweep of the series. Young and Newcomb are the AA Co-Players of the Year as chosen by the South **Carolina Baseball Coaches Association**.

Newcomb, who started in center field, was the Armada’s third pitcher of the game.

Clinton (31-3) had won Game 1 of the best-of-three series in **Myrtle Beach** on Tuesday, 5-1. The Red Devils, who won all eight of their playoff games, closed the season with 10 straight triumphs.

Young, who rewrote the Clinton record book with 13 home runs, hit a slider about 380 feet.

“I took a good swing at it. All of my teammates were up on the (dugout) fence, yelling that I got it,” said Young, a senior. “It was the same with just everybody in the stands. It’s unbelievable how much this community is behind us.”

The Red Devils only collected four hits, but two were for extra bases.

AAAA BASEBALL

By Thomas Grant Jr.

Special to HSSR

West Columbia – More than any other season, **Andy Hallett** wanted to close his 29th as **A.C. Flora High School** baseball head coach with a championship.

Just two months earlier, Hallett announced his decision to leave the program he built from humble beginnings into a state power. Hallett accepted the positions of athletics director and baseball head coach at **Midlands STEM Charter School in Winnsboro**.

Motivated to send Hallett out with an eighth state championship, the Falcons fulfilled his wishes. On Friday, they completed a best-of-3 AAAAA state championship series sweep of defending champion **Airport** with a 4-0 victory at **Eagle Stadium**.

The victory took place less than 18 hours after A.C. Flora pulled out a 2-1 victory in 10 innings at **Falcon Field**. With the win, the Falcons ended the season with a 17-game winning streak, which included a perfect 8-0 record in the postseason.

This team right here is going to go down in history as one of the greatest ones to wear an A.C. Flora uniform and have created one of the longest winning streaks of my career,” Hallett said. “In 29 years, I’ve never won this many games (in a row) before, and not only do we do it, but we do it to end the season.”

The series was highlighted by three consecutive days of postponements due to inclement weather. Before Game 1 was finally played on Thursday, there was another 3-hour delay due to thun-

derstorms.

Once play started, the Falcons’ pitching was the deciding factor. After starter **Tyler Hernandez** gave up an RBI single to **Rylan Bullis** in the first inning, A.C. Flora held the Eagles scoreless over the remaining 16 innings of the series.

AAAAA DIVISON I BASEBALL

By Thomas Grant Jr.

Special to HSSR

Lexington – There was some hesitation by **James Island High School** baseball head coach **Matt Spivey** in selecting **River Bluff High School** as the location for Saturday’s deciding game against **Dorman** in the best-of-3 AAAAA Division state championship series.

Just nine days earlier, the Trojans visited **The Swamp** looking to wrap up the Lower State title in Game 2 of that series. Sparked by four runs batted in from All-State senior **Taj Marchand**, they had a 9-0 lead over the Gators after three innings, and the Trojans were feeling pretty good at that point.

However, a resilient River Bluff rallied for nine unanswered runs to tie the game. James Island regained the lead in the top of the fifth only for **Wes Godwin** to belt a 2-run home run in the bottom half of the inning to give the Gators the improbable 11-10 comeback win.

This time around, the Trojans left their personal “**House of Horrors**” with a pleasant memory and their third straight state championship. Taking an early lead and with **Brayden Easterling** and **Marc-hand** combining for seven shutout innings on the mound, James Island defeated Dorman 5-0 for the victory.

“He doesn’t flinch,” said Spivey of Marchand, the star senior shortstop/pitcher who has signed to play at **Mississippi** but is expected to be selected in the top three rounds of the Major League Baseball draft in July. “The moment is never too big for that guy and he showed that today.”

James Island concluded the season at 31-4 with their third straight title, the last two in AAAAA Division I.

“We got together as a staff and then as a team, and said, ‘We have to conquer some demons,’ and this was the place that we wanted to do it, and I think we did that today,” said Spivey.

James Island led 2-0 after the first inning. Junior **Trip Ostergard** led off with a single. Then senior center-fielder **Connor Dantzler**, a **Tulsa** football signee, got a 1-out single to advance Ostergard to third. Dantzler advanced to second on the throw. Senior first baseman **Finn Pratt** singled to right field, scoring Ostergard to make it 1-0 with Dantzler advancing to third. **Brady Dantzler** got an RBI groundout to score his brother, making it 2-0.

See Baseball Champs, pg. 60

AD Nelson likes Dorchester coaching staff

By Dennis Brunson

hssr.com Associate Editor

St. George – The athletic teams have done a good bit of winning at **Dorchester Academy** in recent years. However, what impresses Raiders athletic director **Michael Nelson** with his coaching staff goes beyond the win-loss column.

“One of the things I’m most proud of is the quality of coaches we have across our athletic department,” Nelson said. “They’re dedicated to serving our students, building relationships and creating a positive experience while competing at a high level. Our coaches genuinely care about helping kids grow in athletics, academics and character.”

Dorchester returns all but one of its head coaches from a year ago. The only newcomer is volleyball head coach **Lee Blakely**.

The Raiders return two head coaches who led their teams to state titles last year. **Callie McClure** led the girls basketball team to the SCISA AA state title, while **Brent Jackson** guided the baseball team to the AA state title.

Dorchester won its first girls basketball title since 2017, that too coming under McClure. The Raiders defeated **Cross Schools** 39-37 in overtime to win the crown. The baseball team only had a 13-15 record, but they beat defending state champion

Clark Twins from Carvers Bay honing skills via two summer college leagues this summer

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher

Hemingway—You would be hard-pressed to find any two recently graduated prep baseball players working any harder than the twin brother duo of **Clark** and **Brantley Jones** as the brothers have been busy playing into two summer college leagues since they graduated from **Carvers Bay High School** in May.

Athletes can only improve, and get better, by either practicing or playing as much as possible and the Jones’ boys have grown up a lot in the game playing against college competition all summer. They plan to enroll at **NAIA South Carolina Central College** in Columbia this fall with the goal of moving up to a bigger baseball program at some point.

The duo began this summer playing for the **Briar Cliff Eagles** in the Beach Collegiate Baseball League. After that season ended, they joined the **Florence Flamigos** in the Coastal Palins League where they will compete and play until deep into August. Playing against college players has honed the skills of both players.

For their five-year varsity playing experience at Carvers Bay, and with both players coming on strong late in their senior seasons, the *HSSR* has named both of them to the 2026 *HSSR* Class A all-state baseball team.

This past high season Clark Jones had 88 K’s in 74 innings of work with a 2.34 ERA. His out-pitch is a slider. He also throws a two-seam fastball that was recently clocked at 85 miles per hour.

“I am going to college as a two-way player,” said Clark Jones. “I have learned a lot playing against the college guys this summer. I feel like I have improved in all aspects of the game with the competition this summer. It has been both a growth and a learning experience for sure and I am having a lot of fun.”

In the BCBL this summer, Clark worked 20 innings on the mound with 22 K’s and he compiled an ERA of 1.05, only allowing three earned runs. With the Coastal League just getting started up, Clark has had one outing in relief with the Flamigos. In two innings of work, he allowed one hit and had 4 K’s as he struck out the side in one inning.

Clark talked about his long-time love of baseball. “I have been playing baseball since tee ball,” he said. “I do not know what kind of person I would be without baseball in my life. I have a love for the game, and it has been a great experience playing in both college leagues this summer, against outstanding competition.

“I have a lot more room for growth in the game,” said Clark. “This summer has been a great experience. I feel like I have vastly improved in all aspects of the game.”

Clark said he career highlight memory came when his

Lee Academy in three games to win the crown.

Nelson is back for his fourth season in charge of football. Dorchester went 9-2 last year, losing in the semifinals. He has **Lance Brownlee**, **Nick Chinn** and **Larry Windham** returning to his coaching staff.

“I’m excited about the group of coaches we have,” Nelson said. “We have good people who care about our student-athletes, work extremely hard and bring a lot of knowledge and energy ever day. Our goal is to build a program that develops young men both on and off the field, and I believe this staff is committed to that mission.”

Justin McClure will be back for his third year as the softball head coach. After playing for the state championship in 2025, the Raiders came up short this past year, losing in the championship round of their bracket in the AA state tournament.

“I think we had a successful season overall, but all of us are disappointed that we did not end the year with a championship,” McClure said. “That was the ultimate goal and will be again next season.”

Dorchester had three players selected to the SCISA All-State team in **Emery McClure**, **Kinsey Bates** and **Molly Blanchard**.

Nick McAlhany returns as the boys basketball



Clark (left) and Brantley Jones

pitching performance helped the Bears win their first District championship in school history against **St. Johns** in the playoffs. “We won the game 4-0 and I hit a two-run homer in the 4th inning to give us our first lead of the game,” he said. “I pitched a complete game shut out with six strikeouts also.”

Both Clark and Brantley agree that playing with teammate **Ty Vestie** has been a wonderful experience. “I just met him a month ago, but we connected as baseball players immediately,” said Brantley. “He has a lot of knowledge of the game, and he will be coaching in college this fall. I am sure that when I get married one day he will be in my wedding party for sure.”

Brantley tore his ACL last summer playing travel baseball and he did not start playing in a varsity baseball game at Carvers Bay until the end of March.

Brantley started as a catcher at Carvers Bay for three seasons where he was a gold-glove defensive catcher with excellent pop time, but he did not play the position as a senior due to his ACL injury. “I started my senior season strictly as a designated hitter then I played second base in the field, and I didn’t start pitching until the end of the season when the playoffs started,” said Brantley.

In 24 innings of work, Brantley had 26 K’s with an ERA of 3.50. As a second baseman he had a team leading fielding percentage of .962 among starters, making only

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head coach. He guided the Raiders to a 17-13 record, going 1-1 in the state tournament.

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So far this summer Brantley said he has improved as a player competing against” a lot of SEC players.” “As a pitcher I have learned to locate my pitches better this summer,” said Brantley. “I have learned this summer just what a mental game the pitcher has with batters. To be an effective pitcher I am learning that you almost must trick the batters. or at least get into their heads some.”

Brantly said he is feeling like he is playing at 90 percent of his old self, prior to the ACL injury. “I am getting stronger with every game I play,” he said. “I am not fully recovered yet, but I am feeling a lot better.”

Brantley’s highlight memory as a high player came against **Green Sea Floyds** during his junior season. “We were down by one run in the 7th inning with one out and I hit a home run to tie the game, and we later won the game on a throwing error in the 8th inning,” said Brantly. “That was a pretty electric moment for me.”

Both players thanked their families for always being behind them 100 percent in the game of the game of baseball. Brantley added, “Myfamily has always pushed both of us to do better and keep working hard.”

The Clark twins left a lot of memories on the baseball field at Carvers Bay in their five-year careers, and they are making even more memories competing well against older college players this summer. You just never know when the baseball light bulb is going to shine its brightest.

From talking to both of them you get the feeling that their best baseball is still ahead of them and they are eager to improve and next season at South Carolina Central could be a great opportunity for both of them to take that giant step forward in the game of baseball.

Alphin ready for second year as DCS football coach

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Dillon – At this time a year ago, **Chris Alphin** was learning on the fly: how to be a football head coach as well as an athletic director.

The 26-year-old still has plenty of learning to do on both fronts at **Dillon Christian School**, but he’s a lot further along in the process than he was.

“Last year I tried to juggle a bunch of different things and was still learning,” said Alphin, who is the lone athletic director this year after sharing the duties last year. “I’ve got the right guys around me. I’m definitely more comfortable than I was.”

The Warriors went 3-7 overall last season and 2-2 in SCISA Region 1-AA. The two losses came to **Bethesda Academy** and **Pee Dee Academy**, the two teams that played for the state championship.

Dillon Christian won’t have to worry about either one of them this season. Following SCISA’s bi-annual reclassification, DSC will be playing Class A football for the next two years.

“That’s really where we need to be,” Alphin said of the Warriors, who will be playing in a region with **Lee Academy**, **Carolina Academy** and **Clarendon Hall**.

Alphin will call the defense, a position he held before moving into the role of head coach. **Landry Collins** returns as the offensive coordinator, while **Jameson Stallings** will coach both the offensive and defensive lines as well as serve as the run game coordinator.

Charlie Wright returns as an assistant, and **Samuel Gibson** will be the statistics analyst.

“I feel good about the team,” Alphin said. “We had a team camp where we did some conditioning, but the main thing was team bonding. All of the sophomores we had last year will be juniors this

year. I think everyone is on board. The buy-in has never been bigger.”

Dillon Christian will play a scrimmage at **Thomas Sumter Academy** on July 30 before playing in a scrimmage with Lee and Pee Dee on Augusts 7. The Warriors will play in a jamboree at **Florence Christian School** on August 14 before returning to FCS the following week for their season opener on August 21.

Ryan Sampson will return as the boys basketball head coach after leading the Warriors to a 9-12 record in his first season. There will be a new girls head coach in **Sarah Grace Lee**. She is the daughter of **Bo Stone**, the man Sampson succeeded, and he will be her assistant coach.

Tony Blackmon will be back for baseball, while **Jennier Easterling** and **Kelly Jacobs** will coach volleyball together again.

“I think it’s looking up,” Alphin said of DCS athletics. “We’re consistently improving facilities; the alumni association is involved in multiple projects. The buy-in is there from the community, alumni, players and coaches.”



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Johnnie Moreno named new football coach at Lee

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Bishopville – When **Lee Academy** had an opening for its football head coaching job for the 2025 season, **Johnnie Moreno** applied for the job.

He got an interview with Lee Head of School **Brad Bochette** and athletic director **Kemp DeWitt**, but Moreno didn’t get the job.

Fast forward a year though and Moreno is preparing for his first season as the Cavaliers’ head coach. He got the job after the man who beat him out last season, **Justin Logan**, decided to step down. Moreno is looking forward to the opportunity.

“I was set to be the B team head coach at **Lugoff-Elgin (High School)**,” Moreno said. “They (Lee) had just got an opening, and Brad reached out to me and asked if I wanted to come in and interview. I had an interview with both Brad and DeWitt and had some really good conversations. This year the job opened, I interviewed, and that was all she wrote.”

Moreno was an assistant at **Thomas Sumter Academy** in **Dalzell** for many years and the two schools located about 20 miles apart scheduled each other every year

“I always enjoyed playing there,” Moreno said. “They had big, strong kids, and I just liked the whole atmosphere there. I knew if I ever got the opportunity I would love to coach there.”

Moreno inherits a team that went 2-8 last year and lost to eventual SCISA Class A state runner-up **Colleton Prep Academy** in the first round of the state playoffs.

Moreno wasn’t hired until June, so he is still put-

ting his coaching staff together. To date, he had **Adam Skidmore**, **Trent Griffin**, **Noah Allen-Steele** and his son, **Maximus Moreno**, in place

Moreno is the only new varsity head coach for the Cavaliers. There is one with a new name but a familiar face in **Ivy Capell**. She is the former **Ivy Watts**, who is back for her second season in charge of the volleyball program.

Danny Price will return for his third season at the helm of the baseball team. He led the Cavaliers to a AA state title in 2025 and back to the state championship series this past year where they lost in three games to **Dorchester Academy**.

SCISA veteran coach **Kim Langston** will return as the girls basketball head coach and the girls golf head coach. LA reached the semifinals of the AA state tournament for the second consecutive year and finished with a 13-8 record.

DeWitt will be in his third year as the boys basketball head coach. Lee went 4-15 and did not make the state tournament.

Craig Nesbit is back in charge of the softball program. The Cavaliers were 12-12 this past season and went 2-2 in the AA state tournament. Nesbit has all but one starter returning for the 2027 season.

Lindsay Brazell will be the cheer coach.

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2026 Softball Championships Wrap Up

SCHSL crowns its newest softball state champions

**** These are shortened versions of the championship stories. For the full versions and to see the championship photos, please visit us online at www.HSSR.com**

AAAAA Division I Softball

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Summerville—Senior shortstop **Katie Guilliam** led off with a home run as the first Green Wave batter against **Byrnes**, in the first inning of game two of the Div. I AAAAA softball series on May 17, and she will also remember her single in the bottom of the sixth that drove in two runs that helped **Summerville** defeat the Rebels 6-3, earning the Green Wave their third state title in recent years.

Guilliam, headed to **Missouri** on a softball scholarship, told the HSSR after the game. “She pitched me on the inside every time I batted in game one, so I knew what was coming,” said Guilliam. “I timed it out right and got a good level swing, so it was great to help give my team early momentum.”

Then in the sixth inning her single brought in two runs with the game still in doubt.” I just loving playing the game, and I am a very humble player so anytime I can help my team win a game, that’s my goal,” she said. “I have been on the varsity for six years now and I am proud to have been apart of all three state titles we won.

“Being a senior, this one is very special, especially after last year the way we lost in game three in the state finals,” said Guilliam. “This is the way I wanted to go out. This one felt good.”

For the game Guilliam went 3-of-4 with three RBI’s to lead the Green Wave. Summerville head coach **Heather Tucker** was very proud of her team after the game. “Katie Guilliam, what a stud,” said Coach Tucker. “She has been playing on the varsity since the 7th grade. She is a tough kid, and I love her approach to the game.

“She is a grinder who puts so much work and effort into the sport,” said Coach Tucker. “She always comes through when she is on the big stage.”

Tucker said it was no doubt in her mind that the best two teams in Div. I AAAAA softball were the Green Wave and Byrnes. Summerville won game one in Duncan 6-5 in a game that took 9 innings. “That first game was a battle on the road and it was a tough game no doubt,” said Coach Tucker. “We got home at 4:30 am Tuesday morning and we got ready that afternoon to get ready for this game. It was a team effort and a great team win.”

Coach Tucker also praised the play of senior pitcher **Daphne Grady**, headed to **North Greenville**. “She stepped up this year as our pitcher and she wanted the ball in her hand every game and we gave it to her,” said Coach Tucker. “She worked hard and put in the extra time to give us strong pitching all season. I am super proud of

her.”

Grady had well over 300 strikeouts for the season setting a new record for one season at Summerville. Coach Tucker also cited the play of CF **Jayden Bennett**, and she praised ay f senior **Delaney Hayes** who rejoined the team for her senior year, after not playing since junior varsity.”

Summerville won state softball titles back in 2023 and 2024. Coach Tucker also won a title as a player at **Stratford** back in 1996.

Summerville had 10 hits for the game. Behind Guilliam was Bennett who had a hit and made two really nice catches in center field. Frady had a hit and two RBI’s and **Maeven Moreno** had a hit and played solid defense. **Summer Knight** had a hit along with Hayes and RF **Haylee Sexton** also contributed a hit.

In the circle, Frady went all seven innings, allowed 10 hits, with four strikeouts.

Byrnes also collected 10 hits in the evenly matched game. Melton, who has a strong arm in RF, led the Rebels going 3-of-4 with a double. **Addy Waters** had a hit and one RBI, while Durrah also had one hit and one RBI. Aiken, a superb defensive shortstop for an 8th grader, had two hits and sophomore left fielder **Bayleigh Murray** had two hits, including a double.

In the circle, Crutcher worked all six innings, allowed 10 hits, and had four strikeouts.

Class AAAAA Division II Softball

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Florence — **Indian Land** (31-3) and **St. James** (27-7) split their first two games in the best-of-three state softball finals, from the Div. II AAAAA ranks, so a third game was needed at neutral site, **South Florence High** on May 29, to break the deadlock.

Indian Land scored all their four runs in the 4th inning, and pounded out 10 hits in the game, to earn a 4-0 win over St James, earning the school’s 10th state softball title. The Warriors had won 9 state titles as a Class A member, with their last title coming in 2006. The program won seven straight titles between 2000 and 2006.

Indian Land has a rich softball tradition, and their current head coach, **Monica Barfield**, won three of those titles in 2004, ’05. ’06 before she took a break, after the 2008 season, to help raise her small children at the time. Coach Barfield returned to the program as the head coach in 2017, for what she calls “Round II.”

In game one, Indian Land lost at home to St. James 5-3 on May 25. Bad weather delayed game two at Indian Land until May, 29 when St James, head coached by **Paula Blackwell**, took that game on the road 3-1, forcing a third game tie-breaker.

In the bottom of the 4th, in game

three, catcher **Logan Thomas** got Indian Land going on offense with a double. Pitcher **Olivia Miller** followed with a double to score Thomas, for the game’s first run. Right fielder **Taylor Marvin** then doubled scoring CR **Jayla Herron** to make it 2-0. Next, with no outs, first baseman **Layla Crandall** singled to center scoring Marvin to make it 3-0.

The next two batters were out on a pop- ups in foul territory. Center fielder **Avery Clark** came up and smashed a double to left field scoring Crandall and the Warriors led for good at 4-0, with no additional runs being scored by either team.

Miller was the winning pitcher for Indian Land. She went a complete game seven innings allowing just three hits with seven strikeouts. At one point in the season Miller had a 9-4 record in the circle with an incredible 102 strikeouts in 42 innings of work with an ERA at 1.17.

For the game Miller, Marvin and Crandall paced the Warrior’s offense with two hits and one RBI each. Clark and Thomas joined first baseman **Harper Murphy**, and second baseman **Raegan Langborgh** with one hit each.

St James was limited to three hits in the game. They were made by short-stop **Kinzie Kraus**, first baseman **Payton Cox** and DP **Khloee Barton**.

Raegan Tibbits was the losing pitcher for the Sharks. She pitched all six innings, allowed 10 hits, and had three strikeouts.

AAAA Softball

By WORTHY EVANS
HSSR Contributing Writer
COLUMBIA — With little drama, the **Gray Collegiate** softball team made a big statement Friday night at the **A.C. Flora** softball field.

Sophomore **Mackenzie Sease**’s home runs in the first and second inning helped boost the War Eagles to a 6-0 lead, while junior **Peyton Hendrix** took the circle for the second time in the best-of-three series to close out a 11-1 victory and secure Gray’s second straight 4A state championship and third straight state title.

Add to that, University of South Carolina signee **Aspen Boulware** finished off her career with the War Eagles with a solo home run in her final at-bat, the 60th of her career.

“We set a goal this year to go undefeated,” head coach **Doug Frye** said. “I know that sounds crazy, but we’d take it one game at a time. These girls bought into it and they stayed focused on what we were doing the whole year. It’s amazing, 34-0. It’s incredible.”

The War Eagles beat the Falcons 7-1 in the first game of the series that was disrupted by rain.

Gray held a 3-1 lead going into the fourth inning before the weather forced a suspension Wednesday night. When play resumed Thursday the War Eagles scored

two more runs in the fourth inning on Sease’s 2-out double that drove in Wright and Boulware to make it 5-1. Gray scored a run in the fifth inning and another in the sixth, and Hendrix closed out her first complete game this week in the circle by shutting out the Falcons in the seventh. Hendrix scattered six Flora hits and struck out 10.

“It was just staying focused. All the preparation we’ve done before this season, that’s really what our strategy was,” Hendrix said Thursday. “We’ve all worked very hard this season and it’s trusting that process.”

AAA Softball

By Rob Gannt
Special Contributor
Hanahan — There’s nothing special in the water in **Iva** which magically helps **Crescent High School**’s softball program find success. It’s just a sense of family and culture - and a bunch of tough kids - that keeps the Tigers shining on the diamond spring after spring.

Tigers head coach **Jeff Craft** had plenty of words of praise for his squad after it rallied for a 12-7 victory over **Hanahan** on Thursday, May 28, at the HHS field in the AAA state championship series, securing another state crown for the traditional power with a 2-game sweep of the Hawkettes.

The title was the 20th overall for the program, but the first in 13 years.

“We’ve been behind in seven of eight playoff games and just battled back and haven’t lost a one,” said Craft, whose team finished 29-4 for the season. “It’s just what they do. Every time they get behind, you see no fear... They never believe they’re out of a game. You saw that tonight. They refused to make an out in the seventh inning.”

The Tigers plated seven runs in the top of the seventh to pull away from the home team. Earlier, Crescent trailed 4-0 and 7-3 but kept chipping away to get within striking distance going into its final set of hacks. The Tigers recorded five hits in the seventh, including a 2-run single off the bat of pitcher **Mikayla Rodney** with one out that broke a 7-7 tie.

AA Softball

By Dennis Brunson
Hssr.com Associate Editor
Chesterfield – The **Saluda High School** softball team made history in 2024 when it played in its first ever upper state championship series. In 2025, the Tigers made history again, winning the AA upper state title and playing in a state championship series for the first time.

Well, Saluda made history again on Thursday, so you know what that means. The school has to make room for a state championship trophy.

The Tigers won the school’s first ever softball state title by beating **Chesterfield** 3-0 in front of a packed house at the

See Softball Champs, pg. 60

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2026 Soccer Championships Wrap Up

SC's prep soccer champions recently crowned for 2026

Wando girls get revenge on Mann in girls AAAAA Division I finals

After losing to J.L. Mann in the state finals last spring, Wando girls soccer coach **Shannon**

Champ predicted that her young team would find its way back into contention in 2026.

Those young Warriors did just that and then some. Wando met Mann for the AAAAA Division I state championship on May 23 in Columbia and found a way to win a tightly-contested contest.

The game went through two 10-minute overtime periods and two more golden goal sudden

deaths sessions still tied 1-1.

On to penalty kicks, with the kicks tied at two, Wando's **Avery Setters** knocked in a third goal.

Madeline Sheppard followed with a stop of **Caroline Ray's** shot, sending Wando into a wild celebration.

Sheppard is the unlikely hero of the championship, having been a keeper for two weeks. She

replaced starter **Camryn Carras** two weeks ago when Carras was injured and deemed out for the season.

"Maddie stepped up and everyone rallied around her to give her the confidence that she could do it," Champ said.

Though each team had several scoring chances, neither could score in regulation. Less than a

minute into the first overtime, Wando's **Kiera Jenkins** found the back of the net for a 1-0 lead.

That lead appeared to be enough to win but the Patriots' **Emilyn Kneeland** tied the contest with a minute left in the overtime.

"The game went about as we expected," Champ said. "Usually these types of games are low-scoring so you just try to not make the big mistake. Our girls were confident but we knew the other team would be ready to play."

The championship was Wando's 14th in school history and Champ now has 10 titles as the head coach.

Underdog Clover upsets top-ranked Wando in boys soccer

Not many outside of the **Clover High** soccer community felt their Blue Eagles could upset the top-ranked team in the state, **Wando**, in the AAAAA Division I state championship game.

Games are not played on paper and desire and intensity cannot be measured. Clover suffered through a three-hour rain delay and went to overtime before **Evan Trubilio's** goal in the second overtime proved to be the game winner, 1-0.

The loss ended Wando's winning streak at 23. The Warriors lost their opener and their finale. Wando played

shirt-handed in the later stages if the game after red cards sent two players to the bench.

For Clover, coach **Todd Sykes** felt all along that his 2026 team could be a contender but realized things had to go their way. His team was not intimidated by the powerhouse.

"They were super confident going into the finals," said Sykes, who is in his second season as head coach but has 27 years experience coaching in Clover's club program, "We had not allowed a goal through the playoffs and we had nine clean sheets during the season. We knew we could hang with them but we just couldn't give up an early goal. We did great scouting to help us prepare for how they play. These boys have all played a high level through club for many years so they knew what it would take."

Clover won 16 games last year and had decent experience returning. As the team learned to play as one, there were some losses along the way. But Sykes saw his team gradually turn the corner.

"We knew we had the ability to play with anyone coming into this year; he said. "We were young and we just needed the time to come into our own and play our style. The goal from the beginning of the season was to make it to the finals. We were very good but we needed a little time to gel. We played a very tough schedule so we took some losses. But we learned from each loss and things started to come together over the last 10 games (9 wins)."

Eastside overcomes Chapin in PK's to win AAAAA Division 11 boys soccer title

Weather played its usual role in the 2026 SCHSL state championship games on May 21-23 at Memorial Stadium. If it wasn't too hot or humid, it was storming and dropping tons of rain. By the time the final whistle had blown, it was 1:40 a.m. Sunday morning. That final contest, the Division II-AAAAA finals, saw **Eastside** beat **Chapin**, 1-1 (3-2 on penalty kicks) after 30 minutes of overtime.

Eastside keeper **Brandon Jaramillo** proved to be the hero in penalty kicks, swatting away successive attempts Eastside then got goals from **Frazor Kazian** and **Hunter Kazian** to complete the win.

"These boys have so much heart and determination and I never count them out," Eastside coach

Steven Wood. "I think the region we play in and the schedule we play prepares us for something like this."

Eastside has won seven state titles but this is the first since 2022. Chapin ended the season with an 18-5 record and all five losses came in penalty kicks.

"I hate it for these guys because

they do everything we want them to do," Chapin coach Bob Taylor said.

Despite the long delay in starting, both teams seemed fresh and aggressive early. In the 16th

minute, Eastside's **Ryder Martin** headed in a pass from **Asher Wilson** for a 1-0 lead.

Later in the half, Chapin got the equalizer on a penalty kick by **Lucas Rogers**.

In the penalty kick phase, Chapin led 2-1 after successful kicks from **Sam Szarkawski** and **Cole Keys**. Chapin keeper **Cooper Hughes** made two saves and Chapin had the momentum. But, Jaramillo rose to the occasion and stymied Chapin's chances. His clincher was off the foot of **Gabe Salisbury**.

Chapin girls finally finish the job; win AAAAA Division II title

After some near misses since winning a state title in 2016, **Chapin** girls soccer coach

Chad Bridges had to wonder if his program would even ascend back to the top. But, the coach had faith.

That faith in his team proved to be strong as Chapin ended their drought with a 4-0 win over Eastside. The Eagles allowed just nine goals all season and ended the season on a 14-game winning streak.

Chapin lost to Eastside in overtime last season and lost to Clover in the finals of 2024.

Faith became the mantra of the season and the team bought in.

"Our motivational word was faith," he said. "I feel that word accommodates a lot of what we dealt with this year. It was the first time in five years that we had not win our region. I knew we had a good team but we did have to replace five starters and eight seniors. We had some girls who didn't play much in the past have to step up."

Chapin got an early goal from **Sydney Stoner**, on a header, in the 14th minute set the tone and Chapin was clearly the more aggressive team offensively.

Two minutes later, **Avery Stoner** found the goal, and then added a second score five minutes later. Comfortably in control, Chapin methodically controlled possession and thwarted any possible Eastside goals. Chapin's last goal came from **Liz Kujawa** in the 56th minute.

The start of the championship was delayed by about four hours as bad weather moved in but the delay had no ill effects on Chapin.

"It's good to get here because that shows where your program is, but to win it gets you over the hump," said Bridges. "I'm so glad these girls get to see the other side and what it means to win a state championship. It is very satisfying and I'm so happy for the girls."

A.C. Flora repeats as AAAA girls

champ

For the second straight season, the **A.C. Flora** girls soccer program edged **Bishop England** to claim the AAAA state championship.

The contest was tied 1-1 after regulation and overtimes, but the Falcons won the penalty kick shootout, 5-3. Keeper **Kennedy Bagley** was the defensive hero in the win while **Rachel Britt** provided the clinching score in penalty kicks.

"It's been a crazy season with so many ups and downs," Flora coach Eric Navarro said. "Being able to see their effort and focus throughout the match was special for me as their coach."

OCA wins sixth consecutive title

At some point, but not likely soon, a school will beat **Oceanside Collegiate's** girls soccer team in a state championship venue.

For now, the rest of the state, whether it's Class AA or AAA, can only sit back and marvel at the excellence on display. The latest victim was **St. Joseph's Catholic** of Greenville. The teams met for the AAA state title on May 21 at Memorial Stadium in Columbia.

St. Joe's is another highly successful program and has won state championships before so many felt this matchup could be interesting. OCA scored two goals in each half on their way to a 4-0 win, their 17th victory of the season. It was the sixth consecutive state championship under coach **Mark Meyer** at the school.

"There's no magic," he said. "We have very talented players who take the game very seriously. They work hard at it. They condition themselves to be the stronger team. They are a very competitive group and it just carries over from year to year."

The Landsharks made 1-0 with a goal from **Sarah Ligon**, a freshman, who scored 23 minutes into the contest. The Landsharks dominated possession and kept the flow of the match in control. In the 38th minute, Ligon again found the back of the net off an assist from Ava Klein.

By halftime, it felt the end result was inevitable as OCA continued with their possession and took several quality shots. **Hailiey Piesner**, a junior captain, made it 3-0 in the 54th minute. Senior captain **Ella Petry** put the finishing touches on her outstanding career with a goal late in the contest.

Academic Magnet sweeps AA soccer titles

When it comes to academic prowess and soccer success, few schools do it as well as its done at **Academic Magnet** school.

For years, the school has been recognized as one of the top academic schools in the country.

Marlboro County athletics all set for 2026-27

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Bennettsville – Things got back to normal last school year for the Marlboro County football program.

The Bulldogs posted eight wins last season and reached the second round of the AAA state playoffs, losing to eventual state champion Oceanside Collegiate, 24-7.

Marlboro County had one of the state's top teams in 2024. On the field, the Bulldogs went 9-1 in the regular season, losing only to Dillon. However, the final record was officially 1-9 after it was determined the team had six ineligible players participating. The players were transfers from schools in North Carolina and several did not comply with the residency rules of the South Carolina High School League.

Last fall was **Cory Johnson's** second as the head football coach and the coach has brought the focus back to football and getting better on the field. Johnson also has assumed duties as athletic director in addition to keeping his role as head football coach.

Johnson brought to Marlboro County a winning pedigree, posting a 61-12 record as a head coach in Clinton, North Carolina. Most of coaching back-

ground is on defense but his teams also have been quite adept at scoring points.

The coach has been hard at work with his players this offseason and there will be a focus on repeating the success of last season.

The 2026 Bulldogs show a lot of promise as several key players return on both sides of the ball. Offensively, junior **Tre Blakeney** returns at quarterback after a sophomore season that produced 1,639 passing yards and 761 rushing yards. Junior running back **Khrishawn Smith** and senior receiver **LaQuincy Leach** also return as impact players.

On defense, leading the list of top returners are linebackers **Layton Chavis** and **Jamorie Williams**.

In his role as athletic director, one of his jobs is to make sure the varsity coaches have what they need to best compete. Hiring new coaches is another major task but Johnson reports that no varsity teams had a coaching opening this summer.

Among the varsity coaches are **Ryan Pierce** (baseball), **Kevin Inglis** (softball), **Demetrius Knox** (boys basketball), **Leah Zimmerman** (girls basketball), **Deon Quick** (boys golf, girls golf), **Anthony McMillan** (wrestling), **Dori Sanders** (cheer), **John Nall** (boys soccer), **Hallie Dyer** (girls soccer) **Ashley Pate** (volleyball), and **Dennis McFatten** (track and field).

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Hartsville football adds four to coaching staff

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Hartsville – As he embarks on his 22nd season as the head football coach at **Hartsville High**, **Jeff Calabrese** is anxiously anticipating the upcoming 2026 season.

Calabrese, with more than 200 career coaching wins, says his team has put in good work in the offseason and appears focused on bettering last year's 7-5 record.

"We had a good spring practice, a good offseason all together really," the coach said. "The numbers were maybe a little down but not far off. We spent a lot of time evaluating every position. If we needed to make a change we did. The focus in the spring and summer is making sure we have the right guys in the right spots. We basically are trying to get everyone on the same page."

Like all the schools in the state, the Red Foxes put in training four days a week from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Calabrese says this summer has been especially important as four new coaches have joined the program, including new defensive coordinator **Neil Smith**.

"Really excited to have coach Smith. He brings a ton of energy and experience and he has really adapted well here," Calabrese said.

Other new additions to the staff include **Toney Moore**

David Crane era set to begin for BHP football

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Honea Path – The Belton-Honea Path High School football program will be beginning a new era when it opens the 2026 season on August 21 at home against **T.L. Hanna**.

It will be the Bears' first game under the guidance of veteran head coach **David Crane**. He takes over from **Russell Blackston**, who was relieved of his duties following an altercation with **Oceanside Collegiate Academy** at the conclusion of last year's AAA state championship game loss.

Crane, who was hired in February after the position came open in December, came to Belton-Honea Path after spending the past seven seasons at **Seneca**. Crane's best season with the Bobcats came last year when they went 10-2 and beat **Lancaster** in the opening round of the AAAA state playoffs be-

(middle linebackers), **Jacob Strait** (outside linebackers), and **Dashawn Timmons** (assistant offensive line).

In terms of personnel, the Red Foxes have experience returning in several areas, starting with quarterback. Junior **Ford Wallace** is back as the starter and continues to develop in his role as a leader on the offense.

Returning at running back is **Trace Hillian** with **CJ Hickmon** moving from receiver to the backfield. Anchoring the offensive line is two-time all-region performer **Fred Turner**.

Other returning linemen, who could end up on either side of the ball, include **Creighton McKnight**, **Jake Williams**, **Jaquan Samuel** and **Pat Rhode**.

Rod Cranford returns in the back seven as a third-year starter. Zi'Yon Mason is moving from the secondary to linebacker, as is **Jamario Scipio-Bishop**. **Devaris James** and **Deon McCall** are players to watch in the secondary.

"At a school our size, sometimes you have to move some kids around to make it all fit," Calabrese said. "That's why the summer is so important, to get those kids a lot of reps. good group to work with. We just need to build some depth."

fore falling to **A.C. Flora** in the second round.

Crane was 43-39 at his alma mater.

Prior to taking the Seneca position, Crane was the head coach at **Greenville** for five years. Crane was 27-31 at Greenville, but went 11-2 and won the Region 1-AAAA championship in 2017.

Crane, who started his head coaching career at **Southwest Whitfield** in Dalton, Georgia, is just the third head coach for the Bears since 1999.

He inherits a program that is the 2-time defending AAA upper state champion. going 27-3 during that time frame.

The Bears were undefeated entering last year's title game against Oceanside Collegiate before losing 28-7. It was the second consecutive season in which Belton-Honea Path lost in the championship

See BHP, pg. 63

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Holly Hill Academy adds one coach to staff

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Holly Hill – Athletic director **Stradford Hydrick** has announced a change in the direction of the boys basketball program at **Holly Hill Academy** for the coming year.

Former head softball coach **Henry Lockey** will assume duties within the basketball program this season. Lockey is the only new varsity head coach at the school.

Hydrick will return as the head football coach this fall while **Dani Kern** returns as the varsity volleyball coach. **Savanna White** heads up the competition cheer program and **Heath Prescott** returns as the girls basketball coach.

Andy Green heads up the baseball program and **Kally Knight** is the head softball coach. Bothw won state championships this past spring.

Linnea Liebert will again coach the building track and field program and **Billy Wilson** heads up the trap shooting team. Serving as captains for the successful bass fishing team are **Nathan Burgess** and **Ed August**.

Top performers from 2025-26
With state championships in softball and baseball, and a near miss in football, the 2025-26 school year was a productive one for Holly Hill Academy athletes.

The school recently honored the top performers from the past athletic season and here are the athletes that earned special awards for their success/

In cheerleading, **Madison McIntyre** earned the Raider award and **Sissy Miles** was most improved. **Lucy Oliver** received the spirit award and **Audrey Murray** was tabbed as most valuable.

In football, **Parker Kizer** was the team’s most valuable player and was honored as the region player of the year. **Tyler Green** was the defensive MVP and **Ryan Brown** received the Raider award.

For volleyball, **Lucy Oliver** was most improved

and **Kaley Bell** was the top offensive player. **Tinsley Kern** earned top defensive player honors.

For track, the fastest runner award went to **Jeremiah McCune** and Olier received the Leadership award. Annie Oliver received the Positive Attitude award.

In boys basketball, **Tyler Green** and **Jordan Wren** received Captain’s awards, and **Chase Holder** was most improved. **Aarav Patel** received the Raider award.

The MVP in girls basketball was **Milly Kate Prescott**, who also was recognized as the region player of the year. **Taylor Wright** was most improved and **Peyton Strickland** received the Raider award.

Jaxon Jones was the MVP for the still developing wrestling program. **Jayson Krier** received the Raider award.

Steven Murray and **Shade Snyder** represent the school on the bass fishing team and is one of the top duos in the state. They won the SC high school challenge and earned the right to compete in the national tournament in late July.

For softball, **Kaylee Cuttino** was the most valuable player. Prescott was the offensive MVP and **Abigail Burleson** was the defensive MVP. **Tinsley Kern** was most improved and Taylor Wright earned the Coaches award.

In baseball, **Tyler Green** was named MVP and Murray received the Raider award. **Mason Green** was most improved and **Jase Tirado** received the Coaches award.

In the sport of trap shooting, Murray was the Top Shooter and **Sophia Thompson-Whitaker** was most improved. **Jackson Carson** received the Raider award.

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Matthew Martens to take over Saints softball

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Summerton – **Matthew Martens** is far from an unfamiliar face at **Clarendon Hall**. However, he is walking into new territory with the Saints as their softball head coach.

Martens takes over for **Jeffrey Bays**, who decided to step down after a tremendous 13-year run. Martens had been an assistant to Bays since the 2023 season.

Martens believes his taking the job is a God thing. “Stepping into the role of head coach at Clarendon Hall felt like the right decision because I love this school, our community and the game of softball,” said Martens, whose daughter, **Annie Carlyle “AC” Martens**, is on the team. “I believe God opens doors for us to serve others, and I feel called to help develop these young ladies not only as softball players but also as people of strong character and faith.

“Our focus is on helping each player grow in her abilities, build confidence and reach her full potential through hard work, discipline and a willingness to learn. We have developed a great coaching staff to develop the young ladies from B team, JV (junior varsity) and varsity softball.”

Clarendon Hall won four state championships and played for four other state titles during Bays’ tenure. He finished with a 192-76 record. Clarendon Hall’s first state title under his guidance came in 2015. The other three came consecutively, a SCISA Class A title in 2022 and consecutive AA state crowns in ’23 and ’24.

The Saints lost to **Pee Dee Academy** in the AAA title series in 2025 before finishing 10-11 in the just completed season.

“Having the opportunity to coach under Jeff has been invaluable,” Martens said. “His leadership helped establish a championship culture built on hard work, commitment and doing things the right way. Learning

from him has prepared me for this transition, and I have tremendous respect for everything he and the previous players and coaches have accomplished.

“The standard they set is something I want our team to embrace every day. My goal is to honor that legacy by developing our talent and continuing to play at the level that Clarendon Hall softball has come to expect.”

Shane Wallace is back for his second season as the school’s athletic director and football head coach. Last season was a very difficult one for the Saints as they finished the year with a 0-10 record, the second year in a row that has happened.

Both of those winless marks came in SCISA AAA. With SCISA’s bi-annual reclassification, the Saints will play football at the Class A level for the next two years.

Wallace’s assistant coaches are **Stewart Price**, **Trey Bagnal** and **Clay Reynolds**.

Clarendon Hall will play boys and girls basketball at the varsity level this season after having just junior varsity teams last year. That decision was made because of a lack of numbers in the junior and senior classes. Wallace thinks the move will pay dividends.

“I believe that playing a JV schedule gave our younger players the opportunity to compete against athletes at a similar stage of development,” he said. “Rather than becoming discouraged by facing older, more experienced varsity teams, they were able to compete, experience success and build confidence.

“It also helped create a strong team culture and family atmosphere while preparing them to compete at the varsity level this upcoming year.”

Rick Atkinson will again coach the boys and **Johnny Horton** will again coach the girls.

Jackie McIntosh returns as the baseball head coach, and **Shannon Rodgers** will coach the volleyball team again.

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2026 Soccer Championship Wrap Up

Now, the soccer program is making a name for itself.

Both the boys and girls teams played in the Class AA state championship in May 21 in Columbia

And, as expected, both teams defended the titles they won a year ago with relative ease.

The girls team knocked off **Andrew Jackson**, 5-0., their 23 rd win of the season. The Title was the program’s seventh and coach **Alstair De-long** has won four as head coach.

“We’re very relaxed and focused for every game,” the coach said. “We have some veteran

players who do a good job leading us. Once the game starts we were pretty loose. Today was just had an edge.

“We didn’t know a lot about them and we may have started a little slow. But we got loose and got going.”

Sophomore **Bridget Lee** was certainly relaxed as she score Magnet’s first three goals, giving her 27 goals this season. **Hannah Collins** added a goal and sophomore **Kamya Pham** closed out the scoring.

Jason Hamil is a fixture on the sidelines of the boys team and led his Raptors to a seventh state title. The boys team beat **Buford** 3-1. Like the girls team, the boys program has high expectations and winning championships is part of the entire school experience.

“The way I see it is a athlete doesn’t have to take a back seat academically,” he said. “We know why these kids are here but we want to help them in every aspect. Soccer is a good teacher.”

Cesr Ramirez got the Raptors on the board first, splitting two defenders for an easy goal. The score remained 1-0 at halftime but Buford scored quickly to start the second half.

Magnet regained the lead mid-way through the half as **Jaidon Daley** headed in a long throw in from **Blake Yarborough** for a 2-1 lead.

With time running out, Ramirez tacked on a goal for the final margin.

Powdersville leaves no doubt in **Class AAA boys soccer**

For most of the 2026 soccer season, defending state champion **Powdersville** and two-time defending Lower State champion **Oceanside Collegiate** were considered the heavy favorites to reach the AAA state finals. Neither team disappointed.

However, once the finals arrived it was Powdersville that proved once again to be the top dog.

And it was impressive. The Patriots scored early and of-tenin posting a 6-1 win with senior **Brody Pike** accounting for five goals in his final high school game.

“As a coach I never expect anything. I hope we play our best and if we do or we don’t we will ultimately get what we deserve.” coach **Jeremy McCall** said. “In watching film I

thought that Oceanside had a strong team, obviously to be back into the state championship game. I thought if we played well we would have a chance to win. Ultimately having a player (Brody Pike) score 5 goals is something that you never expect in a match much less the state championship game.”

McCall states the obvious when he says he had a wealth of talent on this year’s team. But he also feels strongly that it takes more than talent to win the biggest games. This team, he says, had the great intangibles.

“The strengths of this team was the bond and love that they all have for each other. You hear the term “brotherhood” used often but this group is definitely different than any other group I have ever coached. They truly love one another and I like to say that is what make us different.

“There are countless stories of things that this group did off the field to help a teammate out that might be going through a tough situation to pick them up and pat them on the back or even just say you know what, give me that burden, you don’t worry about it. That is what makes this group special and their love for one another was the strength of this team. “

If there is a rebuilding year coming, it could be next year. Then again, maybe not. The team had 11 seniors this season, leaving many holes to fill. However, the junior varsity team was 28-3-2 over the last two seasons.

Hardeeville nabs state soccer title

In only their second year as a school, **Hardeeville High** can claim the title of state champion. Hardeeville defeated defending state champion **Dixie**, 3-2 in the 2026. class A state finals in May. The win avenged a loss to Dixie in last yea’rs finals

Hardeeville ended the season on a nine game winning streak With the score tied at two into the second over-time, freshman **Caden Mitchell** delivered the game-winnung goal and the defense made it stand over the final minutes

Fabian Ramirez had the assist on Mitchell’s goal and also scored Hardeeville’s first goal on a penalty kick in the first half Dixie would.not go away and tied the contest before halftime and took a 2-1 lead early in the second half

Hardeeville got the equalizer on a goal from **Efrain Tinoco**. Tinoco and Ramirez were named all state as was **Jayden Cruz**

Hardeeville head coach **Misael Garzon** is in his first season at the school, coming over from May River. He was confident his team would perform in the final

‘They say ‘if you come at the king, you best not miss’ and that’s what the boys did tonight. It speaks to the determination, they wanted to come back here, they wanted to win. When we



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Hardeeville boys soccer



Academic Magnet Raptors girls soccer

found out it was Dixie, they wanted this match, they wanted revenge. They wanted to show that last year was a

fluke and that this year we were going to earn it and we did.”

DILLON HIGH SCHOOL

Coward begins fourth season as athletic director

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher

Dillon—Dillon graduate **Keith Coward** (2004) is beginning his 4th season as the athletic director in the tradition rich Wildcat athletic program, and as usual there is little turnover with the varsity head coaches at the school coming into the 2026-27 school year.

Dillon has come down to Class AA with the realignment this season after competing as a AAA program this past few years. They are in Region 6-AA along with **East Clarendon, Lake City, Manning, Marlboro County and Waccamaw**. Dillon will start the 2026 football season on August, 21 hosting **Camden High**.

Cowach Coward is also the head baseball coach at Dillon. He is very pleased with the Wildcats having one of their most successful baseball seasons in a while as they finished at 17-8 and won the region title. They also won four playoff games in the SCHSL AAA playoffs and they were eliminated from the playoffs with a one run loss to **Oceanside Collegiate** who went on to compete for a state title.

Coch Coward was a four-time al state baseball player at Dillon and after graduation he pitched all four years at **Ersine College**. He became the head baseball coach during the 2014-15 school year. He is assisted by **Austin Moody, Coley Bohachic, Jamie Coleman, Pierce Watson and Nelson Green**.

Asked what he now understands about being an athletic director, that he did not fully understand when he got the job three years ago, Coach Coward responded, “I have learned that the world will not fall apart if you do not make a perfect decision,” he said. “Sometimes you think you are making a perfect decision but it does not always work out that way. It will not get you fired either.”

Cowach Coward gives Dillion Area Four Superintendent **Ray Rogers** a lot of credit for his advice on many issues since Rogers hired him three years ago. “Mr. Rogers is a great Superintendent, and his door is always open for me,” said Coach Coward. “I have never gone to him for advice when I didn’t feel better afterwards. He has been very helpful in my role as the athletic director for Dillon and Lake View High Schools.”

Coach Coward has a unique perspective on the challenges facing all high school coaches. “As coaches, in reality, we have to rely on what the community brings us in terms of talent within the players on our teams,” said Coach Coward. “I do not mean this in a negative way. The new one-time transfer rule can help you, or hurt you, depending on what side the fence you are on.

“Your challenge is player development, and having athletes willing to work hard to get better,” he said. “We certainly have had our fair share of those type athletes at Dillon and Lake View, especially within our football program. Coaches just have to work hard and coach their athletes the best they can.”

Dillon High has won a total of 8 football state titles, seven under retired Hall of Fame coach **Jackie Hayes** who retired after the 2020 season.

Coach Kelvin Roller succeeded Coach Hayes at the start of the 2021 season and through five seasons Coach Roller is (51-11) with four region titles.

The Dillon football team returns offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach **Jacob Shumate**, a former **HSSR** Mr. Baseball. Shumate was drafted in the first round by the Atlanta Braves out of high school.

Other offensive assistants include **Splinter Spivey** who coaches tight ends. **John Parker** is the offensive line coach while former **SC State** all-American and **Washington** Red Skin all-pro receiver **Charlie Brown** coaches’ receivers at Dillon. **Leo Phillips** rounds out the offensive coaches as the running backs coach.

The defensive coordinator for the Wildcats is **Will Clark**, who came to the team a few years ago from **Scotland County High** in N.C. **Bill Young** works with the defensive line and **Sam Grooms** mentors the defensive ends. **Jamie Coleman** and **Damu Ford** team up to coach inside linebackers and former Dillon stand-out **Lee Page** coaches the Wildcat secondary.

The Dillon junior varsity is head coached once again by **Kevin Roberts**. **Austin Moody** is the offensive coordinator and **Bryce King** works with the offensive line. **Twin Lester** is the linebacker/secondary coach.

Alan McLaurin, long time receivers coach at Dillon, retired after the 2025 season after 33 seasons.

In the past 30 years Dillon High has had two high profile athletes go on and play professionally. Former Wildcat pitcher **Jamie Callahan** was a second- round draft pick of the Boston Red Sox in 2012 (87th pick over-all) after he was named the Gatorade Player of the year from South Carolina that season. In 2004, former Dillon and Clemson stand-out **Derrick Hamilton** was drafted in the third round by the 49^{ers}.

The Dillon volleyball program will again be head coached by **Johnna Jones**, starting her 6th season. Dillon is starting a cross-country program for the first time in memory and Coach Coward said he is in the process of final interviews to fill that new position.

The boys’ basketball program will once again be head coached by Dillon graduate **Brian Grice** who had an outstanding career at **SC State** after finishing high school. Girl’s basketball coach **James McMillian** begins his 11th season as the Dillon girls’ basketball coach, and his team is expected to challenge for an AA state title this season. His team played for a AAA state title two years ago, losing out to **Walhalla** in the title game.

Randy Gray just might the longest serving head varsity coach at Dillon and he returns to head coach the boy’s track program this season. Sam Grooms is back to head coach the girl’s track team.

Stevie Grice will begin his 8th season as the head softball coach at Dillon and his young team made a deep play-off run this season. Just a few years ago the softball team made it to the state title game before losing out to **Seneca** in a third game.

Dillon has a co-ed soccer varsity team and they are coached by **Karla Silver** who will begin her third season with the program.

The Dillon High Principal is **Tim Gibbes**. “Mr. Gibbes is very supportive of athletics at Dillon High,” said Coach Coward. “He has two sons in our high school. One plays football and soccer and the other son runs cross country and is a member of the track team.”

Under Coward’s tenure, the baseball and softball fields at both Dillon and lake View have had covered batting cages installed. The gym floor at Dillon High has been replaced along with new seats being installed. The track has been resurfaced as well.

“Our next major project is to get our Dillon gym air conditioned,” said Coach Coward.

Coach Coward also wanted to thank Brandi Huggins, the head softball coach at Lake View who handles day-to-day athletic matters at her school. “She is a fantastic person and her help with athletic matters at lake View High is greatly appreciated,” said Coach Coward.

Coach Coward wanted to thank the football press crew on Friday nights along with the chain crew and the tunnel volunteers. The public address announcer is **Coley Bohachic**. **John Dove, Daryl Miller, Pierce Watson, and Dwayne Buckner** also help out in the press box with various assignments.

The chain gang crew and tunnel volunteers include **Gene Hill, Brenden Griffey, Jimmy Tanner, Roger Cox and Steve Zander**.

Coach Coward also wanted to extend a high five to Hall of Fame football sideline psychologist “Ma” German and world-renowned supported **McAdoo Bethea**.



The Dillon High School Athletic Dept. salutes all student-athletes and coaches this season!

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Tobin returning home to Pinewood Prep staff

By Roger Lee
Special to the HSSR

Summerville – This school year brings a reunion for the **Pinewood Prep** Baseball program.

Following a distinguished 12-year career at the helm, coach **Jay Buddin** stepped down at the end of the 2026 season. Stepping in to lead one of the school’s premier programs is **Phil Tobin**, who formerly served as the head coach back when Buddin was an assistant.

Despite numerous offers from programs around the state, Tobin felt the time was right to return to Pinewood.

“After several conversations with the administration and those close to the program, I knew in my heart that Pinewood is where I’m supposed to call home,” Tobin said.

He is excited to take the baton from a respected friend and peer and eager to get to work forging a deep sense of camaraderie that Pinewood Baseball is accustomed to and assembling a first-class coaching staff at all levels of the program.

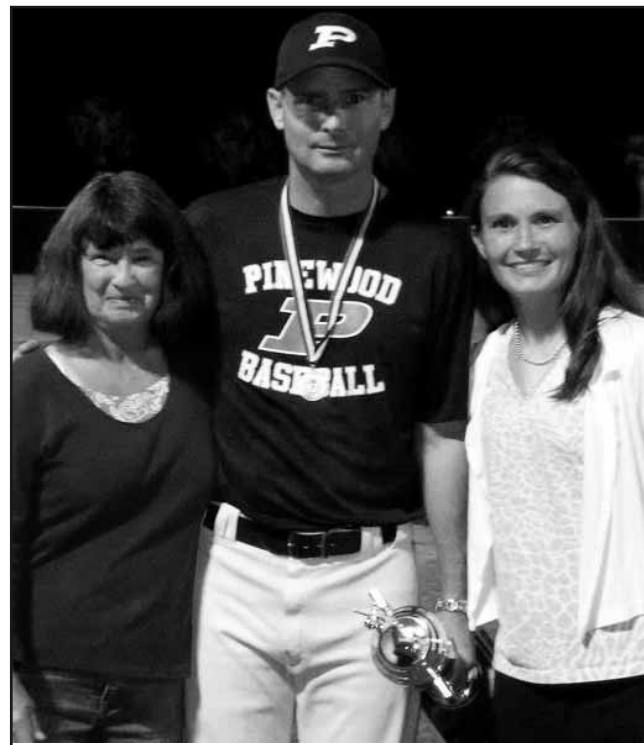
In the spirit of honoring tradition while forging ahead, Pinewood officials are thrilled to reunite with Tobin, who led the Panthers to the **SCISA AAA State Championship** title in 2012. Following his tenure at Pinewood, he served on the staff for **Summerville High School** before returning to his alma mater, **The Citadel**, where he was an outstanding assistant coach.

Tobin is well-regarded throughout the Lowcountry for his baseball acumen. He earned **Region 3 Coach of the Year** honors after leading Pinewood to region titles in 2012 and 2014. In 2012, he was named the **SCISA Statewide Coach of the Year** by the **S.C. High School Sports Report** and earned the **Lowcountry Coach of the Year** award from the **Charleston Post and Courier/Charleston River-Dogs**.

Tobin, who prepped at **Stall High School**, earned four letters from **The Citadel** from 1988 to 1991. He helped the **Bulldogs** to three **Southern Conference** titles (1990 regular season and tournament championships and the 1991 regular season crown).

He played shortstop for the 1990 **Citadel** team that advanced to the **College World Series** and has had the privilege of coaching his son, **Lane**, a stand-out on **The Citadel** squad.

“It is a true honor to welcome back a coach of



Contributed Photo

Phil Tobin, who led Pinewood Prep to a state baseball championship in 2012, will once again lead the Panthers into battle.

Phil Tobin’s caliber,” said **Dr. Dan Seiden**, Pinewood’s head of school. “Not only does he know what it takes to win, but he truly embraces our emphasis on developing young men of character who will lead lives of honor both on and off the field.”

Curtis McCalla has been hired to head the school’s tennis programs.

Tae Hanna is entering his second school year as Pinewood’s Athletic Director. Also back for their second year are softball coach **Ben Snyder**, Girls Basketball coach **Will Priestner**, Cheerleading coach **Veronica Pieretti**, and Athletic Trainer **Amber Andrews**.

The school’s other head coaches are very familiar to students and parents alike.

Thomas King, who serves as assistant AD and assistant football coach, is a main stay.

Pat Eidson has been the Pinewood Boys’ Basketball coach for more than 30 years and has led Pinewood teams to multiple region and state championships. In February, he led the Panthers to the **2026 SCISA 4A Boys Basketball State Championship**. He holds the South Carolina record for most basket-

First Baptist adds one to the coaching staff

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Charleston – While the majority of the varsity coaching staff at **First Baptist School** returns intact, there will be a few new faces this fall.

The school will have a new volleyball coach as **Emma Buchanan** steps into the role this fall. In the spring, the Hurricanes baseball team will have a new leader but that person has yet to be named and approved by the school.

Other returning varsity head coaches include athletic director **Jay Godbolt**, assistant athletic director and girls basketball coach **Presley Singleton**, boys basketball coach **Antoine Saunders**, cross country coach **Erin Jackson**, football coach **Kevin Mapp**, boys soccer coach **Maurice Walters**, softball coach **Katelyn Powell**, track coach **Chad Bond** and golf coach **Jacob Redmond**.

2025-26 athletic awards

Highlighted by state championship efforts in girls basketball and boys soccer, the athletic year at First Baptist was overall successful.

Most of the Hurricane teams were highly competitive in conference play and took on tough schedules across the board.

The school’s athletic department recently released

superlative honors in spring sports, recognizing the top performers and leaders in each sport.

In boys track, **Brady Jackson** was the most valuable performer in running events. **Bates Walpole** was the MVP in field events. **Miles Jackson** received the Hurricane award and **Emory Bentley** received the Rookie award. Most improved performers were **George Doyle** in running events and **Demarcus Vinson** in field events.

Ellie Blitch was MVP in running events in girls track while **Hadley Burr** was MVP in field events. **Clara Grace Blitch** received the Hurricane award and **Elise Crumpton** was most improved in running events. **Amelia Blitch** received the Rookie award and **Addison Townsend** was most improved in field events.

Avin Harrison was tabbed as the MVP in varsity baseball while **Thomas Martin** and **Garrett Huffman** shared most improved honors. **Bennett Bollinger** earned the Cy Young award for pitching, and **Henry Cline** shared the Hurricane award with **Landon Nutter**.

The MVP in boys golf was **Tucker Mappus**. **Walker Jack Weaver** was the most improved player and **Abraham Edwards** received the Hurricane award.

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ball coaching wins.

Gail Osborne has been the Pinewood Girls Soccer coach since 2005 and led the program to multiple region championships and eight state championships.

Jessica Archambault has coached Swimming for the school for more than 15 years.

Other coaches returning are **Andy Morgan** (Lacrosse and Girls Golf), **DeVonte Holloman** (Football), **Tuesday Abernathy** (Girls Volleyball), **JW Myers** (Boys Golf) and **Jake Birdsong** (Cross Country/Track).

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Watts Tisdale was the MVP in boys soccer and **Cal Oliver** was most improved. **Josh Laney** earned the Hurricane award.

Wells Griffin was named MVP of the girls soccer team with **Ellison Cummings** named most improved player. **Caroline Morris** earned the Hurricane award.

Tate Kaplanis was the MVP in junior varsity boys soccer. **Tucker Thomas** was most improved and **Wyatt Brown** received the Hurricane award.

In softball, **Addison Townsend** and **Lula Mayo** shared team MVP honors. **Taber Stelling** and **Bailey Milleman** shared the Hurricane award. **Olivia Jessey** and **LG Cooper** shared most improved honors.

Superior coaching keeps Cyclones athletics on track

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Charleston – A lot of factors, both tangible and intangible, go into the making of a successful high school athletic program.

The obvious ingredient to success in sports is having quality athletes who compete in the arena of play. As important as having quality athletes is to success, having quality coaching is equally important.

Coaches don’t compete but their work throughout the preparation process cannot be measured. Athletes need direction and motivation. They need knowledge and they need to train and practice at a high level in order to compete. Coaches provide that motivation and direction. They establish the winning culture and set forth the discipline needed to work hard with the proper attitude.

Porter-Gaud is home to one of the top athletic programs in the state. Amongst their fellow SCISA schools in South Carolina, Porter-Gaud rates at or near the top across the board. Multiple teams are annual contenders for state championships, and many times over do the Cyclones win state titles.

The high success rate in athletics can be directly attributed to a committed group of quality coaches

Ashley Hall tabs Strickland as athlete of the year

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Charleston – Ashley Hall athletic director **Christian Alcantara** reports very little change within the 2026-27 varsity coaching roster.

Franny Slay, with 12 state titles and more than 800 career wins, will return as the volleyball coach. **Madeline Gill Baldridge** will head up the sailing program and **Cyndi Simpson** is the equestrian coach.

Cassidy Rindge is the swim coach and **Grant Vatter** is the golf coach. **Jeff Word** coaches cross country and track, and **Charlotte Hartsock** is the tennis coach. **Madi Foti** is the lacrosse coach while Marc Simpson coaches the soccer team.

Bryan Bednar returns as the basketball coach, while **Kathleen Klinzing** and **Ellen Rieber** head the archery program.

“When evaluating a coach, the first things you should notice are the intangibles,” Alcantara says. “Positive energy, high standards, and a genuine passion for both the sport and their role. Strong communication skills are equally important because a coach’s primary responsibility is to effectively teach, guide and communicate with our student/athletes.

“Finally, its essential that a coach has a deep understanding of the female athlete, whether through personal experience as an athlete or through extensive experience coaching and mentoring women. I am proud to say that

McKoy continues to build winners at JICHS

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
James Island – After a pair of mediocre seasons to begin his tenure as the head football coach at **James Island**, **Jamar McKoy** has worked to build his program into one of the more consistent programs in the state.

McKoy’s first two seasons yielded just a 9-10 record. However, over the last four seasons, James Island is 45-8, including a 12-2 record last fall. The Trojans reached the AAAAA Division I Lower State title game before losing to Summerville. Both losses last season came to Summerville.

James Island has completed spring practices and is spending the summer getting stronger while competing in 7-on-7 competitions.

“Good spring for us,” he said. “We got after it pretty good. High intensity stuff. We got some great work in with the younger guys and we made some the returners were back up to speed in terms of their knowledge in the system.”

McKoy says quality experience returns from last year’s team but there will be a new guy calling the shots and running the offense on the field. Senior **Brady Dantzler** is the new trigger man for the Trojans, replacing his brother Connor, who threw for 3,400 yards and 42 touchdowns last season.

who strive to be the best in their sport.

Porter-Gaud has several varsity head coaches with state championships on their personal resume. Volleyball coach **Megan Crouch** has won four state titles and has 425 wins in 13 seasons as a head coach.

Boys basketball coach **John Pearson** has won four state championships and is a perennial contender. Lacrosse coaches **Robbie Robinson** (boys) and **Brent Hilpert** (girls) each has won multiple state titles. **Hugh Knight** has multiple state championships in cross country and track and field, while girls soccer coach **Hope Walters** has led her program to back-to-back state championships in the last two years.

Michael Walsh heads up the swimming program and has won more than a dozen state titles(boys and girls). Porter-Gaud also has successful programs in golf, tennis, sailing, bowling and equestrian.

Continuity within the coaching ranks is a key ingredient to extended success. Porter-Gaud rarely goes through coaching changes among their varsity sports but from time to time there are openings to be filled.

Athletic director **Al Wilson** has filled two openings on the varsity staff. In girls basketball, former player **Elise Pearson** will assume duties as head coach this winter. Pearson was an all-state performer

these core qualities have served us well in identifying and bringing outstanding coaches into our program.”

2025-26 sports awards

The Ashley Hall volleyball program is one of the state’s best, led by coach **Franny Slay**.

Ashley Hall has won a dozen state titles over the years, due in part to having talented, dedicated athletes to shoulder the load.

One of the best to ever wear a Ashley Hall jersey was setter **Charlotte Strickland**. As a five-year starter, Strickland never had less than 500 assists in a season. As a sophomore and junior, the Tulane University signee had 1,415 assists. For her career, she has 3,137 assists in 450 sets played. She also had 283 kills, 993 digs and 276 service aces.

For her efforts, the school recently honored Strickland as the 2025026 Athlete of the Year. She also was named the most valuable player of the volleyball team.

In addition to Strickland, the school also honored several other athletes with various accolades. **Ella McCall** received the Slay award and **Gemma Williams** received the Comeback award.

Gretchen Dawson was the Breakthrough athlete of the year and **Natalie Bennett** received the award for best individual performance. Girls tennis coach **Charlottle Hartsock** was named the Coach of the Year and **Penny Rose** was named Teammate of the Year. **Harper Riley** was the junior varsity athlete of the year.

“We are excited for Brady to have this opportunity and he’s ready for this,” McKoy said. “He’s a really competitive kid with an edge. He can throw it and run it and he has prepared himself for this. He doesn’t need to be Connor. Just go be Brady because Brady is good enough.”

Dantzler has three quality targets returning in **Raphael Puii**, **Jordan Kendrick** and **Sam Crumpton**. Puii had more than 1,400 yards and 18 touchdowns last season while Crumpton is among the best tight ends in the state. He recently committed to Charleston Southern.

Four starters return up front, led by fourth-year varsity tackle **Israel Harris**.

The defense will be led by returning starters **Rob Grant** (line), **Bryson Bowers** (linebacker) and **Deuce Prioleau** (corner back).

“I like this group of kids,” McKoy said. “They want to continue to build on the recent successes that we’ve had as a program. They are learning what it takes to compete and to win. I think we have a chance to be pretty good.”

James Island announces new coaches

Athletic director **Jeremy Holland** has confirmed the hiring of several new varsity coaches to the 2026-27 coaching roster/

Sydney McEachern will be the new girls volleyball

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at Porter-Gaud and played at College of Charleston.

Baseball will have a new coach as **Lawton Hendricks** takes over the program. Hendricks spent the last eight years as an assistant at James Island Charter, helping to guide the program to three consecutive state championships. He is a graduate of Porter-Gaud rival First Baptist.

Matt Neighbors returns for his second season as the head football coach.

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In each sport, a Most Valuable Player was recognized. **Reves Sidebottom** earned the award in swimming and **Tate Erwin** was the MVP of the golf team.

Lily Sloan was MVP in girls tennis and Bennett was the cross country MVP. **Pippa Taylor** was the MVP in sailing and **Gretchen Dawson** was MVP in equestrian. Penny Rose was the MVP in archery and **Molly Mettler** was the MVP in basketball.

Kate Murphy earned the award in lacrosse and **Catherine Clark** was the MVP in soccer. **Madison Middleton** was the MVP in track and field.

JAMES ISLAND



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coach and **Emma Oswald** is taking over the competition cheer program. **Joe Riddell** will assume duties as the boys and girls swim coach.

Holland says there also will be a new tennis coach but that hire is not yet official.

David Lee returns as the cross country and track director. **Travis Smith** is the boys basketball coach and **Emily Baldwin** is the girls basketball coach.

John Eppelsheimer is the boys golf coach and **Scott McInnis** is the girls golf coach. **Tony Bolen** is the wrestling coach and Matt Spivey is the baseball coach. **Courtney Hill** is the softball coach. **Todd Robinson** returns as the boys soccer coach and **Gerard Walker** is the girls soccer coach.

Handling lacrosse are **Matthew Loda** (boys) and **Sarah Updegraff** (girls).

LV

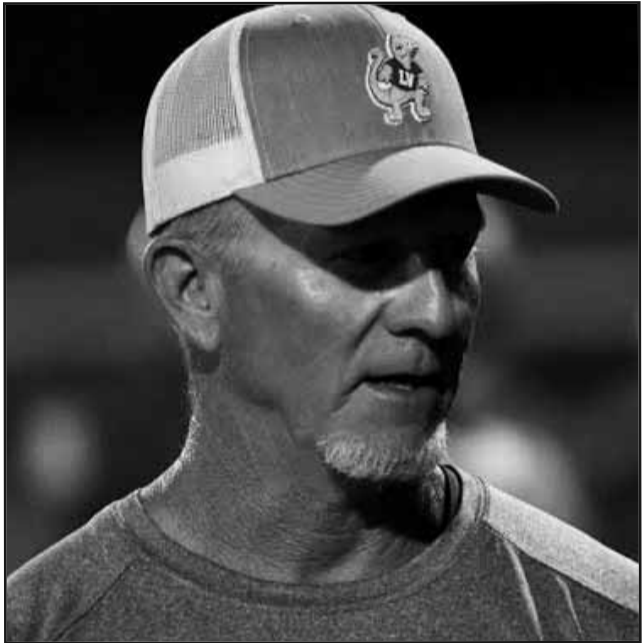
LAKE VIEW

Wild Gators

LV



Former NFL star Darius Leonard is coming home to Lake View to help the LVHS coaching staff in 2026



Daryl King returns to coach the Wild Gators on the gridiron this season

Former star athlete giving back to LVHS as coach

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Lake View – Having secured a solid financial future through an NFL career, **Darius Leonard** could easily choose the easy life of travel and golf.

However, Leonard has made the choice to give back to his community of **Lake View** by serving in a coaching role. Leonard will assume duties as head basketball coach this winter and will spend this fall as a linebackers coach for the Wild Gators football team.

“This is my way of giving back and trying to help young men grow in life,” Leonard said. “I’m really excited about the opportunity that Lake View is giving me. I want to help the school grow and we all know how important athletics is to this community.”

Leonard is easily one of the best athletes to ever wear a Lake View uniform. He was a star in football, basketball and baseball, graduating in 2013. He earned a football opportunity at South Carolina State but his talent was far greater than the FCS level.

“I didn’t focus on academics in my first two years of high school and that hurt me, but I still was able to get a chance to play and get an education so it worked out,” Leonard said.

The 6-2, 235-pound linebacker was a star at SC State and rated as one of the best linebackers in the country at any level. He ended up being the 32nd pick of the 2018 NFL draft, taken in the second round by the Indianapolis Colts. He was a star from a day one.

Leonard earned NFL defensive rookie of the year honors after leading the league in tackles. He was named all-pro, the first of three such awards in his career.

Only a back injury slowed Leonard down. That injury ended up a career-ending injury after six NFL seasons. He totaled more than 600 career tackles, 16 sacks and 12 interceptions. Had it not been for injury, Leonard, who turns 31 on July 27, would still be playing.

“I thought about coming back but I knew I could not perform at the same level as before,” he said. “It was tough walking away but I really did it for my future health. I had to start the next chapter and that’s why I’m coaching.”

Leonard retired in 2023 and has actually been Lake View’s junior varsity basketball coach for the last two years. This summer he held his ninth annual football camp for Lake View kids, free or charge.

“I want as many opportunities as I can get to pour into these kids and make sure they are on the right path, on and off the field. I want to help them avoid the mistakes that I made as a kid. I feel like my life experience can benefit these kids in a lot of ways.”

Leonard was actually the second member of his family to play in the NFL His older brother by 11 years, **Anthony Waters**, played at Clemson and spent a few seasons on NFL rosters.

Leonard loves his football duties but is looking forward to setting the culture with the basketball program. The varsity team has struggled to win in recent years but a new voice could be effective.

“The best part is that I coached the jayvee team the last two years so I have a great feel for the kids,” Leonard said. “They know me and what I expect so it should be a smooth transition.”

Lake View athletic director **Brandy Huggins** says the basketball position is the only changeiin varsity coaches for the coming year. Huggins will return as the softball coach and Will Celmer returns as the baseball coach.

Daryl King is back to lead the football program and **Larry Inman** is the girls basketball coach. . **Angela King** returns as the volleyball coach..

From the Principal, Faculty, Staff and Students

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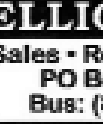
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ORANGEBURG PREP INDIANS



Second year Head Coach Brooks Smith addresses his team during spring drills

Smith more at ease beginning second year at OP

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Orangeburg – With a year under his belt as the varsity football head coach for **Orangeburg Preparatory School**, **Brooks Smith** is feeling a little more at ease with things as the start of the 2026 season approaches on August 21.

“I do feel more comfortable,” said Smith, who took over last year after **Don Shelley** retired. “That comes mainly with the day-to-day operations – when to prep the field, when to do this, when to do that, things people don’t generally think about.

“The Xs and Os hasn’t really changed much. I am definitely not as nervous going into this year. It’s more the admin(istration) part than the coaching part. I’m excited, very excited for the kids.”

Smith has four members of his initial coaching staff returning in defensive coordinator **Michael Heath**, running backs and linebackers coach **Ryan McNair**, wide receivers and defensive backs coach **Ley Pickens** and veteran OP coach **Sam Lambrecht**. The two new members of the staff are **Caden Haws**, who will coach the offensive line and the defensive line, and **Cade Wiles**, who will help with wide receivers and defensive backs.

Smith, who led the Indians to a 7-4 record and a berth in the SCISA AA state playoffs last season, is excited to see how Orangeburg Prep performs defensively with eight starters back and a year of familiarity working in Heath’s system.

“It took a little while for the kids to learn the system, but at the end of the year it was pretty impressive what we were doing,” Smith said. “He also has done a jam-up job as the strength coach. He has really improved that aspect of the program. Our student-athletes look different today than they did a year ago.”

Last season was McNair’s first one coaching on the varsity level. Smith is impressed with how he has developed in such a short time.

“Ryan does a great job with the kids,” he said. “He knows the defensive system and how the coach wants it done.”

Pickens began coaching at Orangeburg Prep when Shelley took over four years ago. Pickens worked for Shelley during his first stint with the Indians as well.

“Coach Pickens does a great job with teaching the fundamentals, especially with the wide receives on

running their routes and on showing the defensive backs where to be and how to get there,” Smith said.

Smith is really happy to have Haws on board to coach the lines. Haws was a 3-year starter on the defensive line for **Power 4 Conference school Brigham Young University**.

“He’s a big man, a large individual, who pushes the kids really hard,” Smith said of Haws, who he estimates is 6-feet-3-inches tall and weighs around 300 pounds. “The players have really taken to him. He does a great job with the kids, teaching them the little nuances on both sides of the line that you learn while starting at a Power 4 school. He’s teaching them little things with technique and stuff. I’m excited to see him out on the field with them (when fall practice starts on July 23).”

Lambrecht has been around the Orangeburg Prep athletic program in different capacities for three decades, according to Smith.

“He’s up in the booth with me, and he’s just a wealth of knowledge,” said Smith, who was coached by Lambrecht.

Wilds is another graduate of Orangeburg Prep, who played collegiately at **Newberry College**.

“He’s been out and about this summer,” Smith said. “He is very knowledgeable.”

Smith is hoping to one day have a run as the Orangeburg Prep football coach like the one he has had as the head coach of the school’s girls track and field team. Smith led the Indians to their sixth consecutive state championship this past season. He will also be coaching the boys team as well and will be assisted by **Michael Delaney** and **Olivia Smith**.

Orangeburg Prep will have only one new varsity head coach. That will be **Will Jameson**, who will take over the softball program.

“They hired Will to market the school and advertise, and I will get him to coach softball,” said athletic director **Jan Stoudenmire**, who is also the person whom Jameson will be succeeding as softball head coach. “He has a lot of experience with public school, and we’re happy to have him come on staff and learn about SCISA.”

Stoudenmire will be back for her 28th season as the girls basketball head coach. She has led the Indians to the championship game of the last two AAA state tournaments. The Indians posted a 22-5 record.

Barkley McNair, Stoudenmire’s daughter, will be

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the junior varsity head coach again and will assist with the varsity. **Angie Patterson** will be the B team head coach.

Delaney will be returning to coach the boys basketball team. Orangeburg Prep finished with a 9-16 record after reaching the semifinals in Delaney’s first season.

Katherine Smith will again coach the volleyball team. She led the Indians to a region title and a 2-2 record in the AAA state tournament.

Tate Jameson, the cousin of Will, will once again coach the baseball team. After leading the Indians to the championship series of the 2025 AAA state playoffs, Jameson guided them to a 13-13 record this season and to the championship round of their bracket in the playoffs.

Mary Albergotti will be the girls tennis head coach, **Matt Burses** will be the boys golf coach, **Josh Shurtleff** will coach the boys and girls cross country teams as well as the bowling team, and **Lauren Still** will be the cheer coach.

McClam ready for new role at Carolina Academy

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Lake City – The football program at **Carolina Academy** has been a rotating door when it comes to head coaches in recent years, but the newest hire for the job is hoping to bring stability to the proud program.

Tyler McClam is taking over as the athletic director and head football coach this fall, moving up from his role as an assistant. McClam also coached the baseball team last spring and has been coaching in various roles at the school for the last several years.

“I’ve been here in the program so I feel like that will help in terms of knowing the kids and the kids being comfortable with me,” McClam said. “We’ve had a lot of change in recent years but I wait these kids to know I have their back. They deserve some consistency and I hope to be able to provide that for them. So far, it’s been a good transition. We’re working hard this summer and moving forward.”

McClam grew up in Lake City, graduating from Lake City High in 2010. He was a football and baseball player in high school and played college football at Campbell University.

After college, McClam returned to Lake City and got involved as a claim adjuster for an insurance company.

“I never really wanted to be a coach but I loved sports,” he said. “My daughter was involved in basketball here and one year they needed a coach for the jayvee team so I took it. I got hooked. Being around the kids and helping them grow is very satisfying. It’s my way of giving back to this community.”

Taking on the role of football coach is enough to keep him busy but McClam also is adjusting to his role as athletic director.

“It has been an adjustment but we are getting



Head coach
Tyler McClam

through it,” he said. “We have great people here. People always willing to help and answer questions. I just have to be organized and be available when needed.”

As for the football program, McClam has a clear idea of what the expectations are and he will work to get everyone on the same page.

“As far as schemes, we will be a lot like we were under coach Rankin,” he said. “We want to be physical and play with great effort. We want to play with more fire and energy, fly around and play like we want to be there.

“I am very fortunate to have this opportunity. I haven’t always wanted to be a coach but I am 100 percent committed to making an impact for these kids. I’m nervous but excited to get started. I can’t wait to be doing real football things to prepare for the season.”

Lake City AD Apicella proud of “The City Way”

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Lake City – **Matt Apicella** likes to talk about “The City way.” When doing so, he is referring to how things are done in the **Lake City High School** athletic department, and if anybody should know, it is him.

The **Ohio** native arrived at the school in 1999, began coaching in 2000, became the baseball head coach in 2010 and the school’s athletic director in 2013.

That has afforded him the opportunity to shape the department’s coaching staff. Apicella is very pleased with the one he has in place for the 2026-27 school year.

“We have a veteran staff across the board with a few new coaches that will be taught ‘The City way,’” Apicella said. “I am extremely proud of our coaches as they hold the standard expected and develop more than athletes.”

The Lake City baseball team just completed an outstanding season under Apicella’s leadership. The Panthers went 18-9 and won their district tournament in the AA state playoffs to earn a berth in the 4-team lower state tournament.

Jamison Estep is back for his fourth season as the football head coach. The Panthers are coming off of a 3-8 season.

Lake City has scrimmages at **Woodland** on August 6 and at **Johnsonville** on August 10 before playing in a jamboree in **Kingstree** on August 14. The Panthers

open their regular season on the road against **Hannah-Pamplico** on August 21.

Seneca Barron will once again be the boys basketball head coach as well as the boys track and field head coach. **Shaquetta Cooper** is the girls basketball head coach.

Heidi Matthews returns to coach softball,

Lorenzo McFadden is the wrestling coach, **Matt Luna** is the boys soccer coach, **Ernest Graham** is the girls track coach, and **Thomas Bucks** is the girls soccer coach.

Lake City will have three new head coaches. **Jerry State** will take over the boys and girls cross country teams, while **Jade Johnson** is the new volleyball head coach. **Marion Brown** is the new cheer coach.

While Lake City is still part of the AA classification following the **South Carolina High School League’s** biannual reclassification, its region will definitely have a new feel to it.

It will be part of the 6-school Region 6. Three of

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the schools will be Region 7-AA schools from last year in Lake City, **Manning** and East Clarendon. The other three schools are ones that dropped down from AAA in **Dillon**, **Marlboro County** and **Waccamaw**.

Williamsburg Academy STALLIONS

Williamsburg makes addition to football staff

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Kingstree – The Williamsburg Academy football program made it to a state championship game for the fifth straight season last year, beating **Colleton Prep Academy** 36-14 to claim the SCISA Class A state title.

The Stallions snapped a 2-year title game losing streak in their first year under head coach **Will Furse**. Having lost only six seniors from the 11-1 team, Williamsburg is certainly in position to pull off a sixth straight title appearance as well as a repeat.

As far as the coaching staff goes, there are some changes. There is one addition but none of the coaches from last year have left.

The newcomer to the staff is **Chris Rowland**, and he will step into an important role as the defensive coordinator. Rowland, who will also coach defensive backs, was at **East Clarendon High School** the past two seasons. He was the special teams coordinator as well as the secondary coach last season.

As the new defensive coordinator, Rowland will have some big shoes to fill. The Stallions allowed just 157 points last season under the guidance of veteran coach **Ken Kellahan**.

Kellahan, who won a state title as the Williamsburg head coach himself, will have a new assignment. He will be in charge of the offensive line this season.

John Floyd returns to coach the defensive linemen and tight ends, while **Chase McFaddin** will be back as the junior varsity head coach and coach wide receivers on the varsity. **Sam Plowden** will be in charge of the running backs and outside linebackers, and **Britton Morris** will coach the inside linebackers and assist with the offensive line.

Furse said he has a great relationship with his coaching staff, and the members of the staff genuinely like each other as well.

"I think our staff, we get along really well," Furse said. "They are all good coaches, but more importantly, they are all good people. We all enjoy spending time together, which is great. It makes work not seem like work."

Furse said he doesn't sense any difference in the way his coaching staff has handled this offseason compared to how it prepared for last year's championship run.

"It's pretty similar to what it was last year," Furse said. "We have to once again deal with high expectations, and we're having to tell our players that just because we had a good season last year, that doesn't mean it will be the case this year. We have to continue to put the work in. Our coaches have done a good job of keeping everyone locked in."

Rowland will also fill an important role for the Stallions away from the football field. He will be the head coach for the boys junior varsity and varsity basketball teams.

Rowland replaces **Kevin Burrows**, who stepped down after nine seasons due to conflicts with his work schedule.

Rowland and Furse were classmates at Laurence Manning and attended college together as well. Furse is

excited to see what his friend does with the program.

"We worked together in the past, and I knew he was hungry for a varsity boys basketball job," Furse said. "He started coaching at **Laurence Manning (Academy)**, where he played for now Williamsburg girls head coach) **Will Epps**, and he's been an assistant at East Clarendon the last couple of years."

"I knew he wanted to be a head coach, so when the job opened up I told him about it. I'm looking forward to see how he does."

Rowland inherits a team that went 12-12 and won its opening game in the AAA state tournament. The Stallions only lost one player in their rotation to graduation.

"With Chris coming on we've had a really good summer," Furse said. "I think it will show up in the wins and losses column this year."

Epps is preparing for his third season at Williamsburg as not only the girls basketball head coach but the volleyball head coach as well.

He guided the girls basketball team to an 11-17 record last year after winning just four games in his first season. Like the boys, the Stallion girls also won their state tournament opener.

The baseball and softball programs will have a pair of second-year coaches in Morris and **Jada Cox**, respectively.

Morris led Williamsburg to a 20-4 record and the AAA state championship series. The Stallions were swept by **Calhoun Academy** in the best-of-3 series.

The softball team finished with a 15-11 record and reached the championship round in its bracket in the AAA state tournament.

"They both did a great job this past season," Furse said of Morris and Cox. "She did a really good job with the softball team even though you didn't necessarily see it with the record."

Williamsburg will have a new girls tennis head coach in **Claire Wise**, who has been the middle school girls basketball head coach. Wise replaces **Mac Kirby**.

McFaddin will once again be the boys and girls track and field head coach, **Ned Hemingway** will be the boys golf coach, **Pat Wildes** will coach the boys and girls cross country teams, and **Lucie Ann Smunk** will be the cheerleading coach.

Furse thinks big things await the Williamsburg athletic teams in the 2026-27 school year.

"I'm extremely excited about all of the programs," he said. "We've got a lot of young coaches who are hard workers, relentless teachers of their sports, and that's what it takes. With practice good things will happen."

If Williamsburg is to repeat as a state champion in football, it will do so at the AA level following the bi-annual reclassification. The other schools in AA football are Colleton Prep, **St. John's Christian Academy**, defending AA state runner-up **Pee Dee Academy**, **Greenwood Christian School**, **Orangeburg Prep**, **Patrick Henry Academy**, **Spartanburg Day School**, **Calhoun Academy** and **Cross Schools**.

Williamsburg will compete at AAA in all the other sports.

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Bamberg County Feature Page

Bamberg-Ehrhardt athletics keep it in the family

By Neill Kirkpatrick
Special to the HSSR

Bamberg – The 2025/26 athletic season saw the Bamberg-Ehrhardt Red Raiders start the year with a state championship and finished the year with the girls track and field team winning their second consecutive class A state championship and in between those championships they enjoyed a lot of success with their other athletic programs.

When talking with head football coach **Corey Crosby** and head track and field coach **Travis Wilson** they both say the same thing, "We don't have boy athletes or girl athletes, we have athletes."

At the state class A track and field meet coach Wilson said, "I coach the same way regardless of the sport. I'm also the defensive coordinator and I expect the same effort from both teams. I told our girls last year to win a state championship we need dogs and they understood what I was talking about. The girls dug deep and would not settle for second place."

The coaches also talk about how important it is to have a staff that is from the area and has roots in the community.

"Our coaches are from here so they have been in the trenches and they understand the hard work that has been put in before now. It means a lot because they coach not just for job or paycheck but for the town and the people around," said coach Crosby Athletic Director **Robert Williams** said, "The one thing about being a small community like ours is athletics is serious business within the community. Our coaches take it seriously, they are dedicated, and they take pride in what they are coaching and the effect they have on our student/athletes."

Coach Willaims softball had another strong season hosting the district 8 tournament. They fell in the final game.

On the diamond the Red Raiders were back in a familiar spot as head Coach **Gene Schwarting** had his team hosting the district 8 tournament as the number one seed. They won their first two games

Vikings ready to launch good year in athletics

By Neill Kirkpatrick
Special to the HSSR

Denmark – The Denmark-Olar Vikings head into the 2026/27 athletic year with their staff intact from last year and with a renewed excitement they are looking to have a banner year on the field, the pitch, the track and on the courts.

Marcus Rivera took reigns of the boys' basketball from long time head coach **Hercules Davis**. After a rough start to the season, the Vikings rebounded to finish second in region with an 8-2 record and first round home playoff game. Coach Rivera inherited a team that lost 9 seniors from the Class A state champions.

"It was a tough start to the season. We had a young team that was learning a new system. Once the guys understood what we expected of them and how we wanted them to play we became a better team. If we can continue to improve and grow as a team in the off season. We will be looking to have a good season," coach Rivera said.

Candance Jones took over the girls basketball

and were in the drivers seat before they fell in the finals.

Coach **Wilson's** girls team won their second straight state championship and with most of his team back they will be looking for a three-peat next season. The boys team finished in the top ten.

"I could not be prouder of the girls. I told them that we could repeat but we had to recommit to the process that got them here. They worked harder and the results were another state championship," said coach Wilson.

Mary Templeton's boys' and girls' cross-country teams had good years with the girls placing fourth at the state cross-country meet while the boy's finished in 16th place.

In basketball, the boy's and girl's teams both advanced into the class A playoffs. **Willie Carter** led the boys' team to a region championship with a 16-4/9-1 record while **Marcus Cann** led the girls' team to 13-5/7-2 record.

Faron Mixon led the volleyball team to another playoff berth and they advanced into the second round while **Terrell Haynes's** wrestling team finished their season in the third round where they fell to lower state champion Edisto.

Jan McCormack and **Bryce Compton** coached the girls tennis team and boys soccer team, respectively. Both squads reached the second round of the class A playoffs.

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head spot and continued the Lady Viking's winning ways. Her squad won their sixth consecutive region title and ran their region winning streak to 69-consecutive games. She lost only one senior from last seasons team so they will be looking to increase their win streak and region title streak this up coming season. Coach Jones is also the head Boy's track and field coach.

William Raysor is back for his third year at the helm of the Viking football program. Last season was a learning experience for his Vikings. He had an extremely young team and the Vikings suffered some injuries during the season. The Vikings will look to rebound and challenge for a play-off spot in the 2026 season.

Back to lead the soccer program is **Xzavier Goldsmith**. Like all the other programs his team was very young and inexperienced.

Lora Hampton pulled double duty last year as she took over the Volleyball program from the retired coach Davis and she headed up the girls track and field. Her volleyball team finished second in re-

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gion play with a 5-2 record and the hosted a first round play-off game.

Chandra Sanders-Williams is the competitive cheer with **Latris Deloach** and **Mitch Baker** head up the Girl's Soccer and golf programs, respectively.

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Manning football coaching staff has changes

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Manning – As **Reggie Kennedy** prepares for his eighth season as the football head coach for **Manning High School**, he will do so with some newcomers to his staff.

Austin Floyd, the former **Laurence Manning Academy** head coach who spent the past four years as the offensive coordinator for **Sumter**, is joining the Monarchs. Floyd will coach the offensive line and be the co-offensive coordinator. He will share the duties with the returning **King Cutter**, who will coach tight ends and H backs.

“Austin Floyd is coming over from Sumter High and bringing a lot of championship experience with him,” Kennedy said. Floyd, who was 25-10 and led the Swampcats to the SCISA AAA state title game on two occasions in his three years, made the move after Sumter head coach **Mark Barnes** decided to retire.

Cutter will be calling plays during games. **Gregg King** is back as the running backs coach as well as handling the strength program, **Marcus Lloyd** will coach the wide receivers, and **Calvin Giles-McClary Jr.** will coach the quarterbacks.

Kennedy, an All-Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference linebacker during his playing days at **South Carolina State** in the late 1980s, will call the defense. **Dontavis Miller** will coach the linebackers, **Kevin Miller** the outside linebackers, **Marco Thompson** the safeties, **Calvin McClary** the cornerbacks and **Craig Hatcher** the defensive line.

Hatcher returns to Manning after spending one season on the staff at Laurence Manning.

“We are glad to have Craig back with us, and he will be an asset to us on the defensive side of the ball,” Kennedy said.

Dontavis Miller will be the special teams coordinator and will also serve as the junior varsity head coach.

Maria Player and newcomer **Brittney Cothran** will be the athletic trainers.

“Brittney Cothran is an addition to our medical staff and will be an asset to our athletic department,” Kennedy said,. “We welcome all of our newcomers and we’re looking forward to working with them.”

Kennedy likes the coaching staff he has put together.

“I feel really good about my coaching staff and the addition of the newcomers,” he said,. “This staff has a lot of experience and knows what it takes to win. I am looking forward to working with this coaching staff this season.”

After enduring a winless season in 2020 during COVID-19 and winning just twice the following year, Kennedy has had Manning on an upward trajectory over the past four years. The Monarchs have a 37-12 record during that time, have reached the third round of the AA state playoffs the last two years and went 9-4 last season.

Kennedy is pleased with what he’s seen from

his team as it prepares for its season opener on August 21.

“We had an outstanding offseason and summer workouts so far,” he siad. “The players are buying in and working hard. We participated in the USC (University of South Carolina) 7-on-7 and had several 11-on-11 workouts this summer. I can see us getting better each time we compete against someone else.

“One thing we are working on this summer and during the preseason is to develop some depth.”

Manning will play host to a pair of 4-team scrimmages at **Ramsey Stadium**. The first will be on August 6, the second on August 10. The Monarchs will host the **FTC Jamboree** on August 14.

Kennedy is once again the athletic director for **Clarendon County School District** as well as being the site athletic director for Manning.

He has two new head coaches of programs in place, but they are familiar faces. Kevin Miller will be the boys basketball head coach, while King will coach the baseball team.

Miller takes over for **Dr. Shawn Johnson**, who also happens to be the district superintendent. Kennedy said Johnson stepped down because the two jobs were stretching him then.

Having a more-than-capable replacement available in Miller surely made the decision easier. Miller was the head coach at fellow district school **Scott’s Branch** for four seasons. He guided the Eagles to Class A state championship games in 2022 and 2023, the final two in a run of four straight title game appearances.

Miller inherits a team that went 13-13 and lost in the first round of the state playoffs. However, Manning only lost one key contributor to graduation.

Justin Johnson is back for his third year in charge of the girls basketball program. The Monarchs went 9-17 last season and won three region contests after getting just five wins, just one of them in a region contest, in his first year.

Like the boys team, the Manning girls lost just one major contributor from last season

Catherine Mahoney returns as the softball coach. She led Manning to a 9-12 record and a berth in the state playoffs where it went 0-2.

“We started off strong and made the playoffs, but it didn’t go as we wanted,” said Mahoney, whose All-Region 7-AA player was **Shayden Epps**. “We lost two strong seniors that we have to replace for next season, but I am looking forward to a successful season next year.”

Dontavis Miller will coach both the boys and girls track and field teams. He led the Monarchs to a fifth-place finish in the AA boys state meet and their first region title in at least a decade.

Sonia Daniels returns as the volleyball head coach, **Deizmond Kelly-Gaskins** will be the cheer coach, **Richard Scheider** returns to head up wrestling, **Ryan Glossum** will coach boys soccer,



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and **Holly McCabe** will once again coach girls tennis.

Kennedy is still looking to fill vacancies for boys and girls cross country and boys golf.

Wilson Hall has no changes on varsity staff

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Sumter – There are three words that come to the mind of **Wilson Hall** athletic director **Glen Rector** when talking about his varsity head coaching staff.

“Experience, stability and consistency are characteristics of our staff, which contributes to our overall success within the program,” Rector said.

For the second consecutive school year, Wilson Hall will be making no changes to its head coaching staff.

Rector is the leader of the Barons athletic department in both position and tenure. Rector will be starting his 22nd season as the girls basketball head coach. He led the Lady Barons to a 16-10 record last year. He will also be the boys golf coach for the third straight season.

Rector’s two assistant athletic directors, **Adam Jarecki** and **Rip Ripley**, are also head coaches of multiple sports.

Jarecki is back for his 12th season as the football head coach. He led the Barons to an 11-2 record for the second consecutive season and to a spot in the SCISA AAA state championship game for the third year in a row. Jarecki will return as the baseball head coach for the third year.

Ripley returns as the head coach for both the boys and girls track and field teams, the volleyball team and the boys basketball team. He led both the boys and girls track teams to runner-up finishes in the Division I state meet this past season after guiding the

girls to the 2025 championship.

The volleyball team went 28-11 and 2-2 in the AAAA state tournament, while the boys hoops team finished 15-16.

The husband-and-wife team of **Katherine Schwartz** and **Reid Schwartz** will once again coach the boys and girls cross country teams. The boys won the AAAA state title for a second straight year, while the girls finished third.

Teresa Alexander will return to coach the softball program, while **Brent Hiott** returns as the head coach of the shooting sports teams. Both are ultra-successful programs.

Curtis Helms returns as the head coach of the bowling teams, leading the girls to a state crown. **Jason Bartlett** is back as the boys soccer head coach after guiding the Barons to the championship match of the AAA playoffs.

Ryan Dutcher will coach the girls golf team, **Jeanna Mahr** the boys and girls swim teams, **Emily Anne Beasley** the equestrian team and **Frances James** the cheerleading team.

The tennis programs will once again have **Julia Sorrells** coaching the girls team and **Luke Whiteside** the boys. This will be the third year for each.

Jarecki’s football staff will have **Robbie Brown** coaching quarterbacks, **Sam Watford** running backs and free safeties, **Chuck McCord** wide receivers and defensive backs, **Kurt Wilson** the defensive line and **Jake Meyers** the linebackers. Jarecki and Wilson will share O line duties.



Proudly Saluting the Barons!



Good luck to the Wilson Hall Barons

Heathwood Hall aiming for strong 2026 showing

By WORTHY EVANS
Special to the HSSR

Columbia - The senior class that lifted **Heathwood Hall** football team to an unforgettable season in 2025 has moved on, but head coach **Tymere Zimmerman** said those seniors have left their mark on a revitalized football program.

“We lost a great senior class, probably one of the best senior classes in a while,” Zimmerman said. “They contributed to every sport at the school but in building the football program they showed the kids all the ways to step up and fill those gaps.”

In the absence of those 15 or so seniors stands dozens of rising seniors, underclassmen, and middle schoolers ready to work toward maintaining what was built on last year. The Highlanders finished 9-4 and reached the 4A state championship game, their first state final since 2009. Heathwood Hall fell to **Northwood Academy** in the state final, but the big game for the Highlanders came when they eliminated **Hammond** 16-13 in the state semifinal round. The Skyhawks were the eight-time defending state champions.

At spring practice in April, the returners, junior-varsity players moving up to varsity, and newcomers came to work looking to build on last year’s success.

“We tell our kids all the time to give it your best, your effort 100 percent and your attitude 100 percent, and we’ll live with the results,” Zimmerman said. “This spring we’ve just gotten better as a team and that is going to help us so much in the fall.”

With quarterback **Patrick Belk** (2,264 yards passing, 20 touchdowns) gone, stepping up under center will likely be transfer student **Harrison Hartley**, a 6-3, 220-pounder. His big target will of course be senior **Keon McKinley**, who had 56 catches for 756 yards and three touchdowns.

“He’s one of the best wide receivers in the state, and he’s a great kick returner too,” Zimmerman said. “He’ll also be in the defensive backfield as a safety.”

Added to the mix of receivers will be **Cardinal Newman** transfer, junior **Alan Rodriguez**. Rodriguez game saw some time in the Cardinals 1-9 rebuilding season and Zimmerman was impressed with his abilities.

“He’s one of the fastest kids in the state, and he’s guaranteed to be a better football player,” he said.

Sophomore **Jackson Dickerson**, a basketball player who saw little action on the varsity football squad last year, will have a more prominent role as a running back.

“His footwork is phenomenal,” Zimmerman said. Senior **Hill Belser** returns to lead the offensive line that lost two seniors. Belzer, noted for his leadership along the line, is joined by seniors **A.J. Morgan** and **Levi Glass**. Juniors **Cole Moore** and 6-4, 220 **Evan Johnson** will be defensive ends.

Junior **Heyward Belser**, at 6-2, 220, is the team’s middle linebacker and may also see time as a running back in some situations. Senior linebackers **John Thompson** and **Christian Hitchcock** will flank Belser.

Senior **Liam Edwards** returns as a safety and is getting looks from Ivy League schools because of his academics as well as athletics. McKinley will also be in the backfield either as a corner or a safety.

With many seasoned rising seniors taking over at several positions, Zimmerman said the Highlanders will be on track for a solid fall practice—and a successful 2026 season.

“We’re on track. Over the summer the coaches did a good job of getting the kids on the field at 6 a.m. every morning and in the weight room afterward,” Zimmerman said. “We’ve been averaging 60 some kids a day, from the middle school ranks to JV to varsity. We have at least 90 kids hitting the weight room over the summer, and that’s a testament to the program that we’re building and a testament to the kids and to the parents to take the time over the summer to get prepared.”

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Youngblood enjoys school spirit from Barnwell

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Barnwell—In terms of an upbeat and positive attitude they do not come any better than **Barnwell High** athletic director **Derek Youngblood** and he got trained for his current job when he coached and worked with **Dwayne Garrick** over a 10-year period back in the day at **Williston-Elko**.

“I was the assistant AD to Coach Garrick when we worked together at **Williston-Elko** and since coming over to Barnwell I used my training from my old job to settle into a smooth transition when I left Williston in 2020 to become the athletic director at Barnwell.” said coach Youngblood.

“We have tremendous leadership here from our school administration starting with our Superintendent **Crisse Stapleton**, to our Principal **Franklin McCormick**,” said Coach **Youngblood**. “We all know the importance of high school athletics to the people in our community and we are all pulling the wagon in the same direction.”

Coach Youngblood said there is a special excitement in the air around Barnwell this summer, with great anticipation of the football season because the Warhorse football team returns 16 starters from a team that went 9-5 a year ago, “First of all, Coach Garrick is a huge part of that leadership team about which I am talking about. He is a veteran coach, and he certainly is not a one size fits all type of head coach.

“Coach Garrick is really great at figuring out where the important pieces of the puzzle need to be plugged in.” Coach Youngblood. “In my opinion he is among the best head football coaches in the state.”

Coach Youngblood said there is a lot around town about the emergence sophomore quarterback **Cameron Austin** who is D-1 prospect in both football and baseball. “I think the sky is the limit for Cameron and everyone in Barnwell is waiting to see him in action.

“We have a lot of talent on this team and he could be that piece of the puzzle we need to win a state title,” said Coach Youngblood. “Our running back (**Tyler Smith**) gained 2,300 rushing yards last year and he jumped 6-4 to win the gold medal at the state track meet. This is the most talent and experience we have had on our football team since we last won back-to-back state titles in 1987 and 1988.”

The varsity football coaching staff has many of the same coaches back. **William Barnes** is in his second-year coaching running backs and former **Miami of Ohio** player **Rokeem Williams** will work with receivers and defensive backs for the third year. **Kris Morris** in his sixth year and he will work with Coach Garrick in the offensive line. Morris is also the head junior varsity coach.

Heath Corley is the defensive coordinator with 10

Camden maintains most of head coaching staff

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Camden – **Camden High School** will have a few changes to its varsity head coaching staff, but perhaps the biggest change will be where the school’s athletic department will be doing business in the 2026-27 school year.

After spending the past two seasons competing – and doing quite well one might add – in the AAAA classification, Camden has returned to the AAA classification following the **South Carolina High School League’s** biannual reclassification.

Camden will be part of the 6-school Region 4, with the other five schools being located either in **Richland County** or **Lexington County**. The other schools are **Airport**, **Brookland-Cayce**, **Gilbert**, **Lower Richland** and **Swansea**. Camden, of course, is located in **Kershaw County**.

There will only be three newcomers to the Bulldogs head coaching staff, but only two are known at this time. **Chris Dixon** will be in charge of wrestling, while **James Seymore** will now coach boys and girls track and field.

A new boys soccer head coach has yet to be



Mike Beasley is being inducted into the SCACA Hall of Fame

years in the program and he focuses on the defensive line. The veteran of the coaching staff with 35 years of experience is outside linebacker coach **Mike Highsmith**. **Thomas Davis** works with inside linebackers. Coach Garrick works with Special teams also.

Rob Roth has been the school’s adult trainer for 20 years. “He is the best in the business,” said Coach Youngblood. “He really cares about the kids at Barnwell. “He especially does an outstanding job rehabbing our injured athletes.”

Coach Youngblood wanted to extend a big thank you to volunteer assistant coach **Britt Pender** who is a former QB for the Warhorses. “Wherever we need some special help Britt just rolls up his sleeves and goes to work,” said Coach Youngblood. “He is a multi-tasker and he can coach it all. He is a great communicator. He works a lot with running backs and receivers too.”

Coach Youngblood also wanted to thank athletic secretaries **Kathy Watkins** and **Gail Still** for their efforts in the assisting him to keep the athletic program running smoothly. **Keri Schneider** is the assistant athletic director at Barnwell. “Keri gets things done and she keeps me and all the coaches straight,” said Coach Youngblood.

Coach Youngblood wanted to also thank Barnwell public address announcer **Gary Brantley** who has been in the press box for football and baseball games for over 20 years. “He plays music and keeps the game flowing and our fans just love him,” said Coach Youngblood.

Coach Youngblood called Barnwell athletic booster club president **Kara Bolen** a true go-getter. “We started doing our own Warhorse discount cards a few years ago as a fund raiser and Kara and her team have sold thousands of those cards over the past few years,” said Coach Youngblood. “Our student athletes are well supported here through the efforts of our hard-working booster club.”

The Barnwell head cheer coach for both cheer and competition squads is **Amy Williams** with 10-plus of experience.

named.

Brian Rimpf will be back as the athletic director and football head coach. This will be Rimpf’s 10th season in charge of football, and the record speaks for itself. The Bulldogs went 9-4 last season, giving them their eighth straight season of at least eight wins and seventh straight of nine wins or more.

Rimpf returns the biggest part of his assistant coaching staff. **Savionn Wingate** is back for his second season at the offensive coordinator. Wingate will not coach the running backs this year. That job will go to returning assistant **Quan Morris**. **Josh Council** will coach the quarterbacks, while veteran **Calvin McRoy** will handle the tight ends, and **Davea Cauthen** will again coach the wide receivers.

The only newcomer to the offensive staff is **Benny DeBruhl**, who handle the line.\

Joey Hendrix is back as the defensive coordinator. Also returning to the staff are co-defensive coordinator and cornerbacks coach **Cedrick Malone**, linebackers coach **Denny Beckley**, defensive line coach **Marshall Minich**, cornerbacks coach

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Will Gee will continue as the head baseball coach and the Warhorses have won two consecutive region titles. Gee has three assistant coaches in **Frank Cannon**, **Jackson Ridgeway** and **Josh Grubbs**.

How can many boys’ basketball players say that their head coach is the also the mayor of the city where he lives? **Martin Rivera** will begin his 4th year as the

See **Barnwell**, pg. 63

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Lamar Keitt and outside linebackers coach **Demarius Alexander**.

The only newcomer to the defensive staff is veteran assistant coach **Alan Gandy**, who will coach the safeties.

See **Camden**, pg. 61

McMillan back at the helm for Wolverines baseball

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Turbeville – **Will McMillan** may have left **East Clarendon High School** as the baseball head coach four years ago, but he never left his home in Turbeville. That’s why he’s making EC his baseball home again.

McMillan was the Wolverines’ head coach for six years before leaving to take over the program at **AAAAA Sumter High** following the 2022 campaign. However, when **Curtis Johnson** recently left his posts as baseball head coach and athletic director at East Clarendon to be the AD at Sumter, McMillan applied for the EC baseball job and was hired.

“I still live in Turbeville, and I have a 4-year-old, and a 2-year-old,” McMillan said. “That meant a lot of time away, and I was missing out on a lot with the drive back and forth to **Sumter**. I knew being close to home would be good.

“I was drawn back to it. East Clarendon is a good fit for me. I had a chance to go out and coach at the highest level against really good coaches, really good teams. I think it’s a better fit for me with the lower levels (EC is in the AA classification), the small town, the community feel. I missed that.”

McMillan had success at both EC and Sumter. In his final year in his first stint with the Wolverines, he had them within a victory of playing in the state championship series. He had Sumter in the championship round of the District 4 tournament in the **AAAAA Division I** playoffs in the just completed season.

Filling the role of the EC athletic director on an interim basis is football head coach **Larry Cornelius**.

“It’s cool,” Cornelius aid. “I’ve been an AD before. I have to adjust to the head coaches in certain ways, and they have to adjust to me. I just want to do what’s best for East Clarendon.”

While Cornelius is the new AD, he will be the old football coach. Cornelius is preparing for his fourth season on the Wolverines’ sidelines. He led EC to a 9-3 record last year and to the second round of the state playoffs.

Cornelius will be the offensive coordinator and coach running backs. He will have his defensive coordinator back in **Brandon Carter**, who will coach linebackers along with **Robbie Mooneyham**. Returning to coach the offensive line will be veteran **Robbie**

AD Lewis happy with Scott’s Branch staff

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Summerton – **Doc Lewis** returns for his fourth season as the athletic director at **Scott’s Branch High School**. He likes where his varsity head coaching staff is at going into the 2026-27 school year.

“I’m extremely pleased with my coaching staff,” Lewis said. “More importantly, my coaching staff cares about the student-athletes and have fostered the Scott’s Branch pride. The students have bought into the programs. I’m expecting big things this season.”

Scott’s Branch will have all of its head coaches back to go along with the addition of one in **Lanitra Bennett**, who will coach volleyball. She will take some of the load off of Eagles veteran coach **Lucinda Stukes**, who will continue to coach girls basketball and softball.

Patrick Fleming is back for his third season in charge of football, while **Damian Days** returns for his second year as the boys basketball head coach. **India Robertson** will be in charge of the boys and girls cross country teams and the girls track and field team, while **Clifton Bethune** will coach the boys track team.

Randy Bass will be the baseball head coach after restarting the dormant program last year.

The football program has made significant strides in

Wright, **Benny Knowlton** will coach quarterbacks, **Dawson Price** will coach wide receivers as well as serving as the B team head coach, and **Kevin Graham** will be in charge of the defensive line.

The secondary will have two new coaches in McMillan and **Malik Richardson**, who played quarterback for Cornelius when he was the head coach at **Lakewood High**. The other newcomer to the staff is **William Lovelace**, who will help Wright with the O line.

“We have some new faces this season in the coaching ranks, but we are quickly getting going within a few weeks,” Cornelius said. “We are excited with all the returning players we have, and knowing that we have an extremely challenging schedule, we need to put our best foot forward every day.”

With the exception of baseball, all of the other varsity head coaches from a year ago return. Longtime EC coach **Patrick Kelly** will once again coach three sports – boys and girls cross country, boys basketball and boys golf.

Bridget Parker Richardson returns for her second year in charge of girls basketball. She led EC to a 10-13 record last year and a playoff appearance.

Jason Newsome will continue as the softball head coach. After leading the Wolverines to a state title in 2025, Newsome guided them to a 24-9 record and a berth in the 4-team lower state tournament of the state playoffs this past season.

Graham is back as the head of the wrestling program as well as the boys track and field team. Candice Barron will be the girls track coach and in charge of basketball cheer, while **Lyn Sullivan** will be the cheer coach.

Kayleigh Young Gonzalez will once again be the volleyball coach, and **Morgan Keefe** will lead the girls tennis team.

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its two seasons under Fleming’s leadership. After going winless in 2023, Scott’s Branch went 4-7 in Fleming’s first season before going 9-3 and winning a first-round game in the Class A state playoffs last year.

The Eagles return all of their football assistants with the exception of quarterbacks coach **Kerry English**. His spot on the staff will be filled by **Spencer Thomas**, who will help with the offensive line.

Along with being head coach, Fleming will be the defensive coordinator and will coach linebackers. **Howard Hilton** will coach the defensive line, and **Brian Mance** will coach the defensive backs.

Mark Green will be the offensive coordinator and coach quarterbacks, while **Travis Baker** will coach wide receivers, **Caleb Wright** running backs and **Chris Weeks** the offensive line.

Baker will also be the special teams coordinator. “We will miss Coach English, but I feel really good about the staff,” Fleming said. “Going into Year 3, we have worked our tails off to have a competitive, complete program. Hats off to the players and the entire staff.”

The boys basketball team went 13-12 in Days’ first year. Stukes, who led Scott’s Branch to the 2019 Class A state championship, helped the Eagles to an 8-16 record last season. Both reached the state playoffs.

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Courtesy Superintendent Shawn Johnson and Clarendon County School District Athletic Director Reggie Kennedy

Long begins fourth season as AD at Gaffney

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Gaffney—**Gaffney High School** is truly fortunate to have an athletic director like **Malcolm Long**, a former *HSSR* Mr. Football who set passing records both at Gaffney High and at **SC State**, where he led the Bulldogs to three straight MEAC championships.

One NFL draft expert projected Long as a possible first round draft pick after college, but it was Long himself who removed his name from the draft. I try not to live myself based on “what if’s”,” said Long. “I had a kid in college, and my priority was going to work and providing for my family.”

After college Coach Long came back to Gaffney where he coached on the varsity football team a few seasons before he was named the athletic director in 2023. He is now the athletic director for the consolidated Cherokee County School District which also takes in **Blacksburg High School**.

“We are very proud of our great tradition in athletics, but we also stress academics and how important it is to keep of your grades while you are participating in athletics,” said Coach Long. “We want all of our students to be prepared for life after high school, should athletics not land them scholarship opportunities.”

Coach Long said he receives a lot of support in his role as athletic director from Superintendent **Dr. Raashad Fitzpatrick** and Gaffney Principal **Shannon Gibson**. “They are both very supportive of the athletic program and any time I have an issue they are always available to with sound guidance,” said Coach Long.

Coach Long is also a local pastor at the **Cedar Grove** Missionary Baptist Church in Jonesville. “We invite ministers to come into the school and do devotionals with our athletes, and we work together to provide guidance and social activities for all of our students,” said Coach Long. “Our coaches care about all the students at Gaffney High, not the ones they coach.”

Coach Long said his number challenge daily is “trying to keep everyone happy.”

He and his wife Porchee’ are proud parents of sons **Jamarion** (15) and **Malachi** (12), the elder vying for time in the OL on the varsity while the youngest son is an aspiring QB.

With realignment Gaffney has come down to Class AAAA for the next two seasons. They are in region 2-AAAA with fellow members Greenville, Greer, Rivers-ide, Travelers Rest, and Wade Hampton.

Gaffney only has two changes amongst their varsity head coaches this year. **Brad “Stumpy” Phillips** will be the new head baseball coach this season and former Clemson volleyball player **Maggie Patterson** is the new head volleyball coach. “They are both Gaffney graduates and we are excited to have both of them leading our base-

WKHS making offseason strides with new coach

By WORTHY EVANS
Special to the HSSR
Lexington - Under **Nick Pelham**, the **White Knoll** football team achieved more wins over a 3-year stretch than at any time in Timberwolves history.

After 29 victories in three years, a 5A state championship appearance in 2023 and a 5A Division 2 lower state championship appearance the next year, and a round-two appearance in 2025, Pelham took the job as the first head football coach at **Lake Wylie High School** after five years with White Knoll.

Former **Chester** head coach **Victor Floyd** took over the team in February of this year, and immediately coined the 2026 season as ‘the next step.’ With spring practice in the books and June’s weight room achievements coming on strong, Floyd said the Timberwolves players are on a strong pace to improve on last year’s 8-4 effort.

“The team’s coming along. The guys have bought in and the ones that didn’t have left before I got here and if they didn’t, they’ve left by now,” said Floyd, a 20-plus year veteran head coach who led the Cyclones to a 3A state championship appearance in 2017 and a 3A state championship the next year. “I like our nucleus. They’re a little experienced, but I love that they are motivated to play. I like where we are and the improvement that we made and the growth that they’ve seen in themselves.”

Taking over at quarterback from **Jhais McKiever**, who now attends **Gray Collegiate**, is rising junior **Brayden Cress**, who has played JV ball and had a good spring practice.

“He has a lot of intangibles and he’s shown strong leadership so far,” Floyd said. “He’s got great processing skills, an above-average arm, and all the tools to be a really good quarterback. It’ll soon be time to turn the reins over to him.”

ball and volleyball programs this season,” said Coach Long.

Last year was **Donnie Littlejohn’s** first season as the Indians head coach following the retirement of former head coach **Dan Jones** who retired after the 2024 season. Littlejohn was an outstanding offensive lineman at Gaffney, and he went on to a successful college career at **Furman**.

Gaffney has a new face on the varsity football coaching staff as former **Goose Creek** head coach **Jason Winstead** will coach running backs this season. Gaffney graduate **Kevin Phillips** returns as the Associate head coach and ILB coach, and he also helps players with recruiting matters. The assistant head coach and defensive coordinator is **Randy Birch**. The offensive coordinator is **Brad Van Horn**.

Other offensive assistants include **Wayne Starkes** who will work with QB’s, and **Jeff Allen** who will work with centers and guards in the OL. **Brad Phillips** and **Andrew Hinchliffe** will coach wide receivers. **Matt McMahon** will coach H-backs, tight ends and offensive tackles.

Turning to defense, **Ian Cooper** will mentor OLB’s while **Brandon Mullins** and **Brennen Canupp** will work with DB’s. The special teams coach and junior varsity head coach is **Brandon Thoms**. **Cody Rackley** will work with the junior varsity OL and the DFO is **Scott Farmer**.

Gaffney has a 9th grade team that serves like a junior varsity team. **Julian Wright** is the head coach. **Jeff Osmont** serves as the RB/QB coach while **Wright Parker** is the OL coach. **Tyler Belue** is the DC/DL coach and **Joe Littlejohn** works with LB’s. **Quinton Hemphill** oversees 9th grade DB’s.

Gaffney will start the season on August 21 with a home game against **Spartanburg**. Earlier in August the Indians will scrimmage **Hillcrest**, **Northwestern**, and **Clover**.

Gaffney has two football players, in particular getting national recruiting interest. Rising sophomore **Kiante Morgan** (6-4, 245) has offers from **Georgia** and **Tennessee** while rising junior DB **Zion Dawkins** (5-11, 190) comes into the season with 15 major college offers including **Georgia Tech**, **Virginia Tech**, **Duke**, and **Boston College**, among others.

Other returning head varsity coaches are **Charles Blue** (boys’ basketball), **Julian Wright** (girl’s basketball); **Lawanda Mooror** (boy’s and girl’s cross country & boy’s and girl’s track); **Jasmine Smith** (Competitive Cheer); **Zach Bridges** (boy’s golf); **Tina Frye** (girl’s golf), **Scott Simmons** (boys’ soccer); **Lily Cazel** (girls’ soccer); **Maddie Pruitt** (softball); **Neeley Swofford** (boy’s swimming); **Kelly Ellis** (girl’s swimming; **David Reams** (boy’s tennis); **Kenny Harris** (girl’s tennis) and **Daniel Grellman** returns as the wrestling coach.

With Cress in development is junior tight end **Kentrell Bonnette**, a 6-3, 220-pounder who Floyd said can line up as a tight end, an H-back or as a slot receiver, depending on the situation. Wide receiver/cornerback **Tyler Brown**, who came up from JV last year, will also help lift the offense.

“He’s going to be an integral part of what we’re doing offensively,” Floyd said of Bonnette. “Tyler’s going to be a top target in addition to being a good return guy. He’s athletic, has above-average hands and real good ball skills.”

Junior guard **Brayden Weston** is the only returner on the offensive line, and Floyd said he’s going to see a lot of time on the offensive and defensive lines, and will have a strong supporting cast on the offensive front, which will have four juniors and one senior among the front five.

On defense, senior **Jah’mauri Davis** returns at line-backer and Floyd considers him a strong FCS recruiting prospect.

“He’s a sideline-to-sideline guy, a three-year starter, six foot and 220,” Floyd said.

Senior **Jonathan Keith** moved from slot receiver to cornerback and in doing so, became an instant prospect in the secondary. He’ll also see time at running back in various situations, but may get the best opportunity to play at the college level as a cornerback.

Sophomore Middle linebacker **Adrian Ellsworth** also stood out among the spring practice highlights. At 5-11, 225, Ellsworth showed “a ton of upside” at that position, along with a Chester transfer, defensive back **Cl’Menta Crosby**.

On special teams, the one standout has been senior long snapper **Charles Bieda**. Not often thought about as a key position, Bieda has gotten notice with his snap

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speed—recently clocked at 0.64 seconds on a 15-yard snap. At that speed, it’s next to impossible for defenders to get to the punter before the kick.

“There’s no telling where he’s going to end up,” Floyd said. “The scholarship-level snap for **Clemson** is 0.72. Once when he was snapping PATs he split a kid’s hand.”

With the July 30 date for fall practice growing closer, Floyd said that the Timberwolves are on a strong track to being ready for the fall season.

“We need to have the same month in July that we had in June,” Floyd said, noting the team’s progress in the weight room. “As long as we do that, hopefully we’ll be ready.”

Green Acres Turf Farm Prospects Page



HSSR Top Football Prospects - Class of 2027

1. Jaiden Kelly-Murray-Oceanside-WR/DB-5-10,170-COLORADO

2. Jaiden Bryant-Irmo-DE-6-4,246-MIAMI

3. David “Tre” Segarra-Byrnes-RB-5-01,204-LSU

4. Tai Phillips-Irmo-RB-5-11,180-Alabama (Transfer From NC)

5. Nate Carson-Irmo-OL-6-5,285- South Carolina

6. Aiden Manavian-Oceanside - QB-6-0,185- D-1! Cannon!

7. Anthony Williams-Oceanside -WR-6-1, 170- UNC

8. Aiden Gibson-Woodruff-RB-6-1,212-AUBURN

9. Jaden Werth-Dutch Fork-DL-6-2, 270-CLEMSON

10. Jackson Ross-Hammond-LB-6-4,215- South Carolina

11. Ty Johnson-Lucy Beckham-OL-6-5,300-GEORGIA

12. Amare Patterson-Bluffton-WE-6-1, 190-NORTH CAROLINA

13. Franklin Richardson-Sumter-Ath-RB-6-2-220-

14. Jayen Williams-Summerville-RB-5-7,170-JAMES MADISON

15. Seth Tillman-South Pointe-DL.OL-6-4,300- Clemson

16. Kaiden Watkins-Rock Hill-DB-5-9,180-James Madison

17. Kevin Johnson-Northwood Academy-QB-6-2-205-

18. James Ross-Ridge View-OL-6-5,290-SC

19. Trey Wimberly-Daniel-WR-6-0,175-CLEMSON

20. Israel “Shank” Harris-James Island-OL-6-3, 270-LIBERTY

21. Peyton Bishop-Dutch Fork-DE-6-4,230-

22. Tajeh Watson-Westside-WR-5-10,170-VIRGINIA

23. Christian Chancellor-Daniel-DB-5-9,162-CLEMSON

24. Aidyn Wiggins-Byrnes-DB-6-1, 183-AUBURN

25. Maleek Miller-Dutch Fork-WR-5-9,170-WAKE/UNC?

26. Carter Hawkins-Timberland-Ath.-6-0,177-WAKE Forest

27. Chanin Harris-Byrnes-WR-6-1,170-SYRACUSE

28. Alex Johnson-Catawba Ridge-DE-6-4,230-BOSTON COLLEGE

29. Xavier Means-Northwestern-QB-Ath-6-0,165-ECU

30. Malik Ratliff-Northwestern-WR-6-0,165-COASTAL

31. Trenton Lynch-Spartanburg-RB-5=9,185-RUTGERS

32. James Porter-Dorman-DL-6-2,265-ECU

33. Eric Richardseon-Lugoff-Elgin-WR-6-0,165-Coastal

34. AJ Veal-Westwood-DL-6-4,225-ECU

35. Jamar Grissette-Irmo-FS-6-3,195-APP ST.

36. Dennis Glenn, Jr.-Boiling Springs-DL-6-1,285-RUTGERS

37. Jackson Connor-Indian land-LB-6-0,215-MARSHALL

38. James Smith-Dutch Fork-FS-6-1,180-LIBERTY

39. Mah’Ky Green-Cross-RB-5-10, 178-

40. Darius Carter-River Bluff-WR-5-11,160-COASTAL

41. Oliver Coleman-Lugoff-Elgin-DB-6-2,175-COASTAL

42. Calvin “CJ” Brooks-Gaffney-OL-6-5,320-UAB

43. Kadin Vassel-Northwestern-WR-5-11,160-UNC-C

44. Calvin Wolford-Crestwood-RB-5-11,195-UNC-C

45. Jaylon Richardson-Northwestern-DB-5-11.165-C. Southern

46. Jack Armstrong-Gray Collegaite-OL-DL-6-2,265-

47. Brooks Abernethy-Daniel-OL-6-2, 265-ARMY

48. Jatavevion Wilson-Blythewood-DB-6-2, 170- Missouri ST.

49.Julian Brown-Myrtle Beach-

50. Marques Skinner-Riversaide-TE-6-2,265-

51. MiCah McClintontok-Woodruff-TE-6-3, 215-

52. Jack Armstrong-Grey Collegiate-OL-

53. Judd Windham-Christ Church-QB-6-4,215

54. Angelo Cromer-Clinton-RB-5-10,170

55. Rhett Gilliam-Clinton-RB-6-1,200

56. John Campbell-St Joseph’s Catholic-DB-5-9,181

57. Reid Hipp-Christ Church-TE-6-4, 215

58. Nyren Bowman-Scott’s Branch-WR-6-0,180

59. Sam Holiday-Fountain Inn-QB

60. Nasir Waldrop-Powdersville-WR/RB-5-7,175

61. Owen Glenn-Clinton-QB-6-1, 175

62 Keandre Allen-Colleton County-WR-6-2, 195

63. Jaiden Williams-Green-Darlington-OL-6-0,350

HSSR SC 2028 Football Prospect List

1. Zion Dawkins-Gaffney-DB/WR-5-11,181

2. Michael Martin-Christ Church-RB-5-10,180

3. Beau Hite-Emerald-QB-Ath.-

4. Jace Grass-Daniel-QB-

5. Lavar Mills-Darlington-TE-6-4,235

This list is FAR from finished! Nominate an athlete today by sending in the nomination form below!

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Reason for Nomination:_____

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Congratulations LMA Swampcats Softball!

Laurence Manning completes Three-peat in SCISA AAAA Softball

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher

Summerville — In the championship moment, with all the tension and pressure consuming her, **Laurence Manning** senior **Lyza Prickelmyer**, a grinder her whole life; showed up and converted her investment of hard work, and sheer sweat equity, into four hits, four RBI's, (including a two-run homer), that led **Laurence Manning Academy** to a 8-7 win over **Pinewood Prep**, giving the Swampcats a three-peat in SCISA AAAA softball on May, 12.

At one point in the game, LMA trailed Pinewood Prep 5-0, before the team rallied behind the soft-spoken senior leadership of Prickelmyer, who honesty needs to change her mind about not wanting to play softball at the next level, especially after her superior performance against the Panthers in prime time.

With the game tied at 6, in the top of the 8th, International tie-breaking rules, placed a runner at second base to start the inning. Prickelmyer led off the inning and she talked about her at bat after the game with the HSSR. "It was a 3-2 full count, and honesty I came into the game with my hitting a little down, and my goal was to advance the runner and I didn't want to walk," she said. "I really wasn't thinking much at all, but I had been lucky with some hits earlier in the game, and I just wanted to get a good look and not walk or strike-out."

Prickelmyer's hard level "quick wrist" swing, met the 62 miles per hour fast ball over the heart of the plate, and like a missile launching towards outer space, it only took seconds for the line drive ball to sail over the fence in dead center field as the large crowd of LMA fans went to tally berserk in real time.

"Winning three straight state softball championships in a row had never been done at my school before," said Prickelmyer. "I think the football team might have won three straight titles back in the 1970's."

"This team is really close, and we have 9 seniors on the team, and we have been playing softball together since we were like six or seven years old," said Prickelmyer. "We are like a sister hood and we all love each other. We made history together at our school and that is a wonderful feeling and memory for all of us to share."

How such a talent like Prickelmyer could escape the evaluation of major college softball programs will remain a mystery to this writer of 50-plus years. "I have been offered recently by smaller colleges like **USC Union** and **Florence Darlington Tech** but I never really reached out to bigger colleges, and honesty I had not pursued playing in college until recently," said Prickelmyer after the game.

Prickelmyer bats from the left side, has jail break speed as a center fielder, and also plays like a gold glove at first base. She has a career batting average of over .500. If she is not a major college softball prospect the sport should be disbanded by the NCAA immediately. For the season she batted .581 with 28 RBI's, three homers and 13 stolen bases.

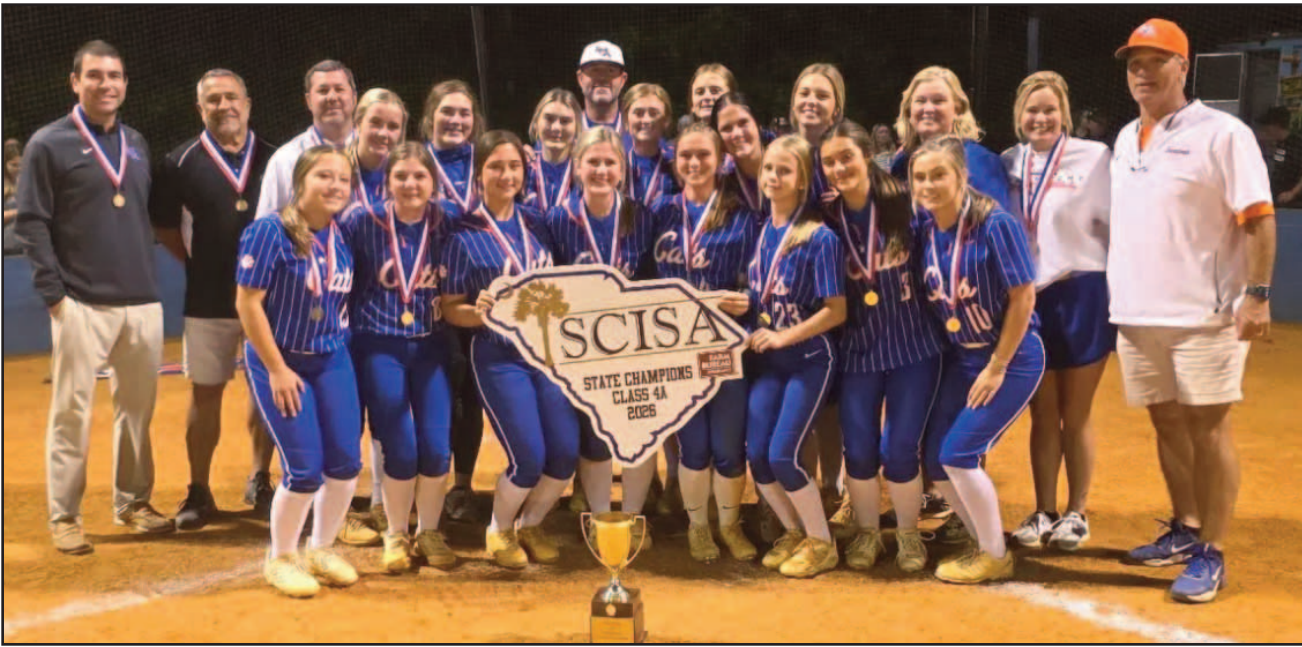
Pinewood Prep head coach **Ben Snyder** said this about Prickelmyer after playing against her for three games. "She is the best two strike hitter I've ever seen," said Coach Snyder. "When she gets two strikes she adjusts everything she is doing in the batter's box. It is quite impressive to observe. She has everything a college is looking for with her arm, glove, and bat. She is an elite center fielder and there is no doubt in my mind that she could play major college softball somewhere."

After the game, LMA head coach **Buddy Truett** was both relieved and excited. "Earlier in the game I told the team we were leaving too many runners on base," said Coach Truett. "I told them to put the ball in play, to get on top of the ball and make it bounce."

Then with the game on the line, his senior veteran hit the bomb that will be talked about around Manning for a long time. "Isn't that fitting," said Coach Truett. "She's special in all aspects of the game."

"Look, all these girls have worked hard and they deserve this championship and they never quit," said Coach Truett. "I didn't want to put any pressure on them earlier in the game but I told them to keep after it, because we were just one hit away from blowing the game open. I told them to believe in themselves and keep going."

"All our state titles have been special, but this one, with 9 seniors who have been together for years now; I am just so happy for them," said Coach Truett. "This one



Laurence Manning Academy Swampcats Softball - SCISA AAAA State Champs!

is really special."

On the bus ride down to the game, Coach Truett talked about the strategy for game two, after LMA's 6-4 win at home on Monday. "We were going to do pretty much do the same thing which was to keep number 10 (Pinewood Prep freshman star **Morgan Everitt**) out of the game at the plate, and having won game one we felt like the pressure would be more on them because we had another game to work with if needed."

So many high fives should be extended to the Pinewood Prep (27-2) program which re-started a varsity softball team after a few seasons of non-play. The team was comprised of four 7th graders (three started), two 8th graders, three 9th graders, two sophomores, two juniors and no seniors. In fact, up into late into the Fall, the school was focused on just having a junior varsity team, but as more interest grew a decision was made to have a varsity team.

The Panthers are head coached by **Ben Snyder** who had spent the past 20 years as an assistant varsity basketball coach at **Summerville High**. Coach Snyder had a connection with softball by being a summer travel team coach the past few years. Everitt finished the regular season with 104 K's in 50.1 innings of work with an ERA of 0.95. She hit .458 with three home runs and she scored 26 runs.

Pinewood started two juniors in game two, **Elizabeth Ellis** in left-field and **Ally Flaherty** started for the first time all year in right field. Seventh grade outfielder **Alexis Buso** is a rising star in her own right. She went 4-of-5 against LMA in game two with a home run and three RBI's. During the regular season Buso hit .532 with three homers and 36 runs scored during the regular season.

"I think you could look at our entire team and say the sky is the limit for all of them, because they are just now coming into their own," said Coach Snyder. "We are trying to create a culture that stresses enthusiasm and a togetherness while also allowing the girls to be themselves. I stress to them to never lose having fun playing the game. I told them that at the end of the day softball is just a game and that the sun will shine tomorrow regardless."

The team's other two 7th grade starters are **Sarah Grace Wickersham** (batted .611) who starts at shortstop and she had two hits in game two. **Sofia Reed** (batted .553) is a 7th grader starting at catcher. Oddly enough, Pinewood Prep starting first baseman **Juliet Sussman** (batted .486) missed the game due to a wedding. She was replaced in the line-up by **DP Claire Ellis**.

Pinewood sophomore third baseman **Makayla Sullivan** (batted .456) had two RBI's in game two while 8th grade first baseman **Kensley Gibbs** (batted .580) had two hits and four RBI's in game two. Freshman **Grace Snyder** (batted .420) started at second base for the Panthers. Freshman LF **Lacey Elis** batted .396 during the regular season.

In the circle, Pinewood's Everitt allowed 8 hits, three earned runs, and had 9 strike-outs in game two.

In game two LMA had 8 hits with Prickelmyer leading the way with four hits and 4 RBI's. Left fielder **Mar-**

lee Black had two hits in game two, and during the season she batted .418 with 15 RBI's. Shortstop **Ashley Rae Hodge** had a hit in game two and for the season she hit .429 with a team leading 32 RBI's. Third baseman **Lily Welborn** had two hits and one RBI in game two and for the season she hit .380 with 19 RBI's.

Other top hitters for LMA during the season were pitcher **Kendall Tanner** who hit .310 with 8 RBI's. Right fielder **Maggie Welch** hit .295 with 8 RBI's. Second baseman **Caroline Welch** hit .375 with 19 RBI's.

In game two Tanner and **Avery Floyd** teamed up to pitch for LMA. Tanner allowed three hits one K in just over two innings of circle duty. Floyd, a 7th grader, worked 5.1 innings, allowed five hits and had two K's with two earned runs allowed.

The main two pitchers during the season for LMA were **Caroline Welch** (6-2) who pitched 58.2 innings with 27 K's with an ERA of 2.86 along with Tanner who worked 49.1 innings with a 3.26 ERA with a 5-2 record.

Coach Snyder is assisted by **Ashleigh Garrett, Samantha Horner, Chuck Jehle, and Stephen Oleary.**

Coach Truett is assisted by **Lisa Ard, Lance Welch, Amy Marshall and Colin Floyd.**



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Spartanburg

DAY SCHOOL

Home of the Griffins

Cerino adds four new varsity football coaches

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Spartanburg—The late textile magnate **Roger Milliken** helped parents and business leaders establish the **Spartanburg Day School** in 1957, and if Mr. Milliken were alive today, he would be very pleased with the growth and focus the school has maintained in helping prepare students for the real world after high school, both in academics and athletics.

The school has been on a mission the past two years to reestablish a varsity football program that last represented the school 40-plus years ago. In 2024 a “B” team was established and last season a junior varsity program was introduced. The football program is under the capable hands of head coach **Patrick Moffitt**.

The school’s athletic director is **Mike Cerino**, and he recently shared some of his thoughts about the Griffins athletic program with the *HSSR*. “We as a staff and school administration are busy building the future of SDS athletics,” said Coach Cerino. “As Spartanburg Day School prepares for the 2026-27 school year, there is real momentum within our athletic program.

“Much of that excitement comes from the return of our varsity football program after a 40-year absence,” said Coach Cerino. “Varsity football’s return is an important step for the school and the athletic department, but the vision is bigger than one sport. It is about creating opportunities for our students to grow, compete, lead and represent Spartanburg Day with pride.

“That excitement is matched by the addition of our four new outstanding varsity coaches, who bring experience, energy, and a shared commitment to student development,” said Coach Cerino. “While each coach comes from a different background, they all believe in one core idea: *“Athletics Should Help Shape Young People, First and Foremost.”*

“At SDS, our athletic philosophy is centered on the development of the whole student athlete,” said Coach Cerino. “We want students to be challenged, supported, and known by their coaches. Strong programs are built on relationships, accountability, and trust.

“Winning matters, but so does the process of

Countdown begins on the re-launch of varsity football at Spartanburg Day

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Spartanburg—They literally have a count-down clock at the **Spartanburg Day School** keeping their fans, players, and coaches up to date until their historic first season of varsity football, in over 40 years, kick-offs on **August 14** with an away game against **Asheville Christian Academy** in North Carolina.

The team is head coached by **Patrick Moffitt** and he has spent the past two seasons working with a “B” team and a junior varsity team to get prepared for varsity football at the SDS.

“We didn’t do 7-on-7 this summer,” said Coach Moffitt. “We just had summer workouts. We had a great turnout in guys who showed up each and every day, and a lot of our guys have really improved, both in and out of the weight room, since the summer started.

“The school community is extremely excited for our varsity football coming back to campus this fall,” said Coach Moffitt. “It has been something since we got here (2024) and it has been a tremendous buy-in from our



Athletic Director Mike Cerino

building confidence, resilience, and character,” said Coach Cerino. “From the athletic department’s perspective, a big part of our job is making sure coaches have what they need to lead well. That means giving them support, encouraging collaboration, and creating a culture where they can build meaningful connections with students.

“We want our coaches to communicate clearly, lead authentically, and set high standards while helping student-athletes reach them as well,” said Coach Cerino. “Athletics at Spartanburg Day are an extension of the school’s mission. Practice teaches discipline and leadership. Competition teaches composure, resilience, and teamwork. Every season gives student athletes a chance to grow into confident young men and women who will make an impact well beyond campus.”

Coach Cerino went in-depth talking to the *HSSS* about all four new varsity coaches for the upcoming school year.

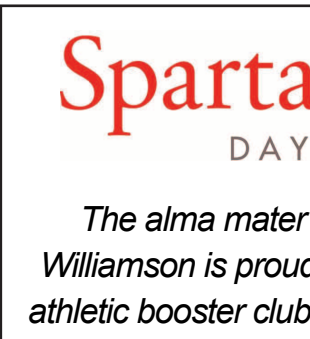
Michael Herring will be the head varsity girls’ basketball coach. Coach Herring, who teaches middle school Social Studies, brings 35 years of teaching experience in education, including 31 years in independent schools. Herring spent 20 years at the **Noble and Greenough School**, outside Boston where he built one of the strongest high school girls’ basketball programs in the New England area, win-

ning more than 300 games and one Independent School League State championship.

Coach Moffitt is in the process of adding one more varsity coach to the program. “I should have one more assistant who hasn’t officially accepted yet, so just have the same coaches as of now.”

Those two varsity assistants include **Andrew Vaught**, a **Wofford** graduate who has done a good job developing the offensive line. The other full-time assistant is **Chris Cormier** who came to the Griffins from **St. Thomas Aquinas High** in Florida, where he served as the team’s offensive coordinator. Coach Cormier was a four-year let-terman as a quarterback at **West Virginia Wesleyan**.

The excitement of varsity football returning to the school has attracted new players. “We have added two more kids to the roster since early June,” said Coach Moffitt. “They are new kids to the school whose families relocated to the Spartanburg area (not for football purposes). These families moved from other states. One is **Finlay MacMillan**, (6’2” 255 OL/DL) while the other is



Spartanburg

DAY SCHOOL

The alma mater of NBA star Zion Williamson is proud to be joined by our athletic booster club, athletic department and the Spartanburg Day School Administration in proudly recognizing the hard work of our student athletes in the High School Sports Report.

The Spartanburg Day Griffins athletic program is on the move with varsity football coming in 2026

ning more than 300 games and one Independent School League State championship.

Coach Herring helped many student athletes continue their careers at Ivy League and NESCAC schools in the region. “In addition to be a successful coach, Michael has taught US History and Economics and served in college counseling and school leadership roles,” said Coach Cerino. “His approach emphasizes character, sportsmanship, and servant leadership, making him an ideal fit for the Spartanburg Day School. He has a passion for mentoring students in both the classroom and on the basketball court,”

Kaitlin Holman has joined the SDS athletic program as the new Director of the Griffins volleyball program. Coach Holman will be a pre-school Physical education teacher as well. “She has a strong background in athletic performance, coaching, and student development,” said Coach Cerino. “She currently serves as the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at D-1 Training in Spartanburg. She has previous experience in the field of athletic training both at Limestone University and as interim director of strength and conditioning at the University of Detroit Mercy.

Holman has a Master’s degree from **Arkansas Tech University** and a bachelor’s degree in Exercise Science and athletic training from **Baldwin Wallace University**. She is also a certified Conditioning Specialist with Distinction and a USA Weightlifting Level 2 coach. Holman is a former member of the USA Under-18 national volleyball team and went on to become a three-letter winner at Baldwin-Wallace.

“For nearly 15 years she has coached elite club volleyball and helped athletes grow in confidence, discipline, and teamwork,” said Coach Cerino. “Her energy and commitment to young people make her an outstanding addition to the SDS community.”
See Spartanburg Day, pg. 61

Sagan **O’Brien**, (6’2” 220 OL/DL). Coach Moffitt said the team will be a member of the SCISA 2-AA region. The Griffins will scrimmage **Blacksburg High** on August 6th, prior to playing at Asheville Christian on the team’s first home game is on August 28th against the **Thornwell Charter School**.

Some of the leadership players, who have played on the Griffins “B” team and junior varsity teams the past two seasons include sophomore **Charles Wilson** (WR/LB), sophomore **Camden Teel** (WR/DB), sophomores **Nick Querin** (OL/DL), sophomore **Tyler Fernandez** (WR/DB) and junior **Heath Boyd** (RB/LB).

“These five players have been staples for us in the program since we started it back in the fall of 2024,” said Coach Moffitt. “They have been the group of guys who have really set the example and been leaders in both seasons, and during off-season workouts. We have a lot of other great kids who have worked really hard, and the whole team is really bought in to what we’re trying to build. We’re excited with the group we have and can’t wait to get going.”

2026 HSSR Preseason Football Polls		
HSSR AAAAA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)	HSSR AA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)	HSSR SCISA AAAAA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)
1. Dutch Fork 2. Dorman 3. Byrnes 4. Sumter 5. James Island 6. Summerville 7. Spartanburg 8. Carolina Forest 9. White Knoll 10. Berkeley	1. Dillon 2. Clinton 3. Strom Thurmond 4. Manning 5. Timberland 6. Philip Simmons 7. East Clarendon 8. Woodland 9. Andrew Jackson 10. Orangeburg-Wilkinson	1. Northwood Academy 2. Pinewood Prep 3. Hammond 4. Heathwood Hall 5. Porter Gaud 6. Laurence Manning
HSSR AAAAA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)	HSSR Class A Div. 1 Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)	HSSR-SCISA AAA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)
1. Irmo 2. Gaffney 3. South Pointe 4. Greenwood 5. North Augusta 6. South Florence 7. AC Flora 8. Myrtle Beach 9. West Florence 10. Westside	1. Abbeville 2. Bamberg-Ehrhardt 3. Hampton County 4. Fairfield Central 5. Central 6. Cheraw 7. Batesburg-Leesville 8. Chesterfield 9. Andrews 10. Latta	1. Bethesda 2. Florence Christian 3. Trinity Collegiate 4. Wilson Hall 5. Hilton Head Christian 6. First Baptist
HSSR AAA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)	HSSR Class A Div. 2 Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)	HSSR SCISA AA Football Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)
1. Camden 2. Hartsville 3. Belton Honea-Path 4. Daniel 5. Powdersville 6. Swansea 7. Hanahan 8. Wren 9. Gilbert 10. Broome	1. Cross 2. Lewisville 3. Lake View 4. Lamar 5. Johnsonville 6. Hunter Kinard Tyler 7. Scotts Branch 8. Calhoun County 9. Blackville-Hilda 10. Hannah-Pamplico	1. Williamsburg Academy 2. Greenwood Christian 3. Calhoun Academy 4. Orangeburg Prep 5. Pee Dee Academy 6. Colleton Prep
HSSR SCISA 8-Man Rankings (As of 7-23-2026)		
1. WW King 2. Jefferson Davis 3. Laurens Academy 4. Andrew Jackson Acad 5. Community Christian 6. Wardlaw		

Hampton County are now all Canes

By Neill Kirkpatrick
Special to the HSSR
Varnville – In the three years since Estill and Wade Hampton merged to become Hampton County High School they have quickly become one of the top AA programs in the lower state reaching three lower state championships games, one state championships and have won 19 region championships but it is this the fourth year that has athletic director Rob Hanna really excited about his program.

“We were lucky in 2023 as we had a phenomenal group of kids that knew we could really good and they did everything we needed to buy into the culture we wanted for our program to be successful. We didn’t have any of the ‘We’re from Hampton, we’re from Estill’ we don’t have listen to the other,” said coach Hanna. “Being year four this will be the first time on our teams that we will have kids that weren’t Red Devils or Gators. They have been Hampton County Hurricanes since they have been in high school.”

Coach Continued, “both Wade Hampton and Estill had solid athletic programs before the merger so bringing that talent together has been one key to the success we have in the first three years. When you have a little bit of success the kids want to be part of that and they get involved and they expect to be successful.”

The Hurricanes will be moving into region 7 A next season which has coach excited about the opportunity sports other than football, basketball, track, and field to reach the success those programs

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Terry steps down as PHA boys hoops coach

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Estill – Patrick Henry Academy is looking for a new boys basketball head coach for the 2026-27 school year after Claude Terry decided to step down after four seasons at the helm.
Patriots athletic director Kelsey Swaim said the process of finding a replacement is ongoing.
Patrick Henry went 6-16 in its final season under Terry after starting the year with a 5-2 record. The Patriots missed out on the SCISA AAA state tournament.

Patrick Henry made the tournament in each of Terry’s first three years. He owned a 45-29 record over his tenure.
All of the other varsity head coaches are back. Joe Gray Peeples returns for his fourth season in charge of the football program, Anthony Creech is back as the girls basketball coach for the fourth year, Kristin Wemes returns for her second season as the volleyball head coach, and Brodie Gibson is back for his second year in charge of the baseball program.

The football team is coming off of a 2-9 season. Peeples led the Patriots to the Class A state title in his first season as head coach. It was also Patrick Henry’s first year in 11-man football after a couple of decades playing at the 8-man level. The Patriots are 17-18 over the last three years.

have in the first three years.
The Cane’s also benefit from a coaching staff that wants to be in Varnville and be part of the success of the kids, the school, and the community.
Head basketball coach Josh James is an example of coach who wants to be at Hampton County. He is a former Wade Hampton Red Devil that wanted to come back and coach on the court he played on. He has gone 40-10/19-1 since taking over legend Romon Gray.
Myrriah Hanna has been cross country coach snice 2006 and is one of the top coaches in the low country.
Long time girls soccer coach Barry Whittington returned three years ago and is getting the girls program back on track while boys coach Jesse Rooker has his team in the playoffs.
Megan Peeples, who was a volunteer last year, will begin her first year as the head coach of the girls tennis program.
Dobie Hiers and Sophie Thompson are the head coaches of softball and volleyball teams and both led their teams into the playoffs.
Henry Howard joined the Cane’s family as the head girls basketball coach and will help with football while Don Williams will join the football team and head up the wrestling program.



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The girls basketball team went 11-11 under Creech and lost to Williamsburg Academy 57-53 in the first round of the AAA state tournament. The Patriots have gone 37-27 during Creech’s tenure.
Wemes led the volleyball team to a 21-6 record in her first season. The Patriots won the region title and went 2-2 in the state tournament.
The Patrick Henry baseball team went 9-11 in its first season under Gibson’s leadership. The Patriots were 9-9 durign the regular season and 0-2 in in their bracket in the AAA state playoffs.
Patrick Henry hasn’t had a softball team the past two years. If it does have one this year, Swaim is slated to be the head coach.
“I will not know that until it is time,” was Swaim’s response when asked if the school would have softball this year.
With SCISA’s biannual reclassification, things have changed a little bit for the Patrick Henry athletic teams. The football team will continue to play at the AA level, while all of the other sports will compete at the AA level this year after being AAA for the past two seasons.

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Go PHA Patriots!

Adams takes over Colleton County football

By David Sheltonn
Senior Writer
Walterboro - Never afraid of a challenge, Bradley Adams has accepted the challenge of rebuilding the Colleton County High football program.

Adams was named to his new position in late January, replacing Adam Kinloch, who was not retained after three seasons. Adams has spent the last two years out of coaching but served as the Beaufort High athletic director.

“I am excited to have this opportunity to lead this football program,” Adams said. “Being away from coaching these last two years has renewed my passion and hunger for coaching and developing young men. We have a lot of work to do but I feel like the program has a lot of what is needed to compete.”

Adams brings more than 22 years of coaching experience at the high school and collegiate levels, including successful head coaching tenures at Georgetown (winningest Coach in program history), Woodruff, and Union County high schools.

A proven program builder, Adams has led multiple teams to playoff appearances (13 out of 15 years as a Head Coach) and region championships, compiling over 80 career wins as a Head Coach while revitalizing programs across South Carolina. During his time at Union, he took over a 2-9 team and won back-to-back region championships before accepting the job at Woodruff High School.

Colleton County has suffered in recent years, managing just a handful of wins in the last six seasons. Adams realizes the challenges ahead

Colleton Prep continues growth in athletics

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Walterboro - In a perfect world, Colleton Prep athletic director Greg Langdale would love to offer as many sports opportunities as other small private schools in SCISA.

However, to have a lot of sports you need a lot of willing participants. While Colleton Prep’s participation rate in athletics is very good, there simply is not enough student-athletes to go around. Langdale addressed the situation in an interview last summer.

“There are very few high school kids in the school that don’t play something,” said Langdale, who is also the head football coach. “The participation rate for the kids that we have is really good. We have a good many athletes who are two sport athletes and several that play three sports. We just don’t have the overall numbers to add sports.”

Langdale says adding a boys soccer program and possibly getting more involved with track and field are on the wish list. However, the turnout of players for soccer was minimal, less than enough to field a team.

“We try every year but you can’t do it with five or six boys,” Langdale said. “We have good

but is ready to attack head on.
“The important thing is to have a plan, a standard, and never waver,” he said. “It’s one step at a time and we can’t rush it or overlook anything. Every day is another day to move forward and we understand that.”

Adams is known for his leadership, commitment to student-athlete development, and emphasis on academics, character, and accountability. His coaching philosophy for Colleton County High School will be centered on the PAW Standard—Preparation, Accountability, and Work Ethic—with a strong focus on building meaningful relationships and lifelong skills.

Colleton County Department of Athletics looks forward to Coach Adams’ leadership as he works to build the Cougar football program and positively impact students both on and off the field.

All of the other varsity head coaches will return in their respective sports in 2026-27, according to athletic director Chris Myers. Myers says there will be a new girls soccer coach but that position as yet to be filled.

Samuel Mwangi will return as volleyball coach and Treshana Weise will coach cross country. Meagan Driggers is the competition cheer coach and Katrina Winfield directs the sideline cheer team.

Kendrae Hiers will return as the tennis coach. He was the region coach of the year for girls tennis last season. Dominic Kahee is the boys basketball coach while Charles Lindsay is the girls coach.

Jaqes Glover heads up the wrestling program. Josh Craven is the baseball coach and

numbers in baseball during the spring. We just don’t have enough boys in the school to spread around.”

Colleton Prep has fielded a girls soccer team in recent years, joining basketball, volleyball, tennis and softball as girls sports are offered. Cross country is another sport that has been hit or miss in terms of participation numbers. There has been growing interest in wrestling and several wrestlers have competed well, though the roster for all weight classes is still incomplete.
One of Langdale’s primary tasks is making sure his teams have coaches. He had to hire a new boys basketball coach two years ago and John Caldwell will return for his third season.

Veteran coach Belinda McCoy directs the successful girls basketball program and she also will coach volleyball.

George Smith will return to direct the cross country program and Mike McCoy will coach the boys golf team. Ladson Fishburne heads up the successful girls tennis program in the fall.

Returning as softball coach is Tiger Martin while Joe Hill will return as the head baseball coach. Both programs are perennial playoff contenders.



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Tavara Edwards is the softball coach. She was the region coach of the year this past season.
Brian Reid will again coach boys soccer and Aubrey Lemon is the track coach. Elsie Huffman is the boys golf coach.

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SUMMERVILLE GREENWAVE

Summerville brings new members to coaching staff

By Roger Lee
Special to the HSSR
Summerville – While there has been some turnover for the **Summerville High School** coaching staff, the **Green Wave** still has a talented group of head coaches entering the new school year.

“Summerville enters the 2026-27 school year with an outstanding coaching staff committed to building on the Green Wave tradition of excellence,” said **Cory Magwood**, who is entering his third year as the school’s athletic director. “This year’s lineup includes six new head coaches who bring exceptional leadership and passion for developing student-athletes.”

Tyler Clark is the new head coach for the **Girls Basketball** program.

“Coach Clark holds an impressive coaching background that spans the high school and collegiate levels,” Magwood said. “Most recently, he served as an assistant coach at **Cane Bay High School** and the **College of Charleston** after previously serving as **Director of Basketball Operations and Assistant Coach** at the **University of Tennessee at Chattanooga**, where he helped lead the program to two **Southern Conference Championships** and back-to-back **NCAA Tournament** appearances.” Clark also developed players at **Wheeling University**. His commitment to player development, accountability, teamwork, and building relationships makes him an outstanding leader according to Magwood.

Jaclyn “Jackie” Boismenu now heads the **Girls Swimming** program. She has a wealth of coaching experience in both swimming and track and field. She joined the Green Wave swim program last season as an assistant coach and made an immediate impact through her knowledge of the sport and commitment to student-athletes.

“Coach Boismenu’s passion for developing young athletes and dedication to excellence make her an outstanding choice to lead the program,” Magwood said. “As both an educator and coach, she is committed to helping students succeed in the classroom, in the pool, and beyond.”

Larissa Szafranski now heads the **Boys Volleyball** program.

“Coach Szafranski was already an integral part of the program, serving as our lead assistant coach for the past two seasons,” Magwood said. “Her leadership, work ethic, game-strategy, and commitment to our student-athletes have made a tremendous impact on the program.”

Prior to coming to Summerville, she coached with the **Pittsburgh Elite Volleyball Association**. As a former standout student-athlete at the **University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown**, she helped lead her team to a **Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Championship** and two **NCAA Tournament** appearances.

Summerville graduate and former Green Wave athlete **Payne Rutherford** has taken over as the head for the school’s golf programs.

“He returned home with a passion for serving the community that helped shape him,” Magwood said. “Last season, he returned as an assistant coach for the Green Wave golf program, quickly earning the respect of our student-athletes and coaching staff through his passion, knowledge of the game, and commitment to excellence. As a teacher he is dedicated to developing young people of character while building a competitive golf program that reflects the pride and tradition of Green Wave athletics.”

Rutherford earned his degree in Education from the **University of South Carolina** before beginning his teaching and coaching career at **Airport High School in Columbia**, where he served as an assistant golf coach.



Tyler Clark is one of six head coaches joining the Green Wave staff next school year

Another proud Green Wave alumna, **Caroline Gilstrap**, is now the head of the school’s **Girls Wrestling** program.

“She served on the coaching staff during the program’s inaugural season,” Magwood said. “As a student-athlete at Summerville, Gilstrap was one of South Carolina’s most accomplished wrestlers. Her experience, leadership and passion for developing young athletes make her an outstanding choice to lead our girls wrestling program.”

Gilstrap won the **2022 South Carolina Girls Individual State Championship** and the **2023 SCHSL Class 5A Individual State Championship**. She also represented South Carolina on the **Girls Fargo National Team** and was recognized with the **2023 Tricia Saunders High School Excellence Award**.”

She continued her wrestling career at nationally-ranked **McKendree University**.

Tara Pellegrino is the new head coach for the **Summerville Cheerleading** program.

“Coach Pellegrino brings a wealth of experience, with 14 years as a cheerleader and eight years of coaching across the all-star, high school, recreation, youth, and sideline levels,” Magwood said. “Her experience, energy, and commitment to excellence make her the ideal leader to continue the proud tradition of Green Wave Cheer.”

Prior to joining Summerville, she coached at **Central Bucks High School West** and **PA Cheer Club**, where both programs earned national-level success. For the past two years, she served as the Green Wave assistant coach.

The school’s other coaches are a largely veteran and successful bunch.

Heather Tucker returns for her 24th year after leading the **Softball** team to its fourth straight **5A Softball State final**. Her team won three of them.

Darryl Tucker returns for his 19th year and has led the **Wrestling** team multiple Lower State championships. **Scott Little** enters his 19th year heading up the school’s **Athletic Training** program. **Jesse Gladis**, the coach for the **Boys Tennis** team for 15 years, is also the **Boys Swimming** coach. **Head Track and Field** coach and assistant football coach **Kevin Bellush** has been at the school 13 years. **Kelly Hazel** has coached the school’s **Cross Country** teams the past 10 years. **Ian Rafferty** is back for his seventh season heading the foot-

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ball program after leading the Green Wave to the **5A, Division 1 State Championship** game last season.

Others returning include **Thane Maness** (Baseball), **Amanda Holcomb** (Girls Soccer), **Liz Yohe** (Girls Volleyball), **Steve DiPaolo** (Boys Soccer), **Richard Schulz** (Girls Tennis), **Michael Jenkins**, (Boys Basketball), **Carneal Hall** (Strength and Conditioning) and **Karen Hill** (Athletic Secretary).

Lampkin joins Kingstree as offensive coordinator

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Kingstree – **Brandon Cantrell** got his start as a high school football coach thanks to **Will Lampkin**. Cantrell’s first job was as an assistant on Lampkin’s **Kingstree High School** staff back in the mid 2000s.

Fast forward a couple of decades and Cantrell is preparing for his second year as head coach at Kingstree, his first head coaching gig. This year Lampkin will be part of Cantrell’s staff.

Lampkin will be the Blazers’ offensive coordinator and quarterback coach as Kingstree will try to improve upon its 4-7 record from a year ago.

“Adding Will Lampkin to the staff will be good for us offensively,” Cantrell said. “He will be in charge of the offense, but I’ll be putting my thoughts on things in as well.

“We have **James Price** back as our defensive coordinator. We’re going to make some changes in what we do defensively. I know he’ll do a great job. I know I can trust both of them.”

All of the other assistants are returning coaches. **Diallo Cooper** will coach the running backs, **Antawn Brunson** will be in charge of the wide receivers, and **Richard Montgomery** will coach the line.

Price will have Brunson coaching defensive backs, Cooper in charge of outside linebackers, **Jason Myers** is in charge of the middle linebackers and **Sharvis Graham** will coach up the line.

Price, who is also Kingstree’s athletic director, likes the football coaching staff that has been assembled.

“I am excited for th 2026-27 football season to begin,” Price said. “We now have a full staff at every position with plenty of knowledge and experience to share with our Blazer football team.

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Chesterfield returns varsity coaching staff in full

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Chesterfield – A year ago, **Chesterfield High** athletic director **Kevin Kenny** had to make a big hire on his coaching staff, choosing Chesterfield alum **Nick Dixon** as the head football coach.

This summer has been a lot quieter and less stressful for Kenny as he reports no new varsity coaching hires for the 2026-27 school year.

Kenny says Dixon will return for year two of his effort to bring continuity to the football landscape. **Lisa Hardwick** will return to lead the girls cross country program, while **Jeff Bland** will coach the boys cross country team.

Courtney Vanderpool heads up the volleyball program and **Lela Oakley** will coach girls golf. **Louis Rivers** is the wrestling coach and **Nick Jolly** is the girls basketball coach. **Ernest Davis** is the boys basketball coach.

Steven Sellers directs the baseball program and **Graham Harpe** is the softball coach. **James Wall** coaches track while **Lee Wallace** coaches the boys golf team.

The summer focus at Chesterfield has been on football and Dixon is pleased with the work that his team put in during the offseason. The Rams lost only four seniors from last year’s team so experience is a plus this fall.

“They are a committed and hard-working staff that are here not only to build strong football players, but most importantly, they are here to build young men into productive students and citizens.”

Kingstree had several 7-on-7 scrimmages over the summer as well as an 11-on-11 practice with **Georgetown**. It will take part in a scrimmage at **Manning** that also includes Georgetown and **Timberland**. The Blazers will be playing host to the **Lake City Jamboree** on August 14 as work on the **Lake City High** field will not be completed in enough time.

Kingstree will open its season on Thursday, August 20, when it travels to Marion.

As far as the staff of head coaches, there will only be one change. **Samantha Segres** will be the volleyball head coach.

Price will once again be the girls head coach. The Blazers went 19-5 this past season, finishing second in Region 7-AA and reaching the second round of the state playoffs.

Shawnte’ Evans returns for his third year in charge of boys basketball. Kingstree went 5-19 last season.

Ameisha Owens, who coached volleyball last season, will once again coach softball. **Leonard Montgomery** will be the baseball coach again.

Myers will be the boys track and field head coach, while **Christi English** will coach the girls team.

“I am excited for the 2026-27 sports season at Kingstree High,” Price said. “The athletic program is trending in the right direction with a full commitment to improving in all of the sports that we offer. The coaches are working extremely hard to prepare the kids, and I am pleased with what I have seen all summer.”

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along the way and I’m excited to put my spin on things.”



Woodland Principal
Robert Bevin



Superintendent / Boys Soccer Coach
Jeff Beckwith

Strong school administration fuels success in athletics and academics at Woodland

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher

Dorchester—Just 8 days on the job as the new Principal of **Woodland High**, **Robert Bevin**, is all smiles as this reporter walks into his office to interview him about the athletic program at his high school.

Bevin is no stranger to Woodland High. He taught English at the school between 2017 and 2022 before he left to become an assistant Principal at **Stratford High** for four years. Bevin succeeded **Michael White** who was promoted to Chief Academic Officer of DD4 for the 2026-27 school year.

Principal Bevin stresses his three “Wolver E’s” to all students at Woodland High. “Our long-term goal for every student at our school is that when they graduate, they are either enlisted, enrolled, or employed,” said Bevin. “We hope that you either enlist in the military, enroll at a college, or become employed when you graduate, and if this happens, we feel like we have done our job as educators.”

Bevin said it is extremely important to have all students at Woodland High participate in extracurricular activities, whether it be on the football team, the band, or even robotics. “Being exposed to more opportunities leads to better growth, not just in the career path, but in the college path as well,” said Bevin.

The athletic director at **Woodland High** is **Ty Sibert**, who grew up in McCormick, SC. Mr. Bevin has known Coach Sibert since he was a former teacher at the school, “Coach Sibert has been a great role model for all the students at Woodland High, not just our student athletes,” said Bevin. “When you have a person like Coach Sibert in your corner you let them take their expertise

and push it to the next level. We have a massive advantage with him here as our athletic director.”

Woodland’s head football coach **Eddie Ford** will begin his 8th season at Woodland this year and in his career, he has a record of 109-43. Last year the Wolverines were 5-6 competing in the 6-AA region. Coach Ford will serve as a Shrine Bowl assistant coach at the conclusion of the 2026 season.

“Coach Ford is all about raising expectations for students on his football team,” said Bevin. “He is very forward with his players, and he has great relationships with all the students he works with daily. He has a vision for his program, and he holds his players accountable.”

Principal Bevin noted that both the Valedictorian and the Salutarian of the Class of 2026 at Woodland High this past school year were athletes, as well as excellent academic students.

Woodland High will have a new volleyball head coach this year in **Sarah McCellan**. Coach McCellan also serves as the school’s wrestling girl’s coach. **Collen Martin**, recently married, returns as the boy’s and girl’s cross-country coach.

In winter sports, **Austin Jeffries** returns as the head girls’ basketball coach while **Bill Barry** is the head boys’ basketball coach. **Keith Sharf** returns as the boy’s wrestling head coach.

In the Spring, **Seth Patrick** will be the new head baseball coach after serving as an assistant coach to **Keith Lowman** last season.

Veteran head softball coach **Kim Reeves**, a Health Science teacher, returns after completing nearly a decade in the program after last season.

The new boy’s golf head coach is **Brian Marvel** who just completed his first year in the new program. School is starting a girl’s golf team this fall, and Coach Marvel will also coach this first



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year team.

The boys’ soccer team is fundamentally sound under the coaching leadership of DD4 Superintendent **Jeff Beckwith** who played the sport in college. Mr. Beckwith will begin his third season as the head soccer coach this year and his team has made improvement each of the past two seasons.

The girls’ soccer program will once again be under the tutelage of **Isabella Wilmer** as well. Vic Simon returns as the boy’s tennis coach while Gladys Summers is once again coaching the girl’s tennis team at Woodland High.

Perhaps the school’s most accomplished college athlete is head track coach **Summer Knight Troutman** who was an all-state pole vaulter at Woodland before moving on to a track scholarship at East Carolina. At ECU she was a two-time all-American where she also set several school records in the pole vault in college.

“First, Summer is a great person as well as being a great track coach,” said Coach Sibert. “She loves coaching track and she is very enthusiastic about her job.”

Coach Sibert, beginning his 15th year at the school, expressed why he feels blessed to be the athletic director at Woodland High. “The thing I enjoy the most about Woodland High is the strong sense of community, the people I work with on a daily basis, and while we might not always have the best in terms of material things, we definitely have the best-of-the best in terms of our people. We care about each other and that matters.

“From our great administration down to our cafeteria workers and even our custodians, we are all pulling the wagon in the same direction at Woodland High,” said Coach Sibert. “This is what brings joy to me. Most of all we have great kids who are willing to put in the work to get better.”

Coach Sibert also wanted to thank the many volunteers who donated their time to help make the athletic program successful. He cited 20-year volunteer **Sam Gadsen** as such a volunteer. Over the year Mr. Gadsen has helped out coaching football and has even run the play clock at games.

With DD4 consisting of leadership from **Jeff Beckwith** as Superintendent, **Robert Bevin** as Principal, and **Ty Sibert** as athletic director, this school district, and high school, will continue to grow and serve as a great example to all other school districts, and high schools, in South Carolina.

Weber takes over Fort Dorchester swim teams

By Roger Lee
Special to the HSSR

North Charleston – **Jacob Weber** is entering his first school year as the head coach for the **Fort Dorchester Swimming** program.

“With 40-plus years of coaching experience at the high school, college and club levels in **Wisconsin** and **Illinois**, Coach Weber brings an incredible legacy of excellence to **Patriot Nation**,” said Fort Dorchester athletic director **Taryn Floyd**. “For the past 24 years, he led high school boys and girls programs in **Deerfield and Libertyville, Illinois**, developing elite swimmers while building strong, competitive teams.”

Throughout his career Weber has coached **Junior National** qualifiers, state champions and state record holders, zone champions and dozens of swimmers and relay teams ranked **Top 16** in the nation.

A former distance swimmer, he competed at **Northern Illinois University**, where he earned his degree in **Education (Spanish and Physical Education)**. Alongside coaching, he has spent many years teaching physical education and serving as a recreation supervisor.

A pair of coaches return to FD for their second year heading a Patriots’ program. **Jay Christmas**



Graphics from FDHS
Jacob Weber brings a lot of experience to the Fort Dorchester Swimming program

is back as the head coach for **Patriots Baseball**. **Kyle Conway** returns to head the **Fort Boys Tennis** program.

Shaun Lorenzano is preparing for his third season as the head of the **Fort Football** program. **Rashad Palmer**, (Wrestling), **Megan Foley** (Girls

Kephart takes charge of AR boys soccer program

By Roger Lee
Special to the HSSR

Summerville – **Ashley Ridge** faces two head coaching changes for Fall sports next school year and one for Spring sports.

Nate Harris, one of the “OGs” of the school’s coaching staff, stepped down as the head coach for the **Swamp Fox Boys Soccer** program after last season. One of the few coaches who helped open the school for its first year in 2008 who remained on staff through 2025-26, Harris built the soccer program into a state-championship program.

Taking over for Harris is someone familiar to many on the local soccer scene, **Andrew Kephart**. A former all-region soccer player for **Fort Dorchester** who has served as an assistant soccer coach for the **Patriots** the past few years, has been named the new head coach for the AR Boys.

“We are excited for Coach Kephart to join the Ashley Ridge staff,” said **Ashley Ridge Athletic Director Kelly Lewis**. “He has many years of experience and is familiar with many of our returning players. We feel he will keep our men’s soccer program competing for the region championship on a regular basis.”

After graduating from Fort Dorchester in 2014, Kephart played for **Francis Marion University**. He earned his college degree and then served as an assistant soccer coach for the university before returning to the Fort to coach. He also has extensive experience coaching club soccer.

“I’m incredibly grateful for everyone at Fort Dorchester who helped shape me both as a coach and a person,” Kephart posted online. “The rela-

Contributed Graphic
Andrew Kephart has been hired to head the Ashley Ridge Boys Soccer program.

tionships, memories and lessons I’ve gained will always stay with me. I’m excited for this new opportunity and can’t wait to get to work building something special with the Swamp Foxes.”

Bradyn Benes, also a Fort Dorchester graduate, has been named the new head coach for the **Swamp Fox Boys Volleyball** program. He served as an assistant coach for the Patriots last year.

Chonsie Eecheute served as an AR assistant **Girls Volleyball** coach last season. She has been promoted and will handle head coaching responsibilities leading into the new school year.

BJ Bellush founded the **AR Baseball** program and has been its head coach for all but five sea-

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Volleyball) and **Nicolas Danielski** (Girls Cross Country) are also entering their third season heading a Fort program.

Most of the school’s other head coaches have been at the Fort for a while. **Boys Cross Country Coach Thane Williams** has coached for more than 30 years, the majority being for the **Patriots**. Others returning include **Tara Brigman** (Cheerleading), **Bobby Floyd** (Strength and Conditioning), **Kenny Walker** (Golf), **Neil Veloso** (Boys Soccer/Girls Tennis), **Elizabeth Govert** (Boys Volleyball), **Thomas McElveen** (Boys Basketball), **Katrina McClain** (Girls Basketball), **Ashley Johnson** (Basketball Cheerleading), **Jason Birchwood** (Girls Soccer), **Curtis Moore** (Softball) and **Jalain Whitfield** (Girls Track).

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sons when co-founder **Brian Givens** held the “skipper” position. Bellush is also the strength and conditioning coach.

Jeff Plane came to the school in 2008 as an assistant football coach and now serves as the head coach for the **Cross Country** teams.

Boys’ basketball coach **Brad Dobbels** has more than 20 years of overall coaching experience. Under his leadership, the **Swamp Foxes** finished as the **5A, Division 1 state runner-up** last season and set a new school record for wins. He also coaches the **Boys’ Golf** team.

Victoria Merritt has been the **AR Swimming** coach for 11 years and led multiple teams to region championships. **Larissa Shannon** is another long-termer. As the **AR Softball** coach she once won six straight region titles.

Jimmy Brown, who is entering his fourth year with the AR girls’ basketball team, has more than 20 years of total experience. Others returning include **Jeff Tate** (football), **Shane Calvert** (Girls Soccer), **Noelle Hauck** (Girls Tennis), **Taea Fonkert** (cheer), **Alan Aponte** (wrestling), **Ron McNally** (girls golf), **Alyx Sisofa** (Sports Medicine) and **Saeed Jones** (track and field).

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Lodge begins fourth season as Stags coach

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Moncks Corner – After a pair of six-win seasons in his first two years, **Berkeley** head football coach **Eric Lodge** guided the Stags to a 10-3 record last fall.

Lodge is hoping and expecting to see continued growth and development in 2026 and recently put his prospective team through spring drills. The purpose of the spring is to identify roles and hopefully find rising talent that can assist either as backups or starters this fall.

“Our spring is about evaluating kids, all of them, to see where they fit in,” Lodge said, “Those practices are very important to the growth of the program. We get everyone involved and work to get them up to speed. Once we get into the summer, we are working hard to get stronger in the weight room along with seven-on-seven stuff.”

Lodge says most of the returning experience is on the offensive side and the Stags should be explosive. **Henry Rivers**, a senior, will be a fourth-year starter and rates as one of the best in the state. Hethres for more than 1,200 yards and 12 touchdowns last season, adding 803 rushing

Cane Bay baseball under new direction in 2026

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Summerville – **Cane Bay High’s** baseball program will have just its second head baseball coach since opening their doors in 2009. **Danny Clark** has been selected as the replacement for outgoing coach Shane Todd, the only coach in school history. Clark has coached in the program for three seasons, the last two as the head Jayvee coach.

Originally from Kentucky, Clark retired and moved to the Lowcountry after a highly successful career. He was selected to the Kentucky Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame in 2025.

Football completes summer workouts
The last two football seasons have been sub-par for the Cane Bay Cobras but veteran head coach **Russell Zehr** believes the pieces are in place for a potential resurgence.

The Cobras finished the last two seasons with three wins each but did win a region championship in 2024. Zehr and his staff have worked hard in the offseason to develop some up and coming talent. They did so through the weight room and spring practice.

“We had a good spring overall,” Zehr said. “We were missing a handful of guys due to track but we had good numbers. We spent a lot

yards and 16 more scores. Returning at receiver are **John Cleveland**, **Eli Mitchell** and **Johnathan Mitchell**, who combined for more than 60 receptions last season.

Anchoring the running game are returners **Lawrence Washington**, **Bryson McGee** and **Jesse Brown**. That trio will work behind a revamped offensive line but Lodge sees potential in the developing unit up front.

“I like our depth at running back and receiver, and of course we have a veteran leader at quarterback,” said Lodge.

There are significantly more holes to fill on defense. The Stags lost an all-state tackle and three starting linebackers that were three-year starters. There also are three holes to fill on the back end.

“We have identified some young men who we feel will step in and be solid players for us,” Lodge said. “Replacing the experience is tough but we have some guys who will learn and grow over time. We’re not new to having young guys on the field. The talent is there and there are opportunities for guys to get on the field.”

of time getting everyone up to speed. It was an opportunity for us to see younger kids that are coming up and find out who can help us this season. We had about 80 kids during the spring and about 75 of those have been consistent in their workouts over the summer.”

The Cobras will have a new quarterback this fall. Zehr says senior **Coran Houpe** is moving from running back to run the option offense this season.

Returning in the backfield are **Mayson Samuel** and **Sam Rolston**, with some talented backs coming from the lower levels. The offensive line returns two starters, **Isaac Siefken** and **Eli Taylor**.

Junior **JJ Rose** is back as the leader along the defensive front, with ends **Devin Cobbs** and **Brennen Shokes** also returning. The linebackers will be new starters with only **Jackson Williamson** returning with experience.

The secondary could be a strength with returners **Tyrell Bess**, **Zion Bryant** and **Caeden Wilson**.

The kicking game is a solid strength with senior **Aiden Thorne** returning. Thorne is a deep threat on kickoffs and field goals.

“He’s got a leg and can be a real weapon for us,” Zehr said.

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Wardlaw welsomces new football era in 2026

By: Gerald Doolittle
Johnston, S.C. – Wardlaw Academy will open the 2026-27 athletic year with the start of a new football coaching era to replace the outgoing 14-year tenure of **Mark Rodgers** who coached the **Patriots** to **SCISA 8-MAN** titles in 2012, 2016 and 2017.

Marsh Stark a 1990 graduate of Wardlaw will be the new head football coach. Also joining the Patriot football program to coach the **Middle School** team will be another former Patriot in **Tucker Miller** from class of 1993. These two men brings with them the knowledge of what it takes to continue the winning traditions at Wardlaw while preparing the young men to succeed in the game of life.

Amber Weaghton will coach the Cross

Knights coaching staff all set for 2026-27

BY: GERALD DOOLITTLE
Batesburg-Leesville, S.C. - The Coaching roster for **W.W. King Academy** is all set for the 2026-27 school year. The **Knights** are working hard to prepare the football and volleyball teams for the fall sports.

The **Varsity Football** team will again be coached by **Brian Kneece**. Kneece, a WKA alum coached the Knights to a 12-0 **SCISA 8-MAN** Title in 2025. **Lane Bedenbaugh**, another WKA alum, will coach the **Middle School** football team.

Athletic Director **Kathy Gibson** and **Sean Anderson** will coach the **Varsity Volleyball** team

Nibert new AD, boys hoops coach for Crusaders

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Laurens – Gregg Nibert walked into retirement last year after stepping down as the boys basketball head coach at **Spartanburg Day School** in a career that saw him spend 28 years as the head coach at **Presbyterian College**.

Nibert just walked right back out of retirement. He is the new boys head coach and athletic director at **Laurens Academy**.

“It wasn’t all it was cracked up to be,” Nibert said of retirement. “You can only water the plants, take the little puppy on a walk so much. My wife said I needed to find something to do.

“I thought it was time, but you never know how something is until you do it. I’m a coach. I may not do many things that excite me, but coaching excites me.”

Nibert takes over both posts from **Travis Plowden**, who was the boys head coach for 16 years. He led the Crusaders to a SCISA state title in 2015 and guided last year’s team to the AA state semifinals.

Along with winning more than 400 games, Nibert led Spartanburg Day to the 2022 SCISA AA state championship.

While he knows coaching basketball, this will be Nibert’s first go at running an athletic department. Because of the staff already on hand, he believes things will go smoothly.

“They’ve been there so long and they do a

Country team. **LeAnne Hill** will coach **Middle School Volleyball**. **Lexi Quarles Peacon** will lead the **Varsity Volleyball** team and **Brandi Carpenter** will coach the **Cheer** team.

Kristina Spurlock will coach both **Varsity** and **Middle School Girls basketball**. Coach Spurlock will work hard to get her varsity team ready to defend their **2026 SCISA Class A Championship**.

Austin Spurlock will again coach the **Varsity Boys** basketball. Coach Spurlock will work hard to get his Patriots competitive in their tough region. **Terence Goodwin** will coach the **Middle School Boys** basketball.

Morgan Burgess will coach the **Varsity Baseball** team. **Katie Yonce** will coach the **Varsity Softball** team and **Dan Booth** will coach the **Middle School Softball** team.

and **Ashleigh Buzhardt** will coach the **Middle School Volleyball** team.

The **Varsity Cheer** will be coached by **Katie Rowe** and the **Middle School Cheer** coach will be **Jessica Buzhardt**.

Dennis Gibson will again be the **Varsity Boys Basketball** coach hoping for a stronger and competitive season. **Daniel Bartley** will be the **Middle School Boys** basketball coach.

Zach Matthews will again coach the **Varsity Baseball** team. The Knights will be the defending **SCISA Class A Champions**.

Allen Guy returns to coach the **Varsity Softball** team. He hopes to have a strong competitive team in Region and SCISA playoffs.

great job with their programs,” he said. “I’ll do whatever I can do to help them. They’ve got a great staff of head coaches.”

Jolly Doolittle will be back as the football head coach. He has led the Crusaders to consecutive appearances in the 8-man state championship game.

Doolittle will be assisted on the varsity by **Luke Tollison**, **Gerald Kirton**, **Josh Tackett** and **Nathan Bell**. **Thomas Lowry** will be the middle school head coach.

Shannon McGee is back for her 11th season as the volleyball head coach. LA saw its run of consecutive state championships come to an end at three last season – barely. The Crusaders lost to **The King’s Academy** in five games in the AA state championship match to finish 27-6.

Jason Marlett is back for his 13th season as the girls basketball head coach. He led the Crusaders to a 24-3 record and a fifth straight appearance in the state tournament semifinals, finishing as runner-up twice. He led the Crusaders to consecutive state championships in 2018 and 2019.

Darryl Halbert will be coaching the baseball team for the 13th year as well. He led Laurens to a state championship in 2011.

He guided the Crusaders to a 13-8 record this past season and to the semifinal series in the state playoffs.

Frankie Dunaway is returning as the softball coach.

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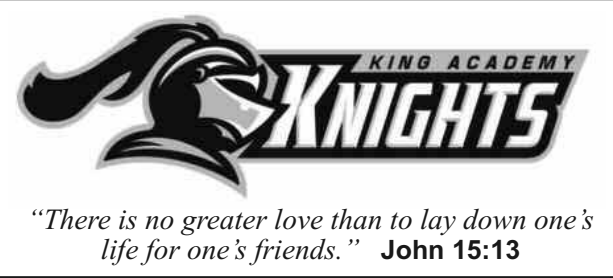
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Gray Collegiate football reloading for 2026

By WORTHY EVANS
Special to the HSSR
Columbia In De'Angelo Bryant's second year as head coach of the **Gray Collegiate Academy** football team, the War Eagles powered to a Region 4-4A championship and played **South Florence** for the 4A lower state championship.

"There were a lot of pieces to the puzzle that we had to fill last year, and we had a lot of guys step up in a major way," Bryant said. "We ended up getting close to it (a state championship) but it was not meant to be. We're always going to aim for a state championship."

Gray lost 16 seniors from that 11-3 effort, including linebackers **Michael Boulware** (Citadel signee; 283 total tackles: 51 tackles, 232 assists), **Tye Rivers** (131 total tackles) and **Caleb Raysor** (106 total tackles). Also gone is strong safety **Royal Williamson**, one of three sons of former **South Carolina** standout **Troy Williamson** on the team.

"We lost a great group of seniors that had multiple years experience, especially on defense," Bryant said. "We had some great leadership among the seniors, but from what we have returning, I really like our guys. From a talent standpoint, there's still some holes, but I think our guys will fill them."

The War Eagles got started in seeing which athlete best fits which spot on the field in spring practice in May.

Returning as quarterback is rising sophomore **Xavier Wright**, who is coming off a sensational freshman year. In 12 games Wright passed for 2,202 yards and 22 touchdowns to just five interceptions. He also rushed for 328 yards and three scores.

"He was such a success last season, and the expectation for us is how is he going to respond this year," Bryant said. "His answer is that he put on 10-plus pounds in the offseason, and has led the team in the weight room. Anytime that your quarterback can have that leadership speaks volumes for him and for the other guys. Three of our underclassmen in the

backfield have had great offseasons." The other two are the two other sons of Troy Williamson, rising seniors **Royce** and **Trevon Williamson**. Trevon led the rushing attack with 1,662 yards and 25 touchdowns, while Royce had five rushing TDs and 42 catches for 725 yards and eight scores in the wide receiver position. Both players also saw significant time in the defensive backfield, with Royce pulling in eight interceptions and Trevon notching two sacks and four tackles. This year's senior group, including the Williamsons, athlete **Jack Armstrong** (37 tackles, two sacks) and cornerback/wide receiver **Corey Gleaton** (52 catches for 1,243 receiving yards and 12 touchdowns; 49 tackles, six interceptions), led the way in practice. "These four are catalysts for our offense and defense, and they've all had a great offseason," Bryant said.

Among the younger guys fighting for a spot on the roster, Bryant said **David Quattlebaum** is a skill player up from the JV squad and will play on both sides of the ball. **Junior Darryl Washington** will boost the offensive line.

"David had a good JV season and has a great opportunity to be a guy we can depend on," Bryant said. "With Darryl, when you talk about a guy who has really transformed his mindset and body and his physical ability, you talk about him. I'm really happy to see the role he's going to play. He's built himself into a college football prospect."

Bryant expounded on the team's performance on the practice field last spring. "Our guys did a great job. Very coachable, very productive during spring practice. We felt like our team had taken some steps forward in the weight room and the conditioning allowed us to push them a little bit. The biggest thing was we had the chance to move the guys around and see where we're going to have our depth. Spring practice for us was solid. Nothing over the top, but we got a chance to see what we could be."

Oceanside football setting sights on four-peat

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Mt. Pleasant – So what does a football program with three consecutive state championships do for an encore? Go for a fourth title un a row, of course. **Oceanside Collegiate Academy** enters the 2026 football season as a strong candidate to win the AAA title this fall. While the Landsharks did suffer considerable personnel losses along the trenches, there is an abundance of talent and experience in most every other area on the field.

Head coach **Brent LaPrad** says much of the focus during recently completed spring drills was finding new potential starters and working on developing some depth.

"We combined our varsity and junior varsity guys and had about 60 kids out," the coach said. "We had quite a few playing spring sports so we spent a lot of time with the younger guys. Keeping the returners up to speed and letting them help teach the younger guys was important. I thought we had a good few weeks and it has carried over into the summer."

The Landsharks made the rounds with 7-on-7 competitions in June, playing in showcase events at North Carolina and South Carolina.

Back to run the high-powered offense is senior **Aiden Manavian**, who took over as the starter during the playoffs of his freshman year and has been at the helm for all three of the state title runs. Manavian is nearing 10,000 career passing yards and threw 42 touchdown passes last season.

The passing game will feature a pair of Power 4 receivers in seniors **Jaiden Kelly-Murray** (Colorado) and **Anthony Williams** (North Carolina).



Quarterback Aiden Manavian

Cooper Webb and **Tyler Garner** combined for 73 catches and 1,100 yards last season. Senior **James O'Connor** has returned from injury and will the RB1 entering the season. Senior **Jaxon Bean** is a returning linemen with potential to play on either line. "We feel good about the guys we have identified up front but they need time to gel as a unit," LaPrad said. "We have more questions on the defensive line this summer." Defensive backs **Michael Strickler** and **Cole Gaspar** are two key returners on the defense. Strickler, a hybrid safety, had nearly 100 tackles last season while Gaspar had five interceptions. **Meyer announces new hires in volleyball,**

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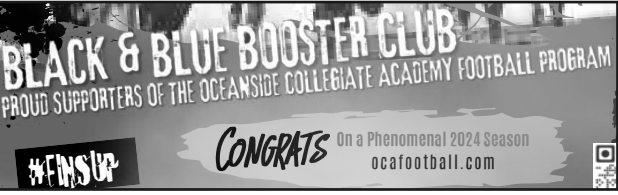
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cross country

Oceanside Collegiate athletic director **Mark Meyer** has announced the hiring of new head coaches in volleyball and cross country. Named as the new varsity volleyball coach was Allie Siebert, who attended Hawaii and Nebraska and has coached in the club level locally. **Terry Hamlin** will take over the cross country program this fall. Hamlin is the co-founder or the highly successful Cooper River Bridge Run in Mt. Pleasant.

Burnette returns to Timberland as head coach

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
St. Stephen – Whoever coined the phrase (you can't go home again) didn't have **Brooks Burnette** in mind.

Burnette, who played football at **Timberland High** from 2002-05 has returned to his alma mater as the next head football coach. He was named head coach in April.

Burnette has spent the last several years as the offensive coordinator at Woodland High but could not turn down this opportunity to for his first head coaching position.

"Returning to Timberland is incredibly meaningful to me," he said. "This is where I grew up as a player and developed a lifelong love for this game. My family's legacy in Berkeley County football helped shape who I am today and I carry that with me every time I step on the field."

Burnette comes from a coaching family, which includes his father Rick and brother Mathis, both former head football coaches. That coaching legacy continues to shape his passion for coaching and his commitment to student-athletes as he returns to place where his football journey began.

Following his prep career, Burnette continued his

Cavaliers, Dan Jackson look to be a good fit

By Neill Kirkpatrick
Special to the HSSR
Moncks Corner – To say that St. John's Christian Academy athletic director **Dan Jackson** has been learning the job on the fly is an understatement as he was thrust into the job when AD **Shaun Welch** suddenly decided to step down last fall.

Jackson is a former football player, baseball player and wrestler at Becton Regional High School in East Rutherford, NJ as well as 20+year retired Police Officer at the Port Authority in New York and New Jersey. He started at SJCA as the security officer after he and his wife followed their youngest daughter (CoFC student) to the Charleston area. Athletic' has always been a part of the Jackson family and when the assistant AD position opened at SJCA he put his hat in the ring and got the job.

"When the assistant AD resigned, I was looking do something different. I had always been involved in sports so I talked with **Becky Ellison** and Shaun if they would consider me for the position. They thought I would be a good fit so I took the assistant spot", Jackson said. "Then unfortunately some things and Shaun resigned so Becky asked if I would be interested in the AD job and I decided to take it."

Coach said some of the biggest challenges since taking over is the many hats that he has to wear at

Cross football has successful spring and summer

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Cross – Having firmly established themselves as one of the premier football programs on the Class A level, the 2026 **Cross High** Trojans are looking to take the next step.

Cross has been a true state championship contender for the last several years but they have yet to finish the job. The Trojans were 11-2 last season and are 46-10 since the 2022 season.

With some experience back this fall, head coach **Shawn Wright** sees championship potential in his team.

"Like everyone else on this level, we have to stay as healthy as we can," Wright said. "With all of our key guys on the field, we can play with team in class A. We have a lot of potential if we can fill some holes."

Wright and the Trojans completed spring practice and the work has continued four days a week.

"The commitment level has been good," Wright said. "We were missing some guys due to track in the spring but we have them all during the summer. The biggest thing with spring practice was identifying guys

who can step in as starters or provide us some depth. The attitude and work ethic of the guys has been on point. I'm pretty pleased."

Offensively, Wright will look to quarterback **Tyler Harris** to lead the way. This season will be his third as a starter and his experience cannot be overstated. Harris passed for 1,619 yards and 17 touchdowns last season.

"He's very smart and he sets a great example," the coach said. "He prepares more than any player I have coached. Nothing rattles him."

Senior **Mah'ky Green** is back for his third season as well and should be among the leading rushers in Class A this season. Green topped 1,600 yards with 16 touchdowns last season.

The Trojans also return four offensive linemen, led by **Jalen Broughton**. Broughton is the lone returner on the defensive front.

Wright says the strength defensively will be at linebacker where **Kahlil Levine**, **Jimmy Smith**, **Jakobe Jones** and **Keyawn Wilson** return. All four also will spot time at running back.

The football staff welcomes two new coaches for the coming season. Wright announced that Montreal

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Courtesy Matthew Bradberry, Athletic Director

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Hanahan tabs Roberts to lead boys basketball

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Hanahan – In an effort to breathe new life into the program, Hanahan High has hired William Roberts as its next boys basketball coach. Roberts will begin his tenure for the 2026-27 school year. Roberts, who was confirmed in April, inherits a program that has struggled in recent years. Hanahan’s last winning season came in 2017-18 and the program has managed only 40 wins over the last eight seasons. Roberts brings with him a wealth of high school experience and is known as a developer and program builder.

A graduate of Grand Canyon University with a degree in history, Roberts has built an impressive resume at the high school level, serving in key roles at Berkeley High, Summerville High, West Ashley High, and Pinecrest High in North Carolina. Throughout his coaching career, he has contributed to multiple region and conference championships, a Lower State appearance, an Elite eight run and a final four appearance.

Known for his strengths in skill development, culture building, feeder program development and weight room leadership, Roberts has developed a strong reputation for building strong relationships with student athletes, while fostering competitive,

Northwood hoping to build on success of ‘25-26

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Summerville—
Northwood Academy will once again field 17 varsity sports during the 2026-27 school year as athletic director Ryan Leaver begins his 19th season with the Charger SCISA AAAA athletic program.

The school moved their campus from North Charleston to the Carnes Crossroads area of Berkley County in 2015, and this area is among the fastest growing populations anywhere in the state of South Carolina.

“Our Head of School, Dr. Christi Furrow, has done an amazing job promoting growth at our school,” said Coach Leaver. “We have waiting lists for just about every grade at our school.”

Coach Leaver said the focus at Northwood Academy is the development of the “whole student body, in both academics and athletics. “Everything we do as a school and a church is putting Christ at the center of everything we do,” he said. “Our kids are the pillars of the school for sure.

“We lean on our relationships,” said Coach Leaver. “Having so many sports, and so many coaches, who do not always work at the school, we work hard at building relationships, and the kids see this also. We know that many student athletes want to specialize and play just one sport, but we want our basketball coaches to stand on the football sidelines and vice versa. We hope all the athletes and coaches support all the sports at the school.”

During the 2025 football season the Chargers went 14-0 and won a SCISA AAAA state title against Heathwood Hall in the finals. It was the school’s third state title in school history. Veteran head coach Johnny Waters will be starting his 4th season with the Chargers who recently won the 7-on-7 championship against all teams in June at the University of South Carolina passing league competitive camp.

“Last year was the third season for Coach Waters and he came into the season with his sights on a state title run,” said Coach Leaver. “He challenged the guys with that and they responded. Coach Waters is a tremendous head football coach, and he truly cares about his players on and off the field.”

disciplined programs. Most recently, Roberts served as a varsity boys assistant coach at Berkeley after helping lead the varsity and junior varsity programs at Summerville to significant success. His passion for developing young men on and off the court makes him a tremendous addition to the Hanahan athletic program. Meanwhile, the football coaching staff, under the direction of head coach Milan Turner, is prearing for a competitive season this fall. Turner is beginning his fourth season as head coach and returns virtually his entire coaching staff this season.

Cam Willis returns as the offensive coordinator and Brett Fields returns as the defensive coordinator. Eric Tuttle is the quarterback coach and Brian Swiney is the running backs coach. Brandon Ford is back to coach receivers and Zack Evans works with the tight ends and H-backs. David Hines is the offensive line coach.

Brian Mitchell coaches defensive backs and Jacob Poston coaches linebackers and handles the special teams. Jason Davis works with the defensive linemen. Matt Harpster is an offensive assistant and works with the b-team while Peter Smits is a defensive assistant and also works with the b-team. Poston is the head junior varsity coach and Evans is the head b-team coach.



Athletic Director
Ryan Leaver

28th. The dean of head coaches at Northwood is girl’s head basketball coach Ginnell Curtis, and her team made it all the way to the state finals championship during the 2025-26 season. The Chargers finished 28-2 and were led by rising senior combo guard prospect Maliyah Birch who averaged 20 points a game last season. “Our goal will always be to win the state championship,” said Coach Curtis. “We’ll be back next season.” The volleyball program will have a new head coach this year in Alexis Gandy, Last year’s coach was Kennedy Pointer, who was an all-American player at The College of Charleston, but she moved away with her husband for his job opportunity in Arkansas. Coach Gandy is stepping up after serving as an assistant volleyball coach for the past two seasons. The swim team is under the tutelage of new coach Frank Berger. He will be assisted by Jess McLoughlin and Chris Garver. Shawn Wood is the new boy’s and girls’ cross-country coach. He will be assisted by Chloe Mott. Coach Leaver said that the biggest money maker for the school’s athletic program is the archery team, and they have won seven straight SCISA state titles under the direction of head coach Doug McLeod. He is assisted by Louise Silence. “We had 60 boy’s and girl’s athletes on our archery

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team last season, and we have trophies and awards scattered all over the school,” said Coach Leaver. “The gym is always packed out for home Archery events. The sport brings in a lot of revenue to our athletic program.” The boys’ basketball team will have a new head coach in the person of Josh Cutler. Thomas Nicholson and James Ugland will assist him. The wrestling program returns head coach Rob Stolin for another season. The varsity cheer squad head coach Christy Christmas returns, and she is assisted by Joyce O’Brien. Ashley Farr will return for his second season as head baseball coach. Track coach Keith Bolus returns for his third season. Paul Dalesandro begins his 5th season as the head boys’ soccer coach while Jason Bond returns for his 4th season as the head girls’ soccer coach. The school is still seeking a head softball coach at this time. Thomas Nicholson is the Asst. AD and Doug McLeod is in charge of Athletic Operations. The school’s athletic trainer is Kevin Thomas.

Chad Leaphart, son joins Saluda football staff

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Saluda – The ties between Greg Woerner and Chad Leaphart run deep. Before becoming the football head coach at Saluda High School last season, Woerner had been a part of Leaphart’s successful staffs at both Gilbert and Swansea. Now, with Leaphart “out of a job,” Woerner is returning the favor to his mentor. Leaphart, who just retired as the Lexington 1 district athletic director, will be on the football staff and teach at Saluda in the upcoming school year. Needless to say, Woerner is happy to have Leaphart on board.

“I was on Coach Leaphart’s staff at Gilbert where I coached quarterbacks and helped install and run the offense,” Woerner said. “We kept in touch after he moved to the district office as the district athletic director, and one day he expressed interest in getting back into coaching. It just so happened that we had an opening on staff and we were able to bring him on.”

Leaphart posted a 41-27 record at Swansea, leading the Tigers to five state playoff appearances in his six years. He moved to Gilbert for the 2017 season. He would remain at his alma mater for eight seasons, posting a 78-18 record.

Under Leaphart, the Indians won four region titles and 10 or more games in a season five times. The Indians made it to the AAA lower state championship game in 2020. Gilbert made the playoffs every year under Leaphart and won at least one playoff game each year.

Leaphart will coach running backs while his son, Gray Leaphart, will join the staff as well as the tight ends coach. Gray just graduated from Newberry College, where he played tight end.

They will serve on offensive staff that has Thomas Coleman back for his second year as of-

fensive coordinator. He will coach the offensive line along with Ed Chariker, while Woerner will handle the quarterbacks and Daniel Stone will coach the wide receivers. “Offensively, we’ve added two new coaches who know the offensive scheme so they have fit right in,” Woerner said.

The Tigers will have a new defensive coordinator in Mark Minchew. He helped coach linebackers last season, but will be in charge of defensive backs this year.

Tommy Strickland will coach the linebackers, Reggie Phillips will coach outside linebackers and strong safeties, and Dedrick Payton, the other newcomer to the coaching staff, will be in charge of the defensive line.

“We’ve gpt a new DC, and a new coach on the defensive side of the ball and moved some of the other guys around,” Woerner said. “But they’ve done a great job installing the new schemes and helping the guys learn it.”

Woerner can’t wait to see how things pan out with the new staff.

“Yeah, I’m really excited about this staff that we’ve put together,” he said. “They’ve done a great job getting this team ready for the season ahead. I feel like the staff has gelled really well, and I hope that helps the team achieve our goals.”

The Tigers went 6-6 in Woerner’s first season, reaching the second round of the AA state playoffs. However, they were so close to having a tremendous season.

The Tigers were 2-3 in region play, but they were 11 points from an undefeated region season. They lost the region games in succession, falling to Ninety Six 28-27, to eventual state champion Strom Thurmond 20-14 and to Batesburg-Leesville 35-34 in overtime.

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Abbeville athletics looks to build on last year

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Abbeville – The 2025-26 school year will go down in Abbeville High athletic history as one of the most successful even. So says athletic director **Maggie Jameson**.

“The 2025-26 athletic year was one of the most successful in recent memory for Abbeville High School, highlighted by championship performances, deep postseason runs, and individual accomplishments across multiple sports,” she said. “Leading the way was the Lady Panthers volleyball program, which captured the SCHSL Class A state championship, becoming just the second girls team in school history to earn a state title. They join the 2011 softball team in this historic achievement, adding another unforgettable chapter to Abbeville athletics.

“Success extended well beyond volleyball. Several Panther teams advanced deep into the postseason, demonstrating the competitiveness and determination that have become hallmarks of Abbeville athletics. The golf program celebrated an outstanding season with two athletes tying for state runner-up honors. Across every season, Panther athletes represented their school and community with pride, dedication and sportsmanship. Perhaps even more exciting is what lies ahead. Many of Abbeville’s athletic programs return the majority of their starting lineups, providing a strong foundation for continued success during the 2026-27 school year.”

As one of the more rabid fan bases in the state of high school sports, **Abbeville High** athletics has as much community support as any school in the state.

It truly is all about the “A” when it comes to supporting the Panthers. Jameson, is well aware of that support and says it plays a major role in the overall athletic success.

“Abbeville has the most supportive fans who come out to events by the bus load and are always

there to support out athletes in every way possible,” says Jameson, who is entering her fifth year as athletic director. “Without the community, the fans, the businesses, we could not run our athletic department.”

Jameson says the ability to maintain the varsity head coaching roster also plays a key role in success. The longer a coach can be in the program, the better opportunity to establish a winning culture. She reports that all of the varsity head coaches are returning this coming year.

Jamie Nickles returns as the head football coach. Nickles led the Panthers to a state title lin 2024, his ninth as the school’s head coach. He is the all-time winningest coach in school history.

Sara Wojlkowski returns for her third season as the volleyball coach. The Lady Panthers won the class A state ttle last season.

Jameson and **Katie Finley** handle the cheerleading program. Jeremiah Boyd coaches cross country and track ad field.

Doug Belcher is the boys basketball coach, having led his team to the Class A Upper State title last season. **Ellis Belton** returns as the girls basketball coach and **Bill Glace** is the head wrestling coach.

In the spring, **Daniel Little** is the head baseball coach while **Tim Collins** and **Lacy Johnson** team up as the softball coaches.

Logan Crawford is the boys golf coach. The soccer teams are coached by **Martin Lockyer** (girls) and **Arnaldo Sabatino** (boys).

“With experienced leadership, talented returning athletes, and a commitment to excellence, both on and off the field, the future is bright for Panther athletics. As preparations for a new season begin, the Abbeville community has much to celebrate and even more to look forward to. The standard has been set and Panther athletics is poised for another exciting year of competition and success,” Jameson said.

A few changes afoot at Emerald High School

By Jeff Moeller
Special to the HSSR
Emerald - With the fall sports’ season drawing near, Emerald High has made a notable change in its athletic department. However, the shift should be a smooth transition.

Athletic director and head baseball coach **Mack Hite** will move into the role of interim principal replacing **Rico Salliewhite**, and head football coach **Tad DuBose** will also serve as interim athletic director.

Hite previously served as district and high school athletic director for five years and director of career and technology for two years, both at Strom Thurmond High School in Johnson.

DuBose was Abbeville High’s athletic director for 11 years. He was a four-time regional athletic director-of-the-year during his tenure there.

With his background, **DuBose**, who took over as head football coach in 2020, doesn’t anticipate any initial issues.

“I am very familiar with the duties and responsibilities that come with it,” said **DuBose**. “I am excited to continue to serve the young people at Emerald High and honored that the administration has the confidence to name me the interim AD.”

DuBose also is very optimistic about the Vikings’ chances to make another solid playoff run. They return nine starters on offense and seven on defense from a 6-6 team that advanced to the second round of the Class 4A Region 1 playoffs last year.

“Spring workouts were great,” beamed **DuBose**. “There is a lot of excitement around the football program.”

Along with **Hite** and **Dubose**, other returning coaches are **Tiara Agnew**, softball; **John Mark Scruggs** and **Sammy Robinson**, boys basketball; **Hayden Lawter**, wrestling; **David Payne**, cross country and track and field; **Bradley Nickles**, boys’ soccer; **Jonathan Bass**, girls’ soccer; **David Moody**,



Mack Hite will now serve as Interim Principal as well as Athletic Director and Baseball Coach

golf; **Sydney Nichols**, cheer; and **Emily Shirley**, cheering.

New coaches on board in their respective sports are **Sally Spangler**, volleyball; **Dexter Baylor**, girls’ basketball; and **Adam Cohen**, boys’ tennis.

Hite believes he has been blessed with continuous and consistent leadership.

“We are fortunate to have several veteran coaches who have built respected programs and experienced tremendous success throughout their careers,” boasted **Hite**. “What makes them special is not simply their wins or championships, but the relationships they build with students.

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“Our veteran coaches lead with integrity, maintain high standards, develop young people, and consistently represent Emerald High School the right way. Their experience and willingness to mentor younger coaches are also invaluable to our athletic department.”

In his new role, **Hite** plans to monitor the school’s overall picture.

“As I begin serving as interim principal, I will continue to oversee athletics, communication, delegation, and teamwork across our campus will be especially important,” said **Hite**. “One of our biggest challenges is balancing the needs and growth of all our athletic programs while providing each coach and student-athlete with the resources and support they deserve.

“Like many schools, we continually work through scheduling, transportation, facility usage, staffing, and budget priorities.

“We are also focused on increasing community involvement, improving our facilities, and creating a first-class experience for our student-athletes and fans.”

Stratford hires Davis to lead girls basketball

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Goose Creek – After winning the Lower State championship three seasons ago, the Stratford girls basketball program has fallen on hard times.

Last season ended with a 3-23 record prompting a change in the leadership of the program. The school announced on July 17 the hiring of proven winner **Calvin Davis** as the new head coach. If anyone can turn the fortunes of the program around, it’s Davis.

Davis has an extensive winning background, first as an assistant coach in the powerhouse Goose Creek High program. His first head coaching job came at **Cross High**, where he inherited a struggling program. However, in five seasons, Davis posted 74 wins and made the Trojans a state title contender in Class A.

Wanting another challenge, Davis took on the **Summerville High** girls program. In his first season, 2016-17, Summerville mustered only three wins. The win total improved to 12 in year two and Summerville won 16 games in his third season.

The fourth season began a very successful run of at least 20 wins over the next five years (except for the shortened season due to Covid 19). Summerville played for three Lower State championships, winning two titles.

The Green Wave slipped to 12-12 this past sea-

New coach Fordham sets up first staff at GCHS

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Goose Creek – When **Jamie Fordham** was named the head football coach at **Goose Creek** in early spring, he immediately focused on putting together his first coaching staff.

Fordham completed the task with the hiring of several new coaches to go with three holdovers from the previous staff.

Staying in the program are veterans **Lee Taylor** and **Joe Marion**, who will serve as the offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator, respectively. Both coaches has more than 30 years in high school coaching experience.

“They have been through the wars and they know what it takes to build a successful football program,” Fordham says.

Another coaching veteran, **Sam Mallard**, will return to coach the offensive line this season. Mallard formerly coached at Goose Creek.

Running backs coach **Jeff McElveen** is new to the staff and is a Goose Creek graduate. Same goes for defensive backs coach **Melvin Ravenell**. **DeAndre Daniels**, another former player, will join the staff as will **Dashon Blaylock**. **David Padilla** will coach the special teams, having held the same role at Charleston Southern.

Former Summerville all-state quarterback **Johnathan Bennett** will coach the quarterbacks. **Jalen West** will assist with receivers and former Palmetto High head coach **Doug Shaw** will coach defensive linemen.

“We have a great mix of young, new, energetic coaches and some veteran coaches who know how to relate to kids and teach the game,” said Fordham. “I really like this staff and can’t wait for August.”

For Fordham, a 2004 graduate of Goose Creek and one of the top running backs in school history,

son and Davis opted to step down as coach. In compiled a 158-80 record, giving him 232 career wins in 15 seasons as a head coach.

Stratford also will have a new athletic director this coming year as **Mark Blacklocke** takes over for **Mathis Burnette**, who left to become principal at Fort Dorchester High.

Former Goose Creek boys basketball coach **Blake Hall** has assumed duties as an assistant principal at Stratford. Hall was a highly successful coach at Goose Creek before stepping away from coaching this past spring.

At press time, it was believed that all other varsity head coaches are slated to return for the 2026-27 school year.

Dennie McDaniel is the head football coach while **Tony Osterman** is the baseball coach. **Marshall Cabbagestalk** returns as the boys basketball coach and **Angela Burnett** is the girls volleyball coach. **Jess Scannell** is the boys volleyball coach and **Andy McBride** directs the swim program.

Connor Roudabush coaches boys cross country and **Carl Calvert** coaches the girls team. **Chris Wood** is the girls golf coach and **Philip Smith** is the boys golf coach. **Jessie Stament** is the boys soccer coach while **Peter Heusinger** coaches girls soccer and girls tennis/ **Madison Ackerman** is the softball coach and **Stevan Harris** coaches boys track.



the long wait to become a head coach has allowed him to prepare to run a program. He has spent

New football coach
Jamie Fordham

nearly two decades working with athletes as a professional trainer and serving as an assistant at his alma mater.

“I was torn between two loves, coaching and personal training, but I always felt coaching was a great way to influence the lives of young men,” said Fordham, who played collegiately at Coastal Carolina. “The men I have been about to surround myself with, great men that I was able to work for and learn from, have prepared me for this day.”

Fordham took the 2024 season off and returned

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to Jason Winstead’s staff last fall. “I had to find myself and make sure my purpose was aligning with God’s will for my life,” Fordham said.

The Gators finished 0-10 last season, prompting Winstead to step down as head coach. Fordham decided to pursue the position and has a well-defined plan for rebuilding the program.

“My vision involves creating a positive atmosphere and share the love of football and for Goose Creek with ur players. It’s a challenge but we will take it one day at a time. We will not cut corners for a quick fix. This program was once the top program in this area and my plan is to bring us back to where we belong. We have great kids here and I can’t wait to lead them.”

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Shuey takes over Laurence Manning baseball

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Manning – The Laurence Manning Academy baseball program has undergone a major shift with the retirement of head coach **Barry Hatfield** and the naming of **Preston Shuey** as the new head coach.

LMA has gone from a coach in Hatfield with 31 years of head coaching experience — the final 17 with the Swampcats – to a first-time head coach in Shuey, who spent the last five years as an assistant coach at **East Clarendon High School**. He is looking forward to the challenge.

“I’m excited to be getting this opportunity,” said Shuey, who was a standout collegiate player at **Francis Marion University**, where he attended after graduating from **South Mecklenburg High in Charlotte** in 2007. “Coach Hatfield built a successful program, and I want to step in and make a smooth transition.”

Hatfield guided Laurence Manning to three state titles, back-to-back championships in 2016 and 2017 and the third one coming in 2022.

“Some of the older players know success as they were part of the program the last time Laurence Manning won a state championship,” Shuey said. “I just want to continue the program on the path he started. I am excited to be a part of the Swampcat family and looking forward to building on the success of Coach Hatfield.”

Shuey and Laurence Manning head of school **Allen Kirby** have been friends since meeting while playing baseball at Francis Marion. That played an instrumental role in Shuey coming to LMA.

“Allen Kirby (who just completed his first year at LMA) wanted me to take over,” Shuey said. “A lot of things fell into place, and I felt it was the way God was leading me.”

While Hatfield emphasized pitching and defense, Shuey stresses offense.

“I’m a hitting guy,” said Shuey, who was the de facto hitting coach for East Clarendon the past four years. “I want us to be aggressive at the plate, get a pitch and drive it, hit it hard.

“My pitching philosophy is I want my staff to throw strikes, and on defense make the routine plays.”

Laurence Manning athletic director **Morgan Watt** is happy to have Shuey on board.

“Preston is really excited to build on the winning tradition of baseball that Coach Hatfield had at Laurence Manning,” Watt said. “We are super excited to have him as head coach.”

Shuey won’t be the only new head coach for Laurence Manning,. SCISA veteran **David Rankin** will be in his first year as the football head coach. Rankin spent the last two years at **Carolina Academy**.

“The kids have bought in good so far,” said Rankin. “The participation has been great over the summer. Things have been going well, but we haven’t played a game yet.

“We’re trying to get our guys in shape and get them familiar with the way we do things so when we get to July 23 (the first day of fall practice) we can roll, not standing out there wasting time. We just want to get

that kind of stuff in.”

Rankin has been the head coach at **W.W. King Academy, Thomas Sumter Academy** and **Lee Academy** on two different occasions each and one term at both Carolina and **Williamsburg Academy**. It was during his second stint at Lee where Rankin enjoyed his greatest success. After going 3-8 and 5-5 in the first two years of his 11-year stay that ran from 2013 to 2023, the Cavaliers went 89-26 over the final nine seasons. They won Class A state titles in 2015 and 2022 and played for the state title on four other occasions. For his career, Rankin has coached a state runner-up eight times.

Rankin is still piecing together his coaching staff. As of press time, he has another veteran SCISA head coach in **Brock Miller, Cedric Bennett** and **Patrick Anderson**, who served as the interim head coach for the second half of the 2024 season, on staff.

Anderson is back for his third season in charge of boys basketball. He led the Swampcats to a 25-5 record and the semifinals of the SCISA AAAA state tournament last year. That was the first time LMA had gone that far since winning the AAA title in 2011-12.

“We are looking forward to building on the success of last year and taking the next step,” Anderson said. Girls basketball head coach **Lisa Ard** is back for her third year as well. She led a senior-dominated Lady ‘Cats team to an 11-12 record last year and the program’s first state tournament win since the ’13-14 season.

“Looking forward to the challenge of leading a very young team,” Ard said.

Buddy Truett will be back as the softball head coach. He has led the Lady ‘Cats to three consecutive AAAA state titles. “Four times in a row will be tough, but we are going to give it all we got,” Truett said.

Robin Page is once again in charge of the varsity cheer program. “It is going to be a great year for Swampcat football, and our squad is ready to cheer them on,” she said.

Jessica Weinberg will be in charge of the girls tennis program again, while **Karla Beard** will head the boys and girls cross country program again.

“The team has been working hard and we are excited about the challenge of this year,” Beard said.

Mike Davey is back as the lacrosse coach. **Donald Hardy** returns as the girls golf head coach, while Watt will once again be in charge of the boys team.

“We have a great group of young ladies and are looking forward to the season,” Hardy said.

As of press time, Watt was still looking to fill head positions for bowling, volleyball and boys and girls track and field. That means **Jay Atkins** is stepping down as the bowling head coach after leading the Swampcats to 12 state titles among the co-ed, girls and boys divisions.

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Malphrus returns to sidelines of THA this season

By Jeff Moeller
Special Writer
Ridgeland-After a year’s absence, **Taylor Malphrus** is back at the controls of the **Thomas Heyward Academy** football program.

Malphrus, a former standout player and assistant coach for the Rebels, took the team to a SCISA Class A title in 2024, producing a 12-1 overall mark in the process. He stepped aside after the season to become the offensive coordinator/quarterback and wide receivers coach at **Hampton County** last season.

Assisting Malphrus this season will be alumni **Leon Etheridge**, assistant head coach, **Brandon Bishop**, defensive coordinator, and **Bill Smith**, line coach, along with assistant **Kenny Herndon**.

The Rebels finished 4-6 last season under **David Bryan**.

Athletic director and alumnus **Logan Thomas**, who will begin his second season at the program’s helm, is glad to have **Malphrus** back in the fold. **Thomas** also serves as the head golf coach.

“What makes him special is his ability to motivate and get kids to buy into the program, and he brings high energy and a fun environment,” said **Thomas** about **Malphrus**. “He’s highly organized, which matters just as much. He proved all of that, leading his team to a state championship in his first year, so we’re excited to have him with us.”

Other new head coaches onboard this season are **Megan Congleton** for cheerleading, and

Beaufort spring teams chasing playoff berths

By Jeff Moeller
Special to the HSSR
Beaufort - Beaufort athletic director **Cody Slaughter** is literally getting acclimated to his new role with the Eagles’ program.

Slaughter had a previous three-year stop at Bluffton, and a six-year stay at South Florence in the same capacity.

He’s confident he can be settled before the fall season begins. **Slaughter** replaced **Bradley Adams**, who stepped down to take the head football coach position at Colleton County.

“I’ve been here a week, so I’m still figuring this out,” stated **Slaughter**. “Right now just getting to know all of our coaches and learning how the district functions.

“We have great coaches on staff, and I am looking forward to working with them.”

Head football coach **Bryce Lybrand** is back for his ninth season in charge of the program. The Eagles finished last season with an overall 3-8 record.

Chris Warbington will be the Eagles’ offensive coordinator, and **Rob Gorrell** will run the defense.

Florence Christian, continued from pg. 27

tles and a pair of runner-up finishes. The Eagles went 8-3 last season and lost in the semifinals of the AAA state playoffs.

Clay Bochette is back in charge of boys basketball after leading Florence Christian to a 21-5 record and the semifinals of the AAA state tournament.

Denise Carter returns after leading the volleyball team to the AAA state championship match as it finished with a 24-10 record. **Scotty Keefe** will be in his third season in his second term in charge of baseball. FCS was 13-6 last year.

Jesse Lyles will coach softball, **Josh Puryear** boys soccer, **Jared Vernon** girls soccer, **Kenan Granger** girls tennis, **Rob Hardy** boys golf and

alumni **Kelan Fripp** for boys’ basketball. **Thomas** indicated that he is still seeking a new girls’ basketball and track and field coach.

Returning coaches in their respective sports are alumnus **Jamie Davis**, volleyball, second year; **Russell Langlands**, baseball, second year; **Jeb Fay**, softball, third year.

Under **Malphrus**, the Rebels will be seeking their second title in the last three years, and their 13th overall state crown. Before 2024, their previous championship was in 2021.

Thomas is optimistic the Rebels’ program can once again reach their glory years. Legendary football coach **Barry Turpin** made his mark in the postseason.

“We haven’t had a coach here that long with state championship experience, though back in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s we had several,” said **Thomas**. Coach **Turpin** was a highly recognized coach here back when we were in Class AAA.”

With a small program, **Thomas** believes he can begin to make the most of his opportunities.

As an AD, the biggest challenge is creating great opportunities on a small budget,” stressed **Thomas**. “Being a 1-A private school, it takes getting creative to keep building for our athletes. The real challenge is scaling and growing the program without major resources. But you always need people. People are the cornerstone of any program.”

Besides Lybrand, other coaches back in their respective sports are **Jeff Abrams**, golf; **Rocco Russo**, boys’ and girls’ tennis; **Julie Pike Jones**, boys’ and girls’ swimming; **Hillary Savarese**, cheerleading; - **Jeremy Huff**, boys’ basketball; **Reggie Hones**, girls’ basketball; **Adam Mullen**, baseball; **Scott Rast**, softball; **Jonathan Caratella**, boys’ soccer; **Jessica Porter**, girls’ soccer; **Joe Garry**, boys’ lacrosse; **Megan Whitney**, girls’ lacrosse; **Reggie Jones**, boys’ track; and **Herb Glaze**, girls’ track.

New head coaches joining the staff are **Marlena Pegula**, girls’ volleyball; and **Brooks Maxwell**, boys’ and girls’ cross country. **Slaughter** is looking to hire a wrestling coach.

Once he gets settled, **Slaughter’s** goals for the overall program will become quite clear both on and off the courts and fields.

“Our goal is to win championships,” stressed **Slaughter**. “Our purpose is to develop young people who act with integrity, respect others, and lead with passion inside our building and on their respective teams.”

Kendyl Berry cheer.

Minton has a football coaching staff with deep ties to Florence Christian.

“Our staff is extremely talented,” Minton said. “We are blessed with experience and continuity. **Mark Drummond** has been here the longest. This will be my 15th season. The rest of the staff all played at FCS. They know our standards on and off the field, and you won’t find a better group of men to lead young people.”

Drummond is in charge of the offensive line. **Chris Coker** will once again be the defensive coordinator and will have help with **Michael Smith** coaching the line as well as serving as the strength coach, **Vernon** handling defensive backs along with

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doing special teams and conditioning, and **Jameson Berry** will coach linebackers.

Minton is in charge of the offense. He will have **Peyton Watson** as assistant offensive coordinator, **Carson Stone** handling wide receivers, and **Garrett Coker** coaching running backs and quarterbacks.

Hilton Head Prep selects new baseball coaches

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Hilton Head – There are few athletic departments in South Carolina better than the one at **Hilton Head Prep**.

While participating in the SCISA ranks, Hilton Head Prep is consistently contending for state championships across the board.

Athletic director **Shon Hardy** credits the coaching staff for a lot of the success.

“I believe we have an exceptional coaching staff at every level. They continue to impress with their professionalism, preparation, and commitment to our student-athletes,” Hardy reports. “As a department, we’ve experienced a great deal of success. Our message remains consistent: build authentic relationships with student-athletes, commit to continuous growth and improvement as a coach, and foster a positive playing experience—one rooted in individual development, team unity, and the life lessons learned through sport.

“Each year, Prep Athletics begins with the same core emphasis and expectations for our coaches and student-athletes: work hard, be prepared, compete with enthusiasm, and give your best when called upon.”

Consistency among the coaching staff fosters success. Prep has experienced very little head coaching turnover in recent years. There will be, however, a new head coach in baseball after the retirement of veteran **Chris Wells**. Wells stepped out of coaching after the 2026 season. His replacement is former assistant **Hiram Rodriguez**.

Dilligard new AD, boys basketball coach for HHCA

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Bluffton – **Marcus Dilligard** is the new athletic director and boys basketball head coach for **Hilton Head Christian Academy**.

Dilligard takes over as AD from **JW Wilkerson** and in basketball from **Bryan Brown**.

Dilligard most recently served as athletic director and boys head coach at **Grace Christian Academy** in **Knoxville, Tennessee**, where he led an athletic department that included 17 programs, more than 60 teams and 85 staff members.

Dilligard heard about the job openings through HHCA baseball head coach **Jay Scarbro**. The two worked together at Grace Christian.

“The opening came up and Jay reached out to me to see if I would be interested,” Dilligard said. “I talked to their people and it worked out.

“It’s a great place. The people are genuine, they love God, and they work hard. I believe some special things are getting ready to happen beyond what has already taken place here.”

Dilligard inherits a team that went 6-18 last season. He wants to use the basketball program to help build the lives of the student-athletes.

“I want them to play hard, to play hard, to compete and win,” he said. “I want to use the game as a tool for life. We want to develop great camaraderie, expect excellence and the rest takes care of itself.”

At Hilton Head Christian, Dilligard will inherit an athletic department that has 18 programs.

Rodriguez is well-known around the program after his six seasons under Wells. He also has been an active coach and developer of talent in the local rec league as well as summer travel baseball. He assisted in starting a baseball training academy on Hilton Head and has worked extensively with the Prep Baseball Academy. He is the director of security at Prep.

“Prep athletics is excited to have Hiram back among our coaching ranks,” said Prep athletic director Shon Hardy. “He has been an integral part to the growth and development of the baseball program for the last several years. His ability to build relationships and develop the skill level of our athletes is unquestioned, and what we were looking for in our next head coach. I am extremely confident that Hiram will continue to elevate the program and guide it to even greater heights.”

Rodriguez is excited and appreciative of the opportunity to lead the program that he has invested so much time and effort in building.

“I’m honored to step into the role of head baseball coach at Hilton Head Prep,” he said. “Having been a part of the Hilton Head baseball community for many years, this opportunity is especially meaningful to me. I look forward to continuing to develop our student athletes, building on the program’s success, and helping our players grow both on and off the field.”

While winning is the ultimate goal in any sports competition, Hardy stresses the importance of overall growth and development of the student/athletes.

“Even more meaningful than the trophies, how-

Ron Peduzzi returns as the football head coach. Scarbro has led the baseball team to two of its three consecutive state championships.

Chloe Holtz will coach volleyball, **Melanie Hilton** will handle boys and girls swimming, **John Houpt** is the strength and performance coach, **Julie Newlands** will be back as softball head coach, **Katie Likins** is the cheer coach, **Laurie White** will coach up the girls soccer team, while **Jacob Deuel** will coach boys soccer, **Mike Spangler** is the boys golf head coach, **Parker Collins** is the girls golf head coach, **Matt Payton** is back for his second year as girls basketball head coach, **Aaron Mau** will be in charge of the boys and girls cross country teams and the boys and girls track and field teams, and **Patricio Arquez** is the head coach for boys and girls tennis.

Peduzzi has a veteran coaching staff. Five of the seven on this year’s staff were with the Eagles last year.

“Our staff is experienced with over 150 years of playing and coaching combined,” Peduzzi said. “We hold to our mission of providing the necessary tools for our young men in our football program – based on Christian faith, love of family and mentoring to compete every Friday night.”

Matt Smith returns as the defensive coordinator and assistant head coach. He has been coaching with Peduzzi since the 2017 season. Houpt, a former head coach at **Bluffton High**, will be the offensive coordinator.

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Shatone Powers, a former wide receiver at **Northern Illinois**, will coach wide receivers and defensive backs. **Ronnie Coolbaugh** will once again coach the defensive line and will coach running backs on offense. **Luke Guess**, a former offensive lineman at **The Citadel**, will once again coach the offensive line. Also working with the offensive line is newcomer **Wyatt Hill**, a former United States Marine Corps staff sergeant.

The other newcomer to the staff is a very familiar face, in particular to Peduzzi. He is **John Patrick Peduzzi**, the coach’s son.

John Patrick just graduated from **Washington & Jefferson College** where he was an NCAA Division III All-American wide receiver in 2025. He will coach wide receivers and defensive backs.

Florence Area Feature Page

Braswell excited to be SoFlo new football coach

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Florence – The **South Florence High School** football program will certainly be entering a new era in the 2026 season. That’s because **Drew Marlowe**, who took the Bruins to two AAAA state championships while playing in four consecutive title games the past four years, is now the head coach at his alma mater, **Sumter**.

South’s new head coach is **Scott Braswell Jr.** While he has some big shoes to fill in his first head coaching gig, there is no way Braswell should be overwhelmed. He has been the defensive coordinator for the past four years at **Dutch Fork**, which has won five straight state championships and seven in the last eight years.

“It’s been great,” Braswell said about his first few months with the Bruins. “I’ve been incredibly blessed. There had been whispers about the job coming open, but I was steaming along with Dutch Fork when Coach (former South athletic director **Cody**) **Slaughter** reached out to me about the job. I’m so excited to be here. It’s been an incredible blessing.

“The kids have been so great. I’ve been preaching to them and coaching them, and they’ve accepted me. They’ve really worked their butts off since I got here.”

Clay Owens will be Braswell’s assistant head coach,

while **Patrick Koone** will be offensive coordinator and coach the quarterbacks. The offensive line coach has a familiar name, **Scott Braswell** – Sr. The elder Braswell had coached at Dutch Fork the past two years.

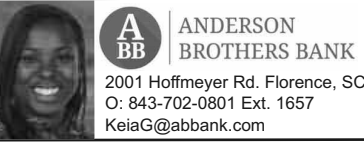
John Gathings will coach the tight ends, **Adam Rice** the wide receivers, **Demetrius Brand** the running backs, and **Michael McManus** will be the offensive skill assistant.

Braswell Jr. will call the defense. He will have **Neal Boozer**, who coached at **Brookland-Cayce** last year but had worked with him at Dutch Fork, coaching safeties as well as working as the strength and conditioning coach.

Other defensive assistants are **David Robinson** with cornerbacks, **Sam Montgomery** with linebackers, **Stan Adams** with tackles and **Troy Biddy** with ends.

Over at **Wilson High**, **Brian Wilson** will be back for his second year as head coach. He took a Tigers team that went 1-9 in 2024 and led it to a 7-5 record with a victory in the first round of the AAAA state playoffs.

With eight starters back on both sides of the football, See Florence Area, pg. 41



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Florence Christian returns all of its varsity coaches

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Florence – For some high school athletic programs, who is on the coaching staff from year to year can be like a revolving door. However, at **Florence Christian School** it is news when it has a new varsity head coach.

For the second straight season, FCS will have no new varsity head coaches among the 11 sports it offers.

“No newcomers this year,” said Eagles athletic director **Neil Minton**. “We are very blessed to have the quality of coaching, but more importantly, leaders for young people that love the Lord and put that

first in their lives.”

Now it’s easier for Minton to hold on to his coaches when he takes two of the spots himself. However, he has been more than successful as the girls basketball head coach and the football head coach.

Minton will be back for his 12th year in charge of girls basketball. He led Florence Christian to the SCISA AAA state title and a 24-2 record this past season, the first championship in the program’s history.

He is gearing up for his 15th season as football head coach. Minton has led FCS to a pair of state ti-

See Florence Christian, pg. 39

Lamar’s Boyd likes the pressure of success

By Dennis Brunson
Hssr.com Associate Editor
Lamar – **Tyler Boyd** and his coaching staff did a pretty good job in his return to his alma mater as its football head coach last season. All the Silver Foxes did was go 12-3 and play for the Class A state championship.

So, hey, no pressure going into Year 2, right coach? “I guess expectations added a little pressure,” said Boyd, who led **Williamsburg Academy** to consecutive SCISA state championship games in his two years in charge there before coming to Lamar. “I’ve been fortunate enough to be part of that kind of pressure for a while. I wouldn’t want it any other way though. That’s part of being a good program, and it means maybe you’re doing something right.

“Now maybe we set the bar high by going that far. We’ve got a lot back and we’ll see what we can do this time.”

The only assistant coach Boyd lost from last year’s staff is offensive line coach **Hayden Wilks**. Returnee **Jimmy Woods** will move into that role this year.

The other returning coaches are **Jablonski Green**, **Rob Joye**, **Brian Scott** and **Alan Poole**. The newcomer to the staff is **Noah Brazzel**.

Boyd having a year under the belt with the staff is making things much easier as they prepare for the 2026 season.

“I’m definitely more comfortable with them,” he said. “Last year it was a whole new team, a whole new situation. I feel great. It’s a lot easier because the kids aren’t learning a whole new offense and a whole new defense.

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Perkins named new Marion football coach

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Marion – Aundres Perkins knows that the Marion High School football team has gone 1-19 over the last two seasons, including a 0-10 record last year, and is in the throes of an 18-game losing streak.

However, being a native of the **Pee Dee** and having coached in the area his entire career, Perkins also knows Marion is loaded with plenty of athletes. That, more than anything, is why Perkins decided he wanted the job of Swamp Foxes head coach.

“Marion has been in a lot of growing pains of late,” said Perkins, who was hired in May. “I’m a hard worker, and I believe these young men are hungry. Marion has always had athletes. I’m glad I was lucky enough to get it.”

And it’s not as if Marion has been in an extended state of despair. In the five seasons prior to the 1-9 campaign in 2024, the Swamp Foxes won 41 games and played for the AA state championship in 2020.

Perkins believes the opportunity for a quick turnaround is still there.

“Marion is still Marion; they still have athletes,” Perkins said. “We’re not going to dwell on what happened in the past. We’re just going to get out there and change the culture to where the kids believe in themselves and just get a win.”

Perkins comes to Marion after having served as an assistant coach at **Hartsville**. Prior to that, he was an assistant at **West Florence**, his alma mater where he played running back before going on to play collegiately at **Coastal Carolina**.

Perkins has been a head coach one other time, at **Hannah-Pamplico** in 2015 and 2016. He posted a 10-13 record during his 2-year stint.

Perkins has his coaching staff in place with **Dar-**

Adams named new boys basketball coach

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Mullins – **Mullins High School** will have a new head coach in place for its most high-profile sport in the 2026-27 school year.

DeAngelo Adams is the new boys basketball head coach. He is taking over for **Eric Troy**, who decided to step down after eight seasons in the position. Troy will remain at the school as a teacher.

Troy posted a 127-52 record with the Auctioneers, leading them to the AA lower state championship game on two occasions. One of those came in the just completed season when Mullins went 22-8 overall and won the Region 7 title with an 11-1 record.

Adams comes to Mullins from **Williams Middle School** in **Florence**. He was the boys head coach for three years, posting a 40-7 record. He was also head varsity assistant coach for **Wilson High**.

“I decided Mullin was the right fit for me because it has a strong tradition of excellence, hard work and winning,” said Adams, who played high school ball at **West Florence** and collegiately at **Morris College**. “As someone who has played basketball, I know success comes from discipline, teamwork and consistently giving your best effort, qualities that I see reflected in Mullins’ culture.

“I want to be part of a community that sets high standards, values, dedication and is committed to being the best. I’m excited about the opportunity to contribute to that culture while continuing to grow, both personally and professionally.”

Adams obviously isn’t walking into a situation where a major rebuild is needed. Instead, he is inheriting a program that was one of the four best in

ryl **Page** as his offensive coordinator. Page led **Wil-**
son High to a state title as a head coach.

Darnell Williams and **Aykelles Cross**, teammates of Perkins at Coastal, are on the staff. Williams will coach the wide receivers and Cross the defensive line. **Demetrius Johnson**, a holdover from the previous staff, will coach running backs, **Denton Graves** the offensive line, and **Randy Den-**
nison, another returnee, the defensive backs.

“The coaching unit is great,” Perkins said. “We get along well, we challenge each other, we’re all hungry, and I think we’re all on the same page. These men have been around the game on the collegiate level, and they understand what it takes to be great.”

Perkins will coach the linebackers and call the defense. However, Perkins doesn’t see himself as a defensive aficionado or offensive one for that matter.

“I’m a football guy,” Perkins said. “I don’t emphasize one side over the other. I’m a student of the game. I’m always learning, trying to come up with new ideas.”

Perkins is happy with the progress the program has made over the summer.

“It’s going well,” he said “We’re laying things out, setting expectations for the kids. We’re trying to establish culture and getting back to having fun. It’s a kid’s game after all.”

“It’s been good, been positive. We’re giving them the power to the program, ownership, accountability. They’re buying in little by little.”

The Swamp Foxes, who have had 35 varsity players regularly attending summer workouts, open their season on Thursday, August 20, when they play host to **Kingstree**.

AA last season. Adams isn’t in awe of the circumstance.

“There’s definitely some pressure, but not much,” he said. “I see it as a positive. When you join a successful program like Mullins, expectations are high because of the standard that’s already been set. As a basketball player I’ve learned to embrace that kind of pressure. It pushes you to work harder, stay disciplined and bring your best every day.

“I’m excited for the opportunity to contribute to that winning culture and do whatever I can to help the program continue its success.”

Lamonte Curry is back for his second season as the athletic director. **Marc Lowery** will return for his fourth season as the football head coach. The Auctioneers went 3-6 last season.

Mullins will have five returning assistant coaches. **Donald Brown** will coach wide receivers, **Tony Nelson** defensive backs, **Jeremy Oxendine** linebackers and running backs and **Mike Davis** the defensive line. **Johnathan Williams** will be back to assist newcomer **Matthew Caulder** on the offensive line. The other new assistant is **RJ Richardson**, who will help with defensive backs and wide receivers.

Edward Bears is the only other new coach besides Adams. He will head boys soccer.

The other returning head coaches are **Alex White** in girls basketball, **Cierra Reaves** in softball, **Johnathan Elliott** in baseball. **Kireem Liles** in volleyball, **Taurus Gilchrist** in girls track and field and **Amara Sturkey** in both boys track and cheer.

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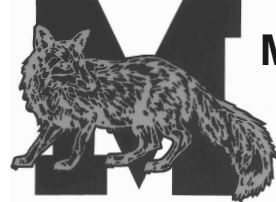
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Hannah-Pamplico athletics continues to thrive

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Pamplico – As is the case with many small high school athletic programs, sharing athletes is a necessity in order to compete across the board.

Often, athletes at small schools play multiple sports. Many will play two sports and some will participate in three sports.

Hannah-Pamplico is able to compete as a Class A athletics program because many of the athletes play on more than one athletic team during the school year. Athletic director **Trey Woodberry** credits those athletes will shouldering the load in terms of athletics.

“We have a good many boys and girls that play three sports and quite a few that play at least two sports,” said Woodberry, who is also the head football and baseball coach at the school. “As a whole, our teams compete very well and a major reason is that our best athletes play more than one sport. We have great kids here, kids that love sports and love to compete.”

Another big reason for athletic success is stability within the varsity coach staff. And, those coaches are constantly working to improve their program.

“Our coaches work really hard and do the best they can for our athletes,” Woodberry said. “They are not only good coaches but they’re good people. They are good examples for our athletes to learn

Prince named new defensive coordinator at BLHS

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor

Batesburg-Leesville – Having lost 24 seniors from a football team that went 8-4, there can’t help but be plenty of change for **Batesburg-Leesville High School**.

There will be change taking place on the coaching staff as well. The Panthers will have a new defensive coordinator. **David Prince** will move from coaching wide receivers to the DC role after **Gary Adams** left for **Emerald**.

B-L head coach **Greg Lawson** said moving Prince, who is also the strength coach, into the DC role was an easy decision.

“He’s been a head coach, and we’ve just got a lot of experience with him,” Lawson said of Prince, who was a defensive coordinator and head coach at **South Florence**. “We’re really excited he’s taking the defensive coordinator job.”

Arromus Harris, who coached defensive backs last season, will handle wide receivers. **Rob Bouknight**, the baseball head coach, will return as the offensive coordinator.

Brandon Cumbee returns to coach the offensive line and will be joined by newcomer **Rick Snelling**. **Bryan Cotney** will coach the running backs.

Defensively, **Shane Bryant** and **Andy Harris** will coach the linebackers, **Jake Getson** the defensive backs and **Lane Janney** and **Chris Whitt** the defensive line.

“I feel real good about our staff,” said Lawson, who is preparing for his fifth season as head coach. “We still have a core of Batesburg-Leesville people, who played there, had success there. who have roots there.”

Batesburg-Leesville, which will drop from AA to Class A following the **South Carolina High School League’s** biannual reclassification, offers its stu-

Johnsonville, continued from pg. 36

person.”

In other varsity coaching assignments, **Walter Clark** is expected back as the head softball coach with **Sally Coker** being a key assistant. Coker also assists in volleyball with head coach Latima Hannah.

Casey Geter is the boys basketball coach and

from.”

Woodberry reports the hiring of three new head coaches for the coming year. Kara Poston will take over the volleyball program. Jalen Jenkins will join the football staff on a full-time basis this fall, and AJ Smith is taking over the junior varsity volleyball program.

Michael Manning will be in his second season as varsity girls basketball coach. Manning is a former head boys coach at Lake City High and was a boys assistant last season at Hannah-Pamplico.

Adam Brown is ready for year twod as the cross country coach and will again head up both the boys and girls teams.

The other varsity teams will have returning head coaches. **Jimmy Williams** will coach varsity boys basketball and track. **Rusty Turner** heads up the boys and girls tennis teams and **Jay Watson** is the boys golf coach.

Dawn Burgoyne is the volleyball coach and **Amber Knight** is the softball coach. The softball team won a state title three years ago and won the class A state title this past spring. The boys basketball team also has been a successful playoff team, along with baseball and football.

The boys golf team finished as the Class A state runner-up in 2025 and finished fourth in the state tournament this past spring.

dent-athletes a wide array of sports. There are eight boys sports, 11 girls sports and two co-ed sports. B-L will offer two new girls sports in golf and flag football, according to athletic director **Eric Gambrell**. **Jim Iacuone** will coach the golf team, while **Erica Gambrell**, the AD’s older sister, will be in charge of the flag football team.

The coaches for the other fall sports are **Johnelle Bell** in boys cross country, **Heather Eargle** in girls cross country, **Eric Shick** in volleyball, **Micah Bolen** in girls tennis, and **Presley Mabus** in competition cheer.

William Ash and **DeVeto Johnson** return to coach the boys basketball and girls basketball teams, respectively. Batesburg-Leesville will have both boys and girls wrestling again this winter. **Ryanne Hall** will coach the girls, while AD Gambrell is in the process of finalizing the hiring of a wrestling coach for the boys.

“We have a great coach,” he said. “We’re just waiting on all the paperwork and formalities.”

Alex Richardson will be the archery head coach over the winter and the clay targets coach in the spring. **Claudia Pollard** will be the sideline cheer head coach for both football and basketball.

Bouknight will once again lead the Panther baseball team. After taking B-L to the 2025 AA state title, Bouknight had it two wins away from going back to the title series. The Panthers reached the championship round of the upper state tournament, losing to eventual state champion **Clinton**.

Amber Hartley will be back in charge of softball after leading the Panthers to a big turnaround in 2026. They finished 14-6 after winning just three games the previous season.

“This season certainly met my expectations,” Hartley said. “I knew we had a very talented team that could compete in a strong region (2-AA, which

works with the track team in the spring. **Jakob Marlowe** and **Joedy Cook** assist with the football team while Hill assists in football.

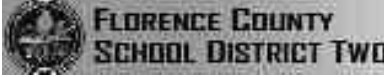
Kacey Lambert heads up cross country and girls track while **Brian Welch** coaches girls tennis in the fall and boys golf in the spring. The golf team won the Class A state championship this past spring.

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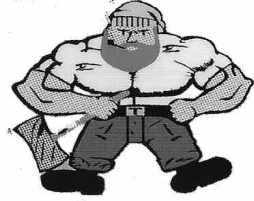
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included state champion **Saluda**). Although we fell short of my playoff hopes, facing high-caliber opponents taught us valuable lessons and provided experience we will build on moving forward.”

Batesburg-Leesville was led by All-State selection and Region Co-Player of the Year **Ainsley Minchew**. She had 226 strikeouts and a 1.25 earned run averaged in 106 2/3 innings pitched.

Minchew was joined on the All-State and All-Region teams by **Kate Shealy**. She had a .395 batting average, an on-base percentage of .495, a .987 slugging percentage, 12 home runs and 33 runs batted in.

Chandler Bouknight was also an All-Region pick. She batted .416, had 37 hits and 19 stolen bases.

The other spring sports coaches are **Paige Scruggs** for girls soccer, **Charles Holloway** for boys soccer, **Erica Gambrell** for girls track and field, **Harris** for boys track, **Lawson** for boys golf and **Taylor Jeffcoat** for boys tennis.

Former boys basketball coach **Harris Avant**, though retired, does assist with the football program as the b-team head coach. **MD Coleman** also is a football assistant.

Sharing in the cheerleading program are **Shanda Poston** and **Emmalee Poston**.

Johnsonville shuffles coaching assignments

By David Shelton
Senior Writer
Johnsonville – Johnsonville High’s athletic success is well-known among Class A schools in South Carolina.

Not every team can win a state championship but being competitive in the region and getting a playoff opportunity is a good measure of success.
Johnsonville has long been an athletic program that competes well. There have state champions in various sports and nearly every varsity team at Johnsonville is in the mix from year-to-year.

Ken Cribb is the school’s athletic director and also is the head football coach. His own football program won Lower State championships in 2022 and 2023 before losing in the state championship game in each season.

Cribb came to Johnsonville in the 2018-19 school year, inheriting a football program that had struggled to post wins for several seasons. His first two seasons netted just four total wins. But the Flashes have become a strong program, winning 48 games over the last eight years with the seasons of 2020 and 2021 cut short due to Covid-19.

Cribb is a graduate of Pleasant Hill High School and has been a head coach at Hemingway and Georgetown prior to his time at Johnsonville.

“This is a good place to coach,” he said.
While football is obviously a major focus of Cribb, being the athletic director is something he takes seriously. His goal is for every team to get rewarded for their hard work and commitment.

“I thought we had a good year last year and we are looking to build on that,” Cribb said. “Our kids work hard. They take athletics seriously. A lot of them play more than one sport and some play three sports. They love to compete. Our community is very supportive also. The people here want to see our kids do well.”

Latta athletics looking to continue growth

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Latta – The Latta High School athletic program is coming off of an outstanding school year, and athletic director Robbie Brown sees no reason why the same can’t happen in the upcoming year.

“The 2026-27 school year is about building something greater than ourselves,” Brown said. “Together, as one athletic department, we will lead with purpose, compete with passion and uphold the proud tradition of Latta athletics. Excellence will be our expectation, not our goal.”

Brown guided the Vikings baseball team to the 2026 Class A state championship. Latta, which beat McBee in three games to win the title series, finished with a 27-10 record.

Anna Rogers will be back as the softball head coach. After leading the Vikings to the 2025 state title, Rogers got them to the if game in the lower state tournament of the Class A playoffs and a 15-12 record.

Rogers will also coach the boys and girls cross country teams.

Both of the basketball coaches will be back after outstanding seasons. Bobby Richardson coached the Latta girls to the lower state championship game, the Region 6 title and a 20-5 record. The boys went 18-6 under Chris Page, reaching the third round of the playoffs and finishing second in the region.

Sandra Gomillon will be the golf head coach. Latta will have two new head coaches on staff this year. Amber Jordan will coach volleyball, and Michael Donald will handle boys and girls track

In a perfect world, every athletic team would have the very best facilities, the best uniforms, the best culture. Cribb says Johnsonville is solid in every area and says the coaching staff at the school takes full advantage of what they have instead of complaining about what they don’t have.

“Our coaches do a good job working with what they have,” Cribb said. “We try to give them what they lead to be competitive and successful. Some of our coaches coach more than one sport so they are very dedicated to doing right by the kids.
“Our coaches are good role models. We stress that it’s more than just wins and losses. We want to win but we want to build character is our athletes. It’s more important they leave here ready to contribute to our community. Working hard in sports, being a part of a team, helps to develop that in our athletes.”

Avoiding major turnover in the coaching ranks is vital to building a strong athletic program. Johnsonville may have coaches leave occasionally but most stay and build. Cribb had to shuffle a few coaching assignments for the coming year but was able to stay mostly in-house with the new hires and responsibilities.

One change is in baseball where Carson Carroll is giving up the program to focus on his duties in football. Replacing him is former assistant Peyton Hill, who also works in the football and basketball programs.

In volleyball, the new head coach is Travis Cook while the new girls basketball coach is Petra Woodberry.

“We are fortunate that we are able to make hires of people already familiar with our program,” Cribb said. “Makes it easier on the athletes and the adjustment. Anytime we have an opening we look what we have here already and if it fits we go with that

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and field.

The person with the longest tenure on the Latta head coaching staff is Brandon Iseman, who is getting ready for his 12th year in charge of the football program. Iseman led the Vikings to an 8-3 record last season in which they reached the second round of the state playoffs, losing to eventual champion Bamberg-Ehrhardt.

Iseman has his entire coaching staff returning this year. Sport Sawyer is back for his second year as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. Brown will coach the offensive line, Richardson the wide receivers and Page the running backs.

On the defensive side, Iseman will be the coordinator and coach the linebackers, while Brandon Page will coach the D line, and Donald will be in charge of the defensive backs.

Iseman is happy with the continuity he and his coaching staff have developed.

“We have a lot of guys who have been with me for close to a decade,” Iseman said. “We have a feel for each other, what we’re thinking, what we’re trying to achieve and the standard we’ve set for doing things. I think it all flows pretty well.”



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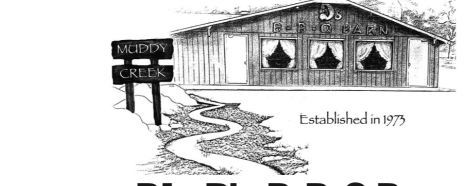
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Pee Dee has no changes to 2026 coaching staff

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Mullins – After “major” shakeups in the varsity head coaching staff at Pee Dee Academy the past two school years, things are back to normal.

Pee Dee lost one head coach in both 2024-25 and 2025-26. As the start of the new school year draws near, the Golden Eagles will be returning all of their head coaches, according to assistant athletic director Jonathan King.

One of those returning coaches will be King himself over football. After leading Pee Dee to the 2022 AAA state championship and to the 2024 AA state title, he had it back in the AA title game last year.

King, who assists longtime athletic director Lon Spivey, has all of his football staff returning as well in Kyle Drew, Stump Spivey, Danny Barker, Dan Barker, Michael Martin, BJ Larymore and Hudson Spivey.

“We have had a very consistent coaching staff for years now,” King said. “In 2026, we return everybody from last year’s staff. I can’t praise them enough for the time and effort they put into our program to help us be successful.”

Will Eskridge will be returning as the head coach of the softball program, which has now won five consecutive SCISA state championships. The

Andrews moving to Class A in new classification

By Neill Kirkpatrick
Special to the HSSR

Andrews – The Andrews Yellowjackets head into the 2026/27 year with their coaching staff almost intact so expectations will be the same to compete for region championships and make deep runs in the class A playoffs.

After spending several years in Class AA, the Yellowjackets will move to Class A region 9 this season. The region schedule will reduce travel time and renew some area rivalries.

The Yellowjackets had two region champs in 2026 with Baseball and Softball winning region 6AA. Each team hosted the district 8 playoffs with the Softball team advancing all the way to the lower state finals.

The girls track team finished 10th at the state AA meet while Boys’ soccer, boys’ basketball, football, and volleyball all made the playoffs.

“While we had a good season overall athletically, we feel it wasn’t up to our standards. We were in a difficult region in several sports and being one the smallest schools in the region depth was an issue. We are going to try and bounce back this season,” said athletic director Scott Durham.

Coach Durham will head into his 14th season at the helm of the Yellowjacket football program with 89-52/ 44-22 record. Last season they made the

latest came
with a sweep of Colleton Prep Academy in the best-of-3 AAA championship series as the Eagles finished the year with a 28-2 record. Pee Dee has played in nine straight championship series.

The baseball program just completed its first season under the guidance of Danny Barker. He led the Eagles to a 14-8-1 record as they reached the championship round of their bracket in the AAA state playoffs.

Drew will be back as the boys basketball head coach and Megan Thomas returns as the girls head coach. The Golden Eagles boys struggled last year with a 4-15 record after playing for the AAA state title the year before. The PDA girls went 11-11 after winning the AAA crown in 2025.

Lori Ann Rogers is back in charge of the volleyball program while Jim Carter is the girls tennis head coach. Drew will be the head coach of the boys golf team, Frank Drew is the boys soccer head coach, Reed Norris is the girls soccer coach, Jason Hulon is the sporting clays head coach, and Brian Lowe is the cheer coach.

Nothing has changed competitively for Pee Dee’s athletic program following SCISA’s bi-annual reclassification. Pee Dee will once again be competing at the AA level in football and in AAA in all other sports.

playoffs for the 13th consecutive season by finishing third in the region.

Joy Weisner is back to head up the volleyball and softball teams. Her softball came within two games of playing for the schools sixth state championship falling in game one of the lower state finals. In volleyball her squad reached the first round of the playoffs.

Defensive Coordinator/ LB coach Richie Poston won another region championship on the diamond this season as the head baseball coach. It was his third region championship in the last four years.

Head boys basketball coach Lamar Brown guided his team to a fourth place finish earning them a playoff berth. They ended the season in the first round. He has solid core group returning that will be looking for a region championship.

Tevin Wallace, the girls head basketball coach, has been looking forward to this year with his. He returns his entire roster from last season. His young ladies have taken their lumps the past couple of seasons but they have gotten bigger, stronger, and more experienced.

Ramona Izzard will be back as cheer coach, Go Yellowjackets!

Andrews is still looking to fill their boys and girls soccer head coaching position. Last season the Yellowjackets boys made the class AA playoffs.

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Varn, Dominique Muldrow, Nick Alvarado and Tiyon Evans.

The three Florence 1 high schools will once again be in the same classification and members of the same region following the South Carolina High School League’s bi-annual reclassification. South, West and Wilson will all be part of Region 7 along with St. James, Myrtle Beach and North Myrtle Beach.

West Florence was bumped up to AAAAA in the 2024 reclassification while Wilson and South Florence remained AAAA.

linebackers along with Lindsey Robertson, while Zimmerman and Malik Samuels will coach the defensive line. Antonio Jones and Zy’Quarius Washington will coach the defensive backs.

Chad Wilkes will be back for his second season in charge of West Florence football. He led the Knights to a 6-6 record after a 1-3 start, and they also came away with a victory in the first round of the AAAAA Division II state playoffs.

Wilkes, who coached Oceanside Collegiate Academy to a state championship in 2023, will have Mike Jones back as his defensive coordinator. Other members of the staff will include Andrew Niemeyer, Kris Howell, Robbie Suggs, Mike Howard, Jarret Varn, Kody

Jefferson Davis focused on continued success

By Dean Ray
Co- Head of School Jefferson Davis
Blackville- Little ole Jefferson Davis Academy, located in Blackville, has been playing some big-time football over the past few years with the Raiders just three short years removed from their 2023 SCISA 8-man state title.

The past two seasons saw the team make playoff runs to the state semifinals. The tiny SCISA school boasts 8 state championships in football through the years. The Raiders would love nothing more than to add title number 9 to their resume this upcoming season.

Recently JDA school officials traveled to Mooresville High School in North Carolina where they purchased the school’s entire weight room. There was so much extra equipment that came along with the purchase the school has been selling some items to other schools.

Head football coach Anthony Reitenour has been the driving force behind the gridiron success of JDA since he came to the school in 2022. He has a 38-13 record in three seasons at JDA with an 82-36 overall career record.

He has brought stability to the program, a heavily desired trait in today’s sports climate. His leadership speaks for itself in the win column, too with the team posting 38 wins over the past four seasons. Last season the Raiders were 8-4 in football. They begin the 2026 football season away at Andrew Jackson Academy on August 21.

However, he would be the first to give credit to his assistants and everyone involved with the program. The defense is led by coach Matt Lightsey. Anyone involved in coaching 8-man football knows what kind of challenge this entails. The Raider defense hits hard and flies to

Sammons is new Fox Creek football head coach

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
North Augusta – David Sammons is a familiar face who will be in a new position at Fox Creek High School.

Sammons, the Predators’ offensive coordinator for the past three seasons, was selected as their new head coach in June. He takes over from his old boss, Lemuel Lackey, who announced at the first of May he was leaving for a similar position at Silver Bluff.

Lackey was the head coach for five years, positing a 17-34 record. The Predators were 5-6 last season.

This will be Sammons’ first head job. He will be inheriting a young team that will have to deal with the challenges of playing in the AAAA classification following the South Carolina High School League’s biannual reclassification. Fox Creek played AAA the last two years and AA the two seasons prior to that.

The only other new head coach at Fox Creek will be JR Williams in girls golf. Athletic director Derrick Quinn likes the staff he has in place.

“I am excited about the Fox Creek athletic

the ball.

Coach JT Calloway handles both the OL/DL. He is also the school’s head junior varsity football coach. Last season the team saw more success than it had in several years. The season highlight was coming out victorious over the PAC Panthers. PAC beat the jayvee early in the schedule, but the Raiders bounced back and beat them a few weeks later.

Coach Garrison Owens works with the OL as well. Owens is a graduate of JDA and was a solid player for the Raiders during his career.

Coach Mitchell Webster is involved with the offensive side of the ball. Coach Webster is beginning his 5th season at JDA.

The varsity volleyball team will be head coached by Morgan Owens this season. Larry Johnson will head up the girls’ basketball team while Coach Reitenour will once again coach the boys’ basketball team, and he has compiled a 158-87 career record that includes two state titles and one runner-up finish.

. Kenneth Bollinger will be an assistant to both the boy’s and girls’ basketball teams. Bart Owens and Sydney Owens will be assistants in volleyball.

Anna Beth Randall will be varsity softball coach this season. Manny Wright returns as the head baseball coach for his third season.

The 2026 football season is approaching rapidly, and the Raiders return a solid nucleus from last season’s team. It could be another special season at Jefferson Davis. Friday night football in Blackville is a fun time for everyone. Come out and support the coaches and players who work hard to put a winning product on the field.

staff,” Quinn said. “We have a good mixture of old and new, which should make for an exciting year moving to AAAA.”

Along with being the athletic director, Quinn returns for his 12th season as softball head coach. Fox Creek finished this past season with an 18-7 record and reached the championship game of its district tournament in the state playoffs.

Both of the basketball coaches are back for their third seasons, Tim Butler for the boys and Aaron Ray for the girls. The boys went 25-6 and played for the AAA state title, falling to Christ Church 52-49. The girls were 18-10 and reached the quarterfinals.

Roby Gillespie is set for his fourth year in charge of baseball. Fox Creek was 20-8-1 and went undefeated in winning a region title.

Jake Torres returns for his fifth season as the boys lacrosse coach, while Alexis Cohan is the girls lacrosse coach. Mark Thomas will once again coach the boys golf team, while Taylor Thomas returns for her 11th season as the competitive cheer head coach.

Jason Spinks is back for his fourth season in charge of the girls soccer program, while Kate Schladenhauffen returns as the boys soccer

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coach. Schladenhauffen will be coaching the boys and girls cross country teams for the second year.

Jessica Weir is entering her seventh year as girls tennis head coach. Emma Paden is back as the boys and girls swim coach, and Floyd Norman will again be the boys tennis coach. Carrie Albion will coach volleyball for the second year.

www.HSSR.com

Woolbright back for second stint at NMBHS

By David Shelton
Senior Writer

Little River – Entering his sixth year as the athletic director at North Myrtle Beach High, Anthony Heilbronn feels his program is on the verge of big things.

Recent facility improvements have inspired strong commitment from the athletes and a strong group of coaches is making the most of their opportunities to compete at the highest level.

“I think the coaching staff we have is one of the best in the Grand Strand area,” Heilbronn said. “Collectively, I would put them up against any other staff as they work hard and do the best they can to bring out the best in our kids. I love our coaches and am excited to see what they can do this upcoming season.”

The most significant coaching change at North Myrtle Beach comes in football. Hired for his second stint as the school’s head coach is Perry Woolbright. Woolbright served as the head coach from 2010-2014. His last football season, 2014, produced nine wins and set the table for future success.

Woolbright has a 100-78 career record as a head coach, which includes stops at Batebug-Leesville, Lexington and Clover, his alma mater. HE led Batesburg-Leesville to the AA state finals in 2016 and won 10 games. He was 22-13 in three seasons at Clover.

Girls volleyball head coach Jenn Loeswick guided her program to a state title in her first season as head coach in 2024. The Lady Chiefs reached the state finals in 2025 as well but lost in five sets to Woodmont to finish 36-6. The team had only four seniors so 2026 should be a good season.

Brian Alderson is returns as the varsity baseball coach. Alderson led the Chiefs to back-to-back appearances in the AAAA Lower State finals om 2023 and 2024. Krystal Mante is back for her third season as the head softball coach.

Ryan Walker is set to return as the varsity boys basketball coach while Heather Kearney will return for year four with the girls basketball program. The Lady Chiefs advanced to the state

finals two seasons ago.

Alex Booth coaches cross country and track and Miranda Ruppe coaches cross country as well. Ryan Dinnant will coach boys track in the spring. Kyle Cavallini will be the boys golf coach and Wendy Hilburn coaches the girls golf team.

Zach Lytle (boys) and Danielle Lowrimore (girls) will coach the lacrosse teams. Joel Schmaltz and Kristen Henley are the swim coaches and Brian Patterson is the coach in boys and girls tennis. Dru Brooks coaches the boys volleyball team.

Zach Brittain is the boys soccer coach and Kelsey Winkler is the girls soccer coach.

Overall, the athletic department has seen significant upgrades in facilities over the last few years.

Thanks to the Horry County school district, North Myrtle Beach has had about two million dollars of facility improvement, namely the football stadium and track since 2022. The district, as part of a county-wide upgrade of area schools facilities, refurbished the track and installed artificial turf on the football field. The track was completed in the spring of 2022 and the football field was ready by the start of that season. The turf cost is estimated at \$1.2 million while the track upgrade cost about \$800,000 dollars.

The stadium also has a new lighting system and also has a new video board.

The softball and baseball facilities have the best playing surfaces around and new scoreboards.

“It’s a joy to work here with so many great people,” said Heilbronn. “A lot of great things have happened over the last few years and we continue to make improvements where we can. We had a good year overall in terms of our teams competing in the region and getting playoff opportunities, Now, the goal is to do even better.”

With the reclassification of schools by the South Carolina High School League last winter, North Myrtle Beach has moved back to Class AAAAA after spending the last two years in AAAAAA Division II.

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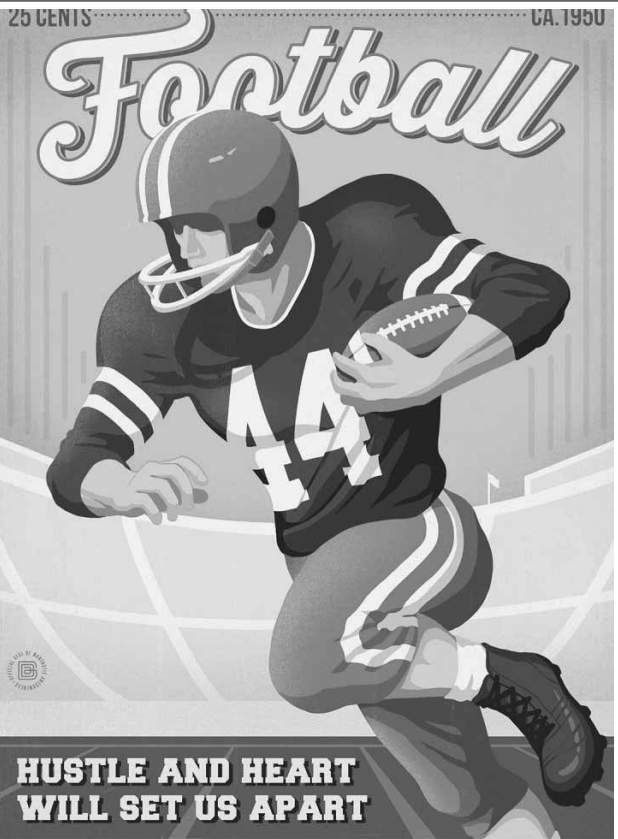
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AD Leaird retires after 34 years at Central

By Dennis Brunson
hssr.com Associate Editor
Pageland – Mitch Leaird graduated from **Central High School** in 1987. Right after earning his college degree, he was back at Central as a coach and a teacher.

His run at the school came to an end with the just completed school year as Leaird announced his retirement after 34 years. He was the baseball head coach for 27 years, the junior varsity football coach for 22 years and the athletic director for the past 12 years.

“I just felt like it was the right time for me to walk away,” said Leaird, who spent most of those years teaching algebra as well. “The program is going to be in good hands with (football head coach) **Jonathan Eason**. He’s going to do a super job.”

Leaird said as soon as he graduated from college an opening for a coach and teacher came open at Central. Football head coach **Al Usher** and baseball head coach **Joey Mangum**, both of whom Leaird played for as a Central athlete, encouraged him to take the position.

“I came right back home,” Leaird said. “It was like it was meant to be. I actually lived a dream job. What I wanted to do when I was in high school was to teach and coach, and to get to come home and do it at your alma mater is great. Central High School and its athletics has been very special to me.”

Eason, who is preparing for his third year as football head coach and a Central graduate like Leaird, thinks he is walking into a great situation with his new post.

“I’m excited about going into the AD role,” he said. “I feel like Coach Leaird has made it a very smooth transition. He has set a great foundation by hiring a lot of great coaches that are all returning to Central. I’m really excited about getting to work with all the athletes at the school now, and I am really ex-

McManus set to assume role as athletic director

By David Shelton
Senior Writer High
Myrtle Beach – A period indecision and flux came to an end as **Myrtle Beach High** finally filled an opening for athletic director after more than a year.

Earlier this spring, the Horry County school board approved the hiring of long-time coach and administrator **Hal McManus** to take over running the successful athletic programs at Myrtle Beach. He replaces interim athletic director **Joe Quigley**, who served the last year in place of former athletic director **John Cahill**.

“The 2026-27 school year will mark the beginning of my 32nd year in education,” McManus said in a statement. “I have been in athletic administration for 26 years and a varsity head basketball coach for 24 years... My wife [Alison] and I are excited to join the Myrtle Beach family.”

McManus has an extensive background, previously being athletic director at Spartanburg, Boiling Springs and Liberty High Schools before his current tenure at Broome, which began in 2023.

He was named the Region III-3A Athletic Director of the Year in 2025; he is the son of long-

cited about the future of Central athletics. “Our boys were very successful this past year. Football made the fourth round (lower state championship) of the (AA state) playoffs, basketball made the third round, baseball was region champs, golf just won their eighth region championship in a row, track (and field) and cross country continue to be very strong programs throughout the state, and our new soccer program is growing every day. I feel like our girls programs are all heading in the right direction. Each program is showing improvement, so I am very excited about what the future holds for all these teams.”

Desmond Sowell returns as the boys basketball coach, **Trent Strickland** will do baseball, **Joel Dale** will do boys and girls cross country and share the duties with **Billy Blakeney** for boys and girls track, **John Nall** is the soccer coach, **JT McManus** will do girls basketball, **Hannah Kirkley** volleyball, **DJ Middleton** softball, **Randy Cryster** golf and **Stephanie Rivers** and **Kimberly Welch** cheer.

Eason has most of his football staff returning. **Jody Sellers** returns as the offensive coordinator and the quarterbacks coach, while **Kyle Pollard** will again be the defensive coordinator and strength coach.

The other returning offensive coaches are **Jacob Aldridge** with wide receivers and **Paul Tomberlin** as the passing game coordinator. **Hayden Wilks**, who joins the staff after coaching at Class A runner-up **Lamar** last season, will be the offensive line coach.

On defense, **Cornelius Chambers** will handle the line, **Dioon Mason** and Tomberlin will coach the defensive backs with Mason also being the JV head coach, Strickland will coach the linebackers, **Darius Gladden** will coach the JV defensive line and newcomer **Brandon Rollins** will handle the JV offensive line.

time South Carolina coach **Harold McManus**. Together, they are the only father-son duo in South Carolina history to have both won basketball state championships.

Hal’s 2005 Broome High team won the Class 2A state championship.

McManus was the boys basketball coach at Conway High from 1997-1999. He was hired as the Socastee athletic director in the summer of 2020, but left the school in less than one year.

Myrtle Beach Principal **Kristin Altman** sent a note to the Myrtle Beach High School community on Monday night, officially confirming the news.

“We are beyond excited to welcome Hal McManus as our new Athletic Director, bringing with him a distinguished career in both athletic leadership and basketball coaching across South Carolina,” the statement said in part. “Most recently serving as Athletic Director and Head Boys Basketball Coach at Gettys D. Broome High School, Coach McManus has built a reputation for excellence defined by competitive success, program development, and strong relationships with students and staff.”

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AJA football returns to 8-Man for 2026 season

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher
Ehrhardt—Andy Palmer will begin his second season as the head football coach, head softball coach, and athletic director at **Andrew Jackson Academy**, so the veteran coach wears many hats in his day-to-day activities in the Warriors program.

One major change for the 2026-27 season is the fact that the Warriors football team is moving back to 8-man football after playing at the Class A level the past two seasons.

“Our move back to 8-man should be an advantage for us,” said Coach Palmer over the summer. “We go from being one of the smallest SCISA 1-A schools playing football to one of the largest in 8-man based on enrollment.”

Coach Palmer tells the *HSSR* that the Warriors football team will scrimmage **Orangeburg Christian** in early August. The Warriors start the season against **Jefferson Davis on August 21**.

The summer roster provided to the *HSSR* showed six returning starters on offense and 9 returning starters on defense.

On offense, senior **Ollie Barnes** returns at RB/WR along with senior OL **Eli Mathys**. Senior **Jason Tucker** returns to the TE position while senior **Brad Hightower** returns as an RB. Junior **Everett Ulmer** is back at FB and junior **London Johnson** returns to provide depth as a WR.

The defense will return to 8 starters from last season. Barnes will flip to start at DB on defense, while Mathis will be a starter in the DL. Johnson will flip to start at LB, along with Ulmer, who will start at LB also. Other defensive starters returning include senior DB **Jaxon Tucker**, senior RB **Brad Hightower**, soph DL **Noah Riddle**, and junior LB **Brisen Riddle**.

Top newcomers include: soph OL/DL **Evan Mathys**, along with freshman QB/DB **Will Barnes**, freshman QB/LB **Braedon Wilcox**, soph WR **Cody Guider**, freshman OL/DL **Robert Stevenson**, and freshman OL/DL **Bryce Drawdy**.

Other members of the AJA football team include senior OL/DL **Nathan King** and sophomore OL/DL **Mitch Ott**.

AJA has an excellent football program. Randy Rentz, Bill Johnson, and Robbie Williams work with the junior varsity program. Rentz heads up the 10U football team while **Todd Folk** coaches the 8U team.

At the school awards banquet in May, **Tanner Chassereau** and **Walker Terry** tied for the “Ben Fender Award,” given annually to a Male Student Athlete at AJA who plays at least two varsity sports, with academics and community service weighing heavily into the winners. “The Allison Carter Award,” based on similar criteria, is awarded to a female athlete every year and **CJ Ulmer** earned that award.

The Dean of Coaches at AJA, in terms of longevity at the school, is head boys’ basketball coach **Josh Barnes** who will begin his 16th season with the program this school year.

“We had a very active summer with the team,” said Coach Barnes recently. “We participated in the SCISA Live team event at Heathwood Hall in June.

We also played in the Denmark-Olar play date where we beat Bridges Prep, but we lost to Midland Valley.

“For the first time ever, we hosted a play date at our place on June 17th,” said Coach Barnes. “We lost to **Cathedral** but beat **Denmark-Olar** and **Hilton Head Prep** and these games gave us some valuable experience.”

Three key players will return to the AJA boys’ basketball team this season. They include rising senior combo guard **Ollie Barnes**, rising senior power forward **Elijah Davis**, and rising freshman point guard **Will Barnes**.

Ollie Barnes averaged 24.3 points and six rebounds a game as a junior when he went over 1,000 points early in the 2025-26 season. He could become the all-time leading scorer in school history as a senior with a good senior season performance.

AJA will field six varsity sports in the 2026-27 school year including varsity cheerleading.

Stephanie Brandt will once again be the varsity cheer coach. The *HSSR* extends sincere condolences to the Brandt family for the loss of a wonderful husband and proud father **Shaun Brandt** in early June. Mr. Brandt was a huge supporter of AJA, and he was a star athlete at the school in the 1990’s when he helped lead the football team to a state title.

Danielle Tuten will assist Brandt with the varsity cheer team. **Catherine Bessinger** and **Ashlyn Peters** will work with the “B” team cheerleaders.

Brandy Smith will coach the mini-cheer team while **Brittany Risher** works with the Tiny Cheer team.

Zach Bolt returns as the volleyball head coach. **Carmen Mixson** does an excellent job as the Junior varsity, B team, and C team volleyball coach. Coach Bolt is also the head girls’ basketball coach. **Randy Rentz** and **Jeremy Bessinger** work with the lower-level girl’s basketball teams.

The junior varsity boys’ basketball coach is **Leonard Carter** while **Jamee Barnes** returns to coach the “B” team. **Randy Rentz** is the “C” team boy’s coach.

Head baseball coach **Jason Mathys** earned the Region Coach of the year in the SCISA 2-A region after his team had another winning season that included a region title. Coach Mathys will be returning as head baseball coach at AJA this season. **Austin Risher** coaches the jayvee baseball team.

Coach Palmer had a very successful season as the head softball coach this past season. He is assisted on the varsity and jayvee by **Monica Beard**. **Bill Johnson**, **Jeremy Beard**, **Carmen Mixson**, and **Denise Duncan** help coach the jayvee softball team.

Robbie Williams coaches the Sporting Clays team. Coach Palmer is the speed and strength coach at AJA also.

The Head of School at AJA is **Gill Hackney**. The Asst. Head of School and Guidance Director is **Susan Kinsey**. The Booster Club President is **Jana Chassereau**.



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Seawell’s Midlands Feature Page

Spring sports championships abound in the Midlands

By WORTHY EVANS
Staff Writer

Columbia - The Midlands spring season was filled with long playoff runs and state championship appearances in track and field, boys tennis, baseball, softball, and soccer, and lacrosse.

Among the victors, the **Gray Collegiate** softball team won its third straight state championship and second straight 4A state title.

A.C. Flora’s baseball team bid longtime head coach **Andy Hallett** farewell with the eighth state championship in his tenure. The Falcons girls soccer team won a clutch 4A state title victory in PKs over **Bishop England**, and the boys tennis team put its winning streak at 49 games with its second straight 4A crown.

The **Chapin** girls soccer team overcame two straight years of being runner up to finally claiming a 5A state championship.

The **Blythewood** girls track and field team won its fourth straight state championship, **Cardinal Newman** claimed its seventh straight SCISA boys soccer title, while the **Heathwood Hall** girls won state in Lacrosse.

Baseball

Andy Hallett wanted to close out his final season at **A.C. Flora** with an eighth state championship. Sure enough, his Falcons gave him that gift.

A.C. Flora took out defending 4A champion **Airport** 4-0 May 28—one day after beating the Eagles 2-1 in the first game of the best-of-three series—to complete a 2-game sweep and send their beloved head coach of 29 years on his way to take over the program at **Midlands STEM Charter School in Winnsboro**.

The series wins were the seventh and eighth straight postseason victories for the Falcons, and stretched the team’s winning streak to 17 games.

“This team right here is going to go down in history as one of the greatest ones to wear an A.C. Flora uniform and have created one of the longest winning streaks of my career,” Hallett said. “In 29 years, I’ve never won this many games (in a row) before, and not only do we do it, but we do it to end the season.”

Game one was delayed several days—and then several hours on game-day May 27—because of rain. When play finally started, the Falcons and Eagles battled for 10 innings. Airport scored a run in the first inning, A.C. Flora scored a run in the fourth inning, and all was silent until the Falcons opened the bottom of the 10th inning with pinch hitter **Rohan Bremmer’s** single. **Brennan Fudger** went in to pinch run for Bremmer, and he quickly moved to second on **Joe Ray’s** base hit, and then to third on an infield error.

Logan Price lashed out a walk-off single that drove in Fudger well after midnight.

Starting pitcher **Taylor Hernandez** gave up an RBI single to Airport’s **Ryan Bullis** in the first inning. Hernandez

Final Midlands Baseball Polls

1. **A.C. Flora (25-5)**
2. **Chapin (19-9)**
3. **Airport (25-5)**
4. **River Bluff (22-11)**
5. **Batesburg-Leesville (19-9)**
6. **Blythewood (25-5)**
7. **Swansea (23-7)**
8. **Gray Collegiate (22-5-1)**
9. **Cardinal Newman (17-12)**
10. **Gilbert (18-10-2)**

shook it off and worked 4 2/3 innings before leaving the mound. Three other pitchers combined to scatter seven hits and strike out 10 Eagles batters.

Game 2 was considerably less tense. Starting pitcher **Sam McCutchen** worked a complete-game 2-hitter, striking out 10.

The Falcons took a 1-0 lead in the first inning on **Roper Wentzky’s** RBI single that drove in **Charlie Scott**. In the third inning **Monty Laffite** did the same, singling in **Tyler Hernandez** to make it 2-0. Later in the inning **Jack Chetwood** scored on a fielder’s choice.

Scott homered in the top of the sixth to make it 4-0.

After McCutcheon struck out **Callahan Berry** to put the game in the books, the Falcons piled onto the pitcher’s mound to celebrate—one year after Airport did the same when it won its first ever state championship.

“I was proud of our guys,” Airport head coach **Casey Bradwell** said. “Proud of our guys. There wasn’t a lack of competing. The moment wasn’t too big. We just got beat by a better team right now.” After the award ceremony and taking his last Gatorade shower as a Falcon, an emotional Hallett reflected

Final Midlands Softball Polls

1. **Gray Collegiate (31-0)**
2. **A.C. Flora (22-6)**
3. **Lexington (19-7)**
4. **Airport (14-16)**
5. **Blythewood (16-7)**
6. **Batesburg-Leesville (15-6)**
7. **River Bluff (17-10)**
8. **Gilbert (14-10)**
9. **Chapin (11-16)**
10. **Pelion (10-12)**

on his career and the friendships he’s made at the school and in the community.

“It’s been a wonderful ride for me,” Hallett said. “(It was) 29 years ago, a man...took a chance on a guy that had never been a head coach. I told him I was going to build a championship-caliber team and a program.

“He said, ‘How you’re going to do that? We’ve never won here before.’ I told him it would be fundamentals and discipline. In four years, we hoisted our first trophy. And the one thing I’m probably the proudest of is we’ve been relevant for 30 years. We’ve won across three decades.

“Our kids have always bought into my system. I think we coach our rosters really well from speed teams to power teams, we do our philosophy based on what’s in our dugout, not what we believe, and I think our kids are really good at responding to that.

“It is a sad day. Twenty-nine years is a long time if you’re 57 years old. But as the road goes, every road comes to an end, and I’m really proud and happy my road has ended at A.C. Flora.”

At Chapin May 28, the Eagles hoisted their first ever state championship after closing out a 2-0 series sweep of T.L. Hanna.

The Eagles beat the Yellow Jackets 7-3 in Anderson the day before, then closed out the quick series win with a 4-3 victory at Eagles Field.

It was **Dell Lever’s** first year coaching Chapin, and throughout the season the Eagles won eight of their 23 games by one run.

“It’s kind of how it’s been all year,” said Lever, who became the first Chapin head coach to win a state baseball title. “It always came down to one run near the end whether we won or lost.”

Lever continued, saying the coaching staff really started preaching about a month ago about key moments in games.

“That’s kind of been our mantra up until this point, just moments,” he said. “We never know what moments are going to make or break a game. So, if we can stay calm and just relax in said moment, more often than not, we’re going to be successful and then once we got into this playoff run, our mantra became ‘one more’ – one more pitch, one more play and so forth. If we can just relax and play ‘one more, one more,’ we’re more likely than not going to have a positive ending on the scoreboard.”

Chapin showed its capitalization of moments in the final game of the series.

T.L. Hanna had taken a 2-0 lead in the first inning on **Tatum Manning’s** RBI single followed by **Brayden Stuart’s** RBI single.

Felix Flecha Ruiz erased that lead with the first of his two home runs on the evening, a 2-run shot over the right-

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SEVENTY YEARS OF HOSTING BIG DAYS

Modern Turf Farm Recruiting Feature

Wow! State of SC has 41 in-state players committed to major college football! A new record at this point in the time period!

By Billy G. Baker
Publisher

Moncks Corner—Coming in the SCACA Coaches Clinic on July 24, being held at the Greenville Convention Center, the state of South Carolina has 41 in-state 2027 prep football players committed to one of the 138 major college teams that define Division I FBS programs.

This is a new record for this point in the recruiting process in South Carolina and clearly indicates the overall quality of our football talent, and the quality of our high school football coaches who develop them into major college football prospects.

As always, we pause to thank **Mark Grainger** and the fine folks at Modern Turf in Irmo and Rembert for their sponsorship of this very popular recruiting page.

Google Analytics recently confirmed to the *HSSR* that in the past 12 months our companion web site hssr.com received 1 million home page views, with 41,000 unique visitors checking out our free web site each and every month! We upload all content in our publication to hssr.com for free viewing. Yes, we feel like our coverage of high school football in the Palmetto State is read by college football coaches all over the nation.

The recent NFL draft selected five players who grew up in South Carolina, playing prep football, and this is the consistent average in most years going back 30 years. We take exception to one tracking site claiming **Clemson** and Hartsville native **Damonte Capehart** (6-5, 315) as a native of Bradenton, Florida, where Capehart attended the IMG Academy for just one year. Capehart played for the Red Foxes through his junior year, and he is a native of the Palmetto State. Capehart was drafted (155) by the Buccaneers in the April 2026 draft.

The other four players are former **Georgia** and **Oceanside Collegiate** OL **Monroe Freeling** who went (19) to the Packers, former **South Carolina** and **Lakewood DB Brandon Ciese** who went (52) to the Packers. The number four player was former **Clemson** and **Dutch Fork** WR **Antonio Williams** (71) to the Commanders, with the 5th player being former **Clemson** and **Myrtle Beach** athlete **Adam Randall** who was drafted (174) by the Ravens as an RB, but he played WR in high school and for a large part of his career of Clemson.

So, when the *HSSR* strongly suggests to the South Carolina and Clemson football programs that they work extra hard to project who these five players are in the current 2027 class that are almost certain to be drafted in four or five years, we are being honest and sincere. This has been a consistent pattern for years. It also explains why we are always upset at national recruiting services like 247 Sports who rarely place more than two or three current SC based players on their top 247 list which is their mirror to future NFL drafts.

Well, for the first time in recent memory would you believe that 247 Sports has finally rated exactly five in-state 2027 football players from South Carolina in their current 247 national list. (Our prayers have been answered, and we encourage them to keep up the good work). 247 Sports currently has **Irmo DE Jaiden Bryant** (6-3, 245) rated number 20 overall and he is pledged to **Miami**. **Byrnes** RB **David Segarra** (5-10,205) is rated number 133 nationally and he is committed to **LSU**. **South Pointe** DL **Seth Tillman** is ranked at number 139, and he is committed to **Clemson**. The 5th “Top 247” prospect is **Irmo OL Nate Carson** (6-4, 290) who is committed to SC.

By comparison, the *HSSR* rates **Oceanside Collegiate** WR/DB **Jaiden Kelly-Murray** (5-10,175, 4.4) as the state’s number one over-all prospect in the 2027 class in SC. Kelly-Murray has committed to **Colorado**.

During his freshman season at Summerville the



**Irmo’s
Jaiden Bryant**



**Oceanside’s
Aiden Manavian**



**Dutch Fork’s
Antonio Williams**

HSSR saw Kelly-Murray play in four different games as a starting FS in an AAAAA program. He had around 8 picks that first season and we stood beside three different major college coaches that season on the sideline and all three recruiters told us he was a five- star player with a bright future.

Kelly-Murray was switched more to a WR his sophomore and junior year at Summerville where he caught 145 passes for 2,159 yards and 27 TD’s in two seasons he helped lead the Green Wave to the state finals against **Dutch Fork**.

Kelly-Murray decided to transfer to **Oceanside Collegiate** for his senior year mainly because the Landsharks have highly regarded 20027 QB **Aiden Manavian** (6-0,185) waiting to toss this gifted receiver a bunch of home run balls during the 2026 season. We expect Kelly-Murray to have between 1,800 and 2,000 reception yards this season.

We rate Bryant as number two on our 2027 list, and if his commitment to **Miami** holds the Hurricanes are getting a future NFL player no doubt. We have **David “Tre” Segarra** of Byrnes rated as the *HSSR* number three over-all player coming into the 2026 season. **LSU**, his current commitment, might just be in a battle to hold his commitment as many colleges, namely SC, will try to flip him before the December signing date.

Segarra has excellent vision, and his ability to reach full speed quickly allows him to make cuts away from tacklers with ease. He rushed for 1,460 yards on 174 carries and 17 TD’s as a junior. He averaged 8.4 yards a carry. If he continues to develop, he just might be among those five players a year average in future drafts?

The *HSSR* ranks **Irmo High** and **Alabama** RB commitment **Tai Phillips** (5-11, 180) as the number four over-all player in the 2027 class in SC going into the season. Phillips transferred to Irmo from Cape Fear, NC after his junior season. In two seasons he rushed for 1,799 yards on 202 carries. He only played seven games as a junior but his 302 rushing yards in a game against rival **Terry Sanford** helped get his name to the desks of many college recruiters.

Our number five 2027 player going into the season is **Irmo** DL/OL **Nate Carson** (6-5,285) who is committed to **South Carolina**. Carson is a road grader with good arm extensions, flexible hips, and he uses his quick feet to get a jump on incoming defensive lineman.

So, we agree with three of the five 247 Picks among our top five 2027 prospects starting the season.

Our next five rising 2027 prospects are Manavian at number six and we feel like he is the top overall QB

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