



2026 BEST OF PREPS AWARDS

STUDENT-ATHLETE AWARDS



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Athletes, coaches honored at annual *Best of Preps Banquet*

Cory Smith
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PHOTO BY JOHN PETERS

Serena Bowman, General Manager of the Mount Airy Regional Media Group, welcomes guests to the ninth-annual Best of Preps Awards Banquet.

The top athletes and coaches from a five-county area were celebrated at the ninth-annual Best of Preps Awards Banquet on May 19.

The Mount Airy Regional Media Group's Best of Preps Awards recognize the highest athletic achievements and performances of local high schools in the coverage areas of The Mount Airy News, The Stokes News, The Yadkin Ripple, The Tribune and The Carroll News.

Athletes from 13 high schools across five counties — Surry, Stokes, Wilkes and Yadkin counties in North Carolina, and Carroll County in Virginia — were eligible for the awards. Each school submitted nominations, then the nominees were voted on by a panel of local sportswriters with input from coaches.

Nearly 200 guests convened at First Baptist Church in Mount Airy for the Best of Preps Banquet. Awards were handed out for each state-sanctioned sport, as well as awards that honored the top overall athletes, athletes who were active in their community, athletes who overcame adversity, a dedicated athletic director and a coach who went the extra mile.

Elkin senior Charlie Pelkey was recognized as

the Premier Student-Athlete. The two-sport player of the year received all-state honors in soccer and was nationally ranked in two categories. He was also one of the state's most prolific scorers in basketball.

Pelkey led two teams to the fourth round of the state playoffs while working as a Certified Nursing Assistant and medical

translator. He also volunteered with Yadkin Senior Living, raised money for organizations such as Hands for Hearts and the Ronald McDonald House, and participated in book drives for kids in Guatemala.

East Surry's Maggy Sechrist was named Female Athlete of the Year. The senior earned conference player of the year honors in two sports, volleyball and basketball. She was one of the top outside hitters in the state on a team that won its fifth-consecutive conference

title, then led East Surry to a state runner-up finish in basketball while leading the team in points, rebounds, assists, steals and blocks.

Elkin's Jericho Edwards was named Male Athlete of the Year. The senior won two state titles this year, one in indoor track and one in outdoor track, while setting a state record in the 500-meter run. He had three additional state runner-up finishes this year. Edwards graduates with 10 school records, 26 individual conference titles and 12 state medals.

East Wilkes' Bailey Stanley was the recipient of the Sandy Hurley Award, which was created in 2025 to honor the longtime publisher of the Mount Airy Regional Media Group. The award recognizes a student-athlete who personifies hard work, determination and a relentless pursuit of greatness despite facing significant adversity.

Stanley was diagnosed with Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome in 2024 and had heart surgery just one week after receiving the diagnosis. She returned to athletics and was a standout in volleyball, basketball, track and dance. She also became student body president, president of the National Honor Society, and was heavily involved in organizations such as HOSA, Beta Club and Honors Chorus — all while being dually enrolled at Wilkes Community College.

Stanley became an advocate for her condition and the Atrium Health Heart of a Champion program that discovered it. Her diagnosis and treatment inspired her to pursue a career in the medical field. She will attend Duke University and plans to major in neuroscience before pursuing a career as a pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon.

Award winners throughout the evening wowed guests with their impressive resumes.

Elkin's Connor Ballard and Aidan Ballard graduated as seven-time state champions in tennis.

East Surry's Pennson Badgett set North Carolina state records



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Elkin senior Charlie Pelkey, left, receives the Premier Student-Athlete Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.

the Premier Student-Athlete. The two-sport player of the year received all-state honors in soccer and was nationally ranked in two categories. He was also one of the state's most prolific scorers in basketball.

Pelkey led two teams to the fourth round of the state playoffs while working as a Certified Nursing Assistant and medical



PHOTO BY JOHN PETERS

Former Surry Central football coach Monty Southern served as the keynote speaker for the Best of Preps Banquet.

for the lowest 18-hole score and lowest 36-hole score at a state championship.

Carroll County's Wyatt Ogle was honored as the Region 3D Male Swimmer of the Year in the Virginia High School League and went on to medal at the state championship.

Forbush's Addison Edwards won three NCHSAA state cheer championships and will continue her career at UNC Charlotte.

West Stokes' Rylee Tedder recorded the 300th strikeout of her career and had a 0.742 ERA this season.

North Stokes' Aaliyah Brown was the lone freshman to win a Best of Preps Award.

Seven athletes won their second Best of Preps Award: Elkin's Connor Ballard, East Surry's Sechrist, Mount Airy's Joyce, Martin and Olalde, North Surry's Puckett and West Stokes' Tedder.

Four athletes won their third Best of Award: South Stokes' Brady Clark, Elkin's Jericho Edwards and Mount Airy's Andrew Meadows.

East Surry's Badgett became the first person to win a Best of Preps Award all four years of high school.

Hugh Chatham Health - Orthopedics was the Premier Sponsor of the event again this year. Practice Support Manager, Jessica Tulbert spoke on behalf of Hugh Chatham and congratulated the athletes for their achievements.

Go and Be Great Monty Southern served as the keynote speaker for the banquet.

Southern was a three-sport varsity athlete at Surry Central High School who went on to play baseball at Appalachian State. Upon graduating from Appalachian State in 1996, Southern returned to his alma mater to teach and coach sports such as football, basketball, baseball and softball.

"This is truly a great event. It's an honor to be a part of it," Southern said. "I want to say congratulations to all the athletes. I know there are a lot of coaches here too, so I want to congratulate them as well because those athletes didn't get to this point by themselves. There are a lot of parents, grandparents and friends here as well that deserve thanks."

Southern spent 18 seasons as the Golden Eagles' head football

coach before retiring in 2024. Just three weeks before the Best of Preps Banquet, Surry Central High School officially dedicated Monty J. Southern Stadium to recognize his contributions to the school and the community.

"Some people want to get out of Surry County, or wherever they're from, as fast as possible, and others want to come back home and build a life here," Southern said. "I knew this is where I wanted to be."

Before returning to Dobson, Southern took a detour through Raleigh for a summer with a friend. Their original plan was to live and work together as a last hurrah before adulthood. Plans changed, and Southern was left living alone in an area he didn't know while working a different job with new people.

He told a story about how he got lost in Raleigh with no GPS to turn to. When he finally swallowed his pride and went to ask for directions, Southern realized he couldn't ask for directions because he didn't know his address. He kept driving until he finally saw something he recognized.

Southern used his experience as an anecdote for the student-athletes.

"I always heard the quote, 'If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there,'" he said. "But really, if you don't know where you're going, none of the roads will take you there. So for you young folks, figure out what your path is going to be and go get it."

Southern spoke on responding to adversity and disappointment when plans change.

He first referenced a long-term relationship that he thought would never end. When things eventually ended in college, Southern questioned why that happened and thought it had messed up his life. That was until he met the woman who would become his wife.

"About six months after we broke up is when I had my first date with my wife, then about six years after that we got married," Southern said. "I can tell you unequivocally that my wife is my soulmate. That is who I needed to be with."



PHOTO BY HOLLY LAMM

Jessica Tulbert from our premier sponsor Hugh Chatham Orthopedics spoke to the crowd.



East Wilkes senior Bailey Stanley, right, receives the Sandy Hurley Award from members of the Hurley family. Pictured, from left: Wes Hurley, Holden Hurley, Will Hurley and Bailey Stanley.

PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

“I always wanted to make my mom proud, and I told my players that they needed to be playing for a cause that’s bigger than just themselves.”

Southern referenced two award winners – East Surry’s Audrey Hiatt and Mount Airy’s DJ Joyce – as great examples of overcoming adversity. Both suffered serious knee injuries as juniors, then turned around and had great senior seasons. Hiatt set home run records for the Cardinals, while Joyce became the Granite Bears’ career leader in sacks. Both

Monty and Jodi have two daughters together, Aubrey and Mallie.

Southern walked on to the baseball team at Appalachian and was redshirted his freshman season. He only pitched 6 1/3 innings his sophomore year, so he decided to dedicate his life to improving so he could move into a better spot the following season. He played summer ball and put in a lot of work on his own time, then as a junior Southern’s playing time increased to 6 2/3 innings.

After throwing just 13 innings through three years, he acknowledged his time would be better spent as just a student. He did manage to win an intramural horseshoe championship in 1995, though.

“Proverbs 19:21 says, ‘Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails,’” Southern said. “God’s got a plan. It may not line up with what you think you want, so you have to find a way to deal with those disappointments.”

Southern’s final point of emphasis revolved around the death of his mother in 2006 when she was just 57 and he was 32. Eight months after her passing, Southern was named head football coach at Surry Central.

“I struggled with that a lot in the beginning because my mom knew how important coaching was to me,” Southern said. “She passed away before seeing me be a head coach, but as I grew through the years, what I really came to realize was mom got to see every game I ever coached. That was a little bit of intrinsic motivation.

Hiatt and Joyce will play at Division I schools in the fall.

In closing, Southern encouraged those in attendance to be a positive influence no matter which avenue they pursue. Making a positive impact on just two people can go a long way if those people then influence two more people, and so on.

“Go and be great,” he said.



Serena Bowman reads off the accomplishments of the Best of Preps Male Athlete of the Year, Jericho Edwards.

PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

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PREMIER STUDENT-
ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Charlie
PELKEY

Elkin High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Charlie Pelkey, left, receives the Best of Preps Premier Student-Athlete Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Elkin's Charlie Pelkey (5) finishes at the rim with his left hand.

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Charlie was voted conference player of the year in two sports and helped lead Elkin to the fourth round of the state playoffs in both.

Charlie earned all-state honors in soccer and was even a candidate for the all mid-Atlantic squad. He competed in the Triad All-Star Classic and was selected to play in the North Carolina East-West All-Star game.

Charlie either scored or assisted in all 26 matches his senior season, finishing the season with 36 goals and 52 assists. He tied



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Elkin's Charlie Pelkey (11) splits a pair of Community School of Davidson midfielders.

for first in the nation in assists and had the third-most assists in a single-season in state history. In terms of points, which factor in both goals and assists, his 124 points ranked No. 4 in the state and No. 25 in the nation.

In the winter, Charlie was a scoring machine for Elkin's basketball team. He averaged 21.6 points per game while shooting 54% from the field and 37% on 3-pointers. He finished second in the 2A classification and No. 32 in the state in scoring. He scored at least 20 points in 16 games and at least 30 points in five games, helping him score his 1,000th career point this year.

Charlie made just as big of an impact off the field as he did on it. He learned Spanish, becoming fluent in less than three years, became a Certified Nursing Assistant and works as a CNA Intern and medical translator at Hugh Chatham Health Urgent Care. He has volunteered and raised money for Hands for Hearts, the Ronald McDonald House and participated in book drives for kids in Guatemala. He also volunteers with Yadkin Senior Living.

Charlie is part of the National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society, HOSA Club, Beta Club, Trailblazer Club and Student Council. He received an AP Scholar Award, Beta Club Service Award, and was a finalist for the JA Campbell Scholarship and Levine Scholarship. He has a 4.682 GPA and will attend Campbell University in the fall.

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MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jericho EDWARDS

Elkin High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Jericho Edwards, left, receives the Best of Preps Male Athlete of the Year Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.

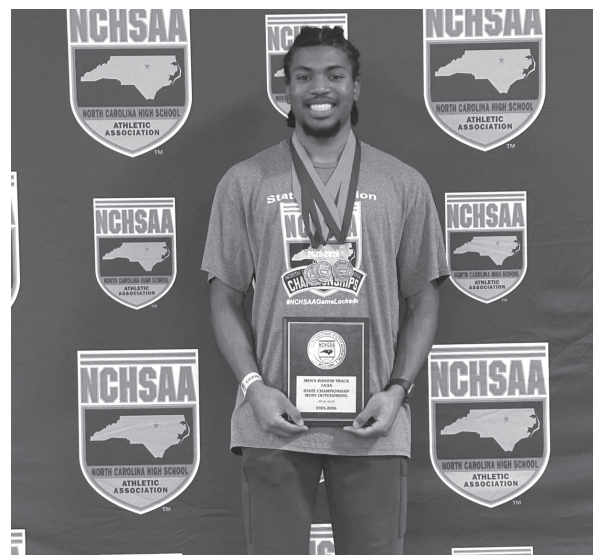


PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Elkin's Jericho Edwards is named the Most Outstanding Performer of the 1A/2A State Championship Indoor Track meet.

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Jericho Edwards left a trail of fire behind him everywhere he went during his senior year at Elkin. The track star was a two-spot conference male athlete of the year that also found success at the regional and state levels.

In indoor track, Jericho won conference championships in the 55 meters, 300 meters, 500 meters and 4-by-400-meter relay, and set new conference records in all four. He went on to win the 1A/2A State Championship in the 500-meter run and set a new state record in the process, finishing the race in 1 minute and 4.65 seconds. He added two state runner-up finishes in the 55 and the 300, as well as a seventh-place finish in the 4 by 400 relay, and was voted the Most Outstanding Performer of the 1A/2A Championship Meet.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Jericho Edwards shows off his medals at the outdoor track state championship meet.

Jericho added four more conference titles in outdoor track, winning the 100, 200, 400 and 4 by 400 relay. He medaled in all four events at the outdoor regional championship, including regional titles in the 100 and 200-meter dashes, then captured the 200-meters state championship with a time of 21.95 seconds. He finished state runner-up in the 400, falling just 0.02 seconds of the top spot, and finished third in the 100, where he was just 0.05 seconds out of the top spot. Jericho was also part of Elkin's 4x400-meter relay team that won a bronze medal.

Jericho graduates with 10 school records and eight conference records. During his career, he won 26 individual conference titles, 31 conference medals, 13 regional medals and 12 state medals.

He will be attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Jericho Edwards crosses the finish line to win the 200-meter dash state title.

SPONSORED BY: **HUGH CHATHAM HEALTH ORTHOPEDICS**

FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Maggy SECHRIST

East Surry High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Maggy Sechrist, right, receives the Best of Preps Female Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY JR WILLOUGHBY PHOTOGRAPHY

Maggy Sechrist shoots a jump shot in the 3A State Championship game.

Cory Smith

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Maggy was Ms. Reliable on East Surry's volleyball and basketball teams. She was also known as Ms. 1,000 as she recorded her 1,000th career kill and 1,000th career dig in volleyball, then scored her 1,000th career point in basketball a few months later. She was voted conference player of the year in both sports and led both to conference championships and beyond.

Maggy earned all-state and all-region honors in volleyball as an outside hitter. She finished No. 10 in the state with 481 kills, averaging more than 20 per match, and was No. 20 in the state with 460 digs. The first week of September, she was named the Female Athlete of the Week for the 336 area code by HighSchoolOT. She led East Surry to its fifth-consecutive

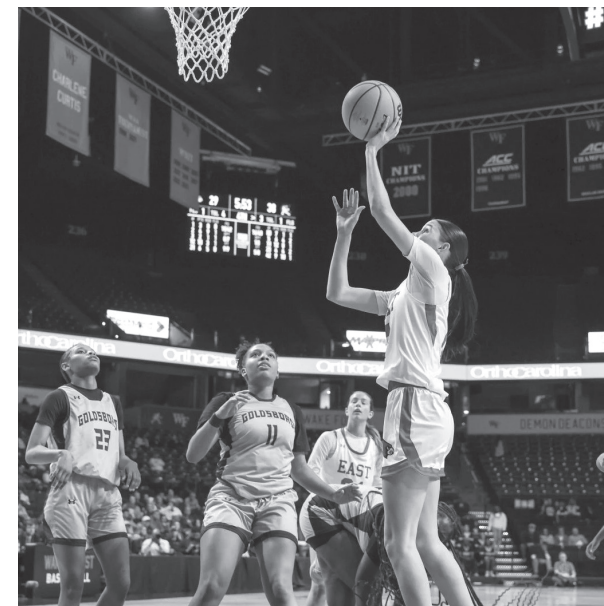


PHOTO BY JR WILLOUGHBY PHOTOGRAPHY

Maggy Sechrist knocks down a layup in the 3A State Championship game.

conference title and its 12th-consecutive Sweet 16 appearance.

In the winter, Maggy earned all-district honors as she helped lead East Surry to its first conference title in five years. The Cardinals won 18-consecutive regular season games, then went on to win the 3A West Regional Championship and finish 3A State Runner-up with a 25-4 record. Twenty-four of the team's 25 wins came by at least 10 points.

Maggy led East Surry in all five major statistical categories, averaging 11.3 points, 8.1 rebounds, 4.8 assists, 4.2 steals and 0.8 blocks. She had nine double-doubles, one triple-double, and had 21 games with double-digits in at least one of the five major categories.

Maggy will continue her volleyball career at The University of Virginia's College at Wise.



PHOTO BY FRANKIE ANDREWS | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Maggy Sechrist floats an attack over the net in a playoff match against Draughn.

SPONSORED BY: **HUGH CHATHAM HEALTH ORTHOPEDICS**

SANDY HURLEY AWARD

Bailey STANLEY

East Wilkes High School

Cory Smith

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The Sandy Hurley Award was introduced in 2025 in honor of the longtime publisher of the Mount Airy Regional Media Group. The award recognizes a student-athlete who personifies hard work, determination and a relentless pursuit of greatness despite facing significant adversity.

Bailey Stanley embodies everything the Sandy Hurley Award stands for. She's a fierce competitor who earned all-conference honors in volleyball, basketball and track while also thriving on the dance team and in theatre. She is heavily involved at school as a member of HOSA, Beta Club and Honors Chorus, is Student Body President and president of the national honor society, and she remains active in her community — driven to give back in any way she can.

Bailey unquestionably has the heart of a champion, and it was Atrium Health's Heart of a Champion program that helped shape her into the person she is today.

Before her junior year, Bailey received a free physical through the program. In addition to the standard tests required for high school athletes, Bailey underwent an electrocardiogram to evaluate the electrical activity of her heart. The test revealed that she had been living with Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, a congenital heart condition that can cause irregular or rapid heart rhythms. In severe cases, the condition may lead to cardiac arrest.

Bailey underwent surgery just one week after receiving the diagnosis. She didn't stay down for long, though. Only a few days after her surgery, she insisted on joining her team at NC State's women's basketball camp. She returned

to the court and was All Conference in volleyball and basketball, and helped the Cardinals win a conference championship in basketball her senior year. She was also an all-region track athlete during her junior year — all while being dually enrolled at Wilkes Community College.

Bailey is now an advocate for the Heart of a Champion program and has worked to raise awareness about her condition. Her diagnosis and treatment inspired her to pursue a career in the medical field. She has since interned with Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital, shadowed a veterinarian at State Road Animal Hospital and explored healthcare careers at Camp Med.

Bailey will attend Duke University on a full ride through the Trinity Scholars Program. She plans to major in neuroscience and pursue a career as a pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Bailey Stanley is recognized at a Wake Forest men's basketball game in February 2025. Stanley was diagnosed with Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome thanks to a screening at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist's Heart of a Champion Day. Now, she's an advocate for Heart of a Champion Day and raises awareness of her condition.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Bailey Stanley, left, receives the Best of Preps Sandy Hurley Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Bailey Stanley knocks down a free throw in a playoff victory over Starmount.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR AREA ATHLETES

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Bailey Stanley of
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PHOTO BY JIMMY KUHN | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
East Wilkes' Bailey Stanley (13) elevates for an attack in a 2024 match at Mount Airy.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH
East Surry's Audrey Hiatt hits a line drive against Surry Central.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH
Elkin's Charlie Pelkey scores a layup against Mount Airy.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH
Surry Central's Jackson Wilmoth pitches in a playoff game against Pine Lake Prep.



PHOTO BY JOI OGLE
Carroll County's Wyatt Ogle competes in the 100-yard freestyle.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY
South Stokes' Olivia Amos sets in a 2025 home match.



COURTESY PHOTO
West Stokes' Bryan Morrison crosses the finish line to win the 1,600-meter run 4A State Championship.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MULLINS
West Stokes' Elizabeth Grabs races her way to a 4A Regional Championship.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY
North Stokes' Taylor James scored 42 goals on the season, including five hat tricks.

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

Cody COOK

Starmount High School

Robert Money

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Cody Cook has devoted eight years to Starmount athletics – five as Assistant Athletic Director and the past three as Athletic Director – and his impact has been nothing short of transformational.

His influence

on the field speaks for itself. This year alone, the football team won the conference championship and advanced to the state semi-finals, the softball team reached the fourth round of the playoffs, multiple runners qualified for the state championships, and a discus thrower claimed a state title. These aren't isolated successes; they reflect a program-wide culture of excellence that Coach Cook has built from the ground up.

Off the field, his contributions are equally impressive. He helped plan and oversee the construction of a new auxiliary gym, football stadium, and track, and spearheaded a fundraising campaign that generated over \$300,000 for a new weight room. He also launched a community reading program that sends Starmount's in-season athletes into feeder elementary schools each month – a reflection of his belief that being a great athlete means being a great leader, too.

All of this has run parallel to a remarkable coaching career. Over the past decade, Coach Cook has also served as Starmount's head men's soccer coach, winning five conference championships and earning Conference Coach of the Year honors four times and Regional Coach of the Year once.

Coach Cook has made Starmount a better place to compete, to learn, and to grow – and his athletes, students, and community are better for it.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Cody Cook, right, receives the Best of Preps Athletic Director of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Starmount Athletic Director Cody Cook speaks at the Rams' Awards Ceremony in 2025.

SPONSORED BY: **MOUNT AIRY MEDIA GROUP**

EXTRA MILE COACH OF THE YEAR

Darrin HAYWOOD

East Surry High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Darrin Haywood, right, receives the Extra Mile Coach of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CAMMEL HURSE

East Surry's Darrin Haywood, right, is presented the Homer Thompson Award by NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker at the 2025 NCHSAA Awards Ceremony.

Cory Smith

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Coach Haywood has dedicated nearly 30 years to education based athletics and has been a positive influence in the classroom, on the wrestling mat and on the golf course. He has more than 300 dual team wrestling wins across the men's and women's programs and three state champions. His men's golf teams have won three state titles, including this year, and two individual titles. He's also led multiple regional championships teams with both the men's and women's golf programs.

In 2025, Coach Haywood won the NCHSAA Home Thompson Award that recognized coaches who lead with character, respect and integrity.

One of his nominations for the Extra Mile Coach Award stated: "Darrin

Haywood is one of the best role models and mentors for young athletes that I've ever known. Whether it's in the classroom, on the golf course, wrestling mat, or in the community, he does things the right way and conducts himself with the utmost integrity. The student athletes from East Surry and the Pilot Mountain area are blessed that they have had him as a coach and mentor."

Another nomination stated: "I've had the privilege of knowing Coach Haywood for over 25 years. Over this time I have witnessed how he holds himself and his athletes to a higher standard. He is always willing to help, give advice, or just listen even if it is someone from another team or program. His successes as a coach come from his high moral character which is his greatest asset. Coach Haywood is an excellent coach, a great man, and an even better friend."

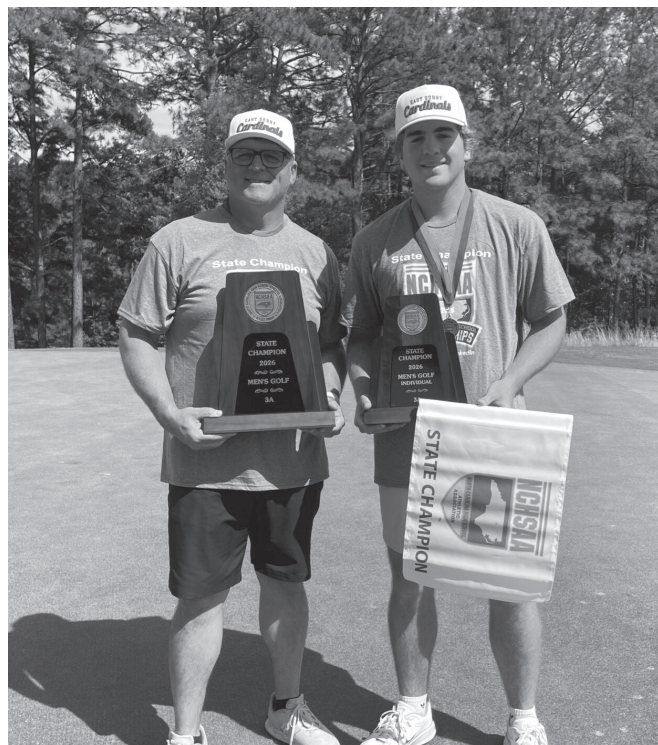


PHOTO BY CARDINAL ATHLETICS

East Surry coach Darrin Haywood, left, and senior Pennson Badgett show off the 3A State Championship team and individual trophies.

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**MEN'S COMEBACK
PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

DJ **JOYCE** *Mount Airy High School*



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

DJ Joyce, right, receives the Best of Preps Male Comeback Player of the Year Award from the Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

DJ Joyce (22) leads an effort to take down a North Surry running back.

Cory Smith

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DJ had one of the greatest seasons in the history of Mount Airy football as a junior. He set the single-season sack record of 19.5, breaking the previous record that he set as a sophomore, and led a defense that allowed just nine points per game. He also served as Mount Airy's No. 2 running back, averaging more than 50 yards per game and scoring 13 touchdowns.

Less than a month after his junior season ended, DJ tore his ACL playing basketball. When he started his road to recovery, he wasn't sure if he'd be back for the start of football season or how his knee would feel when he returned to the field. Opposing players quickly learned the answer when DJ suited up week one and had six tackles for a loss and two sacks.

DJ earned conference defensive player of the year honors for a second-consecutive year and helped Mount Airy win its fifth-consecutive conference title. He had 77 tackles, 37 tackles for a loss and 12.5 sacks. He broke another Mount Airy school record by finishing with 45.5 career sacks.

DJ will continue his football career at North Carolina A&T State University.



PHOTO BY JR WILLOUGHBY PHOTOGRAPHY

Mount Airy's DJ Joyce (22) brings Shelby's Jonas Woods (26) down behind the line of scrimmage.

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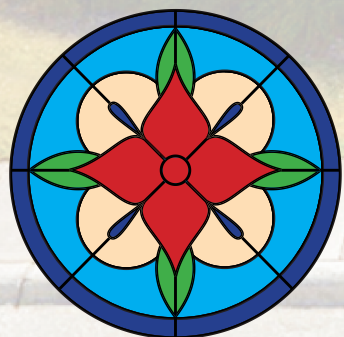
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**Congratulations to these East Surry High School
2026 Best of Preps High School Sports Athlete Winners!**

**Men's Golf Athlete of the Year
Pennson Badgett**

**Comeback Player of the Year -Female
Audrey Hiatt**

**Extra Mile Coach of the Year Award
Darrin Haywood**



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WOMEN'S COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Audrey

East Surry High School

HIATT



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS



PHOTO BY JR WILLOUGHBY PHOTOGRAPHY

Audrey Hiatt slides across home plate to score one of East Surry's 14 runs against Mount Airy.

Audrey Hiatt, right, receives the Best of Preps Female Comeback Player of the Year Award from the Stokes News' Bob Ward.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Audrey Hiatt made a strong impact on the softball field her first two years of high school. She led North Surry in hits and RBIs as a freshman, then moved to East Surry the following year and led the Cardinals in both categories. She also established herself as a force in the middle infield.

In the fall before her junior season, Audrey tore her ACL and meniscus. She missed her entire junior season and was sidelined for seven months. She said the recovery process taught her a lot about determination

and how to work past huge setbacks in life.

Audrey came back better than ever for her senior campaign and was named Co-Conference Player of the Year. She posted career highs across the board with a .515 batting average, 34 hits, 17 home runs and 52 RBIs. She broke East Surry's single-season record for home runs and RBIs, and tied the school record for career home runs. She is just the 11th player in state history to hit at least 17 home runs in a season.

Audrey will continue her softball career at Radford University.



PHOTO BY JEFF LINVILLE | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

East Surry's Audrey Hiatt hits a home run against Surry Central to set a new single-season school record.

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MEN'S COMMUNITY SERVICE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

David SCHUYLER

North Surry High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

David Schuyler, right, receives the Best of Preps Community Service Award from the Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY JR WILLOUGHBY PHOTOGRAPHY

North Surry quarterback David Schuyler (8) calls his own number for a rush.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Having David Schuyler on your team was like having an extra coach on the field. He leads with both his words and his actions, and that goes for sports and life in general.

David was a three-sport varsity athlete in football, basketball and baseball. He was an all-conference defensive back/receiver/whatever position he was asked to play that helped lead North Surry to a conference championship. He won three consecutive conference titles with the men's basketball program and was a multi-year starter on the baseball team.

David tore his ACL at the end of football season but stayed involved in sports. He helped coach basketball and was instrumental in raising the 55 thousand dollars for the new projection system in Ron King Gymnasium. He also coached baseball for the Beulah Royals.

David is North Student Body President and president of the National Honor Society. He helped organize the first ever HoundFest by organizing food trucks, vendors and live music. He led the organization of the Fall Carnival, Powerpuff game and senior sunset. He's also part of Interact Club and a volunteer for YoungLife.

David will graduate Summa Cum Laude and attend Western Carolina University to study engineering.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

David Schuyler takes off for third base in a 2025 home game.

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Sandra Matthews
Agent

Congratulations to these 2026 Best of Preps High School Sports Athlete Winners!

Football Athlete of the Year- Offensive
Taeshon Martin- Mount Airy High School

Comeback Player of the Year- Male
DJ Joyce- Mount Airy High School

Community Service Award- Male
David Schuyler- North Surry High School

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WOMEN'S COMMUNITY SERVICE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Callie HARRIS

Carroll County High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Callie Harris, right, receives the Best of Preps Community Service Award from Jerry Carter of OneOfUs.Care.



PHOTO BY CAVALIER ATHLETICS

Callie Harris is recognized for her 1,000th career dig.

Ryan McCafferty

ryan.mccafferty@thecarrollnews.com

Callie Harris is a three-sport star from Carroll County High School who has excelled in volleyball, basketball, and soccer. More importantly, she is an outstanding community member who embodies what it means to be a true leader both on and off the field.

On the volleyball court, Callie has accumulated more than 1,000 digs across her high school career, ranking her second in program history. On the soccer pitch, she is one of three girls in Carroll County history with at least 40 goals and assists, ranking top five all-time in both categories. During her senior year, she has been responsible for 72 percent of her team's offense.

In the offseason, Callie serves as a camp coach for all three sports she participates in. She has been an assistant coach in local youth leagues, and is a certified referee with the United States Soccer Federation. She sings in her school chorus as well as with her church, and has also participated in Safe Halloween events with the town of Hillsville, exemplifying her commitment toward making a difference in her local community.

Callie will attend Ferrum College to play volleyball next fall. She intends to pursue a career in education.



PHOTO BY CAVALIER ATHLETICS

Callie Harris signs her letter of intent to play volleyball at Ferrum College.

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**Community Service
Award Female**

Callie "Half Pint" Harris
Carroll County
High School



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**FOOTBALL - OFFENSE
ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

Taeshon
MARTIN

Mount Airy High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Taeshon Martin, right, receives the Best of Preps Football (Offense) Athlete of the Year Award from the Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Taeshon Martin breaks free for a 73-yard touchdown run against North Surry.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Taeshon built an incredible legacy at Mount Airy High School.

He ranks first in school history and second in Surry County history with 6,172 career rushing yards. He is one of only 40 players in state history to run for more than 6,000 yards and one of 20 with at least 92 rushing touchdowns. Taeshon ran for at least 100 yards in 30 games and had seven games with at least 200 yards.

As a senior, he averaged more than 160 rushing yards per game and scored 27 touchdowns. He led Mount Airy to its fifth-consecutive conference championship and was named conference offensive player of the year for the second time.

Taeshon will continue his football career at Campbell University.

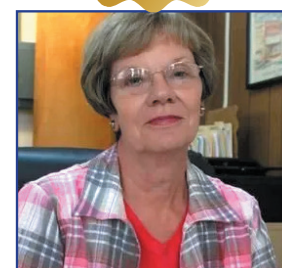


PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Taeshon Martin continued to climb Mount Airy's all-time rushing list with a 200-yard performance against East Surry.

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FOOTBALL - DEFENSE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Keyvon PROBST

Starmount High School

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Keyvon Propst established himself as one of the premier defenders in North Carolina's 2A classification during a dominant junior season for the Starmount Rams. The linebacker recorded 147 total tackles — ranking 2nd in the 2A and 27th across all classifications statewide — while adding 28 tackles for loss (2nd in 2A, 3rd overall in North Carolina), two interceptions, and two fumble recoveries.

Keyvon anchored a Rams defense that surrendered just 9.7 points per game and posted six shutouts, ranking 5th among all classifications statewide. His performance helped propel Starmount to the Mountain Valley Conference Championship and an 11-3 record, with a run to the NCHSAA 2A Western Finals, where the Rams finished as 2A West runners-up.

Recognized for his impact on both sides of the ball, Keyvon earned All-Conference honors on offense and defense and was named the 2025 Mountain Valley Conference Defensive Player of the Year.

PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Keyvon Propst, middle, receives the Defensive Football Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward, left, and The Tribune's Holly Lamm, right.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Starmount's Keyvon Propst (0) brings Mitchell County's running back down behind the line of scrimmage.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

The Rams' Keyvon Propst ranked 2nd in the 2A and 27th among all classifications with 147 total tackles during the 2025 season.

SPONSORED BY: **MOUNT AIRY MEDIA GROUP**

MEN'S BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Brady CLARK

South Stokes High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Brady Clark, right, receives the Men's Basketball Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

Brady Clark led the Sauras with nearly 20 points a game during his senior season.

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Brady Clark established himself as one of the most decorated players in South Stokes basketball history during his four years on varsity. A back-to-back conference Player of the Year, Brady was a cornerstone of a program that captured four consecutive conference championships, three conference tournament championships, four regional appearances, and two regional finals appearances – amassing an impressive 105 wins during his tenure.

Brady's individual accolades are equally remarkable. A three-time all-conference and three-time all-county selection, he earned First Team All-District honors in both his junior and senior seasons before being named the 2024-25 Best of Prep Basketball Player of the Year. He capped his senior campaign by reaching the 1,000-point milestone, a testament to his consistency and impact on the court.

Perhaps the most compelling chapter of Brady's story is his resilience. After suffering his second ACL tear, he returned to earn the 2023-24 Comeback Player of the Year award – a reflection of the determination and work ethic that defined his career from start to finish. Brady will continue his basketball career at Forsyth Technical Community College.

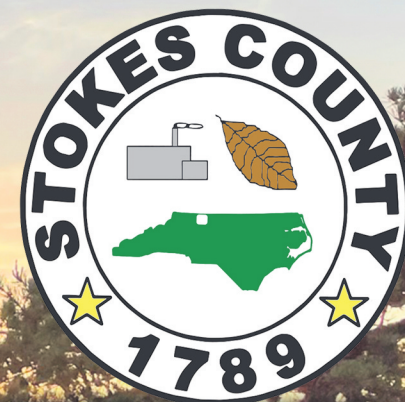


PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

South Stokes' Brady Clark drives the middle of the lane against a Surry Central player.

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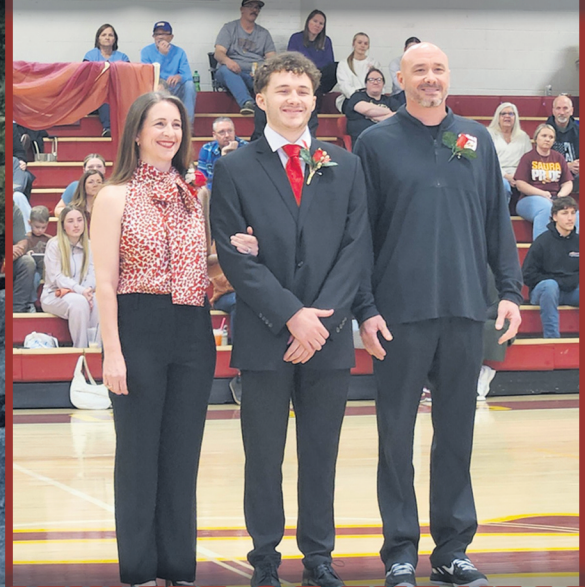
BRADY CLARK



OLIVIA AMOS

MEN'S BASKETBALL

VOLLEYBALL



ATHLETE OF THE YEAR!



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ATHLETE OF THE YEAR!

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VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Olivia AMOS

South Stokes High School

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Olivia Amos closed out her senior season as one of the most accomplished volleyball players in South Stokes history. A dominant presence on the court, she earned a remarkable collection of honors in her final campaign – Conference Player of the Year, All-Tournament Team, All-County, All-Region, and All-State.

Olivia was a driving force behind back-to-back conference and conference tournament championships for the Sauras. Across her junior and senior seasons combined, South Stokes posted a 39-13 overall record and went 24-2 in conference play, advancing to the third round of the state playoffs both years.

Her senior season numbers were impressive across the board: 167 kills, 129 aces, 35 blocks, 333 digs, and 691 assists. She finished her career with 477 kills, 263 aces, 150 blocks, 1,162 digs, and 1,936 assists – a testament to her versatility and consistency as both a playmaker and defender.

Olivia will carry her career to the next level at the University of Virginia's College at Wise.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Olivia Amos, right, receives the Volleyball Athlete of the Year Awards from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

Olivia Amos signs to play volleyball at UVA-Wise.

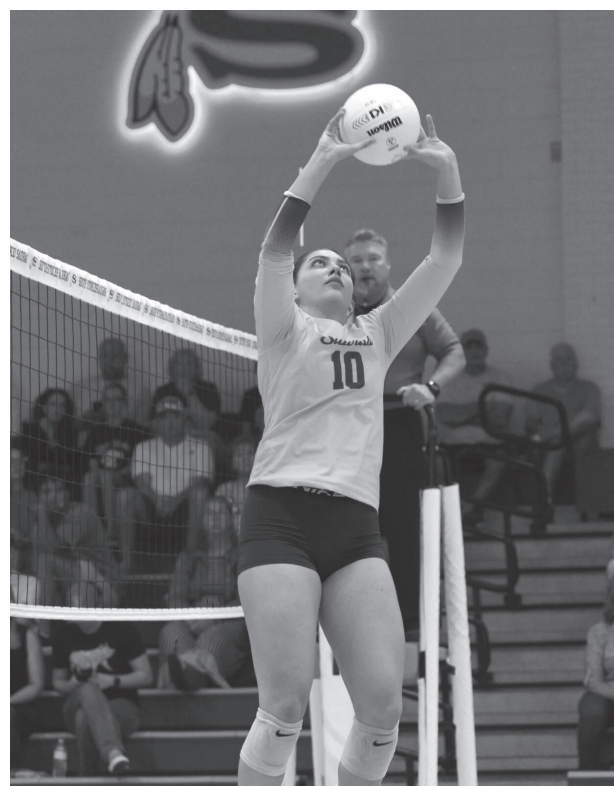


PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

Olivia Amos will leave South Stokes with as the career assist leader with 1,936 assist.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

The Sauras' Olivia Amos recorded 129 aces during her senior season and finished her career with 263.

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MEN'S SWIMMING ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Wyatt OGLE

Carroll County High School

Ryan McCafferty

ryan.mccafferty@thecarrollnews.com

Carroll County senior Wyatt Ogle is one of the premier high school swimmers in Southwest Virginia, with his achievements highlighted by his recognition as the Region 3D Male Swimmer of the Year this past winter.

At the Region 3D Championship, Wyatt won first place honors in the 50-yard freestyle and 100-yard freestyle, while also contributing to a victory in the Boys 200 Medley Relay and a second-place finish in the 200 Free Relay. He completed his senior season with 15 total wins across all of his team and individual events.

Additionally, Wyatt qualified for the VHSL Class 3 State Championship as an individual, where he placed fourth in the 50-yard freestyle and eighth in the 100-yard freestyle. His improvement from his freshman year to his senior year highlights a dedicated work ethic and commitment to excellence. He will continue to swim at the collegiate level, where he will attend Roanoke College.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Wyatt Ogle, right, receives the Best of Preps Men's Swimming Award from Jerry Carter of OneOfUs.Care.

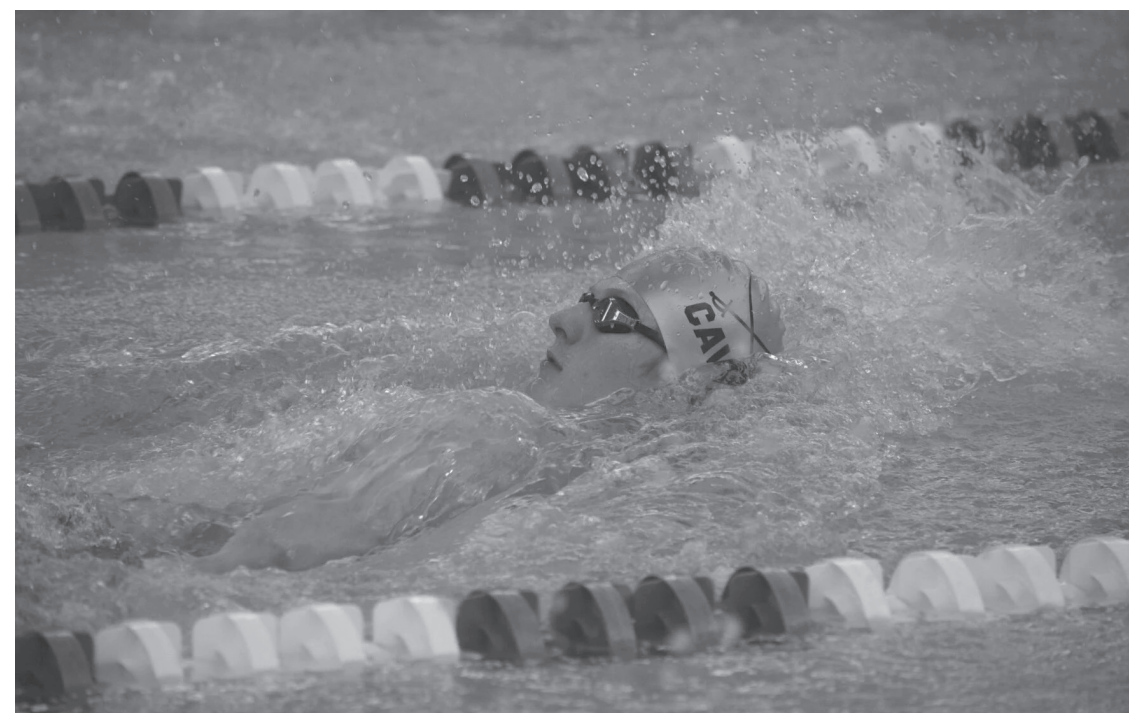


PHOTO BY JOI OGLE

Wyatt Ogle competes in the backstroke portion of the 200-yard individual medley.



PHOTO BY CAVALIER ATHLETICS

Wyatt Ogle receives the Region 3D Swimmer of the Year Trophy.

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**Congratulations to Wyatt Ogle and
his family for being named
The 2026 Best of Preps Male Swimming
Athlete of the Year.**

*Thank you for everything you did and the manner
that you did it during your time on The Hill.*



**Men's Swimming Athlete
of the Year**

Wyatt Ogle
Carroll County High School



WOMEN'S BASKETBALL ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Avarie

East Wilkes High School

MARTIN

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Avarie was a crucial part of East Wilkes' dominant basketball season. She averaged 16.6 points, 6.5 rebounds and 2.2 assists while shooting better than 44% from the field and 75% from the free throw line. She had three double-doubles and six games with at least 20 points.

After losing the season opener, Avarie and the Cardinals went on a 24-game winning streak that included 19 wins by double figures. East Wilkes went 14-0 in conference play, and Avarie was voted conference player of the year.

East Wilkes reached the 2A West Regional Semifinals.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Avarie Martin, left, receives the Best of Preps Women's Basketball Athlete of the Year Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Avarie Martin (24) fades to shoot a jump shot over Surry Central's Sierra Carpenter.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Avarie Martin (24) shoots over Starmount's Faith Strickland (10) and Carley Money (11).

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Congratulations to local State Championship Teams

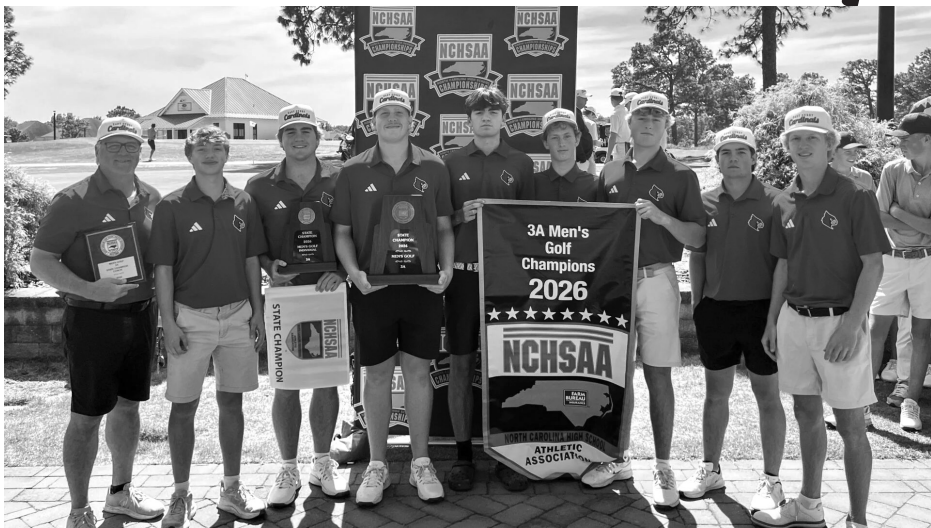


PHOTO BY CARDINAL ATHLETICS

East Surry's Men's Golf team is presented the 2026 NCHSAA 3A State Championship Banner and Trophy at Longleaf Golf & Family Club.



PHOTO BY BUCKIN' ELK ATHLETICS

The Elkin Men's Tennis team defeated Research Triangle Park 5-4 to win the 1A/2A State Championship — Elkin's fourth-consecutive dual team title.

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MEN'S INDOOR TRACK ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jack HARDY

Surry Central High School

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Jack exploded onto the scene his sophomore year. He saw success in all three running sports, but had his best season in the winter.

Jack won two Northwest Conference Championships in the 4 by 400 and 4 by 800 meter relays. He placed second in the 1,000 meter run, though he finished behind a runner from a higher division. Jack went on to win the 3A 1,000 meter State Championship in two minutes and 41 seconds, becoming Surry Central's first men's indoor track state champion in seven years. He also finished state runner-up in the 4 by 400.

Jack also won hardware in cross country and outdoor track. In the fall, he helped lead the Golden Eagles to a conference championship, regional championship and state runner-up finish, where he had his team's top 5K time of 18 minutes.

In the spring, Jack finished state runner-up in the 800-meter run and earned a bronze medal with the Eagles' 4x800 relay team.



PHOTO BY BARBI MANCHESTER | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Surry Central's Jack Hardy pushes through the final stretch of the 800-meter run at the 3A Outdoor Track State Championship meet.



PHOTO BY BARBI MANCHESTER | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Surry Central's Jack Hardy, middle, receives his gold medal for winning the 3A 1,000-meter run State Championship. Hardy is pictured here alongside coaches Tanner Martin, left, and Kevin Pack.

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MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Mason

Elkin High School

DAY



PHOTO BY BNC MILESPLIT

Mason Day, front, maintains his pace at the 2A State Championship.



PHOTO BY NC MILESPLIT

Mason Day pushes through the final stretch of the 5,000-meter run at the 2A State Championship.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Mason Day was a distance running machine for Elkin.

This year in cross country, Mason won conference runner of the year by running a 5K in just 16 minutes and 33 seconds. He went on to win the 2A West Regional Championship and earned all-state honors by placing 10th at the state championship. In eight races his senior year, Mason finished first in six.

He was a three-time conference runner of the year, a three-time conference champion and a three-time state qualifier.

Mason went on to win three indoor track conference titles his senior year and finished state runner-up in the 1,600 meters and 3,200 meters. In the spring, he won three more conference titles and two more state medals, winning bronze in the 1,600 and the 4 by 400-meter relay.

Mason graduates with six school records across the three sports.



PHOTO BY BNC MILESPLIT

Elkin's Mason Day, right, and Ella Kleinheksel are pictured with their medals at the 1A/2A Indoor Track State Championship.

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WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Ryley BOWLES

West Stokes High School

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Ryley Bowles saved her best for last. The West Stokes senior closed out her career in remarkable fashion, earning All-State honors with a ninth-place finish at the 2A State Championships and helping the Wildcats to a third-place team finish – the program's strongest state performance of her tenure.

Ryley capped the season by sweeping her third consecutive set of individual honors: Conference Runner of the Year, All-Regional, and Best of Prep Female Cross Country Runner of the Year. She also won the 2A Midwest Regional individual title and played a central role in leading West Stokes to a regional team championship.

Her impact extended well beyond a single season. Over four years, Ryley was the driving force behind a program that won four straight conference championships and made steady progress on the regional stage – climbing from fourth place in 2023 to third in 2024 before breaking through with a regional title in 2025.

She leaves West Stokes as one of the most decorated runners in program history.

PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Ryley Bowles, right, receives the Best of Preps Women's Cross Country Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.

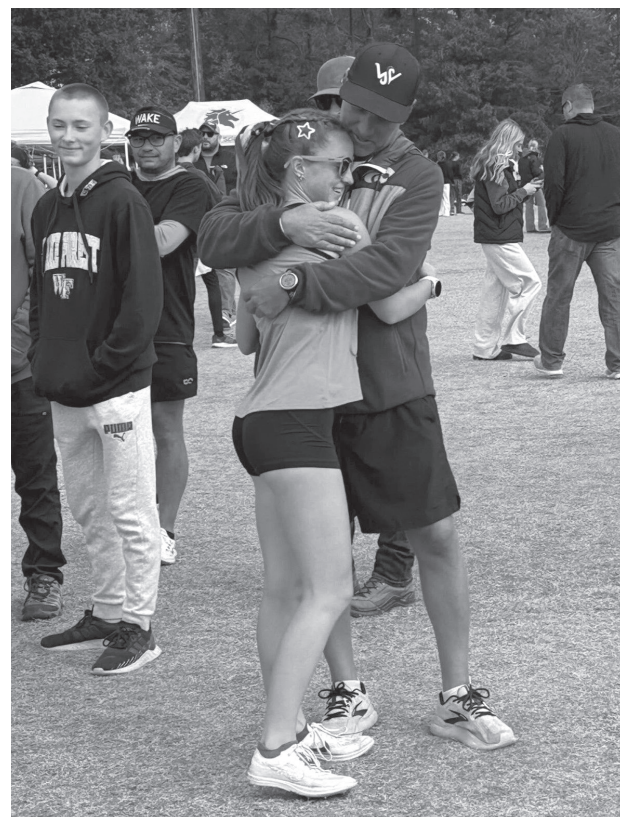


PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

Ryley Bowles, left, embraces coach Benji Knox at the 4A regional championship.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

The Wildcats' Ryley Bowles placed ninth in the NCHSAA 4A State Cross Country Championship.

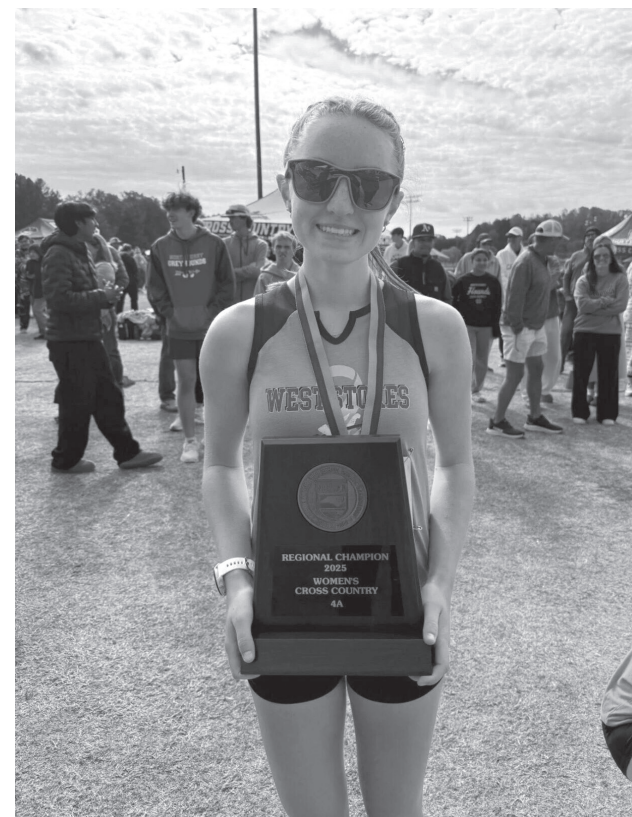


PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

West Stokes' Ryley Bowles holds the team Regional Championship.

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RYLEY BOWLES



ELIZABETH GRABS



REESE HALL



RYLEE TEDDER



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MEN'S OUTDOOR TRACK ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Bryan MORRISON

West Stokes High School

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

West Stokes junior Bryan Morrison put together one of the most accomplished distance-running seasons in the region, capping it with 4A State Championships in both the 1600-meter and 3200-meter runs.

Bryan's dominance was on full display throughout the postseason. At the conference championships, he swept all three distance events – the 800, 1600, and 3200 – earning Conference Runner of the Year honors. He carried that momentum into the 4A Central Regional Championships, where he claimed titles in both the 1600 and 3200.

Beyond his individual accolades, Bryan played a key role in leading the Wildcats to back-to-back conference championships, a 4th-place finish at regionals, and a 7th-place finish at the state meet. He was recognized for his contributions with All-Region and All-State honors.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Bryan Morrison, right, receives the Men's Outdoor Track Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

West Stokes' Bryan Morrison captured both the 1600 meter and 3200 meter 4A State Championships.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MULLINS

The Wildcats' Bryan Morrison runs the mile during a home meet late in the season.

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WOMEN'S SWIMMING ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Elizabeth GRABS

West Stokes High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Elizabeth Grabs, right, receives the Female Swimming Athlete of the Year from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MULLINS

West Stokes' Elizabeth Grabs competes at the Northwest 3A/4A Conference Championship.

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Elizabeth Grabs capped an outstanding season by earning Conference Female Swimmer of the Year honors for West Stokes. At the conference championship meet, she swept individual gold in both the 200-yard individual medley and the 100-yard breaststroke, while also contributing silver medals as a member of both the 200-yard and 400-yard freestyle relay teams – helping the Wildcats finish as conference runners-up.

Her strong performance carried into the postseason, where she claimed Regional Championships in both the 200 IM and the 100 breaststroke, and qualified for the 4A State Championship in both individual events as well as on the 200-yard and 400-yard freestyle relay teams.

On the sport's biggest stage, Elizabeth continued to compete at an elite level, earning a silver medal in the 100-yard breaststroke and finishing fourth in the 200-yard individual medley.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MULLINS

The Wildcats' Elizabeth Grabs placed second in the 100-yard breaststroke at the NCHSAA 4A State Championships.

SPONSORED BY: **STOKES COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP**

SOFTBALL ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Reese HALL

West Stokes High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Reese Hall, right, receives the Softball Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

West Stokes' Reese Hall rips a single during the championship game against Forbush.

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Senior Reese Hall capped a standout high school career by earning co-conference Player of the Year honors this season. The shortstop was a cornerstone of three consecutive conference and conference tournament championships, going a remarkable 33-1 in conference play over that stretch.

Setting the tone at the top of the lineup as the Wildcats' leadoff hitter for the past two seasons, Reese was a consistent threat at the plate. She batted .459 with a .512 on-base percentage in conference play, adding 22 RBIs, 26 runs scored, 4 doubles, 10 walks, and 15 stolen bases. She finished just five hits shy of 100 for her career. She etched her name throughout the program's record books — ranking top 10 in games played, career starts, at-bats, walks, sacrifice flies, and stolen base percentage, while placing 5th all-time in stolen bases and first in fielding assists. Her excellence was recognized at every level, earning all-conference, all-county, and all-tournament. She is an all-district and all-state nominee after being selected for both in 2025.

Reese will continue her softball career at Surry Community College.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

The Wildcats' Reese Hall slides past North Surry's Addison Hawks.

SPONSORED BY: **STOKES COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP**

SOFTBALL PITCHER OF THE YEAR

Rylee TEDDER

West Stokes High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Rylee Tedder, right, received the Softball Pitcher of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MULLINS

Rylee Tedder completed her sophomore season with an .742 ERA.

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Rylee Tedder is coming off one of the best pitching seasons in West Stokes Wildcats softball history. The sophomore went 18-3 with a 0.742 ERA this season, striking out 193 batters while walking just 15 and holding opponents to a .174 batting average across 151 innings. She also reached a major milestone this season, recording the 300th strikeout of her career.

On top of her on-field success, Rylee earned Conference Pitcher of the Year honors for the second consecutive season and was selected the conference tournament MVP. She is an all-district and all-state nominee after earning both in 2025.

Rylee has been a key part of back-to-back conference and conference tournament championships for the Wildcats, who have reached the fourth round of the state playoffs in each of the last two seasons.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

West Stokes' Rylee Tedder pitches against during the regular season. Tedder finished 18-3 this season from the circle.

SPONSORED BY: **STOKES COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP**

BASEBALL ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jackson WILMOTH

Surry Central High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Jackson Wilmoth, right, receives the Best of Preps Baseball Player of the Year Award from the Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Jackson Wilmoth hits a line drive to bring in Surry Central's first run against Mount Airy.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Jackson was part of a one-two punch on the mound where he had a 7-3 record and threw 79 strikeouts in 55 2/3 innings pitched. He allowed 26 earned runs on 40 hits while walking 32 batters. Opposing players batting 0.190 against him.

At the plate, Jackson batted 0.366 with 30 hits and 23 RBIs.

The Golden Eagles went 21-6 and won their first playoff game since 2017, their first conference championship since 2013 and won 20 games in a season for the first time since 2010. Jackson was voted conference player of the year.

He will continue his baseball career at King University.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Surry Central's Jackson Wilmoth pitches in the third inning against East Surry.

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BASEBALL PITCHER OF THE YEAR

Dru GADDY

Surry Central High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Dru Gaddy, right, receives the Best of Preps Baseball Pitcher of the Year Award from the Mount Airy News' Nathaniel Blevins.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Surry Central's Dru Gaddy pitches in a playoff game against Madison.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Dru helped lead Surry Central to its first conference title in nine years and earned pitcher of the year honors in the league.

The southpaw junior boasted a 6-1 record on the mound with an ERA of 2.04. He finished the season No. 11 in the state with 98 strikeouts. He only allowed 19 hits and 14 earned runs in 48 innings pitched. He enters his senior season with 249 strikeouts.

Dru was also a force at the plate. He recorded 26 hits, 28 runs scored and 20 RBIs with a 0.342 batting average.

In addition to their conference championship, the Golden Eagles won their first playoff game since 2017 and won 20 games in a season for the first time since 2010.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Dru Gaddy pitches against North Surry in the Northwest 3A/4A Conference Semifinals.

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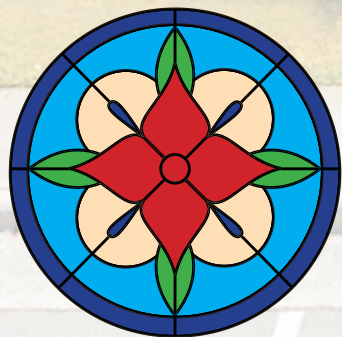
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Men's Wrestling Athlete of the Year
Andrew Meadows- Mount Airy High School

Women's Wrestling Athlete of the Year
Jenevy Olalde- Mount Airy High School

Women's Golf Athlete of the Year
Emerson Puckett- North Surry High School



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MEN'S GOLF ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Pennson BADGETT

East Surry High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Pennson Badgett, right, receives the Best of Preps Golf Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY RYAN LOCHHEAD | PGA OF AMERICA

Pennson Badgett hits his tee shot on the first hole during the final round of the 2025 Junior PGA Championship at Birck Boilermaker Golf Complex in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Pennson is the first athlete to win a Best of Preps award all four years of high school.

He is a four-time conference champion, four-time regional champion, two-time team state champion, two-time individual state champion and two-time individual state runner-up.

As a senior, Pennson set two North Carolina state records for the lowest 18-hole score and lowest 36-hole score at the state tournament. He's competed in tournaments such as the Junior PGA Championship, US Amateur Golf Championship and Junio President's Cup.

He will continue his golf career at the University of Tennessee.



PHOTO BY BARBI MANCHESTER | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Pennson Badgett tees off at Mount Airy Country Club.

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WOMEN'S GOLF ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Emerson PUCKETT

North Surry High School

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Emerson overcame the elements and a talented field of competitors to win the 4A State Championship in October. The first 18 holes of the championship match took more than five hours to complete as she competed in 40-degree weather while being battered by wind and rain.

She is just the second women's golfer in Surry County history to win a state title and the first from North Surry. In addition to her state title, Emerson led the 4A division in scoring average.

Emerson, who is only a sophomore, also won a conference title and was the conference golfer of the year for the second-consecutive season.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Emerson Puckett, right, receives the Best of Preps Golf Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

North Surry's Emerson Puckett tees off during a Sept. 2 golf match at Pilot Knob Park Country Club.



PHOTO BY GREYHOUND ATHLETICS

North Surry sophomore Emerson Puckett, left, receives the 4A State Championship trophy alongside coach Jonathan Sutphin.

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WOMEN'S WRESTLING ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jenevy OLALDE

Mount Airy High School



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Jenevy Olalde, right, receives the Best of Preps Women's Wrestling Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY TABITHA COLLINS | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Mount Airy senior Jenevy Olalde has her hand raised after winning the 1A-4A 107-pound State Championship.



PHOTO BY TABITHA COLLINS | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Jenevy Olalde, top, takes control of her championship match against East Henderson's Mia Roberson.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Jenevy is the first women's wrestler from Surry County to win a state title since the sport was sanctioned in 2023.

She went from finishing fifth as a sophomore to state runner-up as a junior before winning the 107-pound state title her senior year. She went 41-2 this year - 34-0 against girls and 7-2 against boys - and was voted conference wrestler of the year.

Jenevy had a career record of 128-15. She plans to continue wrestling at Southern Virginia University.

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MEN'S
WRESTLING
ATHLETE OF
THE YEAR

Andrew MEADOWS

Mount Airy High School



PHOTO BY TABITHA COLLINS | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Andrew Meadows, back, smiles as he pins Providence Grove's Malachi Combo in the state semifinals.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Mount Airy senior Andrew Meadows has his hand raised after winning the 3A 175-pound State Championship.

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Andrew is a multi-time All-American that capped off his high school career by winning his third individual state championship. He is just the third Surry County wrestler to win three individual state titles, and during his three championship seasons had a combined record of 145-3. He broke the Surry County career wins record by going 184-12.

Andrew will continue wrestling at The Citadel Military College of South Carolina.

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CHEERLEADING ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Addison

Forbush High School

EDWARDS



COURTESY PHOTO

Forbush cheerleader, Addison Edwards, will join the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's cheer squad next season.

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Forbush senior Addison Edwards is heading to the University of North Carolina Charlotte this fall, where she will join the 49ers cheerleading program and pursue a degree in nursing.

Addison spent three years on the varsity cheerleading squad, cementing herself as one of the program's most accomplished athletes. During her tenure, she was part of three NCHSAA State Championship teams — a remarkable achievement that speaks to both her individual talent and her commitment to the sport. In addition to cheerleading, Addison was a multi-sport athlete, competing in soccer for four years and tennis for one year.

Forbush head cheerleading coach Madison Hutchens had high praise for her departing athlete. "Addison made an excellent choice by committing to UNCC," Hutchens said. "She is incredibly dedicated, hardworking, and passionate about her sport. She has a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, and determination to



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Addison Edwards, left, receives the Cheerleader Athlete of the Year Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.

keep improving, and she will make a meaningful impact on the program."

Hutchens described Addison as a natural leader whose influence extended well beyond her athletic ability. "She leads by example and will be a great asset on the mat. Addison holds herself to high expectations and consistently pushes herself to improve. She is a supportive and encouraging teammate who helps create a positive team environment. Her leadership, dedication, and the energy she brought to our team every day will be missed greatly."

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**MEN'S TENNIS
ATHLETES OF THE YEAR**

Connor and Aidan
BALLARD *Elkin High School*



Cory Smith
csmith@mtairynews.com

Connor and Aidan graduate as two of the most decorated athletes in North Carolina history as seven-time state champions.

They won four-consecutive dual team state titles and went 78-6 in dual team competition during their careers. Playing Nos. 1 and 2 singles, respectively, Connor and Aidan were named co-MVPs of the 1A/2A State Championship this spring.

During the Ballards' tenure, Elkin only lost once to a team in their division.

The twin brothers also won three-consecutive doubles state titles. Connor and Aidan went 19-0 as a doubles pair this season and 75-3 in their careers. This included a 68-match winning streak across their final three years. Their most recent high school loss as a duo was in the 2023 1A Doubles State Semifinals.

Connor graduates with a four-year singles record of 69-11, while Aidan went 74-5.

They will attend Wake Forest University and plan to play on the club tennis team.

PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

The Tribune's Holly Lamm, middle, presents the Best of Preps Men's Tennis Athletes of the Year Awards to Connor Ballard, left, and Aidan Ballard.



PHOTO BY BUCKIN' ELK ATHLETICS

Elkin's Connor Ballard, left, and Aidan Ballard are presented the 2026 2A Doubles State Championship trophies.



PHOTO BY BUCKIN' ELK ATHLETICS

Aidan Ballard hits a forehand in the doubles state championship match.



PHOTO BY BUCKIN' ELK ATHLETICS

Connor Ballard serves in the doubles state championship match.

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WOMEN'S TENNIS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Emerson

East Wilkes High School

SIMMONS

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Emerson, a junior, earned all-state honors for the third-consecutive season. She went 23-1 in singles as she led East Wilkes to a conference title, regional title and dual team state runner-up finish. Twenty-two of her 23 wins came in straight sets.

Emerson also went 23-1 in doubles, teaming with Ava Darnell to repeat as conference and regional champions. The duo returned to the doubles state championship match for the second-consecutive year before suffering their first loss.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Emerson Simmons, right, receives the Best of Preps Women's Tennis Athlete of the Year Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.



PHOTO BY ZACH COLBURN | THE WATAUGA DEMOCRAT

Emerson Simmons hits a forehand in the No. 1 singles match against Watauga.



PHOTO BY CARDINAL ATHLETICS

Emerson Simmons, middle, and her doubles partner Ava Darnell, right, receive their gold medals for winning the 2A West Regional Doubles Championship alongside East Wilkes coach Aaron Simmons.

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WOMEN'S INDOOR TRACK ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Ella KLEINHEKSEL

Elkin High School

Cory Smith
csmith@mtairynews.com

Ella was the Mountain Valley Conference Female Athlete of the Year as part of a dominant senior indoor season.

She won conference championships in the 1000 and 1600-meter runs, setting new school and conference records in both, while placing second in the 3,200. She went on to win state bronze medals in the 1,000 and 1600.

Ella ran ahead of the pack in more than just indoor track. She set the Elkin 5,000-meter run record, was a conference champion and conference runner of the year in cross country. She finished third in 2A West Regional and placed fifth at the state championship. In outdoor track, Ella won a state bronze medal in the 1,600.

Ella graduates with six school records across her three sports.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Ella Kleinheksel, left, receives the Best of Preps Women's Indoor Track Athlete of the Year Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER KLEINHEKSEL

Ella Kleinheksel competes in the 1,000-meter run at the 1A/2A State Championship.

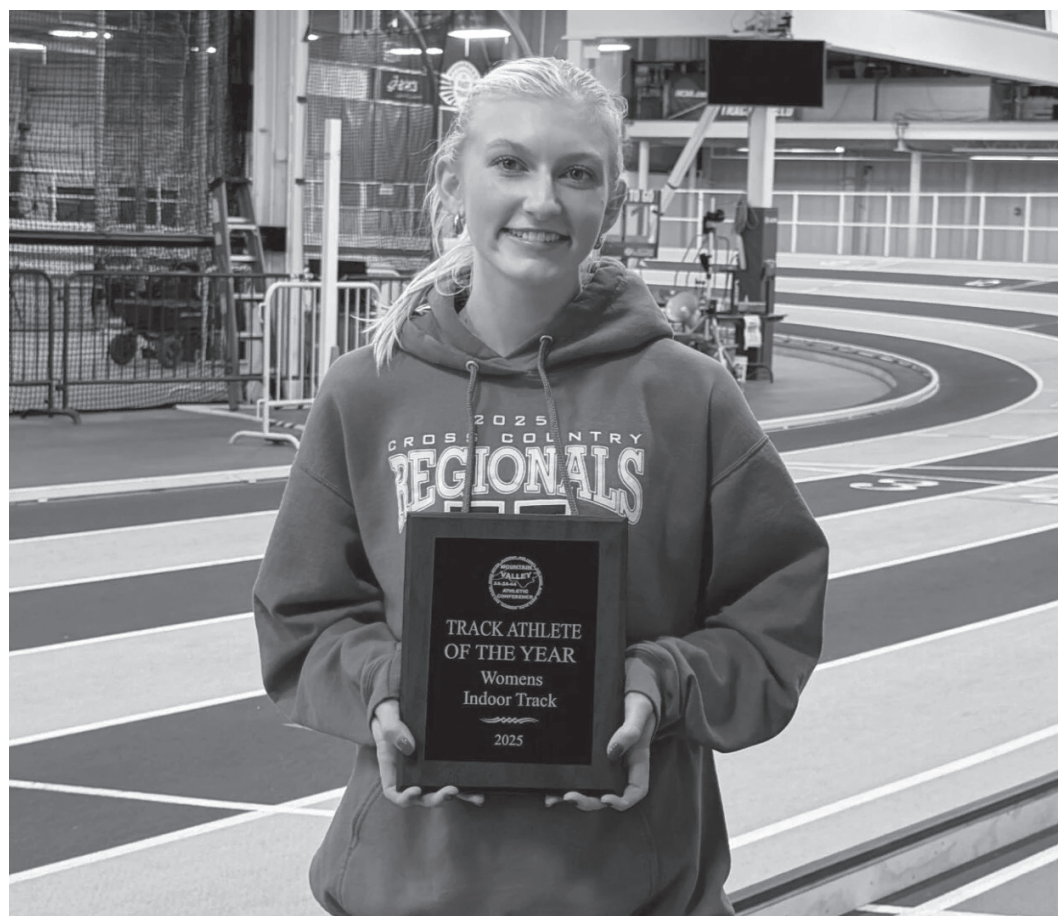


PHOTO BY BUCKIN' ELK ATHLETICS

Ella Kleinheksel is named the Mountain Valley 2A/3A/4A Conference Women's Indoor Track Athlete of the Year.

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MEN'S SOCCER ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Elvis

Forbush High School

MENDEZ

Cory Smith

csmith@mtairynews.com

Elvis Mendez led Forbush to its fifth-consecutive conference championship and was named conference offensive player of the year.

The senior forward scored 32 goals and added seven assists on a team that finished 18-6-1 and reached the third round of the state playoffs. The Falcons were 18-0 in matches that Elvis scored in.

Following the season, he was named to the 4A All-State Team for the first time.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Elvis Mendez, left, receives the Men's Soccer Athlete of the Year Award from The Tribune's Holly Lamm.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Forbush's Elvis Mendez (10) speeds past a Watauga midfielder.



PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Elvis Mendez looks on during a match at Starmount.

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**WOMEN'S SOCCER
ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

Taylor

North Stokes High School

JAMES

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Sophomore Taylor James has been a force for the North Stokes Vikings since the moment she stepped on the varsity field. As a freshman, she recorded 29 goals and 4 assists, earned All-Conference honors, and helped lead the Vikings to the second round of the state playoffs.

This season, Taylor raised the bar even higher — finishing with 42 goals, 10 assists, and five hat tricks, while earning All-Conference honors for the second consecutive year and once again advanced to the second round of the state playoffs. North Stokes finished the season 14-4-2 and has helped the Vikings to a 24-8-6 over her two seasons.

In just two seasons, she has scored 71 career goals and is already one of the most accomplished players in program history.



PHOTO BY KATELYN GOINS

Taylor James, right, receives the Women's Soccer Athlete of the Year Award from The Stokes News' Bob Ward.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

The Vikings' Taylor James outruns an opponent and wins possession of the ball.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MULLINS

North Stokes' Taylor James (4) breaks away from a West Stokes player during the regular season.

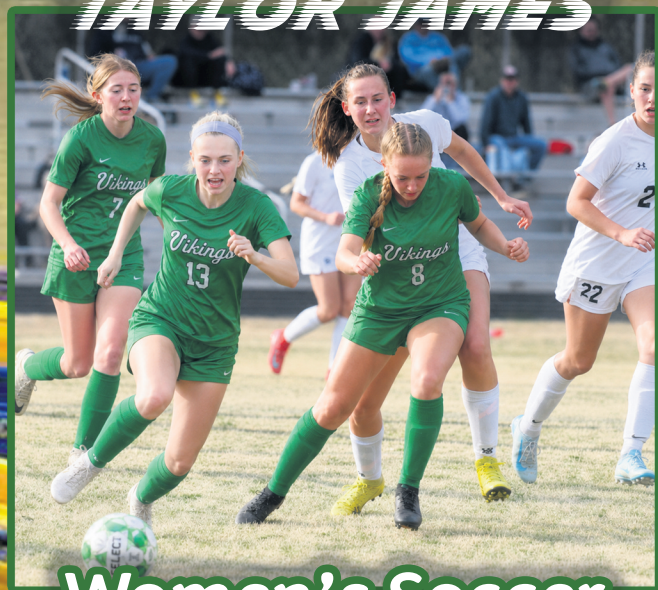
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**WOMEN'S OUTDOOR TRACK
ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

Aaliyah
BROWN

North Stokes High School

Robert Money

robert.money@thestokesnews.com

Aaliyah Brown made an immediate impact as a freshman at North Stokes High School, earning Conference Female Athlete of the Year after sweeping conference titles in the 100-meter hurdles, 300-meter hurdles, and high jump, while adding a bronze medal in the long jump.

At the 1A West Regional, she claimed gold in the 300-meter hurdles and high jump, and silver in the 100-meter hurdles. She carried that momentum to the 1A State Championship, where she medaled in both hurdles events – silver in the 100-meter hurdles and bronze in the 300-meter hurdles – while also competing in the high jump and long jump.

Heading into the championship, Aaliyah was ranked No. 2 in the state in both the 300-meter hurdles and high jump, and No. 3 in the 100-meter hurdles.



COURTESY PHOTO

Aaliyah Brown received the Female Outdoor Track Athlete of the Year Award.



PHOTO BY PENNY PARRISH

North Stokes' freshman Aaliyah Brown wins the Greater Triad 1A/2A Conference Championship in the high jump.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Vikings' Aaliyah Brown competes in the long jump during the 1A State Outdoor Championships.

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The *best of the best* ...again

13 student-athletes won a Best of Preps Award for either the second, third or fourth time.



PHOTO BY AMERICAN JUNIOR GOLF ASSOCIATION

South Stokes' Brady Clark follows through on a drive during a practice round before the Junior Presidents Cup in Montreal. Badgett, a senior, is the first student-athlete to win a Best of Preps Award all four years of high school, winning the men's golf award four times.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

West Stokes' Ryley Bowles is named the 2025 Northwest 3A/4A Conference Runner of the Year. Bowles, a senior, won the Best of Preps Women's Cross Country Athlete of the Year Award for the third consecutive year.



PHOTO BY BUCKIN' ELKS ATHLETICS

Elkin's Jericho Edwards is named the Most Outstanding Performer of the 1A/2A Indoor Track State Championship. Edwards, a senior, won the Best of Preps Men's Outdoor Track Athlete of the Year Award in 2023, the Best of Preps Men's Indoor Track Athlete of the Year in 2025 and was the Best of Preps Male Athlete of the Year in 2026.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

West Stokes' Rylee Tedder prepares to pitch in a 2026 home game. Tedder, a sophomore, won the Best of Preps Softball Pitcher of the Year Award for the second consecutive year.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

South Stokes' Brady Clark, right, embraces his father and coach Jason Clark as he exits the court in his final home game. Brady, a senior, won the Best of Preps Male Comeback Athlete of the Year Award in 2024, and was the Best of Preps Men's Basketball Athlete of the Year in both 2025 and 2026.



PHOTO BY FRANKIE ANDREWS | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
East Surry's Maggy Sechrist hits a kill against North Surry. Sechrist, a senior, won the Best of Preps Volleyball Athlete of the Year Award in 2025 and was the Best of Preps Female Athlete of the Year in 2026.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MONEY

North Surry's Emerson Puckett tees off at Pilot Knob Park Country Club. Puckett, a sophomore, won the Best of Preps Women's Golf Award for the second consecutive season.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Mount Airy's DJ Joyce (22) takes down Starmount quarterback Luke Collins (1) in a 2024 away game. Joyce, a senior, won the Best of Preps Football-Defense Athlete of the Year Award in 2025 and was the Best of Preps Male Comeback Player of the Year in 2026.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Mount Airy's Taeshon Martin crosses into the end zone to score one of his six touchdowns against Thomasville. Martin, a senior, earned the Best of Preps Football-Offense Athlete of the Year Award for the second consecutive season.

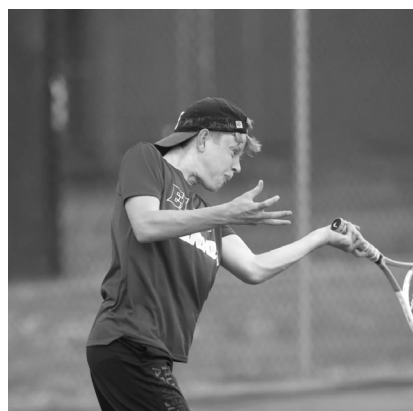


PHOTO BY CHARLES LEFTWICH | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
Elkin's Connor Ballard hits a forehand in a singles match against South Stokes. Ballard, a senior, won the Best of Preps Men's Tennis Athlete of the Year as an individual in 2025, then won as part of a doubles team with his twin brother, Aidan, in 2026.



PHOTO BY CORY SMITH

Andrew Meadows, back, sets up a pin against Polk County's Zachary McCraw. Meadows, a senior, won the Best of Preps Men's Wrestling Athlete of the Year Award for the third-consecutive year.



PHOTO BY GRANITE BEAR ATHLETICS

Mount Airy's Jenevy Olalde is recognized for her 100th career victory. Olalde, a senior, won the Best of Preps Women's Wrestling Athlete of the Year Award for the second consecutive season.



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