



Rico Dowdle on a mission to prove he deserves starting running back role

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Republican lawmakers have pledged to create another safe congressional district for the GOP when the North Carolina General Assembly convenes next week. The most likely target is the 1st Congressional District, where Rep. Don Davis, a Black Democrat, is the incumbent.

High stakes for NC voters with gerrymander derby

Creation of 11-3 GOP congressional majority would dilute Black representation

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

North Carolina is joining the gerrymandering race, which has long-term implications for Black voters.

Republican lawmakers announced Monday they will return to Raleigh next week to redraw the legislative map to give the GOP a better chance to add an 11th Republican representative in Washington. The most likely target is the Republican-leaning 1st Congressional District now represented by Don Davis, a Black Democrat.

According to Data USA, 47.4% of the district's residents are white and 40.2%

Black.

President Donald Trump demanded earlier this year that Texas, which has the nation's largest Republican-majority congressional delegation, redraw its maps to carve out five more GOP-leaning districts to ward off potential Democratic gains in next year's midterm elections. Other Republican-leaning states followed suit, as did Democratic strongholds California and Illinois. California voters will decide via referendum next month whether to permit redistricting.

Typically, redrawing district maps are limited to immediately after the national census, which occurs every 10 years.

The most recent census was in 2020.

"President Trump earned a clear mandate from the voters of North Carolina and the rest of the country, and we intend to defend it by drawing an additional Republican Congressional seat," House Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) said in a statement. "Our state won't stand by while Democrats like (California Gov.) Gavin Newsom redraw districts to



Hall

aid in their effort to obtain a majority in the U.S. House. We will not allow them to

Please see **REDRAWN** | 2A

Support for 1-cent transit tax measure

Black Political Caucus backs passage of county ballot referendum

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

The fate of Mecklenburg County's 1-cent transportation tax referendum is now on the ballots of voters.

With the start of early voting on Oct. 16, the referendum will be decided by what's expected to be a sliver of the electorate. Turnout is likely to be thin as typical of a municipal election.

The measure has generated debate among Black voters and advocacy groups, who are split, but some of Mecklenburg County's best-known and influential Black political leaders have announced their support.

The Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Charlotte City Council member James Mitchell have endorsed the referendum. The BPC offered its support after a vote of its membership.

"This overwhelming vote of support demonstrates the unity of our members in recognizing the importance of this referendum to Mecklenburg County's future," BPC Chair Jocelyn Jones-Nolley said in a statement. "We look forward to partnering with the Metropolitan Public Transportation Authority and other stakeholders to ensure community concerns are prioritized and addressed, and that the benefits of this investment are shared broadly across all neighborhoods. This is about ensuring

Please see **BPC** | 2A

Medical debt relief beats expectations

By Brandon Kingdollar

NC NEWSLINE

Gov. Josh Stein announced Monday that the state's medical debt relief initiative has eliminated roughly \$6.5 billion in medical debt for 2.5 million North Carolinians.

The program, launched under former Gov. Roy Cooper last year, has far surpassed its initial projection of \$4 billion in alleviated debt, and Stein and Health and Human Services Secretary Dev Sangvai said they will continue to search for debts to alleviate.

Focused on debt deemed "uncollectible," the relief program incentivized the state's 99 acute care hospitals to relieve medical debt for low- and middle-income patients and expand charity care policies as conditions for receiving higher payments through Medicaid's Healthcare Access and Stabilization Program. The state also instructed hospitals to stop reporting medical debt to credit agencies.

"For many people, the debt service serves as an anvil holding them back from opportunity and a better life, from getting a mortgage or a small business loan," Stein said in a news conference at the Executive Mansion. "Unlike most other forms of debt, medical debt is not a choice. Nobody chooses to have a heart attack or get diagnosed with a chronic condition — you just have to deal with it."

Stein thanked Cooper and former

Please see **MEDICAL** | 3A

Farm to school program keeps kids fed, engaged

By Kylie Marsh
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH - In the face of federal budget cuts, the NC Farm to School program could keep 1.1 million public school students from going hungry.

North Carolina Sen. Jay Chaudhuri and Wake County School System Superintendent Robert Taylor discussed the impact federal budget cuts would have on students that receive summer nutrition assistance.

Policy changes in eligibility for programs like SNAP and Medicaid will cause a 10% reduction for students receiving school meal programs in the school district and disqualifying 33 schools from providing free meals to all students.

"Let's expand that across the entire state and think about the number of children that will be impacted," Taylor said. "When children show up and hunger is not an issue, they can focus."

October is National Farm to School Month, which celebrates local agriculture's role in serving public school students while developing the local economy. This week is also National School Lunch Week, a campaign which spotlights the significance of a healthy lunch in a student's life.

Rachel Candaso of Pitt County Schools, the 2025 North Carolina Teacher of the Year, said nutrition is tied to student performance.

"A hungry student can't focus on equations or essays when they're hungry. Fresh, healthy food that we provide students at school helps them to be ready to learn, to lead and to thrive, and that's what we want for North Carolina students," Candaso said. "When students in North Carolina enjoy sweet potatoes from Wilson County or Rice from Tidewater

Please see **FARM** | 2A



CITY OF CHARLOTTE

The Queen City ADU program is a city of Charlotte initiative that encourages construction of accessory dwelling spaces to diversify affordable housing options.

Have space on your lot? Charlotte initiative encourages extra housing

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

It's OK to build extra living space next to your Charlotte house, and the city will help with expenses.

Charlotte Housing & Neighborhood Services Department is making it easier for property owners to add accessory dwelling units through the Queen City ADU program. An accessory dwelling can be attached to an existing house, like a converted basement or garage, or a small, detached

unit. The units are complete homes are independent from the main house and include a kitchen, bathroom, sleeping area and separate entrance.

The goal is to diversify housing to increase affordable options as well as improve density and environmental sustainability. Smaller units typically fit the needs of elders, retirees and single people, as well as multigenerational families. Advocates point to

Please see **HAVE** | 2A

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Please
Recycle



Redrawn district map will impact Black voters

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undermine the will of the voters and President Trump's agenda."

Democrats accused Republicans of kowtowing to Trump's demand for protection against accountability. As the congressional chamber that controls government appropriations, a Democratic-controlled House would determine federal spending as well as oversight.

"Republican lawmakers made clear today that they plan to come back to Raleigh and disenfranchise the voters of this state," House Democratic Leader Robert Reives (D-Chatham) said. "Instead of lowering costs for families or ensuring Medicaid can stay afloat, they are hell-bent on consolidating as much power as they can. Call it what it is: They are stealing a congressional district in order to shield themselves from accountability at the ballot box."

Said Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham): "We are doing everything we can to protect President Trump's agenda, which means safeguarding Republican control of Congress. Picking up where Texas left off, we will hold votes in our October session to redraw North Carolina's congressional map to ensure Gavin Newsom doesn't decide the congressional majority."

Gerrymandering has long been a sticky subject in North Carolina politics, primarily because of the state's racial history. Numerous lawsuits have been filed by Democrats and Republicans since 1992 when Mel Watt of Charlotte and Eva Clayton of Warrenton were the first Black representatives elected since 1901. Civil and voting rights advocates contend that Republican-drawn districts dilute the strength of Black voters while GOP lawmakers contend - and courts have backed - gerrymanders for political purposes.

The U.S. Supreme Court is hearing such a case in Louisiana v. Callais that centers on Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act - the primary safeguard against racially discriminatory redistricting.

If the justices strike down Section 2, it could result in another 19 safe Republican seats compared to 2024 and 24 overall, which would virtually guarantee years of House GOP control, according to Fair Fight Action, a nonprofit founded by former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams to expand voting rights.

"This is about more than lines on a map - it could decide whether millions of Black, Latino, and other voters of color still have a voice in our representative democracy," said Lauren Groh-Wargo, CEO of Fair Fight Action, which published a report earlier this

month on the impact of Section 2's elimination. "We're watching the GOP advance to the endgame of a decades-long strategy to dismantle the Voting Rights Act and lock in their own power. If Section 2 is struck down, the court will be dragging us back to a pre-1965 America where racist maps blocked entire communities from having fair political representation."

There isn't much of North Carolina's congressional pie left for Republicans to divvy. They hold a 10-4 majority in the House delegation despite earning only 53% of the congressional vote - primarily outside urban areas along the Interstate 85 corridor. Davis, who won his seat in 2024 by less than 2% of the votes cast, represents a competitive rural district in the northeast.

"Republican leaders are back at it again rigging elections instead of doing their jobs," Senate Democratic Leader Sydney Batch (D-Wake) said. "They know their ideas are out of step with the people of North Carolina and that's why they keep trying to rewrite the rules to cling to power."

"For 105 days now, Republicans have failed to pass a state budget. Instead, they've gutted healthcare access, stalled progress on Medicaid expansion, and ignored the rising costs that working families face every day. But somehow, they've found time to return to Raleigh to redraw congressional lines and try to squeeze out a few more votes in their failing districts. That tells you everything you need to know about their priorities and who they serve."



Reives



Batch



Berger

BPC backs transit tax

Continued from page 1A

growth that works for everyone." If approved by voters, the sales tax increase would fund road improvements and public transit options including buses, rail, and micro-transit services. The local levy will raise Mecklenburg's sales tax from 7.25% to 8.25% and generate a projected \$19.4 billion over 30 years.

According to a 2024 survey by Charlotte Area Transit System, Black commuters made up three-quarters of bus riders, far outpacing white (11%) and Hispanic (5%) commuters. About half (48%) had a yearly income under \$50,000.

Light rail demographics show 57% of commuters are Black, 25% white and 12% Hispanic.

At least 43% of riders earned less than \$50,000.

Community groups on both sides of the referendum have rallied support while the League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg hosted an information session last week that included Mecklenburg commissioners Chair Mark Jerrell, former council member David Howard, a consultant with executive experience at the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Admin-

istration.

Mitchell, an at-large council representative and longtime BPC member, touted the referendum as a chance for greater economic equity through improved mobility options.

"The Black Political Caucus has long been a cornerstone of civic leadership in Charlotte," he said. "Our endorsement of the referendum reflects both the values of the organization and the future we want for this community - a future where transportation connects people to opportunity, strengthens neighborhoods and supports growth for decades to come."

The Charlotte Regional Business Alliance is collaborating with nonprofits to back the referendum. Corporations like Bank of America and Atrium Advocate Health as well as nonprofits Crisis Assistance Ministries and Urban League of Central Carolinas are supporters.

The referendum has critics, too. Action NC, among the most aggressive opponents, contends the legislation doesn't provide enough detail on what is included in the tax or whether it is permanent.



Mitchell

Education leaders seek overhaul of NC school grading system

By Ahmed Jallow
NC NEWSLINE

North Carolina education officials want to change the way public schools are graded, moving away from a heavy focus on test scores and toward new metrics that capture a broader picture of student success.

At its Wednesday meeting, the State Board of Education heard a proposal from Department of Public Instruction officials to create a new task force that would change school performance measures. The current A-F grading model, in place since 2015, has faced criticism for its heavy reliance on standardized test scores, which some argue does not adequately measure the

full scope of a school's success.

Currently, the grading system focuses primarily on test scores in a few core subjects, which means the contributions of many teachers are not fully represented. The proposed task force would develop a multi-measure model assessing not just test proficiency but also student growth, access to advanced coursework and career training, and progress toward graduation.

"Our current system doesn't necessarily reflect what folks see in the daily work in their schools," said Michael Maher, DPI's chief accountability officer.

"It is a limited reflection of readiness for college career and life. Because it's

heavily weighted on an individual test score on an individual day, it doesn't give us the full picture of what's happening in schools," Maher told the board.

The effort falls under Pillar 6 of the board's new five-year strategic plan, which calls for "transformative change" in public education.

Board member Olivia Oxendine questioned DPI officials on how this task force would differ from past attempts to change the state's school accountability system.

Maher said that this task force will be established directly by the State Board of Education, unlike previous efforts. He also noted the

Please see **OVERHAUL** | 3A

Farm to school program keeps state's students fed and engaged

Continued from page 1A

Grain, they're not just eating lunch, they're tasting the story of North Carolina agriculture."

Tommy Wheeler, founder of Tidewater Grain Company based in Pamlico Sound, discussed the importance of tapping into North Carolina's strong agricultural industry to feed public school students.

"Think of this as a future savings account that we're investing in for many, many years to come. It's not a one-time buy," Wheeler said. "The Carolina Gold rice we served them at lunch today pays dividends for many, many years to come."

North Carolina's Farm to School program has no administrative costs, so the money goes directly back to the farms, schools and communities. By connecting public schools to local farms, Wheeler said the partnership is an opportunity to invest in the local economy.

Chaudhuri said it will be easy to gain bipartisan support in the General Assembly to get an additional \$1.9 million in fund-

ing for the FTS program.

"I think the ask is quite reasonable and quite small in dollars and also illustrates the fact that asking for a small amount of dollars is gonna result in a lot more money coming back from the federal government," Chaudhuri said the projected return on the small investment is \$131 million.

"I think if we keep our request narrow and reasonable and focused on the kids, I think we're trying to stay optimistic that the leadership in both chambers will see the benefit of doing so. This is not hundreds of millions of dollars that we're asking for," he said.

"Unless the state adds this funding, we will start having to wind this program down, and we know that's bad for our kids and our families and our communities where those dollars are being spent," said Abby Emanuelson, executive director of the N.C. Alliance for Health. "These are essential safeguards for nutrition and educational success."

Have space on your lot? Charlotte initiative encourages extra housing

Continued from page 1A

the benefit of wealth-building for homeowners through rental income while providing find affordable housing.

Fifty-one percent of Charlotte metro renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing and

Mecklenburg County built 11,500 fewer housing units than needed to keep pace with growth over the past decade. To catch up, the county needs an estimated 10,600 new units annually.

"I think that ADUs are a great thing, generally speaking," said Nadia Anderson, an urban design professor at UNC Charlotte. "I think that they can provide income for existing homeowners, and they can provide affordable housing for, I always think of students, but could be other people as well. And I think that another thing is that they increase density.

One of the problems with our city is that it's sprawling more and more and getting more people closer to work-places or school or, access to goods and services, medical care, etc., is a good thing."

Queen City ADU offers up to \$80,000 in forgivable, interest-free financing to help homeowners build a unit. ADUs must have their own kitchen and bathroom, subordinate to the main home, and no larger than half the size of the primary residence with a cap of 1,000 square feet for detached units. Only one ADU per lot is permissible.

ADUs are "essentially the equivalent of a studio apartment," Anderson said. "The ones that I have seen, not only in Charlotte, but also other places, are about that [size], sometimes a little bit smaller, maybe 700 or 800 square feet. I used to live in a

three-bedroom house. It was 1,000 square feet, so for a studio, that's not bad."

Owners must rent their unit to tenants earning no more than 80% area median income and monthly rents may not exceed the published fair market rent for a studio unit at 70% AMI, as defined in the city of Charlotte's Zoning Administration Manual. The loan is forgiven at a rate of \$10,000 annually of affordability, up to eight years but faster forgiveness is possible - at up to \$15,000 a year - if Section 8 voucher holders or residents referred by supportive service agencies or city housing partners rent.

Homeowners interested in building an ADU can use an online tool to see if their property qualifies.

Interested residents can apply at civiform.charlottenc.gov/programs and information on the program is at charlottenc.gov.



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Medical debt relief program tops goal

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Health and Human Services Secretary Kody Kinsley, the latter of whom was in attendance, for spearheading the “first-of-its-kind” initiative to use federal health care funds as leverage to change hospitals’ debt policies.

“Most of the debt had been on the books for years. It only served to deprive people who had no way of paying back of a brighter financial future,” he said. “If they could have paid, they would have paid.”

The North Carolina Healthcare Association, an advocacy group for the hospital industry, didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

The program was able to surpass its initial forecast as participating hospitals found additional debt that could be relieved through the review process that was not included in the initial negotiation between NCDHHS and health care providers, Stein said, adding that he expects that number to grow as hospitals continue the relief process.

To inform North Carolinians that their debt has been erased, NCDHHS has partnered with charity Undue Medical Debt to send explanation letters to those impacted. Undue Medical Debt is set to mail more than 250,000 letters this week informing residents they no longer owe their balances.

“I am particularly proud to highlight that North Carolina’s approach is particularly unique because it facilitates, in the short term, debt relief for families today, while incentivizing long-term policy changes that will end the cycle of medical debt by attacking it at its root cause, ending it before it even starts,” said Undue Medical Debt board vice chair Jose Penabad.

Stein also used the news conference Monday to reiterate calls for the North Carolina General Assembly to fully fund the state’s Medicaid program and for Congress to renew Affordable Care Act subsidies. “We have so much work to do to improve people’s health and financial wellbeing,” Stein said.

While the program is based on conditioning federal dollars for hospitals, the ongoing government shutdown has not impacted the debt relief efforts, Sangvai said.

He added that NCDHHS will continue to evaluate the effects of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and its changes to Medicaid and HASP, but the debt relief policy changes at the hospital level help ensure the sustainability of the program regardless of federal health care policy.

“This is not a one-time fix,” Sangvai said. “It is a sustainable model that will continue to reduce debt burden and improve access to care for the years ahead,” Sangvai said.

‘Mind your business’ during UNCG police confrontation

By Kate Denning
CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

A physical altercation between three UNC-Greensboro Police officers and a man and woman during an Oct. 6 traffic stop is drawing criticism from UNCG students and civil rights groups.

Video footage of the incident shows officers grabbing and cursing at a man during the arrest and kneeling on top of the woman.

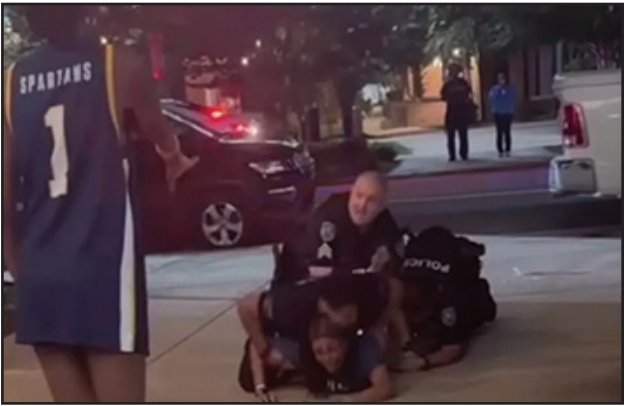
A report of the incident obtained by Carolina Public Press names the man as Quenten Thomas, 24, of Greensboro, and the woman as Alisia Rea, 22, of Charlotte.

Thomas and Rea are both Black. The officers who initially approached Thomas for his vehicle being stopped in a turn lane are Latino, and a third officer who arrived during Thomas’ arrest is white. The UNCG chapter of the NAACP released a statement on the altercation criticizing UNCG Police who they say “brutalized two Black Greensboro residents.”

UNCG released a statement acknowledging at least one of the individuals arrested is a student at the university. “The University is aware of a campus incident involving a student and law enforcement that has raised concerns in our community,” UNCG said in a statement posted on social media Thursday.

“While we cannot comment on ongoing legal matters, our priority is the safety and well-being of our students. Support is available through the Division of Student Affairs for those with questions or concerns.”

In the video, a female officer who is listed in the incident report as Officer Rebecca Galicia, a police trainee, says Thomas was



SUBMITTED

Three UNC-Greensboro police officers are on top of student Alisia Rea, who is from Charlotte, in this scene from a bystander's video feed of the incident on Oct. 6 in Greensboro.

initially pulled over for being stopped in a turn lane, though records show he was ultimately arrested for a revoked driver’s license and “resist, delay or obstruction” in addition to stopping on a highway.

Rea, who filmed several minutes of the altercation and arrests, was arrested for assault on a public official and issued a trespass warning according to the incident report, despite officers saying in the video she was being arrested for interfering with their investigation.

Rea, who identified Thomas as her boyfriend, told CPP on Oct. 13, that they do not “have a statement to make at this time.”

How the incident happened

The start of the video posted to social media shows a male officer, who can be identified by his nametag as UNCG Police Officer Cristian Ortiz but is not named in the incident report, attempting to grab Thomas out of the driver’s seat of his vehicle. Thomas told Ortiz to let go of him so he could step out of the car.

Ortiz let go of Thomas, and Thomas repeatedly asked the officers to back up from the driver’s side so he could step out. Ortiz shouted at Ortiz, telling

him to, “Get out of the f—ing car right now, man!” “Can you back up?” Thomas said in the video. “I do not feel safe getting out of the car with you guys hovering over me right now.”

A third officer, whose nametag is blurry in the video and is not listed in the incident report but has been identified as UNCG Police Sgt. Braxton Hiatt in the incident report, then arrived on the scene and said Thomas was under arrest. Hiatt is seen removing his stun-gun device and pointing it at Thomas through the open car door, moments after arriving.

Ortiz pulled Thomas out of the driver’s seat and began restraining him. As Thomas had his hands behind his back against the side of the vehicle, Hiatt told Thomas he was about to be “tased.” Thomas expressed he did not know what he was doing to be tased for or why he was being arrested.

The video continues to show Thomas being put in the police car. Rea, the woman filming the interaction, asked officers whether they read Thomas his rights. Hiatt responded, “You watch too much TV. Mind your business.”

Overhaul sought for NC school grading

Continued from page 1A

department now has several years of research and prior work to draw on.

“They will receive homework, an orientation packet, which will include the prior work done so that work is not lost. That was important work,” added Rupen Fofaria, director of board operations and policy.

Despite those assurances, Oxendine said she worries that focusing too much on changing measures could distract from the core goal of improving student achievement in reading and math. While she acknowledged the frustration many feel with the current grading system, she warned against creating a model that “just puts lipstick on a pig.”

“I want an accountability model that is

also about increasing the reading achievement of kids, the math achievement,” Oxendine said. “I don’t hear that in this discussion.”

This isn’t the first push to change how schools are graded. Last year, former State Superintendent Catherine Truitt told lawmakers that the current grading system is “broken” and fails to provide parents and communities with useful information.

The task force will include representatives from the state board, lawmakers, educators, researchers, and community leaders.

“This is about giving families and educators information they can actually use,” Maher said.



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The Voice of the Black Community

Gerald O. Johnson | CEO/PUBLISHER

gerald.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

André P. Johnson | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

andre.johnson@thecharlottepost

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

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Data centers and energy equity

North Carolina is once again America's top state for business.

When businesses look to move and grow in North Carolina they look at our welcoming business climate but a company they also look at our investments — in our people and our infrastructure.

A company is only as good as the people that work for it, and North Carolina boasts a skilled work force. But in order to keep business booming we have to continue to make the lives our citizens and workers better. Right now, people across North Carolina are struggling. Rising costs at the grocery store and energy bills that climbed nearly 6% nationwide last year are impacting us all.

With that we have to be proactive and think about the future, not just how North Carolinians can work but how business can work for us. We can't afford to be complacent.

There's been a lot of talk about data centers in the news recently and some have argued that new data centers will automatically make energy more expensive for everyday customers. I'll admit that I have had my hesitations, but I believe that when you hold reputable companies to high standards and even higher commitments, data centers can help stabilize costs and put downward pressure on energy rates.

We've seen this work in other states. In Georgia, utility leaders have credited large customers with allowing them to freeze base rates for three years. In Virginia, the world's largest hub for data centers, billions in annual tax revenue have generated budget surpluses and even property tax cuts for homeowners. And in South Carolina, large facilities are paying higher costs instead of pushing that cost on tens of thousands of households. Oregon passed a law as well creating a new customer category specifically for data centers to assign energy responsibility equitably.

The key is responsibility. Data centers are going to continue to move into North Carolina but it's important that we put in safe guards to protect North Carolina families, our communities and the environment.

Data centers are required to sign long-term contracts, guarantee minimum payments, and cover the infrastructure costs their projects trigger. Many also agree to reduce or shift their power use during peak times, which relieves stress on the grid and helps avoid costly new capacity. Far from pushing bills higher, these steps help spread fixed costs more broadly and fairly.

We also have to address the root drivers of rising energy costs—aging infrastructure, volatile fuel prices, and extreme weather events. Seventy percent of our transmission lines are more than 25 years old. Utilities are being forced to make costly upgrades, and those costs shouldn't be passed on to consumers.

Add in inflationary pressures and billion-dollar damages from hurricanes and wildfires, and it's no surprise bills are climbing.

It's no secret that, data centers and artificial intelligence have a large energy demand, but we can take the time now to build new clean energy projects that add supply to the grid. This will also help spread out the fixed costs of running the grid, which means households aren't carrying those expenses alone.

And when new lines or maintenance is needed, it will be the data centers that are required to pay for those upgrades upfront, leaving the grid stronger and more reliable for everyone. That means more investment in energy infrastructure, steadier rates, and a fairer distribution of costs across all customers.

Communities also see direct benefits. Data centers create thousands of good-paying jobs, first in construction and the skilled trades to build the facilities, and then in long-term operations and maintenance once they're running. And by partnering locally, data centers can help fund community projects, from weatherization upgrades that lower utility bills to resilience hubs that keep schools and community centers open during storms.

Here in North Carolina, the task before us is not to slow growth but to manage it responsibly. That means holding companies accountable for their share of infrastructure costs, prioritizing projects that deliver strong local economic value, and ensuring visible benefits for families — from weatherization upgrades that cut monthly bills to training programs that prepare workers for the clean energy jobs of the future. At the end of the day, ensuring that North Carolina families don't shoulder the burden of rising energy usage and keep cost down.

North Carolina has the opportunity to show the rest of the country how to do this right: attract transformative investments, protect ratepayers, and strengthen our grid for the long haul. Data centers are not a threat to affordability, but a part of the solution, if we insist on clear rules and fair contributions.

North Carolina Rep. Terry Brown of Charlotte has represented Mecklenburg County in the North Carolina General Assembly since 2021 and serves as chief Democratic whip in the House of Representatives.



TERRY BROWN

Ripple effect of leadership incivility

By Veronica Ivory
SPECIAL TO THE POST

As I listened to Pam Bondi, Kash Patel, and Karoline Leavitt field questions with thinly veiled hostility and dismissiveness, one truth was unmistakable: leadership sets the tone. The way a leader carries themselves in their administration.

Crassness at the top rarely stays contained. It trickles down, normalizing rudeness as strategy and arrogance as confidence. When you elect someone who thrives on insults and personal attacks, you empower a culture where decorum is dismissed as weakness, and hostility becomes the default response.

For years, Americans have debated whether tone matters. However, political theater aside, it influences how our representatives interact with one another and with the public. A president who lacks dignity invites a team that confuses aggression with strength. Leaders who degrade their opponents teach their staff that bullying is acceptable and that decency is optional.

Good governance isn't just policy — it's culture. Respectful, measured dialogue creates trust, encourages collaboration, and sets a higher bar for problem-solving. Incivility, on the other hand, corrodes the foundation of service and replaces it with spectacle.

The recent spectacle of rude, combative responses from key political figures is no accident. It's the logical extension of a leader who rewards outrage over intellect and spectacle over substance. If we choose leaders who lack class, we can expect an administration that reflects it — unfiltered, undisciplined, and unwilling to rise above the worst instincts of human behavior.

The takeaway is simple: the president isn't just a policy setter; they're a cultural architect. When we ignore character in the highest office, we forfeit civility in public life.

The sad truth is that with their smug responses and abrasive behavior, they likely believe they're projecting intelligence and

savvy — when in reality, they're an embarrassment to our country. Each display chips away at the pride America once held before this president's tenure, a far cry from the ideals of meritocracy.

The era of "When they go low, we go high" now feels like a fairy tale. To even get this administration's attention, you're almost forced to wade into the gutter with them. But is that really who we are as a nation? The question isn't whether they'll drag us down — it's whether we'll choose to stay there. Because, as the beacon on the hill fades, we must decide whether we'll let its light go out — or fight to make it shine again.

Veronica Ivory lives in Shreveport, Louisiana.

A few local tales for Halloween season

'Tis the season.

Skeletons haunt yards, and pumpkins are plopped on porches. Kids (and many adults) are scheming about their Halloween costumes. But if you really want to get in the mood for Halloween, in a local kind of way, pick up "The Devil's

Done Come Back: New Ghost Tales from North Carolina," a collection of stories and poems edited by Winston-Salem's Ed Southern and published by Blair, a small press based in Durham.

You'll get what you expect: a slinky, lurking cat; people who died years ago re-appearing to have a chat; hands desperately scraping on the outside of windows; and ghosts riding horses in the foggy night. But you will also get some timely and interesting commentary on topics that feel more pertinent to day-to-day life.

Woven through the short stories and poems from over a dozen North Carolina writers are four installments of "A House of Vine

and Shadow," an overarching, fairytale-like story of Nate Batts, a young developer from the fictional Goldleaf Company. Nate's soulless job is to convince homeowners to let Goldleaf buy them out of their old property. Goldleaf's developers aim to transform land into "one more high-end subdivision full of 'luxury' homes that look like they were made of cottage cheese, like they were imitation castles in a cheap amusement park."

He knocks on the door of a charming ramshackle house that Goldleaf hopes to purchase. A man who "looked like a living skeleton" answers the door, invites Nate in, and presents him to his wife, who has "been like to have a fit waiting on you to get here."

The home feels familiar: a parlor with old wallpaper peeling off the wall, a wicker chair, a Mason jar full of tea "so sweet he'd have sworn he could feel his teeth start to come loose from his gums." While visiting this simultaneously bewitching and creepy couple, smells waft over Nate that he cannot quite place— smells that are a little good and a little bad.

His nose is filled "with something rich and bitter-sweet, with a little of the rot of pluff mud, a little of the sting of salt."

The ancient ghost-like pair implores Nate to listen to the stories they tell about the surrounding land. They try to root him in the past instead of literally bulldozing into the future. They beseech: "The thing is, son, you need to hear these stories, and you need to try to really hear them. You need these stories. You needed them long since."

The longer Nate stays in the house, the more he feels glued or rooted to the ground, mesmerized— and terrified— by the stories and what they mean for him. The stories are warning Nate— and us— that we are lost and are losing our connection to the past. If we don't pay attention, we are in danger of losing something fundamental.

Spoiler alert: Goldleaf wins. The old farmhouse is torn down, the old growth forests and old farm fields obliterated. What replaces the old farmhouse, old tobacco fields, and old growth trees is a development full of "hectic gables and peaks without

need or reason, gaping facades without balance or symmetry or beauty." But Nate is changed, his eyes open to what happens when we ignore the stories calling us.

Like any good campfire ghost story, you'll finish this book having had a good tale. There are belly laughs, startling surprises, and more than enough haunting moments. But Southern and some of our state's great authors give us something deeper and decidedly unsettling, uprooting us from our comfort zones.

So, as the nights grow longer and the weather takes on a chill, snuggle up with "The Devil's Done Come Back." Like Nate, you might feel more aware and grounded in the present through these stories that take us to the cobwebby past and beyond. It's a fine North Carolina way to celebrate the season — and you might just discover that our ghosts have a lot more to say than "boo."

D.G. Martin is a former UNC system vice president and hosted PBS NC's "North Carolina Bookwatch."

Does revenge, retaliation warm your heart?

"I got you" is an age-old expression used when someone gets the best of us.



JAMES EWERS

You hear it used in a joking manner and sometimes in an ill-tempered way. When you hear it, you will either smile or frown.

Growing up back in the day had me using I got you a lot. The term was usually associated with us playing childhood games. Those were fun times where happiness was the main ingredient.

In fact, as a boy coming of age, I don't recall hearing it in a negative way. Playing tag or dodgeball always meant that we would hear "I got you."

As a youth, I never imagined the three words used in a sinister way. I guess the times we're living in have shown me a different interpretation of those three words.

Being spiteful and seeking retribution aren't part of my persona. So, for those who have those attributes, I feel sorry for them. How do you go around picking people to hurt?

When the truth is used against you then take your medicine and do better the next time. Fortunately, we live in a country where it is a staple of our democracy. Is that the case now?

Fabricating and just flat out lying won't get you any brownie points, at least not with me. However, there is a remnant of Americans who use them and then say, "I got you." Integrity and honesty have been removed from the front burner and off the stove.

We see people in masks

taking folks from their communities and jobs. Checking legal papers and credentials isn't being done. There is a "I got you" mindset that is being displayed by those in charge. This will continue as long as the checks and balances system isn't being used in our nation. At one point, it was being used, but not anymore. This is my opinion.

I got you has now shown up in the housing market. Home loans and the National Flood Insurance Program are now being held up. There is uncertainty as to how long this will last.

Sources say active-duty service members and others on the federal payroll may miss paychecks on Oct. 15 because of the government shutdown. However, the administration says it has identified funds to pay the military.

Advocates of what I call the "I got you" movement are simply going along with business as usual as if nothing is wrong. America, something is terribly wrong. It is beginning to get a bit cooler now and with that we'll see more sickness. This is normally the time we take some precautionary health measures. This includes taking flu and now COVID-19 shots. However, we are being advised by some elected and appointed officials not to take them.

Reports say those that say not to take them have already taken their vaccines. They are practicing "I got you." Misinformation gathers around us like a storm cloud, and we are succumbing to it.

Pundits are telling us that these are unprecedented times, and we are falling for wrongdoing. There are those who are engaging in voodoo politics. However, polls show that a large per-

centage of us are distrustful and disillusioned with what is going on today. Rules and regulations have been thrown out of the window onto the pavement.

The American people are being held as hostages and collateral damage to a new set of laws. Mind you, laws that are made up sometimes to benefit only a small group of Americans.

During the last election season, we were told how great things would be. Do you remember the lyrics, "Vote for me and I'll set you free" from the Temptations' "Ball of Confusion?" Now, those same people are saying, "I got you."

Winston-Salem native and Johnson C. Smith University graduate James Ewers lives in New Orleans.

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TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers running back Rico Dowdle runs to the goal line on a 36-yard touchdown reception from Bryce Young in their 30-27 win against the Dallas Cowboys Oct. 12, 2025, at Bank of America Stadium. Dowdle, a former Cowboy, rushed for 183 yards on 30 carries.

Rico Dowdle’s prove-it mission

Gaffney, SC, native making the most of a one-year deal with Carolina as Panthers’ lead running back

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott misses Carolina Panthers running back and former teammate Rico Dowdle.

After spending five years together, Prescott and Dowdle were separated last offseason when the Cowboys decided to go with Javonte Williams and not re-sign Dowdle, who eventually decided to come “home” and form a 1-2 punch with starter Chuba Hubbard.

With Hubbard missing the past two games with a calf injury, Dowdle is proving the Cowboys may have made

a mistake. After compiling 234 total yards in a come-from-behind win against Miami a week ago, Dowdle compiled a franchise record 239 yards Sunday as the Panthers rallied to a 30-27 victory, sealed by rookie Ryan Fitzgerald’s 33-yard field goal as time expired. At 3-3, the rebuilding Panthers are .500 for the first time since Week 10 of 2021.

“Dowdle did a great job tonight,” Prescott said. “Great job last week. We have a hellava group of running backs and I love my team, but I miss that guy. I’m proud of him more than anything.”

Dowdle rushed for 183 yards on 30

carries and caught four passes for 56 yards, including a 36-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Bryce Young, who has guided the Panthers to consecutive fourth-quarter comebacks at Bank of America Stadium.

The friendly banter between Dowdle, a native of Gaffney, S.C., and his former teammates started during pregame warmups and extended to his victory stroll off the field.

“It’s definitely special being back home,” Dowdle said. “I’m on my home team and it’s special to do it in front of family and friends.”

Including Prescott, no doubt.

Dowdle exacts his revenge

Facing the NFL’s 32nd-ranked defense, which entered the week yielding 412 total yards per game, the Panthers’ game plan centered on Dowdle.

He did not disappoint.

Dowdle started the first quarter with runs of 9, 12, and 8 yards, helping the Panthers drive into Cowboys territory and setting up a game-opening field goal.

Dowdle wasn’t perfect, though. With 44 seconds remaining in the first half, Young hit Xavier Legette with a short pass. Legette bobbled the catch and as

Please see **BETTER** | 6A

Zone read: Panthers improved while Cowboys face hurdles



CAMERON WILLIAMS

The Carolina Panthers improved to 3-3 and 3-0 at home with a walk-off 30-27 win over the Dallas Cowboys.

There were plenty of takeaways from the game, so here are five of them:

1. Rico Dowdle should be Carolina’s RB1

In the absence of starting running back Chuba Hubbard, former Cowboy Rico Dowdle has made the most of his opportunities.

Dowdle ran for 206 yards on 23 carries in his first Carolina start against Miami and proceeded to follow it up with 183 yards on 30 carries against his former squad. There were many instances where it appeared the Cowboys had no answer for Dowdle.

Along with the rushing outburst, Dowdle added 56 yards receiving on four receptions that included a touchdown pass.

This is no slight on Hubbard and the production he has given the Panthers, but it is not going to be an easy decision to hand starting duties back to him, knowing that there’s a bell cow tailback in Dowdle.

2. Jerry Jones is... to be polite, CRAZY

for not re-signing Micah Parsons

When you have the chance to sign one of the best edge rushers in the NFL, you do it. This apparently didn’t cross Cowboys’ owner Jones’ mind in the offseason. He is on record as saying the franchise looked to shore up the run defense by getting rid of Parsons in the trade with the Green Bay Packers.

Not only are they not stopping the

Please see **READ** | 6A

Shaw the next challenge for Golden Bulls

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Johnson C. Smith is back to mastering the football moment.

The Golden Bulls ensured their third straight .500 season, their best stretch since 1967-73 with a 31-20 win Oct. 4 at Virginia State. J.C. Smith (5-1, 1-1 CIAA) can go over .500 Saturday with a win at Shaw.

Knocking off Virginia State was a statement game because the Trojans were among the preseason favorites for a berth in the conference title game. For the Golden Bulls (No. 23 in the Division II coaches poll, 24th in the media poll), they’re in the hunt for relevant games in what amounts to a series of elimination contests.

Please see **JCSU’s** | 6A



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

J.C. Smith quarterback Kelvin Durham is second in the CIAA with 1,442 yards and 13 touchdowns through six games. The Golden Bulls (5-1, 2-1 CIAA) are No. 23 in the Division II coaches poll.

Carolinas contenders in ACC basketball

By Cameron Williams
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

The Carolinas ACC basketball teams have high aspirations. Here are season outlooks for all five.

Clemson (27-7, 18-2 ACC): The Tigers finished third in 2024-25 with the same conference record as second place Louisville. Ironically, the two teams met in the conference tournament semifinal where the Cardinals were victorious. The Tigers made the NCAA tournament and lost to McNeese State in the round of 64.

The Tigers are young but have a couple of seniors that will make an impact.

“[We are] excited to be here for year 16 for me,” coach Brad Brownell said. “I’m excited to see what this new team brings. R.J. Godfrey and Dillon Hunter are alongside me, two seniors that I think will be tremendous leaders for this year’s team. I like our group. Obviously, we have 10 new players, six freshmen, so we’re a little bit young, but I think we’ve got great depth. I’m excited about how we’re practicing. I think our guys are competing very hard.”

Clemson is widely known as a football school and rightfully so given three national championships, but Brownell is entering year 16 for a reason. He

Please see **CAROLINAS** | 6A

Magnificent Seven hold station for second week

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Change wasn’t inevitable in this week’s Magnificent Seven rankings.

Every team in the upper echelon of Mecklenburg County high school football won the week prior to hold position, topped by Hough and West Charlotte. The Huskies, who have topped the rankings every week during the regular season, will look to get a week closer to running the table when they play South Mecklenburg.

West Charlotte is second, followed by Palisades and Mallard Creek which squares off against No. 6 Independence.

This week’s Magnificent Seven with overall record, conference record and previous week’s ranking:

1. Hough (7-0, 2-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A,

first). Best team in Mecklenburg and the most consistent, too. The Huskies smoked Garinger 66-0, which is no surprise. A home date against South Mecklenburg is next.

2. West Charlotte (5-2, 2-0, Meck Power Six 7A/8A, second). A rested pride of Lions head to Bulter with a chance to extend their win streak to five games. Hough is having the most dominant season, but West Charlotte is hitting stride.
3. Palisades (5-2, 2-0 Southwestern 7A/8A, third). Anyone who’s paying attention must give Pumas coach Jonathan Simmons his flowers for the job he’s doing with the fourth-year program. Fresh off a 54-14 beatdown of Ballantyne Ridge, Palisades turns its gaze to Providence.
4. Mallard Creek (5-2, 1-1 Meck Power Six 7A/8A, fourth). The Mavericks are riding

steady these days with a 33-14 win against North Mecklenburg the latest evidence. Friday’s challenge is No. 6 Independence in Mint Hill.

5. Myers Park (6-1, 2-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A, fifth). The Mustangs, winners of three straight, blew the tires off Hopewell with a 63-8 romp. A road trip to West Mecklenburg awaits in a potential trap game before the Myers Park’s showdown against Hough.
6. Independence (5-2, 1-1 Meck Power six 7A/8A, sixth). The Patriots really took care of business with a 41-6 thrashing of Chambers. A tougher challenge awaits with No. 4 Mallard Creek coming to campus.
7. Olympic (5-2, 4-0 Greater Metro 6A/7A, seventh). The Trojans picked up big win with a 20-17 result at West Cabarrus. Next up: Harding at home.

Better buckle up: Rico Dowdle’s on a mission

Continued from page 5A

he was going down, he heard Dowdle scream: “Pitch it ... pitch it ... pitch it.” He did, but Dowdle mishandled the lateral and fumbled, which Legette recovered.

“That’s on me,” Dowdle said. Canales joked about the play during his post-game press conference: “I said guys, ‘let’s not make stuff up.’ It’s a good way to remind the group to just do your job.”

Dowdle certainly did in the fourth quarter.

With Dallas leading 24-20, Dowdle touched the ball on seven of 10 plays, including six straight snaps, leading to rookie Tetairoa McMillan’s second receiving touchdown.

On the Panthers’ final possession with the score tied at 27, Dowdle helped fuel the game-winning 15-play, 71-yard drive with five rushes for 25 yards. Like last week, he cramped and was forced to the sideline.

“I made it further than last week,” Dowdle joked.

‘They weren’t buckled up’

Dowdle warned the Cowboys about his intentions.

“They know I’m a violent runner.” he said last week. “I’m looking forward to getting to the second level on them. They’ve just got to buckle up.”

Despite proving to be a starting caliber back in 2024 when Dowdle rushed for 1,079 yards, the Cowboys decided to commit to Williams and add rookie Jaydon Blue to the mix. Dowdle moved on and signed a one-year, \$2.75 million deal with the Panthers. With incentives, the contract value could rise to approx-

imately \$6 million.

To prepare for Dallas, Canales said on Friday the Cowboys’ coaching staff would use five seasons of internal data to prepare for Dowdle.

“If there’s some holes in a player’s game that you try to exploit, you try to use all the information that you have at your disposal,” Canales said. “That’s part of the nature of competition and beauty of our game, when you have a little more information: ‘How can you use that?’”

“When you have an opportunity to compete against people you know, it’s exciting, but at the same time you have to be focused on the scheme and we have to be focused on executing our game plan. I expect Rico to do the same thing.”

Seven days after running for 206 yards, matching the second-highest mark in Carolina history, Dowdle collected 423 scrimmage yards over the past two weeks, breaking Christian McCaffrey’s previous record of 416.

Williams rushed for 29 yards on 13 carries.

“(Dowdle) looked like the same guy as last week,” Canales said. “He ran with violence, and he had a plan, a man on a mission. He’s human and I’m sure there were emotions (playing) against his former team.”

Prescott said he missed catching up with Dowdle after the game but would reach out soon.

“I’ll connect with him,” he said.

Added Dowdle: “It’s all love at the end of the day.”

But he did get in the final jab: “They weren’t buckled up.”

Read and react to Panthers

Continued from page 5A

run much better (giving up over 120 yards per game on the ground on average), but they also can’t get pressure on the quarterback with any type of consistency, either, something Parsons did.

Dallas had one sack on Panthers’ quarterback Bryce Young — and it was a coverage sack at that. It is a pretty sure thing that you aren’t going to be very efficient on defense if you don’t limit the run and allow opposing quarterbacks all the time they need in the pocket.

3. Dallas’ offense is scary good, and they aren’t at full strength

While the Cowboys’ defense may have more holes in it than Swiss cheese, the offense can be one of the best in the NFL.

Dallas is without the services of star receiver CeeDee Lamb, who had over 100 yards receiving the first two games of the season before getting hurt in a loss to the Chicago Bears. The Cowboys are also without KaVonte Turpin, a serviceable receiver and kick return specialist.

In Lamb’s absence, first-year Cowboy George Pickens has been all they could have hoped he would be when they got him in the offseason. Pickens carved up the Panthers with nine catches in 11 targets for 168 yards and a touchdown.

While the Panthers were able to stymie the Cowboys’ ground attack, in large part it has been efficient. Tailback Javonte Williams, who signed with Dallas after a stint with the Denver Broncos, has 79 carries for 447 yards and five touchdowns.

The pieces are there for Dallas to have a stout offense, but they may have to score 40 points to win.

4. Tetairoa McMillan is a bonafide WR1

McMillan didn’t fill the stat sheet against Dallas, but he hauled in three catches for 29 yards and two touchdowns, his first in the NFL.

The rookie has 27 catches this season and over 60 yards receiving in three of the Panthers’ six games and poses a threat to defensive backs. His athleticism is really eye-opening, and it appears the Panthers have finally hit on a first-round draft pick.

I think McMillan’s best asset is his ability to draw the attention of extra defenders. The Cowboys defense appeared to shield their coverage to help eliminate the deep pass to McMillan, leaving options like Hunter Renfrow, Tommy Tremble and rookie Jimmy Horn Jr. open underneath. This will continue to make the Panthers’ offense more efficient.

5. Neither team is playoff ready

The Panthers at 3-3 and Dallas at 2-3-1 are far from the postseason discussion.

But there is a lot of football left, and Carolina has the luxury of playing in the NFC South where other than Tampa Bay, no one else is very good. This bodes well for the Panthers down the road if they can continue to pile on wins.

Dallas, which plays in the NFC East, may have a tougher road. Although the Philadelphia Eagles haven’t looked like the last season’s Super Bowl champions to this point, at 4-2 they lead the division and beat Dallas in Week 1.

The New York Giants have already fallen to the Cowboys in the first of two meetings, which was before the Giants moved former Super Bowl champion Russell Wilson to QB2 in favor of rookie Jaxson Dart. The Giants are 2-1 since.

The East is wide open, but top to bottom the quality is better than the NFC South.

Carolinas’ ACC basketball programs prep for season

Continued from page 5A

loves the process of building a winner.

“I’ve been there for a long time, and I think it’s because the values and what Clemson stands for is excellence,” he said. “I think you see it throughout the university.”

Duke (35-4, 19-1 ACC): By Duke standards, the Blue Devils fell short of their goals last season. Despite a Final Four appearance and ACC title, they had goals of cutting down the nets in San Antonio.

Several key contributors are now in the NBA, like No. 1 pick Cooper Flaggy; Kon Knueppel and Sion James, who are both now Charlotte Hornets; Kahman Maluach and Tyrese Proctor. The Blue Devils reloaded via the transfer portal and had the nation’s No. 1 ranked recruiting class come in as well to help this year’s title aspirations.

The Blue Devils welcome three 5-star players in Cameron Boozer, son of former Blue Devil Carlos Boozer, Nikolas Khamenia and Dame Sarr. They also added 4-star recruits Caden Boozer (Cameron’s twin) and Sebastian Wilkins.

“Our team has worked incredibly hard,” coach Jon Scheyer said. “We’ve had a big-time offseason, focused on individual development from everything from their bodies to their skills to, most importantly, how to be connected together, and that’s in every way possible.”

Duke has a handful of key returners from last year as well in Isaiah Evans, Patrick Ngongba, Caleb Foster, Darren Harris and Maliq Brown. Foster, a junior, will look to be one among this year’s leaders. When it was an option to transfer elsewhere, Foster opted to stay with the Blue Devils.

“I’ve been a Duke fan my whole life,” he said. “I didn’t really think about transferring at all. Duke is where I want to be. It’s where I want to call home. It’s where I want to leave my legacy.”

North Carolina (23-14, 13-7 ACC): The Tar Heels have had a bumpy road under coach Hubert Davis minus the 2022 national runner-up finish. North Carolina exited the NCAA tournament in the round of 64 last season and lost to rival Duke in the ACC semifinals.

Davis brought in several players to construct the 2025-26 roster. North Carolina brought in 5-star freshman Caleb Wilson and hit the transfer portal for Jarin Stevenson (Alabama), Henri Veesar (Arizona), Jaydon Young (Virginia Tech), Kyan Evans (Colorado State) and Jonathan Powell (West Virginia). One key returner for the Tar Heels is guard Seth Tremble.

“I always tell the guys that in order to play for me you have to know me, and I have to know you,” Davis said, “and the only way that we get to know each other is to spend a lot of time together. I’m thankful that we’ve had that time in the summer and in the fall heading into the season where we have a clear understanding of who we are on and off the court that allows us to be the best that we can be on the court.”

North Carolina State (12-19, 5-15 ACC): For N.C. State, 2024-25 was a season worth forgetting. Just two seasons removed from a Final Four berth, the Wolfpack struggled to stay in games, much less win. The biggest change for the Wolfpack this season is new coach Will Wade, who comes in from McNeese State following the dismissal of Kevin Keatts.

Wade (42) is the third-youngest coach in the ACC just ahead of Scheyer (38) and Jai Lucas of Miami (36). Wade led McNeese State to the round of 32 in last year’s NCAA tournament before falling to Purdue.

“We’re excited to be here, excited to get the season started,” Wade said. “[I am] proud of our team, proud of our staff for putting the team together and the amount of progress that we’ve made. [We] put our team together with an emphasis on being able to win, being able to win in March. We have the most NCAA tournament minutes of any team in the ACC on our roster. We have six guys on our roster that won an NCAA tournament game last year.”

One key addition to the Wolfpack roster is no stranger to the ACC. Center Ven-Allen Lubin transferred to N.C. State after playing last year at North Carolina. It is common in today’s college athletics landscape to transfer, but to transfer to a rival school was a big decision.

sion.

“I think it was just how transparent [Wade] is,” Lubin said was the driving factor behind transferring to the Wolfpack. “He isn’t just someone who is going to say the things that you want to hear. ... He is going to keep it real with you. That is the thing that I really admire about him. We both haven’t been able to max out our potential. You’ve seen that at my previous stops; I haven’t been able to max out my potential and that is what he wants for me and to do whatever I can to help impact this program.”

Wake Forest (21-11, 13-7 ACC): The Demon Deacons were on the bubble of making last year’s NCAA tournament, but an ACC quarterfinal loss to North Carolina was the pin in the balloon of any hopes coach Steve Forbes had. Forbes, who is entering his sixth season, has a career coaching record of 390-168.

Forbes said after every season he and the staff have in-depth assessments of what went well and what didn’t. They identified some things they wanted to improve in 2025-26.

“I thought that we obviously need to improve our three-point shooting,” he said. “We needed to improve our passing with more assisted baskets, improve our rebounding on both sides of the ball, and improve on some movement and cutting on offense. I feel like we’ve accomplished those things and more since March.”

One key returner for the Demon Deacons will be Salisbury High alumnus Juke Harris. As a freshman, Harris averaged 6.1 points per game in 19 minutes per game. At 6-7, he is a tall guard and Forbes said he has improved his size and shooting in the offseason.

“He always had really good positional size at 6-7,” Forbes said. “He’s gained a lot [of weight] -probably, I don’t know, 10 or 15 pounds in the weight room. He’s really improved his shooting - he’s shooting 47% from three right now in practice. We’re shooting 41% as a team. Now, when the lights come on, we’ll see. But yes... he’s a two-way guy. He can be a really good offensive player and be a dominant defensive player.”

JCSU’s next test: Shaw Bears

Continued from page 5A

J.C. Smith moved up the conference pecking order by offsetting Virginia State quarterback Rahsaan Matthews’ one-man assault with big plays on both sides of the ball. Matthews accounted for 345 yards total offense (16-of-30 passing, 259 yards, 2 TDs; 16 carries, 86 yards, TD), but the Golden Bulls, who have the CIAA’s second-ranked offense at an average of 34.1 point per game. countered with red zone efficiency.

They scored a pair of touchdowns on two possessions inside the Trojans’ 20 while the defense limited VSU to 2-of-5 that included two failed field goal tries and a turnover on downs. JCSU also converted 9-of-15 third down opportunities while holding the Trojans to 4-of-12 in similar situations and 0-for-3 on fourth down.

The Golden Bulls, who have the conference’s top scoring defense (17.2 ppg), never trailed against VSU and led 17-14 at intermission after opening with a 10-0 advantage in the first quarter. Kelvin Durham, the CIAA leader in passing yards (1,442) continued his tear, going 18-of-29 passing for 251 yards and four touch-

downs for the second straight week.

In addition to matching Matthews’ output, Durham, whose 13 touchdown passes is second in the CIAA, lifted JCSU with explosive plays in the third quarter to shut the door. He connected with Reggie Daniel on a 42-yard touchdown and a 41-yarder to Isaiah Perry to expand the Golden Bulls’ lead to 31-14. Daniel, who caught three passes for 59 yards, also scored on a 3-yard pass in the first quarter.

Although J.C. Smith was outgained 422 yards to 381, the Golden Bulls controlled time of possession with 32 minutes, 55 seconds, due in part to offensive balance. Running back Bobby Smith, whose 472 rushing yards is second in the CIAA, added balance with a team high 96 rushing yards on 24 carries to go with a pair of receptions for 38 yards.

Next week’s opponent, Shaw (2-4, 2-2), is scored its biggest win of the season last week with a 20-13 result against Winston-Salem State. Under first-year coach Lamar Manigo, the Bears are ninth in the CIAA at 18.2 points scored per contest, while the defense’s 32.2 points allowed is also ninth.

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