

Hite driven to steer KFHS Bulldogs to title

BY MATTHEW HATFIELD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For a King's Fork boys basketball team that is widely considered the strongest in the area with a 34-4 mark dating back to the start of the 2021-22 campaign, the expectations and goals are rather simple. It's to be the final team standing in March at VCU at the Class 4 level.

Unlike the King's Fork girls team that got to celebrate its title at the Siegel Center in Richmond last March, the boys did not get that same opportunity back in 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic canceled the scheduled Class 4 Final between the Bulldogs and Manor High out of Portsmouth. The VHSL named them co-state champions.

There is one holdover from that squad hoping to get to celebrate this time and that is 6-foot-3 senior guard Ryan Hite, son of Bulldogs head coach Rick

Hite.

Ryan has played with some exceptional players during his career at King's Fork, most notably the likes of Division I talents such as Jayden Epps (Illinois), George Beale (Norfolk State) and Quentin Livingston (Hampton). Yet, there is something special about the 2022-23 edition of Bulldogs.

"I think this is the most brotherhood we've had as far as a team goes. We're playing for something. That loss last year was motivation," Hite said in reference to the 84-68 loss to Varina that ended his junior season at 24-1 overall.

"We have like four newcomers, so most of the team was on that state semifinals team that lost," he said. "We're all playing as hard as we can just to get back there and go further this time."

Ryan also is seeking the right fit to continue

his basketball career at the collegiate level. He recently indicated that Virginia State University is "probably in the lead," for the time being, but is no rush to make a decision and will listen to all opportunities at the various levels – Division I, II and III.

"I'm just looking for a school that's home and feels like this here [at King's Fork]," said Ryan, who most enjoys watching NBA players such as Shai Gilgeous-Alexander of the Oklahoma City Thunder and Gary Payton Jr. from the Portland Trail Blazers on television.

"A school is getting a defender who can do it all, score the ball when needed and be a leader," he said.

Freshman dazzling ladies for Nansemond River

Freshman Jordin Richardson is having quite a sensational season for the Lady Warriors. Through 12 games, she's

averaging 24.8 points, 5.3 rebounds and 2.6 steals per game for a team that has started 7-5 overall. That's a big improvement for a Nansemond River girls basketball team that went just 3-15 overall and notched just one district victory.

Richardson recently erupted with 31 points and 10 rebounds in a 70-22 non-district win over Bruton that followed up her 39-point, 13-rebound effort in a 59-54 loss to Great Bridge.

After a 2-3 start, Leroy Skinner's team has won five of its past seven games, doing so with a majority of ninth graders playing major minutes. Layla Stewart is the lone senior logging starter minutes and averages 10.3 points per game. Of their top ten scorers, four are freshmen and three are sophomores.

Tip-ins

► The Nansemond River Warriors boys basketball team dropped to

9-4 overall on Jan. 20 with a hard-fought 71-69 home loss to Great Bridge. Yet in the game, senior forward Chris Hayes turned in another splendid performance, registering 24 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks.

For the season, Hayes is averaging right around 14.7 points and 11.5 rebounds per game.

Nansemond River, which led by eight after the first quarter and 30-26 at half-time, fell behind by 10 points with under seven minutes to play. Even with 0.4 seconds left, the Warriors had a chance to send the game into overtime or win in regulation when they were fouled on a three-pointer. But they were plagued by 7-of-21 shooting at the charity stripe compared to 22-for-26 for Great Bridge, which won its eighth in a row to move to 11-3 overall.

► The King's Fork girls cruised to a 104-24 win over Hickory Jan. 20 as

junior guard Cyriah Griffin had 33 points, while freshman Zaniyah Williams added a career-best 32 points. It marked the fourth time since 2017 that the King's Fork girls hit for 100 points or more in a game.

► A showcase event – Battle Lines V – takes place on Saturday, Jan. 28 at King's Fork High School. There are five games, beginning at 1 p.m. with Deep Creek vs. Hampton, followed by Grassfield vs. Green Run at 2:30 p.m., Nansemond-Suffolk Academy taking on Kecoughtan at 4 p.m., and undefeated Menchville playing Meadowbrook at 5:30 p.m.. To close the night, the King's Fork girls will host undefeated Northeastern out of North Carolina at 7 p.m. with the King's Fork boys playing Northeastern in the 8:30 p.m. nightcap. Tickets are \$10 with kids ages 5 and under allowed in for free.

Coach impersonates JV basketball player

BY MATTHEW HATFIELD
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Generally, junior varsity boys and girls basketball games feature freshmen and sophomores honing their skills to prepare for the future at the varsity level in the coming

seasons.

On Saturday, Jan. 21, it was supposed to be an ordinary junior varsity girls basketball game at Nansemond River High School as the Warriors played host to Churchland

See BASKETBALL, 10

Basketball: Coach impersonates player, loses job

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from nearby Portsmouth. What transpired was anything but typical.

Arlisha Boykins, a 22-year-old who was an assistant coach on the Churchland junior varsity girls basketball team, decided to impersonate a 13-year-old who participated for the Truckers.

The parents of the unidentified 13-year-old indicated that their daughter was away at a club basketball tournament.

No Churchland administrators were in attendance at the junior varsity game between the visiting Truckers and Warriors when this unprecedented occurrence took place.

Administrators investigated the situation and reported all findings to the Virginia High School League without any penalties levied as of this point. However, Churchland administrators decided to terminate the coaching

staff for both the junior varsity and varsity girls basketball teams. A spokesperson indicated that Boykins no longer is employed by Portsmouth Public Schools with her last day of working coming on Jan. 25.

Additionally, the Churchland girls varsity and junior varsity teams have decided to opt out of the remainder of the 2022-23 campaign.

While Churchland's

season is over for its junior varsity and varsity girls basketball teams, Nansemond River has returned to some normalcy. The junior varsity girls at NRHS will play four more district games - at home vs. Lakeland (Feb. 2), at King's Fork (Feb. 6), vs. Oscar Smith (Feb. 10) and at Western Branch (Feb. 14) along with out-of-district matchups at Franklin (Feb. 4) and at New Kent (Feb. 8).

NSA Grad gets Super Bowl ring

BY MATTHEW HATFIELD
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Nansemond-Suffolk Academy grad Cole Christiansen, a linebacker who starred at Army after his playing days for the Saints, is a member of the practice squad for the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs, who outlasted the Philadelphia Eagles 38-35 to win Super Bowl LVII.

Cole's mother was able to make the trip to the Sunday Feb. 12 game and reflected on the once-in-a-lifetime experience that culminated at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, home of the Arizona Cardinals.

"It was pretty incredible," Monica Christiansen said. "The Hunt family that owns the Chiefs is a class act organization. They coordinated to get families and treat every player equally in those terms. They may have different salaries, but all of them are equal when it comes to being on the team and treated that way. That's really special."

She said they got to stay at the team hotel, had all kinds of functions for friends and families to make them feel special

"It was very seamless. Coming from Suffolk and going to something like the Super Bowl blind would've been overwhelming."



SUBMITTED BY MONICA CHRISTIANSEN

Former Nansemond-Suffolk Academy football star Cody Christiansen, now with the Kansas City Chiefs, is pictured here with his mother, Monica, just after his team won Super Bowl LVII in Phoenix, Arizona. Monica, husband David and their daughter Paige traveled to show their support for the Chiefs in their defeat of Philadelphia, 38-25

Superbowl: Family cheers on Chiefs

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Christiansen said. “Parking would’ve been a nightmare. They coordinated with shuttle buses for everybody coming together, to an incredible pre-game experience for just friends and families of the Chiefs, and helped navigate everyone to get into the stadium.”

This Super Bowl also marked the first time each franchise featured service academy players, and in this particular case, two Army West point officers. Brett Toth, a lineman for the Eagles, is a 2018 grad from West Point who was once a teammate of Christiansen.

“We’re really proud that Cole is the one that gets the ring,” Christiansen said. “The atmosphere there was phenomenal, weather was great and everything was wonderful. The postgame celebration was fun also.”