

Southern Vance wins OT thriller

Raiders snap losing streak, dedicate victory to Newton

BY LOGAN ULRICH
SPORTS EDITOR

At first, it seemed like Friday night's season opener against Bartlett Yancey would be the same old story for Southern Vance.

Looking to snap a 16-game losing streak, the Raiders instead were plagued by the same penalties, missed assignments, turnovers and general struggles that have come to define the program since their last win in 2015.

But this isn't the same team as last year. This year's team stayed the course, and playing in memory of former offensive linemen William Newton, who passed away in a car accident on Saturday, the Raiders pulled out a wild, 30-22 overtime thriller of a win to snap the losing streak and start a new Southern Vance.

"It's a tremendous hurdle that has been a long time coming," new head coach Darry Ragland said. "This is a big win for this senior class, this is a big win for the community. There's more people at this game that's been at a Southern Vance football game in I don't know how long."

Southern Vance made the plays it needed to down the stretch, taking a lead for the first time in the game in overtime following senior quarterback Elijah Stewart's two-yard touchdown run and senior run-



CHRISTINE T. NGUYEN / Dispatch staff

Southern Vance quarterback Elijah Stewart runs for a touchdown during overtime in his team's 30-22 win Friday night over Bartlett Yancey.

ning back Tyrese Henderson's two-point conversion. Then it was another senior in corner Malik Boyd who made the game-sealing interception as the crowd in the stands went wild.

In the first half, though, there was little to cheer for. A Raiders' offense that's generated a fair amount of hype this summer went nowhere. A young offensive line missed blocks, wide receivers missed

opportunities for big plays and penalties killed drives.

"The light flashes, I just can't keep it on," Ragland said.

Halfway through the second quarter, senior running back Tyrese Henderson coughed up

a ball the Buccaneers recovered at Southern Vance's 35. After a penalty on the defense allowed the Buccaneers to convert on fourth and short,

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Jones captures first Cup pole in critical Bristol race

Many drivers fighting for playoff spots

BY JENNA FRYER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Erik Jones' timing was perfect for first career pole in the NASCAR Cup Series — at Bristol Motor Speedway, where he's fighting hard for a playoff position.

The rookie turned a lap at 128.082 mph around the high-banked bullring to take the top starting spot for Saturday night's

race. Jones, who drives for Furniture Row Racing, bumped Kyle Larson from the pole.

Larson qualified second at 128.057 to continue his hot streak. He won Sunday at Michigan — where he beat Furniture Row teammates Jones and Martin Truex Jr. on the final restart for his third victory of the year.

Kasey Kahne qualified third and was followed by Hendrick Motorsports teammate Chase Elliott.

Matt Kenseth was fifth, followed by Truex and Denny Hamlin as Toyota drivers took four of the top seven spots.

This is crunch time in NASCAR because there's just three open spots in the 16-driver playoff field. There's already 13 drivers locked in by race wins — and that doesn't count Joey Logano, who won at Richmond but failed inspection so the victory is wiped out regarding playoff eligibility.

On the bubble for those final spots are Chase Elliott, Kenseth, Jamie McMurray and even Logano — all drivers who made the playoffs last year. Oh, and Jones, who is 16th in the standings.

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Bagley hoping to play this season for Duke

Top recruit scheduled to graduate from high school later this month

BY JOHN MARSHALL
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marvin Bagley III, widely considered the top recruit in the class of 2018, reclassified this week and could be eligible to play for Duke in the upcoming season.

His decision immediately thrusts the Blue Devils toward the front of the national-title conversation for the 2017-18 season.

But what exactly does it mean to reclassify and how does the process work?

According to the NCAA, all incoming student-athletes must complete 16 core courses from a list that includes English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy. Classes such as physical education, health and music do not count as core courses, nor do remedial classes or classes completed through credit-by-exam.

The student-athlete must also show proof of graduation from high school and have an ACT/SAT test score that corresponds to his or her core course GPA on a sliding

scale; the higher the GPA, the lower the standardized test score needs to be.

The NCAA eligibility center's amateurism team then determines whether to certify a student-athlete. The process and requirements are the same for every sport.

Bagley is scheduled to graduate from Southern California's Sierra Canyon High School later this month, completing his course work a year ahead of schedule. His transcripts may be a little more complicated because he attended three different high schools and the NCAA will review his final transcript following his graduation to determine if he is eligible to play Division I basketball.

Bagley's move is not unprecedented.

Through the years, five-star prospects who want to get a jump on their college careers — and potentially professional careers — have gone through the same process, though usually not right before the fall semester begins as Bagley did.

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Kenseth has no current plans after final season with Joe Gibbs Racing

BY JENNA FRYER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Matt Kenseth still doesn't have a job lined up for next season and the two-time Daytona 500 winner doesn't really want to discuss his situation.

Kenseth is in the final year of his contract with Joe Gibbs Racing and the team has said Erik Jones will drive the No. 20 Toyota next year. The move left Kenseth without a ride, and seats are extremely hard for veterans to land in this current climate.

Team owners have found

younger, unproven drivers are much cheaper to hire as sponsorship dollars are declining.

Asked Friday at Bristol Motor Speedway if he has anything for next year, Kenseth said: "No, not at the moment. When I do, I'll tweet something. Like on a Monday or something. No plans right now. Just raise kids and hang out with my family."

Kenseth is the 2003 NASCAR champion and won the Daytona 500 in 2009 and 2012.

He has been with Gibbs

since 2013 and won 14 races for the organization. He is currently ninth in the Cup standings, not yet locked into the playoff field.

But Kenseth is also 45, and there is a rapid youth movement in NASCAR. Because fielding a team is so expensive, owners are no longer willing to pay big salaries when they can hire a younger driver at a fraction of the price.

It has created a dynamic where talented veteran drivers — Kenseth, Kurt Busch,

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Knights' volleyball drops opener; golf tees off

SPECIAL TO THE DISPATCH

GOLF

After an hour rain delay, the Kerr-Vance Academy women's golf team won its first match of the season at Henderson Country Club. Competing against Oxford Prep, Falls Lake, Voyager, East Wake and Franklin Academy, the Spartans finished in first place with an overall 161 team score.

Emma Hogge took second place in the individual competition with a 47, while teammates Becca Johnson and Mallorie Boyd turned in a score of 57 — one stroke out of third place.

It was the inaugural season for the Griffins and their first match as a team. Hannah Brewer was the top scorer with a 66, followed by Jadyn Cooper with a 70. Rorie Brewer and Jordan Jones both had a 72.

Kerr-Vance plays again next Thursday on the road against South Granville High School.

VANCE CHARTER VARSITY VOLLEYBALL

It was the season opener for Vance Charter as they hosted the Lady Rams from Franklinton on Thursday night. The Knights won the toss and elected to serve; after five rounds of trading servers, the Rams were up 11-10 in a highly contested match. That's when Franklinton began to string points together and gradually take the momentum, winning set one, 25-18.

In the second set, the teams again played even to ten points, and once again the Rams began a push to extend their lead. Nadia Simmons did not make it easy, as she turned



Vance Charter's Jenna Radford sets the ball as Nadia Simmons looks on during the Knights' season opener against Franklinton. Vance Charter's team of sophomores fell to the Rams, 3-0, at the start of what looks to be a tougher schedule this season.

SPECIAL TO THE DISPATCH

in three solo blocks and numerous defensive touches on the ball (one ace, 15 digs, four kills, three blocks). Vance Charter found themselves

down 20-12 when Jenna Radford stepped up to serve 6 winners behind good team play.

Franklinton immediately put a stop

to any thoughts of a comeback by not allowing another point from the Knights in set 2, winning 25-18.

The third set saw the Rams take charge from the beginning with the Knights never holding the lead. Vance Charter was under defensive pressure from the constant, well-hit Ram attacks and had a difficult time mounting a consistent attack of their own. The third set ended with same score as the previous two. Vance Charter's Skylar Aiken finished perfect from the service stripe on 7 serves (nine digs, three kills, one block).

Vance Charter will travel to Davidson University to compete in the Best of the Best Tournament on Saturday.

VANCE CHARTER JV VOLLEYBALL

It was a rematch from the contest two days prior when the Franklinton Lady Rams traveled to Vance Charter. The contest was much the same in the early going, with each team not allowing the other to gain an advantage. However, the Knights could not keep pace and fell in in the first set 25-20.

The second set saw Vance Charter falling behind early. The Rams piled on the points, and after going up 18-9, most everyone in the gym figured the contest was over. Then Jordan Horton stepped up to serve and reeled off ten unanswered points before Franklinton could end the comeback.

The Rams went on a run of their own, stringing together six straight points to win the 25-20 set and the match.

The Lady Knights will host Wake Forest on Monday at 5 p.m. The Knights are 1-1 on the young season.

UNC awaits ruling in academic case

BY AARON BEARD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Carolina has wrapped up a two-day hearing with an NCAA infractions committee panel that will decide whether the school faces penalties tied to its multi-year academic scandal.

Now the case goes into yet another holding pattern.

School officials spent much of Wednesday in a closed-door meeting with committee members in Nashville, Tennessee. They returned Thursday morning for a second session lasting about 4½ hours with the panel that will determine whether UNC faces penalties such as fines, probation or vacated wins and championships.

NCAA spokeswoman Stacey Osburn confirmed the hearing was complete but both sides were mum afterward.

Osburn didn't comment further because the panel must deliberate before issuing a ruling, which typically comes weeks to months after a hearing. UNC athletics

spokesman Steve Kirschner said the school wouldn't have any comments about the hearing either.

Getting through the hearing process was a major step toward resolution in a delay-filled case tied to irregular courses, though there's still the potential for the case to linger beyond a ruling if UNC decides to appeal or pursue legal action. The school faces five top-level charges, including lack of institutional control.

The focus is independent study-style courses in the formerly named African and Afro-American Studies (AFAM) department. The courses were misidentified as lecture classes that didn't meet and required a research paper or two for typically high grades.

In a 2014 investigation, former U.S. Justice Department official Kenneth Wainstein estimated more than 3,100 students were affected between 1993 and 2011, with athletes making up roughly half the enrollments.

BAGLEY

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Mike Gminski is considered the leave-high-school-early originator, graduating a year early so he could play at Duke in 1976. He went on to become an All-American and played 17 NBA seasons.

In recent years, Kansas' Andrew Wiggins, North Carolina State's Dennis Smith Jr., Duke's Derryck Thornton and Kentucky's Karl-Anthony Towns were among the student-athletes who graduated early to play college basketball sooner. Kentucky's Hamidou Diallo graduated a semester early and joined the Wildcats in

January last season, but did not play. He declared for the NBA draft before deciding to return to Lexington.

Jontay Porter reclassified this year so he could play a year early with his brother, top recruit Michael, at Missouri. Canadian guard R.J. Barrett, considered the top recruit in 2019, has reclassified so he can graduate in 2018.

"With AAU and year-round competition basically, a lot of the players are ready for college-level play at an earlier age," Gminski told WRAL in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 2015. "And most of these guys have been around a lot. They do a lot of traveling. They tend to mature pretty fast."

KENSETH

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Kasey Kahne, Danica Patrick — either don't have seats or sponsorship lined up yet for next season.

Kenseth said he's not worried "even really one

percent anymore."

"I'm just not concerned about it," he said. "I'm really concerned about 2017 and that's the truth. Hopefully we get a win, get in the playoffs and try to race for a championship. That's our goal every year and really that's what I'm been concentrating on."



Southern Vance's Malik Boyd intercepts the ball in overtime in the Raiders' 30-22 win Friday over Bartlett Yancey.

CHRISTINE T. NGUYEN / Dispatch staff

VANCE

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senior running back Joe Durden scampered ten yards around the right side for a touchdown. Durden added the two-point conversion and Bartlett Yancey led 8-0 with no signs of life from the Raiders.

Then, Southern Vance responded. Elijah Stewart unleashed a bomb deep down the left sideline on the ensuing drive that senior wide receiver Shamond Lyons ran underneath for a 62-yard gain. On the next play, Stewart rolled right and took the ball into the end zone, then completed a pass to Lyons for the conversion to tie the score.

Despite the offense's struggles, the defense came into the game determined to prove a disastrous 2016, when the Raiders allowed almost six touchdowns per game, was behind them. They did just that, limiting the Buccaneers to one touchdown in the first two quarters and adding an interception by senior Lorenz Evans to end the first half.

Unfortunately for the Raiders defense, the second half started with some of the bad luck that seems to follow struggling teams. On third and long, the Raiders forced a fumble that bounced forward ten yards, where Bartlett Yancey's Demontez Branch

was in the perfect spot.

Instead of a turnover to start the second half, the Raiders could only watch as Branch raced 50 yards to the end zone for a touchdown.

Like they did in the first half, the Raiders responded.

Stewart hit senior wide receiver Kyree Ford for a 31-yard gain, then Henderson rumbled into the end zone around the right side from 20 yards out. Stewart's two-point conversion pass fell somewhere between two receivers, leaving the score tied at 14.

The Buccaneers then scratched out a ten-play scoring drive aided by two pass interference penalties on the Raiders — including a backbreaker on fourth and long.

Trailing 22-14, Southern Vance then entered another offensive funk. A sack and a bad snap on two critical third downs on Bartlett Yancey's side of the field effectively killed two drives late in the third and early fourth quarter.

Southern's defense, which had faced 61 plays to that point, buckled down. When Bartlett Yancey perhaps went to its clock-killing offense too early, the Raiders forced a fumble and scooped it up near midfield with seven minutes remaining in the game.

Even after that momentum shift, nothing came easy for Southern Vance. Two touchdown runs — a 38-yard

demolition by Henderson and a six-yard bootleg by Stewart — were taken off the board because of holding penalties.

Finally, facing first and goal sixteen yards out after a penalty, Stewart rifled a bullet between two defenders to senior wide receiver Kendall McClendon for a touchdown, then kept the ball himself for the tying two-point conversion.

"They could have folded several times," Ragland said. "What can I say? I don't know what to say, but I'm proud of the kids."

The defense again came up with a huge play with a sack by senior Hakeem Smith on third down before a storm delay pushed the game back nearly an hour. When it returned, the defense again did everything it could to keep the Raiders in the game.

After Southern Vance's offense came up dry following Smith's sack, junior corner Micahiah Wilson picked off a Buccaneer pass with 16 seconds remaining. And when that offensive drive faltered, the defense against stepped up, not allowing Bartlett Yancey to gain a single yard in overtime.

By the time Boyd picked the ball off to seal the game, there was only one single outpouring of emotion that made sense — the crowd chanting, "William, William, William."

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BRISTOL

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"We definitely have to win," Jones said. "It's just too big of a deficit with three races to go. I think the pressure is on, but we've been

handling the pressure really well."

Elliott, ranked seventh in the Cup standings, is highest among drivers not locked into the playoffs.

"You're never comfortable," Elliott said. "We're certainly in a tight spot. We're there towards the back. I

don't exactly know 100 percent where we are, but I know we're one of the last few spots of non-winners that are still in. That's not a comfortable position to be in, because there is always an opportunity for a guy on the outside to win a race and bump you back another position."