



THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 5, 2026

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 22

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



An artist's rendering of the proposed affordable housing community on property owned by The Park Church in west Charlotte. City Council approved rezoning the area for a mixed-use neighborhood that includes 320 units with 88 single-family homes and 95 attached townhouses.

Development partnership clears construction hurdle

City rezoning approval opens door to The Park Church's housing initiative

By Herbert L. White

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One of the largest congregations in Charlotte is a step closer to expanding its development footprint.

City Council last month rezoned 30 acres owned by The Park Church for construction of mixed-use affordable housing along Beatties Ford Road. The initiative includes 320 units that includes 88 single-family homes and 95 attached townhomes. The development also includes 125 multi-family units, including affordable senior housing and 12 accessory dwelling units built on lots shared with other housing.



The Park Community Development Corporation is the development partner and will oversee the design phase.

"This rezoning approval represents the unfolding of a vision rooted in faith, stewardship, and love of community," Bishop Claude Alexander, senior pastor at The Park Church said in a statement. "For more than 25 years, we have believed housing can be a pathway to dignity, stability, and opportunity, and this moment reflects what is possible when faith, public

leadership, and responsible partners work together for the good of the community."

The homes are valued between \$325,000-\$375,000 and targeted for households within 80-120% of area median income range.

The church contributed land at a discount, invested private capital and financial literacy and wealth-building programs along with construction partner True Homes, which is building units at cost.

Buyers are projected to move in with an average of \$50,000 in equity on the

Please see HOUSING | 2A

Delays in Leandro case hurt students, advocates tell NC Supreme Court

By Ahmed Jallow

NC NEWSLINE

Education advocates, parents and teachers braved the cold last week as they urged the North Carolina Supreme Court to enforce its Leandro ruling and release about \$1.7 billion for public schools, saying delays are hurting students statewide.

Speakers at the news conference described over-crowded classrooms, teacher shortages and deteriorating school buildings, and faulted both the court and the Republican-led General Assembly for what they called prolonged inaction.

"For nearly 700 days, the leadership of this court, backed by the same wealthy and corporate donors as their General Assembly counterparts, has refused to affirm and enforce the constitutional rights that we are guaranteed," said Bryan Proffitt, a high school history teacher and vice president of the North Carolina Association of Educators.

The Leandro case, first decided in 1997 and reaffirmed in 2022, requires the state to provide every student with a "sound, basic education." Advocates said the court's decision to rehear the case and its delay in issuing a mandate have left school districts without money for staffing, special education services and building repairs.

Republican lawmakers have criticized the ruling, saying the state constitution gives the legislature sole authority over state spending and that courts cannot order appropriations.

Rhyan Breen, a Wilson County school board member and attorney, said part of the \$1.7 billion at issue would be used for capital improvements. "In Title I counties, that funding is necessary," he said.

State Rep. Rodney Pierce, a Democrat who repre-

Please see DELAYS | 2A



DANIEL COSTON | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra music director earned a Grammy for best opera recording for "Heggie: Intelligence" with the Houston Grand Opera.

Charlotte Symphony conductor Kwamé Ryan earns Grammy Award

By Herbert L. White

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Charlotte Symphony Orchestra music director Kwamé Ryan is a Grammy winner.

Ryan, who has led the symphony since 2024, earned music's biggest prize in the best opera recording category at the 68th annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. The winning recording was "Heggie: Intelligence" with the Houston Grand Opera in which Ryan conducted the 2023

world premiere of Jake Heggie's work.

Ryan, who was born in Canada, raised in Trinidad and studied in England and Germany, grew up with classical music, but there was also inspiration through jazz and Indian music. As a conductor, Ryan's globe-hopping work exposed him to a wide palette of cultures.

"Both my parents (Joya and Selwyn), who incidentally are Trini-

Please see CHARLOTTE | 2A

Feds fault CATS on security missteps

By Herbert L. White

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A federal audit determined Charlotte's transit authority failed to meet safety mandates.

A report published Feb. 2 by the Federal Transit Administration identified 18 areas where CATS failed to meet federally mandated safety requirements. The audit of local compliance with Public Transportation Safety Plans found issues that include CATS's assessment of risk, track repairs, and de-escalation training for staff.

FTA launched its probe in September following the stabbing death of Iryna Zarutska on the Lynx Blue Line a month earlier. Decarlos Brown Jr., 34, was charged with murder as well as a federal charge of committing an act causing death on a mass transportation system. He has pleaded not guilty.



Molinaro

Federal officials also evaluated CATS's responses to federal directives on addressing safety risks to transit workers related to assaults - which was found to be five times the national average. Passenger crime rates were three times the national average in 2025.

"FTA is determined to do its part to address the systemic failures within Charlotte's transit system that led to Iryna Zarutska's tragic death," FTA Administrator Marc Molinaro said in a statement. "We look forward to seeing these 18 points fixed immediately to bolster safety for both transit workers and

Please see FEDERAL | 2A

Students oppose election site changes

By Eric Tegethoff

NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

North Carolina students are taking voting into their own hands after the election board stripped their college of its early voting site.

Protect Ours is a movement started at North Carolina A&T State University, the nation's largest historically Black college, to transport people to the polls for the state's upcoming primary election.

Despite having a site in previous years, the school lost its early voting place for the March 3 primary. Changes to election law last year put Republicans in charge of the state's 100 county election boards and its Board of Elections, and since then, polling places have been rejected on several college campuses. Sunday early voting was also removed in a number of counties.

Shia Rozier, a third-year student organizer for Protect Ours, said there is a clear pattern to the decisions.

"When we look at the demographics which they're targeting and that are consistently losing more access to polls, it's young students, it's minorities," Rozier said. "Sunday is a day that minorities go and vote often. So there's a commonality where it's really disenfranchisement of young and minority voters."

Please see STUDENTS | 2A

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Housing partnership clears rezoning hurdle

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path to building generational wealth. The project is projected to generate more than \$89 million in collective community wealth over 15 years.

"This project reflects Bishop Alexander's long-standing vision, the diligent leadership of The Park CDC, and the power of intentional partnerships," said Dan Horner, True Homes' co-founder. "By building at cost and committing a portion of our annual homebuilding to attainable housing, we are expanding access to homeownership and creating meaningful, lasting community impact."

Said Marcus Kornegay, executive director of developer Prosperity Alliance: "This milestone brings us closer to fulfilling Bishop Alexander's vision of creating real pathways to generational wealth through attainable homeownership. Together, we are committed to stewarding this land to empower families, strengthen the community, and create lasting opportunity for generations to come."



Kornegay



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Federal Transit Administration issued a report that found Charlotte Area Transit System failed to meet 18 safety standards.

Federal report faults CATS on safety and security missteps

Continued from page 1A

Molinaro hosted a community round-table in January with local transit stakeholders.

Among the report's findings, CATS:

- Failed to meet requirements regarding general Public Transportation Agency Safety Programs performance targets.

- Didn't implement safety risk assessment processes in its agency safety plan when assessing the risk of assaults on transit workers.

- Missed the requirement for de-escalation training.

City leaders announced last year steps to address safety upgrades on routes and vehicles. In October, Mayor Vi Lyles said the city collaborated with the White House and federal officials to add patrol units and new equipment like bike teams and all-terrain vehicles to boost security.

"These are the things that we are doing," she said. "These steps are in motion. Our city departments, CATS leadership and federal and state partners are

sitting at the same table, sharing information and coordinating and collaborating each step of the way safety is taking care if all of us work together. And I want to be clear that I often hear from our neighbors, our residents, the people that live in this great city, who just want to feel safe."

The federal review included an examination of CATS' safety plan and related documents, as well as virtual and on-site interviews to assess implementation of the requirements. The audit found non-compliance with government requirements covering safety risk management, joint labor-management safety committee, safety risk reduction, and de-escalation training.

CATS leaders must develop and submit corrective action plans within 30 days. After FTA's review, the federal agency will monitor CATS's progress and conduct meetings to review developments.



Lyles

Taking Blue Line after stabbing

By Mackenzie Thomas

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

Naya Clark has been riding the light rail since freshman year.

Twice a day, every day from Monday to Thursday, she takes the Blue Line from 25th Street Station to school at UNC Charlotte. Now a junior, Clark's been doing this for the past two years. She knows that public transit, or really anywhere, can be dangerous for a woman, she said.

It's a fear that she's dealt with, wrestled with, but one that didn't become real for her until August, when Charlotte resident Iryna Zarutska was murdered on the Blue Line.

"It kind of confirmed what could happen to me, and it bothered me for a few days," Clark said. "It made me feel sad, and I was ... scared taking the light rail because I have to, I don't have a car, so I really had no choice."

Zarutska was murdered Aug. 22 on the Blue Line in Charlotte. The suspect, Decarlos Brown Jr., was reportedly suffering from delusions stemming from schizophrenia. Prior to his arrest in August, he had been arrested at least a dozen times for offenses ranging from misusing 911 to armed robbery, according to court records.

Signs of mental illness were present in a previous arrest in January and a forensic mental evaluation was ordered in July, according to court records. Brown's next scheduled

appearance in court for the alleged murder is for an administrative hearing April 30, 2026, according to court records.

Now, just over three months since the murder, Clark said she is more alert to her surroundings and is more proactively taking steps to ensure her safety — and she's noticed other Blue Line passengers doing the same.

"I try to get as close to the wall as I can, or if I can, I can sit in the very last one where there's a wall behind me," Clark said. "But if I do have to sit and the chairs are turned around, I try to angle my body. I've seen a lot of women doing that, sitting sideways."

As security has been enhanced in the wake of Zarutska's murder, and as parts of the new law named after her took effect Dec. 1, there has been ongoing discussion to address the question: How could this tragedy have been prevented?

How Blue Line security has improved

The Charlotte Area Transit System announced new safety measures Oct. 3 for the light rail. Professional Security Services, the third-party service tasked with light rail security, is now fully staffed along the Blue Line and supported by 24 off-duty officers from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, according to the CATS website.

Charlotte resident Rob Drinkwater said he notices the increase in police pres-

ence while biking up and down a trail alongside the light rail.

"Definitely noticeable police presence that historically was not there, and that's just been pretty much a mainstay since she was murdered," Drinkwater said.

Police have been more present since the murder, but the fact that the light rail isn't all connected and is instead split into multiple cars can make enforcement on the train tricky, Clark said.

"The police or the security are on one car, but there's six cars in the whole train, and you can't, obviously, if you're riding, if it's moving, you can't move," Clark said.

Along with the increased

Blue Line security presence, CATS rolled out new bike and utility terrain vehicle patrols that will allow for more coverage and improved response time. Brent Cagle, interim chief executive officer for CATS, said he thinks these additions will improve overall security.

"The addition of bike and UTV patrols is a critical step in our mission to increase safety and reliability in our transit system," Cagle said in a press release announcing the changes. "We believe these patrols will not only increase visibility, but also foster a greater sense of security for our riders."

Fare enforcement on the light rail historically has

Please see TAKING | 4A

Charlotte Symphony's Ryan earns Grammy Award

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dadians, are big classical music lovers, and had during my youth a really extensive vinyl collection that I had the pleasure to explore it when I was in, in single digits of age," he told The Post in 2024 upon his appointment to the Charlotte Symphony.

"My mother in particular really loves Bach and Wagner and she's very much into classical music. Growing up on the island of Trinidad, there wasn't a lot of symphonic music being played. In fact, when I was a child, the only opportunities I had to hear an orchestra in Trinidad were the annual productions of the Trinidad and Tobago Opera Society. They would get the best local singers together; they would get the wind and brass from

the military band."

Ryan, the first Black director in Charlotte Symphony is the first music leader in company history to earn a Grammy.

"Kwamé Ryan's Grammy win reflects what audiences in Charlotte experience every time he steps on the podium," Charlotte Symphony President & CEO David Fisk said in a statement. "We are incredibly proud of Kwamé and this well-deserved honor. He brings extraordinary clarity, emotional depth, and purpose to the music, and this recognition underscores the artistic vision shaping the future of the Charlotte Symphony."

Ryan will return to Charlotte to conduct the Charlotte Symphony in Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 on Feb. 13-14 at Belk Theater.



KAITLYN PARKER | NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

North Carolina A&T State University students were upset with the state's decision to strip the school of its early voting site for the primary.

Students oppose election site changes, prepare for primaries

Continued from page 1A

Last week, the College Democrats of North Carolina sued state officials in an effort to get early voting sites reopened at A&T, UNC Greensboro and Western Carolina University.

Protect Ours is raising funds to shuttle students to the polls during early voting, as well as for voter education and get-out-the-vote initiatives on campus. In removing the early voting site, officials cited low

voter turnout in recent years.

Olu Rouse, also a third-year student and organizer for Protect Ours, said the organization is planning a march to the polls on Feb. 12, the first day of early voting for the March primary, and hopes members of the community will join them.

"We know that losing our polling site is bigger than just a loss for students," Rouse said. "It's a loss for

the Guilford County community as a whole."

Rozier added the barriers to voting this year will not stop students.

"We're just making a holistic plan that, despite losing our polling sites, we won't lose our right to vote," Rozier said. "We'll continue to vote and make whatever provisions necessary in order to get the maximum amount of people out to the polls."

Delays in Leandro case hurt students, advocates tell NC Supreme Court

Continued from page 1A

sents Halifax, Northampton and Warren counties, said he was a former Leandro student and teacher and now has a child in public school. "Children across North Carolina are paying the price for political games and chronic underfunding," he said.

Speakers cited schools without full-time teachers, heavy reliance on contract workers for special education and heating and cooling systems that fail. Profitit said educators have sent photos showing classroom temperatures as high as 85 degrees and as low as 45.

The group called on the court and the General Assembly to issue a ruling enforcing Leandro, release the disputed funds and pass a full state budget, which is now more than seven months late.

The case began in 1994, when five low-wealth rural counties sued the state over

school funding. The N.C. Supreme Court ruled in 1997 that North Carolina was failing to meet its constitutional obligation, a decision it reaffirmed in 2022 when it ordered lawmakers to fund the first two years of a remedial plan.

Democrats controlled the General Assembly until 2011 but did not fully fund the remedies outlined in the Leandro case. In recent years, Republican lawmakers have also declined to appropriate the full amount called for in the court-ordered plan.

After the court shifted to a 5-2 Republican majority in 2023, justices agreed to reconsider that ruling. They heard arguments in February 2024 but have not issued a decision.

North Carolina ranks near the bottom nationally in teacher pay and per-pupil spending.

Arrest of Black reporters in crackdown

By Stacy M. Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

Former CNN journalist Don Lemon may draw the headlines, but Emmy-winning independent reporter Georgia Fort and Trahem Jenn Crews and Jamael Lyndell Lundy were also taken into custody as federal agents moved

against four Black journalists whose only apparent offense was documenting protests critical of the Trump administration's

immigration crackdown.

Lemon, a longtime critic of President Donald Trump, was arrested last week in Los Angeles after livestreaming an anti-ICE demonstration connected to a January protest at a St. Paul, Minnesota, church.

A short time later, Fort, a Minnesota-based journalist, was arrested in her home state for reporting on the same protest, according to public statements and court records.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said the arrests signal a dangerous escalation by the Trump administration rather than any attempt to ease tensions following the fatal shootings of civilians by federal agents in Minnesota.

She said Lemon was doing his job when agents arrested him and stressed that Fort's detention made clear this was a broader assault on press freedom.

Federal authorities revived charges to protest at Cities Church in St. Paul after a magistrate judge declined to approve arrest warrants against Lemon and others, citing insufficient evidence. Prosecutors then pursued indictments through a grand jury, a move civil liberties advocates say appears designed to sidestep judicial scrutiny and chill coverage of protests against ICE operations.

Civil rights leaders said the symbolism was unmistakable. The Rev. Al Sharpton, founder and president of the National Action Network, said Lemon's arrest marked a direct blow against the First Amendment and warned that journalists critical of the president were being singled out.

Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen, said the arrests represent a constitutional crisis for journalism in the United States, adding that reporters have the right to document and share information with the public without fear of retaliation.



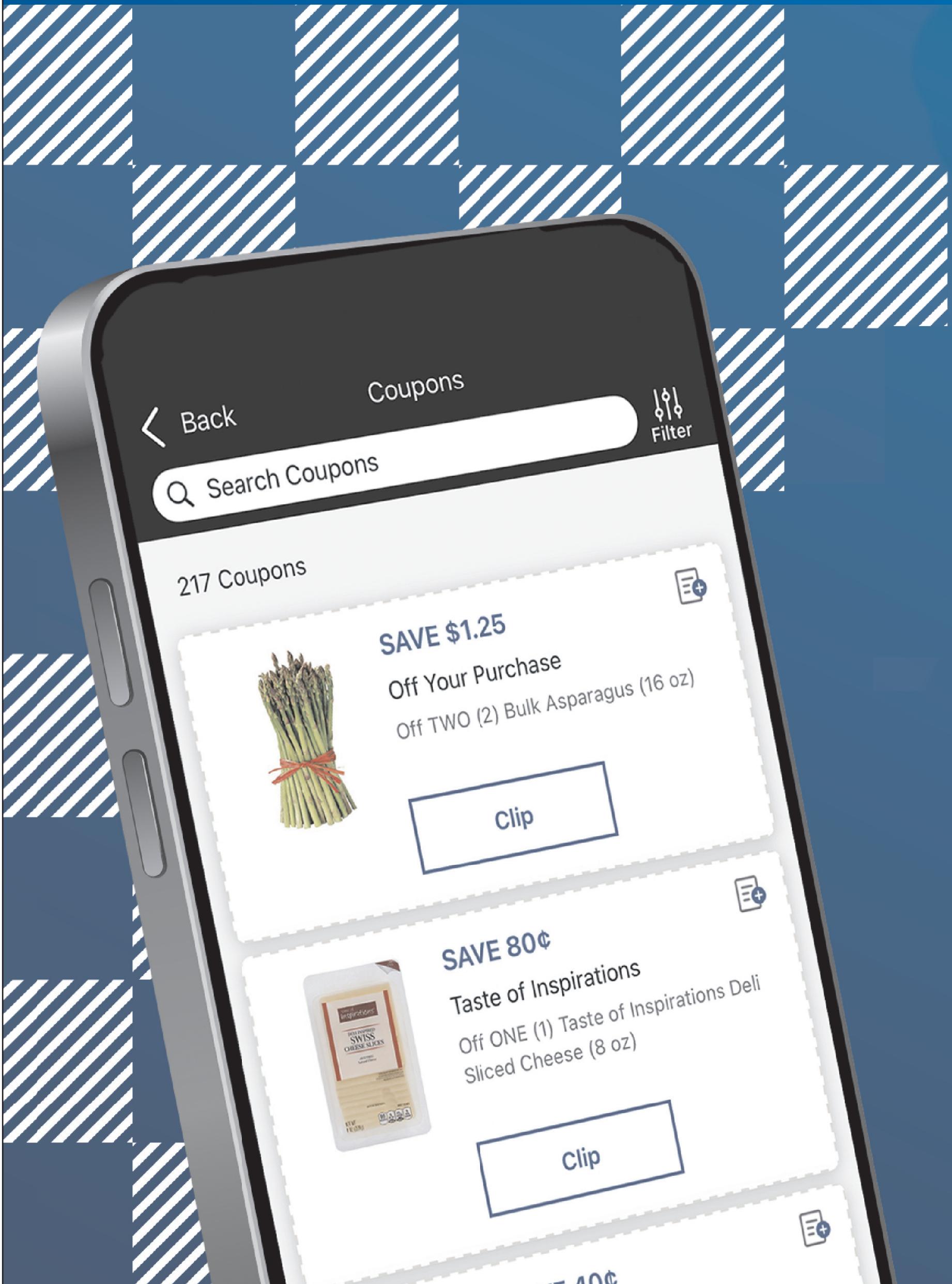
Fort



Lemon

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Sports

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2026



CHARLOTTE HORNETS

Collin Sexton scored 21 points on 5-of-5 shooting from three-point range in the Charlotte Hornets' 111-106 win against San Antonio Jan. 31, 2026 at Spectrum Center. The Hornets are on a seven-game win streak, their longest since the 2004-05 season.

Streaking Hornets are finally hot

With six straight wins to close January, Charlotte might be on the road to relevance in NBA East

By Cameron Williams
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Wins come in many forms — even from a 22-point first half deficit.

The Charlotte Hornets found a way to do just that on Monday, by beating the New Orleans Pelicans 102-95 for their seventh straight thanks to a stout second half. Coach Charles Lee was proud of his team's resiliency.

"That was a really good team that we played," Lee said. "... They kept us on our heels all night, but credit to our team, too. At halftime, we talked about

this was going to be like a character game, and we're going to see how we respond. We've built a ton of resiliency over the last month or so, and I love a lot of the things that we were doing, and we were just going to see if we could kind of figure it out and rely on the habits that we had just built the previous games."

The Hornets (23-28) got a scare early in the first quarter when guard LaMelo Ball collided with Lee, causing a gash over Ball's eye. Ball went to the locker room before returning to finish with a

team-high 24 points and a game-best plus-24 rating when he was on the floor.

"That is just Melo continuing to compete," Lee said. "And I took a play off, and you are not supposed to take any plays off. I thought the ball was going out of bounds, and I was going to save it from going into the stands, and he was going to save the ball. We went head-to-head, and credit to him, he didn't yell at me too bad, but I apologized. Obviously, I love his spirit of like, 'OK, let me get back. I'm going to get

cleaned up. I want to get back out there.' And he was right back out there, so it just shows the growth that he continues to have to be able to take a bump or bruise like that, shake it off and come back out."

Kon Knueppel and Brandon Miller added 17 and 16 points respectively for Charlotte, but it was Grant Williams who had his best total performance since returning from knee surgery. Williams scored 16 points on 5-for-7 shooting and grabbed nine rebounds

Please see HORNETS | 6A

« JOHNSON C. SMITH »

SIAC powers kick off Golden Bulls schedule

By Cameron Williams
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Johnson C. Smith's 2026 football schedule includes a nationally televised showcase and a pair of games against 2025 Division II playoff teams.

The Golden Bulls, who earned their first postseason berth, the CIAA title and a school best 10-2 record last year, open with nonconference games against SIAC powers Benedict and Albany State. The Benedict game — JCSU's fifth straight season-opener on the road — is Aug. 29 in Columbia, S.C., followed by Albany State in Canton, Ohio, for the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic. That game will be broadcast on NFL Network.

Benedict went 10-3 in 2025 and advanced to the second round of the playoffs, where the Tigers lost to Albany State, Smith's Sept. 6 opponent. The Golden Rams have a new coach in David Bowser, JCSU's linebackers coach from 2023-25 who inherits a program that posted a 12-2 record and advanced to the national quarterfinals for the first time.

"We've been going for four years here at JCSU, and there has not been much staff turnover at all with us, and that's one of the keys to our success," coach Maurice Flowers

Please see NATIONAL | 6A



Johnson C. Smith running back Bobby Smith scores on a 14-yard pass against Bluefield State in the Golden Bulls' 69-13 win on Sept. 27, 2025. JCSU opens the 2026 season at Benedict Aug. 29 and Albany State Sept. 6 in the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic in Canton, Ohio.

TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte FC adds center back Henry Kessler

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte FC has signed free agent center back Henry Kessler.

The deal with Kessler, who spent a season and a half with St. Louis City SC, is good to the end of the 2026 season with club options

for June 2027 and 2027-28. Kessler, 27, is also a veteran of the United States national team, earning a pair of caps after debuting during the 2021 Concacaf Gold Cup, where the U.S. won their seventh title.

"Henry comes to Charlotte with a ton of experience and is an MLS caliber starting de-

fender," general manager Zoran Krneta said in a statement. "His six years of playing in this league gives him a clear understanding of what it takes to compete and win trophies. He will be a strong addition to our backline as we solidify our spine and continue building off

Please see CHARLOTTE | 6A

Surging 49ers basketball builds momentum with role players



CHARLOTTE ATHLETICS

The Charlotte 49ers have won seven of eight games and sit atop the American Conference after beating Rice 80-70 Jan. 30 at Halton Arena. Charlotte is 13-9 overall, 7-2 in conference games.

By Cameron Williams
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The Charlotte 49ers are building momentum at the right time.

Winners of seven of their last eight games, the 49ers are 13-9 overall, 7-2 in the American Conference, which is good for first place followed by 6-2 South Florida and Tulsa. Charlotte has yet to face South Florida. Tulsa beat the 49ers 86-74 on Jan. 14 and play again on Feb. 18.

Like a lot of teams across the country, Charlotte had a roster overhaul to start the season with 10 new players. It took time to find chemistry but have done so in January, capped by an 80-70 win against Rice Friday at Halton Arena.

"We've had a number of guys that haven't won very much in their career," 49ers' coach

Please see 49ERS | 6A

The chase continues for Ascent

By Steve Goldberg
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Halfway through Gainbridge Super League's second season, the Carolina Ascent sit exactly where they were at this point last season: in third place and looking for more.

After a slow start, they found their mojo and ripped off a six-game win streak by which they will always be compared in terms of consistent excellence and dominance. It raised them to the Players' Shield.

Can they do it again?

The first test was a missed opportunity as the Ascent lost to league leader Sporting JAX 1-0 Jan. 30. The newest GSL team, Sporting (8-3-4, 28 points) is undefeated in their last six matches with five wins. Carolina (5-5-5, 20 points) is 2-3-1 in that same span.

Six weeks off can change a lot of things. Three weeks between games last season proved enough to dull the blade of the Ascent after that six-game run. Carolina plays Lexington SC Feb. 7 at Memorial Stadium. Kickoff is 2 p.m.

Bolstering the squad

Since losing Maddie Mercado to the NWSL after she scored four goals in six games to start the season, Ascent coach Philip Poole has been looking for someone to fill the void and improve the conversion rate on chances created.

Rylee Baisden is the active leading goal scorer, putting four in the net. Mackenzie George has three goals. Audrey Harding (now Coleman, after getting married in December) has two. Last year's leading scorer, and second in the league with 12 goals, Mia Corbin, has just one tally so far, but has been playing primarily in central midfield.

Only five players — Jill Aguilera, George, Baisden, Riley Parker, and Taylor Porter — have played in all 14 games so far this season, and only Aguilera and Porter started all of them.

Over the past few weeks, Carolina announced three additions — Ava Cook, Shea Groom,

Please see POSTSEASON | 6A



Charlotte Hornets coach Charles Lee praised his team's resilience during their six-game win streak to close January, capped by a 111-105 win against San Antonio to pull within 2.5 games of the final spot of the play-in.

Hornets move toward relevance with streak

Continued from page 5A

in 19 minutes.

"It was good to see a couple [shots] go down," Williams said. "You know, just continue to progress. It felt good. And I know my teammates put me in a lot of great positions. So, thankful to them for that. ... I'm here for whatever the team needs me to do, and I think tonight it gave us a little bit of space and pace."

Lee applauded Williams and his teammates for their leadership when they struggled in the first half. "I see them all talking," Lee said, "Brandon sometimes coming off the court was very vocal. [Pat] Connaughton is always grabbing individual guys and sometimes grabbing the whole group. Grant is constantly talking to the group. The same type of thing. So, I don't want to just say it was



one person. I think it's collective voices. But those are definitely the ones that kind of start the conversation."

The Hornets are now in a relatively unfamiliar spot as one of the NBA's hottest teams with the longest winning streak and opponents are going to want to end it. Williams, who played in Boston when the Celtics won the 2023-24 Finals with a 64-18 regular season record, said it is motivation. They'll try to extend the streak to eight games Thursday at Houston.

"Right now, it's kind of unique, because I think Charlotte hasn't done it that often," he said, "but all of us just have to put our heads down, not worry about the streak."

"We worry about the game that's in front of us, so the competitive edge that will show throughout each game, and also just getting everybody's best shot, that's something you want if you're a true basketball player and a true lover of the game."

Charlotte FC signs Kessler

Continued from page 5A

last season's top four finish."

Kessler was drafted sixth overall in the 2020 MLS SuperDraft by the New England Revolution, where he became an immediate starter on a backline that tallied four clean sheets. As a rookie, Kessler played in 19 of 20 games and the next season started 25 matches in 2021 to help New England to its first Supporters' Shield with a 22-5-7 record. He made 110 appearances across all competitions with four goals and an assist for the Revolution.

Midway through the 2024 campaign, Kessler was traded to St. Louis City, where he made 25 appearances with a goal and an assist as a defender.

Charlotte FC also acquired \$150,000 in general allocation money from Red Bull New York in exchange for Ethan Horvath's discovery priority.

The Crown received half in 2026 GAM and the remainder next year in addition to the best of Red Bull New York's 2027 MLS SuperDraft second round picks.

Crown promotes Dicker to coach staff

By Herbert L. White

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Gary Dicker's earned a promotion to Charlotte FC's coaching staff.

Dicker, Crown Legacy's head coach, was bumped up to the first team as an assistant, replacing Christian Fuchs, who was hired as coach of EFL League Two's Newport County AFC. With Dicker's promotion, Crown Legacy assistant coach Kevin Sawchak was promoted to head coach and Charlotte FC Academy Under-18 team coach Kevin Martinez was bumped to Crown Legacy assistant coach.

"Gary has acclimated really well within the organization and was a natural choice to move up into the senior team," Zoran Krneta said in a statement. "He built a good rapport with the Crown Legacy players and the first team coaching staff. Gary will still be a bridge between Crown Legacy and the first team while continuing to bring new energy and ideas to the squad."

In one season as Crown Legacy coach, Dicker oversaw development of several players to first team status, including homegrown defender Jack Neeley, who made his Charlotte FC debut during the U.S. Open Cup in May and midfielder Baye Coulibaly, who made his MLS debut after earning a first team contract in September. Crown Legacy prospects Aron John, Emmanuel Uchegbu, Morrison Agyemang and Willian Sangoquiza also trained and played with the Crown during 2026 preseason

camp.

Eight Charlotte FC academy players made professional debuts in 2025, with Wyatt Holt, Adrian Mendoza and Simon Tonidandel each logging significant minutes.

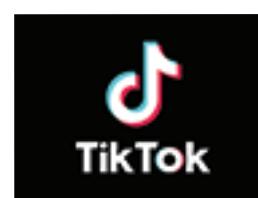
Dicker came to Charlotte from Brighton & Hove Albion, where he was an assistant coach for the U-21 side in Premier League 2. Before that he played 15 years with clubs in Ireland, England and Scotland. He helped Brighton earn promotion to the EFL Championship in the 2010-11 season?

Sawchak joined Crown Legacy in 2023 after a year as an assistant coach with USL League One side Northern Colorado Hailstorm FC. Sawchak was Crown Legacy's interim head coach in 2024 after Jose Tavares resigned, posting an 8-5-5 record and a berth in the MLS Next Pro Eastern Conference semifinals.

He also has coaching experience with the Chattanooga Red Wolves, Oglethorpe University and Atlanta United's Academy. As a player, Sawchak played 10 years as a professional career, mostly in Finland's second division.

Martinez joined Charlotte FC in August as the academy's U-18 head coach. Before that, he was an assistant coach with FC Dallas in 2024 season and director of the academy's sports performance staff (2023-24) and assistant coach with the U.S. U-16 and U-18 national teams. Martinez also coached in Spain with clubs such as PE Sant Jordi, CD Ibiza and UE Olot.

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National broadcast and playoff teams on schedule

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said. "But with success comes change. I told our players, 'You have success, you're going to have some change because people want your guys."

The final eight games are against CIAA opponents, starting Sept. 12 at Winston-Salem State. The Golden Bulls have won three straight against WSSU, which has a new coach in Tory Woodbury, Smith's offensive coordinator from 2015-17.

JCSU's home opener is Sept. 19 against Fayetteville State in a rematch of the Golden Bulls' last-minute 17-14 road win last year to keep their CIAA title aspirations alive.

After an open week, the Golden Bulls go to Bluefield State on Oct. 3. Smith's 69-13 win against Big Blue 69-13 for last year's homecoming was the Golden Bulls' largest margin of victory and most points scored since an 83-7 romp against Livingstone in 1964.

The next two dates are at McGirt Field:

Shaw on Oct. 10 and the following week against Lincoln (Pa.) for homecoming. A road trip to Bowie State - which is still looking for a head coach - on Oct. 24, followed by the home finale Oct. 31 against Virginia State.

The regular season finale is Nov. 7 at Livingstone in the Commemorative Classic, a renewal of the oldest rivalry in Black college football that dates to 1892. JCSU scored a come-from-behind 26-21 win last year to clinch a berth in the CIAA title game.

Johnson C. Smith 2026 football schedule:

August
29 at Benedict
September
6 vs Albany State (Canton, Ohio)
12 at Winston-Salem State
19 Fayetteville State
October
3 at Bluefield State
10 Shaw
17 Lincoln (Pa.)
24 at Bowie State
31 Virginia State
November
7 at Livingstone

49ers rise to first in American

Continued from page 5A

Aaron Fearne said. "We have a starting center [Anton Bonke] that has

hardly played basketball at all, so every game is just a lot of new experiences for him. He's getting better and better every game. I coach them really hard every day. I hold them to a high level of accountability, because I want them to taste success at a really high level and learn to understand that if you work really hard, you'll be rewarded. And I think if you can take those behaviors into their lives, whatever they do, they know they can be successful."

Charlotte has leaned on bench production during the run as well. Against Rice, Damoni Harrison and Dezayne Mingo scored 15 and 11 points respectively. A starter who elevated his game against the Owls was Spencer Elliott. After going scoreless in the prior game against Temple, Elliott

added nine points on 4-for-5 shooting. Fearne's message resonated with him.

"[Fearne said] just to stay confident," Elliott recalled. "At the end of the day, every shot is not going to go in, so just staying confident. We put in the work. Like coach says, if we put in the work, you're going to get rewarded. So, I kept my head down all week, stayed in the gym and worked."

Fearne added what he has seen from Elliott's growth over the season. "Spencer would have learned a lot of things at Tulane," his prior school, Fearne said. "He might not have been happy with his situation, but he was playing at a good program. He's getting an opportunity here. I don't give anything to anybody. I don't care who you are or where you come from, you are going to earn it. Spencer had a challenging summer. I needed him to work harder and work a

certain way. ... I am really proud of him."

The 49ers shift their focus to Wichita State in a rematch of the Jan. 3 game when the 49ers beat the Shockers 104-100 in double overtime where both teams shot 48% from the floor and 38% from three-point range. The Shockers are 13-8 overall and 10-2 at home. Fearne anticipates a ravenous environment.

"[Wichita State] has an awesome fan base," he said. "It will be a huge, aggressive crowd on Wednesday. I really hope it is so [our team] has to deal with that pressure to perform in those environments. They are big, they're physical. They kicked our butts on the glass here in a game that was obviously a wild game, which was a lot of fun. I'm sure they will be very motivated to get us back."

Postseason chase continues for Ascent

Continued from page 5A

and Lily Nabet - to the squad, all of whom bring considerable NWSL experience to Charlotte.

Cook, 27, brings size (5-foot-10) and four seasons with the Chicago Stars in NWSL but is coming back from a torn ACL that limited her time over the past season. She hasn't been a big number scorer in NWSL but scored 76 goals in 80 games for Grand Valley State in college, so she knows where the net is. The scouting report says Cook can stretch defenses with pace down the flank or in central areas, can bolster hold-up play, and connect late runs into the box

Groom, 32, won an NWSL championship

with now-defunct FC Kansas City as a rookie in 2015 and last saw the pitch 31 times over two seasons with the Chicago Stars before signing with Carolina. Poole will look for deploy her as a link player, offering stability and creativity between defense and attack by controlling tempo in midfield.

Nabet, 26, a former Duke captain, adds leadership and strengthens the midfield. After making 35 appearances for Angel City in the NWSL from 2022-25, she was loaned to Fort Lauderdale United in the GSL for the first half of this season. She should enhance Ascent's ability to win the ball and transition quickly.

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