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S.C. SUPREME COURT

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Supreme Court

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APPEAL FROM BERKELEY COUNTY
Kristi Lea Harrington, Circuit Court Judge

———

Supreme Court Case No. 2021-001520
Appellate Case No. 2018-000791
Case No. 2016-CP-08-0131

———

Jeffrey Lance Cruce, Petitioner,

v.

Berkeley County School District, Respondent.

APPENDIX VOLUME III

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Berkeley blisters Trojans in Region 8-AAA opener

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 4, 2013 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 505 words

Byline: David Shelton

Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Few teams in the Lowcountry played a tougher non-region schedule than Berkeley did over the last month. That difficult schedule may have paid off Thursday night as the Stags evened their record at 3-3 with a 40-14 region 8-AAA win over James Island.

The win was Berkeley s second straight after beating Timberland last week. Berkeley s three losses this season came to Summerville, Stratford and Manning, who have combined for a 13-2 record through five weeks.

I think the tough schedule has helped us a lot, not only because of the quality of teams that we played, but four of those five games were against pretty big rivalries, said Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce. I think we ve been in some big games early on and the intensity level is high in those games. I thought we were pretty focused tonight. It s a big win for us to start the region 1-0.

Senior quarterback Matthew Harkness threw two touchdown passes, and the running back tandem of Josh Sellers, Leon Simmons and Jamal Bowman combined for nearly 200 yards on the ground to pace the Stags.

We had to play three quarterbacks, which is not what we want to do, but we had pretty good balance, said Cruce.

Berkeley got on the board early in the first quarter on Vance Bailey s 41-yard field goal. A fumble deep in the Stags own territory set up James Island s first score as quarterback Ty Stubbs scored from a yard out with 5:36 left in the first quarter, giving the Trojans a 7-3 lead.

James Island s first big mistake contributed to Berkeley s first touchdown. The Stags recovered a muffed punt at the James Island 20-yard line, and two plays later Harkness hit Deion Williams with a 20-yard TD pass, giving Berkeley a 10-7 lead with 1:14 left in the first.

Berkeley tacked on a score in the second on Bowman s five-yard run with 5:19 remaining before halftime. The drive was set up by a 23-yard run from Sellers and Bowman s 19-yard run to the five.

Harkness threw his second touchdown pass of the night late in the third quarter, a 10-yarder to D.J. Witherspoon, to push Berkeley s lead to 24-7 with 2:26 left in the third.

James Island showed signs of life on the ensuing drive, marching 76 yards for a score as Stubbs combined with Trayvon Grant on a 17-yard pass with 1:18 to remaining in the third period.

Berkeley tacked on two touchdowns and a safety in the fourth quarter. Tyrone Bradford returned an interception 42 yards for one score, and Leon Simmons scored on a one-yard dive.

Berkeley will place Region 8 favorite Hanahan next week.

Certainly we will have to be at our best to compete with those guys, said Cruce.

Berkeley 10 7 7 16 40

James Island 7 0 7 0 14

B Vance Bailey 41 field goal

JI Ty Stubbs 1 run (Hutch Fontane kick)

B Deion Williams 20 pass from Matthew Harkness (Bailey kick)

B Jamal Bowman 5 run (Bailey kick)

B DJ Witherspoon 10 pass from Harkness (Bailey kick)

JI Trayvon Grant 17 pass from Stubbs (Fontane kick)

B Leon Simmons 1 run (Bailey kick)

B Tyrone Bradford 42 INT return (Bailey kick)

B Safety Grant tackled in end zone

Load-Date: October 4, 2013

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APP. 0742

731

Friday s key matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 11, 2013 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 292 words

Body

Berkeley (3-3, 1-0) at Hanahan (6-0, 1-0)

LAST YEAR: Hanahan won, 34-16.

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; Charlie Patterson, Hanahan.

NOTABLE: Berkeley has another tough game in this Region 8-AAA showdown. The Stags losses have come against teams that have combined for a 15-3 record. Hanahan, which goes up against its former coach, trailed Orangeburg-Wilkinson 21-0 last week on the road, but rallied for a victory to remain undefeated.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Berkeley quarterback Matthew Harkness. He threw two TD passes last week in a 40-14 victory over James Island.

DID YOU KNOW: Hanahan leads the series, 5-4.

West Ashley (4-2, 0-0) at Wando (2-4, 0-0)

LAST YEAR: Wando won, 56-35.

COACHES: Bobby Marion, West Ashley; Jimmy Noonan, Wando.

NOTABLE: West Ashley needs a victory to jumpstart a season that began with four straight victories. The Wildcats led Fort Dorchester 21-0 last week, but couldn t capitalize, falling 28-21. Wando was off last week and has had two weeks to get healthy and prepare for the Region 7-AAAA clash.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Wando running back Kenny Waring. The junior speedster is averaging 12.9 yards per carry.

DID YOU KNOW: Wando leads the series, 9-4.

Cross (3-4, 1-0) at St. John s (3-3, 1-0)

LAST YEAR: St. John s won, 39-13.

COACHES: Sean Wright, Cross; Brad Bowles, St. John s.

NOTABLE: Cross enters the Region 6-A showdown as the defending Division II-A state champ, but must shore up a defense that is allowing nearly 30 points per game. St. John s has a modest two-game winning streak and has allowed only 19 points in eight quarters.

Friday s key matchups

KEEP AN EYE ON: St. John s running back Trevson Coakley. He rushed for 211 yards and a TD in last week s 12-6 victory over Baptist Hill.

DID YOU KNOW: St. John s leads the series, 11-5.

Philip M. Bowman

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APP. 0744

733

Corralled Hawks shut out Stags, improve to 7-0

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 12, 2013 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 1

Length: 509 words

Body

HANAHAN In its Region 8-AAA opener one week ago, Hanahan trailed 15-0 before rallying for a 28-21 victory at previously undefeated Orangeburg-Wilkinson.

A comeback wasn t necessary Friday night at Wiley Knight Stadium, as the Hawks scored early and often en route to a 36-0 shutout victory over Berkeley.

Hanahan senior QB Mason Schwerzler threw for 171 yards and three touchdowns in the first quarter, which included a pair of 49-yard TD passes to Terrell Green and Sam Denmark within four minutes of the opening kickoff.

Shortly thereafter, Quan Wade hit paydirt from 10 yards out before Denmark caught a 69-yard toss from Schwerzler to close out the first-quarter outburst.

The importance of getting off to a strong start was evident in Hawks coach Charlie Patterson s decision to call an onside kick less than three minutes into the game. The unsuspecting Stags were unable to cope, and the kick was recovered by Hanahan, which led to Denmark s first touchdown three plays later.

We emphasized coming out and being ready from the get-go, and playing with emotion, Patterson said. It felt like last week we were kind of a little flat at the start (and) maybe a little complacent.

We won the toss and normally we defer, Patterson added. We decided to take the ball, and (the onside kick) was our plan all along. If we took it down and scored, we were going to do that and try to get the momentum.

Berkeley (3-4, 1-1), coming off a 40-14 win over James Island, threatened to score early in the second quarter. But Vance Bailey missed a 27-yard field goal attempt in what was the Stags only significant scoring opportunity of the half.

Hanahan (7-0, 2-0) used a safety forced by Dominique Green and Schwerzler s fourth touchdown pass a 10-yarder to Green to build a 36-0 advantage at halftime.

Berkeley s Joseph Dress replaced Matthew Harkness at quarterback to start the second half, but the Stags promising drive stalled in the red zone after an interception by Hanahan defensive back Deandrea Thompson.

Neither team added any points to the scoreboard in the second half.

After amassing 282 yards of offense in the opening two quarters, the Hawks added just 75 yards the rest of the contest. Berkeley recorded 285 total yards (149 rushing, 136 passing).

Corralled Hawks shut out Stags, improve to 7-0

We just got beat by a better team, said Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce, who won 10 straight region championships in 13 years at the helm of Hanahan from 1995-2007. I thought we were better prepared.

I m happy for Hanahan, Cruce said. I m glad they re having success. Obviously I m not real happy it s against us. But they re just a better football team. They re the cream of our region right now, and we re about a mid-range region team.

Berkeley 0 0 0 0 0

Hanahan 27 9 0 0 36

H Terrell Green 49 pass from Mason Schwerzler (Kyle Spigner kick)

H Sam Denmark 49 pass from Schwerzler (Spigner kick)

H Quan Wade 10 run (Spigner kick)

H Denmark 69 pass from Schwerzler (Spigner kick failed)

H Safety

H Green 10 pass from Schwerzler (Spigner kick)

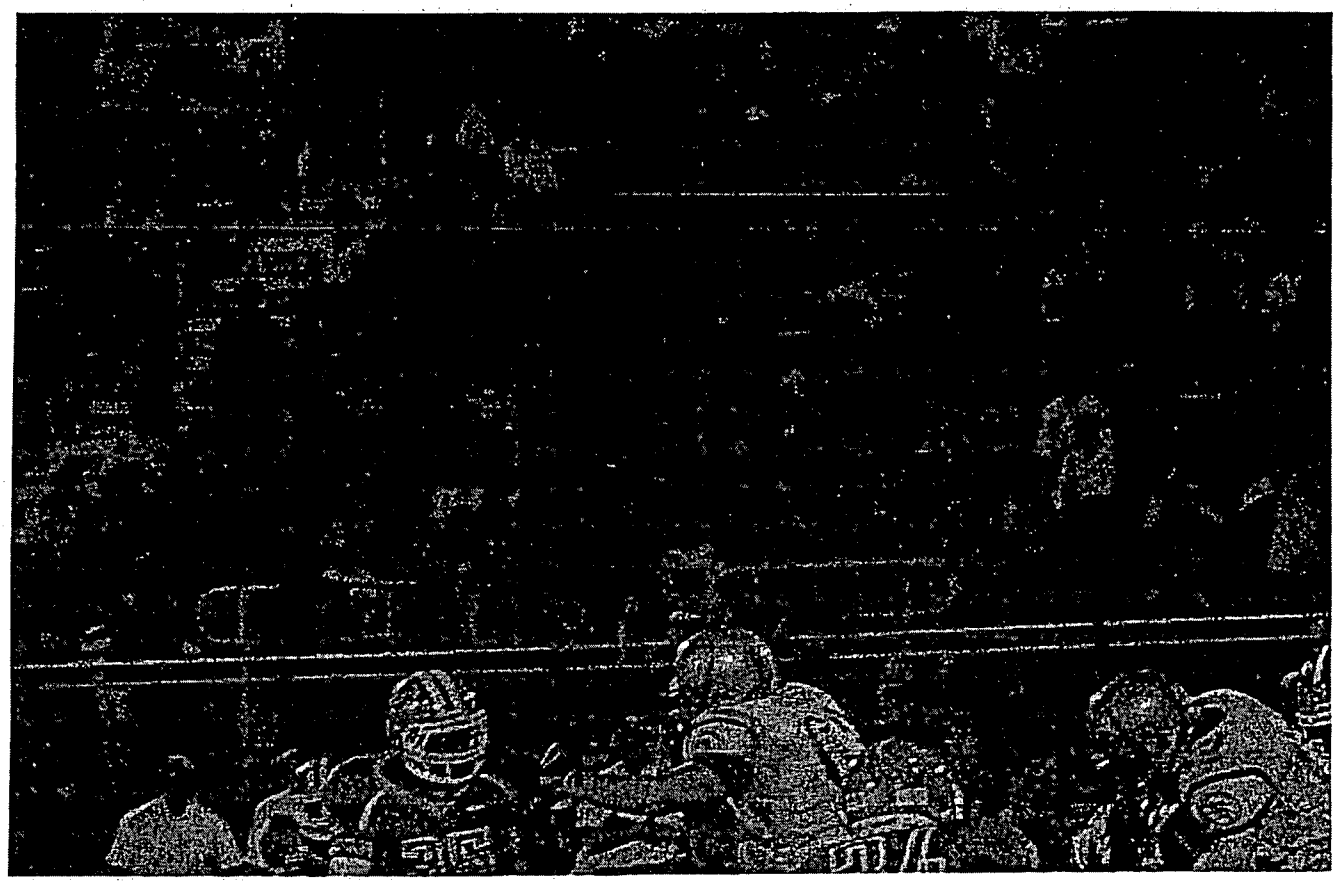
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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/hanahan-manhandles-stags/article_4d9bdcf9-3db7-52e5-a7cc-03c89159200e.html

Hanahan manhandles Stags 36-0

Dan Brown Oct 15, 2013



Dan Brown/Independent The Stags Josh Sellers picks up a first down against Hanahan. Berkeley rushed for 175 yards in the 36-0 loss to the Hawks.

Coming into the Region 8AAA game with third ranked Hanahan having won three out of their last four games, including a 40-14 whipping of James Island, the Berkeley Stags had to feel good about their chances against the Hawks.

That good feeling was gone in about three minutes Friday night at HHS.

Hanahan quarterback Mason Schwerzler made his own case for the title of Berkeley County's top quarterback, throwing for three first quarter touchdowns in the game's first four minutes, 171 yards and four TD passes overall, to lead the Hawks to a 36-0 whitewashing of Berkeley.

This game was over before the Stags ever touched the football.

Schwerzler took the opening kickoff and got his offense in range with three quick handoffs to running back Quan Wade to bring the ball to midfield.

Then Schwerzler went up top, hitting Terrell Green in stride with a 49-yard touchdown pass down the far sideline.

On the ensuing kickoff Hanahan pulled the proverbial rabbit out of the hat with an onside kick that caught the Stags so off guard that kicker Kyle Spigner was able to stroll along with the bouncing football until it reached 10 yards before falling on the ball to give the Hawks the ball at the Berkeley 49-yard line.

Lightning struck twice two plays later when Schwerzler again took to the friendly skies and hit Sam Denmark with an identical 49-yard touchdown pass at the 8:02 mark of the first quarter.

The Hawks had the lead, 14-0, and the Stags get the ball for the first time.

The revolving door at quarterback for the Stags of late had Matthew Harkness under center for the first series. On Berkeley's third play from scrimmage Harkness fumbled, giving the ball right back to Hanahan at the Stags' 30-yard line.

Four plays later Wade rumbled in from 10 yards out to make the score 21-0 before many Stags fans who made the trip down Hwy. 52 were able to find their seats.

Schwerzler wasn't done.

After Berkeley went three-and-out on their next possession, Schwerzler once again found Denmark, this time with a 69-yard touchdown strike and Hanahan was on top 27-0 before the first 12 minutes of play ticked off the clock.

Life didn't get much better for the Stags in the second quarter.

Joseph Dress, now in the shotgun set, drove the Stags to the Hanahan red zone before the drive stalled. A Vance Bailey field goal attempt hooked left and that would do it for the Stags offensively in the first half.

Though the scoring pace slowed in the second quarter for the Hawks, it was the defense's turn to put some points on the board. Dominique Green's pursuit of Harkness into his own end zone resulted in a safety when the Stags QB fell untouched for a sack and two points.

Schwerzler finished off his scoring night with just over 35 seconds left in the half, hitting Green for the second time with a 10-yard touchdown strike to make the score 36-0 going into the locker room.

Stags Coach Jeff Cruce told his team they needed to play with pride in the second half and they did, holding Hanahan to just 75 yards of offense in the second half.

The Stags were able to move the ball between the 20's against Hanahan, garnering 175 yards of rushing offense of their own, but their three drives inside the red zone in the second half ended with an interception, a fumble and a turnover on downs.

"We got beat by a better team tonight," said BHS Head Coach Jeff Cruce, whose Stags fall to 3-4 overall and 1-1 in Region 8AAA. "I thought we'd be better prepared."

Hanahan improved to 7-0 overall and 2-0 in region play.

The Stags return home on Friday to host Stall for Homecoming, but then must face the other two Region 8AAA teams ranked in the top 10, Orangeburg-Wilkinson at home, and Hilton Head on the road.

Stags reign on Stall parade

Dan Brown Oct 22, 2013



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress ran for two touchdowns and threw for a third in the 41-10 homecoming win over Stall.

It rained on the Berkeley Stags' 2013 homecoming game against the Stall Warriors on Friday night.

But in the end, it was Berkeley that reigned supreme, winning 41-10 behind three Joseph Dress touchdowns, two on the ground and one through the air.

The Stags scored in almost every possible fashion: on the ground, through the air, on special teams and on defense to improve to 4-4 on the season and 2-2 in Region 8AAA play.

Dee Harley added a 47-yard punt return for a score and linebacker Darius Nelson scooped up a fumble and rambled 38-yards for the game's final touchdown.

The Stags face showdowns against a top 10 ranked Orangeburg-Wilkinson at home on Friday and a season-ending roadtrip to Hilton Head on Nov. 1.

Both games carry playoff implications for the Stags, Berkeley's playoff seeding, the success of the season overall, and the short legacy of Coach Jeff Cruce, now in his third year.

Win and the Stags finish the regular season with a 6-4 mark, guaranteeing Cruce his first winning season at the helm.

Anything less will be seen as more of the same by some fans.

"We played like we practiced this week," Cruce said Friday. "It was what we needed to beat Stall, but this effort won't do it if we want to beat Orangeburg-Wilkinson next week."

Neither team was able to crack the ice in the first quarter in the rain, but when the skies let up after the game's first 12 minutes,

Berkeley found its offense in the second quarter as Dress, playing a full game for the first time in almost a month after suffering an ankle injury, directed the Stags' offense on a 70-yard 10-play drive capped by a Josh Sellers 5-yard touchdown run. The Vance Bailey PAT put BHS on top 7-0.

Dress would then cap a second scoring drive with a 17-yard touchdown pass to Deion Williams to put the Stags on top 14-0 with 2:50 left in the half. On the previous play, Dress broke right for a 17-yard run to set up the scoring pass to Williams.

"We played well on all sides of the ball, offense, defense and special teams," Cruce said.

The Warriors came out of the locker room by catching the Stags off guard with an opening onside kick.

Warrior quarterback Jordan Carswell rode that momentum for Stall's only touchdown of the game. He hit Jacquee Johnson-Drayton with a three-yard touchdown pass to close the gap to 14-7 at the 7:32 mark of the third quarter.

After the ensuing Stags' drive ended on a Dress interception, the Warrior offense stalled, and the visitors were forced to punt.

Dee Harley caught the punt in stride and took off down the right sideline untouched for a 47-yard touchdown run, taking the wind out of any Stall second half momentum.

In the fourth quarter, the Stags defense took over.

After Dress tallied his second TD of this soggy night on a 29-yard run early in the fourth to go up 28-7, Tyler Crouse set up Berkeley's next touchdown with his second interception of the night, taking the pick to the one-yard line.

Dress scored again on a quarterback keeper from six yards out to put the Stags up 35-7.

But the Berkeley defense wasn't finished.

Linebacker Darius Nelson scooped up a Carswell fumble and rumbled 32 yards for the game's final touchdown.

A late Stall field goal closed out the scoring at 41-10.

With the win Berkeley improves to 4-4, and 2-2, drawing back to .500 going into the season's biggest two games and the final two of the season.

The Stags host the Bruins on Friday and travel to Hilton Head to take on the Seahawks in the regular season finale.

How Berkeley fares in the season's final two games determines its playoff seeding and its fate in 2013.

"This is why we play," Cruce said.

Kickoff Friday night is at 7:30 p.m.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-down-hilton-head-secure-third-seed-in-aaa/article_8fab9489-a9b8-58c6-bb79-5d8175aae0b9.html

Stags down Hilton Head, secure third seed in 8AAA

Dan Brown Oct 31, 2013

Berkeley defenders Josh Simmons and Branden Williams led the Stags to a huge win Friday night against Hilton Head.

Simmons picked off one of two Berkeley interceptions on the night and Williams held North-South All-Star Khalil Lewis to minimal yardage as the Stags downed the Seahawks 26-6.

Kicker Vance Bailey kept the Seahawk offense pinned with their backs against the end zone and kicked four field goals plus two PATs, the dagger to the Hilton Head heart coming in the fourth quarter, a career long 42-yard boot to put the Stags up by 20. Bailey accounted for 14 of the Stags 26 points.

Joseph Dress and Josh Sellers added third quarter touchdowns to even Berkeley's record at 5-5 and give Coach Jeff Cruce his first non-losing regular season as coach of the Stags.

With the win Berkeley will open the playoffs in the Myrtle Beach area, unofficially against Myrtle Beach, which upset North Myrtle Beach 30-28.

For bracket watchers, the win also moves Berkeley out of Socastee's bracket. The Braves have bounced the Stags out of the playoffs each of the last two seasons.

Playoff brackets will be finalized on Sunday. See Wednesday's Independent for complete football playoff news.

Berkeley rolls past Hilton Head

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 2, 2013 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 7

Length: 378 words

Byline: ccox@islandpacket.com

Body

HILTON HEAD ISLAND Vance Bailey kicked four field goals and the Berkeley defense shut down Hilton Head as the Stags claimed a 26-6 victory on the road.

Hilton Head suffered its third straight defeat after an improbable 7-0 start and No. 8 ranking in Class AAA earlier this year. The latest defeat saddled the Seahawks with the final seed from Region 8-AAA, meaning Hilton Head must travel to unbeaten and third-ranked Socastee next Friday for the first round of the playoffs.

It s the little things, Hilton Head coach B.J. Payne said. We were doing the little things the first seven weeks. Taking care of our responsibilities and making sure we were doing everything right. For some reason, we ve gotten away from that.

The Seahawks couldn t seem to do anything right on this night. Hilton Head (7-3, 2-3 Region 8-AAA) found the end zone just once against the stingy Berkeley defense, which limited quarterbacks Ben Oliff and Aiden Hegarty to a combined 6 of 15 passing with a pair of interceptions.

The offense netted just 53 yards through the air and finished with nine first downs, a handful of which came in the fourth quarter with the game s outcome already determined.

I just thought our kids had a great week of practice, Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce said. They took the challenge of knowing how big the game was. We had to win. We wanted to finish third, we didn t want to go to Socastee.

We went there last year. Socastee is pretty good.

Instead, it will be the Seahawks who get that honor. By virtue of its victory, Berkeley (5-5, 3-2) earned the right to travel to Myrtle Beach for next week s postseason opener, as the Seahawks moved to 6-4 following an upset of 8-2 North Myrtle Beach.

Our defense played great, Cruce said. They kept us in the ballgame.

Vance Bailey booted four field goals for the Stags, the last of which came from 44 yards out. Tailback Joshua Sellers had 149 yards on 14 carries, 77 of which came on his touchdown run early in the second half, while quarterback Joshua Dress added 75 yards and a 26-yard score.

Berkeley 3 3 17 3 26

Berkeley rolls past Hilton Head

Hilton Head 0 0 6 0 6

B. Vance Bailey 26 kick

B. Bailey 20 kick

B Joshua Sellers 77 rush (Bailey kick)

HH Tyler Hamilton 4 rush

B Joseph Dress 26 rush (Bailey kick)

B Bailey 35 kick

B Bailey 44 kick

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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-clinch-third-seed-in-aaa/article_6d7883a4-9ab1-51c5-bea8-abb748fee9a3.html

Stags clinch third seed in 8AAA

Dan Brown Nov 6, 2013

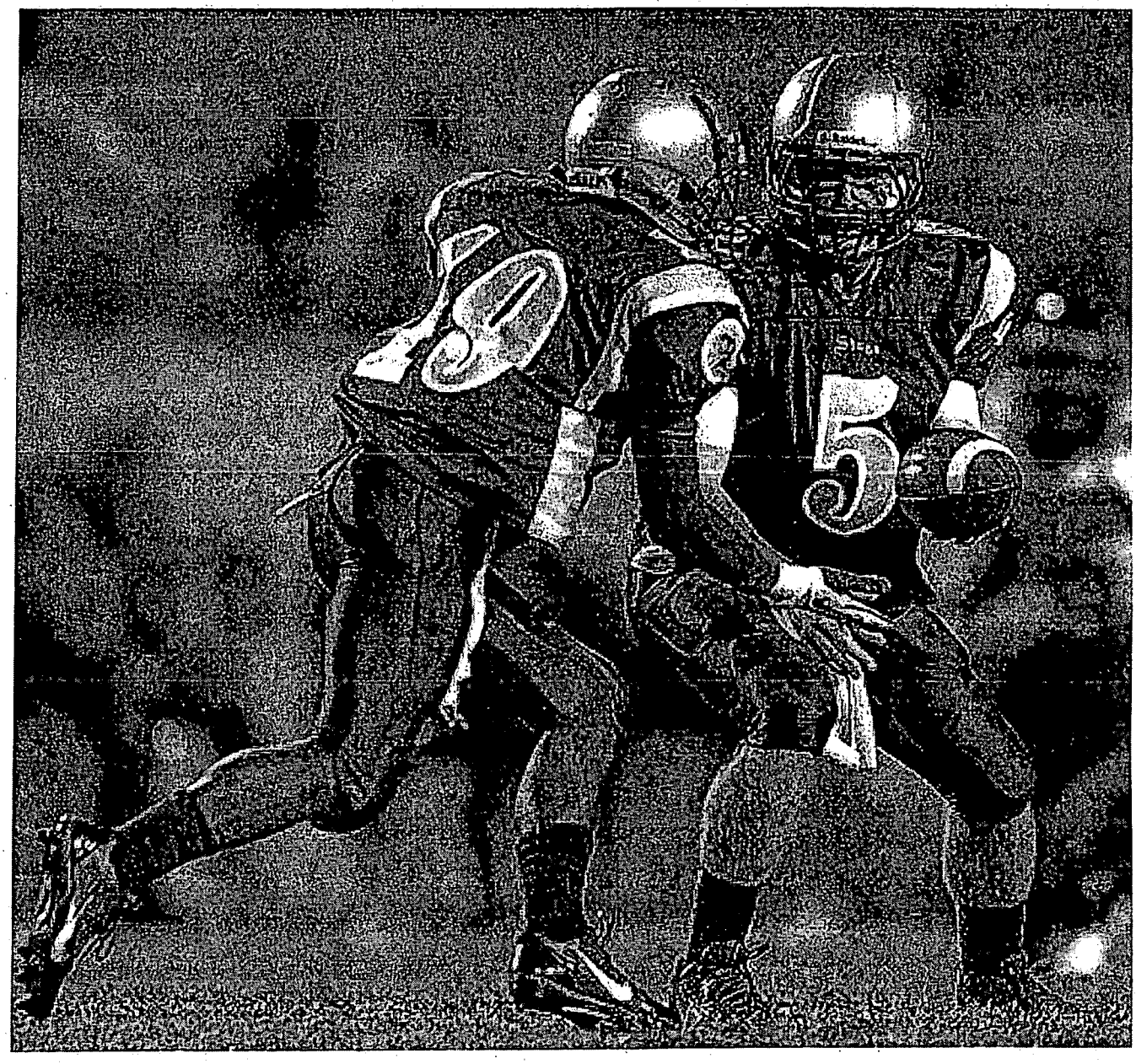


Photo courtesy Roper Photography Joseph Dress (5) and Josh Sellers (19) each scored a touchdown in the Stags' 26-6 win over Hilton Head.

The best offense is a good defense.

The good defense for the Berkeley Stags at Hilton Head on Friday was the two-headed beast that is Josh Simmons and Branden Williams.

Simmons picked off one of two Berkeley interceptions on the night, and Williams held North-South All-Star Khalil Lewis to minimal yardage as the Stags downed the Seahawks 26-6.

"Our defense stepped it up and played great," said BHS Head Coach Jeff Cruce. "We had a great week of practice leading up to the Hilton Head game where I challenged these kids to rise up.

"They did, and now we've got some nice momentum heading into the playoffs."

Damien Woods had the other interception on the Seahawks' first possession that set the tone for the game.

"The old saying is championships are won on defense, and our defense did its job," Cruce said.

Kicker Vance Bailey kept the Seahawk offense pinned with their backs against the end zone and kicked four field goals, the dagger to the Hilton Head heart coming in the fourth quarter, a career long 42-yard boot to put the Stags up by 20.

"After last week's game against Orangeburg where Vance missed a field goal, this was a big confidence booster for him," Cruce said. "We need a good kicking game and Vance gave us an excellent kicking game tonight, in harsh conditions, rain, and a very strong wind. It wasn't the rain so much out there as the wind, and Vance drilled all his kicks."

Joseph Dress and Josh Sellers added third quarter touchdowns to even Berkeley's record at 5-5 and give Cruce his first non-losing regular season as coach of the Stags.

"Joseph has been battling injuries for the past month and while we didn't have a great passing game against Hilton Head, he is a running quarterback," Cruce said. "Josh Sellers gets better and better every week. He broke a huge run that helped put the game away."

Sellers garnered 149 yards rushing, 77 of them coming on the touchdown run in the third quarter. Dress netted 76 yards rushing and a 26-yard touchdown run.

With the win Berkeley will open the playoffs against Myrtle Beach, which upset North Myrtle Beach 30-28.

"Myrtle Beach is a lot like us," Cruce said. "They are a great program and can surprise you. I'm curious to see what they did to beat North Myrtle Beach and how they did it."

On his first non-losing regular season Cruce said it's about getting better every year.

"We're improving and we're doing things in this program that's part of a plan," he said. "I can schedule some weaker teams like some other schools do to pad their record, but for us here it's about preparing to play the best schools in the state.

"We scrimmaged against Goose Creek, and played against Summerville, Stratford, and Timberland. I'll put our pre-region schedule up against anybody's.

"It's not all about wins and losses. It's about getting better and being prepared."

For bracket watchers the win also moves Berkeley out of Socastee's bracket. The Braves have bounced the Stags out of the playoffs each of the last two seasons.

"You have to beat everybody to win a state championship, but Socastee is on the other side of the bracket," Cruce said. "If it's not Socastee it'll be somebody else."

Kickoff Friday night in Myrtle Beach is at 7:30 p.m.

Friday s Key matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 8, 2013 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 343 words

Body

Summerville (8-2, 4-0) at Bluffton (6-4, 2-2)

LAST YEAR: Summerville won, 31-22

COACHES: John McKissick, Summerville; Ken Cribb, Bluffton

NOTABLE: The Green Wave wrapped up its 36th region championship under John McKissick and a win in this Region 8-AAAA clash will give the Green Wave two home playoffs games. The Wave is seeking its seventh victory in eight games. Bluffton averages 35 points per game, but the defense has struggled, allowing 28 points per contest.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Summerville linebacker Mac McCurry. He s logged 169 tackles (99 solo) and two sacks to lead the Green Wave defense.

DID YOU KNOW: Coach McKissick has won 10 state championships, with the last one coming 15 years ago.

Fort Dorchester (6-4, 2-2) at Ashley Ridge (4-6, 2-2)

LAST YEAR: Ashley Ridge won, 41-20.

COACHES: Steve LaPrad, Fort Dorchester; Kenny Walker, Ashley Ridge.

NOTABLE: Both teams are coming off tough losses in this Region 8-AAAA regular season finale. Fort Dorchester scored the final two TDs of the game, but came up short in a 24-21 loss to Beaufort. Ashley Ridge outscored Summerville 12-7 in the final quarter, but lost 39-33.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Ashley Ridge running back Tyler Garland. He needs 59 yards to top 1,000 for the season.

DID YOU KNOW: Fort Dorchester quarterback Kobe Garrett has rushed for 1,024 yards and passed for 1,049. He has accounted for 17 touchdowns.

Berkeley (5-5) at Myrtle Beach (6-4)

LAST YEAR: Did not play.

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; Mickey Wilson, Myrtle Beach.

NOTABLE: Berkeley picked up a 26-6 victory over Hilton Head last week as Josh Simmons and Branden Williams played well on defense and the Stags held the Seahawks to less than 200 yards. Myrtle Beach is coming off an impressive 30-28 victory over North Myrtle Beach. The Seahawks trailed 14-0 after the first quarter but rallied for the win.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Myrtle Beach QB Drayton Arnold. He passed for 262 yards and three TDs in a 30-28 win over N. Myrtle Beach last week.

DID YOU KNOW: Socastee has eliminated Berkeley from the playoffs the last two years.

Philip M. Bowman

Load-Date: November 8, 2013

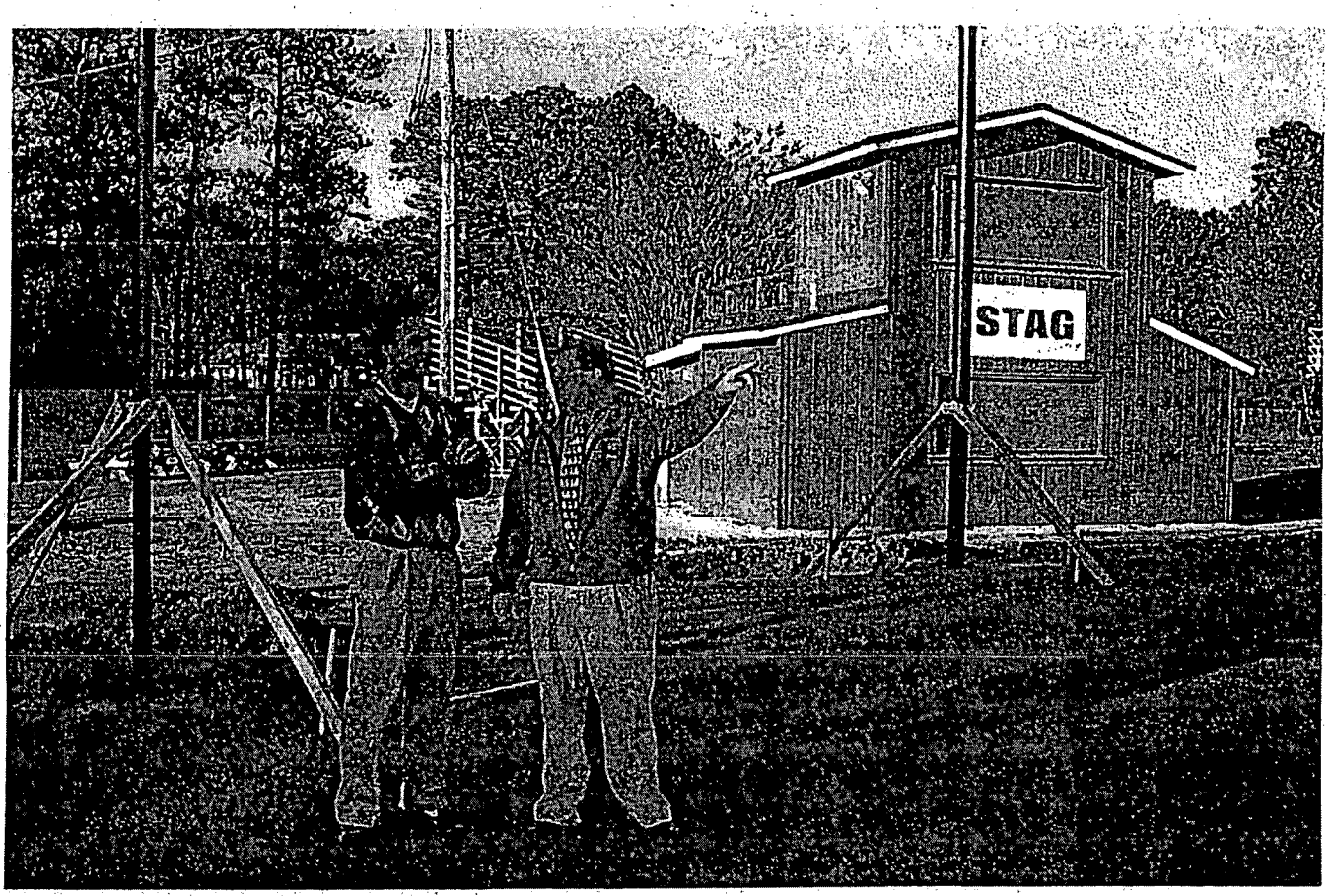
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APP. 0760

749

Cruce, Steele share 5-year plan

Dan Brown Dec 24, 2013



Dan Brown/Independent Berkeley Stags AD and football coach Jeff Cruce meets with BHS Principal Steven Steele to introduce their five-year plan to upgrade and improve Berkeley's athletic facilities.

Buy Now

Berkeley High School Principal Steven Steele and Stags Athletic Director Jeff Cruce met at home plate at Jim Bradley Field a week before Christmas and discussed their vision for Berkeley High School athletics.

"We call it our five-year Berkeley plan," said Steele. "We're working together and moving forward with a cooperative plan designed to give the best student athletes in Berkeley County the best facilities in Berkeley County on which to play."

Cruce echoed his principal's sentiments.

"We are moving forward with a plan to upgrade all the facilities here including baseball, softball and tennis in our first phase," Cruce said. "The five-year plan involves the overall upgrading of our facilities across the board.

"I have long maintained that being a Berkeley Stag is a privilege and what we're doing with the improvements here is rewarding these fine athletes."

Steele and Cruce's meeting and joint announcement may help quell speculatoin about Cruce's future at the school.

"We're a team," Steele said. "Jeff is our athletic director and football coach and we are moving forward from here in the best interests of all Berkeley Stags athletics."

Both Steele and Cruce are committed in their support of each other and working together to build a future.

"All this is possible through the partnership and cooperation between Berkeley High School, the school district and the community of Moncks Corner," Steele said.

Berkeley has often been called the gem of Berkeley County, the shining beacon on the hill, the school their rivals love to hate.

Having the finest athletic facilities in the Lowcountry coincides with that philosophy, and it's already being noticed by some of Berkeley's rivals.

"I heard Summerville is looking to improve their baseball field now as well," Steele said.

The first notable upgrades involve improvements to the baseball and softball fields. The old backstop has been torn down and the first phase involves a new backstop and grandstand area behind home plate.

"We took out the chain link fencing and are in the process of adding a net backstop which should improve the lines of sight for our fans watching the games," Cruce said. "We have six poles now instead of seventeen, and the black netting makes it easier to see the game."

In addition to the netting a four-foot high brick retaining wall will run from dugout to dugout.

"The brick will match the brick used on the gym to give everything a more uniform look and design," Steele said.

In addition, concrete slabs will be poured under the bleachers to help with overall appearance and drainage. A concrete walkway will also lead from the walk bridge spanning the retention pond to the grandstand area behind the third base dugout.

"No more walking through mud in bad weather," Cruce said.

A new drainage and sprinkler system was installed in 2012 that helped with the overall drainage and maintenance of the baseball field. The same type drainage and sprinkler system is planned for the softball field.

"We gave the girls a new field house, improved the cages, and have laid concrete walkways that will take the players from the field house to their batting cages and the fields," Steele said.

"We will also be transforming the lower floor of the press box into a concession stand so they won't have to bring the trailer in here anymore," Cruce said.

Already completed for the softball field are the concrete pads in front of each dugout that offer players and coaches easier visibility and protection during games.

"Sitting in that dugout was like sitting in a cage," Coach Boogie Grooms said. "I think it's remarkable what they're doing to the softball complex here. We have more than thirty girls trying out for varsity softball this year.

"That's how you build a program."

Other facilities improvements include the expansion of the tennis courts.

"We want to add two courts in line with the two front courts and expand to six courts total," Steele said. "The increase and upgrade in our facilities will give us the opportunity to host more region and state events."

The overall facelift for Berkeley coincides with the Town of Moncks Corner's construction of its new 52-acre Park and Recreation Complex that should be ready to host athletic contests in 2014.

"Our plan is to bring athletes and teams to Moncks Corner and Berkeley High School," Steele said. "We want people to come here and play."

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/berkeley-hall-of-fame-announces-scholarships-for-senior-boy-and/article_cef641ab-9850-5aaf-a824-e86add6958ee.html

Berkeley Hall of Fame announces scholarships for senior boy and girl

Dan Brown Feb 18, 2014

Berkeley High School Athletic Director Jeff Cruce has announced the application process for a pair of $2,500 scholarships to a deserving BHS senior boy and girl this spring has now opened.

"One of the benefits of having a Hall of Fame like we do here at Berkeley High School is that we're afforded the opportunity to take some of leftover operating funds each year and award the money to a pair of deserving Berkeley Stags student athletes in the form of a scholarship," Cruce said.

Cruce said students can start filing applications now for each scholarship.

"Your guidance counselors will have the application forms," he said. "Qualifications for the scholarship award include being a senior letter winner and a minimum 2.5 grade point average."

Cruce said the senior student-athlete must have participated and completed two varsity sports in their senior year.

"We are celebrating the commitment of the multi-sport athlete," Cruce said. "Given the year-round nature of high school sports these days, the commitment of a student-athlete that invests the blood, sweat and tears to compete in more than one varsity sport in a year isn't seen often anymore. We feel it is important here at Berkeley High School to reward such a commitment."

The $2,500 scholarship will be awarded at the 2013 Senior Night awards banquet.

The scholarship award will be made payable to the school the student-athlete is attending.

The number of letters won will be calculated with the student's GPA and class ranking to determine the award winners.

Cruce did say that any student-athlete receiving NCAA scholarship assistance will not be eligible for this scholarship award.

"These are NCAA guidelines and not Berkeley High School's," Cruce said. "This scholarship is designed for the high school student athlete that does not plan to play competitive sports on the collegiate level."

For more information see a BHS guidance counselor.

In other BHS Hall of Fame news, nominations are being accepted for future Hall of Fame classes.

The 2014 Berkeley High School Athletics Hall of Fame will be announced in March and introduced at the Hall of Fame's annual golf tournament on April 24.

For more information about nominating an athlete for Hall of Fame consideration, contact the BHS Athletics office.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/berkeley-hall-of-fame-inductees-announced/article_7d541ae3-856b-5fde-9d7c-89a82df5c91e.html

Berkeley Hall of Fame inductees announced

Dan Brown Mar 25, 2014



Photos by Dan Brown/Independent Class of 2014 Hall of Fame indcutee Pete Myers was a member of the last Berkeley Stags baseball team to win a region championship in 1962.

Buy Now

Stags legends.

Grateful to be remembered.

The 2014 class of the Berkeley Athletics Hall of Fame was announced this month, the third such class honoring the long line of outstanding athletes comprising the school's storied history.

New this year is a the honoroing of one of Berkeley's many outstanding teams, the 1960 football squad.

"There are teams that deserve to be honored," said BAHOF Committee Chairman Lane Woffard. "Teams that were dominant during their time like the 1960 Stags ... that are deserving of their place in history."

The honoring of specific teams is a new wrinkle to the hall of fame, which enters its third year.

The Class of 2014 includes Kathy Brittle Jones, Jimmy Villeoponteaux, David Barnett, Don Brown Jr., Mal Lawyer, Clark Simpkins, Pete Myers, and the 1960 football team.

Wofford, the only holdover from the original Berkeley Hall of Fame committee, assumed the chairmanship of the committee from BHS Athletic Director Jeff Cruce over the winter and announced the formation of the new HOF committee slated to serve a two-year term.

New committee members are Dave Copeland, current Hall of Famers Ben Fleming Sr. and Butch Watson, Amy Jones, Craig Mims and Bill McCall Sr.

Cruce said one of his goals when he arrived at Berkeley three years ago was to start a Hall of Fame.

Having done that, Cruce felt it was time to put the committee and the Hall of Fame where it belonged, into the hands of Berkeley sports fans.

"The Berkeley Athletics Hall of Fame will be around long after I'm gone," Cruce said. "One of my goals here was to get this off the ground. We've done that. Now the Hall of Fame should go to the community, the alumni, and fans of Stags athletics."

Wofford announced that the Third Annual Berkeley Athletics Hall of Fame golf tournament has been tabbed for April 24 at the Berkeley Country Club.

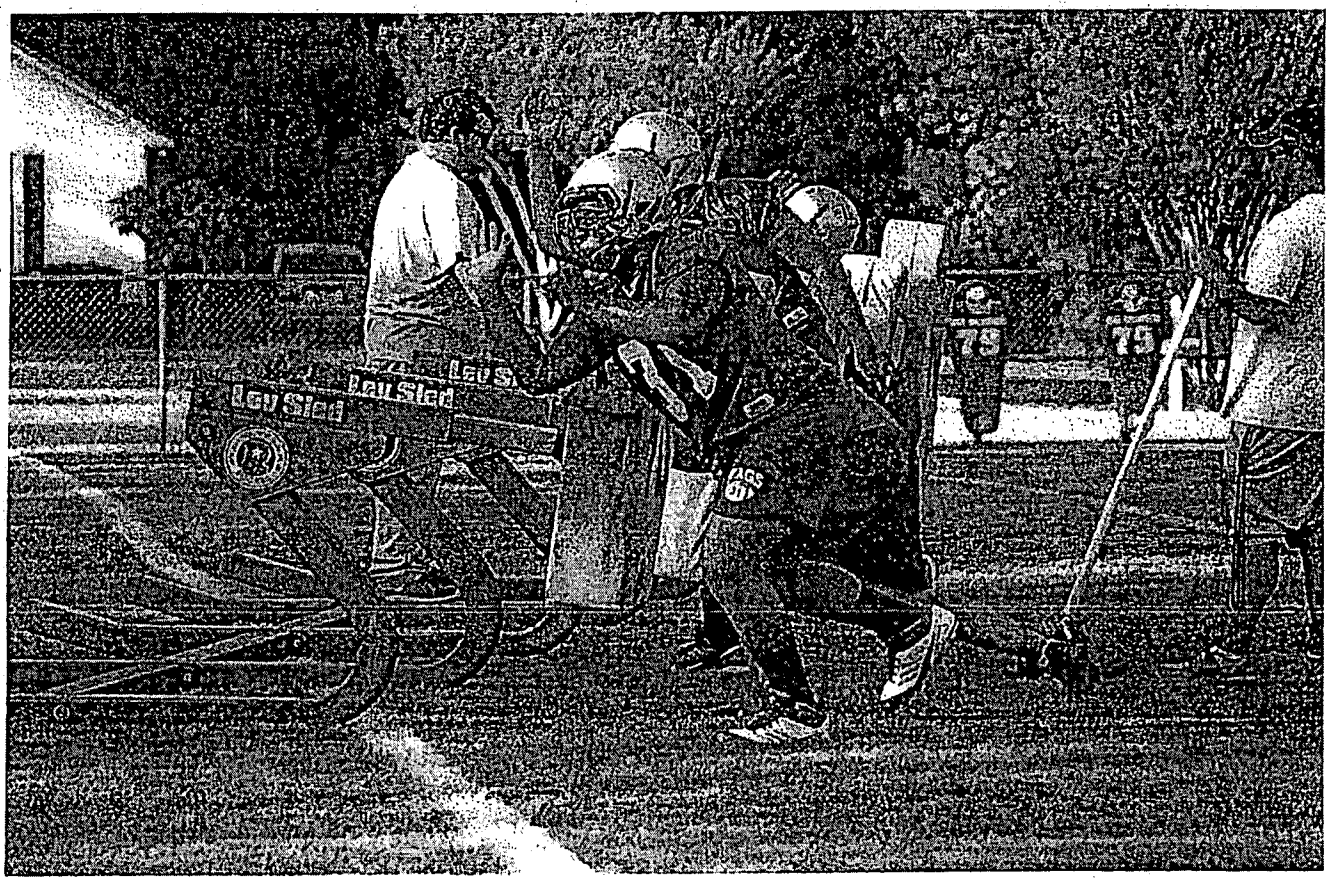
"With the Hall of Fame awarding its first annual scholarship this spring, the golf tournament's importance as our primary fundraiser increases. The tournament is the first chance to meet this year's Hall of Fame inductees and get together for a good cause."

To enter a team in the shotgun start tournament, contact the Berkeley High School office at 899-8800.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-look-to-take-next-step-in-spring-practice/article_40dd8c05-4624-5ce8-80f8-f664f3c54ade.html

Stags look to take next step in spring practice

Dan Brown May 8, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent The Berkeley Stags tout a sizable offensive line in 2014.

Buy Now

As the Berkeley baseball team continue their march to a possible state championship less than 100 feet away, the Stags' football team assembled for the first time on the practice field to wipe off the dust and clear the rust of a long off season.

This year, in 2014, the Stags have something to prove.

"These guys have been under me their entire careers and they have grown up and matured on the field," Head Coach Jeff Cruce said. "We're looking to improve on last year and take that next step in the devleopment of our football program."

Senior quarterback Joseph Dress returns as the starter to lead the Berkeley offense. Dress said his team looked good in its first days of practice.

"We are opening up our routes faster," he said, "which makes our offense run faster. We're hitting our routes."

It has been a long offseason since a 35-0 loss to Myrtle Beach in the 2013 playoffs that capped a 5-6 overall record, including a 3-2 third place mark in Region 8AAA. Still, Cruce remains optimistic about his players returning in the fall.

"We've been working hard in the weightroom since December," he said. "We've been in the classroom getting our plays down. Spring practice is a chance to evaluate what we've done over the last six months."

The Stags have some names that are starting to garner attention around the state.

"We have a force on the offensive line in Alex Taylor," Cruce said. "South Carolina came in and offered him a scholarship just based on his size. He has outstanding potential and has tremendously improved over the last two seasons."

Standing head and shoulders above the rest of his teammates, Taylor has benefitted from time in the weightroom and playing three sports: football, basketball and track.

"He's 6'9" and wears a size eighteen shoe," Cruce said. "And he's still growing."

Taylor will help open running lanes for Dress and a backfield led by senior Jamal Bowman.

"We're excited," Cruce said. "We've been working hard. We've got size on our o-line.

We have a veteran presence in the backfield and wide receiver corps in Dionte Simmons, Jordan Brown, Keron Reed, D.J. Witherspoon and Deion Williams."

Chris Mathis has been moved from the offensive line to the the defensive line. A new Stag, Trey Covin, transferred in from Georgia and Cruce sees big potential in the lineman.

"He's got definite size and he likes to mix it up inside."

The opening kickoff is still more than two months away but the Stags are already getting ready for Stratford.

"Spring is the time to find out where you are and to make the adjustments. Then we spend the summer building on what we've accomplished in the spring."

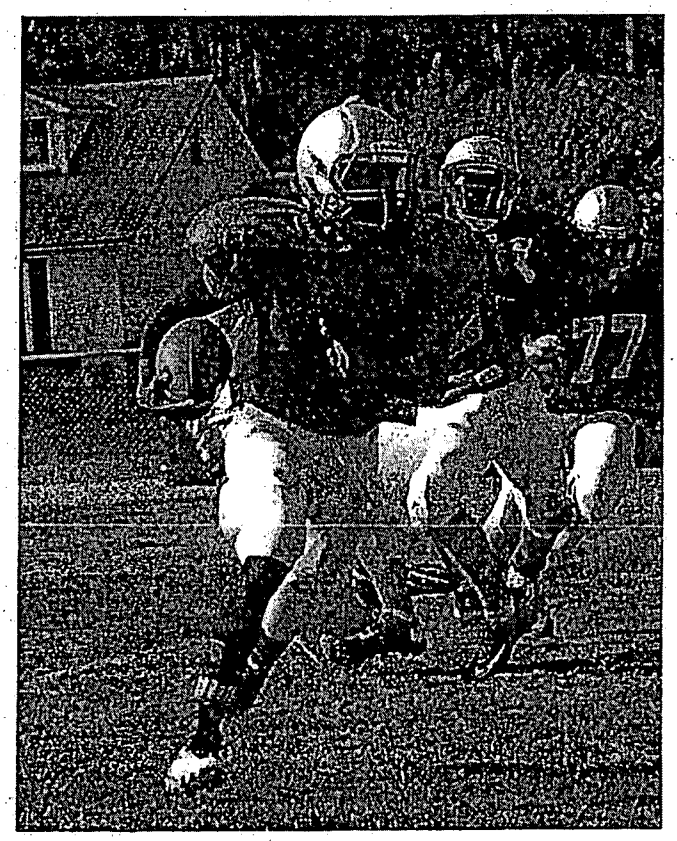
The annual Blue and Gold game is Friday, May 23. The time of kickoff has yet to be announced.

"We'd like to do it during the school day so the kids can come out and watch the game, but that hasn't been decided yet," Cruce said.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/spring-game-gives-coaches-an-early-look/article_ed9b8124-c478-5d96-8751-97e0a6ed4995.html

Spring game gives coaches an early look

Dan Brown Jun 1, 2014



Darius Douglas runs for a gain during the spring game.

Buy Now

The countdown to the 2014 football season has officially begun.

Berkeley vs. Stratford is on the clock and for the next three months the Stags will work hard in preparation for the Aug. 29 tilt with the 2013 Lower State Champs.

In 2013 Jacob Park threw for three touchdown passes, but was picked five times in the Knights' 29-10 win over Berkeley. Both Park and longtime SHS coach Ray Stackley are gone, Park to play for the University of Georgia this fall and Stackley retiring at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year.

As the countdown begins unti the season opener with the Knights, the Stags' coaching staff got its first look at the 2014 edition of Berkeley football in the annual spring game on Thursday, May 22.

Spring games are, for better or worse, the first chance a coaching staff gets to evaluate talent for the coming season.

They are a first look under actual game circumstances, and, like an early rehearsal for a play or musical concert, they are full of mistakes.

Coach Jeff Cruce said while his expectations were realistic, he was pleased with what he saw on the field.

"I thought it was a typical spring game and I thought the effort was good," Cruce said. "This was the first time the kids have done it without the coaches on the field.

"There were lots of mistakes, but that's expected this early in the game."

Rising senior quarterback Joseph Dress directed the Stags offense, sharing snaps with rising sophomore Darius Douglas.

"I thought Joseph did a great job of running the offense," Cruce said. "As did our JV quarterback Darius Douglas. With Joseph being a running quarterback, he will take his share of hits so we need someone in the backup position ready to come off the bench at any time.

"Darius is capable of handling these duties as a sophomore. He's our future under center."

Lining up behind Dress will be returning tailback Jamal Bowman, who made the switch from number 11 to number 3, a number that carries a great tradition and heritage over the last 20 years for the Stags.

"Jamal chose number 3 and undestands the legacy associated with this number," Cruce said. "I admire Jamal's drive and desire to associate himself with some of Berkeley's great running backs.

"He has the talent to fill that jersey."

Other running backs that will get their hands on the ball in addition to Bowman are Miles Austin, Keron Reed, Jordan Brown and Dionte Simmons.

"We have four good running backs in these guys," Cruce said. "We know we have some playmakers and we just have to be smart in how we use them."

Offensive lineman Alex Taylor has generated a tremendous amount of attention over the offseason. Taylor, who played in just four games as a junior continues to be a work in progress but has exhibited a tremendous amount of growth and potential, as seen by his performance during basketball season over the winter and this spring in track.

"By the end of the basketball season, Alex was one of our leading scorers, leading rebounders and leaders in blocked shots," Cruce said. "His quickness and agility is still improving and he's not finished growing yet."

Taylor has caught the eye of South Carolina recruiters who are prepared to offer the 6'9" lineman a scholarship based solely on his size and potential.

"They were ready to offer him based entirely on what they saw him do in the weight room," Cruce said.

Another key component in the trenches is Georgia transfer Trey Covin. "Trey will play on both sides of the ball. He's going to be very good."

Cruce said because of roster size a few of his players could be seeing action on both sides of the ball this fall.

"We have a lot of potential out there," Cruce said. "And while I don't like to do this, three or four of our kids will probably play both ways. We have to get in shape in the weight room to be able to handle the strain of being on the field for the majority of the game."

With seven players missing out on spring practice due to an assortment of reasons, several younger players were able to see a significant amount of action on the field.

"Our roster may not be great in number but the players we have will be in shape and prepared to work hard," Cruce said.

Volunteer assistant coaches

Dan Brown Jun 2, 2014

It takes a while for things to settle in my head and take root.

Like this whole volunteer dad coach thing and how it attracted the attention of the Berkeley County School Board.

A volunteer assistant coach at a midlevel tier sport such as baseball and softball shouldn't garner the attention of the school board saddled with much greater fish to fry.

When you sit through a four-hour school board meeting you have a lot of free time on your hands to think about things and stew a bit.

When I have time to sit and stew I come up with questions.

Questions I would like to have answered. These questions are moths fluttering about the porch light of my brain and they hit me with equations like, 1+1=3, especially when it comes to this bad dad volunteer coaching situation Chairman Kent Murray says is running rampant across Berkeley County.

On May 27, Murray and I stood in the parking lot of College Park Middle School and talked at length about the problem of today's kids, stage parents and parents of these kids being coaches on their respective high school sports teams.

Murray didn't approve of the concept. He said, "Back in our day, your science teacher was your assistant coach, not your dad."

Murray went on to say every high school in Berkeley County that had parents serving as volunteer coaches had problems.

I agreed with the chairman because at one time I was one of those dads. I could see it happening, yet I have not seen any problems with today's dads serving as volunteer coaches.

Certainly not at Berkeley, Timberland and Cross, and I've been on their ball fields so much this year they're going to start charging me rent.

I asked around if there were any problems with overzealous parent volunteer coaches.

Jeff Cruce, Berkeley High School Athletic Director said, "We have some of the best volunteer coaches in the county and have never had a problem with any of our volunteer coaches here at Berkeley."

Cruce went on to say that as a matter of athletic department policy, any situations or problems involving volunteer coaches are handled at the coach and A.D. level and would never be allowed to get as high as the school board.

Which led me to yet another question: Why is the school board getting involved in a lower tier athletic department process that should be nipped in the bud by the coach or at worst the school's athletic director? If it did become a problem significant enough to involve the school district offices, shouldn't county athletic director Charlie Davis be handling this and not the school board?

There must be something we're missing, something else that's causing the Berkeley County School Board to draw volunteer coaches in its sights.

I wonder what that problem might be? It will be interesting to watch this story continue to develop.

Ban on parent-coaches would devastate teams

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

June 23, 2014 Monday

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Section: 01,A; Pg. 4

Length: 816 words

Byline: jhartsell@postandcourier.com

Body

A proposal to ban so-called dad coaches from high school sports in Berkeley County has some residents riled up, and some athletic directors and coaches concerned.

The Berkeley County school board, which meets Tuesday night in Moncks Corner, is considering a proposal that would prevent volunteer coaches from coaching their own children at the varsity and junior varsity levels. More than 350 people have signed a petition at change.org to protest the idea.

The children of Berkeley County deserve to have as many programs available to them as possible, Moncks Corner resident Sally Wofford wrote in the petition. Banning parent coaches will reduce the number of teams.

The proposal came about, according to Berkeley County Superintendent Rodney Thompson, because of concerns that parent-coaches are showing favoritism to their own children.

We have heard concerns and misperceptions about parents offering preferential treatment to their respective children on athletic teams, Thompson told the school board on June 10. We want to protect our athletes and our volunteers from such allegations, which draw attention away from the integrity of the sport.

Jeff Cruce, football coach and athletic director at Berkeley High School, said there are about 20 parents coaching their own children in the athletic program at his school. Losing those coaches, most of whom are assistant coaches, would decimate some of our programs, he said.

It would devastate some teams, Cruce said. It would hurt us, and it would hurt some other schools in the district. I would hope cooler heads would prevail and that in the long run, the board will do what s in the best interest of our kids.

Berkeley softball coach Boogie Grooms is himself a volunteer coach, though he has no children in his program. Some of his varsity and junior varsity coaches do, however.

It would kill my whole coaching staff, basically, Grooms said. And they are real good coaches, too. At Berkeley, we have quite a few volunteer coaches and we could not go out and hire coaches who are that good. It would really hurt our program to take them away from us.

Ban on parent-coaches would devastate teams

Berkeley High is not the only school where parents are volunteer coaches. Hanahan High Principal Ric Raycroft estimates he has six coaches that fall in that category. About 10 coaches at Goose Creek High and 10 more at Timberland would be affected.

Raycroft said parent volunteers are important to high schools, and not just in athletics.

We ve had a lot of parent volunteers over the years, academically and athletically, and they are very important to what we do here, said Raycroft, a former soccer and wrestling coach at the school. As for the impact (the proposal) would have, we ll make do with what we have. We re bound by policy and I support the mission of the school district. If that s the policy in place, we ll follow it.

Cruce said the experience provided by some of the parent-coaches would be hard to replace. For example, one high school in Berkeley County has a former Division I college baseball player and a former minor league player and coach helping with the baseball team. Both have sons in the program.

Some of these volunteers bring a lot of experience and expertise to the table, Cruce said.

As for favoritism, Cruce said it s up to the head coach and athletic director to resolve such issues.

There is a policy in place at Berkeley, he said. When a coach comes to me with a volunteer coach he wants to use, we bring them all in and tell them the head coach is the CEO, and the volunteer coach is there to teach the fundamentals of what the head coach wants. If that is not done, they are no longer part of the program.

The proposed ban would not prevent staff coaches from coaching their own children, which occurs often. Cruce said in his experience, coaches are often harder on their own kids.

That s because of the potential backlash, he said. If you get on somebody, you make sure you get on your own kid. Those kids get it a lot worse than anybody else.

School board member Phillip Obie said the policy could send the wrong message to parents interested in volunteering at school.

Here we are begging parents to get involved with their students at school, and when they do want to get involved, then we go and run them off, he said at the June 10 school board meeting. I don t understand why we re doing that.

Superintendent Thompson said it could take up to two years for a revised policy to be fully implemented. Any proposed changes would go before the school board s policy review committee before going to the full board.

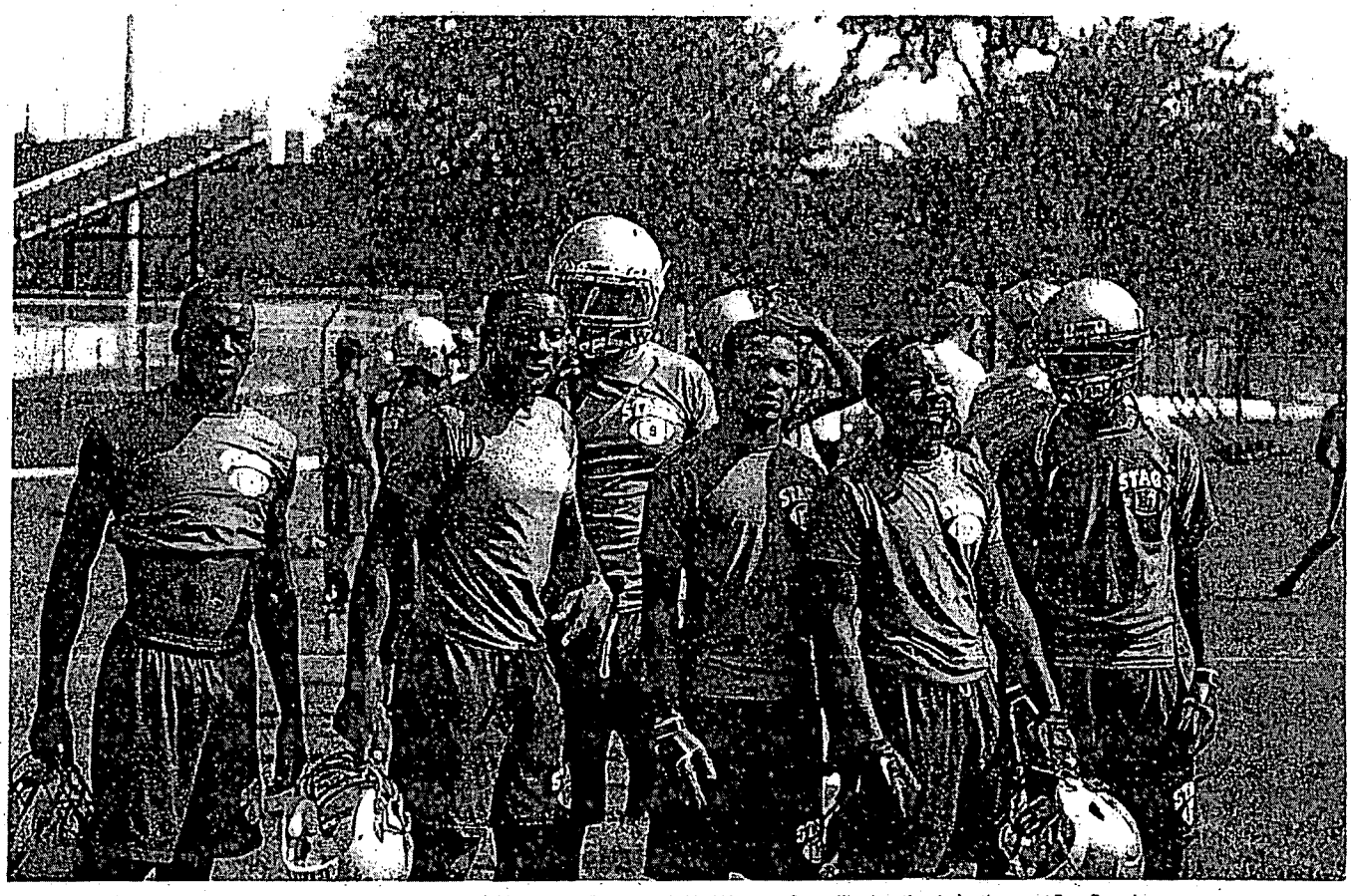
Dorchester County District 2, which encompasses Summerville, Fort Dorchester and Ashley Ridge high schools, has no policy against parent-coaches, a spokesperson said. Charleston County requires that all coaches be full-time salaried employees of the school district, county athletic director Dave Spurlock said.

Load-Date: June 23, 2014

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Cruce: Battle brewing in Region 8AAA

Dan Brown Jul 30, 2014



Photographs by Dan Brown/Independent Jamal Bowman, Kalen Hawkins, Peyton Thompson, Karon Reid and Supreme Scott take a breather during the recent 7-on-7 passing camp.

Buy Now

Berkeley Stags football coach Jeff Cruce can't wait for the 2014 football season to start.

Three weeks from Friday, the Stags open the 2014 season against Class AA opponent Johnsonville at home, on Friday, Aug. 22.

Cruce doesn't expect his team's schedule to be a cakewalk. In fact, he expects a battle, especially in Region 8AAA, and he can't wait.

"We're looking forward to mixing it up with teams this year," he said. "We expect to be very competitive this fall."

The Stags' spring and summer had been very productive, according to Cruce, with his team advancing to the championship games in the passing league camps at both Fort Dorchester and Irmo.

"Berkeley has never advanced to a passing league championship game before so we're excited about being able to do that," Cruce said. "We know the success of a season isn't determined by how well you do in passing leagues, but we take it for what it is, a very positive sign."

The Region 8AAA crown is up for the taking and Cruce said his team has to be ready for a dogfight: "Hanahan is said to be down a little bit this year, but they are always tough and should never be counted out. They will be in the thick of the region race again this year."

Cruce said there is no team in the region that can match Orangeburg-Wilkinson's athleticism. "They have some of the best athletes I've ever seen and step for step I don't think anybody can run with them," he said. "But they're a little reckless and they are beatable. They will be tough, though."

Beaufort is new to Region 8AAA, dropping from Class AAAA in 2014.

"Berkeley has always seemed to have a tough time whenever playing Beaufort," Cruce said. "They're tough and are looking forward to playing in the region this year."

The Eagles finished the 2013 season with a 9-4 record, losing to North Augusta in the playoffs.

Hilton Head and Stall round out the Region 8AAA schedule and should be competitive but Cruce sees the region race to be a four-team dogfight between the Stags, Orangeburg-Wilkinson, Beaufort and Hanahan.

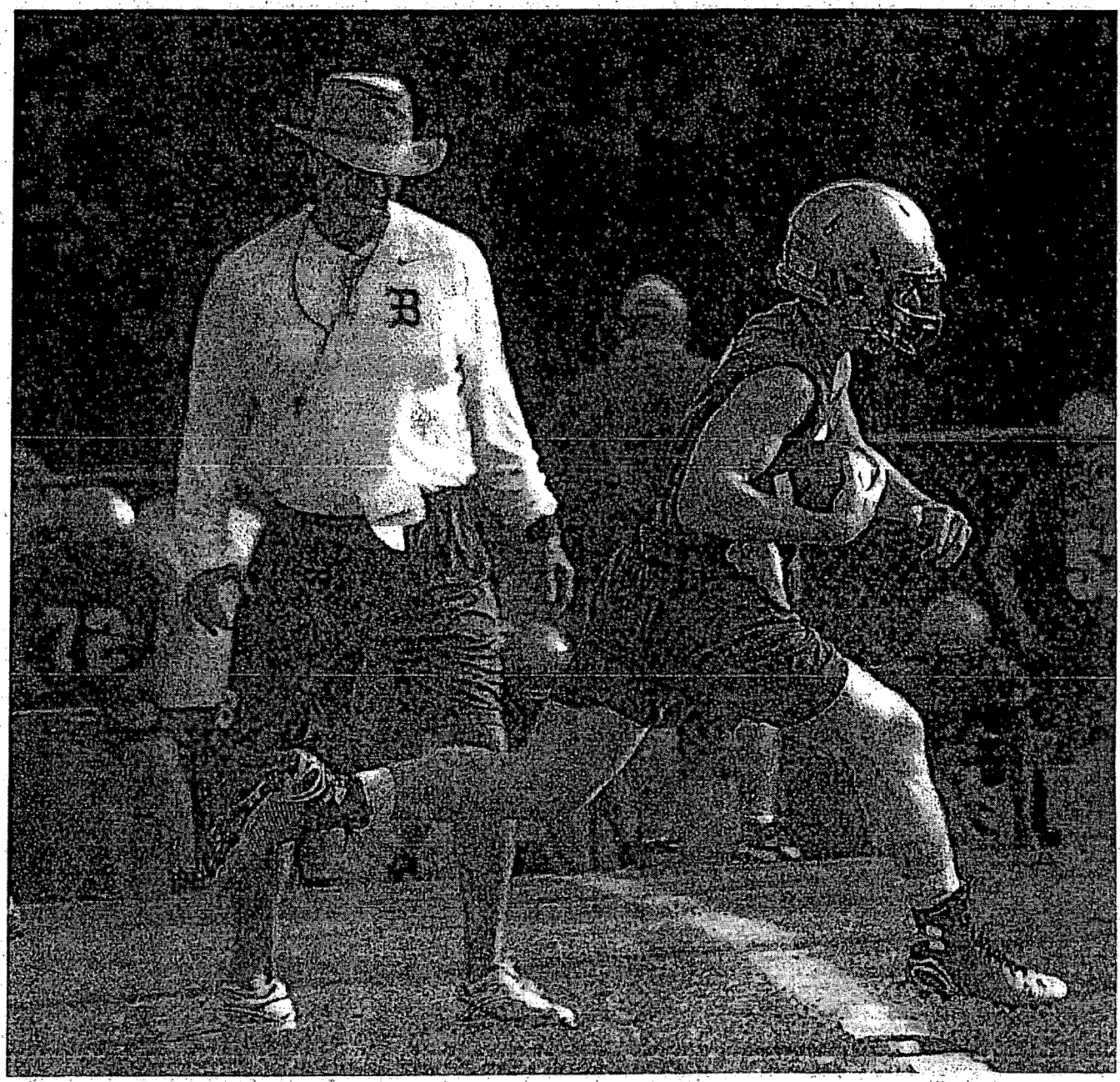
"I don't think anybody runs away with the region this year," Cruce said, "And we expect to be in the thick of it come November."

The remainder of Berkeley's pre-region schedule after Johnsonville includes Stratford, Summerville, Cane Bay and Timberland.

"We've got a tough schedule top to bottom and we'll have to be ready and prepared," Cruce said.

Countdown to kickoff

Dan Brown Aug 5, 2014



Coach Jeff Cruce watches quarterback Joseph Dress execute running drills.

Buy Now

The nine-month wait is finally over.

The start of the Berkeley Stags 2014 football season is just two weeks away.

Practice began for all varsity sports on Friday, Aug. 1, and from the football team to the band, the Stags didn't waste any time before hitting the practice field bright and early.

For the Stags football team, the 2014 edition is the team Coach Jeff Cruce has always wanted.

"This is my team, my coaches," he said. "There are no more leftovers from the previous coach. These are players that started their high school careers under our offense and what we want to do here."

With 25 seniors on the 45-man roster, Cruce believes this is his best team yet.

"I know I've said this before, but I'm excited about what we can do here."

Stags football fans are hungry for a return to football glory.

The Stags begin year five since their last trip to Columbia in 2009 under former coach Jerry Brown. Prior to Berkeley's 2009 state title, Brown endured a 13-year drought since the Stags last state championship in 1996, which included playoff losses in the first and second rounds. Brown's Stags struggled during the late 90s and in 2004 finished at .500 with a 6-6 mark.

The Stags won a pair of region championships during this 13-span between state titles, the first led by Uncle Rusty Williams and the second led by his nephew Bruce Ellington.

Since leaving Berkeley after the 2010 season, Brown went on to win the 2013 Class AA state championship at Batesburge-Leesville, and then resigning to take the head coaching job at Spring Valley.

For Cruce, the fall offers a chance for his program to take a big step forward. With a sub-.500 14-20 record over his first three years and not advancing beyond the second round in the playoffs, a good season would go a long way in pacifying his critics.

Success appears ripe for the picking with the Region 8AAA title an open battle between the Stags, new region foe Beaufort, Orangeburg Wilkinson and Hanahan.

"It'll be a battle between four teams as to who finishes where in the region," Cruce said. "We want a home game in the playoffs."

Berkeley kicks off its 2014 season on Aug. 22 against Johnsonvile, followed by Stratford, Summerville, Cane Bay and Timberland before the region schedule gets underway in October.

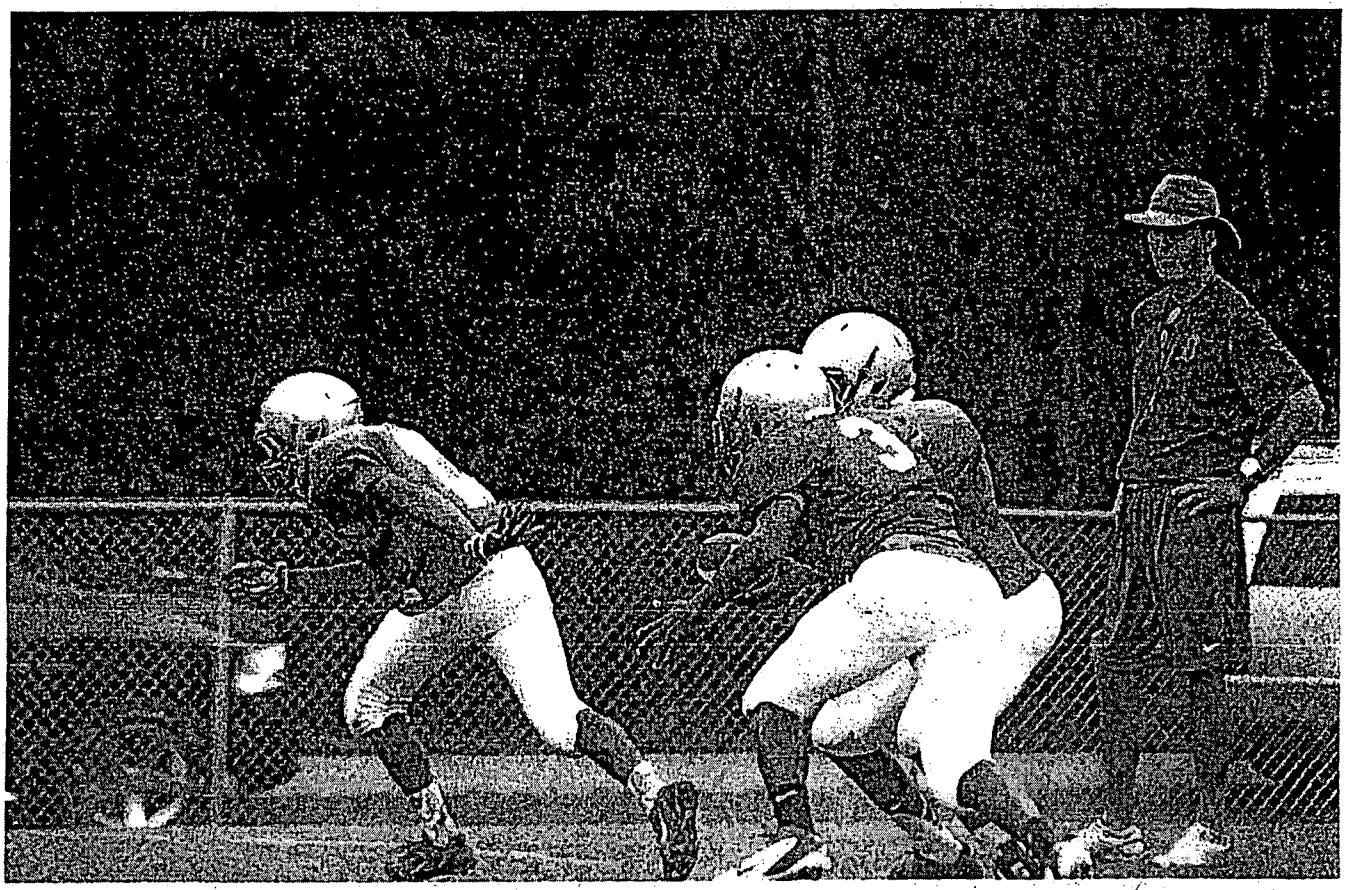
Like the day before baseball's Opening Day, everybody's record is 0-0, and everybody is also tied for first.

But then football pundits are quick to point out, no championship was ever won in August.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/bhs-scrimmage-cancelled-after-wando-football-team-stricken-with-staph/article_da295832-08a0-5e8a-ab3e-5fc35fbfbebb.html

BHS scrimmage cancelled after Wando football team stricken with staph infection

Dan Brown Aug 6, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Berkeley Stags Coach Jeff Cruce watches his team at a recent practice.

Buy Now

With more than half the Wando football team stricken with a staph infection, Berkeley's Friday, Aug. 8 scrimmage against the Warriors has been cancelled.

The cancellation leaves the Stags scrambling to find a replacement game.

"Coach Cruce is working hard as we speak to find someone to play on Friday night," said Berkeley Principal Steven Steele.

On Wednesday, Wando was forced to cancel practice because of the outbreak.

According to Berkeley athletic director and football coach Jeff Cruce, his coaching staff in all sports work hard to guard against staph infection outbreaks.

"More than half the team is a lot and we take preventative steps here to make sure this type of thing doesn't happen," Cruce said.

According to www.webmd.com, "A staph infection is caused by a Staphylococcus (or staph) bacteria. About 25-percent of people normally carry staph.

"The foot is also very prone to pick up bacteria from the floor. The infection often begins with a little cut, which gets infected with bacteria.

"We wash all our gear every day in hot water," Cruce said. "We don't let the kids take anything home. Everything we have is washed immediately after practice."

Cruce also said the locker rooms and weight room are regularly defogged and sanitized to guard against staph outbreaks.

For now, Cruce is left at the mercy of other area football teams in trying to find a replacement for Wando.

"They all want me to come to their place and I'm not doing that this year," he said. "We may scrimmage Goose Creek at their place in the morning as part of a three-team scrimmage but right now that's up in the air."

Armadillos, Colonial Lake & true blue fans

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 8, 2014 Friday

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Section: 04,D; Pg. 1

Length: 556 words

Body

No huge topic on the agenda today, just a hodge-podge of different observations as we head toward the end of summer.

I don t remember ever seeing so many dead armadillos on the side of the road as I have this year. I saw three on an overpass on S.C. Highway 61 on the same day.

The little armor-coated mammals were first spotted in the Lowcountry 10 to 15 years ago. They re about the size of a large house cat, but the Department of Natural Resources ranks them as an invasive species right along with coyotes and feral hogs.

How they could make it here all the way from Texas only to then run into cars and trucks on our roadways is a mystery to me.

Some folks say they taste like pork.

She s a Grand Old Flag

Some Mount Pleasant women recently decided that tattered American flags flying atop some of the shrimp boats in Shem Creek should be replaced.

Their concerns found their way to Boy Scout Troop 40 and Scoutmaster David Benke. Before you know it, Bob Boyles of American Flag Poles and Flags was involved.

In a very short amount of time, new flags were supplied to the boats of Rocky Magwood and David Richardson.

Those shrimpers have certainly taken their share of lumps fighting leaks in their trawlers and holes in their nets.

Even though there may be problems down below, there are now new flags flying up top and a certain scout troop has been promised a free trip on a shrimp boat.

Life on the lake

It s great to hear that Colonial Lake will undergo a renovation. It s still one of those places that seems special, even though it serves a simple existence.

The work will mean the public space will be closed for a year, but as we see the plans and hear about the upgrades, it seems worth it.

Even with the vibrant residential and nearby commercial life in that area of downtown Charleston, Colonial Lake is still one of the great places to take a walk, read a book, ride a bike or merely escape to that bench for the solitude we all should embrace from time to time.

Berkeley Blue

As we head for the start of another football season, Berkeley High head coach Jeff Cruce reminds us of how proud and protective fans can be.

The athletic department purchased two new four-wheel utility vehicles to haul equipment back and forth from the practice fields. The units come with a very distinctive green and gold color scheme.

Almost as soon as the four-wheelers were delivered, Cruce was asked by a Berkeley alum if he could take the vehicles down the street for a couple of days. The vehicles ended up in a paint and body shop where some paint was gladly donated and applied.

Barely 48 hours later, the vehicles returned sporting a new Berkeley Blue paint job.

The booster said he couldn t sleep knowing Summerville colors would be constantly visible on those two units on the Berkeley football field.

That s a true blue fan for ya.

The folks in Moncks Corner have come to terms with the fact that their high school principal, Steven Steele, played his high school football in Summerville. That, apparently, is tolerable.

For at least one fan, though, certain lines had to be drawn.

There probably are a few of you out there shaking your heads right now and saying, So, what s your point?

No point, really, unless one of the new high schools adopts an armadillo as their mascot.

Reach Warren Peper at 937-5577 or wpeper@postandcourier.com

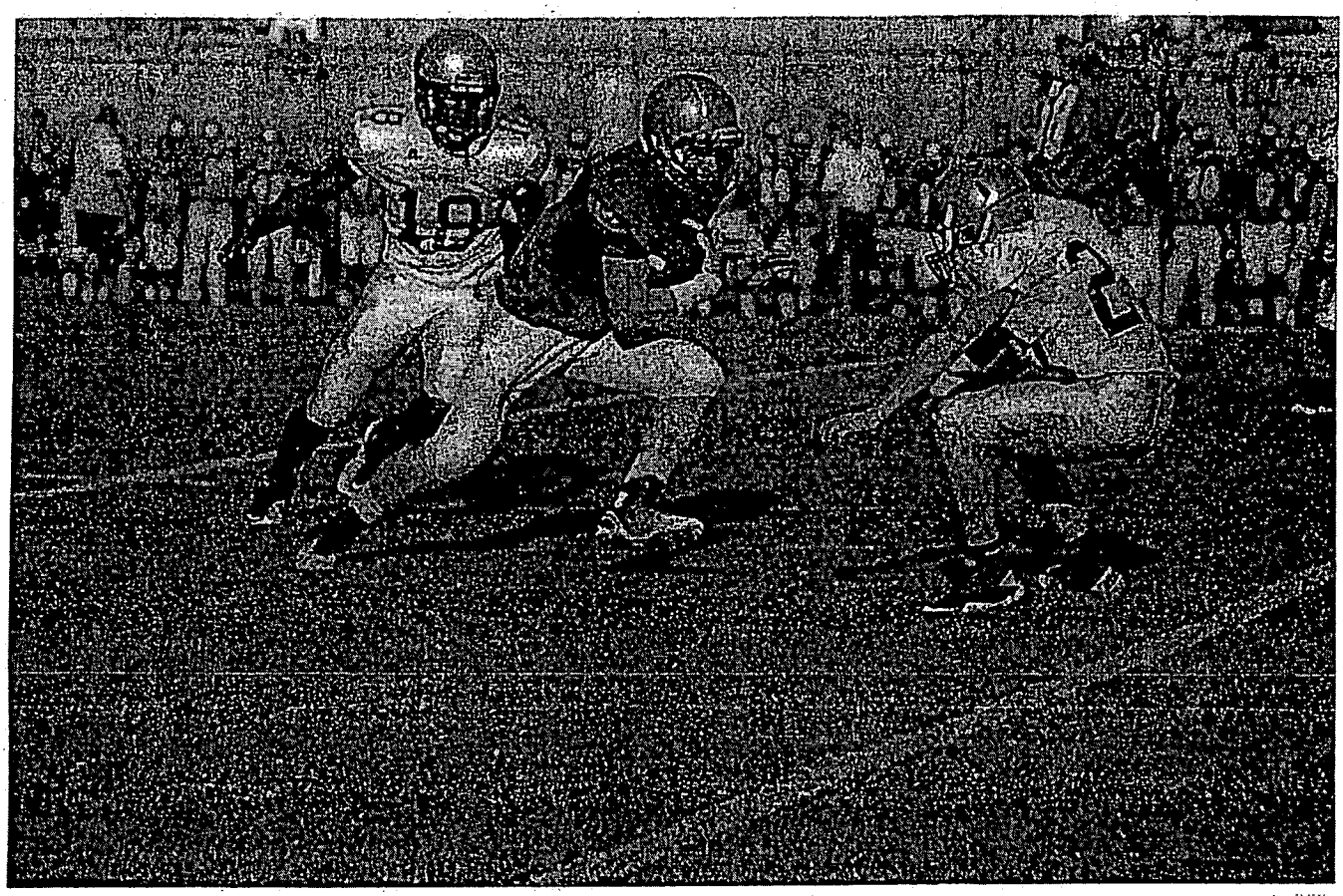
Load-Date: August 8, 2014

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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-feel-the-need-for-speed/article_91508071-76dd-5011-b594-3b16a7f7efa8.html

Stags feel the need for speed

Dan Brown Aug 14, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress scored on a 24-yard on the Stags' second possession of the game.

Buy Now

Berkeley Stags football coach Jeff Cruce might be seen along the sidelines sporting a pair of Tom Cruise "Top Gun" reflecto-shades before the 2014 season progresses very far.

Everything about the Stags offense this year is geared around speed.

"We can't go fast enough," Cruce said following their scrimmage with Battery Creek on Thursday, Aug. 14. "We have to go faster... faster."

That's a football snapped every 18 seconds.

Eighty plays run a game.

These Stags feel the need for speed.

"We need to be in shape for this and a scrimmage like this goes a long way in seeing where we are," Cruce said.

In their final tune-up before their Aug. 22 tilt with Johnsonville, the Stags turned on the afterburners and gave fans a preview of what to expect this fall.

A warning though, a visit to the concession stand and you might miss something big.

"We want to run as many plays as we can as fast as we can," Cruce said. "We can never go fast enough."

That means defenses better be in shape.

The Stags moved the ball downfield at such a pace, the chain gang couldn't even keep up.

"As soon as the whistle blows to start play, we're snapping the football," the Stags coach said.

Joseph Dress, the pilot for this Top Gun Stags fighter jet, ran for a touchdown and threw for two more, as Berkeley scored at will against an unprepared Battery Creek.

"That pass to D.J. Whitherspoon was a dart," Cruce said.

With the ball on the Dolphins 30-yard line, Dress dropped back to pass. Finding no open targets, he tucked the ball to run, rolling out to his left.

As he reached the sideline, Dress spied an open Whitherpoon sprinting across the back of the end zone and fired a 35-yard frozen rope that the Stags wide receiver snared off his shoe tops.

"That's throwing back across the body, off the wrong foot," Cruce said. "He's got the arm strength to make that play."

Dress also ran for another touchdown before giving way to sophomore Darius Douglas, who scored on his first drive under center. Douglas scored on a run up the middle from 18-yards out.

"Darius played very well and he's going to quarterback the JV team," Cruce said. "We could have the best JV team we've had at Berkeley in a while."

On their first possession following a Battery Creek punt, Leon Simmons capped a Berkeley 45-yard drive to get the scoring underway for the Stags, a five-play drive that took all of 90-seconds.

"We're already setting up the next play as we're running up to the ball," Cruce said. "I've been fast at Hanahan and Cane Bay, but never this fast."

Later in the second quarter, Dress also found Keron Reid in the end zone for his second TD pass of the night.

"This was a good scrimmage," Cruce said. "We needed this time on the field badly."

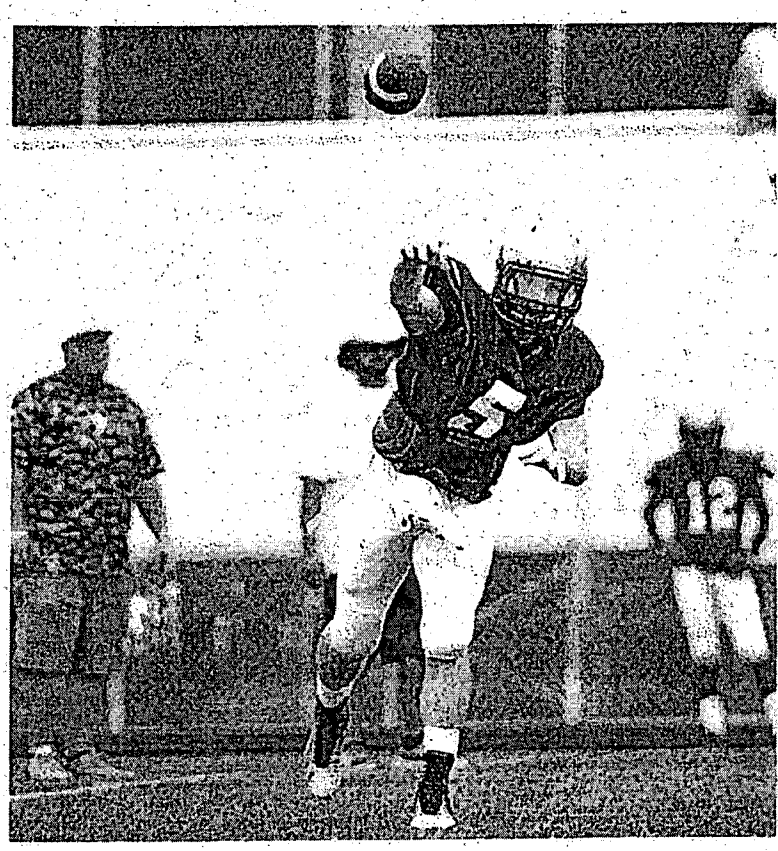
With Johnsonville waiting on Friday, Aug. 22, and Stratford and Summerville standing in line immediately afterward, the Stags need to strap on their flight helmets.

"Summerville is going to be very good this year," Cruce said. "It will be very interesting to see how we do against them."

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-to-run-and-gun-against-johnsonville/article_b76c6e3e-4cee-5596-a1e6-bc043567f695.html

Stags to run and gun against Johnsonville

Dan Brown Aug 16, 2014



Rob Gantt/Independent Stags coach Jeff Cruce calls QB Joseph Dress the best he's ever had.

Buy Now

The countdown is about complete.

Instead of months and weeks, only days remain until the Berkeley Stags kick off their 2014 season on Friday night, Aug. 22 against Johnsonville.

While the rest of the Lowcountry will be scrimmaging at the Sertoma Classic, the Stags will start their regular season. Berkeley plans to hit the ground running.

And gunning.

"We're going to be fast off the ball, fast with the plays, we're going to run, make the play, hear the whistle and line up to run it again.," said Stags Coach Jeff Cruce, who begins his fourth year at the Berkeley helm.

And while each year he expects big things; Cruce remains cautiously optimistic about the Stags good fortune heading into the fall.

"This is the best team I've had," Cruce said. "And I said that last year too. This team is good. We're big, we're fast, we can run the ball, and we have a very smart quarterback."

The Stags held their own against Goose Creek and North Augusta during a three-way scrimmage last week and Cruce was happy with what he saw.

"We scored coming out of the gate," he said. "We marched down the field against Goose Creek and scored early. Then we put a ten-play drive together and should have scored on that. We still need work, but this summer has been about accentuating the positive and we've looked very good lining up against opponents. We just need more game time, and the Johnsonville game will help us a lot."

Against Goose Creek and North Augusta, the Stags scored five times over the three-team scrimmage, gave up four touchdowns, rushed for 224 yards and passed for 167 yards.

"But it's a scrimmage," he said. "Focusing on the positive, we played well. It was hot out and there and the day was long, but we played well."

Cruce said Johnsonville could present problems for the Stags with their wishbone offense.

"Not many people run the wishbone offense these days and Johnsonville runs it well. We just have to keep getting better at the little things and take care of our own business and the rest will take care of itself."

The Stags have been working toward this moment on Friday night since Dec. 2013. Cruce said his team is ready to play and should be competitive.

"We should be able to mix it up with everybody this fall," he said. "Our defense has really stepped it up over the summer, and our offense is fast and experienced. We aren't waiting on anybody. As soon as the referee blows the whistle we're snapping the football."

While Cruce called quarterback Joseph Dress the best quarterback he's ever had, including the time at Hanahan and Cane Bay, the Stags coach had high praise for backup quarterback Darius Douglas.

"Joseph has had a very good summer, but Darius has been outstanding back there. He can throw the football but he can also run very well."

The Stags also look to be strong at the younger levels as he expects both the JV and B teams to be strong.

"We have some players coming up from the younger ranks from the middle school that are going to be very good players one day very soon," Cruce said.

There is no rest for the weary this fall as Stratford, Summerville, Cane Bay and Timberland wait in the wings between now and the start of the Region 8AAA schedule on Oct. 6 against Beaufort.

Kickoff at Bonner Stadium/Gerald Moody Field is at 7:30 p.m.

Wave, Gators headline Lowcountry s Top 10 list

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 17, 2014 Sunday, Sports

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 7

Length: 675 words

Byline: David Shelton

Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Summerville and Goose Creek once again look like state championship contenders in high school football this season, but the Gators and Green Wave are not the only teams worth keeping an eye on.

With competitive battles in every region shaping up, here is The Post and Courier s preseason Top 10:

1. Summerville

Coach John McKissick returns for his 63rd season with 613 career victories. The coach has the best offensive line in the area and quite possibly the state, led by All-American candidate Zack Bailey, a recent USC verbal commitment. The Green Wave also have a three-year starter at quarterback, Sawyer Bridges, and a pretty stout front seven on defense. Summerville should easily reach double figures in wins this season.

2. Goose Creek

The Gators might have been ranked No. 1 had it not been for a season-ending knee injury to senior quarterback Pedro Manigault. While Goose Creek has a capable replacement in junior Dominique Jefferson, the offense will not be as dynamic without Manigault. Goose Creek still has one of the area s top running backs, Tyrik Johnson, and the Gators are big and strong on the defensive front.

3. Hanahan

Hanahan enters the season without a proven quarterback, but the Hawks will be as athletic and solid defensively as any team in the area. Junior Dominique Green and senior Corbin Heyward are big-time defenders along the front. Senior corner DeAndrea Thompson had six picks a year ago. Sophomore receiver Sam Denmark is the major playmaker offensively.

4. Stratford

The Knights have a new head coach as Joe Marion takes over for Ray Stackley, who retired after 29 years and 270 wins. Marion was the school s defensive coordinator since 2000 and has his entire staff returning. Senior Jamison Mobbs has big shoes to fill at quarterback, replacing last year s Mr. Football, Jacob Park, but Stratford should be solid along the offensive front. Expect the Knights to get better as they go and contend for the Region 7-AAAA title.

5. Fort Dorchester

No team in the area will have more athletes lining up than Fort Dorchester. The Patriots have a dynamic playmaker at quarterback in senior Kobe Garrett and should be stout on defense, led by senior nose guard Eurndraus Bryant, a 6-2, 320-pounder. This could be the year coach Steve LaPrad s club makes a major move toward double digit victories.

6. Ashley Ridge

Head coach Kenny Walker feels good about an offense led by junior quarterback Steven Duncan and senior running back Tyler Garland. Duncan (6-4, 205) played at Porter-Gaud last season, throwing for more than 3,000 yards. He is considered a major college prospect. Garland topped 1,000 yards on the ground as a junior. The Swamp Foxes will have to improve defensively over last year and Walker feels that will happen.

7. Berkeley

Jeff Cruce enters his fourth season seeking his first winning campaign at the perennial powerhouse and thinks 2014 is his best team overall. Senior quarterback Joseph Dress runs the show and gives the Stags a solid dual threat. The defense should be led by a solid defensive front.

8. Timberland

The winningest program in the Lowcountry over the last 10 years (111 wins) will once again near double figures in wins. Coach Art Craig will rely heavily on an athletic, fast defense led by Johnell Brown and Wyatt Craig, while a young offensive line matures. Senior Ryan Hood has experience at quarterback.

9. West Ashley

The Wildcats were two plays from winning eight games last season and coach Bobby Marion believes this is his best team since he took over in 2007. Transfer quarterback Justin Berry will make an immediate impact, says Marion, but the Wildcats need some first-year starters to step up.

10. Woodland

Led by one of the state s top senior prospects, lineman Michael Barnett, the Wolverines will be solid defensively. Senior Drake Knight is back as the starting quarterback and the Wolverines have been impressive during the preseason. Woodland moves into a new region, Region 5-AA, which should be more competitive and make Mathis Burnette s team battle-tested for the postseason.

Load-Date: August 17, 2014

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Size, experience are key for Stags success

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 21, 2014 Thursday

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Section: 19,S; Pg. 23

Length: 280 words

Byline: dbrown@berkeleyind.com

Body

Berkeley Stags football fans want to win, and nobody is more aware of this than fourth-year head coach Jeff Cruce.

After finishing 2013 with his first non-losing regular-season at the Moncks Corner school the Stags were 5-6 after a first-round playoff loss Cruce looks to 2014 as the Stags coming-out party.

We have a big front line in the trenches on both sides of the ball, Cruce said. Our quarterback is a three-year starter and we re experienced at the receiver and running back positions.

Senior QB Joseph Dress leads the offense, with quick feet and a strong throwing arm tailored to run the Stags pistol offense. In the backfield, Jamal Bowman heads a stable of running backs ready to gobble up yardage.

Dress targets will be D.J. Whitherspoon, Deion Williams and Keron Reid. Both Williams and Reid will also garner a lot of touches out of the backfield.

But it s the Berkeley line that will pave the way.

The size on the Berkeley line begins and ends with 6 9 Alex Taylor, who has garnered attention from recruiters throughout the South based on his size alone. Danny Long, Ohen Wren and Jonathan Yates also provide size in the trenches.

Taylor has already received a scholarship offer from East Carolina and he hasn t yet to play a down in 2014.

He has great potential, Cruce said. Alex is still growing and has come a long way over the last couple years.

Cruce sees the Region 8-AAA race as wide open with Beaufort, Orangeburg-Wilkinson, Hanahan and the Stags battling it out for playoff spots.

We have to take care of our own business on the field and the rest will take care of itself, he said.

Berkeley opens up the 2014 season on Aug. 22 against Johnsonville.

Load-Date: August 21, 2014

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BERKELEY

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 21, 2014 Thursday

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Section: 19,S; Pg. 23

Length: 27 words

Body

Coach: Jeff Cruce (Fourth year)

2013 Record: 5-6, 3-2 8-AAA

Players to Watch: OL Alex Taylor, QB Joseph Dress, WR D.J. Whitherspoon, RB Jamal Bowman, WR Deion Williams

Load-Date: August 21, 2014

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Berkeley rallies to beat Class AA Flashes

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 23, 2014 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 6

Length: 312 words

Byline: dbrown@berkeleyind.com

Body

MONCKS CORNER The Berkeley Stags got a little more fight than they bargained for in Class AA s Johnsonville Flashes, hanging on to win a shootout, 42-27, in their high school football season opener Friday night.

Leon Simmons and D.J. Whitherspoon each scored a pair of touchdowns, and Joseph Dress ran for one and threw for one as the Stags jumped out to a 1-0 mark for the first time under coach Jeff Cruce.

Johnsonville and its triple option offense proved much more than just a flash in the pan. Two years removed from a state championship game appearance in Class A in 2012, the Flashes hit the ground running in the first quarter, scoring a pair of touchdowns to go up 13-0.

Robert Ripley scored the first of three touchdowns for the Flashes on the game s first possession, finding pay dirt from six yards out to put Johnsonville up 6-0.

After the Stags turned the ball over on downs, Flashes quarterback Jacob Avant capped a six-play, 43-yard drive with a four-yard run to put Johnsonville up by a 13-0 score.

The Stags answered with three touchdowns in the second quarter to take the lead for good.

Simmons put Berkeley on the board with a four-yard run to cut the lead to 13-7, capping a 99-yard, seven-play drive.

After the Stags forced a Flashes punt on defense, Whitherspoon hauled in the kick on his own 45-yard line and scampered untouched 55 yards to put the Stags on top 14-13.

After a second straight stop by the Berkeley defense, Dress scored on a 26-yard keeper to put the Stags up 21-13 going into the locker room.

In the second half the two teams traded touchdown punches until the Stags finally put the game away with fourth-quarter touchdowns by Simmons and Whitherspoon, and a 49-run by Jamal Bowman.

Ripley took care of the Johnsonville scoring with a pair of touchdown runs.

Berkeley hosts Stratford on Aug. 29, while Johnsonville travels to Carver s Bay.

Berkeley rallies to beat Class AA Flashes

Load-Date: August 23, 2014

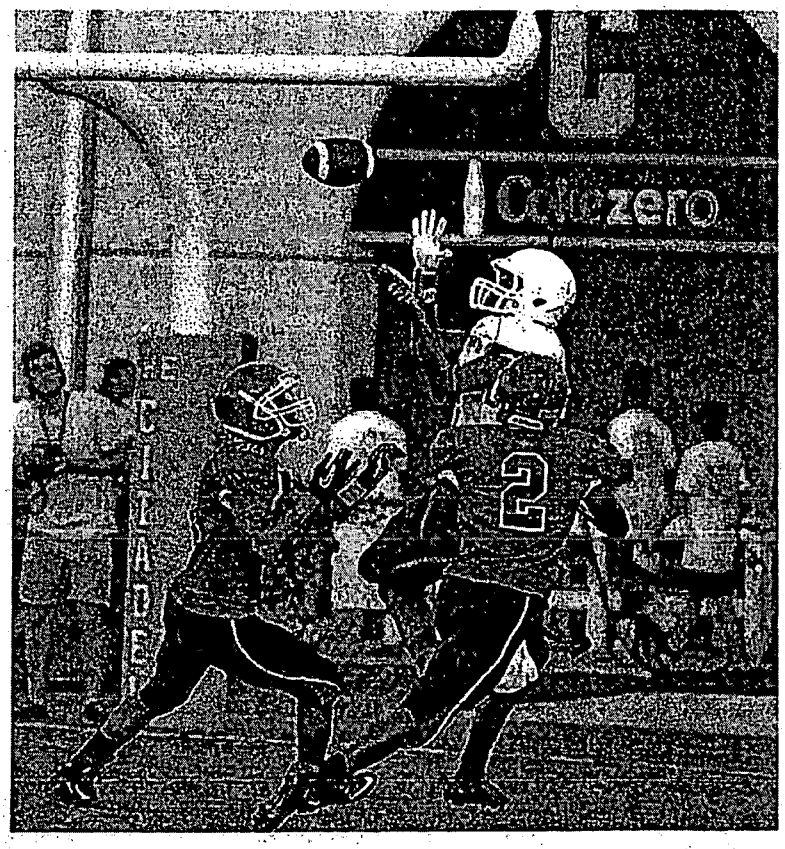
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Stags seek to end losing skid against Knights

Dan Brown Aug 26, 2014



Rob Gantt/Independent Stratford has beaten Berkeley 13 of 16 times and enjoys a 20-10 advantage dating back to 1984.

The 2014 football season kicks into high gear with a full slate of games on Friday night, Aug. 29.

Everybody's playing.

Timberland will host an angry Hanahan Hawks team that lost a heartbreaker to James Island in Week 0.

Cross welcomes defending Class A state champions Hunter-Kinard-Tyler to Ravenell Stadium.

St. John's gets its SCISA 8-Man Football seaon rolling against defending Region 1 champs James Island Christian.

And the Berkeley Stags look to go 2-0 on the young season and end a three-game losing streak against Stratford at Bonner Stadium in Moncks Corner.

The Stags last tasted victory against the Knights 42-28, to open the 2010 season, Jerry Brown's final season at Berkeley.

While Berkeley had won two straight at that point, including during the 2009 state title run, the Knights had the Stags' number for much of the Jerry Brown era.

Stratford has won three in a row since, and 13 of 16 in the series after last season's 29-10 victory. The Knights lead 20-10 going back to 1984.

"It's always been competitive," Knights Coach Joe Marion said. "A lot of the games have been extremely close."

In Week Zero, the Stags won their first season opener under Jeff Cruce and hope to keep the momentum going with a streak-ending win over the Knights.

"We have to tackle better on defense," Cruce said. "Our offense played well. We executed well, but we have to continue to work on fundamentals on both sides of the ball.

Cruce said Stratford will be tough: "Stratford has beaten us a few times over the last few years and have great senior leadership and are well coached. They have a solid quarterback who can throw the ball. We have to play better than we played last week and that includes better execution on both offense and defense.

"This will be an exciting ball game as it always is when Berkeley plays Stratford."

The game is Stratford's first without longtime coach Ray Stackley in nearly 30 years.

Timberland looks to get its season off on the right foot against former Class AA foe Hanahan.

Coach Art Craig is looking to better prepare his team for the playoffs by scheduling tougher pre-region competition. Timberland has scheduled Hanahan, Crestwood, Cross, Bishop England and Berkeley in its first five games, which include three former state champs, and the Battling Bishops, two-time Class AA champs.

"Hanahan always presents a challenge," Craig said. "They are a solid team and we have to come in and play our style of football if we look to compete against them.

"We have to minimize our mistakes and control the tempo of the game."

Cross Coach Shaun Wright went and scheduled the defending Class A state champions in Hunter-Kinard-Tyler in the Trojan home opener.

"It's all about getting ready for the region and the playoffs," Wright said. "I'd rather be 2-4 against good competition than 4-2 against weaker opponents."

Cross finished with a 6-6 record in 2013.

Wright said his program has had to deal with small school issues.

"As a whole we are a month behind in terms of team building, conditioning and building overall depth needed to compete at a level we need to compete at," he said. "We have several kids who will have to play out of necessity that just came out on the first day of school."

That might have been how the game was played back in the day, Wright added, but these days football is a year-round sport.

"We are a marked program," he said.

The John McCall era officially begins at St. John's Christian Academy this week against defending region champion James Island Christian.

McCall replaced Matt Gilbert. SJCA finished a disappointing 3-7 in 2013 and missed the playoffs one year after playing for the SCISA 8-Man Football state championship in 2012.

McCall said his team has invested the sweat equity over the summer months to prepare for the upcoming season.

"I've been really pleased with the team's effort this summer," he said. "This is James Island Christian, defending region champs, so we have to be ready."

McCall hadn't decided on a quarterback, letting returning starter Dustin Parsons and Faith Christian transfer Josh Carter battle it out in summer practice. McCall did say if one wasn't the starter, he'd be playing in another position on offense.

"Josh may be the fastest player on the team and Dustin is tall, quick and has great hands. These two guys will be on the field somewhere, whether at quarterback, or wide receiver, or runningback."

Kickoff for all games is at 7:30 p.m.

High School Football Predictions: Week 1

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 28, 2014 Thursday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 451 words

Body

The wait is over. The summer has finally come to an end and it s time for high school football Lowcountry style.

This year, The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller, who has covered high school football in the Lowcountry for the last 25 years, will team up with ABC News 4 sports anchor Scott Eisberg and pick the biggest matchups each week.

It s Miller vs. Eisberg.

Mano a mano.

Either way, here s to a great season and may your favorite team win.

Here are this week s picks:

Ashley Ridge at James Island

Miller: The Ike Allred era opens with a come-from-behind victory over Hanahan in Week 0, but Ashley Ridge has too many playmakers. Ashley Ridge, 24-20.

Eisberg: Ike Allred s new tempo offense and the momentum from an emotional season-opening win at Hanahan is going to be tough to top. James Island, 28-21.

Colleton County at Beaufort

Miller: One of my all-time favorite players was Walterboro TE/DL Norman Hand. DL Norman Hand Jr. plays for Colleton Country now, but it won t be enough. Beaufort, 31-17.

Eisberg: Saw Beaufort coach Mark Clifford scouting Colleton County last week and he looked a bit nervous seeing a few freak athletes for the Cougars. Colleton County, 35-28.

West Ashley at Bishop England

Miller: Bishop England won back-to-back state titles in 2011 and 2012 and made a deep run last year, but this team is not as talented. West Ashley, 33-13.

Eisberg: A little Sertoma rough up at the hands of Goose Creek only gets WA coach Bobby Marion s bunch mentally prepared for Bishops. Wildcats a bit too big for Bishop England. West Ashley, 35-13

Summerville at Cane Bay

Miller: Summerville s John McKissick gets career win No. 615 easy. Summerville 45, Cane Bay 10.

Eisberg: Summerville crosses state line to romp Providence (N.C) last week. Summerville crosses town to romp Cane Bay, but glad to see Cane Bay break slump last week. Summerville, 49-14.

Stratford at Berkeley

Miller: This rivalry used to be THE game of the season for both schools. No Ray Stackley for Stratford, but Knights still have enough for the win. Stratford, 23-16.

Eisberg: Pressure on both of these coaches. Big expectations on Berkeley in year 4 of the Jeff Cruce era, but Joe Marion has waited nearly three decades for this night. No Jacob Park, no problem, Knights win a tight one. Stratford, 21-17

Hanahan at Timberland

Miller: Been going back-and-forth all week on this game. Hanahan has already played a game in Week 0. It s Timberland s season opener. That ll be the difference. Hanahan, 28-27.

Eisberg: After hearing Timberland coach Art Craig speak and seeing the Wolves at Sertoma, I am making the Wolves an early state title pick. Last year wasn t fun against Hanahan, this year will be for the Wolves. Timberland, 24-14.

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Friday s key matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 29, 2014 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 318 words

Body

Stratford (0-0) at Berkeley (1-0)

LAST YEAR: Stratford defeated Berkeley, 29-10

COACHES: Joe Marion, Stratford; Jeff Cruce, Berkeley

NOTABLE: First game as head coach of Stratford for Joe Marion ... Stags overcame early 13-0 deficit to beat Johnsonville last week ... Stratford leads series, 19-10, and has won the last three meetings.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Berkeley senior quarterback Joseph Dress, who rushed and passed for more than 100 yards in the season opener.

DID YOU KNOW: Stratford senior quarterback Jamison Mobbs will sign a baseball scholarship with Clemson in November.

Hanahan (0-1) at Timberland (1-0)

LAST YEAR: Hanahan defeated Timberland, 41-0

COACHES: Charlie Patterson, Hanahan; Art Craig, Timberland

NOTABLE: Timberland has dominated the overall series, 11-3, but Hanahan won last year s meeting, 41-0 ... Hawks fell behind by 21 points to James Island last week but took a 27-26 lead before losing on a fourth quarter field goal, 29-27.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Hanahan junior nose guard Dominique Green, who is considered one of the top underclassmen prospects in the state.

DID YOU KNOW: Timberland has won more games (111) in the last 10 seasons than any other program in the Lowcountry.

Ashley Ridge (1-0) at James Island (1-0)

LAST YEAR: Did not play

COACHES: Kenny Walker, Ashley Ridge; Ike Allred, James Island

NOTABLE: This will be the third meeting between the two schools with Ashley Ridge winning the first two ... Both teams posted impressive opening wins as Ashley Ridge beat Woodland, 21-6, and James Island rallied to beat Hanahan, 29-27.

KEEP AN EYE ON: The quarterbacks of both teams. James Island sophomore Gage Moloney and Ashley Ridge junior Steven Duncan are two of the top quarterbacks in the area.

DID YOU KNOW: James Island head coach Ike Allred was an all-state receiver out of T.L. Hanna High School in Anderson and spent nine years as an assistant coach at Newberry College.

By David Shelton

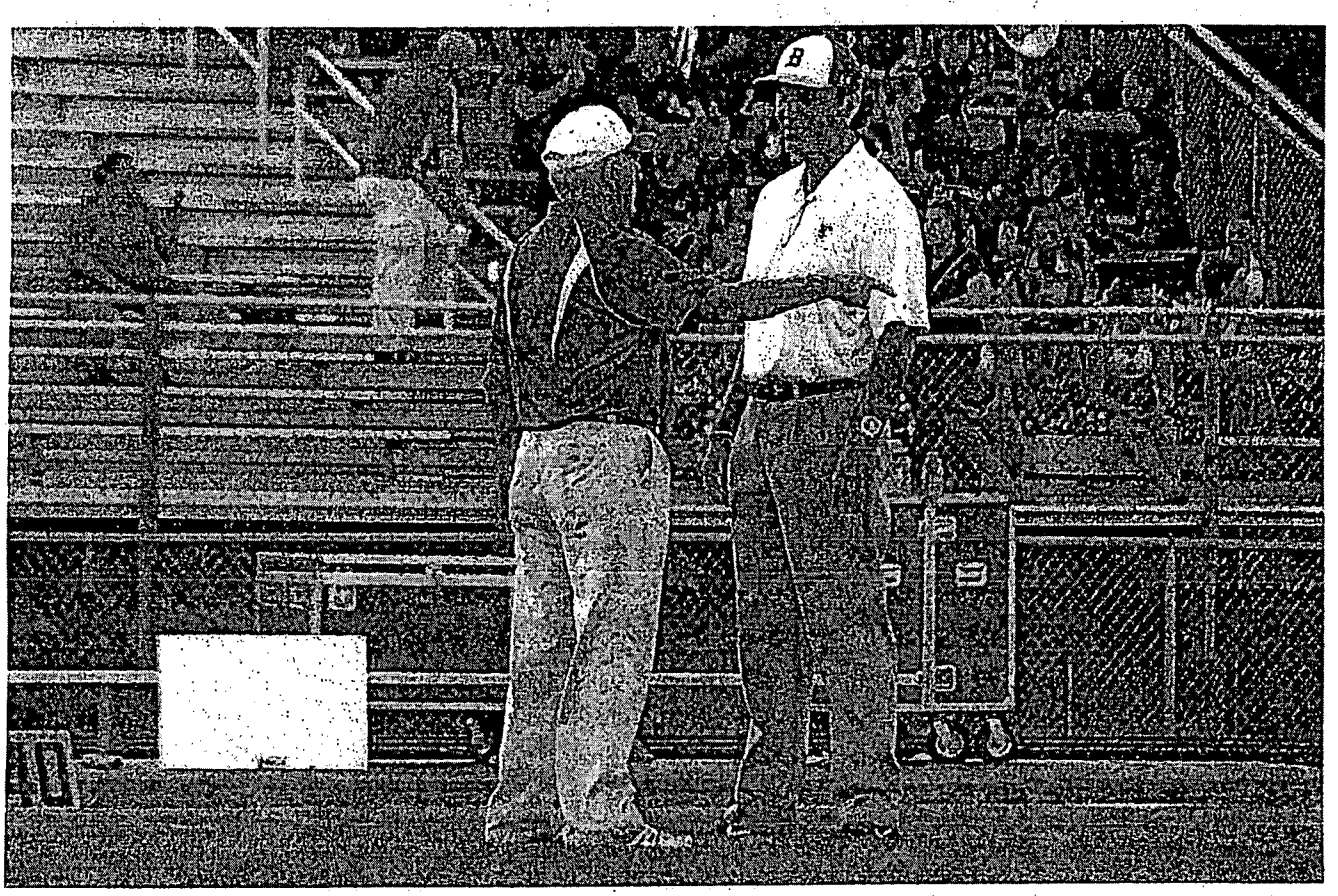
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Stags look to ride Green Wave

Dan Brown Sep 4, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Stags Coach Jeff Cruce shares a moment with Summerville legend John McKissick prior to the 2013 Green Wave/Stags matchup.

Buy Now

If Stags' head football coach Jeff Cruce were to draw up a game plan for success and winning football games, he might draw up the game plan to reflect the first quarter, third quarter and fourth quarter, and skip the second quarter altogether.

"The second quarter has been our nightmare so far," he said.

The Stags self-imploded during the second quarter of their Aug. 29 home opener with Stratford, allowing three touchdowns in their 38-21 loss.

"That nightmare carried over into third quarter when we fumbled the ball on the one-yard line and it cost us a touchdown," Cruce said. "We can't make those kind of mistakes, and that many mistakes and expect to win a football game."

While quarterback Joseph Dress scored three touchdowns to lead the Berkeley offense, he also turned the ball over three times, throwing two interceptions and fumbling the ball on what should have been a 47-yard touchdown run to start the third quarter.

Knights quarterback Jamison Mobbs turned those three turnovers into touchdowns, the dagger to the heart coming on a 66-yard bomb that put Stratfor on top by a 35-14 score.

"There were a lot of positives coming out of the Stratford game," Cruce said. "We were able to run with them, but the turnovers and mistakes killed us. We can't do that against teams, especially Summerville this week, and expect to win."

Cruce downplayed the longstanding rivalry with John McKissick and the Green Wave, saying this was just another football game, but did allude to the allure that comes with playing Summerville on McKissick Field.

"These kids will be excited about playing football on McKissick Field," he said. "But we've got to go out there and play our game. We can't get star struck."

Like stepping onto the field at Yankee Stadium star struck.

"We have to tackle on defense and force the turnovers, and we have to execute on offense and not give up the football."

Berkeley stands at 1-1 on the season with a 42-21 win over Johnsonville on Aug. 22.

For the Stags though, there is this little issue of a nine-game Summerville winning streak to contend with. The Stags have not beaten the Green Wave since 2004.

Following Summerville's lackluster performance in their 15-13 win over Cane Bay last week, Coach John McKissick wasn't happy with his team's showing on the field against the Cobras and said his team better be ready on Friday.

"They have been our rival the whole time I've been here," McKissick said. "They are going to play hard. They are 3A and we are 4A so they will play like the devil against us."

Kickoff at McKissick Field in Summerville is at 7:30 p.m.

Key Matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 5, 2014 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 336 words

Body

Wando (1-0) at Ashley Ridge (2-0)

LAST YEAR: Wando 45, Ashley Ridge 26

COACHES: Jimmy Noonan, Wando; Kenny Walker, Ashley Ridge

NOTABLE: Both defenses have been opportunistic in the early going. Wando forced seven second-half turnovers in last week s win over White Knoll Ashley Ridge has forced seven turnovers in its first two games, including five interceptions.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Wando senior running back Kenny Waring and Ashley Ridge junior quarterback Steven Duncan, two of the top prospects in the Lowcountry this season.

DID YOU KNOW: Wando is 4-0 against Ashley Ridge all-time, and has averaged 32 points per game against Ashley Ridge in those four meetings.

Sumter (1-1) at Stratford (1-0)

LAST YEAR: Stratford 42, Sumter 28

COACHES: John Jones, Sumter; Joe Marion, Stratford

NOTABLE: Both head coaches are in their first season and both earned their first victories in their new position last week. Sumter defeated Crestwood, 48-29, and Stratford defeated Berkeley, 38-21 ... This is the 16th meeting between the two schools with Stratford holding nine wins in the series.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Sumter senior receiver Ky jon Tyler is one of the state s most dynamic play-makers at 5-8, 160 pounds.

DID YOU KNOW: Both programs played in state championship games last season. Sumter lost in the Division I-AAAA finals to Dutch Fork while Stratford lost in the Division II-AAAA finals to Northwestern.

Berkeley (1-1) at Summerville (2-0)

LAST YEAR: Summerville 43, Berkeley 20

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; John McKissick, Summerville

NOTABLE: Berkeley senior quarterback Joseph Dress has passed and rushed for more than 500 yards in the first two games of the season.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Summerville junior quarterback Sawyer Bridges has accounted for five touchdowns in Summerville s first two wins this season.

DID YOU KNOW: Since 1960, Summerville holds a 42-14-1 edge in the series ... Berkeley s last win in the series came in 2004 ... The two teams have played at least once in every season since 1960, except in 2007.

Staff report

Load-Date: September 5, 2014

End of Document

APP. 0806

795

High School Football Predictions: Week 3

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 11, 2014 Thursday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 480 words

Body

Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

In Week 2, The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller went a respectable 4-2 for the second straight week, while ABC News 4 sports anchor Scott Eisberg took a nosedive with a 3-3 finish.

The difference was Miller s exhaustive research of Upstate games, which led him to select Sumter over Stratford.

Eisberg, ever the homer, went with Stratford.

This week, Miller and Eisberg differ on two games, including this week s Game of the Century as unbeaten Summerville travels to Goose Creek.

Eisberg believes that Summerville quarterback Sawyer Bridges will be the difference, while Miller thinks the Gators option attack just might be a little too tough for the Green Wave defense.

The other difference of opinion comes as Wando travels up I-26 to face Lexington. Eisberg goes with the Warriors, while Miller picks Lexington.

After two full weeks, the two prep prognosticators are both 8-4 overall for the season.

Summerville at Goose Creek

Eisberg: Game of the Year, hands down. I ve got Summerville with experience at QB being the difference. Green Wave, 28-21.

Miller: This week s Game of the Century. Want to pick the Green Wave, but going with recent history and the Gators. Goose Creek, 23-20.

Ashley Ridge at West Ashley

Eisberg: Both teams are hot, tough pick. I was really impressed with Stephen Duncan last week and I ve got Ashley Ridge, 38-31

Miller: West Ashley has scored more than 100 points last two weeks. But Ashley Ridge defense and Duncan will be the difference. Ashley Ridge, 31-24.

Cane Bay at Berkeley

Eisberg: Summerville is the common opponent, Cane Bay played them much closer, I ll go with Cane Bay, 28-14.

Miller: This wasn t the start that Jeff Cruce or Stags had hoped for. Cane Bay played Summerville and Fort Dorchester close. Cane Bay, 27-13.

Fort Dorchester at Stratford

Eisberg: Fort is 3-0, averaging 40 points a game. This is their toughest test but I think they ve got it. I ve got Steve LaPrad s bunch. Fort Dorchester, 40-21

Miller: The Patriots off to a great start this season, but I think Joe Marion and Knights have played tougher competition. Stratford, 33-28.

Porter-Gaud at Bishop England

Eisberg: My wife tells me these are top two volleyball teams in area, not the top two football teams, but I ll go BE in the Holy War, tested by tougher competition so far this year. Bishop England, 21-7.

Miller: Bishops have opened season with two tough opponents. Porter-Gaud one of the top SCISA schools around. Bishops, 24-10.

Wando at Lexington

Eisberg: Wando goes and conquers. I recommend Lexington Ale House across the street from the school for the celebration wings on the ride home, my old stomping grounds. Wando, 42-28.

Miller: Too many mental mistakes last week for the Warriors against Ashley Ridge. Wando 0-8 on the road over last two seasons. Lexington, 27-20.

Miller. Last week: 4-2.

Overall: 8-4.

Eisberg

Last week: 3-3.

Overall: 8-4.

Load-Date: September 11, 2014

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APP. 0808

797

Friday s Key Football Matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 26, 2014 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 338 words

Body

Fort Dorchester (4-1) at Wando (3-1)

LAST YEAR: Fort Dorchester 41, Wando 13

COACHES: Steve LaPrad, Fort Dorchester; Jimmy Noonan, Wando

NOTABLE: Fort Dorchester owns a 13-5 edge in the overall series and has won eight of the last nine meetings.

KEEP AN EYE ON: How each team handles the mental part of the game. Wando, coming off an impressive 37-14 win over Summerville, must handle the success and be ready for a physical Fort Dorchester team. On the flip side, Fort Dorchester is seeking to rebound from its first loss of the season, a 17-0 shellacking by Goose Creek.

DID YOU KNOW: Six games in the series have been decided by three points or less.

Hanahan (2-2) at Stratford (2-2)

LAST YEAR: Did not play

COACHES: Joe Marion, Stratford; Charlie Patterson, Hanahan

NOTABLE: Hanahan opened the season 0-2 but has won two straight, while Stratford is 2-2 after a whipping of Ashley Ridge last week.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Hanahan s receiving trio of Sam Denmark, Greg Casselman and Saaheim Brooks is the best in the area, but Stratford s secondary was dominant against Ashley Ridge. Linebacker Jacob Morrison had three interceptions in the win and safety Ty reik Faulks is Stratford s leading tackler.

DID YOU KNOW: Only the second meeting between schools. First one in 1983, Stratford s first year as a school, Hanahan won, 6-0.

Berkeley (1-3) at Timberland (4-0)

LAST YEAR: Berkeley 31, Timberland 12

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; Art Craig, Timberland

NOTABLE: Berkeley has lost three straight since a season-opening win over Johnsonville. The Stags open region play next week against Beaufort. Timberland is 2-0 against AAA teams this season, recording wins over Hanahan and Crestwood.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Timberland s defense has been solid early on, allowing five touchdowns in four games. Berkeley s offense was shut out by Cane Bay, 3-0, two weeks ago.

DID YOU KNOW: In a series that began in 1996, Berkeley won the first eight games in the series and holds a 10-2 record against its Berkeley County rival. The teams have split the last four games.

Load-Date: September 26, 2014

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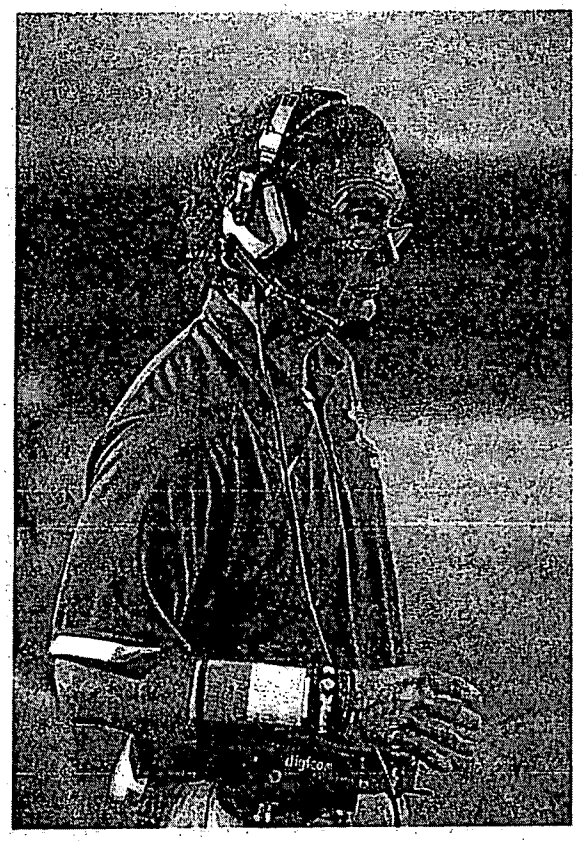
APP. 0810

799

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-look-to-continue-road-rule-against-hilton-head/article_f71d18a6-035d-5c26-8c16-4eb0d3174162.html

Stags look to continue road rule against Hilton Head

Dan Brown Oct 7, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Coach Jeff Cruce looks to continue the Stags' good fortune on the road when Berkeley travels to Hilton Head on Friday for a crucial Region 7AAA game against the Seahawks.

Buy Now

Perhaps the nearly two-hour bus ride to Beaufort last week turned out to be a good thing.

If so, the Berkeley Stags will try to keep a good thing going with another long bus ride Friday, Oct.10 as they travel to Hilton Head to take on the Seahawks in game two of the Region 7AAA schedule.

Berkeley downed the Eagles in its region opener 27-21 to go 1-0 and snap a four-game losing streak.

For the moment, the Stags stand atop Region 7AAA with Orangeburg-Wilkinson and Hanahan, who both won their region debuts as well.

Coach Jeff Cruce said this year, Hilton Head is even more unpredictable than they have been in the past.

"This is a team you can't figure out. They should have put up a better showing against Hanahan but they didn't. They started off the season winning big and beat teams like Bluffton, and then against Hanahan they lost and didn't play well."

The Seahawks are 4-2 overall and have scored a lot of touchdowns in their first five games, including 55 points against Battery Creek. Cruce said as long as his team takes care of business on their sidelines, they'll be ready for whatever the Seahawks throw at them from the opposite side of the field.

"We don't know which Hilton Head team will show up Friday night but we figure it's our game to play. I'm proud of the effort these kids have put forth this year. We might not have won as many as we'd have liked, but the kids gave it everything they had against Cane Bay and Timberland. They have worked their butts off this year."

The Stags were able to wipe the slate of frustration from the first five games clean with their win over Beaufort.

"Our offense played well. Our defense played very well against a dynamic offense and a dynamic offense player in Jeffrey Tookes. We put up more than 400 yards of total offense against Beaufort. Everything worked."

Quarterback Joseph Dress put up career numbers on the ground, rushing for 179 yards on 16 carries and two touchdowns.

Through the air, understudy Darius Douglas hit Deion Williams for a pair of big touchown passes, one of them on a busted play late in the game.

"We caught a bad snap on the field goal attempt," Cruce said. "And we learned from our mistakes on the fake field goal we tried against Timberland."

Cruce said while Douglas' knee was down on the fake attempt against Timberland, he was on his feet in handling the low snap in wet conditions.

"Darius kept his head. Rather than panic he looked for the second option. On a busted play like that, the receivers head for the end zone. Deion Williams went for the corner of the end zone and Darius rolled out and found him with a great pass."

The touchdown turned out to be the game winner late in the fourth quarter.

Cruce sees the Region 7AAA breakdown as wide open after Orangeburg-Wilkinson with the Stags in the thick of the dogfight with Beaufort, Hilton Head, and Hanahan.

"Beaufort and Hilton Head will come back and win their share of region games," he said. "Nobody's unbeatable. Hanahan has to play Orangeburg on Friday and that will be a tough game."

After the Seahawks, the Stags return home to take on O.W. on Oct. 17 for homecoming before finishing out the schedule with Stall and the Hawks on Halloween.

"October is a great time of year for football," Cruce said. "We've been waiting all year for this."

Stags 2-0 after 42-26 clipping of Seahawks

Dan Brown Oct 10, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Peyton Thompson jumpstarted the Stags' offense in the win over Hilton Head with his early play on defense, forcing two turnovers that turned into two Berkeley touchdowns.

Buy Now

Don't look now, but these Berkeley Stags are playing for a region championship.

With a 2-0 record in Region 7AAA play, the Stags are tied with Hanahan after Berkeley trounced Hilton Head 42-26 and the Hawks knocked off 7th ranked Orangeburg-Wilkinson 38-13.

With three games remaining on the 2014 regular season schedule, the Stags are a win away from playing for the region crown.

"We just have to keep going out there every day and working hard and playing our game," said Stags Coach Jeff Cruce.

Berkeley wasted no time planting its thumbprint on the game. Defensive end Peyton Thompson forced a fumble on the game's first play and 20 seconds later Joseph Dress hit D.J. Witherspoon with an 8-yard touchdown pass to put the Stags up 7-0.

On Hilton Head's next possession, Thompson did it again, ripping the ball away from Seahawk quarterback Aiden Hagerty and returning it inside the 10-yard line to set up the Stags' second touchdown.

Austin Miles scampered across from 5-yards out to give Berkeley a 14-0 midway through the first quarter.

"We finally got our runningbacks back," said Cruce. "We've got that cohesiveness in the backfield again with Miles and Simmons understanding their roles. We didn't have that two weeks ago."

Hilton Head's offense finally found its legs and answered with a 42-yard field goal by Thomas Farrell to cut the lead to 14-3, but Berkeley was just getting started.

Dress continued his dominance on the ground, scoring the Stags' third touchdown in under 10 minutes, an 11-yard run to make the score 21-3 at the end of the first quarter.

In the second quarter the Stags' offense sputtered and Hilton Head called on the wildcat formation to cut the lead to 21-19 at the half following a pair of DeAngelo Clark touchdown runs, and a second Farrell field goal, this one from 52-yards out.

But Dress wasted no time coming out of the locker room to start the second half, cutting right and inside on a keeper to romp 68-yards for a touchdown just 19 seconds into the third quarter.

The Stags poured it on at this point, scoring 21 unanswered points. Leon Simmons followed with a 6-yard run and Dress tallied his third rushing TD of the night with a 15-yard run to cap the Berkeley scoring early in the fourth quarter.

Clark scored his third TD of the game late for Hilton Head, but the outcome was already in the bag for the Stags who improved to 3-4 on the season and an impressive 2-0 in region play.

While Hilton Head won the battle of the stat book, tallying 433 yards of total offense, the Seahawks offense broke down inside the red zone.

The Stags rushed for 279 yards and passed for just 51 yards, but played on a short field for most of the night.

Dress led the Stags ground game rushing 15 times for 134 yards and three touchdowns. Dress also threw for a TD, completing 5-of-10 passes for 50 yards.

Leon Simmons carried the ball 14 times for 65 yards, and Harry McHoney 8 carries for 47 yards to help pace the Stags.

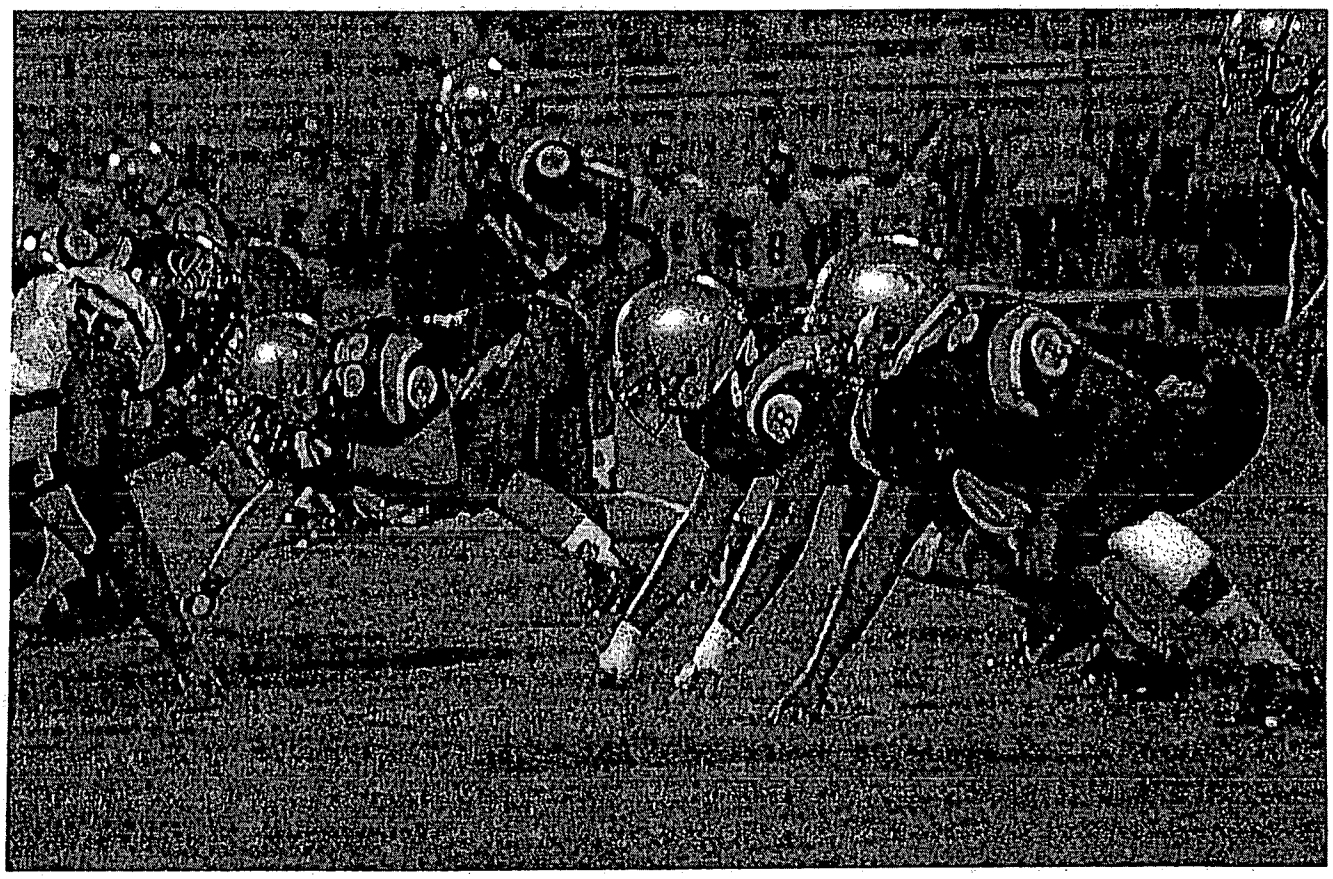
Berkeley is home on Oct. 17 to face Orangeburg-Wilkinson for homecoming. The 7th ranked Bruins fell to 1-1 in Region 7AAA play.

Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-charge-into-region-aaa-title-hunt/article_071ea7c6-61d5-57d1-8d21-086256b40c4d.html

Stags charge into Region 7AAA title hunt

Dan Brown Oct 11, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent The Berkeley defense, keyed by the play of defensive end Peyton Thompson, created scoring opportunities early on for the offense.

Buy Now

The Oregon Duck knockoff uniforms didn't help.

An uptempo offense didn't help either.

Hilton Head's first two possessions resulted in a pair of turnovers that lead to two touchdowns, and Berkeley High School football fans can thank Peyton Thompson for that.

The most unnoticed football player on the field stepped into the limelight on the game's first snap from scrimmage, recovering a fumble deep in Seahawk territory to set up the first BHS TD, and then nearly scored the second one himself on a second fumble recovery moments later.

Berkeley's Joseph Dress took the lead from Thompson and scored three touchdowns.

Dress also threw for a fourth as the Stags won 42-26 over Hilton Head Friday night.

Berkeley stands one win on Oct. 17 against Orangeburg-Wilkinson from playing for a Region 7AAA championship on Halloween night against Hanahan.

How?

After an abysmal 1-4 start to the season that included a four-game losing streak, the Stags are suddenly a team on fire playing in an unpredictable region.

BHS Coach Jeff Cruce knew this going in and even implored fans to be patient, though knowing, in football, patience is not always a virtue.

Berkeley is tied for first in Region 7AAA with a 2-0 record. It has three regular season games remaining - Orangeburg-Wilkinson on Oct. 17, Stall on Oct. 24 and Hanahan at home on Halloween night.

A homecoming win against the visiting Bruins, then Stall the following week, would set up a crucial regular season finale for Cruce's team.

Berkeley hasn't potentially been in a position like this since 2009, so nobody is going to mind if fans do a little schedule calculating.

"I have said everybody in this region is beatable and it's playing out for us now," Cruce said. "While we may not have had the best won/loss record coming into the region schedule, one thing you can't deny is that these kids have worked hard all season long.

"That hard work is paying off for us now."

Cruce would have rather seen Orangeburg-Wilkinson come into Moncks Corner next week undefeated in the region, but it didn't work out that way.

The Hawks systematically dismantled an untamed Bruins offense with a 38-13 trouncing Friday.

"The best part of this is everybody still has to play everybody else," Cruce said. "Beaufort will beat somebody before the schedule plays out. They are a good football team."

At 2-0 in Region play, with those two wins coming against two solid programs in Beaufort and Hilton Head, the Stags finish out the season with important home games against. O.W. and Hanahan sandwiched around a road game against a weak Stall program.

One win at home on Oct. 17 against Orangeburg and the Stags could be playing for a region championship on Halloween night.

One of former coach Jerry Brown's favorite sayings was, "The road to a region championship must pass through Moncks Corner."

It's been quite a while since that statement has carried the relevance it does now.

Wando prepares for volleyball playoffs

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 15, 2014 Wednesday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 2

Length: 699 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

In a potential preview of the Class AAAA state volleyball finals, defending state champion Hillcrest defeated Wando, 2-1, in the finals of the 2014 Wando Invitational tournament, held over the weekend.

Hillcrest won 28-26, 22-25, 15-12 to capture the title, led by tournament most valuable player Callie Yeargin. The two powerhouses met in last year s state finals, won by Hillcrest in five games.

Hillcrest defeated another local power, Porter-Gaud, 2-1, in the semifinals, while Wando knocked off Bishop England, 2-1, in the other semi.

Rock Hill defeated Nation Ford, 2-1, to claim the silver bracket. Other local teams included First Baptist, Ashley Hall, Summerville and James Island.

Members of the all-tournament team included Lauren Adkins and Kealin Amick of Hillcrest; Elisa Aldrich, Megan Morris and Lexie Dominey of Wando; Marla Sagatelian of Porter-Gaud; Montana Swanson and Ashley Brazell of Bishop England; Ariel Flores and Whitney Maness of Rock Hill; Bayles Mack of Nation Ford; Taylor Mabry of Aiken; Mary Seibert of James Island; McKala Rhodes of First Baptist, and Lauren Percy of Ashley Hall.

The SCISA state volleyball playoffs begin on Thursday with Porter-Gaud seeking a fifth consecutive AAA title. Ashley Hall and First Baptist also will contend for a spot in the AAA finals.

The SCHSL postseason in volleyball begins Oct. 22-23, with Wando, James Island and Ashley Ridge among the top teams in the Lower State.

Bishop England will enter the playoffs seeking its 15th consecutive AA state championship. While this year s squad has not been as dominant as teams in recent years, the Bishops are again the favorite in the Lower State. Coach Cindy Baggott does not have a senior on this year s roster.

Stags win big on road

Berkeley will host Orangeburg-Wilkinson in a key Region 8-AAA game this Friday night. The Stags are off to a 2-0 start in region play, doing so with solid road wins at Beaufort (27-20) and Hilton Head (42-26).

The good start in region play erases a miserable four-game losing streak endured by the Stags heading into region play. After head coach Jeff Cruce dismissed two running backs from the team two weeks into the season, senior

quarterback Joseph Dress has become a solid producer and key leader for Berkeley s offense. Dress had four rushing touchdowns and a passing score in the win over Hilton Head last week, and has nearly 1,500 yards rushing and passing with 16 total touchdowns this season.

A tough non-region schedule has proved beneficial for Berkeley. The Stags losses during the four-game streak came to Stratford, Summerville, Cane Bay and Timberland.

Eight-man heroes

The area s eight-man football teams get very little exposure, but several players continue to put up huge numbers this season.

Faith Christian s Alex North is leading the program to its best season ever as the area s leading rusher with more than 1,500 yards and 17 touchdowns.

Last Friday night, St. John s Christian senior quarterback Dustin Parsons had the best game of his career, tossing seven touchdown passes while accounting for 400 total yards in offense.

Tekac among leaders

Stratford High senior placekicker Tyler Tekac, selected last week to the South Carolina Shrine Bowl all-star team, is now tied for the state lead in made field goals with 10, matching Dutch Fork placekicker Tyler Bass. Tekac converted four kicks in last week s 33-7 win over Cane Bay.

McCurry to Newberry

Summerville High senior linebacker Mac McCurry has verbally committed to Newberry College. McCurry (6-1, 215) is a four-year starter for Summerville and currently leads the Green Wave with more than 100 tackles this season. He has more than 400 tackles in his career.

Garrett comes up big

Fort Dorchester s freshman quarterback, Dakereon Joyner, has quickly made a name for himself since moving to the starting role. But senior Kobe Garrett, whom Joyner replaced as the starter, is still a big part of the 7-1 Patriots success. Garrett has been playing running back and slot receiver for Fort Dorchester, and still plays QB, especially at crunch time. It was Garrett who threw a 64-yard pass to Adrian McNeil to set up the winning score in the Patriots 17-12 win over Summerville last week.

Load-Date: October 15, 2014

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Friday s Key Football Matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 17, 2014 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 352 words

Body

Lake Marion (5-2) at Timberland (7-0)

LAST YEAR: Timberland 35, Lake Marion 13

COACHES: Chris Carter, Lake Marion; Art Craig, Timberland

NOTABLE: Timberland is 6-0 all-time against Lake Marion, outscoring the Gators, 260-20, in the previous six meetings. The winner of this game has the clear path to the Region 7-AA title.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Lake Marion defensive back James Valdez is one of the state s top 15 junior prospects with offers from South Carolina and Clemson, among others. Valdez leads the state with six interceptions this season, though that may not come into play against the run-heavy Wolves.

DID YOU KNOW: Timberland has lost only one region game since 2005, that coming to Bishop England in 2011. The Wolves have lost only three region games since 2002.

Academic Magnet (6-1) at Whale Branch (2-5)

LAST YEAR: Did not play

COACHES: Bud Walpole, Academic Magnet; Jerry Hatcher, Whale Branch

NOTABLE: First-ever meeting between the two schools, and the winner of this game has the inside track to the Region 6-AA title. Whale Branch played a tough early season schedule, opening with five consecutive losses before posting two region wins.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Whale Branch junior defensive tackle Nyles Pinckney is one of the state s top prospects with more than 10 Division I offers.

DID YOU KNOW: Whale Branch opened in 2010 and is in its first season on the AA level. Academic Magnet has secured its second winning season ever and is seeking its first region title.

Orangeburg-Wilkinson (5-2) at Berkeley (3-4)

LAST YEAR: Orangeburg-Wilkinson 28, Berkeley 10

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; Tommy Brown, O-W

NOTABLE: Berkeley leads the all-time series, 4-2, but the teams have split the last two meetings. Berkeley won in 2012, 24-14. This is a Region 8-AAA showdown with Berkeley at 2-0 in the region and Orangeburg-Wilkinson at 1-1.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Bruins defensive tackle Albert Huggins, a 2014 Shrine Bowl pick and one of the top 10 senior prospects in the state this season.

DID YOU KNOW: Berkeley senior quarterback Joseph Dress has accounted for more than 1,200 yards in total offense this season.

Staff report

Load-Date: October 17, 2014

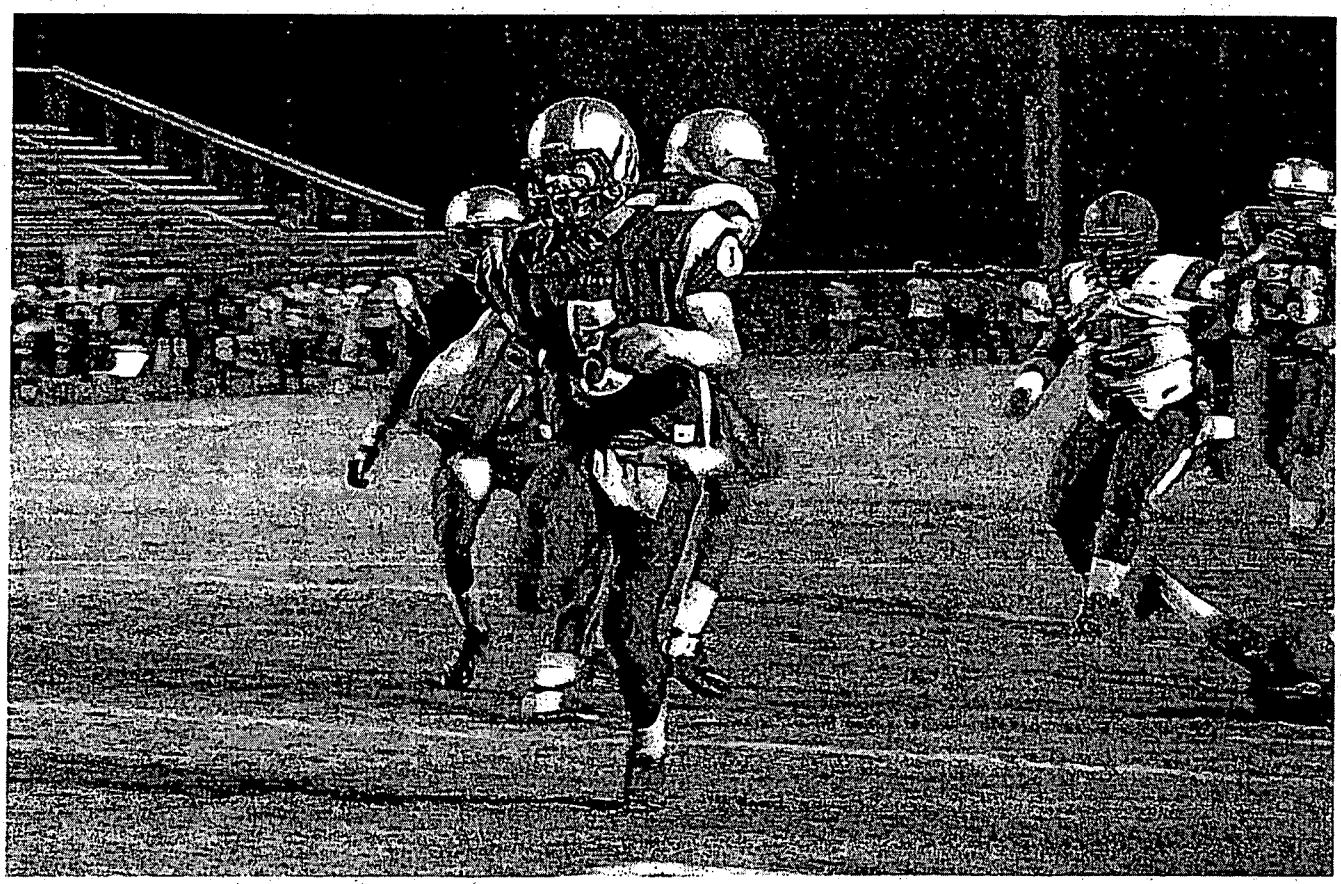
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APP. 0823

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/blown-away-stags-spank-bruins/article_ac1cb44e-e68a-5d16-92f5-c5c3f63fc003.html

Blown Away: Stags spank Bruins 41-15

Dan Brown Oct 17, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress scores the Stags first touchdown of the night on a 4-yard run.

Buy Now

Six turnovers will not win many football games.

A pair of fumbles and four interceptions resulted in 34 Berkeley points in the second half as the Stags (4-4, 3-0) won their third straight game and find themselves in the Region 8AAA driver's seat, spanking Orangeburg-Wilkinson 41-15 before a standing room only homecoming crowd at Gerald Moody Field.

"I didn't expect this," Stags Coach Jeff Cruce said as the final seconds of his team's third straight win wound down. "I thought we would score but not like this. Our defense dominated, which put our offense in position to score."

Supreme Scott had a pair of fumble recoveries. Kalen Hawkins blocked a punt.

And D.J. Whitherspoon put the icing on the cake with a 41-yard interception return for a touchdown.

The win puts the Stags in position to play for a region championship on Halloween night, Oct. 31, against Hanahan.

"Isn't this an incredible story for these kids?" Cruce said. "To turn it around like this and be in a position to win a region championship is an incredible story for these kids to experience."

Neither team could crack the ice in the first quarter as the Stags traded three punts for three turnovers in the game's first 12 minutes. Berkeley wasn't able to capitalize until Keyshaun Gilmore fumbled a punt on his own 4-yard line and Kamal Barton pounced on the football to set up the Stags' first touchdown.

Joseph Dress scored on a 6-yard run up the gut to give Berkeley a 7-0 lead.

The Bruins answered with their only sustained drive of the night, an 81-yard, 8-play drive capped by a Sean Rupert 2-yard run with 21 seconds remaining in the second quarter to tie the score 7-7 at the half.

The third quarter proved decisive for the Stags, capitalizing on the O.W. turnovers to put 34 unanswered points on the board.

"Our defense put us in a position to win against a good football team," Cruce said. "We were able to capitalize off some turnovers, which was good. This was a good win for us, a great win."

The Stags blew the game wide open in the third quarter. A high shotgun snap to O.W. quarterback Austin Bradley resulted in Supreme Scott's second fumble recovery deep in Bruin territory.

Leon Simmons scored the first of his three touchdowns on a 1-yard run six plays later.

On its next possession, the Stags forced O.W. to punt, but Kalen Hawkins blocked the kick to set up Berkeley's second TD. Austin Miles capped the short drive with a 1-yard dive to put the Stags up 20-7.

Three plays later, D.J. Whitherspoon stepped in front of a Bradley pass and darted 35-yards for a Pick Six score to give Berkeley a 27-7 lead with 2:43 remaining in the quarter.

Simmons added his second touchdown in the fourth quarter on a 4-yard run, and then put the icing on the cake with his third score, a 6-yard run with 7:32 remaining to put Berkeley on top 41-7.

O.W. found the end zone late in the game when Ronello Haynes hauled in a Bradley pass for a 45-yard touchdown.

"These kids have worked their tails off all season long," Cruce said. "They never gave up after the 1-4 start. They needed this win, and now we're playing for a region championship in two weeks."

A great win, the fans lining the runway to the Stags lockerroom after the game.

On homecoming night, it was a great win for the Stags.

Orangeburg-Wilkinson drops to 6-2, their second straight Region 8AAA loss.

Stags blast Bruins

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 18, 2014 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 7

Length: 501 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

MONCKS CORNER After opening Region 8-AAA play with two road wins, and playing at home for the first time in a month, the Berkeley Stags celebrated homecoming in a big way on Friday night, dropping visiting Orangeburg-Wilkinson, 41-15, at Bonner Stadium.

Berkeley evened its record at 4-4 overall and sits 3-0 in region play. The Stags will play Stall next week and will decide the region title in two weeks against Hanahan.

Berkeley s defense came up with six turnovers, including three in the decisive third quarter, to break open a 7-7 game at the half.

We beat a good football team tonight, said Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce. The turnovers really hurt them, but our guys made some big plays. We played well enough. We scored some points off the turnovers, which was good to see. We didn t have a great night on offense, but we had some short fields and we converted some opportunities. It s a good win, a great win for this football team.

O-W s first two drives of the game ended with turnovers. Quarterback Austin Bradley fumbled at the Berkeley 39-yard line and the Stags Supreme Scott recovered the loose ball. Berkeley s Richard Edmondson ended the next possession with an interception.

Berkeley s first score was set up by a muffed punt, which was recovered by the Stags Kamal Barton at the 4-yard line. Three plays later, Berkeley quarterback Joseph Dress scored on an 8-yard run with 9:58 to play in the second quarter.

The Bruins moved deep into Berkeley territory again, but Barton picked off Bradley s pass to the end zone to end the threat.

Orangeburg-Wilkinson (6-2) reached the end zone late in the half, tying the game on Sean Ruppert s 2-yard run with 21 seconds left in the second quarter.

The third quarter was all Berkeley. A high snap to Bradley resulted in a fumble recovery, again by Scott, at the O-W 38-yard line. Six plays later, Leon Simmons scored on a 1-yard run for a 13-7 lead with 7:29 left in the period.

Berkeley forced O-W to punt on its next possession, and the kick was blocked and recovered by Kalen Hawkins at the Bruins 11. Austin Miles capped the short scoring drive with a 1-yard run.

Three plays later, Berkeley s D.J. Whitherspoon stepped in front of Bradley s pass in the flat and raced untouched 35 yards for a 27-7 lead with 2:43 left in the third quarter.

Simmons added a 4-yard run with 9:56 left in the contest and capped the night with a 6-yard run with 7:32 left. The Bruins scored on a 45-yard touchdown pass with four seconds left in the game for the final margin.

The Stags Cruce said his team never lost its focus after a 1-4 start.

This football team never quit and right now they really believe in each other, said Cruce. These kids have been through an awful lot. They were 1-4 but they persevered through it all, and now they have a chance to play for a region championship. It s a great story. It s great as a coach to see these kids have some success.

Orangeburg-Wilkinson dropped its second consecutive region game, losing to Hanahan last week.

Load-Date: October 18, 2014

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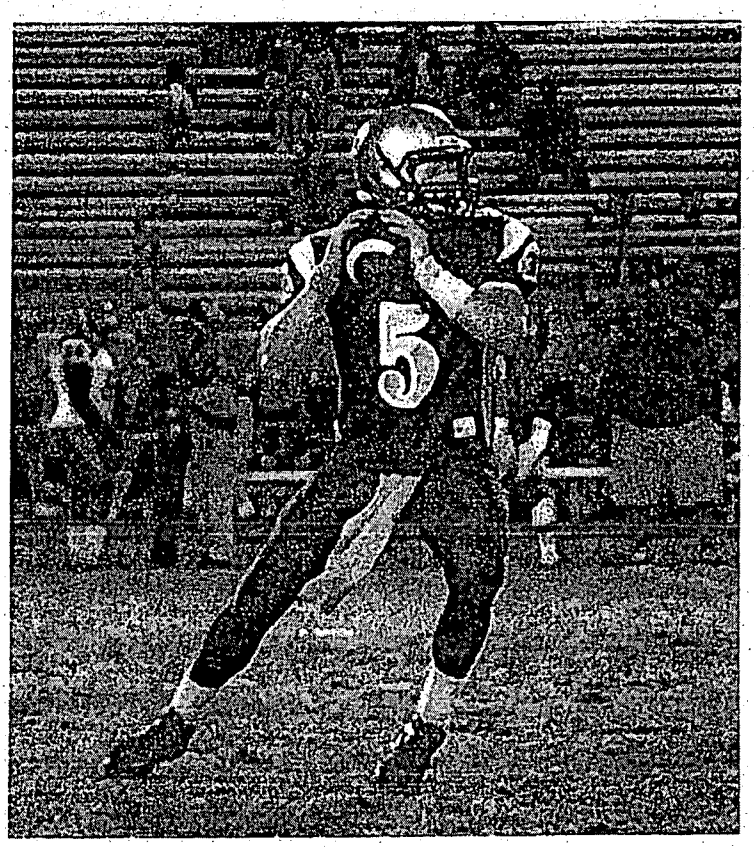
APP. 0828

817

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-rout-stall---region-championship-showdown-next/article_2c006ff0-f752-5f8b-97a6-08d4c9e692fa.html

Stags rout Stall 48-0, region championship showdown next

Dan Brown Oct 24, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress threw for three touchdown passes and ran for a fourth in the Stags 48-0 win over Stall. Buy Now

This one was over by the 10 minute mark of the first quarter.

Less than 120 seconds expired on the clock and the Berkeley Stags are on top 14-0, on fire, and on their way to a 48-0 win over Stall to go 4-0 in Region 8AAA (5-4 overall) and set up a championship showdown with Hanahan for the 8AAA crown.

The Hawks beat Beaufort 24-14 to set up the showdown with Berkeley.

The win assures the Stags of a home playoff game in the first round.

Quarterback Joseph Dress threw for three touchdowns and ran for a fourth, and Berkeley's defense returned a pair of interceptions for touchdowns to put the game on ice by half time.

APP. 0829

Dress hit wideout D.J. Witherspoon just 54 seconds into the first quarter on the game's third play for a touchdown to put the Stags up 7-0,

Just 15 seconds later Keron Reid picked off a pass and returned it 44 yards for a score.

Berkeley 14, Stall 0, with 10:45 left in the first quarter.

The Warriors (1-7, 0-4) could not muster any offense, and after punting to Berkeley, watched as Dress capped a short-field drive with a 1-yard keeper to make the score 21-0 with 3:20 remaining in the quarter.

Berkeley kept up the pressure in the second quarter, scoring four times as Coach Jeff Cruce emptied his bench with more than five minutes remaining in the half.

Dress found Witherspoon a second and third time. Backup quarterback Darius Douglas ran for a 7-yard touchdown on his first series on the field.

And the Stags defense capped the scoring with a second Pick Six late in the first half.

Cruce called off the dogs in the second half, playing mostly JV players as the Stags would take a knee once their drives reached the Red Zone.

The score against this rebuilding Stall program could have been much worse.

The Stags have turned their season around following a rough 1-4 start, to win four straight and earn the opportunity to play for the Region 8AAA championship on Oct. 31 against Hanahan, and a number one seed going into the Class AAA playoffs on Nov. 7.

Should Berkeley win their region, the Stags would face an at-larg fourth seed in the first round at home on Nov. 7.

Should they lose the region title and enter the playoffs as the Region 8 second seed, the Stags would face the third seed out of Region 6AAA.

Currently, Lakewood occupies third place in Region 6AAA with a 2-3 region mark and a 5-4 record overall.

But the Stags have their eye on the top prize, the region crown.

"Wouldn't this be a great story for these kids?" Cruce said following their 41-15 win over Orangeburg-Wilkinson. "To have the start we had at 1-4 and to come back and play for the region championship. That would make a great story for these kids."

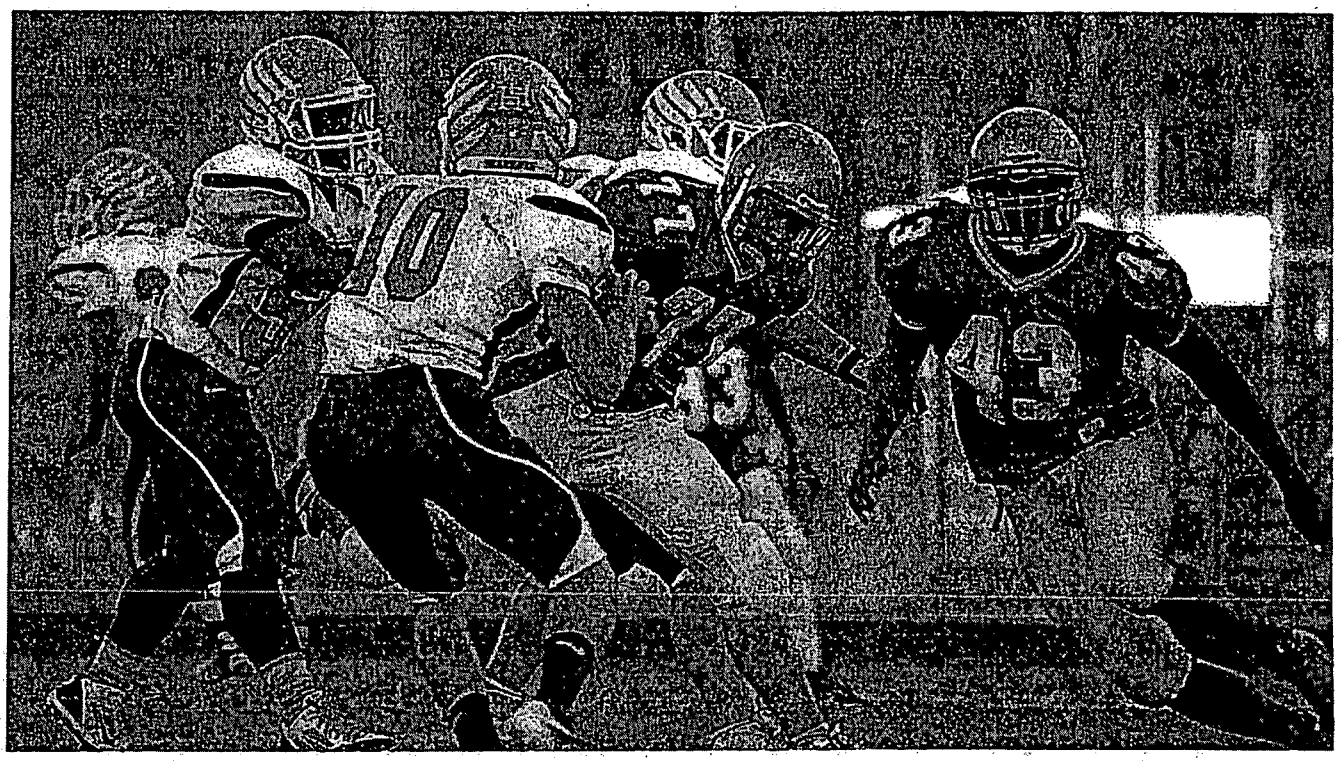
The final chapter of that story will be written on Halloween night.

Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m. at Gerald Moody Field.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/jv-and-b-team-stags-enjoying-banner-seasons/article_9947c324-6faa-5517-ae1e-5a238c54724f.html

JV and B-team Stags enjoying banner seasons

Dan Brown Oct 27, 2014



The JV Stags dismantled Hilton Head 50-6 on Oct. 16.

Buy Now

The Berkeley football teams are enjoying a banner season in 2014, so far. All of them.

On Halloween night, Oct. 31, the varsity Stags will play Hanahan for a shot at the Region 8AAA championship, its first since Berkeley's state championship season in 2009.

The JV Stags have beaten Summerville, Goose Creek, Stratford and Cane Bay on the way to a 6-2 season through this week, the first time such a feat has been accomplished.

And the B-team Stags are undefeated.

BHS Head Coach Jeff Cruce said the good fortune his program has enjoyed is all part of the plan.

"What we're doing with the younger team is part of our plan," he said. "We're teaching our system to the JV, B, and middle school teams, even the Moncks Corner teams in Park and Rec, to get everyone on the same page as to what we're trying to do."

Cruce said the varsity coaching staff remains involved with the JV and B teams, to the point that Cruce even calls the plays for the JV offense on Thursday nights.

"We want everyone on the same page," he said. "Our varsity coaches go down to help out. I call the plays on the JV team so I can work with quarterback Darius Douglas. He's our quarterback for next year and it's important he knows our system.

"We start this process off in seventh and eighth grades. It's part of something we put in place at the start of the year. We have some good young kids. They're going to be good in a couple years."

The JV and B team plans used to not exist. Those players that didn't make the varsity grade would bide their time until they got their shot at the varsity level.

It is a program philosophy also employed by the Stags' baseball and softball teams.

Getting everyone on the same page.

"We have to get them young," Cruce said. "If you haven't taught them the fundamentals by the time they reach high school, it's almost too late."

After a 1-4 pre-Region 8AAA start, the Stags have caught fire and won four straight, entering the Hanahan game with a 5-4 record and a share of the region championship.

Cruce said his players deserve all the accolades.

"Isn't this a great story? With the start we had to be playing for a region championship next week. This is something the younger teams can build on for next year.

"Our JV team has beaten Stratford, Summerville, Cane Bay and Goose Creek. That's never happened at Berkeley."

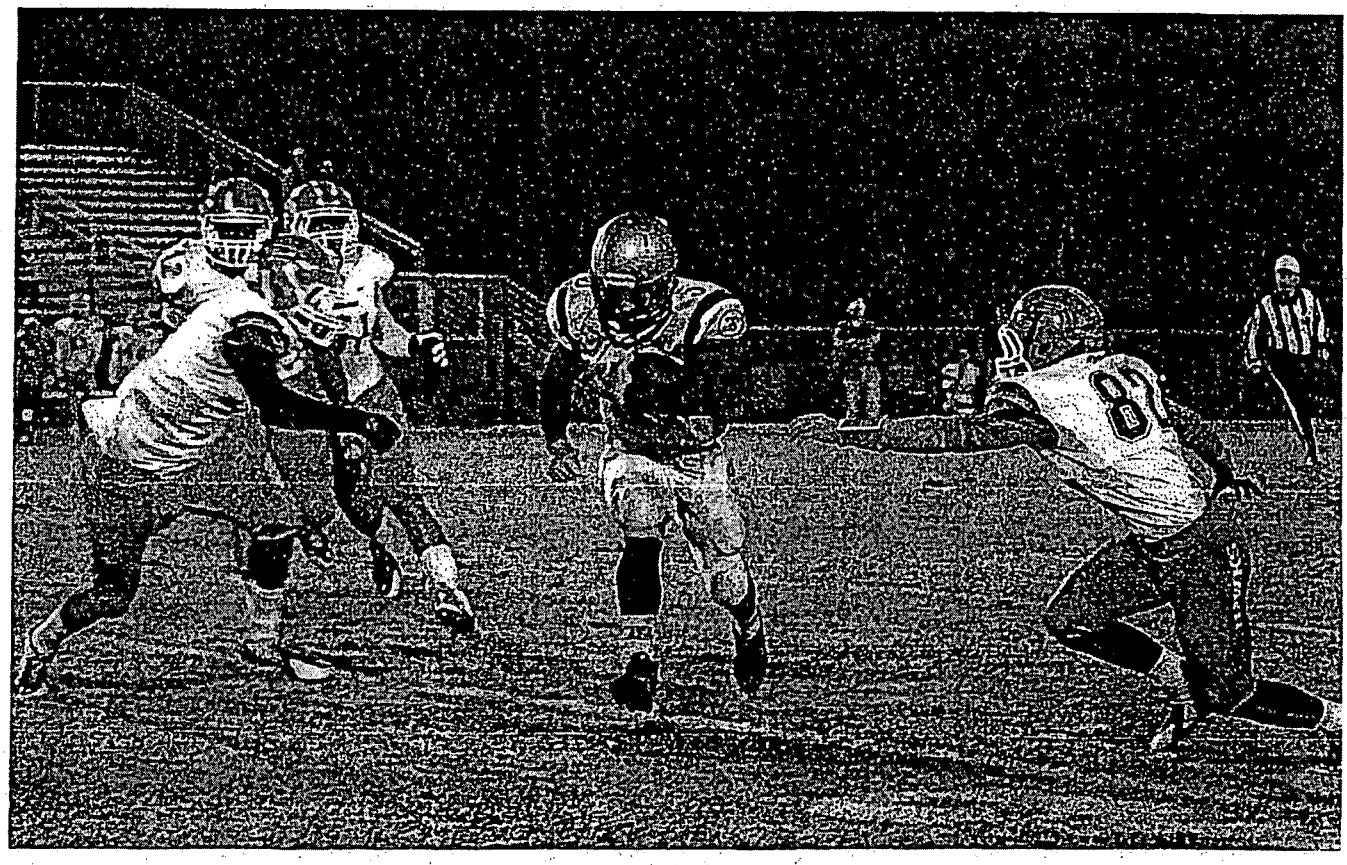
For the kids playing JV and B team football, their time draws near. Soon, names like Darius Douglas, D.J. Chisolm, Tre Morrison and Alec Windham will be making headlines.

"Their time is coming," Cruce said. "This is all a part of the learning process."

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/region-champs-stags-down-hanahan---to-capture-region/article_7b160ba8-9e1a-549c-a1ef-0cb9a1bda552.html

REGION CHAMPS! Stags down Hanahan 24-17 to capture Region 8AAA crown

Dan Brown Oct 30, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress ran for two touchdowns and threw for a third as the Berkeley Stags downed Hanahan 24-17 to win the Region 8AAA championship.

Buy Now

"It's not how you start, it's how you finish."

The quote has been the mantra of the Berkeley Stags football team since early September.

On Halloween night, the Stags finished a remarkable run, downing Hanahan 24-17 to win the Region 8AAA championship, the first of the Jeff Cruce Era.

In other area action, Timberland (10-0, 5-0) once again made a mockery of the Region 7AA schedule blowing out Lee Central 62-0 to wrap up its third straight region title.

The Wolves allowed just one touchdown over the last five games and go into the Class AA Div. II playoffs as the second seed.

Cross lost its bid for a Region 6A championship, falling 24-16 to St. John's. The Trojans (6-4, 4-1) host Branchville in the first round of the playoffs.

Berkeley will host Greenville Berea, an at large team, at home in the first round of the Class AAA playoffs.

"This is all for the kids, this is all for the kids," a teary eyed Cruce said after the win.

And it was for his quarterback too.

Joseph Dress scored a pair of touchdowns and threw for a third, and the Berkeley defense held the high octane Hawks offense in check, as Berkeley (5-0, 6-4) won its fifth straight and first region championship under Cruce.

"I have the best quarterback in the Lowcountry and he should have been a North-South All-Star Game selection," Cruce said. "I told him before the game he had the chance tonight to have an impact on a lot of lives. The All-Star selection is an individual thing, but a Region championship is something where the rest of the guys get to go along with him."

Dress scored twice, the first touchdown coming at the 5:51 mark of the first quarter on a 31-yard run. The second drove the final nail in the Hanahan coffin, a 38-yard gallop down the right side late in the fourth quarter to put the Stags up to stay.

"The pressure this kid has been under, with all the negativity and criticism, he showed what he was made of tonight. Joseph Dress put the game on his shoulders and carried this team to a region championship."

Vance Bailey kicked a 36-yard field goal late in the second quarter to answer a 36-yard kick by the Hawks' Shaun Brady, the only points posted by a Hanahan offense held largely in check by the Stags defense.

The highly touted Hawks defense accounted for 14 of Hanahan's 17 points on the night.

The game lived up to all the hype.

It was every bit the Halloween night thriller fans expected it to be.

It was a slugfest.

A heavyweight title fight.

Like Ali-Frazier I, II, and III.

The Thrilla in Manila.

And in the end, the cry "Stags win! Stags win! Stags win!" echoed over Gerald Moody Field at Bonner Stadium.

The crowd went wild as a potential game-tying drive stalled on the Berkeley 11-yard line as the Hanahan offense turned the ball over on downs with 22 seconds left in the game.

The players went wild as the clock ticked down to 00:00 and they doused their coach in ice water.

The win guaranteed the Stags at least two home playoff games should they win.

The win also completes the transition to a new era in Stags football.

The Jeff Cruce Era is here to stay.

And that's good for these Berkeley Stags.

Friday s Key Football Matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 31, 2014 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 322 words

Body

Summerville (5-4, 1-1) at Ashley Ridge (6-3, 2-0)

LAST YEAR: Summerville 39, Ashley Ridge 33

COACHES: John McKissick, Summerville; Kenny Walker, Ashley Ridge

NOTABLE: Summerville beat Ashley Ridge twice last season, once in the regular season and again in the state playoffs. Summerville owns a 4-1 edge in the series. Ashley Ridge won in 2011.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Ashley Ridge s passing game, led by quarterback Steven Duncan and receiver Dashaun Santiago, will test a sometimes suspect Summerville secondary.

DID YOU KNOW: Ashley Ridge head coach Kenny Walker is the second area head football coach who is a former successful wrestling coach at Summerville, joining Fort Dorchester head coach Steve LaPrad.

St. John s (6-3, 4-0) at Cross (6-3, 4-0)

LAST YEAR: St. John s 33, Cross 25

COACHES: Brad Bowles, St. John s; Shaun Wright, Cross

NOTABLE: The winner claims the Region 6-A title. St. John s leads the overall series, 12-6, and has won the last two games. Prior to the recent two-game streak, Cross had won four of five meetings. St. John s has scored 72 points in the last two games against Cross.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Both teams have been very sound defensively in region play and this looks to be a defensive struggle.

DID YOU KNOW: St. John s is seeking its seventh win, which would be the first time since 2006 that the Islanders have won more than six games in a season.

Hanahan (6-3, 4-0) at Berkeley (5-4, 4-0)

LAST YEAR: Hanahan 36, Berkeley 0

COACHES: Charlie Patterson, Hanahan; Jeff Cruce, Berkeley

NOTABLE: Winner of this game wins the Region 8-AAA title. Hanahan is the defending region champion and has won the last three games against Berkeley.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Hanahan s strong defensive front against Berkeley senior quarterback Joseph Dress, who is equally effective as a runner and passer.

DID YOU KNOW: Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce was the head coach at Hanahan from 1995-2007, winning 92 games as the Hawks head coach.

Staff report

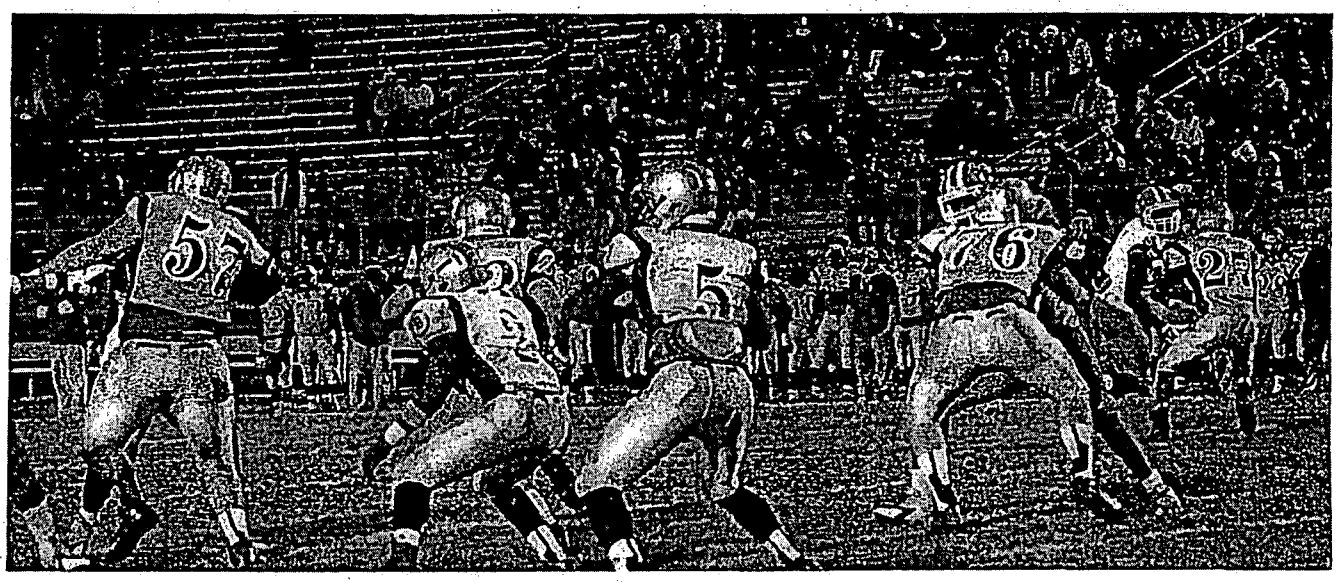
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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/playoff-brackets-set-stags-host-greenville-berea/article_ed2d2e09-7390-5844-8fa3-c34e1b3637e6.html

Playoff brackets set: Stags host Greenville Berea

Dan Brown Nov 1, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent The Stags O-line provide protection for Joseph Dress as he looks downfield for an open man.

The tickets to the Big Dance were handed out Saturday, Nov. 1, and the Berkeley Stags hope to play more than a Cinderella role in this year's Class AAA playoffs.

The Stags' first dance will come this Friday night, Nov. 7, against Greenville Berea at Bonner Stadium.

Berea finished the season with a 3-4 mark and the fifth place team out of Region 1AAA, receiving an at large tournament invitation.

"As long as we win we'll be playing at home," said Stags Coach Jeff Cruce. "These kids have worked their butts off for this, coming back from a rough start in September to win the region championship. Their reward is to play in November at home."

The Stags will be faced with the task of containing the state's leading rusher in junior Stevie Williams, who has rushed for more than 2,200 yards this season.

Hanahan, the runner-up in Region 8AAA will host Lakewood out of Sumter, the third-place team from Region 6AAA.

In Class AA Division II, Woodland grabbed the top seed in the lower state bracket and will host eighth-seeded Johnsonville.

Timberland comes in as the second seed in the lower state and the 10-0 Wolves host seventh-seeded Academic Magnet in the first round.

Bracket watchers will be intrigued to know that Timberland will not have to face arch-nemesis Dillon in the playoffs. Under a new playoff format based on school enrollment Timberland, who has beaten the perennial state champion Wildcats just once in nine tries, dodged the proverbial bullet as Dillon headlines the Class AA Division I bracket this year.

This is good news for the Wolves who are in search of their second football state title.

In Class A Division II, third-seeded Cross will host sixth-seeded Branchville.

Coming in as the bracket's third seed could be seen as a good sign for the Trojans.

"The year we won the title we finished third in the region and had the number three seed," said Coach Shaun Wright. "We had a first round game home then had to travel the rest of the playoffs."

Cross won the Class A, Division II state championship in 2012.

In SCISA 8-Man Football, St. John's Christian Academy plays at 9-1 Richard Winn, while Faith Christian plays at 9-1 Andrew Jackson Academy. Cathedral Academy will visit Clarendon Hall.

Berkeley s Back; Stags clip Hawks to win Region 8-AAA title

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 1, 2014 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 1

Length: 582 words

Byline: David Shelton

Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Of all the plays Berkeley senior quarterback Joseph Dress made in Friday night s Region 8-AAA championship game against Hanahan, the one he will remember most is the last when he took a knee in victory formation.

Dress scored touchdowns on runs of 31 and 38 yards, rushing for 141 yards and passing for 100 more as the Stags knocked off the Hawks, 24-17, to complete an improbable undefeated run through the region.

I can t describe the feeling I feel right now, said an elated Dress after the game. Nobody thought we could do this, but everyone on this team knew we would. We did it together.

Berkeley, which opened the season with a 1-4 record, improved to 6-4 on the season. It is Berkeley s first winning season in the four-year run of head coach Jeff Cruce.

Great effort by everyone, said a teary-eyed Cruce. This is all about the kids and I could not be happier for these kids. I think we ve had a lot of criticism about the way we do things, but we had a plan. It s not how you start but how you finish.

The victory gives Berkeley a first-round Lower State playoff game next week, and if the Stags win, they will be at home for a second-round game.

Hanahan (6-4, 4-1) also gets a first-round playoff game at home next week.

Berkeley s defense did not allow a touchdown in the game as both of Hanahan s touchdowns were on fumble returns. Aiding in Berkeley s offensive effort was senior running back Leon Simmons, who rushed for 122 yards

Dress first touchdown run of 31 yards gave Berkeley a 6-0 lead with 5:57 left in the first quarter. Hanahan s Sean Brady booted a 31-yard field with 10:47 left in the second quarter to trim the lead to 6-3.

Just before halftime, Dress directed the Stags into field goal position and Vance Bailey s 36-yarder gave Berkeley a 9-3 halftime lead.

Hanahan had an 80-yard touchdown pass from Walt Fagan to Sam Denmark negated on a penalty early in the third quarter. The Hawks managed to maintain the drive after the penalty before a fumble on the Berkeley 10-yard line ended the threat.

Dress lost a fumble early in the fourth quarter and Hanahan s Chris Pfaff, who had an interception earlier in the game, scooped up the loose ball and raced 52 yards for a touchdown with 11:03 left in the game.

Undeterred, Dress led the Stags on a 69-yard drive, hitting Deion Williams with a 5-yard touchdown pass, putting Berkeley back on top, 16-10, with 8:01 to play.

Berkeley s Israel Mukuamu intercepted a pass on Hanahan s third play from scrimmage a long pass intended for Denmark at the Berkeley 20. On the next snap, Berkeley fumbled and Hanahan s Tre Smalls returned the ball 17 yards to give the Hawks a 17-16 lead with 6:42 to play.

Dress needed less than two minutes to give Berkeley the lead for good, racing 38 yards while breaking three tackles for a touchdown with 4:57 remaining.

Joseph Dress proved tonight he should be in the North-South all-star game, said Cruce. I m not criticizing the coaches who picked the team. They picked the guys they felt they needed. But my quarterback deserves to be in that game.

The Hawks had one final possession to tie the game and reached the Berkeley 12-yard line with under a minute to play. On fourth-and-2, Denmark was tackled after a reception about a foot short of the sticks, setting off a wild celebration on the Berkeley sideline.

Hanahan sophomore running back Jerry Bailey finished the game with 92 yards rushing 89 coming in the second half. Denmark finished the night with 11 receptions for 91 yards.

Load-Date: November 1, 2014

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Breaking News

School board names three finalists for superintendent

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/cruce-era-officially-begins/article_16142b54-89d2-5ed2-b32a-4d35789c9d7b.html

Cruce era officially begins

Dan Brown Nov 4, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Jeff Cruce and quarterback Joseph Dress share a moment following Friday's game.

Buy Now

This goes out to every Berkeley football fan that called for Jeff Cruce's job ... to the football fans that lacked manners and decided go after the coach's wife and kids in the stands when the scoreboard didn't go their way ... to everyone that lost faith in this team and grumbled about poor won/loss records - in September, no less.

This goes out to all the petition signers that perhaps didn't know as much about Stags football as they thought they did.

For the Stag Nation, all is forgiven. It's time to come home.As Berkeley principal Steven Steele says, "Winning forgives everything."

These Berkeley Stags are region champions, how about that?

With the first football region championship of what is now, officially, the Jeff Cruce Era at Berkeley, BHS fans can rightfully put the Jerry Brown Era in its place - in the history books.

In just four years, Cruce brought a region title back to Berkeley after the tragedy of 2010 that saw the program rocked by the deaths of three of its players in just two years.

The transition is complete, and God bless Jerry Brown. He was, and still is, a great football coach, winning state titles in 1994, 1996 and 2009, while at Berkeley, and he joins the legendary Gerald Moody as a true Berkeley Stags legend.

APP. 0843

But Jerry is four years gone, for whatever reasons he had for leaving. He won another state title last year at Batesville-Leesburg and now plies his craft along the sidelines of Spring Valley.

Leaving here renewed Coach Brown's desire for the game that he apparently lost during the rough times that followed the 2009 state championship and living with "the monster he created in the Berkeley Stags football fan."

Coach Cruce had the misfortune to follow in Brown's footsteps as football coach, and as a community, the lot of us should be ashamed for the Hell we put him through.

No man should be reduced to tears because of his job.

Not like this.

No quarterback should have to shoulder the burden of a team's success like Joseph Dress did.

These Stags deserve their region championship, and join the baseball and softball teams (two each, including a pair of District titles), for winning region championships as part of the Cruce Era legacy.

Before Cruce came along it had been a couple generations since anything other than a Stags football team won a region title outright.

Cruce started a Hall of Fame here, something none of his predecessors had the foresight to envision.

Cruce instilled a new attitude where "Character Matters," that reminded Berkeley's student athletes that they were role models and yes, character mattered. Good character was rewarded with game time. Bad character was not.

Cruce caught a lot of heat on that stance.

But Cruce had his vision and he kept promising something good was coming.

Every year he made the same promise, "I think this is the year we put together a great football team."

Well, here they are, while not yet ready to wear the title of "great," as their job in 2014 is not yet complete, this is a good football team that just won a region championship.

Undefeated in Region 8AAA play, a perfect 5-0.

This is a team that pulled itself off the mat after a 1-4 shellacking in September, like Rocky in the 13th round against Apollo Creed.

"Wouldn't this be a great story if this team came all the way back to win the region championship after the start they had?"

Holy cow, it is a great story.

And for this year's Berkeley Stag football team, as the Stags enter the 2014 playoffs, the story is hopefully just getting started.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stag-nation-calls-for-blue-out-friday-night-against-visiting/article_a8fbea51-6932-5733-8379-8ce08a771a21.html

Stag Nation calls for Blue Out Friday night against visiting Dreher

Dan Brown Nov 5, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Berkeley High School principal has heard the Stag Nation's rallying cry and has called for a Blue Out for the Stags' first round playoff game against Dreher, calling for all Berkeley fans to come dressed in their Berkeley blue.

Buy Now

The call has gone out for Friday night's first round playoff game against the Dreher Blue Devils.

The Stag Nation wants a Blue Out.

The Berkeley Stags Twitter page made the call on Tuesday afternoon, "The students asked for it and they will get it!!! BLUE OUT Friday night against Dreher!!! Wear blue, paint yourself blue, blue spirit towel!"

The Blue Devils finished with a 7-3 mark and a 3-2 Region 4AAA record to take the third seed.

Dreher lost 35-21 on Oct. 31 to A.C. Flora, while the Stags come into the first round of the playoffs with a five game winning streak.

The Blue Devils' playoff status was temporarily in jeopardy as the SCHSL recently banned Dreher from playoff competition because of a post-game fight with Camden.

Dreher officials appealed and successfully gained reinstatement in time for their first round matchup with the Stags.

Berkeley comes into the first round with a 6-4 mark and a 5-game winning streak, following a 1-4 start and a 4-game losing streak. The Stags fell to Stratford, Summerville, Cane Bay and Timberland after a season opening win against Johnsonville.

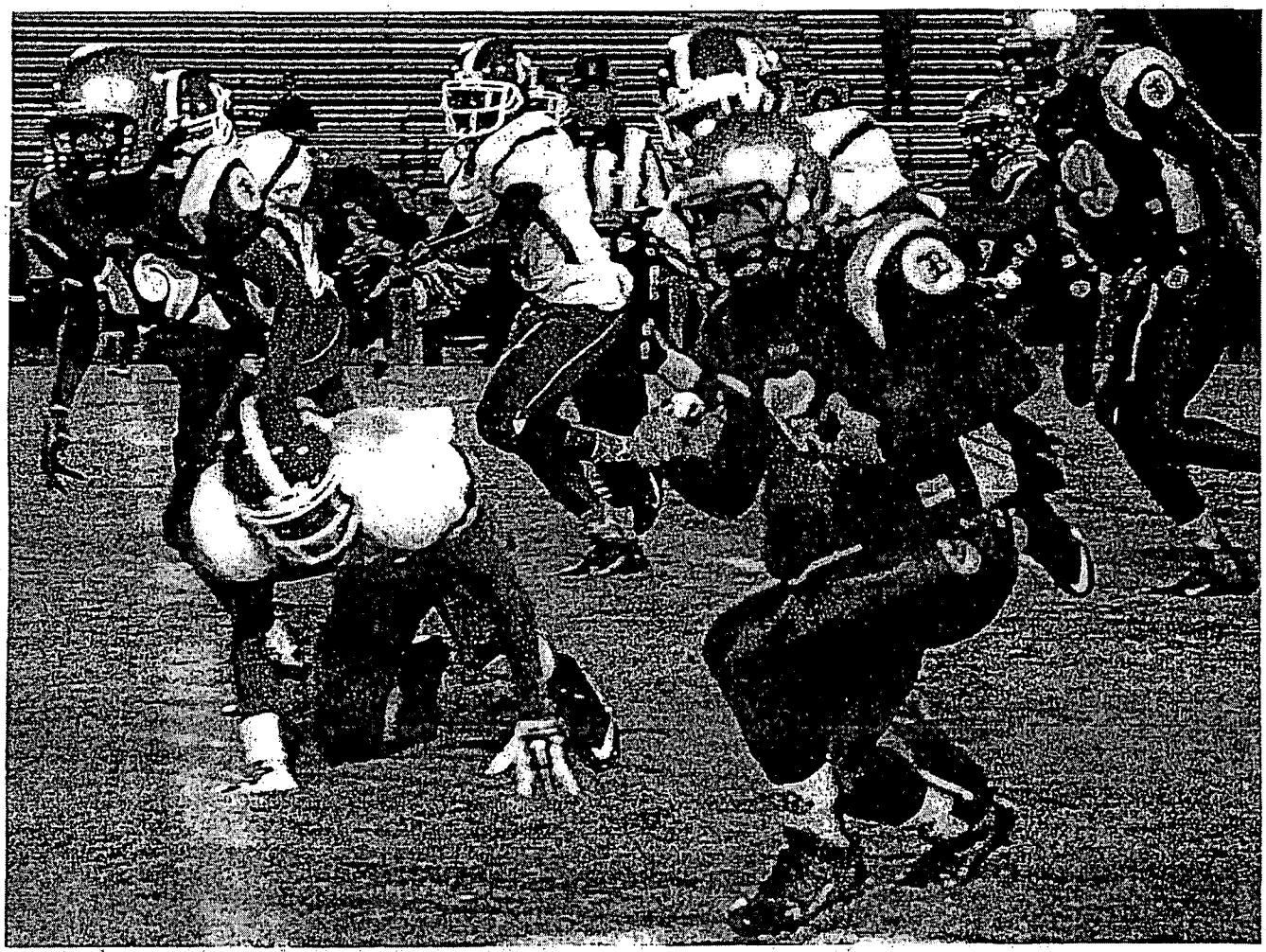
The Stags also claimed their first Region 8AAA championship under Coach Jeff Cruce. Berkeley's last region title came in 2009 under then coach Jerry Brown while on its way to winning the 2009 Class AAAA Div. II state championship.

The Blue Out kickoff at Bonner Stadium is at 7:30 p.m.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/six-straight-stags-give-dreher-playoff-blues/article_36e87e8b-8a99-5943-b8a6-5ee2acc83eca.html

Six straight: Stags give Dreher playoff blues 35-28

Dan Brown Nov 7, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress passed for a touchdown and scored the eventual game-winner with ust 2:21 left in the game to lead Berkeley to a 35-28 first round playoff win over Dreher.

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On a Blue Out Friday night under a full November moon, the Berkeley Stags made it six straight wins with a 35-28 first round playoff win over the Dreher Blue Devils at Bonner Stadium.

Leon Simmons scored on three touchdown runs and Joseph Dress passed for a touchdown and scored the game-winner to lead Berkeley (7-4, 5-0) into the second round of the Class AAA playoffs.

The Stag Train just keeps on rolling.

With the score tied at 28-28 and just over six minutes remaining in the Stags' Class AAA first round playoff game, Coach Jeff Cruce asked quarterback Joseph Dress if he was ready to win this game.

"Get out there," Cruce said, "Put the team on your back and win this ball game."

Dress did just that, orchestrating a 56-yard drive keyed by a big pass play to D.J. Witherspoon and a costly face mask penalty at the end of a first down Austin Miles run that gave the Stags the ball on the 2-yard line, first and goal.

One the ensuing play, Dress bowled over on a quarterback sneak to give the Stags the lead 35-28, then watched as his defense slammed the door on the Blue Devils' potential game-tying drive.

"This was a very good football team that came in here and played inspired football," Cruce said. "They matched us point for point and gave us all we could handle."

The Stags had no answer for running back Lorenzo Ward, who scored four times to lead Dreher.

"We need games like these," Cruce said. "Each round gets a little more difficult. We needed this game tonight."

After gathering at mid-field to sing the Berkeley Alma Mater, Dress was given a free shoulder ride off the field. When asked how he felt about being carried off the field on his team's shoulders, Dress said it should have been the other way around.

"I should carry them," he said. "They do it all for me. Without my team I'm nothing."

Dress rushed for over 100 yards, scored a touchdown and threw for a second in the win.

Simmons rushed for 135 yards with three touchdowns to pace the Berkeley offense.

The Stags will host Midland Valley, a 35-21 winner over North Myrtle Beach on Friday, Nov. 14.

Berkeley s Dress is Stags steady hand

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 7, 2014 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 3

Length: 567 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Most often, when a football team gets on a winning streak after a slow start, the pivotal moment of the turnaround is winning a game that seemed lost.

In the case of the Berkeley Stags, who started 1-4 this season and finished the regular season with a five-game winning streak, the turning point came in a blowout loss to Summerville in the third game of the season.

Berkeley allowed 48 points in the first half to Summerville in what turned out to be a 48-28 loss. The day before that game, Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce dismissed the team s best running back from the program and suspended the other starting back for disciplinary reasons.

Though the Stags lost their next two games, to Cane Bay and Timberland, Cruce felt his team was starting to come around as they entered Region 8-AAA play.

I think the turning point in our season was the Summerville game, said Cruce. I think we made some decisions that maybe people on the outside thought were not good for our team but I think that turned us around. We lost two games after that but I thought as far as our kids, their mindset was changed. I think we started to see our guys pull closer together.

I never felt like the kids attitudes were to a point where we no longer had them. We never lost them in terms of their belief in what we are doing. The Summerville game was a big negative as far as the score, but I think our team came together.

Berkeley went on to win all five of its region games, capturing the 8-AAA title and posting its first winning season in Cruce s four seasons as coach.

The steady hand throughout this roller coaster season has been senior quarterback Joseph Dress. The 5-10, 180-pounder has accounted for nearly 2,000 yards and 24 touchdowns, rushing for 895 yards and 16 scores while passing for 1,108 yards and eight touchdowns.

Joseph has had a great run through the region. He s been very consistent and he s a leader, said Cruce. Nobody will be criticized on a football team more than the quarterback and the head coach. That s football. He knows that and he never lets that stuff bother him. He s such a humble kid. He doesn t like the limelight. He just wants to play football and win games.

For his part, Dress says he and his teammates never lost focus and knew they were close to putting together a good run.

I knew we could do it and the other seniors knew we could do it, said Dress. We have had a lot of underclassmen play big roles too. We just all came together and put it all together at the right time. Everyone bought into the idea that we could win the region.

We had some unlucky stuff happen and we knew if we kept working and stayed focused, something good was bound to happen for us. That s how the game works. If you work hard, you will get rewarded.

One of Berkeley s defensive leaders this season has been senior defensive end Peyton Thompson. He says the early season losses helped to toughen the team and that no member of the program ever hit the panic button.

Berkeley hosts Dreher in a Class AAA Lower State playoff game on Friday night.

We know they re excited about being able to play and that will have them fired up, said Cruce. We have plenty to be excited about as well. We ve been through a lot this year but our kids persevered, won a region championship, and have this chance to host a playoff game. I m excited for our kids, excited about the opportunity they have earned.

Load-Date: November 7, 2014

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Dress late TD lifts Stags to win

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 8, 2014 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 6

Length: 687 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

MONCKS CORNER Berkeley s magical late season run continued on Friday night, and the Stags are headed for the second round of the Lower State Class AAA football playoffs.

Senior quarterback Joseph Dress scored on a 2-yard run with 2:21 left in the game, lifting Berkeley to a 35-28 victory over visiting Dreher at Bonner Stadium.

Berkeley (7-4) will host Midland Valley, a 35-21 winner over North Myrtle Beach, next Friday.

We re excited to be moving on, said Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce. It wasn t easy and we knew it wouldn t be easy. Dreher really came out and played with great effort. It was a battle all night, but I think that s good for us. Having a tough first-round game can only help us. Now we can relax and focus on round two.

Dress continued to pace the Berkeley offensive attack, rushing for 147 yards and passing for 118 more yards as the Stags rolled up more than 400 yards in total offense.

Senior running back Leon Simmons added 110 yards rushing and three touchdowns, his second straight 100-yard rushing effort.

Dreher running back Lorenzo Ward led the Blue Devils with 152 yards rushing. Junior quarterback Chris Cooke, playing for injured starter Avery Armstrong, completed 15 of 23 passes for 161 yards. The Blue Devils ended the season with a 7-4 record.

Simmons gave Berkeley a 7-0 lead with 8:58 to play in the first quarter on a 32-yard run, set up by a 30-yard punt return by D.J. Witherspoon.

Simmons capped Berkeley s second possession with a 15-yard run, giving the Stags a 14-0 lead with 1:30 left in the opening quarter.

Dreher got on the board in the second quarter as Ward capped a 52-yard drive with a four-yard touchdown run, cutting the lead to 14-7 with 8:46 to play.

Simmons, however, reached pay dirt for the third time in the first half, scoring on a 28-yard run to up Berkeley s lead to 21-7 with 7:32 to play in the second quarter.

Ward, the senior son of South Carolina defensive coordinator Lorenzo Ward, put together runs of 29 and 16 yards, the last being a touchdown, to bring Dreher to within a touchdown at 21-14 with 6:39 remaining in the second.

The Stags went on yet another drive, reaching the Dreher 27-yard line before a fumble ended the threat. Dreher responded with a 10-play, 72-yard drive, converting twice on third-and-long, and tying the game on Ward s 1-yard plunge with 2:13 remaining in the second.

Berkeley reached Dreher s 37-yard line on its last possession of the half but that drive also ended in a fumble.

I told the team at halftime that the only time we were stopped was when we stopped ourselves, said Cruce. Defensively we really challenged our guys. I thought our defensive front got whipped in the first half, and we challenged them to come out and take control in the second half.

Dress connected with Witherspoon on a 26-yard touchdown pass to give Berkeley a 28-21 lead with 4:44 left to play in the third quarter.

That lead was short-lived, however, as Ward went back to work on Berkeley s defense. The 5-10, 195-pounder capped a seven-play, 38-yard drive with a 23-yard touchdown run on fourth-and-eight, tying the game at 28 with 1:50 left in the period.

The touchdown drive was set up by a 57-yard kickoff return by Anthony Salters.

After Dress gave the Stags the late lead, Dreher reached midfield on its final possession before Witherspoon ended the threat with an interception.

Berkeley s defense limited Dreher to 114 yards in the second half after allowing 284 yards in the first half.

Dreher was originally not in the state playoff bracket after being barred from the postseason following a post-game fight with Camden a few weeks ago. Dreher won an appeal of the decision on Monday morning and was allowed back into the bracket.

Berkeley was to play Berea in the original playoff bracket, and also had to prepare for a possible game with Richland Northeast.

This was a really tough, mentally exhausting week because we basically had to prepare for three teams until Monday, said Cruce.

I never felt completely comfortable with our game plan but we managed OK. I thought our kids played with great effort and our coaches did a great job.

Load-Date: November 8, 2014

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No Headline In Original

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 13, 2014 Thursday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 5

Length: 525 words

Body

High School Football Predictions: Week 12

All hail the conquering hero.

OK, maybe that s a bit premature, but ABC News 4 sports anchor Scott Eisberg has a commanding three-game lead over The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller heading into the final week of the In The Huddle seasons picks.

In hopes of catching his television counterpart, Miller and Eisberg differed on two picks last week the Stratford-Goose Creek and Berkeley-Dreher games . Miller was unable to make up any ground on Eisberg as they split on the two matchups.

This week Miller is going all in, picking three different winners from Eisberg. Miller has Summerville beating Sumter, while going with Myrtle Beach over Hanahan and visiting Midland Valley topping Berkeley.

You risk nothing, you gain nothing, Miller said.

Eisberg appeared unimpressed with Miller s selections this week.

That s E-I-S-B-E-R-G on the In The Huddle trophy, he said.

Here are this week s picks.

River Bluff at Goose Creek

Eisberg: What a coaching matchup. Two former college head coaches, David Bennett (Coastal Carolina) and Chuck Reedy (Baylor) in a first-round playoff matchup. Bennett was actually Reedy s grad assistant at Clemson, teacher rocks pupil in this one. Goose Creek, 45-7.

Miller: This matchup should be as close as Chuck Reedy s (Baylor) and David Bennett s (Coastal Carolina) former employers. Goose Creek, 52-0.

Gaffney at Fort Dorchester

Eisberg: Sounds much scarier than it is, awful year for Gaffney, season of destiny for Fort Dorchester. Patriots, 28-7.

Miller: Many including this picker surprised by Patriots loss to Ashley Ridge last week, but think Fort Dorchester will rebound with win. Patriots, 24-10.

No Headline In Original

Sumter at Summerville

Eisberg: Thought it could be a state title type year for the Green Wave, I ll now go on record and say they fall in the first round of the playoffs, as much as it pains me to do so. Sumter, 21-17.

Miller: The Green Wave have won three in a row and playing their best football at the right time of the season. Green Wave, 20-18.

Socastee at Stratford

Eisberg: Joe Marion s Knights motivated after losing in the region title to Goose Creek. Still believe the Knights can make a run. Stratford, 28-17.

Miller: Stratford got off to a tough start last week against Goose Creek and nearly pulled off the upset. Stratford, 24-13.

Hanahan at Myrtle Beach

Eisberg: What a matchup on the Grand Strand. Myrtle Beach only has one loss this year, by three points to rival North Myrtle Beach. They play on their home field but I think the Hawks can run with them. Hawks, 20-14.

Miller: If Hanahan can get past Myrtle Beach on Friday, got to believe the Hawks will be favorite to play for a state title. Just don t think it ll happen. Myrtle Beach, 38-31.

Midland Valley at Berkeley

Eisberg: I get my weekly notification from Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce to continue picking against the Stags, it s working for them. Unfortunately for Jeff, I m now on the bandwagon, can t pick against them again. Stags, 28-14.

Miller: Midland Valley s high-powered offense put up 35 points on North Myrtle Beach last week. It ll probably take that many points to get past the Stags. Midland Valley, 35-31.

Load-Date: November 13, 2014

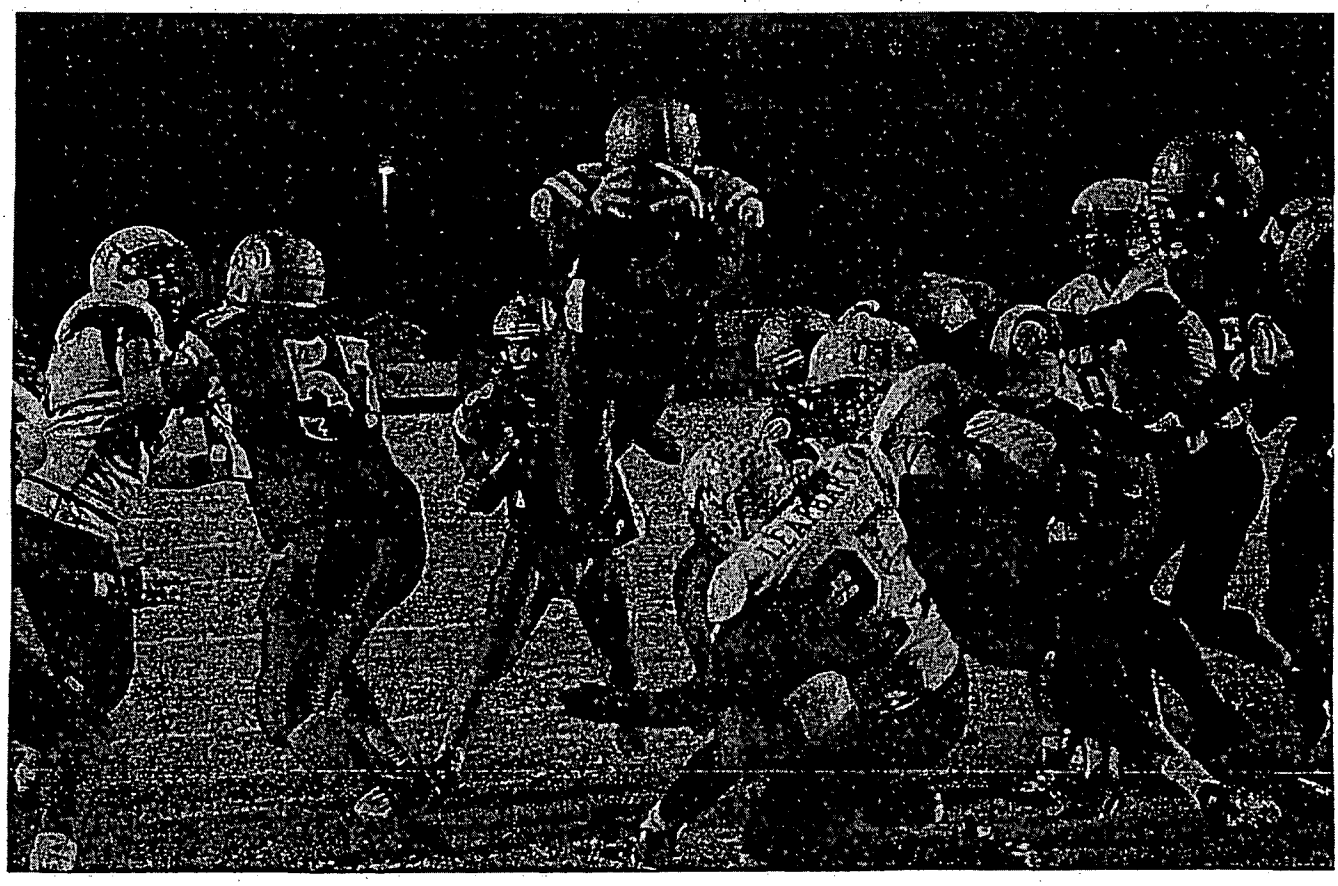
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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/joseph-dress-scores-two-tds-to-lead-stags-to-/article_b82df7b0-1a87-5e33-86a1-2ba5e4e723a3.html

Joseph Dress scores two TDs to lead Stags to 28-21 playoff win

Dan Brown Nov 14, 2014



You can believe a man can fly: Joseph Dress makes like Superman, flying over the Midland Valley defensive line from 1-yard out with 1:52 left in the game to lead Berkeley to a 28-21 win over the Mustangs in the second round of the Class AAA playoffs. The Stags travel to Hartsville on Nov. 21 to take on the Red Foxes.

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Last week, his team carried Joseph Dress off the field.

How would Dress top that feat this week?

He flew.

Diving over the defensive line from 1-yard out with 1:52 left in the game, Dress made like Superman in lifting the Berkeley Stags to a 28-21 win over Midland Valley in the second round of the Class AA playoffs.

The only thing missing was the cape.

"It's just a job to do and doing your job," Dress said of the play. "We needed to score."

Dress had lowered his shoulder and powered over from two yards out three quarters earlier to give Berkeley its first touchdown of the night to tie the score at 7-7.

From there on out the Stags and Mustangs played a game of Touchdown Leapfrog.

Coach Jeff Cruce could only look skyward in amazement as if saying 'thank you' for an answered prayer.

"I'm really beginning to think these kids have earned God's favor," Cruce said of the Stags' play over the last month and a half where Berkeley has now won 7 straight games dating back to Oct. 5. "The amazing things I'm seeing on the football field and the way these games turn out, this is like divine intervention here."

The Stags (8-4, 5-0) will travel to Hartsville on Nov. 21 as the Red Foxes (11-0, 5-0) shut out Georgetown 42-0. Midland Valley ends their season 7-5 with the loss.

Dress capped the late fourth quarter drive with a 1-yard airborne dive to give the Stags the lead. On the previous play, the senior quarterback carried half the Mustang defense 39-yards before going down at the 1-yard line.

Dress said they'd been working on that play all night.

"We had them set up for it where I handed the ball to (Leon) Simmons, but they cut off the inside lane and I pulled it back and took off."

Midland Valley scored on its opening drive when quarterback Daniel Carr capped a 64-yard drive with a 1-yard sweep.

The Mustangs took their only lead of the game, capitalizing on Berkeley turning the ball over on downs at their own 20-yard line. Four plays later Dre'Shun Carr powered in from 4-yards out to give Midland Valley the lead 13-7 after the missed PAT.

The Stags took the lead with just 32 seconds remaining in the half on a Leon Simmons 11-yard run. Vance Bailey's kick gave Berkeley the lead going into the locker room 14-13.

On its first possession in the third quarter, Simmons scored again, this time from a yard out, capping a 71-yard drive to make the core 21-13.

Dre'Shun Carr scored again to tie the score 21-21 after Daniel Carr's successful 2-point conversion.

Berkeley had a possible go-ahead touchdown, a 209 Dress touchdown pass called back on an ineligible receiver downfield.

Momentum for much of the second half had swung in Midland Valley's favor after the Mustangs tied the score 21-21 in the third quarter.

"We made the plays happen in the fourth quarter," Cruce said. "Our defense stepped it up again. They played their hearts out tonight."

Dress late score propels Berkeley

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 15, 2014 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 7

Length: 318 words

Byline: Dan Brown

The Independent

Body

Joseph Dress scored two touchdowns, the game winner coming on a 1-yard dive with under two minutes left in the game, as the Berkeley Stags downed Midland Valley, 28-21, Friday night to advance to the third round of the Class AAA playoffs.

The Stags (8-4, 5-0) will travel to Hartsville next Friday as the Red Foxes (11-0, 5-0) shut out Georgetown 42-0. Midland Valley ends its season 7-5.

Dress capped a late fourth quarter drive with a 1-yard airborne dive to give the Stags the lead. On the previous play, the senior quarterback carried half the Mustang defense 39 yards before going down at the 1-yard line.

Dress said they d been working on that play all night.

We had them set up for it where I handed the ball the Simmons, but they cut off the inside lane and I pulled it back and took off.

The TD was his second of the night, his first another short yardage run, this one from 2 yards out to tie the score at 7-7 in the first quarter.

Midland Valley scored on its opening drive when quarterback Daniel Carr capped a 64-yard drive with a 1-yard sweep.

The Mustangs took their only lead of the game, capitalizing on Berkeley turning the ball over on downs at their own 20-yard line. Four plays later Dre Shun Carr powered in from 4 yards out to give Midland Valley the lead 13-7 after the missed extra point.

The Stags took the lead with just 32 seconds remaining in the half on a Leon Simmons 11-yard run. Vance Bailey s kick gave Berkeley the lead going into the locker room, 14-13.

On its first possession in the third quarter, Simmons scored again, this time from a yard out, capping a 71-yard drive to make the score 21-13.

Dre Shun Carr scored again to tie the score 21-21 after Daniel Carr s successful 2-point conversion.

Dress late score propels Berkeley

I truly believe these kids have earned God s favor, said Berkeley Coach Jeff Cruce, who saw his team win their seventh straight. There was some divine intervention out there tonight.

Load-Date: November 15, 2014

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Stags fan proud of Region 8AAA title

Nov 17, 2014

Dear Editor:

For myself and many other Berkeley Stag football fans, the first three-and-a-half years of Coach Jeff Cruce's tenure have been full of disappointment.

Watching the Stags fall behind 48-0 at Summerville back in September was the low-bottom point for sure.

I can honestly say after that performance, I thought our chances in the region were slim and none.

With this in mind, I have been amazed the last five games on how this team has turned things around, almost 180 degrees.

I am not ashamed of my past viewpoints nor embarrassed to admit that perhaps I've mis-judged Coach Cruce's ability to win football games.

I believe Coach Cruce and his staff have stepped it up. I believe our practices have become sharper and more intense, the play calling much smarter... they have been willing to move players around to both sides of the ball, and perhaps, most importantly, they have got the team to play with a team-first attitude.

The 24-17 victory over Hanahan was a testament to the philosophy as described in the paragraph above.

Congratulations are in order to Coach Cruce, his staff, and all the players on a Region 8AAA title.

With success and talent of both the JV and B teams, it would appear that Coach Cruce has turned the Corner!

Good luck in the playoffs and Go Stags!

P.S. I believe the Stags had at least four players that could have been selected for post-season all-star games - Dress, Thompson, Witherspoon and Williams. I am disappointed for all of them.

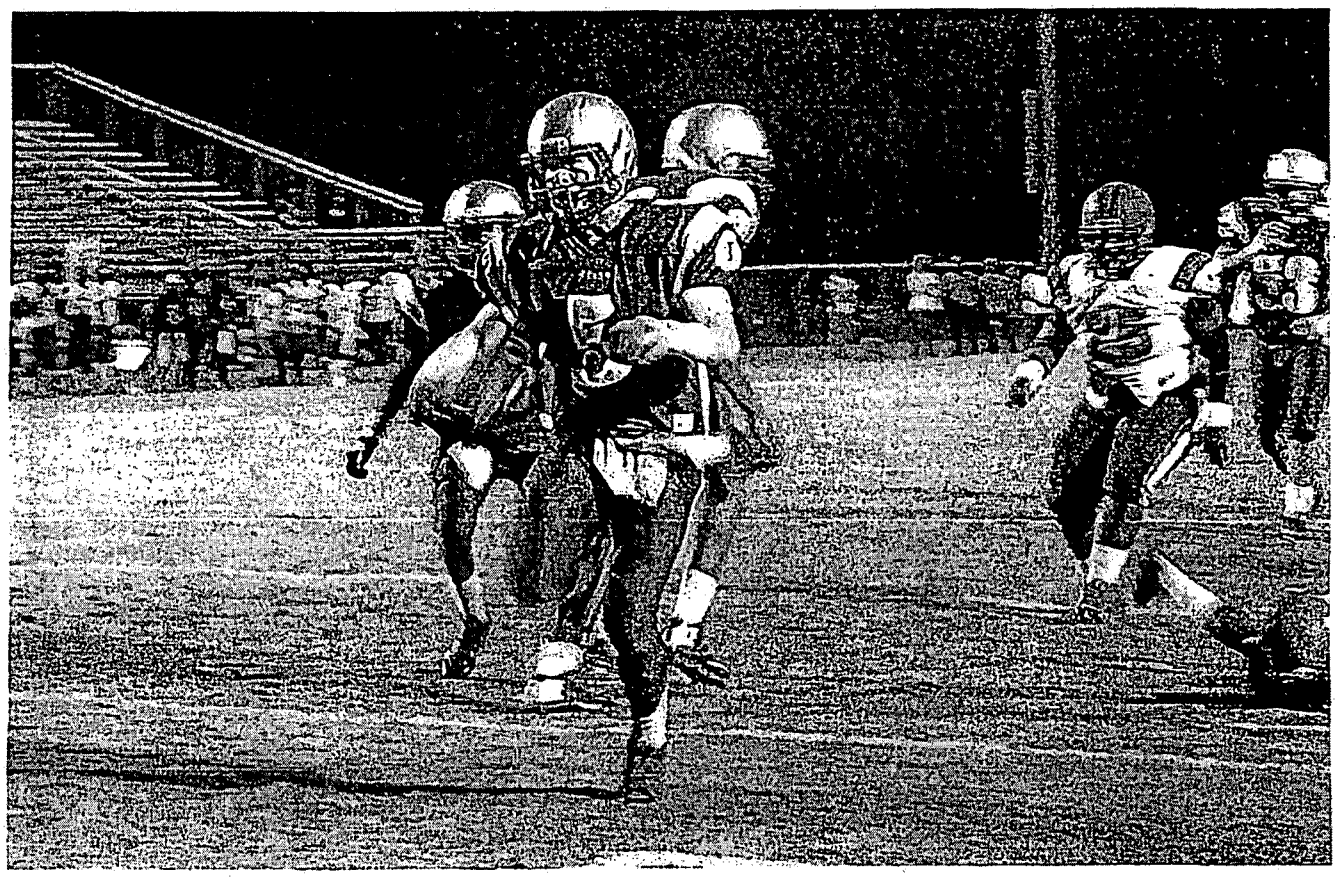
Brian L. Chandler

Moncks Corner

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-best-game-required-to-advance-against-hartsville/article_d19527f5-7907-5364-b4ac-d9cc45eb16f7.html

Stags' best game required to advance against Hartsville

Dan Brown Nov 18, 2014



Dan Brown/Independent Joseph Dress has carried the Stags to seven straight wins dating back to the start of the Region 8AAA schedule Oct. 5

Buy Now

When the Berkeley Stags line up against Hartsville on Friday night, there will be very little margin for error against the top-ranked Red Foxes.

But can the Stags win against the number one team in the state?

Stags Coach Jeff Cruce thinks so.

"Look at what happened last week with Goose Creek and River Bluff," he said. "You only have to be better than the other guy one time."

Cruce knows, though, his Stags will have to hit the field firing on all cylinders.

"We're going to have to play our best game of the year to win against them," he said. "But have we played our best game yet? No, I don't think we have. We've played some good ball games, but we can be better."

Berkeley edged Midland Valley 28-21 to advance to the third round matchup against Hartsville.

Should Berkeley prevail over the Red Foxes, the Stags would play host to the Lower State Finals on Friday, Nov. 28.

"Hartsville is a good football team and they're hungry," Cruce said. "Last year they lost in the third round and have come back this year hungry and motivated. They are number one in the state for a reason."

The Red Foxes shut out Georgetown 42-0 in the second round on Nov. 14 to set up the showdown Berkeley.

Hartsville is 12-0 with playoff wins over Orangeburg-Wilkinson in addition to Georgetown. The Red Foxes have won 37-of-39 games dating back to 2012 when Hartsville won the state title.

The Red Foxes offense averages almost 43 points a game running the Wing-T, engineered by quarterback Matt Lynch.

Hartsville returned its entire backfield in Brian Rivers, Shy McPhail and Aryon Dudley.

Lynch's primary target has been Daquan Benjamin, who hauled in 31 passes for 567 yards and five TD's.

On defense, linebackers Ray Coe and Datavious Wilson lead the Red Foxes charge. Wilson leads the team with 91 tackles, while Coe will play in the North-South All-Star game.

"We can run at them and be successful," Cruce said. "I think we'll be able to score on them. If we can make our plays on offense and stop them on defense... I like our chances."

Kickoff in Hartsville is at 7:30 p.m. The bus leaves from Berkeley High School at 3 p.m.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-cinderella-run-ends-with---loss-to-hartsville/article_d86cfb3f-e6a2-547e-8a59-3b222191bd84.html

Stags' Cinderella run ends with 55-0 loss to Hartsville

Dan Brown Nov 21, 2014

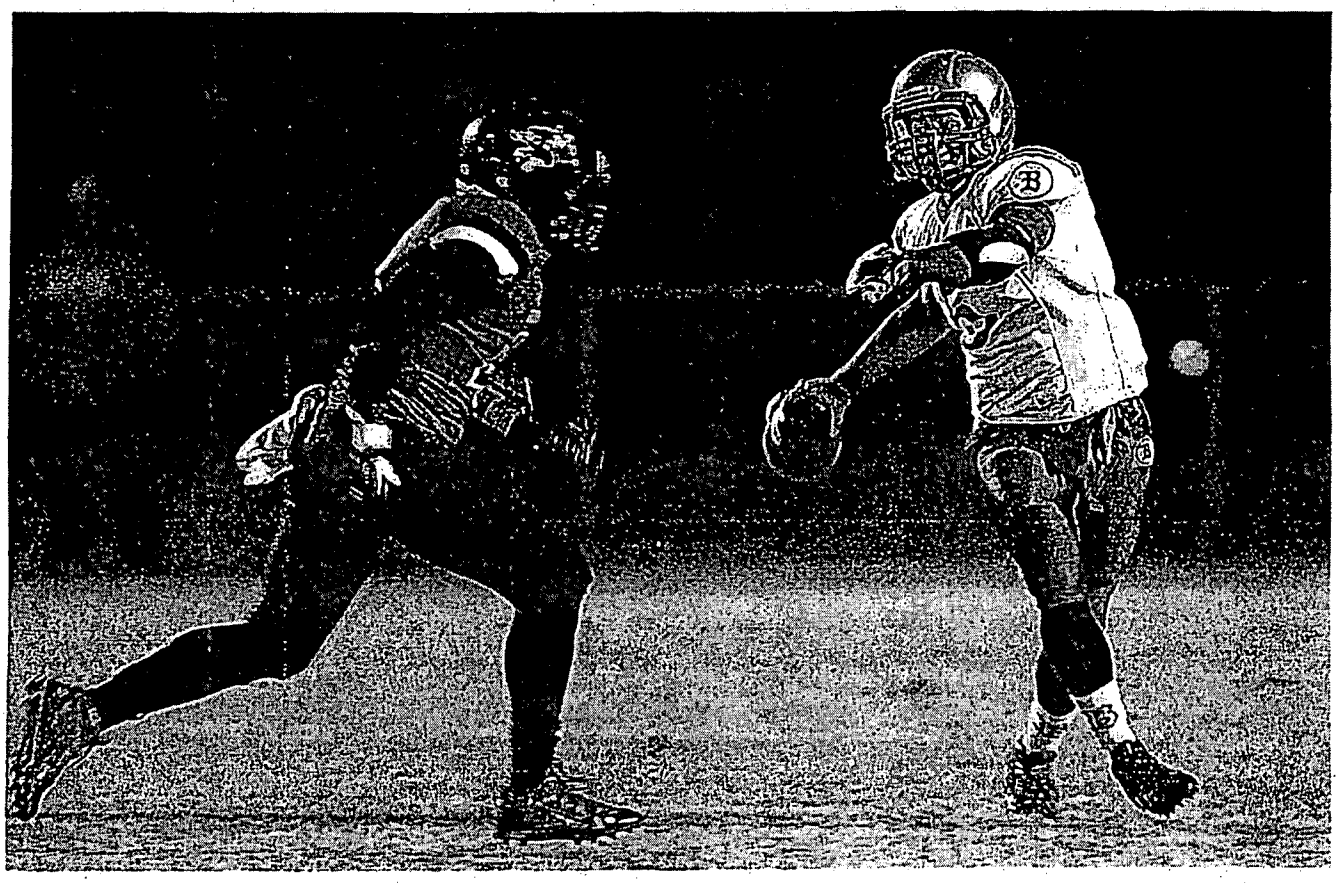


Photo by Christopher McKagen, Hartsville Messenger Berkeley quarterback Joseph Dress throws on the run while being pursued by Hartsville's Ray Coe in the third round of the Class 3A playoffs on Friday.

Buy Now

The Hartsville Red Foxes played the role of the evil stepmother in ending the Berkeley Stags' Cinderella run through the Class AAA playoffs with a 55-0 whitewashing to advance to the Lower State finals.

Aryon Dudley ran for three touchdowns and Jalen Jacobs added a pair of touchdowns in the fourth quarter to help pace the Red Fox ground attack. Along with runs by Brian Rivers and Shy McPhail, Hartsville amassed more than 500 runs rushing, and 643 yards of total office while the Red Foxes defense held the Stags to just 149 yards of total offense.

The 13-0 Red Foxes advance to the Lower State finals against region foe Marlboro County, who knocked off defending state champs Myrtle Beach 42-17.

The number one ranked team in the state showed why they belonged at the top of the heap.

Hartsville was too much for the Stags.

They were too good.

"They were better than we were," Cruce said. "That's all I can say about it. I don't see anybody beating them."

The Stags took the opening kickoff and put together a strong first-possession drive, moving 57 yards to the Red Fox 15-yard before the drive stalled on a turnover of downs.

This would be all the offense Berkeley could muster as the 2012 Class AAA state champs punched four first half touchdowns on the board to put the game away early, 28-0 going into the locker room.

In the second half, Hartsville matched their four first-half touchdowns with four more to win easily, 55-0.

Dudley put the Red Foxes on the board with a 15-yard run to cap an 85-yard opening drive, then added a 1-yard plunge to give HHS a quick 14-0 lead.

Following a quick Stags three-and-out, Rivers broke free for an 82-yard gallop to make the score 21-0. Dudley iced the scoring in the first half with his third score to take both teams into the locker room with the state's top-ranked team up 28-0.

In the third quarter, McPhail's touchdown came from 57-yards out, his 23rd TD of the year.

The Stags finish the season with an 8-5 mark, which included a 7-game winning streak and a Region 8AAA championship.

"We peaked at the right time," said Cruce. "We had a good run, won seven in a row, won the region. It's a good turnaround story, but Hartsville was just better."

Berkeley rallied after an abysmal 1-4 start through the non-region schedule in September to run the table through Region 8AAA and win their first region championship of the Jeff Cruce Era and the Stags' first since their 2009 Class AAAA Div. II state championship.

Hartsville rolls over Berkeley

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 22, 2014 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 7

Length: 505 words

Byline: cmckagen@florencenews.com

Body

HARTSVILLE Hartsville s Red Foxes notched their second shutout of the playoffs Friday night with a 55-0 rout over Berkeley, gaining a blistering 582 yards on the ground.

Hartsville will host Marlboro County for the Class AAA Lower State title.

We played really well again tonight, said Hartsville coach Jeff Calabrese. I thought we did a great job holding them out of the end zone, second shutout in a row. But this one, our kids have been doing some miraculous things, and I think we played great defense. Berkeley s a very good football team, and I just think we played really well tonight.

Hartsville s three studs in the backfield Brian Rivers, Aryon Dudley and Shy McPhail each eclipsed 150 yards in the game.

Offensively, we had some big runs early and some stuff like that, Calabrese said. And I think the kids understand the plan. And they executed the plan, and they executed it fast. It all just came together, and they put in a performance like this.

Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce said his squad had a great season, finishing 9-5 after starting 1-4.

I mean, we had a good run, won seven in a row, won the region, he said. It s a good turnaround story, but they were better than we were. That s all I can say about it. I don t see anybody beating them, but I saw Marlboro County. They re pretty good too. But that s pretty impressive getting two teams from the same region playing each other.

The Stags received the opening kick off and came out strong. Berkeley quickly moved the ball 60 yards down to the Hartsville 14. However, the Stags offense turned the ball over on downs after quarterback Joseph Dress couldn t complete a pass on fourth down.

The 14-yard line proved to be as close as Berkeley came to scoring all night.

From there, the Red Foxes jumped out to a 14-0 lead on two touchdown runs from Dudley in the first quarter. Rivers followed suit with an 82-yard scoring rush just minutes into the second. McPhail broke three tackles following Berkeley s next possession and sprinted 52 yards to put the Red Foxes up 28-0 at halftime.

Hartsville rolls over Berkeley

Hartsville s defense forced Berkeley to punt on five of its six possessions in the first half.

McPhail added another scoring run on the opening possession of the third quarter. The fifth back in Hartsville s rotation, Jalen Jacobs, also tacked on two rushing scores late in the fourth against a deflated Stags defense.

Hartsville tallied 643 yards of total offense while holding Berkeley to just 149.

Rivers finished with 187 yards on 14 carries with a touchdown, followed by Dudley s 182 yards on 17 carries and three touchdowns. McPhail finished the night with 153 yards on 12 carries with two touchdowns. Jacobs added 75 yards and the two scores on just four carries.

Heading into the Lower State championship, Hartsville held its past 13 opponents to an average of 10 points per game while scoring 44 points each outing.

Kickoff against Marlboro County, which knocked off Myrtle Beach in the third round, is set for 7:30 p.m. at Kelleytown Stadium in Hartsville.

Load-Date: November 22, 2014

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With two teams left, an early peek at 15

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

November 26, 2014 Wednesday

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Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Coaches everywhere say the best way to gauge the success of a football season is whether or not you are practicing on Thanksgiving. The traditional holiday is the measuring stick, because if a team is practicing prior to taking part in the big meal, it is still a part of the football playoffs.

For the Timberland Wolves, the Thanksgiving Day practice is one day before the Class AA Division II state championship game, played on Friday at River Bluff High School in Lexington.

The other Lowcountry team still practicing is Fort Dorchester, which hosts Hillcrest on Friday night with the winner advancing to the Division I-AAAA state championship game next weekend at Williams-Brice Stadium in Columbia.

The season ended last Friday night for Stratford, Summerville, Woodland and Berkeley, while Northwood Academy capped its 13-0 season with a 33-27 state championship win over Florence Christian in the SCISA Class AA finals on Saturday afternoon.

With the official end of the 2014 football season drawing closer, now is a good time to look to the future. What lies ahead for local teams in 2015? Will a surprise team make headway into contender status? How will the traditional powers stack up?

James Island failed to make the AAAA playoffs this season, its first under new head coach Ike Allred. The Trojans still have significant steps to take, especially defensively, but the offense next year looks to be solid. Sophomore quarterback Gage Moloney and sophomore wide receiver Jordan McDaniel will be two of the better players in the area next fall.

Ashley Ridge returns one of the state s top prospects at quarterback in Steven Duncan, but the Swamp Foxes do lose great production at running back and wide receiver. The question next season will be how much the defense improves after marginal improvement this season.

Summerville head coach John McKissick stated after his team s loss to Fort Dorchester last Friday that he plans to return for a 64th season at the helm. That may well be the case but don t be surprised if the 88-year-old coach reconsiders during the winter.

The 2015 Green Wave will be much less experienced on defense but will return quarterback Sawyer Bridges and running back Chris Felder.

Goose Creek may have a new head coach next season as Chuck Reedy mulls retirement. Reedy stated recently that he feels next year s Gators squad is potentially better than this year s 10-win team. Who is next line as Goose Creek s premier tailback? Possibly junior Todd McCoy.

Stratford loses great production at quarterback and running back but suffers the biggest losses on a good defensive unit. Linebackers TJ Deveaux and Issac Greer, along with safety Ty reik Faulks, are major losses.

Berkeley had a great run to end this season, winning seven in a row before a loss to Hartsville last weekend. The Stags lose great production at quarterback in senior Joseph Dress, but head coach Jeff Cruce feels very confident about the talent level on the junior varsity and B-team.

St. John s won eight games this season and head coach Brad Bowles loses two key seniors in linebackers Taiwan Green and KC Lowry. However, the coach played a significant number of underclassmen this season and the Islanders could be poised for a championship run in 2015.

Wando returns Bailey Hart at quarterback next fall, as well as running back Kevin Brown and receiver Ortre Smith, but the Warriors had a lot of starting seniors on defense and along the line.

Hanahan should be a solid AAA contender as well with returning stars such as receiver Sam Denmark, linebacker Tre Smalls and nose tackle Dominique Green.

Bishop England also loses several key seniors, but freshman quarterback Leo Albano and junior lineman Blake Jeresaty headline a solid group of contributing underclassmen this season.

Cane Bay was one of the most improved teams in the area this season. The Cobras were 0-11 last season and improved to 5-7 this season, including close losses to Summerville, Goose Creek and North Augusta.

Head coach Russell Zehr loses some key performers, including linebacker Matt Rudy and quarterback Devin Dingle, but the Cobras will return a host of underclassmen that saw extensive playing time during the 2014 season.

The area s top two SCISA programs Northwood and Porter-Gaud must replace major contributors at quarterback next fall. Northwood senior Will Lloyd threw 41 touchdown passes in leading the Chargers to the state title. Porter-Gaud s Kris Johnson topped 1,000 yards in rushing and passing this fall.

Load-Date: November 26, 2014

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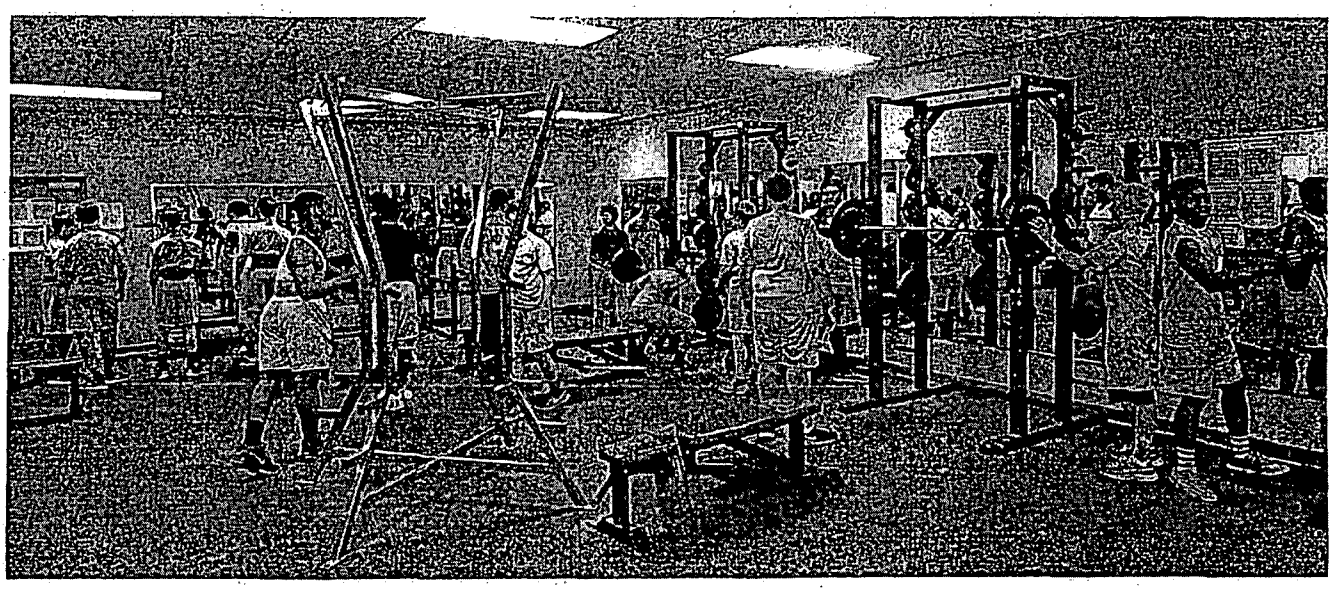
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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/berkeley-middle-school-weight-training-program-pays-dividends/article_d68b25e9-720d-5edd-9b18-0966431d2e3f.html

Berkeley Middle School weight training program pays dividends

Dan Brown Feb 21, 2015



Dan Brown/Independent The Berkeley Middle School 8th grade weight training class puts student athletes on the same page as their high school older brothers and sisters.

Buy Now

When Berkeley Stags Athletic Director and Head Football Coach Jeff Cruce took over the Stags' athletic program in the spring of 2011, he had two primary goals he wanted to achieve immediately.

The first was establishing an athletics hall of fame. The second implementing a school-wide weight training program for both boys and girls athletics and extending that weight training program down to the middle school ranks.

At no time has the fruits of this endeavor proved more evident than this fall and winter with the success of the JV and B team programs.

Since Cruce's arrival the baseball and softball teams have captured a pair of region championships each, the track teams have battled for region titles, and success has been seen across the board on the varsity level.

This same success has begun to show up at the middle school level as well.

"We gave them the opportunity and the facilities to improve and they've taken it and have run with it," he said. "I'm very proud of what we've been able to accomplish over there at the middle school. They have a weight training program in place that can't be found anywhere else in the county."

During Cruce's first two years at Berkeley he personally taught two weight training classes at Berkeley Middle School before hiring Blake Culberson to come in and take over the program.

"Blake's done a great job in maintaining our program and making sure these kids buy into what we're trying to do," Cruce said. "I'm very proud of these kids and how they've bought into this program. The results are showing up across the board. Every Berkeley athletic team this year has made the playoffs."

Culberson, who also serves as an assistant baseball and football coach for the varsity Stags likes it that he's getting these kids ready at an early age.

"I think it's awesome for these middle school boys and girls to learn the basics of weight training. It's gives them a chance to learn the correct techniques before getting to the high school."

Culberson added students are having fun while working out.

"The boys and girls enjoy the class and work hard," he said. "We have a seventh grade and eighth grade boys class as well as a seventh grade and eighth grade girls class."

Berkeley Middle School Principal Mike Wilkerson said the advance physical education weight training program gives his students the opportunity to prepare themselves to be successful in their chosen sport.

"The class combines elements of strength and cardiovascular training similar to what they will have at the high school," he said. "By being exposed to this program early they have a better understanding of the expectations and level of commitment necessary to be successful at the next level."

Wilkerson said he's exicted to be able to offer this opportunity to all his middle school students and not just football players as had often been the case around Berkeley County in the past.

"We are excited to be able to offer this opportunity to female students as well, because we have so many female middle school students making an impact on B-Team and JV teams such as volleyball, basketball and soccer and in some cases varsity programs such as tennis and softball"

Wilkerson added the dividends of weight training programs like these have become very apparent with the success of Berkeley's lower echelon developmental teams like JV and B teams.

"With the recent success of the JV basketball, B-Team football, and middle school wrestling teams, we believe this program at the middle school is having a significant impact on that success and validates what we are doing."

Wilkerson, being an ex-jock and former coach, appreciates the benefits of an early developmental weight training program like this.

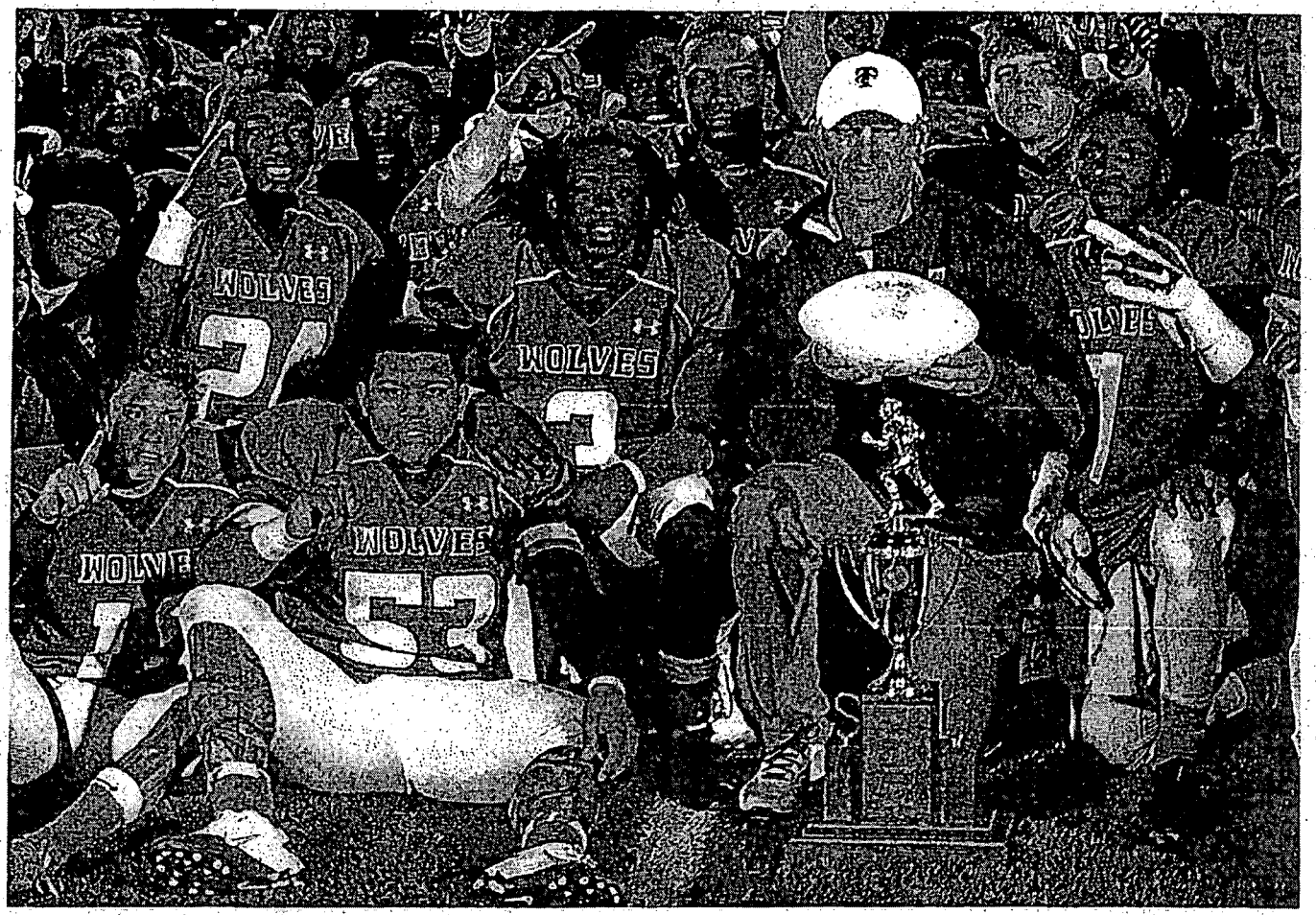
"Being involved in athletics most of my life as both a player and a coach, I understand the important role athletics plays in many students' lives. I'm happy that we can provide this opportunity to develop our young athletes."

Wilkerson said such a relationship between high schools and their feeder schools is important for both student and school.

"The collaborative effort between the middle school and the high school athletic department has enabled us to provide outstanding facilities and equipment to our students in this program."

Athletic directors Cruce, Craig and McDowell honored

Mar 21, 2015



File Photo Timberland Athletic Director Art Craig, pictured following a state title win, is one of three county athletic directors to be honored.

Three Berkeley County School District Athletic Directors were named Athletic Director of the Year for their regions.

Tim McDowell, Assistant Principal and Athletic Director of Cane Bay High School, was chosen for Region 7, Class 4-A.

Art Craig, Athletic Director at Timberland High School was chosen for Region 7, Class 2-A.

Finally, Jeff Cruce, Athletic Director at Berkeley High School was chosen for Region 8, Class 3-A.

All eight regions in all four classifications nominate an athletic director for their region.

Regions choose athletic directors who do an outstanding job managing the athletic programs at their schools, who are actively involved in their classification and who promote the welfare of the student athletes in their school, region and classification.

Executive Director of the South Carolina Administrators Association John Carlisle: "The athletic directors at the school level are the ones who make a daily impact on their coaches and athletes. They are responsible for the coaches, assistant coaches, fields, athletic facilities, transportation of teams and athletic budgets.

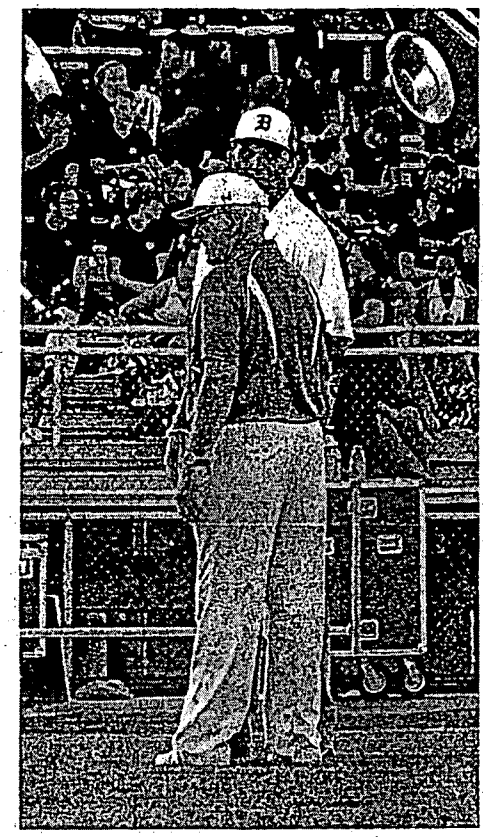
"They also interact with players and their parents. The list of what they do goes on and on. It is a pleasure for SCAAA to recognize athletic directors every year for doing their jobs so well."

The board of the SCAAA will recognize the nominees with official certificates.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/five-class-football-coming-with-schsl-reclassification/article_cae42136-3ef9-59ba-99cd-00a082ac12d1.html

Five-class football coming with SCHSL reclassification

Dan Brown Apr 27, 2015



Dan Brown/Independent With the SCHSL's plan to divide its member schools into five classifications, the Berkeley and Summerville annual game could take on renewed meaning.

Buy Now

Five-class football is coming.

So are the other sports too, but the immediate focus, of course in the South, is football. Coming in 2016 South Carolina's high school sports will be split into five classifications with the addition of a Class AAAAA.

That's a lot of A's.

Exactly who goes where has yet to be determined, but Berkeley High School Athletic Director Jeff Cruce, who is a member of the South Carolina High School League's Executive Committee, said the creation of five classes has been a move that's been long overdue.

"It's designed to help competition of course," he said. "But it also helps financially as well with better gates and less travel costs."

Sports with contests scheduled during the week shouldn't have to worry about two-hour bus rides on a school night, Cruce said.

"It just makes better sense logisticially to do it this way," he said.

The SCHSL will begin tabulating enrollment numbers to decide who plays where in 2016 and in what classification. For Berkeley, it could very well mean a return to AAAA, which the Stags have not seen since the 2009-2010 school year.

"They still have a lot to work out logistically, but should we move up to AAAA we could very well be in a region with Goose Creek and Summerville," Cruce said.

This would happen though without impacting the playoffs since Goose Creek and Summerville, while in the same region as Berkeley, would both be AAAAA teams.

"All those details haven't been worked out yet," Cruce said.

Also gone is the two-division format in all existing classifications except AAA.

"One class, one state champion," Cruce said. "That's the way it should be. I was never a fan of having two state champions in a classification. If you win it you win it. No more split state champions. You don't have to share it with anybody."

While Cruce has not been a fan of the split state titles, he understands schools play the hands they're dealt.

"You play according to the rules they hand you, and if you're playing in two divisions you can only do what your rules say. Winning a state championship is hard, whether the class is split or not, but this way brings it down to one champion per class."

Cruce said the reclassification doesn't just benefit football.

"This will help the minor sports like volleyball, soccer and track," he said. "The spring sports like baseball and softball will benefit by more geographically friendly regions."

For example, Cruce said the Hilton Head based teams like Hilton Head, Beaufort, Battery Creek and Bluffton could form their own region.

"Smaller regions that are closer together will help everyone," he said.

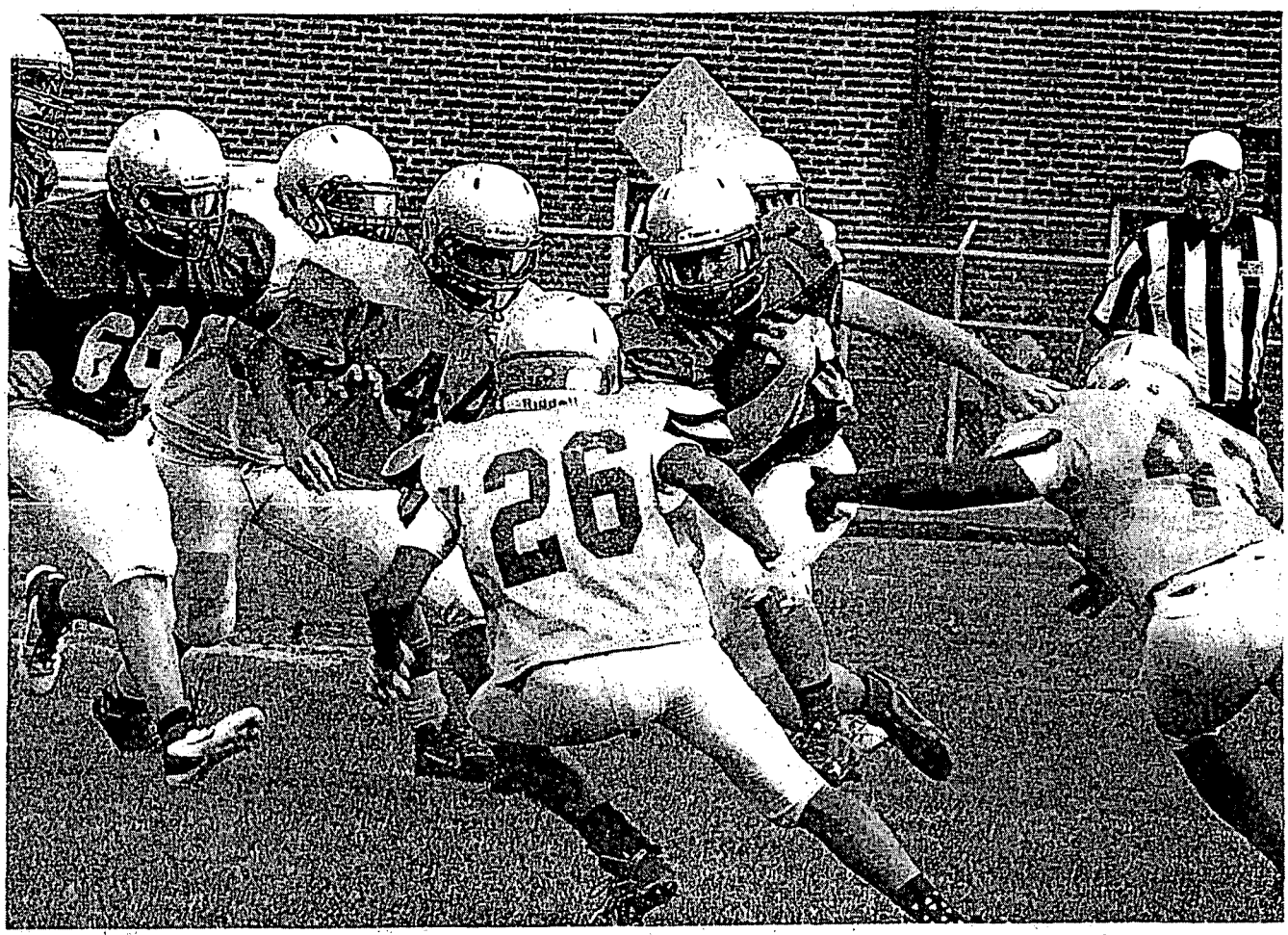
The vote passed by a 10-5 count. The SCHSL will work over the summer to find the best fit for each member school by geography, size and rivalry as some of the contributing factors reviewed during the reclassification process.

A rough draft of the new classifications should be ready by August with the final tally being published in September.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/berkeley-takes-first-steps-toward-region-title-defense/article_53e21ec0-e193-5b2e-886f-2c4b346b16c4.html

Berkeley takes first steps toward region title defense

Dan Brown May 29, 2015



Dan Brown/Independent I can see for Miles and Miles... The Stags' Miles Austin cuts through traffic during the Berkeley Blue and Gold spring game.

Buy Now

The Stag Nation has taken its first look at the 2015 Berkeley football team and the initial reviews are promising.

According to Coach Jeff Cruce, entering his fifth year at the helm of Berkeley football, he'll field a younger team this year, but a good team, after losing 24 seniors to graduation.

"We lost a lot of quality seniors ... and we have a lot of holes to fill, but this is the best group of young skill players I've had since I've been here," Cruce said.

It showed in the Stags' annual spring game on Wednesday, May 27 with the Berkeley Blue offense scoring four times against a solid Berkeley Gold defense.

"The best thing that's come from this spring is, the attitude has been tremendous," Cruce said. "The comaraderie has been tremendous. They are building each other up."

Cruce added that his team has listened, that character matters, and that the Stags are living the motto as opposed to paying it lip service.

"The kids are buying into what we're doing. They're excited. From a coaching standpoint, it's been a pleasure to work with these kids this spring."

Cruce said his team has gotten a taste of playoff football after advancing into the third round in 2014.

"We got beat by a better team in Hartsville," he said. "They've gotten a taste of what it's like to advance in the playoffs."

Cruce has to prepare his team to play teams like Hartsville, which means competing against the teams on his schedule that are similar to Hartsville — like Summerville and Stratford.

"We want to get these kids in the mindset to stand up to teams like Hartsville's," he said. "We're working hard with that. We've got to change the results against Summerville and Stratford."

The Stags are 5-15 against the Green Wave, and 6-14 against the Knights over the last 20 years.

Cruce remains eternally optimistic, and this year's team, he hopes, will stand up well.

"Overall it's been one of the most productive springs we've had in the five years I've been here," he said. "Our entire athletic department is getting better. When you look at it as a whole Berkeley athletics is really improving."

Junior Darius Douglas slides into the starting job under center, replacing Joseph Dress who moves on to Catawba College in the fall. With the significant number of snaps Douglas took during his sophomore season, Cruce said there wouldn't be much of a learning curve when the season begins at the Sertoma Classic on Aug. 14.

"Except for losing a few days to a bad shoulder, Darius should hit the ground running this fall," he said. "He has a tremendous arm and can run. He might be a little faster than Joseph (Dress) was, but he's a cut and dash runner where Dress was more of a power runner.

"Joseph Dress was the most complete quarterback I've ever coached," Cruce said of his departing signal caller. "But we are looking for good things out of Darius Douglas."

The Stags are big in the trenches with seniors Danny Long, Jeremy Poinsette, Corey White and Jaleel Cromedy. Harun Scott and D.J. Robinson provide two-headed depth at tight end and linebacker. Cruce said the players will see significant action on both offense and defense.

"Scott and Robinson can spell each other on both sides of the ball," Cruce said. "They are both effective on offense and defense. They will see plenty of action."

Cruce also mentioned D.J. Chisolm, who did not play in the game because he's still in eighth grade.

"As soon as school lets out and he's officially a freshman he'll be working out in passing drills."

Douglas, Chisolm and Nolan Lytchfield have a wide variety of targets to hit in Freddie Faison, Harry Dorsey, Supreme Scott, Daveon Moore, Corbin Fiddie, Austin Wyndham, Matthew Dress and Isreal Mukuamu, plus Austin Miles, Jordan Brown, Aerimon Gipson, Tearell Pinckney and Quentin Scott coming out of the backfield.

"We are extremely deep in the receiver corps," Cruce said. "We are also the deepest we've been in the backfield since I've been here.

"These are good character kids on this team. They know what they have to do and what's expected of them on and off the field."

Berkeley is scheduled to play James Island in the Sertoma Classic, and open the season on Aug. 21 at Johnsonville. The Stags face Stratford on the road on Aug. 28 before opening at home against Summerville on Sept. 4.

A quick peek at prep football season

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

June 16, 2015 Tuesday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 692 words

Byline: David Shelton

Special to The Post and Courier

Body

In today s world of 7-on-7 passing leagues and year-round training, the high school, college and professional football seasons never really end.

Thus, it s never too early to start talking high school football in the Lowcountry. The official start of preseason practice is about six weeks away and the 2015 Sertoma Classic is a week earlier this year Aug. 13-14. And, if nothing else, an early look at area football will get the conversation started.

There is already major change in the coaching ranks in the area with the retirement of Goose Creek s Chuck Reedy and the (apparent) impending retirement announcement of Summerville coach John McKissick. These two changes come one year after Stratford s Ray Stackley retired from his position.

If the season started today, the Fort Dorchester Patriots might be the best option as the area s top team. Steve LaPrad s bunch is coming off its best year ever an 11-win season that ended with a loss in the Division I-AAAA state semifinal. LaPrad returns two of the area s top offensive linemen in seniors John Simpson and Chris Morales, along with running back Datron James, who topped 1,400 yards rushing last season. Throw in super sophomore Dakereon Joyner at quarterback and the Patriots look to be quite formidable offensively. The defense lost outstanding talent along the front, but finding solid defensive athletes has never been an issue at Fort Dorcheser.

Goose Creek has a new head man as former defensive coordinator Chris Candor assumes Reedy s position this fall. The Gators will again be state title contenders despite losses in personnel. Senior Dominique Jefferson does return at quarterback and defensive end Javon Kinlaw is one of the state s top 10 senior prospects.

Berkeley won eight games last season and head coach Jeff Cruce has expressed optimism about the 2015 season with solid athletes returning. Replacing the production of quarterback Joseph Dress will be the Stags biggest challenge.

Stratford won nine games last season and has some key players to replace, not to mention longtime offensive line coach Tony Smith and departed offensive coordinator Dennie McDaniel now the head coach at St. John s. The Knights turn to senior J.D. Davis to run the offense at quarterback. Davis is a Citadel baseball commitment and should give Stratford a steady leader under center.

James Island begins Year 2 under coach Ike Allred feeling they can be region title contenders in 2015. Allred returns quarterback Gage Moloney (2,077 passing yards), running back Buss Hamilton (1,177 rushing yards) and Jordan McDaniel (70 receptions). The Trojans must improve defensively if they hope to challenge the likes of Goose Creek, Stratford and Wando in Region 7-AAAA.

Speaking of Wando, coach Jimmy Noonan also returns a bevy of talented skill players, most notably senior quarterback Bailey Hart (1,807 passing yards), junior running back Kevin Brown (687 rushing yards) and junior receiver OrTre Smith (28 receptions, 441 yards). The 6-4 Smith already is garnering national recruiting attention.

As for Summerville, it appears veteran quarterback Sawyer Bridges will not play his senior season as he focuses on his impending baseball career at South Carolina. The Green Wave also lost most of their starting defense and two key offensive linemen not to mention a head coach who roamed the sidelines for 63 seasons.

In terms of players, the Lowcountry will have a host of players ranking among the best in the state at their respective positions.

Ashley Ridge senior Steven Duncan is the top quarterback in the area. The 6-4, 220-pounder threw for more than 2,000 yards and 23 touchdowns last season and has received more than a handful of college offers this spring.

West Ashley s Justin Berry also returns at quarterback, along with Moloney and Hart at James Island and Wando, respectively.

Bishop England lineman Blake Jeresaty will be among the top seniors in the area. Hanahan receiver Sam Denmark is a Virginia Tech commitment and linebacker Tre Smalls is one of the tops at his position. Ashley Ridge linebacker Brandon Brown is one of the most productive tacklers in the upcoming senior class.

Load-Date: June 16, 2015

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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-win-stratford-s--on--tournament/article_c1ef45ef-6a9c-5605-b90a-b20a34676b4f.html

Stags win Stratford's 7-on-7 tournament

Dan Brown Jul 20, 2015



The Berkeley Stags football team finished 7-1 in the annual Stratford 7 on 7 passing tournament from July 14-16 and earned the team title based on their record.

Buy Now

Ask any football coach and they'll be the first to dismiss football titles won in June and July out of hand.

Championships aren't won in July. They are won over Thanksgiving weekend.

Every football diehard fan knows this.

But still, it's better to win one over the summer season, than not win one.

With a 7-1 mark, the Berkeley Stags took top honors in this summer's Stratford 7-on-7 passing tournament with a young team that is supposed to be rebuilding. It seems nobody copied the Stags on that memo.

With a confident up-and-coming bunch of youngsters eager to get their feet wet — many of whom have yet to lose a game while in high school, — these former JV and B-team players will get their chance to shine on the varsity gridiron this fall.

"We have a group of kids eager to prove themselves this year," said Stags Coach Jeff Cruce. "This is the best group of kids I've had since I've been here, the best character group for sure."

Cruce said this summer has proven to be one of the most productive summers he's had in a long while.

"Our work ethic has been outstanding this summer," he said. "And we played very well at Stratford. This summer we've felt like we needed to instill the work ethic they needed to be successful, and they bought into it."

Cruce said his team is solid at the skills positions with Darius Douglas and D.J. Chisolm having good summers under center.

"Darius Douglas is getting better the more he's out there, and the young Chisolm kid has had a good summer."

These kids aren't accustomed to losing, despite their inexperience on the varsity level.

"Some of these kids have not lost a game in high school," Cruce said, citing Chisolm's undefeated record in B-team football and JV basketball.

But this isn't B team or JV ball they're playing this summer. The young kids and the older players are meshing well, according to Cruce.

"We've got a good mix of old and young," he said citing veterans Supreme Scott and Jordan Brown providing leadership over the summer scrimmage and practice season.

"This is just a good character group leading these young kids. The biggest thing, this group, these are all my kids. No more holdovers from the previous coaching regime. These kids have been learning my way of doing things and what we expect out of them since seventh grade, and they've bought into it big time. This is the way we do it, and how we do it."

Cruce mentioned Freddie Faison and Daveon Moore as standing out in scrimmages this summer.

"Our skill position players are producing. Our offense is clicking right now. We have played some of our best football over the summer."

With a little less than a month until the start of the regular season on the road against Johnsonville, the Stags are fine-tuning their game.

"Our biggest improvement this summer has been defensively," Cruce said. "I'm pretty excited about where we are and what we've done. Our schedule this fall is competitive and the kids are excited about who we're playing and when we play them."

This includes games against longtime rivals Stratford and Summerville, against whom, historically, the Stags have not fared well over the years.

"We're 4-14 against Stratford, and something like 5-14 against Summerville. I told the kids, if you want to change the course around here, change that."

Fall practice kicks off in August. The regular season begins at Johnsonville on Aug. 21.

The Stags have a month.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/practice-set-to-begin-for-area-football-teams/article_30ad5ceb-eb9d-55ab-896f-83b8478605ac.html

Practice set to begin for area football teams

Dan Brown Jul 27, 2015



Dan Brown/Independent Timberland Coach Art Craig, looking over running back Josh Alston's shoulder, rides a 14-game winning streak as the reigning Class AA Div. II state champion into the 2015 season.

APP. 0885

The official start to the high school fall sports season is right around the corner, set to begin over the weekend.

Area football teams have been chomping at the bit since last December, and working out since May to prepare for the coming fall.

The biggest stories around the Lowcountry involve change for a pair of stellar football programs.

Summerville legend John McKissick called it a career in June, hanging up the whistle after 63 years on the sidelines. For many in the Lowcountry, there has been no other coach leading the Green Wave than McKissick, the most winning football coach ever on any level of competition with 663 wins.

Summerville hired McKissick's grandson and longtime assistant Joe Call to take over the reins on an interim basis during this transition period.

In Goose Creek, the Gators said goodbye to Chuck Reedy, who announced his retirement back in January. Reedy, a former Clemson assistant, racked up 119 wins and transformed Goose Creek football from an afterthought and local doormat into one of the best high school football programs in the state.

The other big story in this part of the county revolves around 2014 Class AA Div. II state champion Timberland.

Will the Wolves ever lose?

With a 14-game win streak on the line, the Wolves will seek to defend their second gridiron state championship with what has been called the most dangerous Wolves 11 ever to strap on the shoulder pads.

Coach Art Craig is on a mission to turn his football program into a dynasty and has the weapons to run the table again in 2015.

A difference this year is that Timberland will meet up with Dillon late in the playoffs once again, should the fates decide, probably for the Lower State championship.

The Wildcats won the other half of the Class AA Division I state championship, losing just one game early in the season.

Storm clouds are already brewing in anticipation of a late November matchup between the two AA powerhouses.

Berkeley looks to build on its Region 8-AAA championship in 2014, their first under Jeff Cruce. Cruce enters his fifth year at the helm of the Stags.

Berkeley has had its best summer in recent memory, winning the tough 7-on-7 Stratford passing league tournament. No Stags team has ever accomplished such a feat before.

With junior quarterback Darius Douglas stepping under center in the fall, the Stags look to run a high-octane type of offense, though Cruce has said his most pleasant surprise this summer has been his defense.

"These kids have bought in to what we're trying to teach them," Cruce said. "They have good character. They want to win and get better."

Up in Cross, Shaun Wright is looking at his best participation numbers in his six-year stay leading the Trojans, likely dressing out more than 40 varsity players this fall.

"We have had a decent summer," he said. "Most of the skill guys have been here everyday. The guys up front have been hit or miss but the good thing about that is we will lift throughout camp, and the year, so we will eventually catch up."

Wright said the competition at the quarterback and running back positions has been good and their play has shown on the 7-on-7 scrimmage field.

The bottom line, these Trojans are ready to play some football.

"We are ready to get to the season," Wright said. "We look to build some depth where we can rest some guys as we believe that could be key down the stretch. We will start Camp Trojan next Tuesday and then go to Allendale for what should be a very physical scrimmage with them and Williston-Elko and Ridgeland."

Sertoma action has moved up a week to Aug. 13-14, with St. John's Christian Academy making its debut as 8-man football comes to Johnson Hagood Stadium.

"We have been working hard over the summer and getting our work done in the weight room," said John McCall, in his second season. "We're looking forward to showing the Sertoma crowd all the excitement we see every Friday night playing 8-man football."

The regular season kicks off in a little more than three weeks on August. 21.

5 things to watch this high school football season

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

July 31, 2015 Friday, Sports

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Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Preseason practices for the 2015 football season get underway on Friday and every team putting on the helmets and shorts begins with optimistic outlooks.

Football in the Lowcountry promises to be as competitive as ever with some of the state s top teams and talents playing in local venues every Friday night.

Here s a look at the top five storylines for 2015.

1. New coaches

No two head coaches enter the 2015 season with more pressure than Goose Creek s Chris Candor and Summerville s Joe Call. Each replaced the winningest coaches in their respective school s history Chuck Reedy at Goose Creek and John McKissick at Summerville.

Neither Candor nor Call has been a head coach prior to this season but both are proven coordinators. Candor was the defensive play-caller at Goose Creek while Call was the offensive coordinator at Summerville.

Goose Creek returns enough talent to again be the favorite in region 7-AAAA. Call is replacing eight defensive starters, two starting offensive linemen, and a quarterback at Summerville.

And, adding to the pressure for Call is the fact that he is an interim head coach with a permanent coach being named after the 2015 season.

2. Fort Dorchester becomes the hunted

Though Fort Dorchester s program has had solid success over the years, the 11-win season that took the Patriots to the AAAA Division I state semifinals was the best in school history.

Head coach Steve LaPrad returns a bevy of talent, especially on offense. The defense lost some key players along the front seven, but finding athletes at the Fort has never been an issue.

Fort Dorchester becomes the team everyone in the Lowcountry is talking about as the season begins. No longer are they considered to be the hunter and now the target is on their back. If the Patriots handle the scrutiny and every other team s best shot on a weekly basis, look for them to make a strong run at a state title.

3. Timberland s dominance continues

The defending state champions of Division II-AA are coming off their first undefeated season in school history and head coach Art Craig returns 13 starters. Look for that winning streak to extend deep into the 2015 season, if they survive an opener against Hanahan and a week five game against Berkeley.

Craig is a remarkable 149-32 at Timberland and has 178 career wins overall. Timberland is the winningest program in the area over the last decade with two state titles.

4. Players to watch

Once again, the Lowcountry will have some of the state s top talent. Arguably the top two players in the area in 2015 are Fort Dorchester offensive tackle John Simpson and Goose Creek defensive end Javon Kinlaw both among the top-rated senior prospects at their position in South Carolina.

Fort Dorchester also has one of the area s top running backs in senior Datron James and one of the top quarterbacks in sophomore Dakereon Joyner.

Ashley Ridge senior quarterback Steven Duncan will be among the area s passing leaders. Top linebackers include Hanahan s Tre Smalls and Ashley Ridge s Brandon Brown. Wando junior receiver Ortre Smith will be a national recruit and Hanahan pass-catcher Samuel Denmark is a Virginia Tech commitment.

Bishop England lineman Blake Jeresaty and Summerville running back Chris Felder will be key to their respective teams success, while junior receivers Jordan McDaniel of James Island and Cam Burnette of Summerville also rate as top underclassmen in the area.

5. Stags resurgence?

The Berkeley Stags won eight games last fall the first winning season in Jeff Cruce s four seasons at the traditional powerhouse. By all accounts, this year s team could be even better and Cruce is excited about an impressive group of underclassmen making their way into the program.

Many will wonder if last year was a turnaround year or a flash in the pan. The Stags play a tough early schedule, including games with Stratford, Summerville and Timberland and started last season 1-4.

Berkeley won several close games last season (four by seven points or less) and will need to repeat that effort in order to make an extended run.

Lowcountry Preseason Top 10

1. Fort Dorchester Staying level-headed may be the biggest challenge for Patriots

2. Timberland Can the Wolves make it two straight undefeated seasons?

3. Goose Creek New head coach but solid returning talent on both sides

4. Berkeley Coming off eight-win season, expectations are high

5. Stratford Knights always sound defensively; new QB this fall

6. Wando Returning talent at skill positions give Warriors a chance

7. Hanahan Hawks should be among the best in area at WR and LB

8. Bishop England Consistent program with good returning experience

9. Colleton County Cougars seeking first winning season in 10 years

10. Northwood Must replace record-setting QB but talent returns in key areas

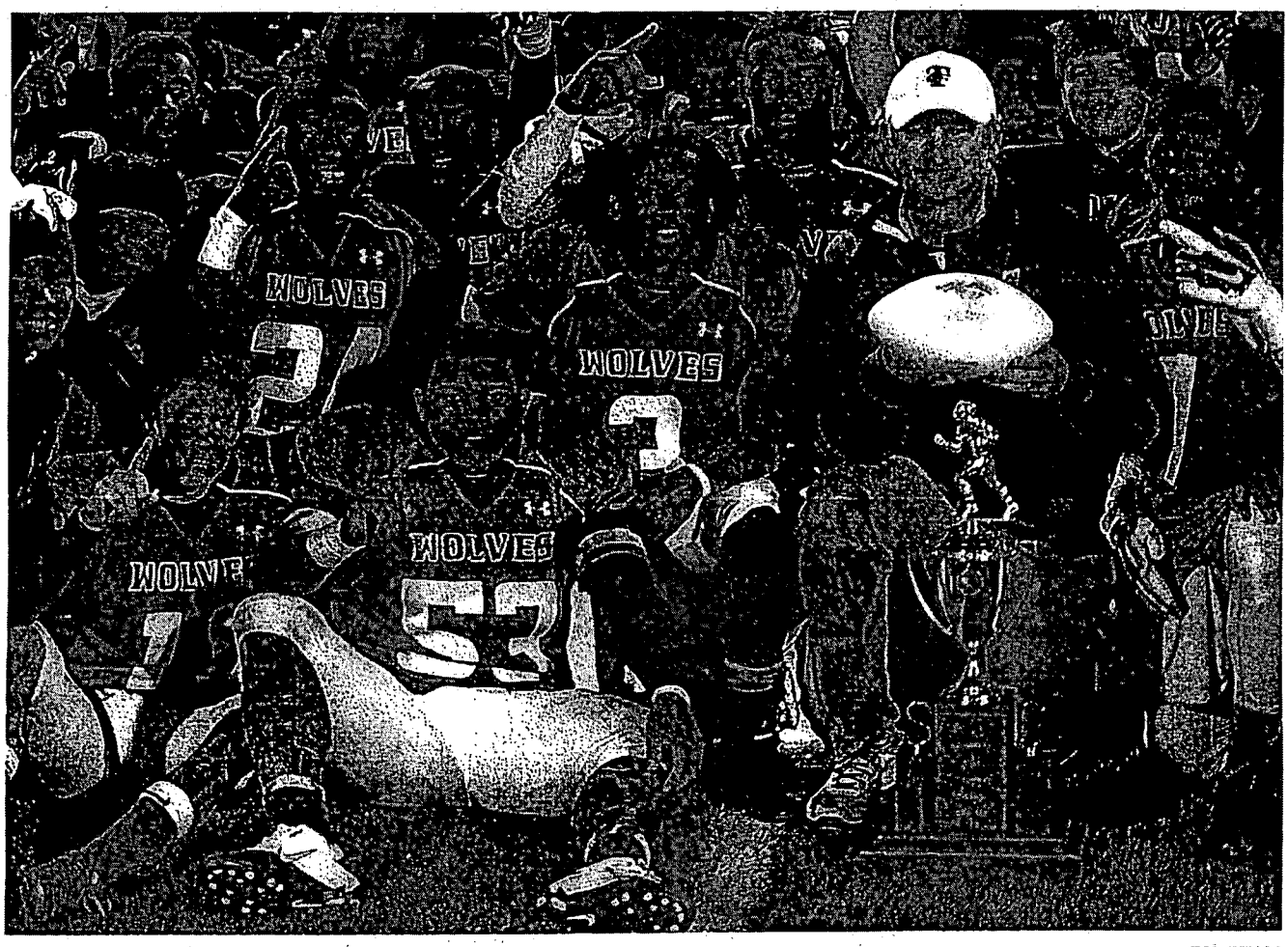
Load-Date: July 31, 2015

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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/one-classification-one-state-champ-with-new-schsl-alignment/article_e200eca5-6277-5fc9-96c4-545b21d01245.html

One classification one state champ with new SCHSL alignment

Dan Brown Aug 9, 2015



One classification, one trophy, is the way the SCHSL will line up in 2016-2017. Timberland won the Class AA, Div. II state title in 2014 with a perfect 14-0 record.

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"Looks like more of the same to me."

That seems to be the opinion of many football fans after seeing the proposed regional alignments from the new five-class system put in place by the South Carolina High School League for the 2016-2017 school year.

This begins and ends with football.

Berkeley moves up to Class AAAA.

Timberland moves up to Class AAA.

Cross remains in Class A, but changes regions.

Goose Creek, Summerville, Fort Dorchester and Stratford move up to Class AAAAA.

Gone are the two-division setups in every classification except Class AAA.

"One classification, one state champion," said Jeff Cruce Berkeley athletic director and head football coach.

Cruce served on SCHSL's reclassification committee and had never been a fan of the two-division classification set up.

"How can you have nine state champions in a four-classification setup? That's too watered down. This way, we have five state champions and it does away with any debate about who is the legitimate state champ."

The expansion to five classifications is a first for high school sports in South Carolina, though the realignment process takes place regularly every two years based on new schools and enrollment numbers, among other factors.

Cruce, who had hoped for what he called a "Super Region" to include Goose Creek and Stratford, didn't get what he wanted.

There is a super region, but it's Region 7AAAAA which includes Ashley Ridge, Fort Dorchester, Goose Creek, Stratford, Summerville, James Island, Wando, Stratford and West Ashley.

Berkeley, which plays in Region 8AAAA will be faced with the same travel issues, making two trips a season to Beaufort and Hilton Head, and one to Colleton County.

The five-team region consists of Berkeley, Beaufort, Cane Bay, Colleton County and Hilton Head.

"They're killing my gate," Cruce said. "We didn't get the region we want, but we'll see how it all plays out."

The Stags are defending Region 8AAA champs.

"It's good that we're playing Cane Bay," he said. "That will make a nice rivalry for football."

Cross remains in Class A, the only team in the area not to move up a classification. Gone though, are the two divisions, and instead of playing in Region 6A, the Trojans have moved to Region 5A, which will consist of Cross, Bethune-Bowman, Branchville, C.E. Murray, and Scott's Branch.

Coach Shaun Wright said the new region will be competitive and he likes that.

"Our realignment is new for us only in the fact that we now have to play each other, but we have been playing all of these teams since I can remember. This will be a competitive region in all sports. I have a lot of respect for all of their programs and we look forward to what this will mean for everyone moving forward."

Wright's concern is focused on November and what will happen come playoff time. Seeding will be based on scheduling, but Wright is looking forward to the new challenges.

"What concerns me is how the playoffs will be structured and of course scheduling, especially if there is a point system put in place," he said. "It is becoming harder and harder to schedule games but nonetheless we will try to do what's best for us here at Cross."

Defending state champ Timberland returns to Class AAA, playing out of a more competitive Region 7 against Bishop England, Georgetown, Lake Marion, Manning and Hanahan.

And of course, with the elimination of the two divisions, the Wolves will get to meet Dillon somewhere in the playoffs.

Coach Art Craig and the Wolves have never shied away from any opponent, in any classification - they face off against Class AAAA powerhouse Goose Creek in the Sertoma Classic this week.

"Goose Creek is going to come out with something to prove. They have a new coach. They will want to take it to us. If we don't have our A-game we could get embarrassed."

Craig said the new region will be more competitive. Since 2004, Timberland has gone 49-1 in region play, losing only to Bishop England in 2011, the year both teams won state titles.

"I think overall it's definitely better competition, when you throw Bishop England, Manning and Hanahan in a region with together."

The Wolves will be one of the smallest schools in AAA, with just 22 students more than the Class AAA minimum enrolled.

"We're one of the smallest schools in AAA," he said. "When you are the bottom tier of a classification, you have to have some special athletes to compete. Footballwise, it's really no different for us when we played in AAA up until 2007. It's pretty close to the same conference we had when Cody (Craig's eldest son) played."

Craig's team will meet this new alignment head-on in 2016.

"We take things one week, and one game at a time, regardless who we play," said Craig, whose Wolves go into the 2015 season as defending Class AA Div. II champs, riding a 14-game winning streak.

The new class alignment takes place at the start of the 2016-2017 school year.

Region alignment for area teams are as follows:

Ashley Ridge

Fort Dorchester

Goose Creek

James Island

Stratford

Summerville

Wando

West Ashley

Beaufort

Berkeley

Cane Bay

Colleton County

Hilton Head Island

Bishop England

Georgetown

Hanahan

Lake Marion

Manning

Timberland

Bethune-Bowman

Branchville

C.E. Murray

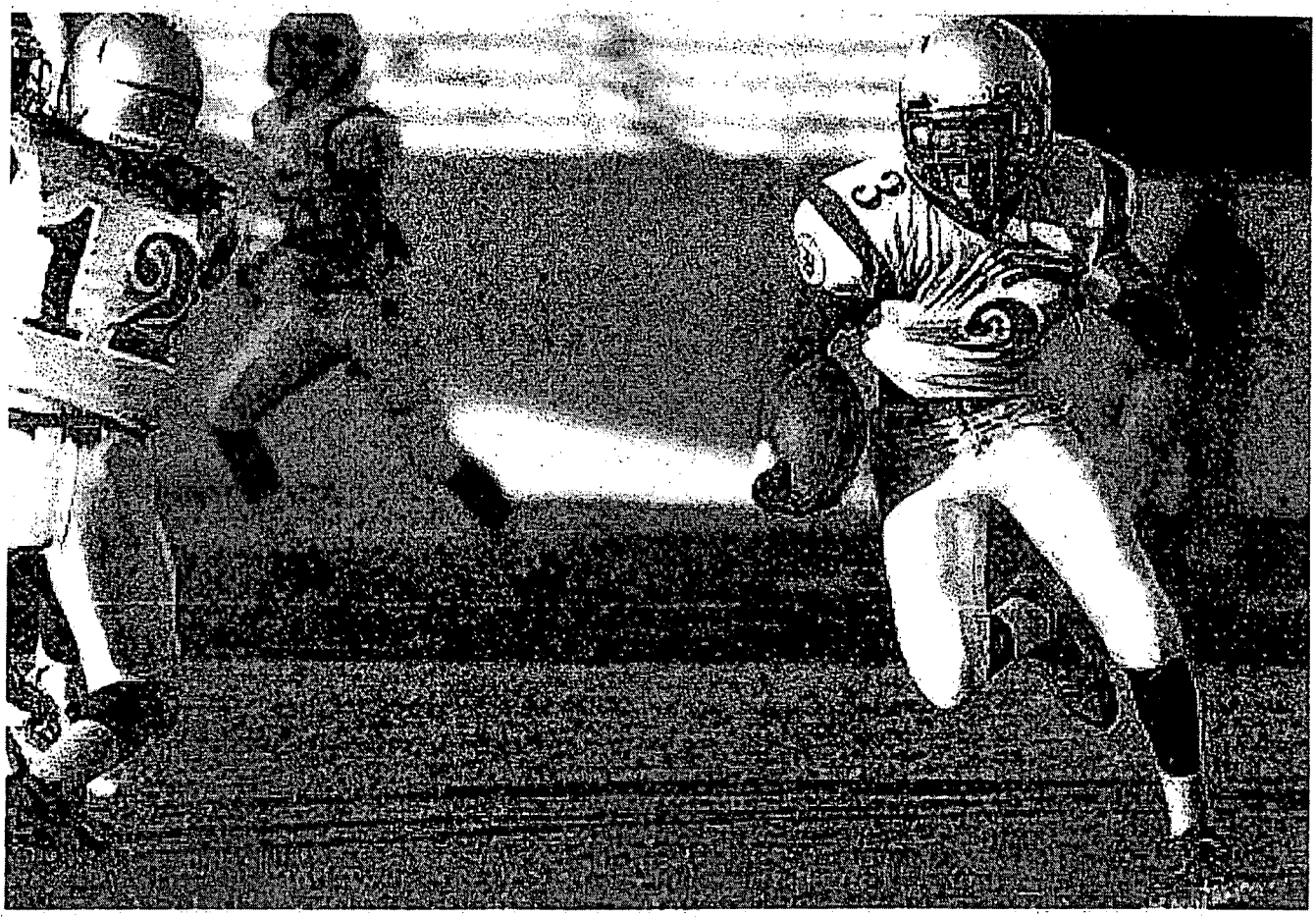
Cross

Scott's Branch

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-score-fast-to-thump-james-island---in/article_3b443375-e5ea-548b-bfda-bfd7608cfc93.html

Stags score fast to thump James Island 14-6 in Sertoma

Dan Brown Aug 17, 2015



Freddie Faison scored a touchdown on a 31-yard pass from Darius Douglas.

The Berkeley Stags football team has enjoyed some early success this summer.

Winning their first 7-on-7 passing tournament, racking up 700 yards of offense against Wando, and 500 yards of offense against Ashley Ridge, the Stags capped the summer season with an impressive 14-6 scrimmage win over James Island in the 45th Annual C.T. Lowndes and Company Sertoma Classic at The Citadel's Johnson Hagood Stadium in downtown Charleston.

The Stags and Trojans combined for three touchdowns in the first five minutes of their one-quarter matchup.

"We're young, but if we stay healthy we'll be pretty good, I hope," said Coach Jeff Cruce. "We've had a good summer competitively because we've played good defense. Our offense has done really well, but we're playing good defense.

Junior quarterback Darius Douglas is quickly showing fans he's the real deal, throwing for a touchdown and rushing for another in the win.

Cruce had preached all summer that his team would be fast, sporting a yellow Oregon shirt, during practices, a souvenir from a week spent out west learning former coach Chip Kelly's high octane Duck offense. It showed quickly, as Berkeley needed just 33 seconds to march 80 yards for its first touchdown — the scoring play coming on a 31-yard pass from Douglas to Freddie Faison.

A 28-yard TD run by JI's Devontre Hamilton closed the gap to 7-6, but Douglas answered in a hurry, capping a drive with a three-yard run with 7:22 left in the quarter.

Two touchdowns in under five minutes of play, Cruce wants to run a play every 14 seconds.

"Fans better not leave their seats, they might miss something," he said.

The Stags open their season on the road, at Johnsonville, on Friday, Aug. 21.

Stags win high-octane nail-biter 40-34

Dan Brown Aug 20, 2015



Rob Gantt/Independent Darius Douglas threw for three touchdowns and ran for a fourth as the Berkeley Stags edged Johnsonville 40-34.

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Darius Douglas fired three touchdown passes and ran for a touchdown, and D.J. Robinson scored twice as the Berkeley Stags delivered as promised, edging Johnsonville 40-34 in a high-octane nail-biter.

Where's the aspirin?

Coach Jeff Cruce promised all summer his team would be fast.

They were.

He also said his defense would be stretched and give up some points.

They did.

But the Stags' D made the stand when it needed to most, and forced four turnovers including two Jordan Brown interceptions to hold on for the win. Berkeley starts the 2015 season at 1-0, and a word of warning to the faint of heart: This will be a wild ride.

Fun, but wild.

Wild, as in 48 points scored in the first half.

The Flashes drew first blood on a Robert Ripley 4-yard touchdown run to take an 8-0 lead.

The Stags answered quickly on a Douglas 23-yard touchdown dash to tie the score 8-8.

Quentin Scott gave the Stags a 14-8 lead with a 1-yard run.

Johnsonville answered a play later with a Jacob Avant 51-yard dart up the middle.

Score's tied 14-14.

Douglas took to the air connecting on his first of three TD passes, this one a 16-yard bullet to Harry Dorsey.

Stags up, 20-14.

The Flashes' Ripley hit paydirt for the second time of the night to give JHS a 22-20 lead with the 2-point conversion.

But Berkeley wasn't finished.

Robinson took a Douglas screen and galloped 35-yards for the score.

At the half, Stags lead 26-22, but 24 minutes of football remained and several more touchdowns to score.

In the third quarter, Tyrik Palmer gave the Flashes the lead 28-26.

Robinson tallied for the second time to retake the lead 34-28 on a 26-yard run through rush hour traffic.

Palmer scored again for Johnsonville to tie the score at 34-34 and this one looked as if it were headed to overtime.

Even though both teams eschewed the kicking game, it was the kicking game that sealed the game's outcome on a bad snap and muffed punt by the Flashes' special teams.

Working on a short field Douglas connected again with Daveon Moore to put Berkeley ahead for good, 40-34.

The Stags head to Stratford on Friday, Aug. 28. Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m.

Stags look to hit the big time

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 20, 2015 Thursday

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Section: 19,S; Pg. 22

Length: 466 words

Byline: dbrown@berkeleyind.com

Body

MONCKS CORNER This year s edition of the Berkeley Stags is brash and confident.

The defending Region 8-AAA champions will field a young team this fall, having been hit hard by graduation in the spring, but these new kids making the step up to the varsity level are ready to put their thumb print on the blue and gold.

We have a group of kids eager to prove themselves this year, said Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce. This is the best group of kids I ve had since I ve been here, the best character group for sure.

Cruce said this summer has proven to be one of the most productive summers he s had in a long while.

Our work ethic has been outstanding this summer, he said. And we played very well at the Stratford passing league. This summer we ve felt like we needed to instill the work ethic they needed to be successful, and they bought into it.

Cruce said his team is solid at the skills positions with Darius Douglas and D.J. Chisolm having good summers under center.

Darius Douglas is getting better the more he s out there, and the young Chisolm kid has had a good summer.

Our skill position players are producing. Our offense is clicking right now. We have played some of our best football over the summer, Cruce said.

With a week until the start of the regular season on the road against Johnsonville, the Stags are fine-tuning their game.

Our biggest improvement this summer has been defensively, Cruce said. I m pretty excited about where we are and what we ve done. Our schedule this fall is competitive and the kids are excited about who we re playing and when we play them.

This includes games against longtime rivals Stratford and Summerville, against whom the Stags have not fared well over the years.

Stags look to hit the big time

We re 4-14 against Stratford, and something like 5-14 against Summerville, Cruce said. I told the kids, if you want to change the course around here, change that.

These kids aren t accustomed to losing, despite their inexperience on the varsity level.

Some of these kids have not lost a game in high school, Cruce said, citing Chisolm s undefeated record in B-team football and JV basketball.

The young kids and the older players are meshing well, according to Cruce.

We ve got a good mix of old and young, he said, citing veterans Supreme Scott and Jordan Brown providing leadership over the summer scrimmage and practice season.

This is just a good character group leading these young kids. The biggest thing, this group, these are all my kids. No more holdovers from the previous coaching regime. These kids have been learning my way of doing things and what we expect out of them since seventh grade, and they ve bought into it big time. This is the way we do it, and how we do it.

Cruce mentioned Freddie Faison and Daveon Moore as standing out in scrimmages this summer.

Load-Date: August 20, 2015

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Berkeley Stags

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 20, 2015 Thursday

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Section: 19,S; Pg. 22

Length: 29 words

Body

2014: 8-5, 5-0 Region 8-AAA

COACH: Jeff Cruce (4th year)

RETURNING STARTERS: 12 (5 on offense, 7 on defense)

PLAYERS TO WATCH: QB Darius Douglas, OL Danny Long, LB Supreme Scott

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No Headline In Original

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 21, 2015 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 2

Length: 466 words

Byline: Andrew Miller

apmiller@postandcourier.com

Body

The wait is over.

Summer is winding down and it s time for high school football Lowcountry style.

This year, The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller, who has covered prep sports in the Lowcountry for the past 26 years, will team up with ABC News 4 anchor Scott Eisberg to pick the biggest matchups each week.

A year ago, Eisberg (50-22) edged out Miller (48-24) on the final scoreboard.

So, every pick counts. And Miller is out for revenge.

Either way, here s to a great season and may your favorite team win.

Here are this week s picks:

Providence (Charlotte) at Summerville

Eisberg: Former St. John s head coach Brad Bowles returning to the Lowcountry. Summerville interim coach Joe Call winning his debut, replacing the legend and grandpa John McKissick, would be a whole lot better story. Summerville, 35-10.

Miller: No one knows the pressures of playing and coaching at Summerville High School better than interim coach Joe Call, who was a quarterback and assistant coach under his legendary grandfather John McKissick. Summerville, 28-17.

South Florence at Fort Dorchester

Eisberg: On the field, the game of the night. I ll go on a limb early and pick Fort Dorchester as a state title contender. They won t do that if they can t win this one. Fort Dorchester, 42-28.

Miller: Last year, Patriots head coach Steve LaPrad said freshman QB Dakereon Joyner would eventually be the best player to every come out of the program. Won t get much of an argument here. Fort Dorchester, 34-27.

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Hanahan at James Island

Eisberg: Great matchup last year, James Island rode the Buss to victory. Losing QB Gage Maloney, they will again have to rely on Trojans running back Buss Hamilton in a close win. James Island, 21-20.

Miller: Hanahan has the offensive weapons to put points on the board, but can the Hawks defense stop James Island running back Buss Hamilton? Just enough. Hanahan, 24-23.

Cane Bay at Colleton County

Eisberg: One area coach told me he can t see Colleton County finishing lower than second in the region. I m buying Cougars stock early. Colleton County, 14-10.

Miller: Colleton County could be the surprise team of the year in the Lowcountry. Led by Norman Hand Jr., the Cougars are loaded with talent. Colleton County, 20-16.

Ashley Ridge at Woodland

Eisberg: Mathis Burnette told me he had to play the early Sertoma game to get his kids home for bedtime, losing 18 seniors at a small school, they really are that young. Ashley Ridge, 42-14.

Miller: Ashley Ridge QB Steven Duncan has committed to Western Kentucky. Big kid with a big arm. Too much for Wolverines. Ashley Ridge, 30-18.

Berkeley at Johnsonville

Eisberg: Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce says this is his favorite group in five years with the Stags. Berkeley, 35-3.

Miller: Stags have too many athletes for Class AA Johnsonville. Berkeley, 31-10.

Load-Date: August 21, 2015

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Berkeley survives its first test

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 22, 2015 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 318 words

Byline: dbrown@berkeleyind.com

Body

Darius Douglas fired three touchdown passes and ran for a touchdown, and D.J. Robinson scored twice as the Berkeley Stags won at Johnsonville, 40-34, in a high-octane nail-biter.

Stags coach Jeff Cruce promised all summer his team would be fast. It was.

He also said his defense would be stretched and surrender some points. It did.

It was the kicking game that sealed the game s outcome on a bad snap and muffed punt by the Flashes.

Working on a short field, Douglas connected again with Daveon Moore to put Berkeley ahead for good, 40-34, with less than 90 seconds left in the game.

The Stags defense made the stand when it needed to most, forcing four turnovers, including two Jordan Brown interceptions, to hold on for the win. Berkeley starts the 2015 season at 1-0, and a word of warning to the faint of heart: This will be a wild ride.

The Flashes drew first blood on a Robert Ripley 4-yard touchdown run to take an 8-0 lead.

The Stags answered quickly on a Douglas 23-yard touchdown run to tie the score 8-8.

Quentin Scott gave the Stags a 14-8 lead with a 1-yard run.

Johnsonville answered a play later with a Jacob Avant 51-yard dart up the middle.

Douglas took to the air, connecting on his first of three TD passes, this one a 16-yard bullet to Harry Dorsey. Stags up, 20-14.

Ripley hit paydirt for the second time of the night to give the Flashes a 22-20 lead with the 2-point conversion.

But Berkeley wasn t finished.

Robinson took a Douglas screen and galloped 35 yards for the score.

At the half, the Stags lead 26-22, but 24 minutes of football remained and several more touchdowns to score.

In the third quarter, Tyrik Palmer gave the Flashes a 28-26 lead. Robinson tallied for the second time as the Stags retook the lead 34-28 on a 26-yard run through rush-hour traffic.

Palmer scored again for Johnsonville to tie the score at 34-34.

The Stags head to Stratford on Aug. 28. Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m.

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High School Football Predictions: Week 1

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 28, 2015 Friday, Sports

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 2

Length: 381 words

Body

After last year s humiliating defeat to ABC News 4 sports anchor Scott Eisberg, The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller went back to the basics during the offseason.

Determined to redeem himself, Miller spent hours and hours pouring over video, talking to coaches in preparation for the high school football season.

All the hard work, the extra hours in the weight room and offseason conditioning, obviously paid off in Week 0. If not for a missed extra point in Joe Call s coaching debut at Summerville, Miller could have been a perfect 6-0. He had to settle for 5-1, while Eisberg was 4-2.

Here are this week s picks:

Cane Bay at Summerville

Eisberg: Tough debut for Summerville head coach Joe Call. Won t happen twice. Summerville, 35-10.

Miller: The Green Wave offense needs some work, but defense was solid against Charlotte Providence. Summerville, 17-3.

Timberland at Hanahan

Eisberg: I liked what I saw from the Wolves against Goose Creek in Sertoma, they won t be overwhelmed. Timberland, 21-14

Miller: Hanahan has one game under its belt already and that will be the difference against Class AA power Timberland. Hanahan, 21-20.

Berkeley at Stratford

Esiberg: New plan from Jeff Cruce at Berkeley. The Stags won t kick the ball punts, fields goal or extra points all season. I like that attitude. Berkeley, 40-30.

Miller: Jeff Cruce with an offensive juggernaut last week. The Stags will have a tougher time moving the ball this week against Stratford. Stratford, 23-20.

Fort Dorchester at Carolina Forest

Eisberg: Datron James won t repeat last week s performance, maybe six touchdowns this week. Fort Dorchester, 42-21.

Miller: Many running backs don t score seven touchdowns in a season let alone in one game. Fort Dorchester, 38-17.

Goose Creek at Dutch Fork

Eisberg: Goose Creek s Chris Candor makes his debut, turns into his signature win this year at the Creek. Goose Creek, 21-20.

Miller: Dutch Fork made it to the state final last year and have another strong team this season. Dutch Fork, 28-17.

Wando at White Knoll

Eisberg: Wando s Jimmy Noonan always likes going back to the Midlands. Wando, 21-10.

Miller: Wando had no problems scoring in its scrimmages. The defense, well, that s another story. Wando, 42-40.

Eisberg: 4-2 last week. 4-2 overall.

Miller: 5-1 last week. 5-1 overall.

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Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 28, 2015 Friday, Sports

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 2

Length: 257 words

Body

Friday s Key Matchups

Berkeley (1-0) at Stratford (0-0)

LAST YEAR: Stratford 38, Berkeley 21

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; Joe Marion, Stratford

NOTABLE: Stratford leads the overall series, 21-10 Berkeley s last win in the series came in 2010 Stratford has won 14 of the last 17 meetings with their county rivals

KEEP AN EYE ON: The 25-second play clock. Berkeley averages a snap about every 12 seconds in its hurry-up offense.

DID YOU KNOW: Since 1995, both Berkeley and Stratford have had 16 winning seasons and three losing seasons.

Bishop England (0-0) at West Ashley (0-0)

LAST YEAR: West Ashley 55, Bishop England 14

COACHES: John Cantey, Bishop England; Bobby Marion, West Ashley

NOTABLE: West Ashley leads the series, 4-1, with Bishop England s lone win coming in 2012.

KEEP AN EYE ON: West Ashley receiver T Qele Holmes in the matchup with Bishop England s secondary. Holmes averaged better than 20 yards per reception last season.

DID YOU KNOW: John Cantey is the son of Jack Cantey, who spent 30 seasons as the head coach at Bishop England.

Timberland (0-0) at Hanahan (1-0)

LAST YEAR: Timberland 25, Hanahan 14

COACHES: Art Craig, Timberland; Charlie Patterson, Hanahan

NOTABLE: Timberland has won 12 of last 13 meetings and holds 14-6 advantage in overall series.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Timberland s ultra-quick defense against a Hawks offense that had two 100- yard rushers in last week s win over James Island.

DID YOU KNOW: Timberland head coach Art Craig has led the Wolves to 13 consecutive winning seasons. This is his 14th season as head coach.

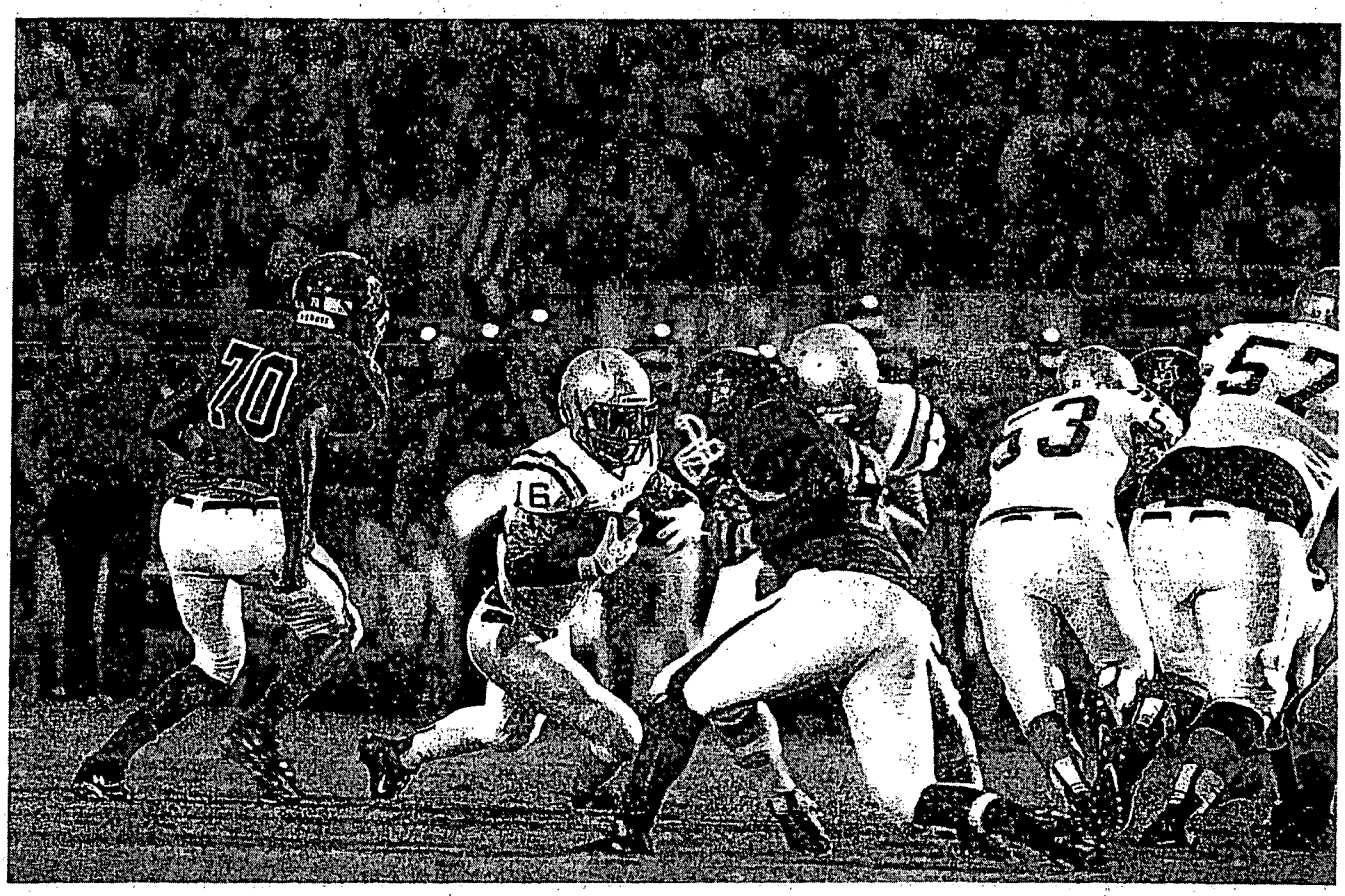
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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/hammer-time-knights-pound-stags/article_c46f88f8-864a-5c0f-a7f8-e0503db478df.html

Hammer Time: Knights pound Stags 47-24

Dan Brown Aug 28, 2015



Dan Brown/Independent Quentin Scott turns up field for a gain during early action in the Stags 47-24 loss to Stratford.

Buy Now

It was not a pretty night in Goose Creek, despite the cotton candy sunset to the west, the smiling full moon rising in the east, and the flock of geese fly-bys before kickoff.

Stratford's methodical huddle and chew-the-clock offense matched Berkeley's manic Oregon Duck patterned scheme score for score in the early going. Given a short field to play with for most of the game, the Knights struck with hammer-like ferocity, pounding out yardage like they were driving nails, to blow the Stags back to Moncks Corner, 47-24.

For an offense to work, it has to work on all four downs.

Not just two or three.

The full house crowd at Ray Stackley Field watched as Berkeley and Stratford traded touchdowns in the first quarter – and first three seconds of the second – with the Stags taking a 16-12 lead on the first play of the second stanza, a 3-yard plunge by running back Quentin Scott. It was their last lead of the night and it didn't last long.

The Stags were just 1-of-8 in fourth down conversions as their hurry-up run-and-gun offense sputtered and fell flat, chuck-and-duck style.

Running back Mike White pounded out yardage with ballpeen efficiency, rushing for 126 yards on 26 carries and scoring a handful of touchdowns – count them, five.

Quarterback J.D. Davis took care of the rest, scoring on two first-half TD runs, chewing up yardage like his big quarterback predecessors Jamison Mott and Jacob Park. Rushing for 143 yards Davis broke a big "Can't Touch This" run of 61 yards for Stratford's first score and again on a 7-yard run to give the Knights a 19-16 lead going into the locker room at the half. The touchdown started a run of 28 unanswered points as the scarlet and black built a 40-16 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Holding true to his pre-season vow of "We will not punt," Stags Coach Jeff Cruce continued to play the averages on fourth down plays.

"We know we're going to get booed out there, but have patience. The averages say an offense scores 33-percent of the time off a punt. The averages also say my offense will convert on fourth down 50 percent of the time."

So, Cruce took his chances.

For the record, 1-of-8 comes out to 12.5 percent.

On this Friday night, the numbers didn't work.

Stags quarterback Darius Douglas showed flashes of his Big Play capabilities early on, bursting out of the gate as if on fire, completing 8-of-12 passes and hitting Freddie Faison with a 2-yard touchdown to give BHS an early 8-6 lead. Douglas also accounted for the Stags' final TD in the fourth quarter with his second scoring strike of the game, again to Faison. Douglas finished 12-of-34 for 196 yards on the night with a pair of touchdown passes.

In between, the wheels came off the Berkeley wagon. Theirs was a story of too many turnovers on offense and giving up too many big plays on defense.

Stratford won the battle of the trenches, Knights Coach Joe Marion's offensive and defensive lines making the plays to open holes for Davis and White, and shutting the Stags high-octane offense out in the game's middle quarters.

"You win the game on the offensive and defensive lines and I thought we won that tonight," Marion said.

While Cruce knows his team has to perform well in their pre-Region 8AAA schedule, the next month will be all about ironing out the kinks.

"We can't go 1-4 again heading into the region," he said. "To be considered a really good team we have to do better against Stratford and Summerville."

The Stags did not play well against Stratford, and none of it had to do with not punting. While it is the conclusion many members of the Stag Nation went to bed with Friday night, punting is not why Berkeley lost.

"We didn't execute," Cruce said. "We didn't play very well. Stratford just played better than we did."

Berkeley falls to 1-1 and hosts a reeling 0-2 Summerville team on Friday, Sept. 4. The Knights open with a 1-0 mark and travel to Sumter.

Knights hurdle Stags; White accounts for five touchdowns to lead Stratford

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 29, 2015 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 1

Length: 437 words

Byline: andrew miller

apmiller@postandcourier.com

Body

GOOSE CREEK Stratford running back Michael White can certainly beat a team with his quick feet and determined running style.

His right arm isn t so bad either.

White rushed for 130 yards and scored four touchdowns and threw for another score on a halfback-option pass to lead Stratford past Berkeley, 47-24, before a crowd of about 4,500 Friday night at Ray Stackley Field.

It was the season opener for Stratford, while Berkeley dropped to 1-1.

White, who is a second baseman on the Knights baseball team, scored on runs of 1, 2, 5 and 11 yards, but it was his 27-yard TD pass that he threw to Andrew Preston that he was most proud of after the game.

The pass that I threw felt pretty good, said White, who carried the ball 26 times during the game. We worked on that all week, the coaches put that in this week and they said they were going to give me a chance to throw it.

It was White s tough running between the tackles that Stratford head coach Joe Marion was most impressed with.

Michael is a good running back, the offensive line did a great job, Marion said. You win the game on the offensive and defensive lines and I thought we won that tonight. Michael ran hard all night and I think we kind of wore them down in the second half.

Stratford quarterback J.D. Davis actually let the Knights in rushing with 143 yards, which included a 61-yard TD run on the Knights second possession of the game.

Besides Stratford s strong running game, it was the Stags strategy to not punt that was the storyline in this match-up of Berkeley County rivals.

Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce has vowed not to punt all season, and the Stags faced eight fourth downs during the game. True to his word, the Stags never punted, but turned the ball over on downs six times.

Knights hurdle Stags; White accounts for five touchdowns to lead Stratford

Four times after stopping the Stags on fourth down, the Knights answered with scoring drives that resulted in touchdowns.

I know I m going to get criticized for not punting the ball, but nothing that happened tonight is going to deter our philosophy coming into the season, Cruce said. Stratford just played better than we did. We didn t play very well. Nothing that happened tonight is going to change my mind about the way we re going to play.

Berkeley quarterback Darius Douglas started out hot, completing seven of his first nine passes as the Stags jumped to an early 16-12 lead early in the second quarter. But Douglas struggled with his accuracy for the next three quarters, finishing with 12 of 34 completions for 196 yards and two TD passes.

We had some guys open and we just didn t connect, Cruce said. My mama said there would be days like this.

Load-Date: August 29, 2015

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APP. 0916

905

High school football: Friday s key matchups

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 4, 2015 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 263 words

Body

Summerville (0-2) at Berkeley (1-1)

LAST YEAR: Summerville 48, Berkeley 28

COACHES: Jeff Cruce, Berkeley; Joe Call, Summerville

NOTABLE: Summerville has won the last nine meetings and 15 of the last 20. Berkeley s last win over Summerville was at home in 1996.

KEEP AN EYE ON: The scoreboard neither team is great defensively and both offenses have some firepower.

DID YOU KNOW: During John McKissick s 63 seasons as head coach, Summerville never started a season 0-3. The Green Wave went 0-2-1 in its first three games in 1965.

Ashley Ridge (2-0) at Wando (0-1)

LAST YEAR: Ashley Ridge 27, Wando 19

COACHES: Kenny Walker, Ashley Ridge; Jimmy Noonan, Wando

NOTABLE: Wando won the first four meetings in the series before Ashley Ridge s win last season.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Two of the area s top prospects Wando junior receiver Ortre Smith and Ashley Ridge senior quarterback Steven Duncan.

DID YOU KNOW: Since Ashley Ridge opened its doors in 2008, the program has won 38 games. Wando has won 37 games during the same period of time.

Fort Dorchester (2-0) at Cane Bay (1-1)

LAST YEAR: Fort Dorchester 40, Cane Bay 24

COACHES: Steve LaPrad, Fort Dorchester; Russell Zehr, Cane Bay

NOTABLE: Fort Dorchester leads the series, 3-0, with an average margin of victory of 17.6 points.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Fort Dorchester s offense is averaging nearly 450 yards per game. Running back Datron James has rushed for 435 yards and nine touchdowns in two outings.

DID YOU KNOW: Fort Dorchester has been shut out only three times since 2001, two of those coming last season (17-0 to Goose Creek, 20-0 to Hillcrest).

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Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 4, 2015 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 547 words

Body

Football coaches across the country are fond of saying that a team improves the most from Week 1 to Week 2.

Guess The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller and ABC News 4 sports anchor Scott Eisberg didn t get the memo.

After impressive performances during Week 1, that saw Miller go 5-1 and Eisberg a respectable 4-2, the two prognosticators hit the skids last Friday night. Eisberg struggled to a 2-4 mark, while Miller went a mediocre 3-3 for the week.

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail, Eisberg said. We ve got learn from our mistakes this week, put this week behind us, and move on and get better this week.

Eisberg and Miller differ on two games this week.

In a battle of two of the top quarterbacks in the Lowcountry Ashley Ridge s Steven Duncan and Wando s Bailey Hart Eisberg is going with the Swamp Foxes, while Miller is picking Wando in an offensive shootout.

The other game is Berkeley s matchup with Summerville. Summerville s interim coach Joe Call is looking for his first career win and Eisberg thinks this is his week. Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce has vowed not to punt all season and that should be difference in Miller s eyes.

Here are this week s picks:

James Island at Colleton County

Eisberg: With two straight convincing wins, hard not to ride the Cougar train. I picked them early and I m sticking with it. Colleton County, 21-10.

Miller: Colleton County could be the most improved team in Lowcountry this season. Colleton County, 28-3.

Fort Dorchester at Cane Bay

Eisberg: Cane Bay, very impressive with a win over Summerville, but they hit a buzz saw in Fort Dorchester s offense. Datron James too strong for the Cobras. Patriots, 35-10

Miller: Cane Bay coming off a huge win over Summerville, but the momentum won t be enough against very talented Patriots squad. Fort Dorchester, 38-13.

Ashley Ridge vs. Wando

Eisberg: I ve been so impressed with Ashley Ridge QB Steven Duncan. He s lived up to the billing. Making the commitment to WKU before the season seems to have taken the pressure off of him. Swamp Foxes, 21-20.

Miller: Battle between two of the top quarterbacks in the Lowcountry as Ashley Ridge s Steven Duncan faces Wando s Bailey Hart. This won t be a defensive struggle. Wando, 41-38.

Summerville at Berkeley

Eisberg: No sweeter team for Joe Call to get his first win against than his grandpa s old rival. Stags will do very well in Class AAA this year with crazy offense, but Class AAAA Summerville a bit too much. Green Wave, 28-14.

Miller: Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce won t punt all season. Summerville can t seem to score when it does have the ball. Stags will do enough offensively to win. Berkeley, 24-20.

Hanahan at Bishop England

Eisberg: Two words. Sam Denmark. That s all Hanahan needs. Hanahan, 42-10.

Hanahan: Bishop England still rebuilding after back-to-back state titles. Hanahan offense hitting on all cylinders to start the season. Hanahan, 48-7.

Ridge View at Goose Creek

Eisberg: Very impressive win for the Gators at Dutch Fork. They like playing against Midlands teams. Goose Creek, 14-7.

Miller: Goose Creek coach Chris Candor gets a huge win over state finalist Dutch Fork last week in his debut with the Gators. Winning ways continue this week. Goose Creek, 22-17.

Eisberg: 2-4 last week. 6-6 overall.

Miller: 3-3 last week. 8-4 overall.

Load-Date: September 4, 2015

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Call gets first win at Summerville as Green Wave roll past Berkeley

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 5, 2015 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 7

Length: 348 words

Byline: rlee@journalscene.com

Body

MONCKS CORNER Joe Call picked up his first win as the interim coach for the Green Wave football team Friday as Summerville rolled to a 70-32 victory at Berkeley.

Summerville quarterback Hunter Taylor scored four touchdowns and running back Chris Felder added four more to lift the Wave to its first victory since longtime coach John McKissick, Call s grandfather, retired. This summer, McKissick stepped down as the Summerville coach after 63 seasons and 621 wins.

This feels great, Call said. Our guys have worked so hard and they bought into the system. Everyone has been accountable, the players and the coaches, so they deserve this. We started 0-2 but they didn t give up. They came out to practice on Monday and worked hard so this is for the players.

While Summerville improved to 1-2 on the season with the win, Berkeley dropped to 1-2.

Well, we scored 32 points, but sometimes you re the bug and sometimes you re the windshield, Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce said, who broke his vownotto punt this season with a third-quarter kick. We were the bug tonight. It s disappointing, but I m happy for Joe Call. Hopefully they understand what kind of coach they have over there. He is a class act and I m happy he got his first win. I wish it hadn t been against us, but I m happy for him.

Taylor completed two TD passes to receiver Krishaon Jackson, including a 64-yard strike that tied the game at 6-6. He also completed a 20-yard TD pass to Cameron Burnette and had a 1-yard rushing TD.

Felder scored on runs of 5, 52, 42 and 61 yards. The Wave also got an 80-yard scoring run from Dallas White after Summerville started substituting on both sides of the ball.

Berkeley starting QB Darius Douglas threw three TD passes, including a 43-yarder to Harry Dorsey. Backup Stags QB Nolan Lytchfield recovered an offensive fumble and returned it into the end zone, and connected with Rionaldo Phyall for a 27-yard TD pass.

The Stags were 0 for 6 on fourth-down conversions in the first half. Late in the third quarter, Berkeley punted the ball, drawing cheers from fans on both sides of the field.

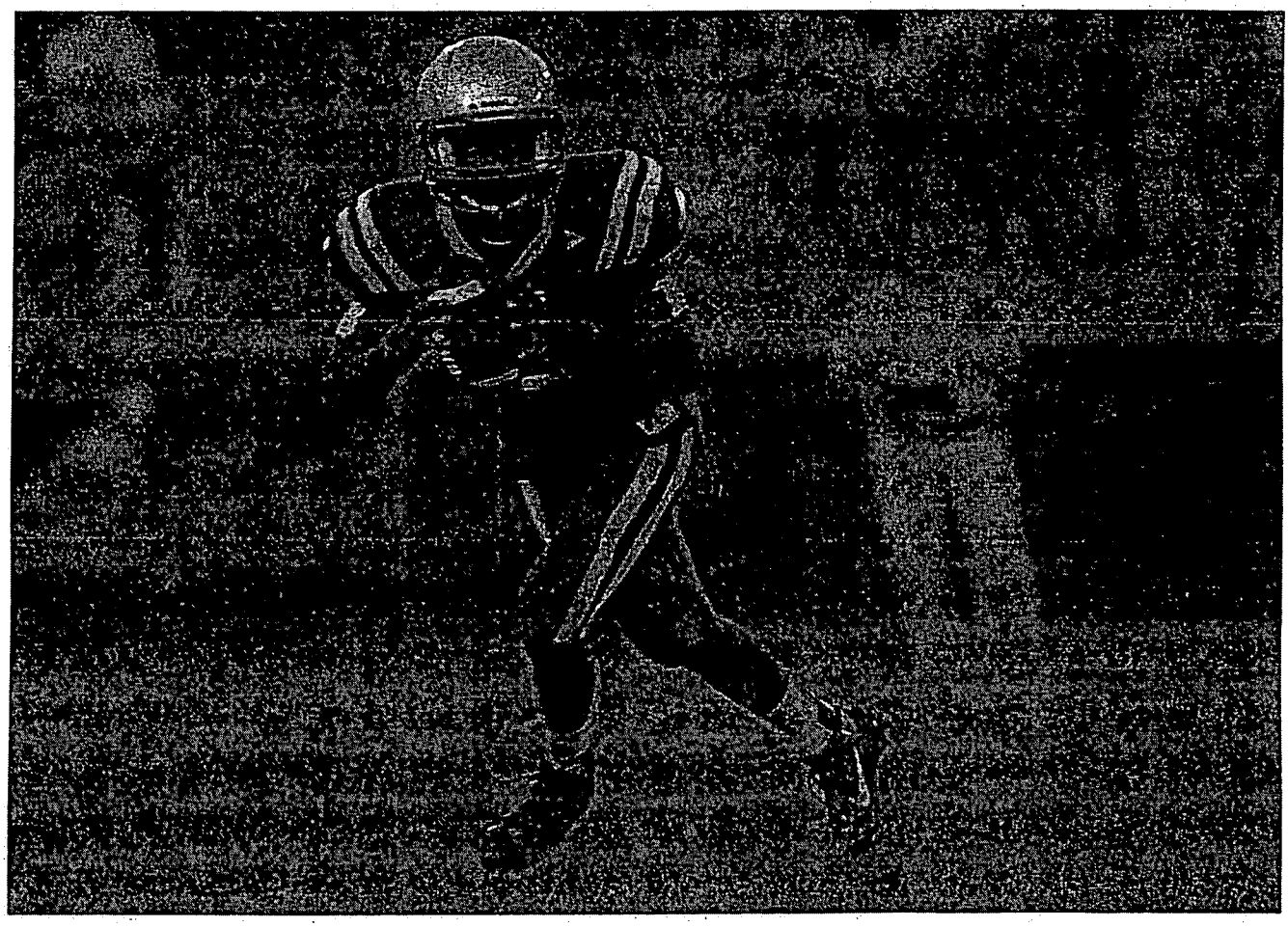
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Green Wave roll over Stags

Roger Lee Sep 8, 2015



Berkeley QB Darius Douglas rolls out of the pocket Friday.

Buy Now

Things just didn't go as planned for the Stags on Friday.

Berkeley had a strong start in its game with long-time rival Summerville, but soon the tide turned. The Stags showed spurts of the explosiveness fans have come to expect from this year's team, but weren't consistent enough and turned the ball over too much to keep up with the Green Wave, which rolled away with a 70-32 victory. It is the first victory for Summerville interim coach Joe Call, who in July took over the reigns for the program from his grandfather, John McKissick.

"Well we scored 32 points, but sometimes you're the bug and sometimes you're the windshield," Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce said. "We were the bug tonight. It's disappointing, but I'm happy for Joe Call. Hopefully they understand what kind of coach they have over there. He is a class act and I'm happy he got his first win. I wish it hadn't been against us, but I'm happy for him."

Summerville quarterback Hunter Taylor was in on four touchdowns and running back Chris Felder added four more to help the Wave improve to 1-2 on the season while Berkeley dropped to 1-2.

The Stags also had some offensive success. Berkeley starting QB Darius Douglas threw three TD passes, including a 43-yarder to Harry Dorsey. Backup Stags' QB Nolan Lytchfield recovered an offensive fumble and returned it into the end zone and connected with Rionaldo Phyall for a 27-yard TD pass.

However, the Stags threw three interceptions that led to Summerville scores and coughed up a fumble. Berkeley was 0 for 6 on fourth down conversions in the first half and three of the unsuccessful attempts led to a Wave score.

Cruce has publicly vowed to not punt the ball this year, yet late in the third quarter Berkeley did punt the ball. That brought cheers from fans on both sides of the field.

The game started off well enough for the Stags, who on their first possession drove 52 yards to score on a pass from Douglas to Freddie Faison. Then Summerville stopped the first of five extra-point attempts Berkeley would try during the game. The Stags only converted one as DJ Robinson scored on a conversion run after Berkeley's final TD of the evening.

In the second quarter, Berkeley drove 65 yards to score on a 31-yard pass to Matthew Dress. Dorsey had a 58-yard reception on the drive.

Later in the quarter, outside linebacker Malik Cypress recovered a Summerville fumble to set up a 43-yard TD pass to Dorsey that cut Summerville's lead to 35-18. However, after Summerville made an interception it was able to score again to take a 42-18 lead into the half.

Berkeley opened the second half with a long drive to the Summerville 3-yard line, but couldn't punch the ball into the end zone. After that, momentum remained with the Green Wave. The Stags did go on to score on Lytchfield's two big plays, but it was a matter of too little, too late.

On Friday, Cruce faces one of the teams he used to coach, Cane Bay. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. in The Cobra Den.

The Cobras (1-2) record isn't impressive, but Cane Bay has looked sound on the field. The Cobras beat Summerville last week and lost tight games with Colleton County and Fort Dorchester. The Patriots, which were ranked No. 2 in the state in the sports writers' poll, escaped the Den with a mere 34-33 win Friday.

"Cane Bay runs the football," Cruce said. "They have hung their hat on the Flex Bone and they do a good job with it. Obviously we didn't do a very good job of stopping the run tonight so we just have to get back to work. I mean we still have seven ball games so we can't get down about it. We have to pick ourselves up and go to work."

For Summerville, Taylor completed two TD passes to receiver Krishaon Jackson and a 20-yard TD pass to Cameron Burnette. He also had a 1-yard rushing TD.

Felder scored on runs of 5, 52, 42 and 61 yards. The Wave also got an 80-yard scoring run from Dallas White after Summerville started substituting on both sides of the ball.

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Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 25, 2015 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 288 words

Body

Cane Bay (3-2) at Ashley Ridge (5-0)

LAST YEAR: Cane Bay 46, Ashley Ridge 27

COACHES: Russell Zehr, Cane Bay; Kenny Walker, Ashley Ridge

NOTABLE: This is the 10th meeting between the two schools with Ashley Ridge holding a 5-4 edge in wins.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Ashley Ridge s balanced offensive attack against a Cane Bay defense that shut out Hanahan last week. Ashley Ridge is averaging 36.5 points per game this season.

DID YOU KNOW: Both Ashley Ridge and Cane Bay opened in the same year (2008). Ashley Ridge has 41 wins and Cane Bay has won 37 games.

Wando (1-3) at Fort Dorchester (5-0)

LAST YEAR: Fort Dorchester 24, Wando 0

COACHES: Jimmy Noonan, Wando; Steve LaPrad, Fort Dorchester

NOTABLE: Fort Dorchester has dominated the overall series, 14-5, but eight of those games have been decided by 3 or fewer points.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Two of the top offenses in the state. Fort Dorchester averages 40 points per game while Wando is averaging 38.7 points per game. Both teams have scored 64 points in a game this season.

DID YOU KNOW: The game features two of the nation s top underclassman prospects Fort Dorchester sophomore QB Dakereon Joyner and Wando junior receiver Ortre Smith.

Timberland (3-1) at Berkeley (1-3)

LAST YEAR: Timberland 9, Berkeley 0

COACHES: Art Craig, Timberland; Jeff Cruce, Berkeley

NOTABLE: Berkeley has won 10 of 13 games in the series, but all three of Timberland s victories have come in the last five seasons.

KEEP AN EYE ON: Timberland s defense has allowed only 33 points in the last three games while Berkeley s no-huddle spread offense is averaging 32.5 points per game.

DID YOU KNOW: Timberland head coach Art Craig is in his 18th season as a head coach and has had only one losing season (2001).

David Shelton

Load-Date: September 25, 2015

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Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

September 25, 2015 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 659 words

Body

High School Football Picks: Week 5

After a couple of tough weeks, our high school football prognosticators The Post and Courier s Andrew Miller and ABC News 4 sports anchor Scott Eisberg have finally returned to respectability.

Both Miller and Eisberg went 4-2 last week after barely breaking .500 the previous two weeks.

Still, despite last week s solid performance, coaches around the Lowcountry have circulated a petition asking Eisberg and Miller to never pick their respective teams to win on Friday nights again this season.

I think my mediocre record speaks for itself, Miller said.

While Eisberg countered, It s not just only our jobs, it s our duty to pick high school football games. We will not stop picking winners and losers just because a few coaches believe we put the mythical media double-jinx on their teams.

This week Miller and Eiberg differ on two games.

Eisberg believes that the momentum West Ashley generated in last week s win over Colleton County will carry over Friday against Summerville, while Miller is jumping back on the Green Wave bandwagon.

Meanwhile, Hanahan s offense, which was shut out last week against Cane Bay, will rebound this week against Stratford. Eisberg is firmly behind the Knights.

Here are this week s picks.

Cane Bay at Ashley Ridge

Eisberg: This could be my most anticipated game of the night, and toughest to pick. The two schools that were formed the same year seem to be peaking the same year as well. Two excellent offenses, one heck of a battle. Ashley Ridge, 28-27

Miller: After a slow start, Cane Bay has found its rhythm the last couple of weeks and is playing well. The Cobras win over Hanahan last week was impressive. However, Ashley Ridge quarterback Steven Duncan will be the difference. Ashley Ridge, 31-20.

West Ashley at Summerville

Eisberg: West Ashley has struggled mightily over the years against Summerville, but I think they may have just enough this season. West Ashley, 21-14.

Miller: Having a tough time trying to figure out which Summerville team will show up this season. Picked wrong every week with the Green Wave. Summerville, 23-17.

Stratford at Hanahan

Eisberg: Stratford is struggling mightily on offense, but Hanahan showed its flaws against a Class AAAA opponent in Cane Bay last week. Makes it a very interesting one. Stratford, 21-10.

Miller: Still believe that Hanahan is one of the elite teams in the Lowcountry. Stratford has had a tough non-conference schedule, but Hawks wide receiver Sam Denmark will be the difference. Hanahan, 21-13.

Wando at Fort Dorchester

Eisberg: Good thing this one is being played at Fort Dorchester, the electricians are still working on the Wando scoreboard after it shorted out due to the scoring last week. Throw in Fort s offense, this one could be even more of an offensive juggernaut of a game. Fort Dorchester, 64-56.

Miller: Wando has plenty of offensive weapons with wide receiver Ortre Smith, running back Kevin Brown and QB Bailey Hart. Too bad the Warriors don t have much of a defense. Fort Dorchester, 49-35.

Timberland at Berkeley

Eisberg: Things are getting tense in Moncks Corner, the townspeople want more defense with the unconventional offense. They don t like giving up 140 points in two weeks. A week off does the Stags some good and things get back to normal against a bit of a smaller Timberland team. Berkeley, 35-24.

Miller: To punt or not to punt, that is the question facing Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce. It won t matter this week against Timberland. Timberland, 31-18.

James Island at Bishop England

Eisberg: The Bishops continue to challenge the bigger schools. It ll help them big time once they get into region play, but won t help against James Island. Trojans, 24-10.

Miller: The Trojans are coming off an impressive win over St. John s last week. The momentum will continue for James Island this week against Bishop England. James Island, 28-7.

Eisberg: 4-2 last week. 17-13 overall.

Miller: 4-2 last week. 18-12 overall.

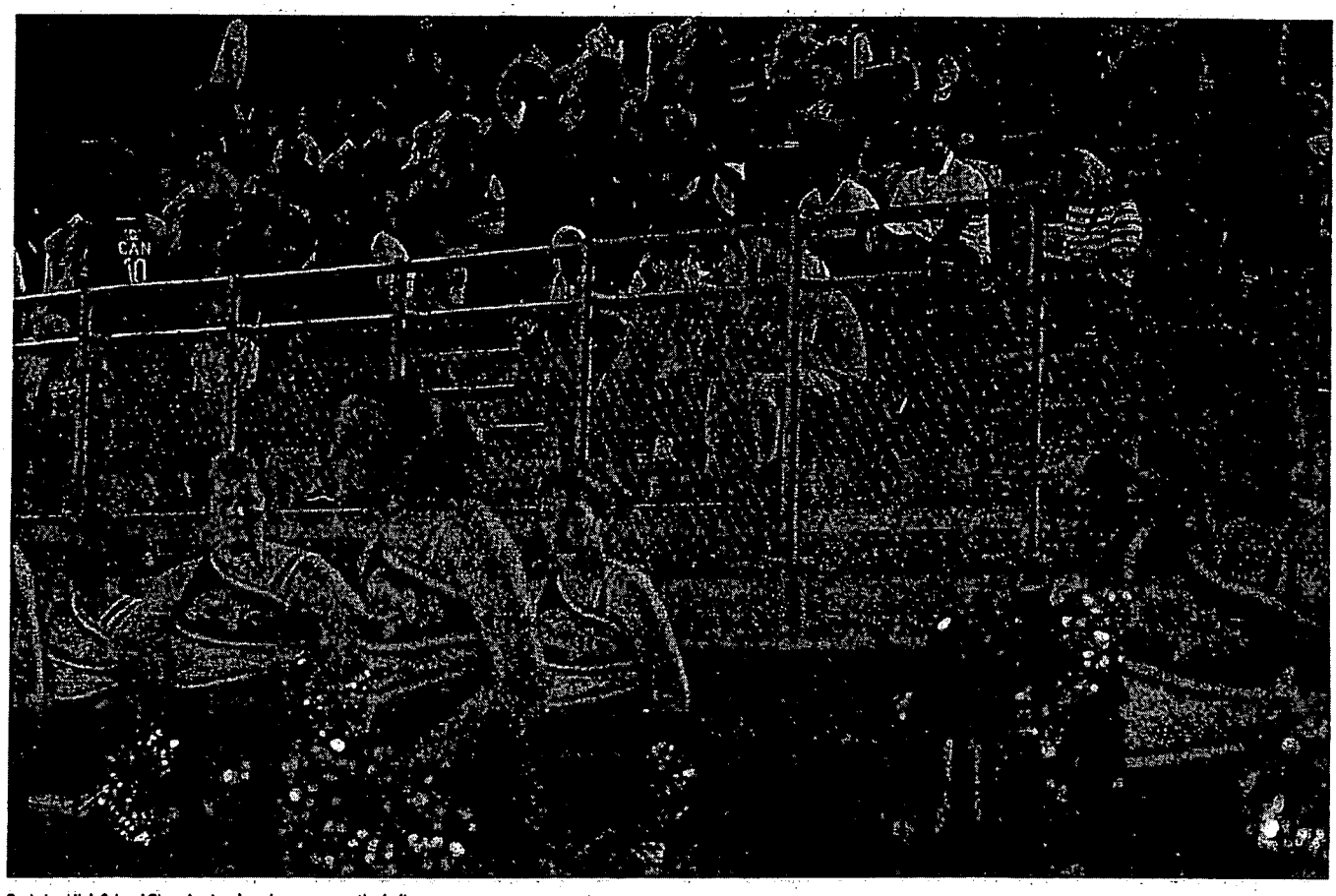
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Berkeley takes Timberland

By Debbie Merlo
The Independent Sep 29, 2015



Berkeley High School Cheerleaders keeping an eye on the ball.

Buy Now

Nevermind Berkeley defeated Timberland 42-32 Friday, five just may be the magic number for Berkeley football coach Jeff Cruce.

It's about analytics, he says.

After his fourth season at Berkeley, Cruce went into his fifth as the man determined never to punt again.

Almost everyone knows that though. It's old news.

But by the fifth game of the fifth season, Cruce — still undeterred in his thought process — had lost three games and gave up 70 points in losses to local rivals Summerville and Cane Bay. Not the greatest way to win over fans about the new offensive philosophy.

At 1-3 after four weeks, Cruce knew he was sure to catch some flack but he was ready for it.

"I've done my homework, the research," Cruce said again on Sunday. "I know it's not conventional but when it's all said and done, it's the right thing and the kids are excited."

But before Berkeley brought it back, they were down 14-0 and 20-12 against their rival from up the road in St. Stephen.

Emotions were high on both sides and it wasn't looking completeley promising for Berkeley.

A 16-yard touchdown by quarterback Darius Douglas didn't bring Berkeley any closer to a win.

Then, "everything we thought would happen [was] happening," Cruce said.

It was a slow start but shortly into the second half the Stags got their momentum back — with fervor.

Darius Douglas, the player Cruce dubbed as "the best QB in the state," came through in the clutch for the Stags and finished with 265 yards and two touchdowns.

Douglas also spent a good bit of his time Friday doing damage with his legs, rushing for 120 yards too.

Freddie Faison came through for the Stags with four catches for 139 yards and a touchdown.

Daveon Moore chipped in with four receptions for 41 yards and Austin Miles rushed eight times for 47 yards and one touchdown.

Timberland had won three in a row since losing its opener. The Wolves fell to 3-2 heading into region play on Friday.

"(Timberland's) Art Craig is a great coach. It was a great job and a great game," Cruce said.

"I think we wore them down, I think they got tired."

Berkeley plays their first region game Friday at home against Beaufort.

Beaufort is coming off a 61-14 win over Manning and has a 3-2 record.

Timberland hosts Kingstree in its region opener.

Kingstree is coming off a 38-16 win over Creek Bridge.

High schools shuffle

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 7, 2015 Wednesday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 1

Length: 374 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Weather forces Lowcountry teams to adjust schedules

With recent rain and flooding playing havoc with school schedules, S.C. High School League officials and football coaches are working hard to make up games that have been postponed three times since last Friday.

Here are Tuesday s developments:

Three games are set to be played at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Lowcountry: St. John s at Baptist Hill; Wando at Bluffton; and Military Magnet vs. Lincoln at Wando Stadium in Mount Pleasant.

Three makeup games are set for 7:30 p.m. Friday: Whale Branch at Bishop England; Battery Creek at Garrett; and Academic Magnet at North Charleston in a matchup of Region 6-AA teams who are each off to 5-0 starts this season.

Region 8-AAA has decided to cancel all of its region openers that were postponed last Friday. That means the Beaufort at Berkeley, Hanahan at Hilton Head and Orangeburg-Wilkinson at Stall games have been canceled. Region 8-AAA will play a four-game region slate, and will decide next week on a points system to determine region standings for the playoffs.

Region 8-AAA teams will resume region play on Monday with Hilton Head at Berkeley, Beaufort at Stall and Orangeburg-Wilkinson at Hanahan.

This is in the best interest of the health and safety of our kids, Berkeley coach Jeff Cruce said.

Class AA schools have decided to move games to the end of the regular season schedule and will delay the start of the playoffs by one week. Teams affected were given the option to play last week s game on this Friday or push the game to the end of the schedule.

Bishop England and Whale Branch will play their region opener on Friday, while Academic Magnet will play at North Charleston. North Charleston s game with Whale Branch, scheduled for this Friday, will be played at the end of the regular season. Bishop England will do the same for its game at Battery Creek, which was scheduled for this Friday.

High schools shuffle

With Berkeley and Dorchester county schools still closed Wednesday, many Class AAAA games set for Friday still are up in the air. Those games include Goose Creek at James Island, Summerville at Fort Dorchester, Colleton County at Ashley Ridge and Stratford at Cane Bay.

West Ashley s Region 7-AAAA opener at Wando has been moved to 7 p.m. Monday.

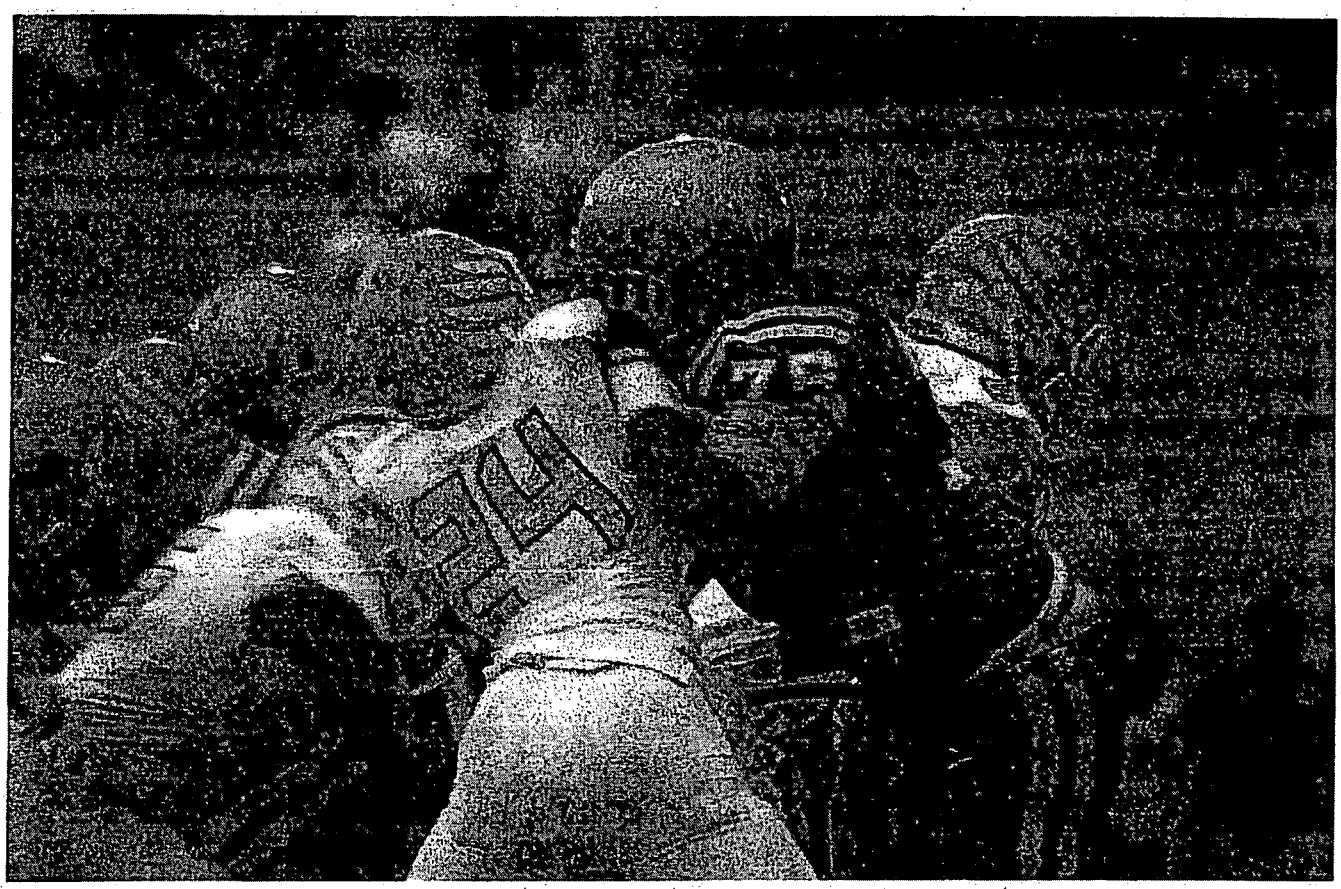
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Berkeley battles back

Debbie Merlo Oct 12, 2015



Debbie Merlo/The Independent Stags vs Seahawks

Buy Now

Hilton Head brought it, Berkeley battled and Monday's game became the never ending night that took one and a half hours to play 24 minutes.

The game may not have turned out the way they planned but Berkeley's loss to Hilton Head didn't come easy.

The Seahawks won with 73 points but the Stags walked off with 52.

And they never gave up.

"We rushed for 570 yards, they had 580," head coach Jeff Cruce said after the game.

"We're disappointed, the loss stings a little but I'm proud of the team."

Even the point man, quarterback Darius Douglas tried to run and had nowhere to go.

It takes more than one to take down a powerhouse though and Hilton Head's, Tyliek Smith (23) and Tyreke Young (24) were the two who tried.

The Stags Austin Miles (23) bumped up the score with a touchdown in the third quarter ending it at 52-40 after a mere 35 minutes making it the shortest quarter of the night.

DJ Robinson gained five yards then got tackled by Jeremiah Jevon Maddox (28).

Seahawks scored again and it was 59-40 until Quentin Scott (16) took the ball for a 21-yard touchdown, closing the gap to 59-46.

Cruce said they'll watch the videos, see what they can do differently when they face-off with Orangeburg Friday.

Hilton Head blasts Berkeley in offensive shootout

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 13, 2015 Tuesday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 5

Length: 435 words

Byline: David Shelton

Special to The Post and Courier

Body

MONCKS CORNER Two of the top offensive teams in the lower state showcased their skills in Monday night s Region 8-AAAA clash between Hilton Head and Berkeley.

On the other hand, neither team did much on the defensive side of the ball.

Hilton Head improved to 6-0 on the season, outscoring the Stags, 73-52. Berkeley dropped to 2-4 overall while allowing 70 points for the third time this season.

It s disappointing, really disappointing, Berkeley head coach Jeff Cruce said. Anytime you score 52 points, you should win the game. It was a game with two really good offenses and they played just a little better defense. We have to fix it, somehow. To give up 70 points three times in a season, that s disappointing.

The two teams combined for more than 1,200 total yards and ran nearly 200 plays. Hilton Head finished with 660 yards, led by the one-two punch of senior quarterback Aidan Hegarty and junior running back Tyler Hamilton.

Hegarty passed for 314 yards and rushed for 67 more while Hamilton rushed for 206 yards, scoring six total touchdowns.

Berkeley amassed 616 total yards, paced by junior quarterback Darius Douglas, who tallied 269 yards passing and 90 more on the ground.

The Stags took an 8-0 lead on D.J. Chisolm s 23-yard run midway through the first quarter. DJ Robinson s 55-yard scoring run gave the Stags a 14-7 lead but Hamilton s first touchdown run of the game gave Hilton head a 15-14 lead with a minute left in the first quarter and the race to 70 was on.

Berkeley s last lead came on Austin Miles 13-yard run, giving the Stags a 20-15 lead with 9:17 to play in the second quarter.

Hilton Head s Jestin Morrow returned the ensuing kickoff 90 yards for a touchdown to begin a 30-0 scoring run. Hegarty tossed three touchdown passes during the run and ended the half with a 44-yard field goal to give the Seahawks a 45-20 halftime advantage.

The kick return really hurt, and then they score and get an onside kick and scored again, Cruce said.

They just got too far ahead in the second quarter. I thought our kids really played hard in the second half. We got it close a few times but we never could stop them.

Robinson opened the third quarter with a 51-yard run but Hamilton scored on a 31-yard run minutes later to up the lead to 52-28. Douglas tossed touchdown passes to Harry Dorsey and Rionaldo Phyall to cut the lead to 52-40 with 3:45 left in the third but Hamilton scored three fourth quarter touchdowns to keep the Stags at bay.

Both teams will have a short week to prepare for Friday night s games. Hilton Head will face Beaufort while Berkeley travels to Orangeburg-Wilkinson.

Load-Date: October 13, 2015

End of Document

Stags QB Douglas hones his skills between the hedges

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

October 16, 2015 Friday

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Section: 03;C; Pg. 4

Length: 507 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

The University of Georgia plays its home football games at Sanford Stadium on a field referred to as Between the Hedges because of the shrubbery that surrounds it.

Berkeley quarterback Darius Douglas has his own version of between the hedges and has used the shrubbery in his own yard to perfect his throwing skills.

Douglas can often be seen throwing footballs in his front yard. But with no receivers to throw to, Douglas has learned to adapt. He works on his footwork and accuracy by maneuvering through a row of hedges, as if they were defenders, before delivering pass after pass toward a stand-alone tree. Hitting the tree translates into a completion. And, with only one football, Douglas has to retrieve every throw, walk back into position, and then repeat the process.

I ve been doing it forever, Douglas said. When I was younger and my brother would be at practice, I would just go out there by myself and practice throwing. I guess I knew back then that I wanted to be a quarterback. It really does help me a lot. I do it all during the offseason and in the summer.

Douglas, a 6-1, 170-pound junior, is in his first season as the starting quarterback at Berkeley. Head coach Jeff Cruce identified his young prospect s skills early and totally revamped Berkeley s offense for the 2015 season. The Stags operate out of a spread, no-huddle offense that seems to suit Douglas skills as a passer and runner.

We decided to go to this offense because of Darius and his skill set, Cruce said this week. He s very athletic and he s a very good passer. He s also a really smart kid and we knew he could handle this.

Heading into Friday night s game against Orangeburg-Wilkinson, Douglas has passed for more than 1,600 yards while adding more than 500 yards on the ground. He has accounted for 21 touchdowns.

As he gets more comfortable with the offense, Douglas produces even more. He says the pace of the offense is not a problem for him. The mental aspects of the position and execution is more difficult.

It definitely requires me to stay really focused and to know what to do, Douglas said. I love our offense. I have to be quick in my thinking, but it s not as hard as it looks. Coach trusts me enough to run it so I feel like I have to work extra hard to be ready on every play. He always tells me to manage the chaos. That s my job.

Stags QB Douglas hones his skills between the hedges

Berkeley is off to a 2-4 start, but the offense is averaging nearly 40 points per game. Most of the struggles have been on the defensive side of the ball. In a 73-52 loss to Hilton Head on Monday night, Berkeley rolled up 603 yards in total offense. Douglas accounted for more than 350 yards.

Douglas is hoping to develop into a college prospect and is constantly working on little things to improve his overall game.

I always work on my touch and staying comfortable in the pocket, he said. I know I have the potential, but I also know I have to keep working on the little things to be the type of player I want to be.

Sounds like those hedges will be getting plenty of work over the next year.

Load-Date: October 16, 2015

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http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/berkeley-quarterback-darius-douglas-hones-his-skills-between-the-hedges/article_774a7c55-ffc0-5f36-805a-1e91f2e3b3f4.html

Berkeley quarterback Darius Douglas hones his skills 'between the hedges'

By David Shelton
Special to the Post and Courier Oct 20, 2015

The University of Georgia plays its home football games at Sanford Stadium on a field referred to as "Between the Hedges" because of the shrubbery that surrounds it.

Berkeley quarterback Darius Douglas has his own version of "between the hedges" and has used the shrubbery in his own yard to perfect his throwing skills.

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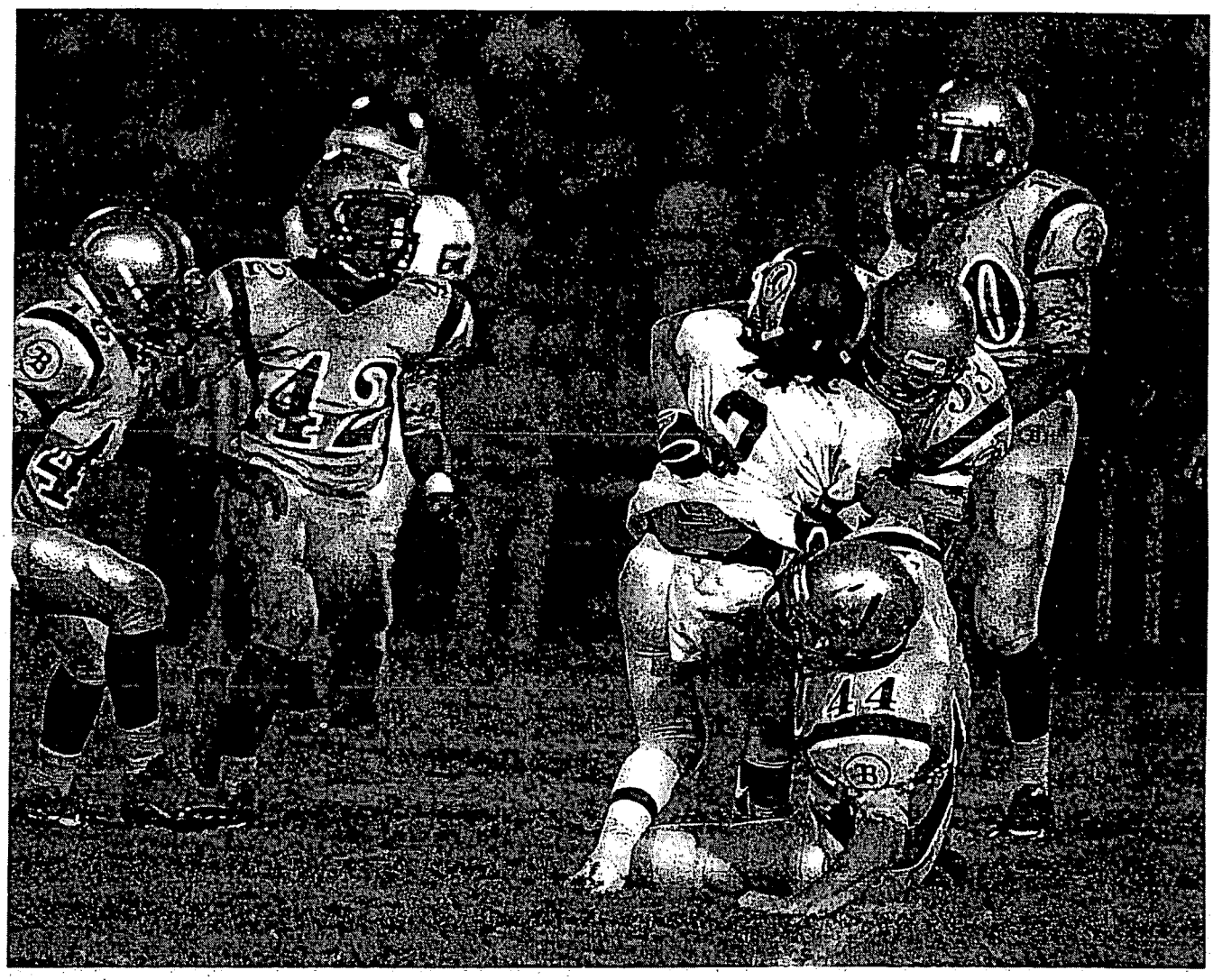
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Sounds like those hedges will be getting plenty of work over the next year.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/defense-defense-defense/article_fa9c7cdf-764b-5461-98d0-c0559e1d4e69.html

Defense, Defense, Defense

by Debbie Merlo
The Independent Oct 24, 2015



Rob Gantt/Independent Robbie Robinson (53) and Zach Simmons (44) make a tackle against Stall.

Buy Now

Put a victory into perspective and it's still sweet.

Berkeley's 48-0 shutout of Stall on Friday came after two tough losses and the win was welcome, expected and necessary.

What the Warriors came ready to give, the Stags' determined defense stepped up and took away, dashing hopes and blazing the trail to score 48 points.

"It's always nice to win your homecoming game," BHS coach Jeff Cruce said.

Happy his team played well and walked away with the confidence-boosting win, Cruce had more on his mind than fuzzies and formalities.

"We've got to get a win-out," said Cruce. "And we've got to get Douglas back."

Quarterback Darius Douglas was out for Friday's game with Stall, sidelined after suffering a sprained ankle.

Cruce praised his players for the game that unfolded minus any of the second-half drama found in losses to Orangeburg-Wilkinson and Hilton Head,

With Douglas on the mend,

Austin Miles finished Friday's game with four touchdowns and 128 yards.

Quentin Scott added 125 yards.

The Stags got another 100 yards from Terrell Pinckney and DJ Chisolm came through with a 50-yard touchdown and a total of 105 yards.

One more region win against either Hanahan or Beaufort could mean a shot at the Class AAA playoffs for the Stags. The top four teams out of the region will make the postseason.

Friday's win was just what Berkeley needed.

The Stags head to rival Hanahan on Friday. The Hawks are coming off a win over Beaufort.They are tied for the region lead with Hilton Head at 3-0.

Berkeley won last season's meeting with Hanahan to capture the region crown.

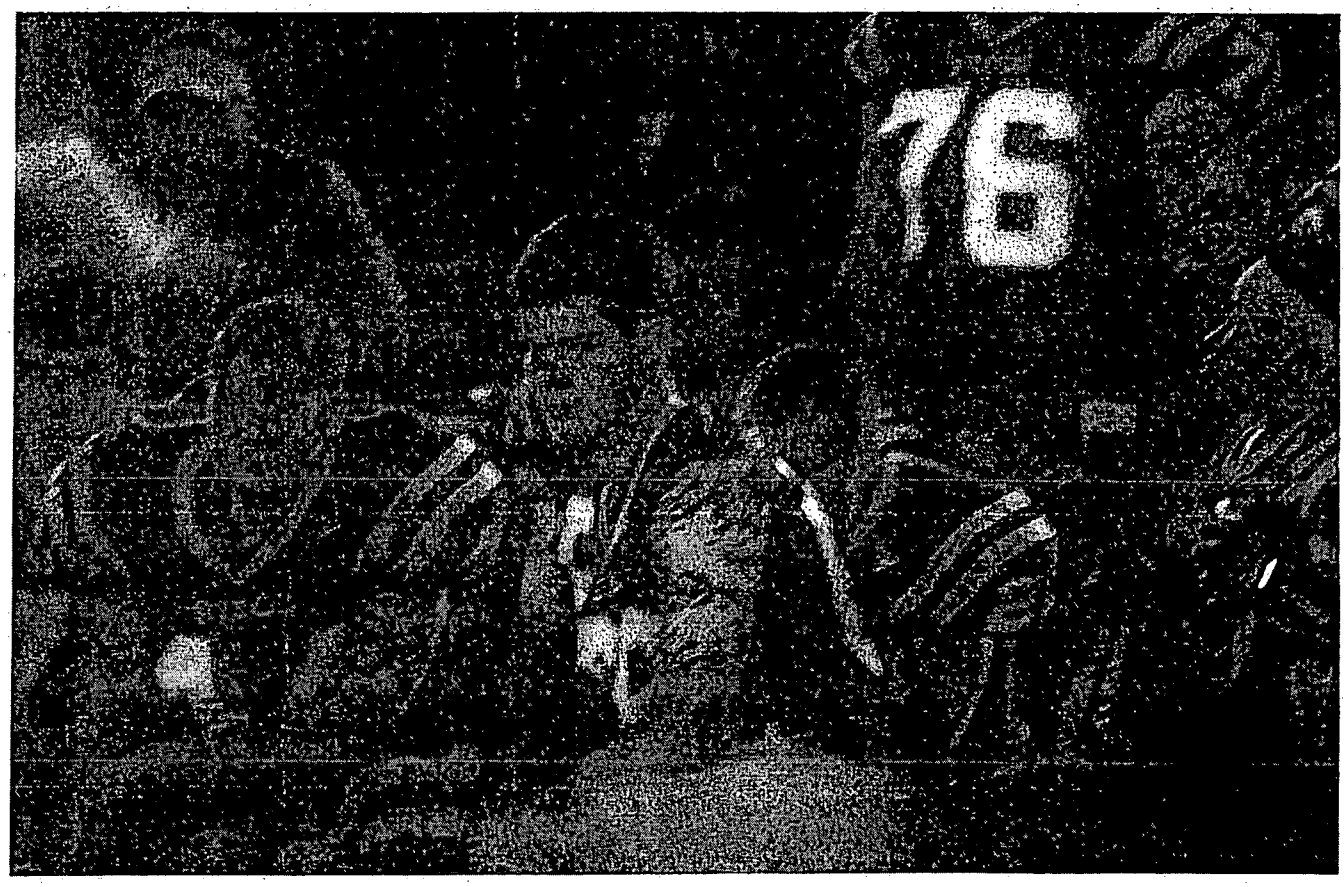
Douglas is expected to play against Hanahan.

The Stags host Beaufort Nov. 6 to end the regular season.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/game-over/article_9790f9a0-02bc-59ef-a364-ce17342af5d8.html

Game Over.

By Debbie Merlo
The Independent Nov 6, 2015



Debbie Merlo/Independent Stags squat in somber silence after the game.

Buy Now

Beaufort's 56-42 win overBerkeley was the Stags last stand.

Their chance to advance to the playoffs ended when time ticked off the clock.

The game didn't turn out the way they planned.

Two ties, touchdowns, trade-offs and then the quarterback went down with 30 seconds to go.

With a minute on the clock, Darius Douglas waited patiently on the sidelines.

"If we can get back into the game, we can score," he said going down hard not long after heading out to the field with those intentions.

"It's not what we wanted out of the season, it's not what we envisioned," Head coach Jeff Cruce said. "Beaufort played a little bit better than we did tonight, they deserved to win, I'm happy for them, sad for us but there's a lot of good positives coming out of the game. We've got a lot of good young kids coming back, we just have to re-group and figured out what didn't go right, fix it in the off season, try to improve, come back and have a good season next year."

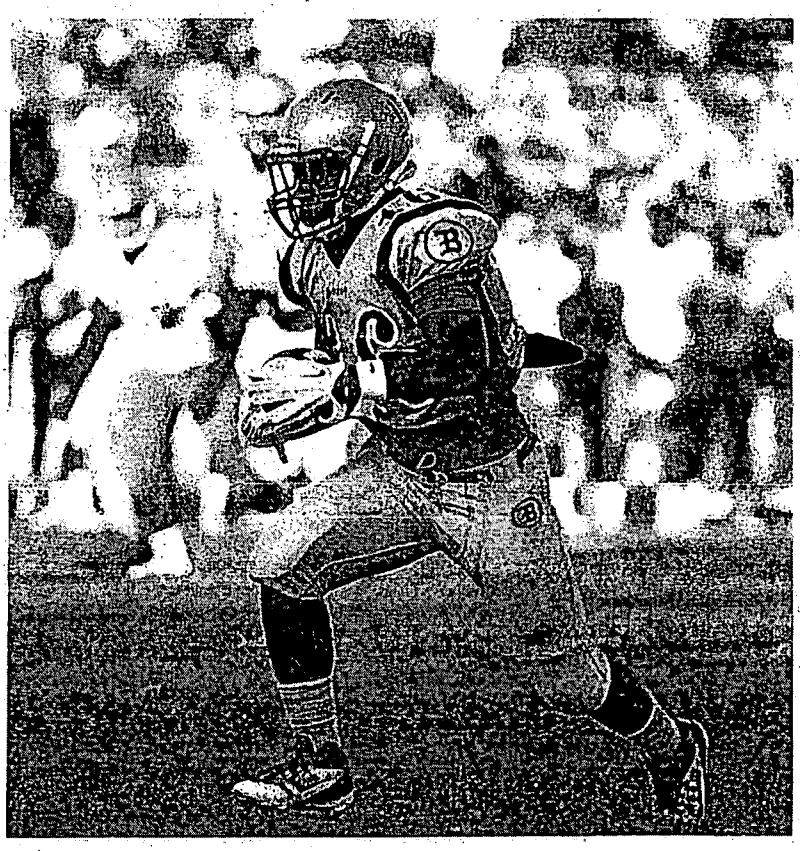
The Stags started off strong coming back to tie during the first quarter 14-14

with Douglas and Terrell Pinckney scoring touchdowns, Austin Miles and DJ Robinson rushed for yards that brought Berkeley back to tie with Beaufort 28-28 in the third quarter before Beaufort ended all with a win, 56-42.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/stags-wrap-up-their-season/article_8250bf57-f578-5396-aa47-65cdbfa717d1.html

Stags wrap up their season

by Debbie Merlo
The Independent Nov 17, 2015



Rob Gantt/Independent Quentin Scott carries the ball for a touchdown. Scott finished the season with 375-yards rushing and five touchdowns plus four receptions.

Buy Now

The Berkeley Stags football team heads into the offseason with thoughts of what might have been.

They didn't quite make the Class AAA playoffs this fall so now the focus is to build toward a better 2016 season.

That begins in the weight room this winter and will continue into spring ball and summer's 7 on 7's.

Berkeley finished 3-7 overall and 1-4 against Region 8-AAA foes. Competitive losses to Beaufort, Orangeburg-Wilkinson and Hilton Head ultimately kept the Stags out of the posteason.

Stags coach Jeff Cruce is looking toward 2016 with optimism.

"I'm going to do the best I can do," Cruce said, hinting the losses that blocked a shot at the playoffs could have been prevented if quarterback Darius Douglas had been fully healthy in the battles between Orangeburg-Wilkinson, Hanahan and Beaufort.

Douglas was injured in a heartbreaking, 20-14 loss at Orangeburg-Wilkinson. The Stags lost on the last play of the game.

The lone region win came against Stall.

Douglas, a junior, finished the season with 1,769 yards passing and 19 touchdowns and rushed for 562 yards and six touchdowns. He figures to draw a lot of college recruiters as a senior.

Undaunted, Cruce conceded this was the first time in 20 years "I haven't had a team make the playoffs," said Cruce.

For 2016, the Stags are going to need players to fill defensive positions.

"We've got good kids coming back," Cruce said.

On the other side of the ball, Cruce named DJ Chisolm and Austin Miles as two he's expecting to make an impact next season.

Chisolm rushed for 138 yards, scored three touchdowns and passed for a total of 78 yards for the season. He came in to play quarterabck when Douglas was injured.

Miles also finished with three touchdowns for the season and rushed for 170 yards.

Leaving the Stags due to graduation are Supreme Scott (2, OLB, MLB), Freddie Faison IV (3, WR), Jordan Brown (6, CB, RB), Harry Dorsey (7, WR), Harun Scott (11, MLB), Quentin Scott (16, RB), Tristian Miles (26, FS, CB), Chris Palmer (40, MLB) Robbie Robinson (53, G, MLB) Jeremy Poinsette (55, DE, DT), Danny Long (57, G), Jonathon Yates (66, LS, C), Joseph Mukuamu (73, DT) and Jaleel Cromedy (76, T).

Faison finished with four touchdowns after receiving the ball 34 times for a total of 505 yards.

Harry Dorsey received the ball 18 times with two touchdowns, Quentin Scott rushed for 375 yards and five touchdowns.

DJ Robinson racked up 612 yards rushing and three touchdowns.

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/cruce-cruises/article_e3693a1c-f14a-54f4-8545-4913f6d8d488.html

Cruce cruises

Debbie Merlo Dec 15, 2015



Debbie Merlo/Independent Berkeley High School Athletic Director/head football coach for the Stags, Jeff Cruce will assume a new role within BCSD.

Buy Now

Berkeley High School athletic director/head football coach Jeff Cruce will be reassigned to another position within Berkeley County School District (BCSD) at the end of the semester after five years with the Stags.

The Stags ended the 2015 season 3-7.

"We appreciate the work Coach Cruce put in with our students and wish him much success in his future endeavors with BCSD," Berkeley High School principal, Steven Steele said in a press release.

According to the release from BCSD, Cruce will take on an unspecified new challenge in Berkeley County School District.

Cruce has been with the district for 25 years and has served as a head football coach in the district for 20 years. Previous head football coaching assignments included Hanahan High School (1995-2007) and Cane Bay High School (2008-2010).

Quarterback Darius Douglas, a junior at BHS, said he didn't expect the Stags to end their season 3-7.

"But that's what happened and we can't do a thing about it."

Jeff Cruce Let Go as Head Coach for Berkeley High Stags

www.berkeleyobserver.com/2015/12/16/jeff-cruce-let-go-as-head-coach-for-berkeley-high-stags/

By The Berkeley Observer
Education
December 16, 2015 8:32 pm by The Berkeley Observer Views: 926

MONCKS CORNER, S.C.–Berkeley High School Athletic Director and head football coach, Jeff Cruce, will take on a new challenge in Berkeley County School District (BCSD) at the end of the semester after five years with the Stags.

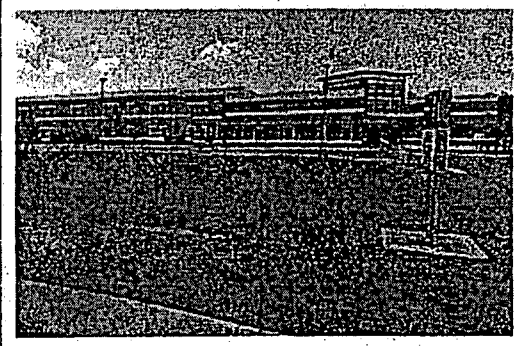
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Previous head football coaching assignments included Hanahan High School (1995-2007) and Cane Bay High School (2008-2010).

Cruce will be reassigned to another position within the district.

"We appreciate the work Coach Cruce put in with our students and wish him much success in his future endeavors with BCSD," said Steven Steele, principal at Berkeley High School.

Spread The Love



Pictured: Berkeley High School

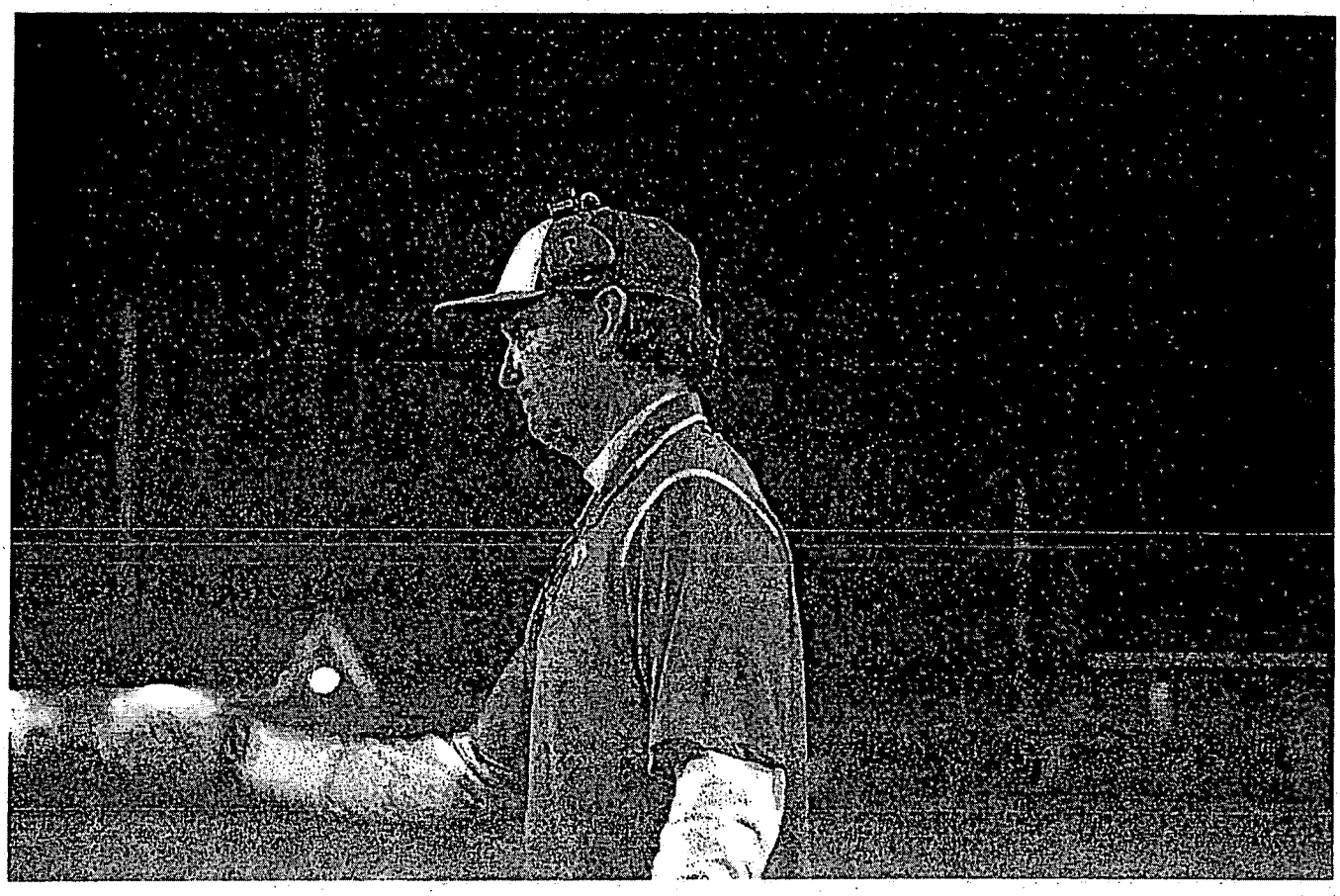
Breaking News

School board names three finalists for superintendent

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/cruce-hires-attorney/article_f866e764-5999-5e58-9471-09725b50877e.html

Cruce hires attorney

Debbie Merlo Dec 17, 2015



Debbie Merlo/Independent Jeff Cruce

Buy Now

Berkeley High School athletic director/head football coach Jeff Cruce said Friday he has hired attorney Nancy Bloodgood.

In a phone call to The Berkeley Independent, Cruce said Bloodgood will contact the school district Monday.

A representative of Foster Law Firm said Bloodgood was gone for the day by 3:30 p.m. Friday.

On Tuesday, a press release sent from Berkeley County School district announced Cruce will be reassigned to another position within Berkeley County School District at the end of the semester.

Cruce has served as head coach for five years at Berkeley County High School where the Stags ended the 2015 season 3-7.

"We appreciate the work Coach Cruce put in with our students and wish him much success in his future endeavors with BCSD," Berkeley High School Principal Steven Steele said in a press release.

According to the release from the school district, Cruce will take on an unspecified new challenge in Berkeley County School District.

Cruce has been with the district for 25 years and has served as a head football coach in the district for 20 years. Previous head football coaching assignments included Hanahan High School (1995-2007) and Cane Bay High School (2008-2010).

Quarterback Darius Douglas, a junior at BHS, said he didn't expect the Stags to end their season 3-7.

"But that's what happened and we can't do a thing about it."

Cruce out as coach, AD at Berkeley

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

December 17, 2015 Thursday, Sports

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 435 words

Byline: David Shelton

Special to The Post and Courier

Body

The Berkeley County School District announced on Wednesday that Berkeley High School head football coach and athletic director Jeff Cruce will be reassigned to another position within the district and will no longer serve as the school s football coach and athletic director.

We appreciate the work coach Cruce put in with our students and wish him much success in his future endeavors with BCSD, said Steven Steele, principal at Berkeley High School.

Cruce has been at Berkeley for the last five seasons, but has been a coach within the district for 25 years 20 as a head coach. Cruce posted a 25-32 record at Berkeley, guiding the 2014 Stags to the Region 8-AAA championship with an 8-5 record. That was Berkeley s only winning season under Cruce, and the Stags finished 3-7 this season.

Cruce also served as the head coach at Cane Bay High School (2008-2010) and Hanahan High School (1995-2007), experiencing his greatest success at Hanahan. At Hanahan, Cruce was 112-44 with 10 consecutive winning seasons. He began his tenure with a 6-16 record in his first two seasons but guided the Hawks to a 106-28 record over his last 10 seasons.

Cruce helped to start the new program at Cane Bay in 2008, posting a 14-20 record in the school s first three seasons of varsity play.

Prior to coming to Berkeley County, Cruce was the head coach for three seasons at Wade Hampton High School in Varnville posting a record of 7-25. He also spent five seasons as an assistant at Berkeley before moving on to Hanahan. His career coaching record as a head coach is 158-121.

Attempts by The Post and Courier to reach Cruce for comment were unsuccessful.

The opening at Berkeley, long considered one of the top coaching jobs in South Carolina, is sure to draw statewide interest from coaches. Early speculation as to coaches interested in the position include Timberland head coach Art Craig, Marlboro County head coach Dean Boyd, former Berkeley head coach Jerry Brown, and current West Ashley assistant Will Lampkin.

The position of athletic director will also be open for applications. It is believed the two positions at Berkeley will be separated.

The Berkeley opening is one of two in the Lowcountry to date. At Summerville, a permanent replacement for legendary head coach John McKissick will be named sometime in the spring, if not sooner.

Former assistant Joe Call served as the interim head coach during the 2015 season, and will again be a strong candidate for the permanent job. Sources indicate the job opening will be posted and applications will be accepted before interviewing candidates for the permanent position.

Load-Date: December 17, 2015

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Ousted Berkeley football coach Cruce plans to fight dismissal

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

December 19, 2015 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 5

Length: 309 words

Byline: Staff report

Body

Ousted Berkeley High football coach and athletic director Jeff Cruce has hired an attorney and plans to fight his dismissal, which was handed down on Tuesday.

In a release by the Berkeley County School District, Cruce s duties as football coach and athletic director were to end on Friday, and it was announced that he would be reassigned within the school district for the remainder of the 2015-16 school year.

Nancy Bloodgood of the Foster law firm, who specializes in employment and labor law, will represent Cruce in his battle with the school district and is expected to contact the district on Monday.

Cruce declined further comment on Friday.

Cruce has been at Berkeley for the last five seasons but has been a coach within the district for 25 years 20 as a head coach. Cruce posted a 25-32 record at Berkeley, guiding the 2014 Stags to the region 8-AAA championship with an 8-5 record. That was Berkeley s only winning season under Cruce and the Stags were 3-7 this season.

Cruce also served as the head coach at Cane Bay High School (2008-2010) and Hanahan High School (1995-2007), experiencing his greatest success at Hanahan. At Hanahan, Cruce was 112-44 with 10 consecutive winning seasons.

Wrestling

The Citadel wrestling team picked up its third victory of the season on Friday afternoon with a 28-10 win over Limestone at McAlister Field House.

The Citadel lost just three bouts en route to the 28-10 win and improved to 3-0.

Earning victories for the Bulldogs were Sawyer Root (9-5 record) at 184 pounds, Marshall Haas (7-3) at 197, Joe Bexley (5-4) at 285, Ty Buckiso (7-4) by forfeit at 141, Matt Frisch (4-1) at 149, Aaron Walker (9-3) at 157 and Jason Carr (4-4) at 165.

Frisch and Haas head to Reno, Nev., for the Reno Tournament of Champions on Sunday. As a team, The Citadel will return Jan. 1-2 for the Southern Scuffle in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Ousted Berkeley football coach Cruce plans to fight dismissal

Load-Date: December 19, 2015

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Breaking News

School board names three finalists for superintendent

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/jeff-cruce-files-formal-complaint-against-berkeley-schools/article_71e5cf41-fd61-5a02-8234-e22bb15d10e0.html

Jeff Cruce files formal complaint against Berkeley Schools

Debbie Merlo Jan 21, 2016

Former head coach and athletic director at Berkeley High School, Jeffery Lance Cruce has filed a formal complaint with the Berkeley County Court of Common Pleas naming Berkeley County School district as the defendant.

Cruce, a 21-year veteran as an athletic director in the Berkeley County School District was employed as a teacher, athletic director and head football coach at Berkley High School from 2011 until 2015.

Cruce was removed from all three positions at Berkeley High School Dec. 16.

He was reassigned as a guidance counselor at a Berkeley County middle school, a job he calls a demotion in the complaint.

Citing wrongful termination, the complaint also states Cruce's credentials and coaching record shouldn't have played a part in the dismissal or demotion. He states in the complaint that the action was due, in part to an on-going animosity and "strained" relationship between Cruce and Berkeley High School principal Steven Steele.

In 16 pages following formalities, attorney for the plaintiff, Nancy Bloodgood hits the highlights 106 times outlining Cruce's credentials and what may or may not have led to Cruce's termination.

Cruce had a continuing contract for his teaching position but both positions as head coach and athletic director were at will positions.

Cruce reported to Steele and received additional compensation for both head coach and athletic director.

While there was no dispute regarding Cruce's performance as a teacher, Cruce did not receive performance evaluations for the other two positions, though the job description as head coach tasked Cruce with being responsible for the health and safety of student athletes.

The complaint states Cruce was recruited and hired as athletic director and head coach "to rebuild the school's problem plagued football program and provide support to all of the school's athletic programs."

Bullet point No. 24 states Cruce's personnel file has no record of any discipline for job performance issues however, Steele allegedly threatened to fire Cruce on more than one occasion, according to the court document.

A formal grievance was filed against Steele in 2013.

Cruce was fired then reinstated by former superintendent Rodney Thompson, the court document states.

Cruce's complaint also states Steele's "real reason" for firing was "because Cruce did not conduct more practices in which his football players engaged in full contact hitting."

In 2015, Cruce implemented a new football varsity practice structure in which he limited full contact hitting to one practice per week.

It was in the same season Cruce decided he would never punt again.

"You can't have fear about doing it," Cruce said to the Kansas City Star in a September 2015 story. "You can't worry about your job. It's a philosophy. When you do it, you're either all in or not."

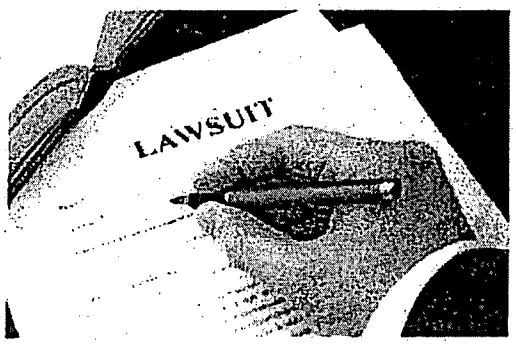
A dollar amount was not set in the complaint but Cruce is seeking relief for loss of wages, benefits and other earnings "as well as actual, consequential and compensatory damages."

BCSD has 30 days to respond.

Berkeley High's Former Head Football Coach Sues BCSD for Wrongful Termination

www.berkeleyobserver.com/2016/01/22/berkeley-high-football-coach-sues-bcsd-for-wrongful-termination/

By Nikki Gaskins



MONCKS CORNER, S.C.–One month after Jeffrey Cruce was let go as Berkeley High School's athletic director and head football coach, he has now filed a civil lawsuit against the Berkeley County School District alleging wrongful termination. Cruce is requesting a jury trial.

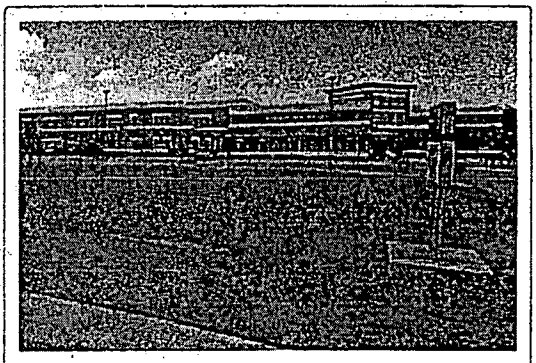
When Cruce was let go from his position in mid-December, there was no indication by the principal, Steven Steele, that Cruce had ever had any performance problems related to his position, the lawsuit claims.

The lawsuit also claims that prior to Cruce's termination, his personal file had no record of any disciplinary actions for job performance issues.

Cruce stresses in the lawsuit that he had a strained relationship with the principal Steve Steele right from the very beginning. Almost immediately after becoming principal, the lawsuit alleges that Steele told Cruce that "I really don't like you."

When Cruce asked Steele why he did not like him, Steel reportedly complained about two incidents: one had occurred eleven years earlier in 2001 when Steele had been an assistant coach. Steele allegedly blamed Cruce for reporting him to the head coach after Steele supposedly talked badly about the head coach behind his back.

The second incident, Steele reportedly told Cruce he was still angry about an incident in 2005 where Cruce questioned Steele's ability to run a quality track meet. The lawsuit claims Steele reportedly told Cruce he had been very offended when Cruce had questioned his ability to run the track meet.



Pictured: Berkeley High School

After becoming principal, the lawsuit alleges Steele refused to talk to Cruce after football games and there was very little communication during the week between them.

Steele reportedly told Cruce that he frequently talked with Cruce's critics in the community and that some people in the community did not like him.

According to the lawsuit, Cruce became so discouraged at Steele's obvious disdain for him, that he finally filed a formal grievance against Steele in 2013. Cruce says another reason for his grievance was due to Steele's alleged threats to fire him every time the BHS football team lost a game.

The day after Cruce filed the grievance in 2013, the lawsuit states Steele terminated Cruce for reportedly "wanting to go in a different direction with the football program." However, former Superintendent Dr. Rodney Thompson reversed the termination within 24 hours. Cruce agreed to withdraw his 2013 grievance after he was reinstated by Thompson.

On December 16, 2015, after Dr. Thompson left his employment with BCSD and it had hired a new superintendent, Steele is said to have terminated Cruce as athletic director and football coach for the second time. .

Cruce claims he was terminated a second time because Steele reportedly wanted to dictate the style of coaching for the football program, which he claims meant requiring more hitting in practice, regardless of Cruce's reported objections and stated goals of preventing –practice-related injuries and fatigue in his football players.

The lawsuit also claims Steele told the community he was fired for having a losing season in 2015, despite the school winning the region championship the previous season. Cruce claims that his job description for the position of athletic director and head coach did

not require that a winning record be maintained every year.

Cruce had been with the district for 25 years and served as a head football coach in the district for 20 years.

The Berkeley Observer is currently waiting on a comment to the lawsuit from the Berkeley County School District.

To read the lawsuit in its entirety, click here.

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Nikki Gaskins

Nikki Gaskins is an Emmy-nominated journalist with more than a decade of experience covering news. She is a graduate of the University of South Carolina with a degree in broadcast journalism.

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Ex-Berkeley coach Cruce files lawsuit

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

January 24, 2016 Sunday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 1

Length: 396 words

Byline: jhartsell@postandcourier.com

Body

Former Berkeley High School football coach Jeff Cruce has filed a wrongful termination complaint against the Berkeley County School District, claiming he was fired for not making his players hit more in practice.

Cruce was fired as Berkeley s coach and athletic director on Dec. 16, 2015, after the Stags went 3-7 last year, a season in which the coach made headlines for his philosophy of not punting on fourth down.

He coached at Berkeley for five seasons, winning a region championship in 2014, and had worked for the school district since 1991.

The suit claims that Cruce was fired because Berkeley principal Steven Steele did not approve of Coach Cruce s coaching philosophy which included less hitting in practice.

Steele said Saturday that he could not comment.

The suit alleges a strained relationship between Cruce and Steele, and says that Cruce filed a grievance against the principal in 2013.

Cruce claims in the suit that Steele fired him after that 2013 grievance, but the coach was reinstated by district superintendent Rodney Thompson.

The suit claims that the reason Coach Cruce was terminated (in 2015) was because Steele wanted to dictate the style of coaching for the football program, which meant requiring more hitting in practice, regardless of Coach Cruce s objections and stated goal of preventing practice-related injuries and fatigue in his football players.

In 2015, the suit says, Cruce decided to limit full contact hitting to one practice per week.

The suit claims that after the season was over, Steele told Cruce, The community does not think you hit enough in practice, and I agree.

The suit says, Despite 19 high school football players deaths this year and the widespread national attention given to head injuries and concussions among high school players, Steele has criticized the football team s weekday practices for not involving full pads and more hitting.

And the suit claims, Coach Cruce was fired for his progressive coaching approach to player safety.

The lawsuit does not cite a specific amount in damages, but claims that Cruce has suffered damages in the form of severe psychological harm, emotional distress, anxiety, pain and suffering, inconvenience, mental anguish, loss of enjoyment, embarrassment, humiliation, physical injuries and injury to his personal and professional reputation.

David Shelton contributed to this report.

Load-Date: January 24, 2016

End of Document

Berkeley names AD; search for coach underway

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

February 2, 2016 Tuesday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 511 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Berkeley High School assistant principal Charlie Harrison is the new athletic director at the school.

Harrison is the school s former boys basketball coach and is in his fifth school year as school administrator. He will continue his role as assistant principal while overseeing the athletic department, similar to what is done at other schools in the Berkeley County School District.

Harrison replaces the school s former athletic director, Jeff Cruce, who also was the school s head football coach. He was reassigned within the Berkeley County School District in December.

Obviously, I am very excited about this new opportunity to lead this athletic department and to begin working on providing the best very for our student-athletes at Berkeley, Harrison said. This is a great community and a great school. We have great kids here and together we will work hard to do what is best for our kids.

Prior to becoming a coach at Berkeley, Harrison coached in various capacities in football and basketball at Northwestern, Hartsville, Waccamaw, Fort Mill and York high schools.

Harrison comes into the new position full of ideas and goals for the school s athletic programs.

We are looking to the future and working to establish a five-year strategic plan, Harrison said. This will involve upgrades in our facilities as well as strengthening our relationship with the Moncks Corner community. We are the hub of Moncks Corner, and this community loves Berkeley athletics.

Some of the things we hope to accomplish cost money. We are going to look at unique ways to create monies that will enable us to upgrade our facilities and equipment.

Harrison said he already is working on the development of an athletic website and will continue to foster positive relationships with members of the current athletic coaching staff.

It s important that we continue to educate our coaches, not only about the X s and O s but also in the area of academics and the recruiting process of our athletes, Harrison said. As a group, we all have to make sure we are giving our kids the best opportunities for success on the field and in the classroom. We re here for the kids and we have to focus on creating a culture of success in every area.

Harrison s first order of business will be helping to locate and hire a new head football coach. The application process has begun, and the school already has received several dozen applications. Principal Steven Steele will head up a selection committee that will consist of Harrison and a handful of community and school leaders.

Certainly it is a very important hire, and I am sure Mr. Steele will make sure we do everything the right way in order to ensure we have the right person leading our football program into the future, Harrison said.

Some of the names mentioned as possible candidates are former head coach Jerry Brown, South Pointe head coach Strait Herron, Marlboro County head coach Dean Boyd, Daniel head coach Randy Robinson and Timberland head coach Art Craig. All five have won state championships at their respective schools.

Load-Date: February 2, 2016

End of Document

Charlie Harrison Named New Athletics Director for Berkeley High, Search Continues for Head Coach

www.berkeleyobserver.com/2016/02/03/school-districts-new-administrator-of-athletics-says-sports-and-academics-enriches-young-lives-and-his-own/

By Nicole Johnson Shealy



Pictured: Charlie Harrison (Provided)

BERKELEY COUNTY, S.C. —More than a month after Berkeley High's former athletic director Jeff Cruce filed a wrongful termination against the Berkeley County School District, the BHS stags are looking ahead to the future and a fresh start.

Recently, Berkeley High School Assistant Principal Charlie Harrison was chosen to serve as the school's new athletic director, a role Harrison, who's already had a long career in coaching sports and academics, is looking forward to.

"I am at the best school in South Carolina to do it in with a 103 year old tradition, and the athletics in this town is second to none! That gives me incredible incentive to be fired up about this," said Harrison, who's official title is administrator of athletics.

The position is a game changer at Berkeley County School District, merging the athletics director position and his current position of assistant principal.

As the new AA, he says his new role will includes those of the former AD: overseeing sports, facilities and fields management, academics of student athletes, fundraising for the athletic booster club, and constant education of coaches.

At the moment, Harrison says he's still developing his game plan. Some things he'd like to see include setting reasonable goals to better facilities, increasing support in the budget for athletics and through fundraising, providing more information to parents on college eligibility for student athletes, and a webpage dedicated to BCSD athletics and let others see how these student sports stars shine.

He speaks passionately about sports transforming young lives.

"Some kids need other avenues other than just academic. This provides them another avenue to pursue their dreams, a future in athletics through academics. It's well documented that kids who are involved in any role after school, whether academic or athletic clubs, they stay out of trouble, they are in touch with their school, their community, and it makes them a well-rounded person."

His current responsibilities as assistant principal include overseeing the Academic Booster Club, the International Baccalaureate, Scholars Academy, and handing various discipline issues and special services. At this point he's not sure in which roles he will continue to take part.

Harrison has been Assistant Principal at BHS for the past five years. His wife Maria is also a teacher there. In fact, the couple met years ago as teachers in Georgetown County. The couple has two sons, D.J. and Bradley.

His first major objective is working with Berkeley High principal Steven Steele and a committee to fill the empty head football coach position there. He says the process is detailed, but basically include gathering applicants, narrowing down the finalists, and finding the right person for the job.

"The best possible candidate with the best possible credentials that fit is what we are going to be looking for," he says.

The position is vacant after the controversial let go of former AD and BHS head coach Jeff Cruce. It happened in mid-December, and as mentioned earlier Cruce has since filed a civil lawsuit against BCSD alleging wrongful termination.

As Harrison sits at his office at the high school, he takes a moment to remember some of the many young people he once coached. He is truly touched by how his role made a difference.

"I got an email from Dan Morgan, the coach at Blythewood, I coached almost 30 years ago, congratulating me for being the AD."

APP. 0963

And then he remembers a certain eighth grader he watched outrun high school students at a track jamboree. He coached a young Bruce Ellington.

"This kid blew everyone's socks off! He won by more than half a lap. You just look at that and thought that kid's going to be special." Ellington went on to play basketball and football for the University of South Carolina Gamecocks and is now a wide receiver for the San Francisco 49ers.

He recently ran into another one of his former students who told him this:

"Coach you worked us hard, but I wouldn't trade it for the world."

For Harrison, its a compliment that means the world.

"Those are the things you know you had a little part in that, and it's gratifying."

As Harrison steps into his new role, he knows there will be many more young people who's lives will be enriched through sports, while they are enrolled at BCSD and beyond.

Prior Stories:

- Jeff Cruce Let Go as Head Coach for Berkeley High Stags
- Berkeley High's Former Head Football Coach Sues BCSD for Wrongful Termination

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Nicole Johnson Shealy

Nicole Johnson Shealy is a freelance journalist in the tri-county area. She began her journalism career in the TV news industry in 2005 and has worked at stations in Columbia, SC, Albany, GA, and in Charleston, SC. Additionally, her work has been published across multiple platforms including newspaper, magazine, and online.



Latest posts by Nicole Johnson Shealy (see all)

http://www.berkeleyind.com/archives/bhs-narrows-field-for-football-coach/article_f0fc27cc-7e35-5ed2-a1a5-9c234dacdeca.html

BHS narrows field for football coach

Debbie Merlo Feb 29, 2016

A list of candidates to replace former coach Jeff Cruce is now down to three finalists. Ten candidates in all were interviewed Friday.

A second round will commence March 4 and will include a day of "meeting, greeting and touring," new athletics director Charlie Harrison said.

From the three, one will be recommended to the school board for approval by BHS principal Steven Steele.

Harrison indicated there would be a news conference announcing Cruce's replacement. There is also speculation former BHS coach Jerry Brown and current Timberland coach Art Craig are two of the three contenders. However, Harrison also said he was not at liberty to release the names of the three finalists pending notification of the seven who didn't make the final cut.

Cruce was fired as Berkeley's coach and athletic director on Dec. 16, 2015, after the Stags finished 3-7.

Cruce led the Stags for five seasons and was 25-32.

North-South All-Star Classic caps wrestling season

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

March 2, 2016 Wednesday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 601 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

With the individual state wrestling tournament now complete, the last event of the 2015-16 high school season will take place this weekend at North Myrtle Beach with the 28th annual North-South All-Star Classic.

The event has four teams competing Upper and Lower State teams comprised of wrestlers from classes AAAA and A, and teams from classes AAA and AA.

Several Lowcountry grapplers have been selected to participate in the event, including four wrestlers who captured state championships last weekend. Competing on the Lower State s AAAA/A all-star team are Burke s Santarion Frasier, Caleb O Quinn of Colleton County, Tanner Trephan and Maurice Phillips of Ashley Ridge, Christian and Caleb Rubin of Goose Creek, and AJ Alford and John Simpson of Fort Dorchester.

Frasier is flying high emotionally after becoming the first wrestler from Burke to win a state championship. He finished the season with a 46-0 record. Caleb Rubin also finished undefeated this season at 36-0, while Alford lost only once all season. Christian Rubin lost just twice during the season.

Bishop England s Andrew Collins is a member of the AAA/AA Lower State all-star team.

The event will begin on Friday night and conclude on Saturday afternoon.

SCISA 4-A all-region

Charleston Collegiate boys basketball coach Jay Godbolt was selected as the SCISA Region 4-A coach of the year after leading his Sun Devils to a region and Class A state title this season.

Cathedral Academy s Travon Hamilton was named as the region s player of the year. Also named to the all-region team were Kegan Boone and Al Young of Charleston Collegiate, Greg Archie of Cathedral Academy, Mikey Smith of Ridge Christian and Sam Fletcher of Coastal Christian.

All-Lowcountry basketball

Area basketball coaches are asked to nominate players for The Post and Courier All-Lowcountry teams. Please send statistical information to shelto66@hotmail.com A first-team, second-team and honorable mention list for boys and girls basketball will be announced, as well as the players of the year.

North-South All-Star Classic caps wrestling season

All-Star football coaches

The North-South all-star football game selected its coaching staff for the 2016 game. Selected as part of the South all-star staff are current Baptist Hill head coach Marion Brown and Goose Creek assistant coach Joe Hauff.

Hanahan head coach Charlie Patterson was also selected as an assistant coach on the 2016 Shrine Bowl all-star staff.

Both all-star games are played in December.

Berkeley coaching search narrows

Final interviews for the vacant Berkeley head football coaching position will be conducted this week with an announcement set for early next week, according to sources.

The selection committee has narrowed the list to a final three, which includes former head coach Jerry Brown and current Timberland head coach Art Craig. The school is seeking a replacement for Jeff Cruce, who was relieved of his duties in December.

Brown guided the program to three state championships during an 18-year run as the school s head coach. He has led three different programs to state championships and has 258 career coaching victories.

Craig has built a Class AA powerhouse at nearby Timberland High, winning more games over the last 10 seasons than any other program in the Lowcountry.

Former Wando pitcher honored

Former Wando pitcher Jeff Gottesman, now a freshman at Bucknell University, was named the Patriot League Rookie of the Week for the team s opening weekend against James Madison.

Gottesman pitched four shutout innings in relief, his first collegiate appearance, to secure a Bison victory. He allowed two hits and struck out five in the outing.

Load-Date: March 2, 2016

End of Document

Berkeley still without football coach

Debbie Merlo Mar 21, 2016

As the rumor mill churned (with spring practices just around the corner), a who's the coach conundrum was continued when Berkeley County School District (BCSD) delivered a disappointing blow to those hoping for the return of Jerry Brown as head football coach for Berkeley High School.

Brown raked in 175 wins and three state championships throughout an 18-year career but BCSD announced last week they will continue the search to hire a replacement for Jeff Cruce. Cruce was removed in December as athletic director and head football coach.

According to the press release, "Members of the administrative staff of Berkeley High School are still engaged in the process of selecting a head football coach for the 2016-2017 school year."

The position, once one but now split into two, has Charlie Harrison at the helm as athletic director. Interviews for the coaching position began after the position was posted in January.

"However, this process did not result in a candidate being recommended for hire," the press release stated. "The position has been re-advertised to increase the pool of candidates."

And Jerry Brown has moved on, electing to accept a coaching position in Irmo at a Christian school.

"After two interviews, I didn't hear anything else," said Brown.

Another possible candidate for the position declined comment.

Ex-Stags coach to start program at SCISA school after denied Berkeley

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

March 24, 2016 Thursday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 4

Length: 471 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Two weeks ago, former Berkeley High School head coach Jerry Brown thought he was going to get a return trip to Moncks Corner for a second stint at guiding the Stags football program.

On Wednesday, Brown was announced as the first football coach at Northside Christian School in Lexington. Brown will start the program this fall, competing on the SCISA eight-man level for two years. The next step would be a move to the 11-man ranks as a Class AAA program.

It s an exciting opportunity for me to start a program from scratch and develop it the right way, said Brown, who has 260 career coaching victories. As a Christian, I look forward to a Christian environment that supports the development of young men. I was looking for an administration that could be loyal and do what s best for kids and I found that at Northside.

It s probably not what I thought I would be doing a few weeks ago, but God sees things that I don t see and his will supercedes my will.

Brown spent 18 years as the head coach at Berkeley, retiring in 2010 after three championships. He returned to coaching in 2012 and guided Batesburg-Leesville to a state title his fifth championship as a coach.

Brown then returned to Spring Valley High School, where he began his career as a head coach. He resigned after one season amidst an allegation of slapping a student during a class demonstration on discipline. No charges were filed and Brown was exonerated but the coach decided to step down as head coach.

Brown says he was contacted by Northside Christian last September but opted to wait and see what other coaching opportunities opened up. When Berkeley relieved Jeff Cruce (Brown s successor at Berkeley) from his head coaching duties in December, Brown immediately became a candidate.

Berkeley was really the only position I would be interested in, Brown said. We enjoyed our 18 years at Berkeley and in the Moncks Corner community. The people were very supportive and I really felt I could bring that support back to the program.

We had as good a program as any in the state when I was there and I felt like I was the one that could get it back to where it was when I left. The kids at Berkeley, I felt, deserved better and I was ready for the challenge.

Brown was recommended by Berkeley principal Steven Steele to be the next head coach but the school district opted not to approve the hire.

I was disappointed that my wife and I are not able to re-aquaint ourselves with the community, but I m not bitter, Brown said. They have to do what they feel is best. I m moving forward and looking forward to building the program at Northside.

The head coaching position is still open with a second round of applications accepted through Wednesday. The next step will be interviews with top candidates with an announcement expected within two weeks.

Load-Date: March 24, 2016

End of Document

Berkeley names new football coach

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

April 8, 2016 Friday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 6

Length: 322 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

After a search that took longer than expected, Berkeley High School has a head football coach.

Principal Steven Steele confirmed Thursday the hiring of Daniel High head coach Randy Robinson as the school s new head coach. Robinson, a former assistant at Berkeley, has been the head coach at Daniel for the last 10 seasons, compiling a 97-31 overall record.

I am very excited to welcome coach Robinson back to the Stag family, Steele said. He will bring the experience and the excitement to the program that will motivate our student-athletes to meet and exceed their potential. We are looking forward to the great things to come from Stag football this fall.

Robinson replaces Jeff Cruce, who was relieved of his duties in December after a 3-7 record during the 2015 season. Cruce was 25-32 in five seasons at Berkeley.

Robinson gained a sterling reputation as a defensive coordinator at Daniel, working under the highly successful Allen Sitterle for 10 years before ascending to the role of head coach. Under Sitterle, Robinson coordinated the defense for a pair of state championship teams (1995, 98). As head coach, Robinson guided Daniel to a 14-1 record in 2013 but lost in the Class AAA state championship game to Myrtle Beach.

Berkeley was set to hire former head coach Jerry Brown about a month ago but the recommendation by Steele was not accepted by the Berkeley County School District. The job was advertised again for a week and Robinson, who did not apply the first time, threw his name into the ring.

Robinson worked as an assistant at Berkeley from 1990-1993 under former head coaches Dennis Swygert and Brown.

Robinson s expertise at building solid defenses will be tested at Berkeley. The Stags were one of the worst defensive teams in Class AAA in 2015, yielding an average of 43.7 points per game. Berkeley allowed at least 70 points in three different games last season.

Check back here for updates to this story.

Load-Date: April 8, 2016

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APP. 0972

961

New coach, attitude at Berkeley

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

July 30, 2016 Saturday

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Section: 03,C; Pg. 5

Length: 780 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

MONCKS CORNER The first day of practice is an exciting time for all high school coaches and players. But Friday morning s opening day was more special than most for the Berkeley High School team and new head coach Randy Robinson.

Robinson was hired in April to replace Jeff Cruce, who went 25-32 in five seasons at Berkeley. Robinson came to Berkeley from Daniel High School, where he spent 17 seasons as a coach. He compiled a 97-31 record in 10 seasons as head coach at his alma mater.

Though he spent the entire summer at Berkeley, competing in 7-on-7 camps and getting to know his new team, Robinson said the official first day of practice was better than he had anticipated.

The first day of camp, no matter where you coach, is always a special, exciting time, Robinson said. Today was awesome. I loved the attitude of these kids. We had great energy and we worked hard. We have a long way to go as far as being ready to play a game. We re playing catch-up in a lot of areas, but man this was fun today.

Senior quarterback Darius Douglas, who passed for more than 1,600 yards as a junior, saw a new attitude Friday.

Things are different, no doubt, Douglas said. The discipline is really strong. Coach Robinson is pressing us hard. I don t think many people think we can do much this year. For us, that s our motivation to prove everyone wrong.

Robinson said he slept very little on Thursday and arrived at the school at 6:30 a.m. Friday. His top priority was to see how the hard work over the summer carried over into fall camp.

We worked hard all summer and they were great, the coach said. I wanted to see how that carried over. The summer is one thing, but it gets real now and we wanted to see how they responded. It was good overall. I m pretty pleased.

The Stags finished 3-7 in 2015. Defensively, Berkeley was one of the worst programs in the state, allowing more than 40 points per game, including three games where they allowed 70 points.

Last year was really tough, especially for us guys on defense, said senior defensive end Aerimon Gipson. We are determined to be better this year. We have to fight hard on every down. That s the message with the new coaches. There is a real sense of urgency this year. From Day 1, coach Robinson told us exactly what has to get done, and so far, everything he said then is happening. We re washing away last year and moving forward.

Robinson said he talks very little about the past, particularly last season. But, he admits that working on the overall psyche of the team has been a challenge.

They heard all last year how they weren t any good, just a lot of negative stuff, Robinson said. That s in the past. We are working hard to build them up, to make them believe in themselves. I think we re headed in the right direction in that area.

Ironically, Berkeley s season opener is at Daniel. The game was scheduled last year when Cruce and Robinson, good friends for decades, decided it would be a fun game to play.

When I scheduled it, it was a fun game, but now, knowing what I left there, it s not a lot of fun, Robinson said jokingly. But I m excited about this program and this team. We re looking forward to the first game but we have a lot of work to do before we get to that point.

Notes

North Charleston head coach Chris Reger accepted an administration position at Ashley Ridge earlier this week, leaving the Cougars in limbo as practices begin. Efforts to contact anyone at North Charleston to discuss who might serve as the head coach this season were unsuccessful.

Fort Dorchester opened practice with several new faces on the field as the program received some high profile transfers. Junior receiver Justin Williams, a member of Colleton County s roster just a few days ago, is now at Fort Dorchester. Williams is regarded as one of the state s top junior prospects.

DeAngelo Knight, one of the top junior athletes in the area, is also at Fort Dorchester. Knight played two years ago at Northwood Academy and played last year at Pinewood Prep. He also is a talented basketball player. Tyler McLellan, a 6-7, 340-pound junior offensive lineman, has moved in from Forsyth County, Ga.

Former Summerville defensive backs coach Fred Edwards has joined the coaching staff at rival Berkeley. Edwards coached for 40 years under John McKissick but was hired by Robinson this spring.

SCISA football programs got a one-day jump on the public schools, starting fall practice on Thursday. First Baptist, however, was the first school to practice in the state this season, opening camp on Monday. The Hurricanes open the regular season Aug. 12 in a showcase game in Alabama against Escambia Academy of Tallahassee.

Load-Date: July 30, 2016

End of Document

Fifty years later, Berkeley gets second shot at Daniel

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

August 19, 2016 Friday

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Section: 03;C; Pg. 5

Length: 529 words

Byline: Special to The Post and Courier

Body

Fifty years ago, the Berkeley High football team traveled to the Upstate to take on Daniel for the state Class AA championship. Daniel won the game, 20-6.

The memories of that game, played on a cold November night, still play fresh in the mind of arguably Berkeley s biggest football fan, Billy Ott. Ott attended the game as a 16-year student at Berkeley and remembers vividly the disappointment of coming up short.

They ran all over us in the second half, Ott recalls. The best part of the night for me was I got to ride back to Moncks Corner in my friend s 65 Mustang.

On Friday night, Berkeley, and Ott, will again make the long drive to Central, just outside of Clemson, as the Stags open the season at Daniel. Friday night will be the 580th time that Ott has seen his beloved Stags play as he continues his quest to reach 600 games. Ott has missed only one Berkeley game since 1966, the 1996 season opener at Sumter. Friday night will offer a first-time experience for Ott.

I m riding the fan bus and it will be the first time in my life that I been on a bus, Ott says. It took me 66 years to get on a bus. I m still not sure how I feel about riding a bus for four hours but it beats driving at my age.

Berkeley s new head coach, Randy Robinson, also is making a return trip to Daniel. Robinson spent the last 20 years at Daniel High, including the last 10 as the head coach. Robinson won 96 games as the Lions head man before leaving to take on the rebuild of Berkeley s program.

Robinson and Berkeley s former coach, Jeff Cruce, have been friends for more than two decades and thought it would be a neat idea to schedule each other in a home-and-home series in 2016-17. Little did Robinson know that he would be standing on the visitor s sideline this Friday night.

Certainly, had I known I would be coaching here at Berkeley, I would not have scheduled Daniel, joked Robinson, who played at Daniel and spent three seasons as an assistant at Berkeley in the late 1980 s. Every game I have ever played or coached in that stadium, I have been on the home side. It s definitely going to be a little weird on Friday night but I ll be focused on what we have to do to win the game.

The Stags will leave Moncks Corner early Friday morning and will stop at Clemson for a walk-through at Clemson s indoor facility. They will take a brief tour as well before eating and moving into game mode later in the day.

Robinson may have a slight advantage in the game, having in-depth knowledge of Daniel s personnel and coaching staff. His former defensive coordinator, Jeff Fruster, replaced him as the head coach. Robinson says the Lions are a bit young but extremely talented. Junior linebacker Jake Venables is a Division I prospect, as is freshman safety Tyler Venables. As you might have guessed, they are the sons of Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables.

Both of those kids are really good players and they have some other underclassmen who are going to be really good for them, Robinson said. I have a good idea on their personnel and it s pretty good personnel. I know what I left there and I expect them to be a really competitive football team on Friday night.

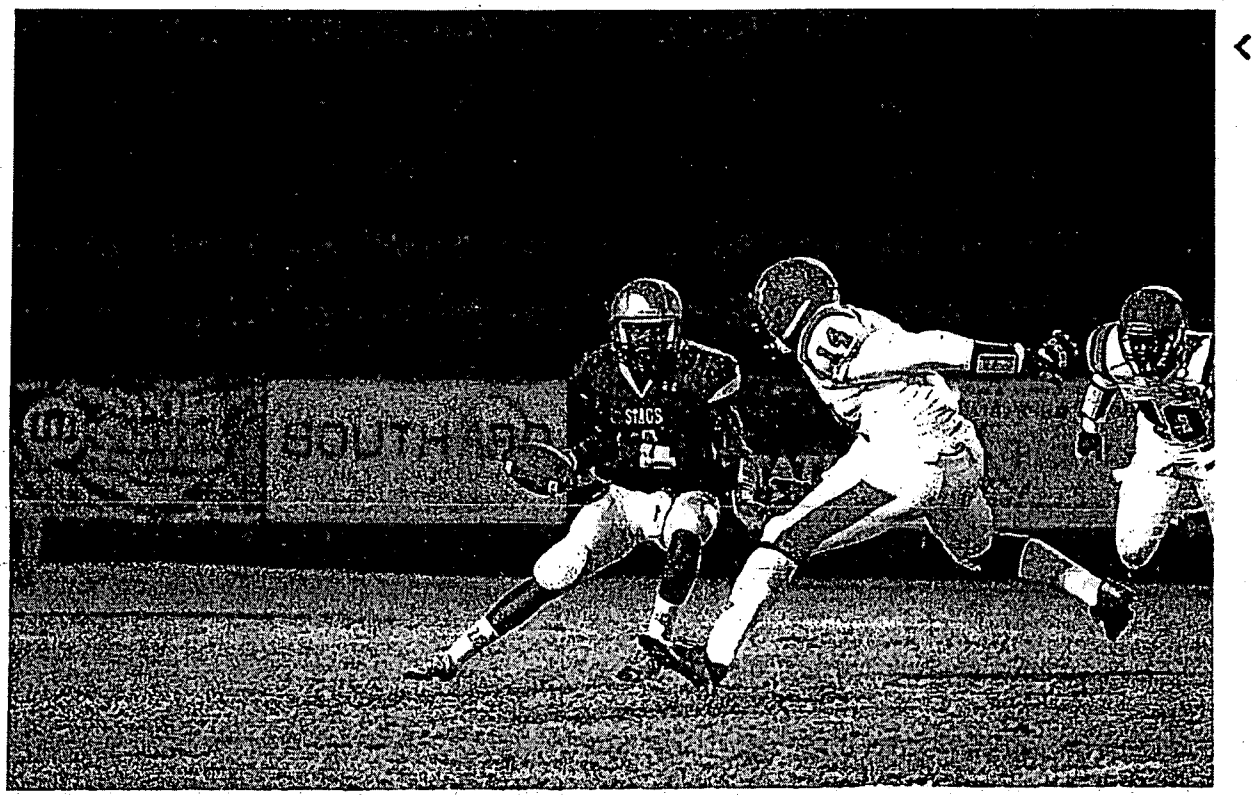
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'He's a born leader:' from one leader to another

By Rickey Ciapha Dennis Jr. rdennis@berkeleyind.com Dec 21, 2016



Douglas often showcased his unique scrambling ability and breakaway speed. He accounted for nearly 3,000 total offensive yards this season.

Rickey Ciapha Dennis Jr./Independent

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Berkeley High School Football Coach Randy Robinson was quite frank about describing Berkeley's dismal 2015 season.

Upon his arrival last Spring from Daniel High School, Robinson watched the film of a Stags squad that went 3-7 and missed the Class AAA playoffs. The team struggled with basic fundamentals in tackling, while also dealing with the unfair consequences of an offense lead by previous coach Jeff Cruce who was reluctant to punt the football and left the Stags defense in short fields to defend.

"They were embarrassed by the season," Robinson said of this year's football returners.

But Robinson, who would provide the structure and spearhead the motivation the team craved, along with standout quarterback Darius Douglas, who's skillset and leadership was unmatched in Berkeley County, would guide the 9-3 Stags to a Region 8-AAAA championship and the second round of the playoffs.

Given those efforts, Robinson and Douglas have been named the Berkeley County Coach of the Year and Offensive Player of the Year respectively by The Berkeley Independent and The Gazette as part of their 2016 all-Berkeley County football selections.

Robinson preached to his guys the necessity of doing the basic fundamentals correctly and helped the Stags defense improve their tackling techniques. The Berkeley defense held opponents to a totaled 258 points as opposed to 437 last season and came up on huge plays to seal significant victories.

"The guys bought into [my message]," Robinson said. "I walked into a group of guys that were hungry."

Robinson also built a reputation with his team, as Douglas said, for "telling it like it is." After a loss, he never shied away from verbally chastising his guys. Even after Berkeley's 40-0 first-round-playoff blowout over Darlington, which followed a region championship, Robinson criticized his guys for their lack of energy and simple errors.

"The feeling after a loss is just not good with Coach Rob," Douglas said. "He calls it being brutally honest, and a lot of us need it. Without it, we wouldn't be in the place where we are now."

At times, Robinson was seen giving his quarterback a good talking-to on the sideline also, but for the most part, Robinson did not have much to fret about on the offensive end lead by the all-star.

Douglas, who tallied over 2,300 offensive yards total last season, finished this year with nearly 3,000 yards.

With a 57 pass completion percentage, Douglas racked up 28 touchdowns through the air and on the ground, he tallied 28 touchdowns, slipping through defenses any chance he got.

Robinson knew Douglas was fast, but when Robinson got to Berkeley, he found out just how fast.

The coaching staff drew up specific plays for Douglas for him to showcase his breakaway speed, giving him some structure but still the freedom to read defenses and make good decisions.

"I don't know how many third down conversions we called for him," Robinson laughed. "He can make a four-yard-play a 40-yard-play."

Like his coach, Douglas too was able to balance an honest, yet constructive approach when correcting teammates when they erred. If the Stags seemed lackadaisical, Douglas would let them know. And if a coach in practice chewed out a player, Douglas would help build him back up.

"He's a born leader," Robinson said of Douglas, adding that Douglas was probably the most notable leader he's ever coached in over 25 years of coaching high school football.

With his coach in attendance, Douglas ended his high school career in the 80th annual Shrine Bowl all-star game at Wofford College on Saturday, a dream he said he had since adolescence.

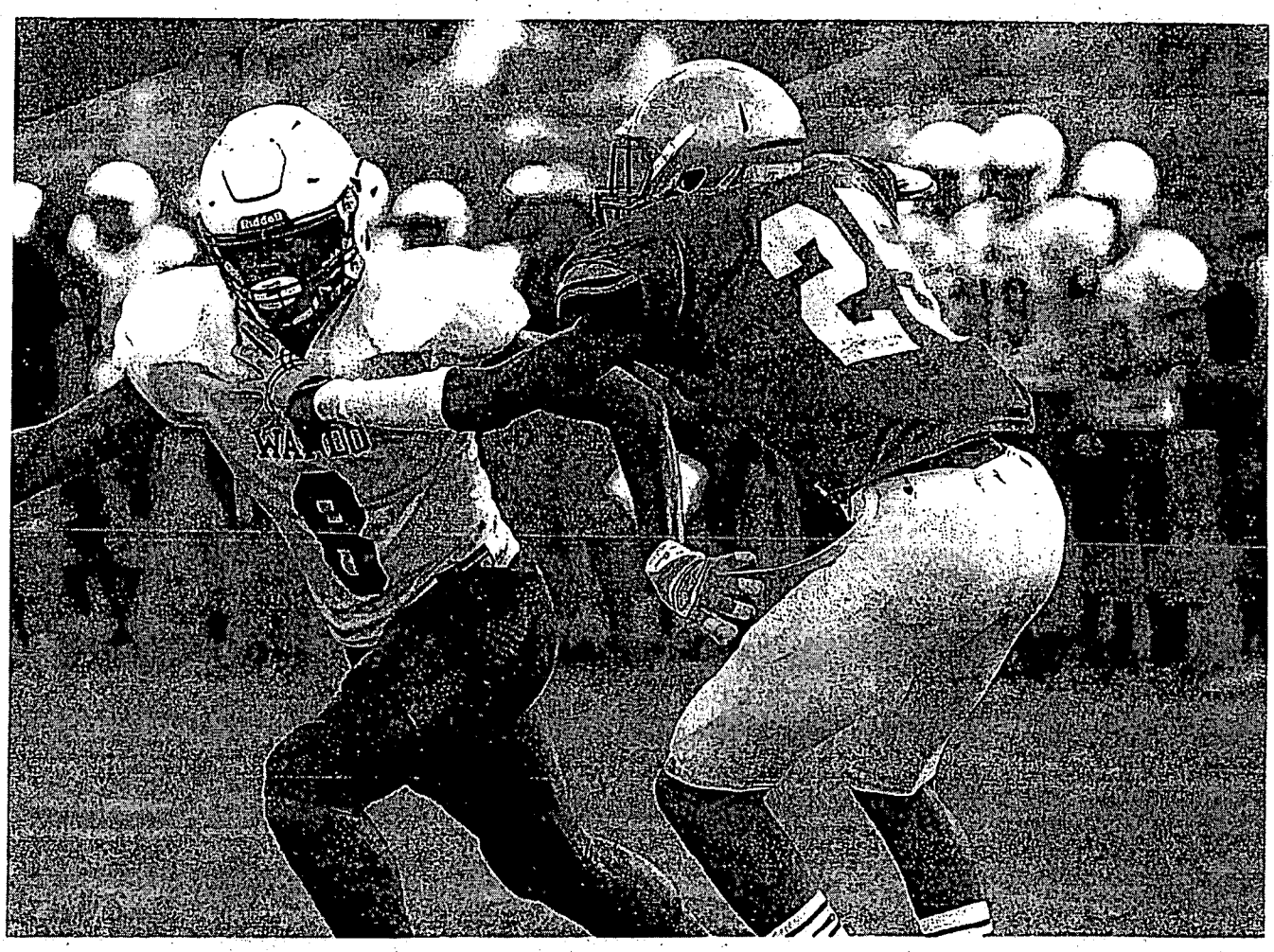
As far as college ball goes, Robinson said Douglas' stock has gone up in recent weeks, citing a few schools have expressed interest in the quarterback talent. Whoever he ends up playing for, Robinson knows the team will be better for it.

"Somebody's going to get a steal," Robinson said.

Rickey Dennis

Former Stags standout holds 19 offers

By C.R. Cumbee, Special to The Independent Jul 3, 2017



Former Berkeley Stags defensive back Israel Mukuamu (right) plays tight defense on Wando receiver Ortre Smith in a preseason scrimmage last summer. Smith eventually signed with the University of South Carolina.

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Rob Gantt/Independent

Former Berkeley defensive back Israel Mukuamu was a key cog in helping the Stags have a breakout 9-3 season in 2016, but the rising senior moved to Louisiana during Christmas break this past year after his father took a new job in Bossier City.

However, Mukuamu has continued to catch the eye of college coaches across the country and is one of the top recruits in the talent-rich state. He is rated a four-star prospect and the No. 11 player in Louisiana according to Rivals.com and currently holds 19 scholarship offers.

"It's been kind of tough because Louisiana is different from South Carolina. I'm just ready to focus on my senior season and have a big season," Mukuamu said. "It was tough leaving my teammates and my high school friends behind, but I guess God had a plan for me and I just stuck with it."

It has been a long journey for the 6'4, 190-pound safety, but the foundation for success was laid at Berkeley High. As a freshman, he started on the varsity squad and ended up leading the team in interceptions. There were ups and downs, but his position coach at the time, Mal Lawyer, never wavered in his confidence in Mukuamu.

"I really learned a lot as a freshman. I was actually scared to mess up because I knew my coach was taking a risk starting a freshman over some juniors and seniors. People were watching me to see what I would do. I just wanted to play my role," Mukuamu said.

"When I first saw him as a freshman, my first thought was his height and size is college ready and close to NFL ready," Lawyer recalled. "I remember coming home after the first practice thinking to myself that this kid is going to be special. I didn't care who started at corner or safety the year before, I was going to start him as a freshman."

Mukuamu and the rest of the team struggled to a 3-7 finish during his sophomore campaign after former head coach Jeff Cruce refused to punt on offense, constantly forcing the defense to defend short fields. Randy Robinson took over for Cruce last year and the Stags turned it around. Mukuamu totaled 63 tackles throughout their stellar run.

"It was a good transition because he (Robinson) came in and made us work really hard and showed us what a winning mentality was," Mukuamu said.

While the team headed in the right direction, so did the individual. Mukuamu camped at the University of South Carolina last summer and picked up the first of his 19 current offers.

He narrowed his list to South Carolina, Georgia State, Oklahoma State, Indiana, Purdue, Louisville, Florida State, Florida and Mississippi, and trimmed those to a top four of USC, FSU, Indiana and Oklahoma State (in no specific order) recently. Mukuamu hopes to make his final decision near the end of the month at Berkeley High School.

"It's been stressful but I'm taking it one day at a time. I'm happy and blessed that I have so many choices. It's been a roller coaster. Sometimes you're happy that so many coaches want to talk to you and sometimes you don't (want to talk). It will be a great opportunity to play college football," Mukuamu said.

Although Mukuamu will wear a Parkway Panthers jersey this season, he will always be a Berkeley Stag. Lawyer knows wherever the talented safety lands, that team will get a player they can count on.

"The sky is the limit with him going forward. He has great work ethic," Lawyer said.

Rob Gantt

Former county football standout holds 19 offers; Former football defensive back holds 19 offers

Post & Courier (Charleston, SC)

July 13, 2017 Thursday

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Highlight: Former Berkeley High School defensive back Israel Mukuamu was a key cog in helping the Stags have a breakout 9-3 season in 2016, but the rising senior moved to Louisiana during Christmas break this past year after his father took a new job in Bossier City.

Body

Former Berkeley High School defensive back Israel Mukuamu was a key cog in helping the Stags have a breakout 9-3 season in 2016, but the rising senior moved to Louisiana during Christmas break this past year after his father took a new job in Bossier City.

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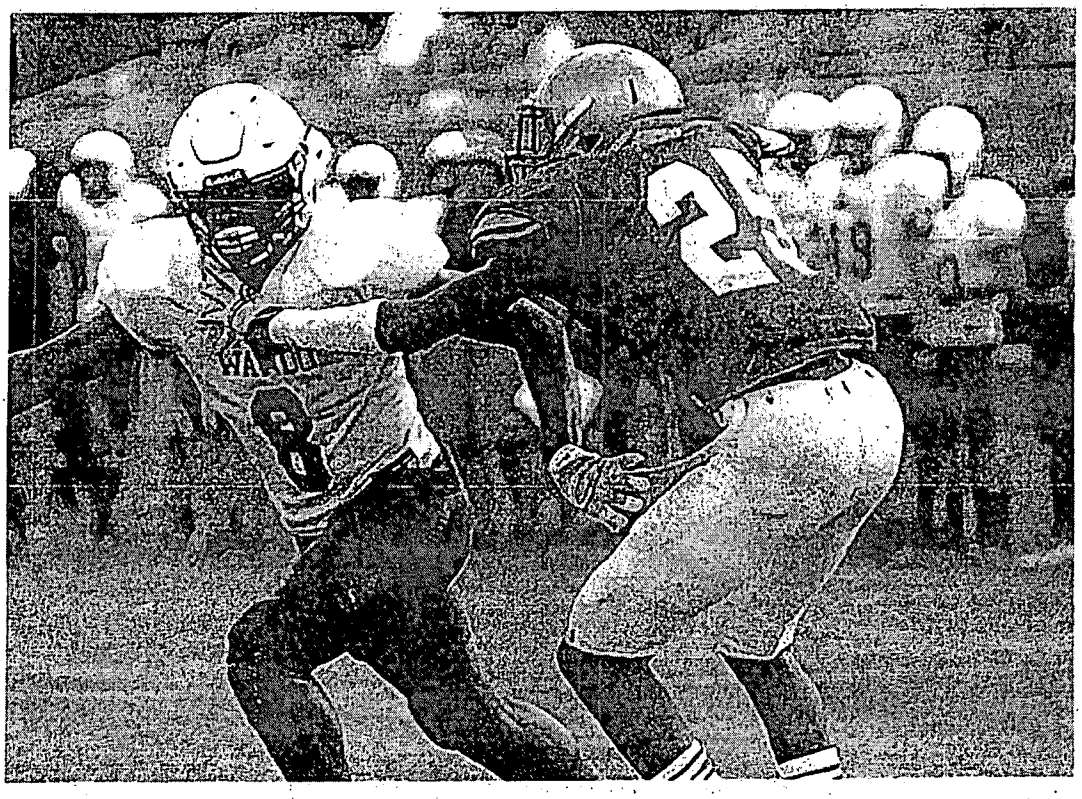
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Graphic

Former Berkeley Stags defensive back Israel Mukuamu (right) plays tight defense on Wando receiver Ortre Smith in a preseason scrimmage last summer. Smith eventually signed with the University of South Carolina.

Rob Gantt/Gazette

Former county football standout holds 19 offers; Former football defensive back holds 19 offers

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THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In the Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM BERKELEY COUNTY
Kristi Lea Harrington, Circuit Court Judge

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SC Court of Appeals

Appellate Case No. 2018-000791
Case No. 2016-CP-08-0131

Jeffrey Lance Cruce,..... Respondent,

v.

Berkeley County School District,..... Appellant.

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STATEMENT OF ISSUES ON APPEAL

I. Did the trial court err in failing to grant a directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District based on absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) of the South Carolina Tort Claims and, more specifically, in failing to rule that Jeffrey Cruce, as a head football coach and athletic director, did not qualify as either a "public official" or "limited public figure" for purpose of defamation?

II. Did the trial court err in failing to grant a directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District on the basis that Jeffrey Cruce failed to prove each of the elements of his defamation claim based on the January 7, 2016 email sent by Chris Stevens?

A. Did the trial court err in ruling that the January 7, 2016 email sent by Chris Stevens was defamatory and false?

B. Did the trial court err in ruling that the record includes any evidence to support a finding of common law malice?

C. Did the trial court err in ruling that the record includes any evidence to support a finding that the damages claimed were proximately caused by the January 7, 2016 email sent by Chris Stevens?

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This is an appeal from a defamation action brought against the Appellant Berkeley County School District ("School District") pursuant to the South Carolina Tort Claims Act. The Respondent Jeffrey Cruce is the former head football coach and athletic director at Berkeley High School. Following the 2015 football season, Cruce was relieved of his duties in those two positions and was transferred to a counselor position at a middle school in the School District. Cruce later left the employment of the School District following the 2015-2016 school year.

During his tenure at head football coach at Berkeley High School, Cruce had only one winning season and several losing seasons capped by a 3-7 record during the 2015 football season. (R. 253-254). That season was notable for Cruce's use of a controversial and well-publicized no-punt strategy. Under that approach, Cruce vowed never to punt on fourth downs regardless of field position or the distance required for the offense to achieve a first down. He believed that the "analytics" supported such an unconventional strategy. (R. 254-259, 268-269, 362-366, 919). Cruce publicized his new approach prior to the season and spoke often to the media, both local and national, about that specific strategy. In doing so, Cruce developed notoriety for himself. He also created and fostered substantial controversy and public scrutiny for himself and his football program. (R. 538-544, 897, 901-903, 904-905, 908-909, 910, 912-914, 918, 919-920, 945, 948, 966, 970).

In 2016, Cruce brought a civil action against the School District for wrongful termination and defamation. Those causes of action proceeded to trial before Circuit Court Judge Kristi Lea Harrington and a jury on September 5, 2017. At the close of the plaintiff's case-in-chief and again at the close of all the evidence, the School District made motions for a directed verdict on numerous grounds, including sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) of the Tort Claims Act. The School District also argued that Cruce failed to satisfy each of the elements of his defamation claims.

Ultimately, the trial court granted a directed verdict in the School District's favor on the wrongful termination claim. (R. 460). The trial court also granted a directed verdict in the School District's favor on the defamation claim which was based on the School District's silence when it removed Cruce as the head football coach and athletic director. (R. 468-469). No appeal has been filed from those dispositive rulings.

The only claim that was submitted to the jury was the defamation claim arising from a single email dated January 7, 2016, sent by Chris Stevens, who was Berkeley High School's head athletic trainer. That email was sent to the athletic coaches, paid and volunteer, as well as select administrators at the school. (R. 532). There were no other recipients of that email. The email was entitled "Student Athlete Eligibility and Medical Files" and addressed Stevens' attempt to

make certain that the student-athletes' eligibility files were complete and in order. In the email, Steven expressed uncertainty as to whether the files were complete, and he requested assistance from the coaches to provide rosters of their student-athletes so that he could make sure that files were complete for all competing student-athletes. (R. 532).

The trial court denied the School District's directed verdict motions as to the defamation claim pertaining to the January 7, 2016 email. (R. 469). In so doing, the trial court ruled as a matter of law that Cruce did not qualify as a "public official" or a "limited public figure" under prevailing defamation law. (R. 461-462). On that basis, the trial court ruled that the School District was not entitled to sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17). The trial court also rejected other arguments with respect to the email. That claim was submitted to the jury, which ultimately returned a verdict of $200,000 in actual damages in Cruce's favor. (R. 12-13, 509-510).

The School District then moved for a JNOV and new trial absolute on the same grounds previously raised. By order filed March 29, 2018, the trial court denied the School District's post-trial motions. (R. 1-9). The School District thereafter filed a timely appeal to this Court.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

When reviewing the trial court's ruling on a motion for a directed verdict or JNOV, the South Carolina appellate courts apply the same standard as the trial court by viewing the evidence and all reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party. *Elam v. South Carolina Department of Transportation*, 361 S.C. 9, 602 S.E.2d 772, 782 (2004). With respect to factual issues, "a motion for JNOV may be granted only if no reasonable jury could have reached the challenged verdict." *Gastineau v. Murphy*, 331 S.C. 565, 503 S.E.2d 712, 713 (1998). In other words, a court should grant a JNOV motion whenever there is no evidence to support the jury's verdict. *Chakrabarti v. City of Orangeburg*, 403 S.C. 308, 743 S.E.2d 109, 112 (Ct. App. 2013).

However, as to the trial court's rulings on questions of law, the appellate courts review those rulings *de novo*. *Fesmire v. Digh*, 385 S.C. 296, 683 S.E.2d 803, 807 (Ct. App. 2009) ("[t]his Court reviews all questions of law *de novo*").

ARGUMENTS

I. The trial court erred in failing to grant a directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District based on absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) of the Tort Claims and, more specifically, in failing to rule that Jeffrey Cruce, as a head football coach and athletic director, did not qualify as either a "public official" or "limited public figure" for defamation purposes.

The Berkeley County School District moved for a directed verdict and JNOV on the basis that Jeffrey Cruce qualifies as a public official or alternatively as a limited public figure. As such, Cruce was necessarily required to prove actual malice to prevail on his defamation claim.

The South Carolina appellate courts have repeatedly made clear that "[t]he Tort Claims Act governs all tort claims against governmental entities and is the exclusive civil remedy available in an action against a governmental entity or its employees." *Proctor v. Department of Health & Environmental Control*, 368 S.C. 279, 628 S.E.2d 496, 502 (Ct. App. 2006). Governmental entities are "liable for their torts in the same manner and to the same extent as a private individual under like circumstances, subject to the limitations upon liability and damages, and exemptions from liability and damages, contained" within the Tort Claims Act. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-40. The General Assembly did not intend to waive all sovereign immunity. Rather, it "intend[ed] to grant the State, its political subdivisions, and employees,

while acting within the scope of official duty, immunity from liability and suit for any tort except as waived by this chapter." S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-20(b).

Specifically, the School District is entitled to absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) of the Tort Claims Act. Section 15-78-60(17) provides that a governmental entity is not liable for a loss resulting from "employee conduct outside the scope of his official duties or which constitutes actual fraud, *actual malice*, intent to harm, or a crime involving moral turpitude." S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-60(17). (Emphasis added). Because proof of "actual malice" is an element of his claim, Cruce's defamation claim is barred by sovereign immunity. The trial court, however, rejected this position and erroneously concluded that Cruce is neither a public official nor a limited public figure.

A. Sovereign Immunity under Section 15-78-60(17)

In *Gause v. Doe*, 317 S.C. 39, 451 S.E.2d 408 (Ct. App. 1994), this Court examined whether the South Carolina Tort Claims Act barred the plaintiff's defamation cause of action against the Myrtle Beach Police Department. The parties did not dispute that the plaintiff, as a police officer, was a "public official" for purposes of the defamation action.[1] This Court explained that "[i]n a case involving

[1] This Court recognized in *Gause* that there was controlling authority in this State providing that a police officer is a "public official" for purposes of defamation. *See*, *Botchie v. O'Dowd*, 315 S.C. 126, 432 S.E.2d 458 (1993) (a deputy sheriff was a public official for the purposes of his defamation action against his employer, the sheriff, and was therefore required to prove actual malice); *McClain v. Arnold*, 275 S.C. 282, 270 S.E.2d 124 (1980) (a police officer is a public official for the purposes of a defamation action).

defamation of a public official, the plaintiff must prove the defendant acted with actual malice." 451 S.E.2d at 409. Citing Section 15-78-60(17), this Court also recognized that the Tort Claims Act "clearly excludes a governmental entity's liability for an individual's loss stemming from a state employee's conduct that constitutes actual malice." *Id.* Based on that provision, this Court "agree[d] with the trial court that the SCTCA bars Gause's slander claim against the MBPD because Gause must prove the MBPD employee's conduct constituted actual malice in order to recover on this claim." *Id.*

This case requires the same result. Jeffrey Cruce, as the athletic director and head football coach, qualifies as a "public official," or alternatively, as a "limited public figure." As such, he was required to prove actual malice in order to prevail on his defamation claim, but pursuant to Section 15-78-60(17), the School District enjoys absolute sovereign immunity for conduct constituting actual malice. Accordingly, Cruce's defamation claim against the School District is barred.

B. Public Official

The South Carolina Supreme Court has held that "to prove fault in a defamation action, a plaintiff who is a public official or public figure must prove by clear and convincing evidence that the defendant acted with actual malice in publishing a false and defamatory statement about the plaintiff." *Erickson v. Jones Street Publishers, LLC*, 368 S.C. 444, 629 S.E.2d 653, 665 (2006). Actual malice

requires proof that the statement was made "with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of which it was false or not." 629 S.E.2d at 666, *citing New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 256, 279-280 (1964). As the South Carolina Supreme Court has cautioned, "[a]ctual malice under the *New York Times* standard should not be confused with the concept of common law malice as an evil intent or a motive arising from spite or ill will." *Erickson*, 629 S.E.2d at 666. *See also*, *Sanders v. Prince*, 304 S.C. 236, 403 S.E.2d 640 (1991).

Accordingly, the Supreme Court has explained that "an important initial step to analyzing any defamation case is determining whether a particular plaintiff is a public official, public figure, or private figure." *Erickson*, 629 S.E.2d at 666. "This determination is a matter of law which must be decided by the court on a case by case basis after a careful examination of the facts and circumstances." *Id.*

While recognizing there is no "all-encompassing definition of 'public official,'" the Supreme Court applies the general rule that "a public official is a person who, among the hierarchy of government employees, has or appears to the public to have substantial responsibility for or control over the conduct of governmental affairs." *Id.*, *citing Rosenblatt v. Baer*, 383 U.S. 75, 85 (1966). "In considering the question of whether one is a public official, the employee's position must be one which would invite public scrutiny and discussion of the person holding it, entirely apart from the scrutiny and discussion occasioned by the

particular charges in controversy." *Id.* "The status of a public official may be deemed sufficient to warrant application of the *New York Times* privilege, not because of the government employee's place on the totem pole, but because of the public interest in a government employee's activity in a particular context." *Id.*

Thus, the dispositive question asks whether the status of a high school athletic director and head football coach makes him a "public official." In other words, the Court must focus not only on whether those government positions are ones that invite public scrutiny and discussion, but also on whether the employee's activity in a particular context invites public scrutiny and discussion.

The South Carolina appellate courts have not, as yet, had the opportunity to address whether a high school athletic director and head football coach qualifies as a "public official." However, a number of cases from other jurisdictions support that conclusion.

For instance, in *Johnson v. Southwestern Newspapers Corp.*, 855 S.W.2d 182 (Tex. App. 1993), the Texas Court of Appeals concluded that a high school athletic director and head football coach qualifies as a "public official." The Texas court first explained that "[t]he 'public official' designation does not apply to all government employees, but applies where 'a position in government has such apparent importance that the public has an independent interest in the qualifications and performance of the person who holds it, beyond the general

public interest in the qualifications and performance of all government employees.'" 855 S.W.2d at 186, *citing Rosenblatt*, 383 U.S. at 86. In applying that test, the Texas court explained as follows:

> This dual position [as head football coach and athletic director] was, so the record reveals, of such apparent importance that the public had an independent interest in the qualifications and performance of the person who occupied the positions, beyond the general public interest in the qualifications and performance of all government employees.
>
> * * * * *
>
> Johnson's position of and activities as athletic director ... show that he was vested with and exercised significant governmental responsibility on behalf of the school district in his sole operation of the athletic department. As head football coach, Johnson filled a position of such importance that the public not only had, but exhibited, an independent interest in his qualifications and performance, transcending any interest shown in other employees of the school system.

855 S.W.2d at 186-187.

Likewise, the Oklahoma Supreme Court held that a wrestling coach was a public official because his position "was of apparent importance in that public school's athletic program for the public to have an independent interest in [the coach's] performance." *Johnston v. Corinthian TV Corp.*, 583 P.2d 1101, 1103 (Okla. 1978).

A New Jersey court has similarly reasoned that a public-school athletic director is a public official. In *Standridge v. Ramey,* 733 A.2d 1197 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1999), that court explained:

> As athletic director, plaintiff was responsible for managing and supervising all the athletic programs in the Roxbury school district, including twenty-four athletic teams. In performing these responsibilities, plaintiff administered a substantial budget and supervised approximately sixty coaches and other employees. He also spoke at booster club meetings and various other community functions. Moreover, we take note of the fact that the performance of high school athletic teams is often a matter of substantial public interest within a community. Therefore, we conclude that plaintiff was a "public official" and must show actual malice to establish his defamation claims.

733 A.2d at 1201-02.

Moreover, in *Weinberger v. Maplewood Review*, 668 N.W.2d 667 (Minn. 2003), the plaintiff, who was a high school head football coach, brought a defamation action based on allegedly false information published about him in a local newspaper. The Minnesota court determined that the coach was a "public official" and was required to prove actual malice. 668 N.W.2d at 673.

The United States Supreme Court decision in *Curtis Publishing Co. v. Butts*, 388 U.S. 130 (1967), is also instructive. The plaintiff was Wally Butts, who, as the athletic director and head football coach at the University of Georgia, was accused in a newspaper article of "fixing" the outcome of a football game. The Supreme

Court ultimately treated Butts as a "public figure" rather than a "public official" only because he was "not technically a state employee" in holding those positions. Butts was, in actuality, employed by the Georgia Athletic Association, a private corporation. Nonetheless, the Supreme Court acknowledged that "the public interest in education in general, and in the conduct of athletic affairs of educational institutions in particular, justifies constitutional protection of discussion of persons involved in it equivalent to the protection afforded discussion of public officials." 388 U.S. at 146. The Supreme Court further recognized the "public interest in the materials here involved" and that Butts, as the head football coach, commanded a "substantial amount of public interest." 388 U.S. at 154. Given the Court's analysis, it is clear that, had Butts been employed by the State of Georgia rather than a private corporation, the Supreme Court would have clearly concluded that Butts qualified as a "public official" in his roles as athletic director and head football coach.

The reasoning in these cases applies with equal force to Jeffrey Cruce. Like those coaches and athletic directors, Cruce's position as coach and athletic director drew far more public attention than the average government employee's position. As a coach, his team's games were covered routinely by the local media, as were his efforts as the athletic director to create a hall of fame for Berkeley High School. (R. 552-973). This media attention reflected the public's interest in the Berkeley

High School football team, which was as intense (according to Cruce's wife) as fans' interest in NFL teams. (R. 387-389). Moreover, as an athletic director, Cruce oversaw all of the sports at Berkeley High School, which fielded at that time every sport offered in South Carolina except lacrosse. (R. 179). As the record clearly reflects, Cruce's level of public attention and scrutiny stands in stark contrast to the lack of public attention and scrutiny typically shown to other teachers at Berkeley High School.

This was particularly true during the 2015 football season given Cruce's use of a controversial and well-publicized no-punt strategy. Prior to that season, Cruce vowed never to punt on fourth down, which was unconventional, and thus commanded substantial public attention and scrutiny. Cruce's no-punt strategy was the subject of numerous local media articles. (R. 897, 901-903, 904-905, 908-909, 910, 912-914, 918, 919-920, 945, 948, 966, 970). It was even the subject of an article in the September 21, 2015 edition of the *Kansas City Star*, in which Cruce was frequently quoted as a proponent of the non-punt strategy. (R. 538-544). In employing such an unconventional approach and then defending it in numerous media opportunities, Cruce brought greater than normal attention to himself and his football team. In effect, Cruce's no-punt strategy commanded greater public attention and scrutiny than a more conventional football coach would receive. The record further reflects that Cruce's strategy was the subject of

tremendous public discussion and displeasure. Principal Steven Steele, in fact, testified about a planned fan protest and also the need to provide the coach with police protection at games. (R. 364-365, 546-547).

As recognized in the *Standridge* case, "the performance of high school athletic teams is often a matter of substantial public interest within a community." *Standridge,* 733 A.2d at 1202. The same is certainly true in Berkeley County during the 2015-2016 school year – even more so given Cruce's no-punt strategy. In short, Cruce qualifies as a "public official" under *New York Times*, *Rosenblatt,* and their progeny. The trial court committed reversible error in failing to hold that Cruce was a public official.

C. Limited Public Figure

Even if not a public official, Jeffrey Cruce qualifies at the very least as a "limited public figure." A limited public figure "is an individual who 'voluntarily injects himself or is drawn into a particular public controversy and thereby becomes a public figure for a limited range of issues. In either case such persons assume special prominence in the resolution of public questions.'" *Erickson,* 629 S.E.2d at 668, *citing Gertz v. Robert Welch,* 418 U.S. 323, 351 (1974).

The South Carolina Supreme Court has provided five factors to consider in determining whether a plaintiff is a "limited public figure":

(1) The plaintiff had access to channels of effective communication;

(2) The plaintiff voluntarily assumed a role of special prominence in the public controversy;

(3) The plaintiff sought to influence the resolution or outcome of the controversy;

(4) The controversy existed prior to the publication of the defamatory statement; and

(5) The plaintiff retained public-figure status at the time of the alleged defamation.

Erickson, 629 S.E.2d at 669.

In denying the School District's JNOV motion, the trial court ruled that "[a] high school football team's defensive strategy was not a matter of public controversy as contemplated by *Erickson.*" (R. 5). That is clearly in error. A public controversy is one that "has received public attention because its ramifications will be felt by persons who are not direct participants." *Carr v. Forbes, Inc.,* 259 F.3d 273, 279 (4th Cir. 2001). Courts have routinely held that public controversies and scrutiny arise from sports news, sporting events and sports figures. *See e.g., Curtis Publishing Co. v. Butts,* 388 U.S. 130, 154 (1967) (holding that a university football coach was a limited public figure); *Vandenburg v. Newsweek, Inc.,* 507 F.2d 1024, 1025, n.1 (5th Cir. 1975) (holding that a college track coach was a limited public figure); *Barry v. Time, Inc.,* 584 F. Supp. 1110, 1118 (N.D. Cal. 1984) (holding that a plaintiff's "voluntary decision to become head basketball coach is a sufficient 'thrust' within the meaning of *Gertz* to create

limited public figure status, since the responsibilities of the position he accepted inevitably put him at the center of public attention regarding a continuing public controversy"); *Dodrill v. Arkansas Democrat Co.*, 265 Ark. 628, 590 S.W.2d 840, 843 (1979) ("[t]he definition of 'public figure' is quite broad and, indeed, one may be held a public figure for limited purposes. Various courts have held included within the definition a football coach"); *McGarry v. Univ. of San Diego,* 64 Cal.Rptr.3d 467, 477 (Cal. Ct. App. 2007) (holding that a plaintiff's "role as head coach of a local university's football team already made him a public figure, and his employment termination was already a topic of widespread public interest"); *Grayson v. Curtis Publishing Co.,* 436 P.2d 756, 762 (Wash. 1967) (holding that a university basketball coach was a limited public figure).

The same is particularly true in the present case. As already discussed above, the 2015 football season at Berkeley High School brought considerable public attention, scrutiny, and controversy. Cruce actually created that controversy by adopting an unorthodox no-punt strategy that proved to be unsuccessful as his team finished with a 3-7 record and gave up more than 70 points in several games. He deliberately adopted such a strategy knowing that it would be controversial. In the *Kansas City Star* article, Cruce is quoted as acknowledging that "[t]his could be a career-ending decision that I've made." (R. 543). Clearly, Cruce's tenure as the head football coach at Berkeley High School, and particularly the 2015 season,

fostered public controversy sufficient to make him a "limited public figure." As indicated, Cruce was at the center of that controversy. He created it and fostered it by his public discourse defending his unconventional approach and the novel use of "analytics" in sports decision-making. Contrary of the trial court's assessment, Cruce was intricately involved in a public controversy. No other conclusion can be reached from the evidence in the record.

In light of its decision that Cruce's coaching strategy was not a "public controversy," the trial court did not address the other factors of the *Erickson* test for a "limited public figure." The evidence in the record, nonetheless, fully supports each of those factors.

First, Cruce had significant access to the media. He testified that he had a radio show, and as the 197 newspaper articles in evidence demonstrate, Cruce had regular access to and discussions with local and even national reporters. (R. 251, 552-973). Reporters sought out Cruce to discuss the Berkeley High School football team's games and, in particular, during the 2015 football season, his use of a no-punt strategy. (R. 538-544, 897, 901-903, 904-905, 908-909, 910, 912-914, 918, 919-920, 945, 948, 966, 970). Cruce was thus in a unique position regarding access to the media when it came to the football team and Berkeley High School sports.

Second, Cruce voluntarily assumed a public role regarding the football team and Berkeley High School sports. He was not forced to be the coach, nor was he coerced into talking with reporters. Indeed, he willingly broadcast his controversial no-punt strategy, including being interviewed for the story in the *Kansas City Star*. (R. 538-544). Cruce did not just assume a role of special prominence in the public controversy; as stated above, he actually created and fostered the controversy by adopting and publicizing unorthodox and controversial football tactics and strategy.

Third, Cruce sought to influence the outcome of this controversy. He repeatedly defended his new strategy during the 2015 season. On one occasion after a loss, he implored people (through the media) to "have patience" because his strategy would eventually work. (R. 902). To a different reporter, Cruce noted that he knew he would get criticized for not punting, but that "is not going to deter" him from sticking to his plan. (R. 905). And after picking up a win against Timberland High School in 2015, Cruce defended his strategy by proclaiming that he had "done [his] homework" on it. (R. 919).

Fourth, the controversy over Cruce's tenure as athletic director and head football coach existed before the January 7, 2016 email. That email was written after Cruce was removed from those positions and was reassigned to Sedgefield Middle School.

Fifth, Cruce was still in the public eye when the January 7, 2016 email was written. This email came less than a month after Cruce was removed as head football coach and athletic director. That decision received media attention. (R. 941-944). And the email came shortly before there was more media coverage of the lawsuit that Cruce filed against the School District. (R. 945-949).

Accordingly, there is clearly evidence to support each of the five elements identified by the Supreme Court in *Erickson*. Additionally, there is authority from other states that supports finding that a high school football coach and athletic director qualifies as a "limited public figure." *See, Beler v. Milford Bd. of Education,* 2005 WL 2008428, *2 (Conn. Super. Ct. 2005) (noting that a plaintiff "concedes, as he must, that as a public school teacher and coach he is considered a 'public figure' for purposes of his defamation claim"); *Brewer v. Rogers*, 211 Ga. App. 343, 439 S.E.2d 77, 81 (Ga. App. 1993) (holding that a high school football coach was a "public figure"); *Mahoney v. Adirondack Publishing Co.,* 71 N.Y.2d 31, 517 N.E.2d 1365, 1366 (N.Y. 1987) (noting that the plaintiff conceded that he was a "public figure" as a high school football coach).

In sum, the trial court erred in failing to rule that Jeffrey Cruce was a "public official" or at the very least a "limited public figure" for purposes of his defamation claim against the School District. As such, Cruce was required to prove actual malice as an element of his claim. However, the School District is

entitled to absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) for employee conduct that constitutes actual malice. Therefore, consistent with this Court's decision in *Gause v. Doe*, the School District was entitled to a directed verdict and JNOV on the defamation claim.

II. The trial court erred in failing to grant a directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District on the basis that Jeffrey Cruce failed to prove each of the elements of his defamation claim based on the January 7, 2016 email sent by Chris Stevens.

In addition to its sovereign immunity defense, the School District also moved for a directed verdict and JNOV on the basis that Jeffrey Cruce failed to prove each element of his defamation claim. The only defamation claim that was submitted to the jury pertained to the January 7, 2016 email that was sent by Chris Stevens, the head athletic trainer at Berkeley High School, to the athletic coaches, paid and volunteer, as well as select administrators at the school. (R. 532). There were no other recipients of that email. The email was entitled "Student Athlete Eligibility and Medical Files" and addressed Stevens' attempt to make certain that the student eligibility files were complete. In the email, Steven expressed uncertainty as to whether the files were complete, and he requested assistance from the coaches to provide rosters of their student-athletes so that he could make sure that files were complete for all competing student-athletes. (R. 532).

"The tort of defamation permits a plaintiff to recover for injury to his reputation caused by the defendant's communication to others of a false message about plaintiff." *McBride v. School District of Greenville County*, 389 S.C. 546, 698 S.E.2d 845, 852 (Ct. App. 2010). "To prove defamation, the plaintiff must show: (1) a false and defamatory statement was made; (2) the unprivileged publication was made to a third party; (3) the publisher was at fault; and (4) either actionability of the statement irrespective of special harm or the existence of special harm caused by the publication." *Id.*

A. The January 7, 2016 Email Is Not False and Defamatory.

"In order to succeed on a defamation claim, the plaintiff must show that the challenged statement is both defamatory (tending to impeach the plaintiff's reputation) and actionable (injuring the plaintiff)." *White v. Wilkerson*, 328 S.C. 179, 493 S.E.2d 345, 347 (1997). "It is the trial court's function to determine initially whether a statement is susceptible of having a defamatory meaning." *Id.*

Under South Carolina law, a statement is defamatory only "if it tends to harm the reputation of another as to lower him in the estimation of the community or to deter third persons from associating or dealing with him." *Holtzscheiter v. Thomson Newspapers,* 332 S.C. 502, 506 S.E.2d 497, 512 (1998). "All of the parts of the publication must be considered in order to ascertain the true meaning, and

words are not to be given a meaning other than that which the context would show them to have." *White*, 493 S.E.2d at 347.

The January 7, 2016 email, when read as a whole and within the proper context, does not have a defamatory meaning. In addition, the email was not false. The trial court, therefore, erred in submitting the defamation claim pertaining to the email to the jury.

As indicated, Chris Stevens sent the email to all coaches and school administrators to recount his and others' efforts to ensure that students' eligibility files were complete.[2] He writes: "After spending some time looking through the files it has come to my attention that there could be some documents that could be misplaced and others that are out of order." (R. 532). He then advises that the student eligibility files need to be complete, and he enlists the help of the coaches to submit a roster of their participating student-athletes so that he can check that every student has the required paperwork. (R. 532). He did not state with any degree of knowledge or certainty that the files were indeed incomplete or had not been properly maintained. And certainly, he places no blame on anyone, including

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[2] In its JNOV order, the trial court states incorrectly that the January 7, 2016 email was sent to "45 recipients who were employees of the district, volunteer coaches, and parents." (R. 5). That is not completely accurate. Cruce himself testified that the email recipients were all coaches employed for pay or as volunteers with Berkeley High School. (R. 279, 282-283). There is no evidence that the email was sent to parents.

Jeffrey Cruce, nor does he directly or indirectly question Cruce's fitness for handling the athletic director's position.

In its JNOV order, the trial court suggests (although does not expressly find) that the email contains an insinuation. The court cites to the case of *Fountain v. First Reliance Bank*, 398 S.C. 434, 730 S.E.2d 305 (2012), in which the Supreme Court explains that "[a] mere insinuation is as actionable as a positive assertion if it is false and malicious and the meaning is plain." 730 S.E.2d at 309. "Statements therefore may be either defamatory on their face, or defamatory by way of innuendo. Innuendo is extrinsic evidence used to prove a statement's defamatory nature. It includes the aid of inducements, colloquialisms, and explanatory circumstances." *Id.* The trial court then suggests the jury heard testimony that Stevens insinuated that Cruce "had been unfit to perform the job of athletic director" or that "the review of the student files and subsequent email was an attempt after the fact to support the district's false reason for termination." (R. 6). That makes no sense. The testimony elicited from Chris Stevens at trial was exceedingly brief. Cruce's counsel did not ask Stevens even the first question about the content, meaning or intent of the email. (R. 396-398). Certainly, there was no extrinsic testimony presented to support any insinuation or innuendo. Stevens was not asked, nor did he testify that he believed Cruce did anything wrong or was unfit to perform the duties of athletic director. Moreover, there is

absolutely no evidence that Stevens had any involvement in or knowledge of the reasons that Cruce was removed as head football coach and athletic director. It is pure supposition and conjecture on the part of the trial court to even suggest that the email was intended by Stevens to support the School District's reasons to remove Cruce from those positions.

Importantly, Stevens only noted in the email itself that some documents "could" be misplaced or out of order. (R. 532). The use of "could" makes this sentence conditional. This Court has, however, ruled that a conditional statement can be the basis of a defamation claim only if the conditional statement "is known to be true." *Warner v. Rudnick,* 280 S.C. 595, 598, 313 S.E.2d 359, 360 (Ct. App. 1984). In *Warner,* the court held that the trial court wrongly denied a motion to dismiss because the basis of the defamation claim was a conditional statement that "depends on a fact which has not and may never occur." *Id.* Similarly, in the present case, Cruce's defamation claim is premised entirely on a conditional statement about documents that "could" be misplaced or out of order.

Finally, in addition to failing to show that the statement was defamatory, Cruce has not suggested, let alone shown, that the statement was false in any respect. The evidence shows only that Stevens and Cruce disagreed about exactly what documents were required to be in a student eligibility file. (R. 220-222). But Cruce never disputes or denies that there "could" have been documents misplaced

or out of order for any of the student-athletes. That is all the email states or insinuates. In short, the jury had no basis on which to conclude the email was false, and because it was not false, it cannot support Cruce's defamation claim.

B. The Jury Had No Evidence to Conclude that Chris Stevens Sent the January 7, 2016 Email with Common-Law Malice.

The trial court correctly charged the jury that Cruce had to prove the January 7, 2016 email was written with common-law malice. (R. 494). This standard requires a plaintiff to prove that the speaker "was activated by ill will in what he did, with the design to causelessly and wantonly injure the plaintiff; or that the statements were published with such recklessness as to show a conscious indifference toward [the] plaintiff's reports." *Holtzscheiter,* 506 S.E.2d at 501, n.3.

The record contains no evidence whatsoever from which a reasonable juror could have concluded that Stevens wrote the January 7, 2016 email with any ill will, spite or malice towards Cruce. Stevens testified that he went into Cruce's old office with permission from the administration because a weightlifting coach had inquired whether a particular student had the necessary paperwork on file to be allowed to lift weights. (R. 394-395). Cruce's counsel then limited her cross-examination of Stevens to the topic of whether Stevens knew what documents had to be in the eligibility files. (R. 396-398). His counsel never broached the subject of any motive Stevens had in writing the email. Moreover, other than being the author of the January 7, 2016 email, Stevens was not mentioned in any other

respect during the trial, so the jury could not have imputed any ill will to Stevens from any other evidence. Tellingly, Cruce himself was never asked nor provided testimony of evidence of *any basis* for Stevens to have ill will towards him. For instance, there was no evidence of any history of personal or professional issues or problems between the two men.

Nonetheless, in its JNOV order, the trial court found that "there is evidence to support a claim that the email was sent with 'recklessness as to show conscious indifference to the Plaintiff.'" (R. 6). There is, however, no such evidence in the record. At most, the trial court points to testimony from Principal Steven Steele to the effect that "the email should not have been sent out in the form and manner that was used by Stevens." (R. 6). It is important to look at Steele's precise testimony. He was critical only of the "format" of the email, but he was not critical of its content. (R. 348-352). Steele explained: "Did it need to be sent out exactly the way it was sent out? No. Did the coaches need to know there might have been some files missing? Yes." (R. 349). He reiterated several times that the "content" of the email was "appropriate." (R. 349). He also confirmed that "there were files missing." (R. 352).

In short, there is no evidence from which the jury could have concluded that Stevens acted with common-law malice in sending the January 7, 2016 email. Likewise, there is no evidence that the email was sent with recklessness as to show

conscious indifference. Without such evidence, an essential element of Cruce's claim is missing, and the jury verdict cannot stand.

C. Cruce Offered No Evidence to Show that Any Damages Were Proximately Caused by the January 7, 2016 Email.

In addition, the jury was presented no evidence to show that Cruce suffered any damages that were proximately caused by the January 7, 2016 email. As the Court charged the jury, "the plaintiff must prove that his reputation was damaged by the defamatory statement. The plaintiff must prove that the damages naturally and proximately resulted from the defendant's statement." (R. 494-495). Importantly, the trial court did not charge the law on defamation *per se*. As a result, there can be no reliance on the law of "presumed damages" to uphold the verdict. Instead, as was charged, Cruce had the burden of proving that the January 7, 2016 email proximately caused damages. He did not meet that burden of proof.

Under South Carolina law, proximate cause requires evidence of causation in fact and legal cause. *McKnight v. South Carolina Department of Corrections*, 385 S.C. 380, 684 S.E.2d 566, 569 (Ct. App. 2009). "Causation in fact is demonstrated by establishing the plaintiff's injury would not have occurred 'but for' the defendant's [wrongful act], while legal cause is proved by establishing foreseeability." *Id.*

In its JNOV order, the trial court in a conclusory fashion states that "[e]vidence was submitted which would allow a jury to reasonably infer that the

Plaintiff suffered damages as a proximate result of the January 7th email." (R. 7). That is not correct.[3] Cruce offered the jury no evidence to show a causal chain connecting the January 7, 2016 email and any damages. Cruce did claim myriad damages, including lost salary, lost retirement, and relocation expenses to the Charlotte area. What Cruce never did, however, was show how any of these damages were proximately caused by the January 7, 2016 email. Most importantly, the January 7, 2016 email did not proximately cause Cruce to be removed from his positions as head football coach and athletic director. That change in his employment had already occurred by January 7, 2016. Moreover, there was no evidence that anyone who received the January 7, 2016 email was a decisionmaker or had any bearing or influence on any decisionmaker who decided at any point not to offer Cruce a subsequent coaching job, whether in or near Berkeley County or in the Charlotte area. In fact, there is *no evidence* that the January 7, 2016 email or its content was ever communicated to anyone other than the recipients of the email.

Furthermore, Cruce did not present testimony from any of the recipients of email, except for Principal Steele. Thus, there is no testimony from anyone who

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[3] In its JNOV Order the trial court erroneously states that Cruce "was told that he couldn't be hired for other jobs because he was 'unfit.'" (R. 7). There is no evidence to that effect. In fact, quite the contrary -- when Cruce attempted to explain what he was told on one occasion when rejected for a job, the trial court correctly sustained the hearsay objection and struck the testimony. (R. 227).

received the January 7, 2016 email that they thought less of Cruce because of that email. In other words, there is nothing in this record to even suggest – let alone prove – that "but for" the email, Cruce would have been held in higher regard by persons in Berkeley County or elsewhere. Consequently, Cruce has not shown that the January 7, 2016 email positively or negatively impacted his reputation, and certainly he has not shown that the email proximately caused him any of the damages he claimed. For this additional reason, the verdict cannot stand, and the School District was entitled to a directed verdict and JNOV.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussion and analysis, the Appellant Berkeley County School District respectfully requests that this Court reverse the jury's verdict and the denial of its directed verdict and JNOV motions with respect to the defamation claim that was submitted to the jury. The School District requests a remand with instructions that judgment be entered in its favor on all causes of action.

Respectfully submitted,

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THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

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APPEAL FROM BERKELEY COUNTY
Kristi Lea Harrington, Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No. 2018-000791
Case No. 2016-CP-08-0131

Jeffrey Lance Cruce, Respondent,

v.

Berkeley County School District, Appellant.

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Argument 2

I. As Appellant's appeal deals solely with objections to the trial court's denial of Appellant's directed verdict motion, issues not raised during Appellant's directed verdict motion are not preserved for appeal and not properly before this Court. 2

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STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Respondent was a high school teacher in South Carolina for 28 years, an athletic director in Berkeley County at various high schools for a total of 21 years, and head football coach at Berkeley High School before he was terminated as athletic director and football coach and reassigned to a middle school in January of 2016. (R. p. 169, lines 6-7; p. 172, lines 2-8; p. 173, line 11—p. 174, line 4; p. 179, lines 13-16; p. 242, line 19—p. 243, line 20; p. 528.) Berkeley High School is one of seven (7) high schools located in Berkeley County. Berkeley County is one of forty-six counties in South Carolina. In the 28 years he was a teacher, Respondent was never disciplined. (R. p. 173, lines 8-10.) Respondent was "Athletic Director of the Year" for his region the year before he was terminated. (R. p. 214, lines 21-22.) As athletic director, Respondent was the only person certified to maintain student athlete eligibility files ("eligibility files") in Berkeley County and the eligibility files Respondent maintained were audited three (3) times a year. (R. p. 220, line 18—p. 221, line 14; p. 222, lines 2-6.) Respondent had just received a clean audit from the high school league a few months before he was terminated as athletic director. (R. p. 222, lines 16-24.)

After Respondent was transferred to a middle school for three (3) stated reasons that had nothing to do with maintaining eligibility files (R. pp. 530-531), several of Appellant's employees, including athletic trainer Chris Stevens, went into Respondent's office and started going through the eligibility files. (R. p. 394, line 1—p. 395, line 4.) Mr. Stevens thought there were documents missing from the files and prepared and sent an email on January 7, 2016 to 45 persons, some of whom Respondent testified he did not know, stating there were records missing from the eligibility files (which Respondent explained was false) and the files created a liability

to the school, inferring Respondent was unfit as athletic director. (R. p. 176, lines 15-22; p. 279, line 1—p. 283, line 7; p. 395, lines 1-9; p. 532.)

The issue before the jury was whether the January 7th email was defamatory. The jury deliberated more than six (6) hours, sent two (2) notes to the judge, and returned a verdict in favor of the Respondent. (R. p. 508, line 14- p. 510, line 18.)

STANDARD OF REVIEW

"When reviewing a trial court's ruling on a directed verdict motion, this court will reverse if no evidence supports the trial court's decision or the ruling is controlled by an error of law." *Burnett v. Family Kingdom, Inc.*, 387 S.C. 183, 188, 691 S.E.2d 170, 173 (Ct. App. 2010). When reviewing the trial court's decision on a motion for directed verdict, this court must employ the same standard as the trial court by viewing the evidence and all reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party." *Id.* "The trial court must deny a directed verdict motion where the evidence yields more than one inference or its inference is in doubt." *Id.*

ARGUMENT

I. As Appellant's appeal deals solely with objections to the trial court's denial of Appellant's directed verdict motion, issues not raised during Appellant's directed verdict motion are not preserved for appeal and not properly before this Court.

Appellant's appeal is based solely on the trial court's ruling on its motion for directed verdict and is, therefore, limited to the issues raised and ruled upon by the trial court regarding Appellant's motion. Appellant stated only three (3) bases for its directed verdict motion as to the defamation claim: Respondent was a "limited public figure" (R. p. 425, line 21—p.445, line 8); the January 7th email was not false and defamatory (R. p. 461, lines 11-18); and the January 7th email was privileged. (R. p. 470, lines 1-4.) Appellant includes only two (2) of these three (3) directed verdict arguments on appeal; specifically, Respondent is a "limited public figure"

(Appellant's Br., Argument I. C.) and the January 7th email is not false and defamatory (Appellant's Brief, Argument II A.)

Appellant now makes two (2) arguments that were not presented to the trial court during its directed verdict motion. (R. p. 425, line 21—p. 470, line 4.) Appellant argues in its brief that the trial court failed to grant a directed verdict in its favor as Respondent is a public official (Appellant's Brief, Argument I. B.) and that there was insufficient evidence for a jury to find common law malice. (Appellant's Brief, Argument II.B.)

Appellant argued after trial, as part of its post-trial motion for JNOV, that Respondent was a "public official." As a JNOV under Rule 50 (b) SCRCP is essentially a renewal of the motion for a directed verdict (*Chapman v. Upstate RV & Marine*, 364 S.C. 82, 88, 610 S.E.2d 852, 856 (Ct. App. 2005)), the trial court could not consider argument on matters that were not raised in the directed verdict including whether Respondent was a "public official." "Failure to raise the issue that is now on appeal in the directed verdict motion bars review on appeal." *See, In re McCracken*, 346 S.C. 87, 93, 551 S.E.2d 235, 238 (2001): *Roland v. Palmetto Hills*, 308 S.C. 283, 286, 417 S.E.2d 626, 628 (Ct. App. 1992) ("A motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict is a renewal of the directed verdict motion and cannot raise grounds beyond those raised in the directed verdict."). The issue of whether Plaintiff is a "public official" cannot be raised on appeal as it was not raised or ruled on at the directed verdict stage of trial and is not properly before the Court.

Appellant also did not argue during its directed verdict motion that there was insufficient evidence the January 7th email was sent with common law malice, which argument it now includes in its brief as Argument II. B. (R. p. 425, line 21—p. 470, line 4.) The only time the issue of common law malice came up during the trial was when Respondent's counsel asked for

a defamation *per se* jury charge which the trial court refused. (R. p. 472, lines 10-22.) The jury charges were not objected to by Appellant. (R. p. 503, lines 13-17.)

Appellant's arguments I. B and II. B. are not properly before the Court as they were not raised during Appellant's directed verdict motion. "It is axiomatic that an issue cannot be raised for the first time on appeal, but must have been raised to and ruled upon by the trial judge to be preserved for appellate review." *Wilder Corp. v. Wilke*, 330 S.C. 71, 76, 497 S.E.2d 731, 733 (1998) citing *Creech v. South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Dep't,* 328 S.C. 24, 491 S.E.2d 571 (1997).

II. The trial court did not err in denying directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District based on absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60 (17) of the South Carolina Tort Claims Act as there is no South Carolina law supporting Appellant's argument that Respondent was either a "public official" or a "limited public figure" and the court properly viewed the evidence in the light most favorable to the non-moving party.

A. The trial court did not err in ruling that the Tort Claims Act does not provide Appellant absolute immunity as actual malice is not an element of a defamation or libel *per se* claim.

Appellant asserts in its brief that "actual malice" is an element of Respondent's defamation claim. That is not true. Respondent alleged only defamation *per se*. (R., p. 16, ¶¶ 102, 103; p. 62.) When a statement is classified as actionable *per se*, the defendant is presumed to have acted with common law malice and actual malice need not be proven. *Castine v Castine*, 403 S.C. 259, 743 S.E.2d 93 (Ct. App. 2013). The trial court understood Respondent's argument as it charged the jury only regarding common law malice; there was no jury charge regarding actual malice. (R. p. 494, lines 17-22.) As explained further below, there was sufficient evidence from which the jury could conclude that the content of the email inferred Respondent was unfit to perform his job as athletic director, which is defamation *per se*, requiring no proof of actual

malice as actual malice is not necessary to prove defamation *per se.* S.C. Code § 15-78-60 (17), which provides immunity to public entities when their employees act with actual malice, does not provide Appellant immunity and the trial court did not err in failing to grant Appellant's directed verdict motion.

B. The trial court did not err in denying directed verdict on the issue of whether or not Respondent is a "public official."

Notwithstanding Respondent's argument that this issue is not preserved for appeal, the trial court did not err in denying Appellant's motion for directed verdict and judgment JNOV based on the assertion that Respondent was a public official. *New York Times v. Sullivan,* 376 U.S. 254, 84 S. Ct. 710 (1964) involved a libel claim brought by an elected Montgomery City Commissioner against the New York Times after an article was written inferring the Commissioner (Sullivan) had responded to Dr. Martin Luther King's protests by ordering the police to use intimidation and violence against King, bomb King's home and assault King, among other things. 376 U.S. at 256-258, 84 S. Ct. at 713-714. The Supreme Court held that because the elected City Commissioner was a public official, he was prohibited from recovering damages for a falsehood relating to his official conduct unless a statement was made with actual malice. 376 U.S. at 279-280, 84 S. Ct. at 726.

Appellant acknowledges there is no South Carolina law establishing that an athletic director or head football coach is a public official. Appellant cites numerous cases in other states for support of its argument, but fails to alert the Court to the many cases in other states that do not support its argument. *See, e.g., Ellerbee v. Mills*, 422 S.E.2d 539 (Ga. 1992) (a high school principal is not a public official as they are removed from the general conduct of government and are not policy makers); *Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Lipscomb*, 362 S.E.2d 32 (Va. 1987), cert

denied, 486 U.S. 1023, 108 S. Ct. 1997 (1988) (public high school teacher was not a public official as he did not influence or control any public affairs or school policy); *McCutcheon v. Moran*, 425 N.E.2d 1130 (Ill. App. Ct. 1981) (relationship a public school teacher or principal has with the conduct of government is far too remote to justify a qualifiedly privileged assault upon their reputation.) *Franklin v. Benevolent etc. Order of Elks*, 97 Cal. App. 3d 919 (1979) (public high school teachers are not public officials); and *Poe v. San Antonio Exp.-News*, 590 S.W.2d 537 (Tex. App. 1979) (summary judgment proof failed to establish plaintiff was a public official).

Further, the cases cited by Appellant to support its argument that Respondent was a public official are factually very different from this case. For instance, in *Johnson v. Southwestern Newspapers Corp.*, 855 S.W.2d 182 (Tex. App. 1993), the plaintiff was solely responsible for the operation of the district's athletic department. Here, Respondent's actions were subject to review, criticism and correction by his Principal. Respondent testified at trial that Principal Steele was Respondent's supervisor (R. p. 194, lines 5-13); Principal Steele discussed Respondent's performance as head coach with Respondent; he had philosophical differences with Respondent about his coaching style and had accordingly threatened to fire him (R. p. 195, lines 11-24); he did not like Respondent's fast-paced offense or lack of punting (R. p. 196, lines 2-14; p. 204, lines 6-18); he ordered Respondent to perform written evaluations of the football coach staff (R. p. 199, line 25—p. 200, line 8); he had considered firing Respondent because Respondent was not making the students hit enough at practice (R. p. 208, line 18—p. 210, line 5); and the Respondent acknowledged the Principal could terminate him at any time as he was the Principal had total authority over the whole school. (R. p. 210, line 23—p. 211, line

3.) Clearly, this is not a situation where Respondent was solely responsible for the operation of the athletic department.

Additionally, in the case of *Johnson v. Corinthian TV Corp.*, 583 P.2d 1101 (Okla. 1978), the court found that although a wrestling coach did not have substantial responsibility for or control over the conduct of government affairs, after he disciplined a student who wanted to rejoin the wrestling team by being whipped while crawling naked with his legs tied through the legs of other team members, and the issue of student discipline was widely publicized on television, the public developed an independent interest in this wrestling coach's qualifications and job performance beyond the public's interest in all government employees' job performance, turning him into a public official.

This set of facts differs dramatically from the facts in this case because the public's interest in the physical abuse of children in school is far different than how a football coach decides to run his offensive strategy. Appellant cites other out of state cases that are not on point. For instance, in *Standridge v. Ramey*, 733 A. 2d 1197 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 1999), an athletic director who managed all of the athletic programs in the entire school district, including 24 athletic teams, and who supervised approximately 60 coaches and employees was accused in a letter sent to the athletic director's principal and to the superintendent of schools (while he was still employed) of illegal and immoral behavior and sexually harassing female coaches and discriminating against them. As the result of the letter, the athletic director was fired. The New Jersey court acknowledged that New Jersey courts took an expansive view of the types of government employees who qualify as public officials. That is not the case in South Carolina. In fact, there are no South Carolina cases finding that a high school coach or athletic director qualifies as a public official. Contrary to the New Jersey athletic director, Respondent coached

one of seven (7) high school football teams in Berkeley County and disagreement with his offensive strategy was not a stated reason for his termination. [1] In *Curtis Publishing Co. v. Butts*, 388 U.S. 130 (1967), a university football coach was involved in fixing football games and the scandal was widely reported. Although the college football coach was not held to be a public official, the court considered him a limited public figure due to the public's interest in fixing college football games. Here, Respondent was only a high school coach, not a university coach and the issue which was arguably of "public interest" was his offensive strategy which is far different that issues related to fraud (fixing games.) None of these out of state cases cited by Appellant is factually similar to Respondent's situation as Respondent's offensive strategy for Berkeley High School was not widely televised and there was no evidence the general public developed an independent interest in Respondent's football strategy any more than any other high school football coach's strategies. The Court did not err when, as a matter of law, she found a high school teacher and football coach at a high school in one county in South Carolina was not a public official.

C. The trial court did not err in denying directed verdict on the issue of whether or not Respondent is a "limited public figure."

"Limited public figures," as enlarged by subsequent cases, are "those persons who, though not public officials are 'involved in issues in which the public has a justified and important interest'" and "include artists, athletes, business people, dilettantes, anyone who is famous or infamous because of who he is or what he has done." *Time Inc. v. Johnston*, 448 F. 2d 378, 380 (4th Cir. 1971) citing *Cepeda v. Cowles Magazines and Broadcasting, Inc.* 392 F.2d

[1] In *Weinberger v. Maplewood Review*, 668 N.W.2d 667, 673 (Minn. 2003) and *Weinberger v. Maplewood Review*, 648 N.W. 2d 249 (Minn. Ct. App. 2002), the lower court's determination that plaintiff was a public official was merely accepted by both appellate courts with no discussion by either appellate court regarding why lower court determined plaintiff was a public official.

417, 419 (9th Cir. 1968) cert. denied 393 U.S. 840, 89 S. Ct. 117 (1968). Respondent is not a famous person and how a high school football coach decides to handle his high school football team's offense from year to year is not a matter of important public interest.

> The United States Supreme Court generally has defined a public figure as follows: "For the most part those who attain this status [of public figure] have assumed roles of especial prominence in the affairs of society. Some occupy positions of such persuasive power and influence that they are deemed public figures for all purposes. More commonly, those classed as public figures have thrust themselves to the forefront of particular public controversies in order to influence the resolution of the issues involved. In either event, they invite attention and comment.

Erickson v. Jones St. Publrs., LLC, 368 S.C. 444, 472, 629 S.E.2d 653, 668 (2006).

The trial court properly denied Defendant's motion for a directed verdict when it ruled that a high school football coach's offensive strategy does not involve "an issue in which the public has an important and justified interest" and did not err when it refused to charge the jury that Respondent was a "limited public figure."

> The "designation of a person as a public figure may rest on either of two alternative bases. In some instances an individual may achieve such pervasive fame or notoriety that he becomes a public figure for all purposes and in all concepts. More commonly, an individual voluntarily injects himself or is drawn into a particular public controversy and thereby becomes a public figure for a limited range of issues. In either case such persons assume special prominence in the resolution of public questions.

Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc., 418 U.S. 323, 351, 94 S. Ct. 2997 (1974).

In the case of *Haskins v. Baylis*, 440 F. Supp. 2d 455, 463 (D. Md. 2006), the District Court held that a dog breeder although well known in the small world of dog breeding and showing purebred dogs, did not assume "any special prominence with respect to any public controversy that he might be considered a public figure for a limited purpose." (citing *Time, Inc.*

v. Firestone, 424 U.S. 448, 453, 96 S. Ct. 958 (1976)) ("Respondent did not assume any role of especial prominence in the affairs of society, other than perhaps Palm Beach society, and she did not thrust herself to the forefront of any particular public controversy in order to influence the resolution of the issues involved in it."). *See also*, *St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church v. Smith*, 74 Md. App. 353, 537 A.2d 1196, 1203-04 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 1988) (associate director of church ministry is not a public figure absent clear evidence of general fame or notoriety), *rev'd in part on other grounds*, 318 Md. 337, 568 A.2d 35 (Md. 1990). Defendant admitted there are no cases in South Carolina that hold a high school coach and athletic director is a limited public figure and, thus, there is no precedent to support Defendant's argument.

Further, the evidence clearly indicated Respondent did not meet all five (5) of the requirements necessary to become a limited public figure. The five (5) requirements for a limited purpose public figure as decided by a federal court in the district of Maryland are: (1) the plaintiff had access to channels of effective communication; (2) the plaintiff voluntarily assumed a role of special prominence in a public controversy; (3) the plaintiff sought to influence the resolution or outcome of the controversy; (4) the controversy existed prior to the publication of the defamatory statements; and (5) the plaintiff retained public figure status at the time of the alleged defamation. *Fitzgerald v. Penthouse Int'l*, 691 F.2d 666, 668 (4th Cir. 1982).

The trial judge properly denied Appellant's directed verdict motion on this issue as all five (5) factors were not met when Respondent changed his offensive football strategy. First, all high school football teams are covered every week in local papers. Respondent testified his team received the same amount of coverage in the local papers as all of the other high school teams. (R. p. 252, lines 14-25.) Second, Respondent did not voluntarily assume any role of special prominence in society regarding a public controversy; he merely changed his offensive football

strategy in 2015. Third, it is true that Respondent sought to have his fast offensive strategy succeed as all high school coaches want to win games, however his offensive strategy was not a public controversy, thus he did not seek to influence the resolution of a public controversy. The fourth requirement also cannot be met as the controversy as to whether or not Respondent should use a fast offense for his high school football team did not rise to the level of a matter of public interest. In *Time Inc. v. Johnston*, 448 F. 2d 378, 383 (4th Cir. 1971), based on the facts in that case, the Fourth Circuit found there was a public interest in sports when sports matters were reported in national papers or in newspapers that dealt exclusively with sports. The local Berkeley County newspaper and Post and Courier are not national papers and do not deal exclusively with sports issues. The fifth requirement was also not met as Respondent did not retain his alleged public status as football coach when the defamatory email was sent as he had already been terminated as coach and athletic director and transferred to a middle school by then. The trial court was correct in ruling at the directed verdict stage of trial that viewing the evidence and all inferences in a light most favorable to Respondent, Respondent was not a limited public figure so the jury did not have to be charged on the issue of actual malice. *See, e.g., Gertz v. Robert Welch*, 418 U.S. 323, 345, 94 S. Ct. 2997, 3010 (1974) (internal citations omitted) ("[a private individual] has not accepted public office or assumed an influential role in ordering society. He has relinquished no part of his interest in the protection of his own good name, and consequently he has a more compelling call on the courts for redress of injury inflicted by defamatory falsehood.")

III. The trial court did not err in denying Appellant's directed verdict as to Respondent's defamation claim as the evidence regarding the elements of Respondent's claim yielded more than one inference, and a jury could have

found that the statements in the January 7th email were false and that it was reckless to send the email to forty-five (45) recipients.

A. There was sufficient evidence from which a jury could find the statements in the January 7th email were false.

Respondent testified the athletic trainer at the high school who wrote the email (Chris Stevens) was not certified to handle student athlete files and he did not know what documents had to be in student athletes' files. (R. p. 220, line 18—p. 221, line 14.) Chris Stevens testified his job was to take care of athletic injuries and illnesses; he admitted he was not an athletic director. (R. p. 394, lines 1-8; p. 397, lines 23-25.) Respondent testified only athletic directors are certified to maintain the athlete files and there was no evidence put forth rebutting Respondent's testimony. (R. p. 220, line 18—p. 221, line 14; p. 397, line 1—p. 398, line 1.) Based on this testimony, a jury could conclude Chris Stevens did not know when he wrote the January 7th email whether the eligibility files were "out of order" as he stated in the email. Further, Respondent testified the statement in the email that the files could be a liability was false as his files were audited three (3) times a year and the last audit that occurred was only a few months before the January 7th email was written and it was a clean audit. (R. p. 222, lines 2-24.) Principal Steele testified Respondent had not been terminated based on his performance as athletic director, which supports the fact that the email falsely communicated Respondent was incompetent as athletic director. (R. p. 323, lines 2-17.)

Respondent also testified the information contained in the email about what documents should be in the eligibility files was false. (R. p. 280, line 8—p. 282, line 18.) Respondent testified the risk acknowledgement and consent to participate form was attached to the physical itself so they were not missing from the eligibility files; no HIPPA form or FERPA form had to be in the eligibility files; information about special accommodations for a student are also written

by the doctor on the physical form so that was not missing; and no social security card had to be in the eligibility file. (R. p. 280, line 8—p. 282, line 18.) Therefore, there was sufficient evidence presented to the jury for it conclude the January 7th email communicated false information alleging Respondent had created a liability for the school through his failure to properly maintain eligibility files.

B. Although common law malice is presumed in defamation *per se* and does not need to be proven, there was sufficient evidence presented from which a jury could find common law malice.

The jury was charged, "Common law malice means the defendant acted with ill will towards the plaintiff, or acted recklessly or wantonly with conscious indifference to the plaintiff's rights." (R. p. 494, lines 19-22.) There was sufficient evidence presented to the jury from which the jury could conclude Chris Stevens acted recklessly or with conscious indifference to Respondent's rights when he sent an email to 45 people alleging Respondent's eligibility files could create a liability for the school as Chris Stevens did not know what information had to be in the eligibility files. A jury could find Chris Stevens acted recklessly and with conscious indifference to Respondent's rights by making false statements about student eligibility files when he had never been certified to do eligibility files. (R. p. 220, line 18—p. 221, line 14.) Principal Steele testified the January 7th email should not have been sent out as it was and that the recipients should have later been told the information in the January 7th email was false. (R. p. 348, line 22—p. 352, line 15.)

Mere belief in the truth of its statement does not justify its publication if the statement is published with an improper and unjustified manner or with improper and unjustified motives and the speaker must be careful to go no further than his interests or duties require. *Fulton v. Atlantic Coast Line R. Co.*, 220 S.C. 287, 296-97, 67 S.E.2d 425, 429 (1951). *See also*, *Tyler v. Macks*

Stores of South Carolina, Inc., 275 S.C. 456, 272 S.E. 2d 633 (1980). ("Words or conduct or the combination of words and conduct can communicate defamation."); *Mains v. K Mart Corp.*, 297 S.C. 142, 149, 375 S.E.2d 311, 315, (Ct. App. 1988) ("The time, place and other circumstances of the publication of defamatory charges, as well as the language of the publication itself, are admissible as evidence to show that the false charge was made with malice.") There was sufficient evidence from which a jury could conclude sending this email to 45 recipients who were not all employees of the school district, and some of whom Respondent testified he did not know (R. p. 221, lines 15-22) was reckless and intended to disgrace Respondent. Respondent testified that only head coaches were allowed to review student eligibility files and most of the 45 recipients were not head coaches so they had no need to know information about eligibility files. (R. p. 279, line 18—p. 280, line 4; p. 283, lines 2-7.)

Further, the jury saw a letter dated January 8th, the day before the defamatory email was sent, indicating Respondent and his attorney met with the District Superintendent on January 4th to discuss, among other issues, his termination as athletic director. (R. pp. 534-536.) The timing was such that the jury could reasonably draw the reasonable conclusion from this evidence that the review of eligibility files and preparation of the January 7th email the next day was an attempt after the fact to create evidence to support the Appellant's reason for terminating Respondent as athletic director. The timing of the email is evidence of ill will towards Respondent as Chris Stevens could have called Respondent if he had questions about the eligibility files before he recklessly told forty-five (45) people Respondent's eligibility files were a liability to the school. This is especially true due to the animosity the Principal held towards Respondent.[2]

[2] Respondent testified the Principal told him, "I really didn't like you"; the Principal threatened to fire Respondent; he criticized how Respondent handled football practices; he created a blank

A jury could have reasonably concluded the email was only sent to humiliate Respondent and make him appear incompetent in this former job. The timing and content of this email and the manner it was sent all support a finding of recklessness on the part of Appellant.

C. Proximate cause does not need to be proven in a defamation case that is actionable *per se*.

Damages are presumed in defamation that is actionable *per se*, therefore, it is not necessary to prove that any damages are proximately caused.[3] "If the defamation is actionable *per se*, the law presumes the defendant acted with common law malice and that the plaintiff suffered general damages." *Parrish v. Allison*, 376 S.C. 308, 313, 656 S.E.2d 382, 385 (Ct. App. 2007). There was no jury charge as to defamation *per quod* which would require actual malice

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template to evaluate Respondent and then used it after Respondent was terminated as athletic director and head football coach on December 18th to justify his termination as football coach and athletic director; tried to fire him in November of 2015; fired him as athletic director for allegedly not doing coaches evaluations that were in fact done but never asked for; and he kept a secret file on Respondent. (R. p. 192, lines 14-16; p. 195, lines 10-21; p. 197, lines 7-21; p. 200, line 17—p. 209, line 12;p. 297, line 3- p.298, line 10; p. 304, lines 1-12; p. 331, line 14—p. 332, line 11; pp. 526-527; p. 529; p. 530-531.)

[3] "Normally, proximate cause is a question of fact for the jury, and it may be proved by direct or circumstantial evidence." *J.T. Baggerly v. CSX Transp., Inc.*, 370 S.C. 362, 369, 635 S.E.2d 97, 101 (2006). In this case, it was not necessary to prove that damages were proximately caused, but even if it had been a required element there was sufficient evidence from which a jury could determine damages that were fair, just and reasonable and attributable to the January 7th email. The January 7th email only addressed Respondent's performance as athletic director, not that of a teacher. The jury heard evidence that prior to the email the Respondent had received many accolades as athletic director voted on by his peers. (R. p. 186, line 2—p. 187, line 18.) The jury also heard evidence that after the email, Respondent could not get a job in South Carolina and there was an implication that he had been fired as athletic director and football coach for cause. (R. p. 225, line 2—p. 227, line 12.) Respondent also testified everything was taken from him based on a "lie" and it was humiliating. (R. p. 225, line 12-16.) Respondent testified he considered the email fraudulent because the information in it was wrong. (R. p. 282, lines 13-18.) Respondent's wife testified Respondent struggled to get his footing after his termination. (R. p. 376, lines 17-23.) In short, there was ample evidence related to the damages suffered by Respondent due to his termination as athletic director and the email.

and as Appellant did not object to the Court's jury charges, Appellant cannot now argue that the jury found defamation *per quod*.

Defamation "is actionable *per se* when the defendant's alleged defamatory statements charge the plaintiff with one of five types of acts or characteristics: (1) commission of a crime of moral turpitude; (2) contraction of a loathsome disease; (3) adultery; (4) unchastity; or (5) unfitness in one's business or profession." *Fountain v. First Reliance Bank*, 398 S.C. 434, 442, 730 S.E.2d 305, 309 (2012) quoting *Goodwin v. Kennedy*, 347 S.C. 30, 36, 552 S.E.2d 319, 322–23 (Ct. App. 2001).

"[L]ibel is actionable *per se* if it involves written or printed words which tend to degrade a person, that is, to reduce his character or reputation in the estimation of his friends or acquaintances, or the public, or to disgrace him, or to render him odious, contemptible, or ridiculous." *Erickson v. Jones Street Publishers, LLC*, 368 S.C. 444, 465-466, 629 S.E.2d 653, 664 (2006) (internal citations omitted). When a claim is actionable *per se*, the plaintiff is presumed to have suffered general damages. *Parrish v. Allison, supra.* As general damages are presumed, no finding of proximate cause was necessary by the jury. *Gertz v. Robert Welch*, 418 U.S. 323, 375, 94 S. Ct. 2997, 3024 (1974) (ordinary citizen can make out a prima facie case without proving more than a defamatory publication and recover general damages for injury to his reputation unless defeated by the defense of truth).

> The common law of defamation is an oddity of tort law, for it allows recovery of purportedly compensatory damages without evidence of actual loss. Under the traditional rules pertaining to actions for libel, the existence of injury is presumed from the fact of publication. Juries may award substantial sums as compensation for supposed damage to reputation without any proof that such harm actually occurred.
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> *Supra*, 418 U.S. at 349, 94 S. Ct. at 3012.

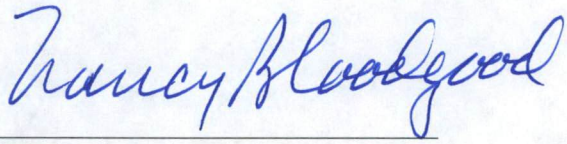
Therefore, damages are presumed and no proof of proximate cause is necessary. *See, Fountain v. First Reliance Bank*, 398 S.C. 434, 730 S.E.2d 305 (2012) and *Erickson v. Jones Street Publishers, LLC,* 368 S.C. 444, 629 S.E.2d 653 (2006) (If the statement is actionable per se, then the defendant "is presumed to have acted with common law malice and the plaintiff is presumed to have suffered general damages.") The fact that the trial court charged the jury with proximate cause and common law malice is merely harmless error.

Erroneous jury instructions are subject to harmless error analysis. *State v. Middleton*, 407 S.C. 312, 317, 755 S.E.2d 432, 435 (2014). When considering whether an error with respect to a jury instruction was harmless, a court must "determine beyond a reasonable doubt that the error complained of did not contribute to the verdict." *State v. Kerr*, 330 S.C. 132, 144-45, 498 S.E.2d 212, 218 (Ct. App. 1998) (citation omitted). "In making a harmless error analysis, our inquiry is not what the verdict would have been had the jury been given the correct charge, but whether the erroneous charge contributed to the verdict rendered." (*Id.*) Here, the jury returned a verdict finding general damages due to defamation. The jury charge for proximate cause actually created a more burdensome standard for finding damages from defamation than the law requires, thus the higher, more burdensome charge did not contribute to the verdict in a manner which harmed the Appellant.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussion and analysis, the trial court did not err when it denied Appellant's directed verdict motion and submitted Respondent's defamation claim to the jury. Respondent respectfully requests Appellant's appeal be dismissed and the jury's verdict be upheld.

Respectfully submitted,



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APP. 1046

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In the Court of Appeals

RECEIVED
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SC Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM BERKELEY COUNTY
Kristi Lea Harrington, Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No. 2018-000791
Case No. 2016-CP-08-0131

Jeffrey Lance Cruce,..... Respondent,

v.

Berkeley County School District,..... Appellant.

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STANDARD OF REVIEW

The Appellant Berkeley County School District takes issue, in part, with the standard of review as expressed in the response brief filed by the Respondent Jeffrey Cruce. The threshold issue on appeal is whether Cruce, as the athletic director and head football coach at Berkeley High School, qualified as a public official or alternatively a limited public figure for purposes of his defamation cause of action. Indeed, the South Carolina Supreme Court has held that "an important initial step to analyzing any defamation case is determining whether a particular plaintiff is a public official, public figure, or private figure." *Erickson v. Jones Street Publishers, LLC*, 368 S.C. 444, 629 S.E.2d 653, 666 (2006). "This determination is a matter of law which must be decided by the court on a case by case basis after a careful examination of the facts and circumstances." *Id.* Thus, as purely an issue of law for the court to determine, that threshold question is not subject to the deferential standard of review described by Cruce in his brief. To the contrary, as a question of law, the standard of review is *de novo* -- which Cruce does not acknowledge. *See*, *Fesmire v. Digh*, 385 S.C. 296, 683 S.E.2d 803, 807 (Ct. App. 2009) ("[t]his Court reviews all questions of law *de novo*").

ARGUMENTS

I. The issues raises on appeal by the Berkeley County School District were raised to and decided in the trial court and are properly preserved for appellate review.

As an initial argument, the Respondent Jeffrey Cruce argues that certain issues raised by the School District on appeal have not been properly preserved for appellate review. Cruce argues that the School District has not preserved the public official and common law malice arguments. The School District disagrees.

Issue preservation "is not a 'gotcha' game aimed at embarrassing attorneys or harming litigants." *Atlantic Coast Builders & Contractors, LLC v. Lewis*, 398 S.C. 323, S.E.2d 282, 285 (2012). The Supreme Court has explained: "While it may be good practice for us to reach the merits of an issue when error preservation is doubtful, we should follow our longstanding precedent and resolve the issue on preservation grounds when it *clearly* is unpreserved." 730 S.E.2d at 285. (Emphasis added). "[W]here the question of issue preservation is subject to multiple interpretations, any doubt should be resolved in favor of preservation." 730 S.E.2d at 287. (Toal, C.J., concurring in result in part and dissenting in part). "At the very least, the matter must have definitely been called to the attention of the trial court sufficiently to obtain a ruling thereon." *Staubes v. City of Folly Beach*, 339 S.C. 406, 529 S.E.2d 543, 546 (2000).

In the present case, the School District raised to the trial court the alternative theories that Cruce was a public official or a limited public figure. Admittedly, the emphasis during the directed verdict motion was the latter, but the record shows that counsel for the School District also addressed whether Cruce was a public official. (R. 429, 441-442). The trial judge even asked Cruce's counsel whether she agreed that Cruce was a public official. (R. 441-442). In addition, there were numerous comments by Cruce's counsel and the trial judge as to whether Cruce was a "limited public official." (R. 434-436, 438, 441, 443). Cruce's counsel even discussed limited public figure as being "a subset of public official." (R. 436). Thus, the colloquy at directed verdict strongly suggests that the "public official" issue was raised.

That is certainly supported by the post-trial proceedings where the parties discussed in detail the public official issue. Cruce's counsel never objected to the trial court's consideration of that issue, and in fact, she made the same argument that "[a] limited public official is a subset of a public official." (R. 100). She also argued that "[i]f he's not a limited public official, he's not a public official." (R. 100). In addition, in its written order, the trial court clearly addresses the "public official" issue and even acknowledges that "[t]he Defendant makes excellent arguments in support of its position that Plaintiff should be classified as a public official." (R. 4). In sum, the public official issue was certainly raised, argued and

adjudicated in the court below, and that issue is sufficiently preserved for appellate review.

The School District also argues that Cruce did not present any evidence from which the jury could have concluded that Chris Stevens, the author of the allegedly defamatory email, acted with common law malice. At the directed verdict stage, the trial judge had not ruled on whether the court would charge defamation *per se* or would instead require the jury to find common law malice. That decision was made after a charge conference. (R. 472). Thereafter, in returning a verdict for Cruce and based on the charge given by the trial court, the jury necessarily found common law malice. Yet, there is no evidence to support that element of the proof. The School District timely raised that issue as to the insufficiency of the proof in its post-trial motions, and the trial court considered that issue without objection. The School District submits that the issue was timely raised and adjudicated and hence is preserved for appellate review. If the Court determines the issue is not properly preserved for JNOV purposes, the issue has been timely raised certainly for purposes of obtaining a new trial absolute.

II. The trial court erred in failing to grant a directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District based on absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) of the Tort Claims and, more specifically, in failing to rule that Jeffrey Cruce, as a head football coach and athletic director, did not qualify as either a "public official" or "limited public figure" for defamation purposes.

The Berkeley County School District moved for a directed verdict and JNOV on the basis that Jeffrey Cruce qualifies as a public official or alternatively as a limited public figure. As such, Cruce was necessarily required to prove actual malice to prevail on his defamation claim. However, the School District is entitled to sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17) of the Tort Claims Act for any employee conduct rising to the level of actual malice.

Although not acknowledged by Cruce, this presents purely an issue of law for the court to decide, and the applicable standard of review is *de novo*. Contrary to Cruce's suggestion, this Court is not bound by the trial court's rulings in any respect.

In response to the School District's position that Cruce, as the athletic director and head football coach, qualifies as a public official, Cruce cites only inapposite cases that hold that teachers or school principals are not public officials. But reliance on those cases misses the larger point. The head football coach is not just a teacher or a principal -- not in South Carolina and not in Berkeley County.

Importantly, the South Carolina Supreme Court has explained that "[i]n considering the question of whether one is a public official, the employee's position

must be one which would invite public scrutiny and discussion of the person holding it, entirely apart from the scrutiny and discussion occasioned by the particular charges in controversy." *Erickson v. Jones Street Publishers, LLC*, 368 S.C. 444, 629 S.E.2d 653, 666 (2006). "The status of a public official may be deemed sufficient to warrant application of the *New York Times* privilege, not because of the government employee's place on the totem pole, but because of the public interest in a government employee's activity in a particular context." *Id.*

Thus, the dispositive question asks whether the status of a high school athletic director and head football coach makes him a "public official." In other words, the Court must focus not only on whether those government positions are ones that invite public scrutiny and discussion, but also on whether the employee's activity in a particular context invites public scrutiny and discussion. That is what distinguishes a head football coach from a classroom teacher or even a school administrator.

Without reasonable dispute, high school football is important, newsworthy, and subject to intense public interest and scrutiny in this State. The record fully supports that, and frankly, the Court can probably take judicial notice of that very point. Moreover, within the context of this case, Coach Cruce brought even more than normal notoriety and scrutiny upon himself during the 2015 football season by adopting a controversial and well-publicized no-punt strategy. Cruce discounts

this in his response brief by labeling it as merely "offensive football strategy." That shows a lack of understanding of the basics of the game. The no-punt strategy was not on par which deciding what kind of offense to run. In sharp contrast, the no-punt strategy was a radical departure from typical football where the offense *never* punts on fourth down regardless of field position or the score of the game. That radical departure cannot be downplayed or disputed on this record. The Court need only to refer to the article in the September 21, 2015 edition of the *Kansas City Star* as well as the numerous local media reports in the record. This was not a situation where the head football coach decided to pass the ball more or run more. This represented a radical change from how the game was typically played -- an innovation that ultimately proved to be an abject failure that resulted in several huge losses for Cruce's team.

Even if this Court does not agree that a head football coach in South Carolina is a public official, there should be no doubt that Cruce qualifies as a limited public figure under the facts of this case. Cruce argues in a conclusory manner that he "did not voluntarily assume any role of special prominence in society regarding a public controversy; he merely changed his offensive football strategy in 2015." *See*, Respondent's Brief, p. 10. As discussed above, Cruce cannot downplay his no-punt strategy and its inherent controversy.

But, in a general sense, Cruce also suggests that sports are not the type of public controversy that can make a football coach a limited public figure for purposes of defamation law. That basic premise is flawed. In its opening brief, the School District cited numerous cases showing that sports can be and often are the subject of intense public controversy and scrutiny. Indeed, the initial case from the United States Supreme Court to recognize the concept of a public figure in a defamation context involved a football coach as the plaintiff. *See*, *Curtis Publishing Co. v. Butts*, 388 U.S. 130 (1967).

Likewise, in *Time, Inc. v. Johnson*, 448 F.2d 378 (4th Cir. 1971), the Fourth Circuit explained that "the *New York Times* privilege is not confined to 'political expression or comment upon public affairs,' nor even matters of social utility or educational value. It embraces the entire range of legitimate public interest." 448 F.2d at 382-383. The Court further recognized that "[s]uch a test clearly is sufficient to cover sports and sports figures, whose 'public interest' character is amply demonstrated by the elaborate sports section in every daily newspaper published in this nation and by the numerous periodicals, such as that involved here, exclusively devoted to sports." 448 F.2d at 383. Cruce misconstrues that language from the Fourth Circuit decision to suggest that sports are only of "public interest" where it is written about in "sports only" media, and hence, any sports stories in a local newspaper or any multi-subject media cannot be within the

"public interest." Instead, the Fourth Circuit was recognizing the obvious -- that sports is an important part of people's lives and very clearly falls within the "public interest" so that its leading figures including coaches do qualify as limited public figures.[1] *See also*, *Chuy v. Philadelphia Eagles Football Club*, 431 F.Supp. 254, 267 (E.D. Pa. 1977), *aff'd,* 595 F.2d 1265 (3d Cir. 1979) (en banc) ("We obviously cannot say that the public's interest in professional football is important to the commonweal or to the operation of democratic society in the same sense as are political and ideological matters. However, the fabric of our society is rich and variegated ... [Interest] in professional football must be deemed an important incident among many incidents, of a society founded upon a high regard for free expression").[2]

In sum, the record clearly shows that Coach Cruce was, at the very minimum, a limited public figure and certainly during the 2015-2016 school year during which Cruce created and fostered intense public attention and scrutiny by adopting and publicizing unorthodox and controversial football tactics, namely the no-punt strategy. He widely addressed his controversial approach to football in the

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[1] The Court should take judicial notice that the Fourth Circuit case pre-dated the existence of the internet as a source for sports news, cable sports networks such as ESPN, fantasy leagues, and the like which make sports an even bigger industry today than in 1971.

[2] This reference to a case involving the Philadelphia Eagles is particularly apropos given that Wendy Cruce, the coach's wife, testified that her husband's position as the head football coach at Berkeley High School was "sort of like being a coach for the Philadelphia Eagles or something like that." (R. 387).

local media and was even interviewed for a story in the *Kansas City Star*. (R. 538-544). Cruce did not just assume a role of special prominence in the public controversy; he indeed made the controversy what it was and made himself the central figure in it. The trial court erred in failing to rule that Cruce was either a public official or a limited public figure to which the *New York Times* standard applies. Because Cruce was required to prove actual malice as an element of his defamation claim, the School District was entitled to absolute sovereign immunity under Section 15-78-60(17). This case should never have been submitted to the jury. The School District was entitled to a directed verdict as a matter of law.[3]

III. The trial court erred in failing to grant a directed verdict and JNOV to the Berkeley County School District on the bases that Jeffrey Cruce failed to prove each of the elements of his defamation claim based on the January 7, 2016 email sent by Chris Stevens.

In addition to its sovereign immunity defense, the School District also moved for a directed verdict and JNOV on the basis that Jeffrey Cruce failed to

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[3] In his brief, Cruce argues that he was not a limited public figure "so the jury did not have to be charged on the issue of actual malice." *See*, Respondent's Brief, p. 11. To be clear, the School District does not contend that the trial judge erred in failing to charge actual malice and have the jury determine whether actual malice was proven. Instead, because Cruce qualified as a public official or limited public figure, actual malice was a required element of his proof, and accordingly, the defamation claim as brought against the School District is barred by Section 15-78-60(17). *See*, *Gause v. Doe*, 317 S.C. 39, 451 S.E.2d 408, 409 (Ct. App. 1994) ("the SCTCA bars Gause's slander claim against the MBPD because Gause must prove the MBPD employee's conduct constituted actual malice in order to recover on this claim." *Id.*

prove each element of his defamation claim. The School District contends that the January 7, 2016 email that that was sent by Chris Stevens, the head trainer at Berkeley High School, was not false and defamatory. In addition, the School District argues that Cruce presented no evidence that Stevens acted with common law malice as well as no evidence that the January 7, 2016 email proximately caused any damages.

On these latter points, the primary argument made by Cruce is that he presented a claim for defamation *per se*. That is incorrect and is not the law of the case. By Cruce's own admission, the trial court did not agree with that theory. The trial judge denied Cruce's request to charge defamation *per se*. (R. 472). While Cruce preserved an objection with respect to the jury charge, he never filed a cross-appeal to assert that the trial court's ruling was in error. It is well settled that "an unappealed ruling, right or wrong, is the law of the case." *Atlantic Coast Builders & Contractors, LLC v. Lewis*, 398 S.C. 323, 730 S.E.2d 282, 285 (2012). Thus, the trial court's ruling that the defamation claim is not *per se* is the law of the case. In fact, the law of the case as to the elements to be proven may be gleaned from the trial judge's charge, which includes the following:

> The plaintiff must prove that the statement made -- was made with common law malice. Common law malice means the defendant acted with ill will towards the plaintiff, or acted recklessly or wantonly with conscious indifference to the plaintiff's rights.

> Finally, the plaintiff must prove that his reputation was damaged by the defamatory statement. The plaintiff must prove that the damages naturally and proximately resulted from the defendant's statement.

(R. 494-495). Thus, as the trial judge charged, Cruce was required to prove common law malice as well as proximate cause. Cruce cannot fall back on an unappealed argument that he stated a claim for defamation *per se* as a *post hoc* justification for his lack of proof on these elements.

As to the merits, Cruce has failed to show any evidence that Chris Stevens acted with common law malice in sending the January 7, 2016 email. No testimony was elicited from Stevens or Cruce as to any ill will between the two. Additionally, there is no evidence to support any finding of recklessness or conscious indifference by Stevens -- which is a heightened standard that the evidence does not remotely satisfy. Instead, Cruce concocted a speculative tale that Stevens was in cahoots with the District Superintendent to "create" evidence to support Cruce's "termination" as athletic director. There is no evidence to support that. Inferences must be reasonable,[4] and quite frankly, that is *not* a

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[4] The applicable standard for directed verdict or JNOV motions requires consideration only of "reasonable inferences." The Supreme Court has explained that "[w]hen considering a directed verdict motion, the trial court should view the evidence and all *reasonable inferences* in the light most favorable to the non-moving party." *South Carolina Federal Credit Union v. Higgins*, 394 S.C. 189, 714 S.E.2d 550, 552 (2011). (Emphasis added). In *Jones v. Sun Publishing Co., Inc.*, 278 S.C. 12, 292 S.E.2d 23 (1982), the Supreme Court also explained: "South Carolina adheres to the 'scintilla of evidence' rule which requires submission of an issue to a jury whenever there is competent and relevant evidence tending to establish the issue in the mind of a reasonable juror. The rule does not authorize submission of speculative, theoretical or

reasonable inference. It is, at best, speculation and conjecture which does not support the verdict.

The same is true with respect to the issue of proximate cause. Cruce has not shown that the January 7, 2016 email positively or negatively impacted his reputation. He has also not shown that the email proximately caused him any of the damages he claimed, including lost salary, lost retirement, and relocation expenses to the Charlotte area. Lastly, Cruce has not and cannot dispute that the January 7, 2016 email did not proximately cause him to be removed from his positions as head football coach and athletic director. Without dispute, that change in his employment had already occurred by January 7, 2016.

Finally, with respect to the defamatory nature of the January 7, 2016 email, Cruce focuses on the following sentence from the email: "From a liability stand point with competing sports and athletes it is necessary that all of the files be present to safeguard the athletes as well as to maintain the proper care for those athletes if something were to happen." (R. 532). Cruce claims that Stevens was stating that Cruce "has created liability for the school through his failure to properly maintain eligibility files." *See*, Respondent's Brief, p. 13. That is not the case. Stevens makes no reference to Cruce. Moreover, during his testimony,

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hypothetical views nor does it permit a verdict to stand upon surmise, conjecture or speculation." 292 S.E.2d at 27.

Stevens was never asked what the "liability" language meant. (R. 396-398). It is clear, however, that Stevens was trying to convey the importance of his request to the coaches, who were the recipients of the email, that they assist him by providing the requested roster of their participating student-athletes so that he could check that every student had the required paperwork. (R. 532). The email must be read as a whole to properly determine its meaning and whether it was defamatory. Stevens did not say and was not insinuating any *existing* liability on the part of the School District that could be attributed to Cruce or anyone else.

For each of these reasons, the verdict cannot stand, and the School District was entitled to a directed verdict and JNOV on the defamation claim.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussion and analysis, the Appellant Berkeley County School District respectfully requests that this Court reverse the jury's verdict and the denial of its directed verdict and JNOV motions with respect to the defamation claim that was submitted to the jury. The School District requests a remand with instructions that judgment be entered in its favor on all causes of action or alternatively for a new trial absolute.

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South Carolina Court of Appeals
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Jan 14 2021
SC Court of Appeals

RE: Jeffrey Lance Cruce v. Berkeley County School District
Appellate Case Number: 2018-000791
Civil Action Number: 2016-CP-08-0131
Claim Number: 17177
Our File Number: 104.20017

Dear Ms. Kitchings:

The purpose of this letter is to provide the Court with a supplemental citation for a decision issued by the South Carolina Court of Appeals on November 6, 2019, which was after the filing of Final Briefs in this case.

In accordance with Rule 208(b)(7), SCACR, the Court's attention is directed to *Garrard v. Charleston County School District*, 429 S.C. 170, 838 S.E.2d 698 (Ct. App. 2019), in which the Court of Appeals affirmed the circuit court's ruling that a high school football coach is a "public official" for purposes of a defamation claim.

I am enclosing with this letter a copy of this supplemental decision. I am providing all counsel of record with a copy as well.

Thank you for your assistance and the Court's consideration of this additional case law.

Sincerely,

LINDEMANN & DAVIS, P.A.

Andrew F. Lindemann

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THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

Jeffrey Lance Cruce, Respondent,

v.

Berkeley County School District, Appellant.

Appellate Case No. 2018-000791

Appeal From Berkeley County
Kristi Lea Harrington, Circuit Court Judge

Opinion No. 5854
Heard February 2, 2021 – Filed September 1, 2021

REVERSED

E. Brandon Gaskins, of Moore & Van Allen, PLLC, and Joshua Steven Whitley, of Smyth Whitley, LLC, both of Charleston; Andrew F. Lindemann, of Lindemann & Davis, P.A., and Richard J. Morgan, of Burr & Forman LLP, both of Columbia, all for Appellant.

Lucy Clark Sanders and Nancy Bloodgood, both of Bloodgood & Sanders, LLC, of Mount Pleasant, for Respondent.

KONDUROS, J.: Berkeley County School District (the District) appeals the circuit court's denial of its motions for a directed verdict and a judgment notwithstanding the verdict (JNOV) on Jeffrey Lance Cruce's defamation cause of action. The District contends it had absolute sovereign immunity because Cruce

qualified as either a public official or a limited public figure. It also maintains Cruce failed to prove each element of defamation. We reverse.

FACTS/PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Cruce was a high school teacher in South Carolina for twenty-eight years, an athletic director in Berkeley County at various high schools[1] for a total of twenty-one years, and head football coach at high schools for about twenty years. He began serving as head football coach, athletic director, and teacher at Berkeley High School (the School) in 2011. In December 2015, the District removed him as athletic director and football coach. The District reassigned him to a middle school as a guidance counselor starting in January of 2016. Cruce left the District and retired at the completion of the school year.

During his tenure as head football coach at the School, Cruce had one winning season and several losing seasons, including a three-wins-and-seven-losses record during his final football season. That season, Cruce used an analytics-based strategy in coaching the team.[2]

As athletic director, Cruce was certified to maintain student athlete eligibility files (eligibility files) in Berkeley County, and the eligibility files were generally audited three times a year. A few months before he was removed as athletic director, the high school league conducted an audit and determined everything was proper.

On January 7, 2016, Chris Stevens, Berkeley High School's head athletic trainer, sent an email to the School's athletic coaches—paid and volunteer—as well as others involved in the athletic department and some administrators at the School, totaling approximately forty-five recipients. The subject of the email was "Student Athlete Eligibility and Medical Files." The email stated:

> Today, January 7th 2016, myself, [C]oach Ward, and Mr. Gallus went into the athletic director[']s office to check on the status of the student files left by our previous athletic director. After spending some time looking through files it has come to my attention that there could

[1] The county includes seven high schools.

[2] Cruce and the District differ as to the focus of his strategy. Cruce termed it as a "less-hitting philosophy." The District referred to it as a "no-punting" philosophy.

be some documents that could be misplaced and others that are out of order. From a liability stand point with competing sports and athletes it is necessary that all of the files be present to safeguard the athletes as well as to maintain the proper care for those athletes if something were to happen.

I will be in the [athletic director's] office during the next few day[s] to make sure the correct files are in place for competing athletes and those weightlifting after school to make sure EVERY child has the correct paperwork on file.

I would ask if you have athletes competing and/or conditioning at the present time, this includes weightlifting, that you send me a copy of that roster ASAP so that I can check your student-athletes off the "no-fly" list. ALL students MUST have the following files in order to participate in scholastic sports:

- Risk Acknowledgment and Consent to Participate form
- Pre-participation Physical Examination form (signed by a doctor)
- Proper understanding of HIPAA and FERPA rights
- Emergency Insurance Information and Consent to Treat form
- ANY special accommodations such as asthma, allergies etc. must have a written Doctor's note filed and must have necessary treatment (Inhaler, Epi-pen) present at all times.
- Copies of Birth Certificate and Social Security Cards.

I will update everyone again next week once everything has been checked off. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

In 2016, Cruce filed an action against the District for wrongful termination and defamation. As to the defamation cause of action, Cruce alleged the District's agents, while acting within the scope of their authority, made false and defamatory statements about his "fitness for his profession to employees, students, volunteers,

potential employers, and members of the community" "with conscious indifference to and complete disregard of the truth of their statements and the effect that the false statements would have on [him] and his career." Cruce asserted the statements were plain in meaning and constituted defamation per se because they stated he was unfit for his profession. He further contended the statements were made with common law malice. The District answered, raising several defenses including that the South Carolina Tort Claims Act barred the claims in whole or in part. The District asserted because Cruce could not show actual malice, his claims were barred because he was "a public official, [a] limited purpose public official, and/or any complained-of speech was on a matter of public concern."

At trial, Cruce testified Stevens was not certified to handle student athlete eligibility files and did not know what documents had to be included in the files. Cruce indicated only athletic directors are certified to maintain the athlete eligibility files. Cruce stated only head coaches were allowed to review eligibility files and most of the forty-five email recipients were not head coaches and thus those recipients did not need to know information about eligibility files. Stevens testified his job was to take care of athletic injuries and illnesses; he indicated he was not an athletic director. He agreed he was not certified to maintain eligibility files. He provided that some of the recipients of the email were former coaches.

Cruce disputed the statement in the email that the files could be a liability because his files were usually audited three times a year and the last audit that occurred was only a few months before the email was written and was "clean." Cruce further testified the information contained in the email about what documents should be in the eligibility files was incorrect. Cruce provided, "You have to be certified to -- there are certain files -- as an athletic director, there's three things you've got to have on file. You've got to have a current physical; you've got to have a birth certificate; and you've got to have their grades on file." Cruce testified several forms the email specified as missing from the files were not missing for a variety of reasons: the risk acknowledgement and consent to participate form was attached to the physical itself; HIPPA and FERPA forms were not required to be in the file; information about special accommodations for a student were written by the doctor on the physical form; and a social security card was not required to be in the file.

The principal was asked if the email was "talking about a former employee" and "talking about problems that have been found in his office," and he responded affirmatively to both questions.

Cruce and his principal's testimony at trial differed as to the focus of his coaching strategy for 2015. Cruce maintained it was a "less-hitting philosophy." He asserted that while not punting was part of the philosophy, it "has no bearing on what the philosophy is." When asked if "that philosophy involved use of statistics, number of plays that were run, yards that were gained," he responded, "It was driven by offensive productivity, yes, sir."

The principal testified:

> [Cruce] said, I'm going to be using analytics, because I -- there's one gentleman in Little Rock who does the no punting and does all this stuff, so I'm going to use analytics this year.
>
> And that's where he talked about earlier about telling me about the no-kick rule.
>
> When he said, no punting, it also meant no kicking extra points, no punting under any situation, 4th and 20 doesn't matter, and no kickoffs. So all of our kickoffs were -- basically were either muffs or short little kicks instead of deep kicks.
>
> And that's where that whole conversation kind of went down with our analytics, him explaining all of that. And that's why analytics was number one.

The District maintained Cruce sought out media attention due to his use of a no-punt philosophy. The District provided almost two hundred articles that mentioned the football team for the years Cruce was the coach and the following year. The District pointed to a few articles—one from Kansas City discussing the no-punt strategy, the coach who created it, and other coaches who were using it as well as some local articles that mentioned the strategy in reporting on game outcomes or predictions for area football games during the 2015 season. Most of the articles were summaries of or predictions for area football games over the years Cruce coached at Berkeley High School; less than ten reference the no-punt strategy. Some of the articles are about the team the season following Cruce's departure and Cruce's lawsuit.

Cruce further testified:

> The no-punt philosophy, what you said -- the strategy of the no-punt philosophy, that wasn't the strategy. The guy in the paper in all -- everybody got enamored with the no punt. It was a philosophy based on a strategy with numbers involved and no punt was part of it. The no punt -- we punted that season.
>
> So when you assess a new philosophy, which I've done through my whole career, this philosophy worked. And everybody got enamored with the word no punt. We punted during the season. So as your philosophy takes shape, as a coach, you monitor and adjust.
>
> So there were times during the season that we did punt. So the writer of this particular article leaves out part of what was said in that, and that being that the -- putting your chips all in one spot was about the safety of the kids, about not hitting as much in practice, about taking full gear off on a Wednesday.
>
> . . . .
>
> I said it to the reporter and the reporter took liberties of what he wrote. I can't -- I can't make the reporter write everything that we talked about.

Cruce testified that as the football team's head coach, he had a Friday night radio spot one year early on at the School in 2011 or 2012. He provided that if there was a game, such as basketball, baseball, or football, the coach for that team had access to media. He indicated:

> My teams got press coverage. I just happened to be the head coach, but they wrote about my team, not necessarily about me.
>
> . . . .
>
> I had opportunities to praise my kids and give stats that would promote my program and my kids, yes, sir, I did.

. . . .

> Well, the old saying goes, the buck stops here, and if they were going to talk to anybody, they were going to talk to me. So they didn't talk to an assistant coach because there w[ere] no wins or losses by their names. It was always the head coach. So, yes, sir, most interviews you see in the paper will be from the head coach.

At the close of Cruce's case[3] and again at the close of all the evidence, the District moved for a directed verdict on several grounds, including sovereign immunity under the Tort Claims Act, section 15-78-60(17) of the South Carolina Code (2005). The District argued Cruce was a limited public figure, which required that he prove actual malice. The District also asserted no statement in Stevens's January 7, 2016 email was defamatory. The circuit court granted a directed verdict in the District's favor on the wrongful termination claim. The circuit court also granted a directed verdict to the District on the defamation claim based on the District's silence when it removed Cruce as head football coach and athletic director. However, the circuit court denied the District's directed verdict motion on the remaining defamation claim arising from the January 7, 2016 email. The circuit court found as a matter of law Cruce did not qualify as a limited public figure under defamation law.

The jury found for Cruce and awarded him $200,000 in damages. The District moved for a JNOV, new trial absolute, or a new trial *nisi* remittitur. On March 29, 2018, the circuit court denied the District's posttrial motions. This appeal followed.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

When ruling on a directed verdict motion, "the trial court is required to view the evidence and the inferences that reasonably can be drawn therefrom in the light most favorable to the" nonmoving party. *Sabb v. S.C. State Univ.*, 350 S.C. 416, 427, 567 S.E.2d 231, 236 (2002). This court must follow the same standard. *Welch v. Epstein*, 342 S.C. 279, 299, 536 S.E.2d 408, 418 (Ct. App. 2000). A motion for JNOV "is a renewal of the directed verdict motion." *Glover v. N.C.*

[3] Due to timing issues, the circuit court continued the motions until after the District called its witness.

Mut. Life Ins. Co., 295 S.C. 251, 256, 368 S.E.2d 68, 72 (Ct. App. 1988). "If more than one reasonable inference can be drawn or if the inferences to be drawn from the evidence are in doubt, the case should be submitted to the jury." *Chaney v. Burgess*, 246 S.C. 261, 266, 143 S.E.2d 521, 523 (1965). When the only reasonable inference from the evidence is the plaintiff has failed to prove a material element of his cause of action, it becomes the duty of the court to grant a directed verdict against the party having the burden of proof. *Bragg v. Hi-Ranger, Inc.*, 319 S.C. 531, 534-35, 462 S.E.2d 321, 323 (Ct. App. 1995). This court will reverse the trial court's denial of a motion for a directed verdict only when no evidence supports its ruling. *Steinke v. S.C. Dep't of Labor, Licensing & Regulation*, 336 S.C. 373, 386, 520 S.E.2d 142, 148 (1999). "When reviewing a motion for directed verdict, this court . . . may only reverse a jury's verdict if the factual findings implicit within it are contrary to the only reasonable inference from the evidence." *Maher v. Tietex Corp.*, 331 S.C. 371, 376, 500 S.E.2d 204, 207 (Ct. App. 1998). "When considering directed verdict motions, neither the trial court nor the appellate court has authority to decide credibility issues or to resolve conflicts in the testimony or evidence." *Erickson v. Jones St. Publishers, LLC*, 368 S.C. 444, 463, 629 S.E.2d 653, 663 (2006).

LAW/ANALYSIS

The District contends the circuit court erred in denying its motion for directed verdict and JNOV as it had absolute sovereign immunity under the Tort Claims Act because Cruce was a public official or a limited public figure. It argues because Cruce was a public official or limited public figure, he was required to prove the District acted with actual malice. It asserts section 15-78-60(17) of the South Carolina Code (2005) establishes a governmental entity is not responsible for employee conduct constituting actual malice. We agree.

The tort of defamation allows plaintiffs to recover for injuries to their reputation as the result of defendants' communications to others of falsities regarding the plaintiffs. *Boone v. Sunbelt Newspapers, Inc.*, 347 S.C. 571, 580, 556 S.E.2d 732, 737 (Ct. App. 2001). "Defamatory communications take two forms: libel and slander. Slander is a spoken defamation while libel is a written defamation or one accomplished by actions or conduct. If a communication is libelous, then the law presumes the defendant acted with common law malice." *Swinton Creek Nursery v. Edisto Farm Credit, ACA*, 334 S.C. 469, 484, 514 S.E.2d 126, 133-34 (1999) (citation omitted). "In cases involving the defamation of a public official, the plaintiff must prove that the defendant acted with constitutional actual malice, that is, with knowledge that the statement was false or with reckless disregard of its

falsity." *Sanders v. Prince*, 304 S.C. 236, 239, 403 S.E.2d 640, 643 (1991) (citing *N.Y. Times v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254, 279-80 (1964)).

"The Tort Claims Act 'is the exclusive civil remedy available for any tort committed by a governmental entity, its employees, or its agents except as provided in [section] 15-78-70(b)'" of the South Carolina Code (2005). *Curiel v. Hampton Cnty. E.M.S.*, 401 S.C. 646, 649, 737 S.E.2d 854, 856 (Ct. App. 2012) (quoting *Wells v. City of Lynchburg*, 331 S.C. 296, 302, 501 S.E.2d 746, 749 (Ct. App. 1998)); *see also* S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-200 (2005) ("Notwithstanding any provision of law, this chapter, the 'South Carolina Tort Claims Act', is the exclusive and sole remedy for any tort committed by an employee of a governmental entity while acting within the scope of the employee's official duty."). The Tort Claims Act provides: "The State, an agency, a political subdivision, and a governmental entity are liable for their torts in the same manner and to the same extent as a private individual under like circumstances, subject to the limitations upon liability and damages, and exemptions from liability and damages, contained herein." *Proctor v. Dep't of Health & Envtl. Control*, 368 S.C. 279, 290, 628 S.E.2d 496, 502 (Ct. App. 2006) (quoting S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-40 (2005)).

"Under the [Tort Claims Act], a governmental entity is not liable for a loss that results from 'employee conduct outside the scope of his official duties or which constitutes actual fraud, *actual malice*, intent to harm, or a crime involving moral turpitude.'" *Gause v. Doe*, 317 S.C. 39, 41, 451 S.E.2d 408, 409 (Ct. App. 1994) (emphasis added by court) (quoting S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-60(17) (Supp. 1993)). "In a case involving the defamation of a public official, the plaintiff must prove the defendant acted with actual malice." *Id.* (footnote omitted). "The [Tort Claims Act] clearly excludes a governmental entity's liability for an individual's loss stemming from a state employee's conduct that constitutes actual malice." *Id.* at 42, 451 S.E.2d at 409. In *Gause*, this court held "the [Tort Claims Act] bars [the plaintiff's] slander claim against the [police department] because [the plaintiff] must prove the [police department's] employee's conduct constituted actual malice in order to recover on this claim." *Id.*

An important step in beginning to analyze a defamation case is determining whether the plaintiff is a public official, public figure, or private figure. *Garrard v. Charleston Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 429 S.C. 170, 208, 838 S.E.2d 698, 718 (Ct. App. 2019), *petition for cert. filed*. This determination is a matter of law to be decided by the court. *Id.* In considering whether a person is a public official, the employee's position must invite public scrutiny and discussion of the person

holding it, unrelated to the current controversy. *Id*. A public official's status may be sufficient because of the public interest in that official's activity in a particular context instead of the official's place in the organization's hierarchy. *Id*.

> For purposes of a First Amendment analysis, our courts have held a variety of public school administrators and employees to be public officials. *See Sanders v. Prince*, 304 S.C. 236, 403 S.E.2d 640 (1991) (finding school board members to be public officials); *Scott v. McCain*, 272 S.C. 198, 250 S.E.2d 118 (1978) (finding school trustee to be a public official). Other jurisdictions have held that public school teachers and athletic coaches are public officials for purposes of applying the *New York Times* doctrine. *See Mahoney v. Adirondack Publ'g Co.*, 517 N.E.2d 1365, 1368 (N.Y. 1987) (finding a public high school football coach to be a public figure); *Johnston v. Corinthian Television Corp.*, 583 P.2d 1101, 1102 (Okla. 1978) (finding person holding the dual positions of public school coach and physical education teacher to be a public official); *Johnson v. Sw. Newspapers Corp*., 855 S.W.2d 182, 184 (Tex. Ct. App. 1993) (finding person holding the dual position of athletic director and head football coach to be a public official).

Garrard, 429 S.C. at 208, 838 S.E.2d at 718.

In *Garrard*, a high school football coach (Coach Walpole) brought suit against a newspaper for defamation. *Id.* at 181, 838 S.E.2d at 703-04. The circuit court granted summary judgment to the newspaper, finding Coach Wadpole was a public official and was required to prove the newspaper acted with actual malice. *Id.* at 188, 838 S.E.2d at 707. Coach Wadpole appealed, arguing he was a private figure and not a public official. *Id.* at 207, 838 S.E.2d at 718. This court determined "Coach Walpole is a public official for purposes of applying the *New York Times* doctrine." *Id.* at 209, 838 S.E.2d at 719. The court noted "Coach Walpole holds many positions within the School District"—head football coach, head coach of the women's basketball team, and teacher. *Id.* "Coach Walpole testified that he interacts with the parents of the athletes after each game and he participates in newspaper and television interviews. Furthermore, as head coach, he is responsible for the oversight of the teams' activities." *Id.* at 209-10, 838 S.E.2d at

719.

Initially, Cruce argues the District's argument he was a public official is not preserved because the District did not raise it during the directed verdict motion and first raised it in the JNOV motion. During the directed verdict motion, the District repeatedly asserted Cruce was a limited public figure, and Cruce disagreed. However, the District also referenced the related concept of a public official and asserted other jurisdictions have held that all public employees are public officials. In response to questioning by the circuit court if the statements had to relate to coaching for the actual malice standard to apply, the District answered "it does not matter if you follow the line of cases that says that every public employee is a public official. Because in that case, whether a teacher or as a coach, he's a public employee, he's a public official, and all public officials must prove actual malice." "[A] party is not required to use the exact name of a legal doctrine in order to preserve the issue." *Herron v. Century BMW*, 395 S.C. 461, 466, 719 S.E.2d 640, 642 (2011). As our supreme court has observed, "it may be good practice for us to reach the merits of an issue when error preservation is doubtful." *Atl. Coast Builders & Contractors, LLC v. Lewis*, 398 S.C. 323, 330, 730 S.E.2d 282, 285 (2012). Accordingly, the issue was sufficiently argued to the circuit court to address it on appeal.

Based on this court's decision in *Garrard*, the circuit court erred in not finding Cruce was a public official or a limited public figure.[4] Cruce was an athletic director, a football coach, and a teacher, similar to Coach Wadpole in *Garrard*, who was a coach of two different teams, including football, and a teacher. Accordingly, Cruce was a public official.

Because Cruce was a public official, he has the burden of proving actual malice. Under the Tort Claims Act, the District, as a governmental entity, is not liable for a loss resulting from employee conduct that constitutes actual malice. *Gause*, 317 S.C. at 41, 451 S.E.2d at 409. Therefore, the Tort Claims Act bars Cruce's defamation action because he has to prove the District's employee's conduct constituted actual malice in order to recover on this claim. *See id.* at 42, 451 S.E.2d at 409 ("The [Tort Claims Act] clearly excludes a governmental entity's liability for an individual's loss stemming from a state employee's conduct that constitutes actual malice. We therefore agree with the trial court that the [Tort

[4] Because our court's opinion in *Garrard* was not issued until November of 2019, it was not available to the circuit court in the present case as the trial here occurred in 2017 and the circuit court issued its posttrial order in 2018.

Claims Act] bars [the plaintiff's] slander claim against the [police department] because [the plaintiff] must prove the [police department's] employee's conduct constituted actual malice in order to recover on this claim."); *see also Kennedy v. Richland Cnty. Sch. Dist. Two*, 428 S.C. 98, 118, 833 S.E.2d 414, 425 (Ct. App. 2019) ("[A]ctual malice does, in fact, refer to constitutional malice when defamation involves the First Amendment, a public official, or an issue of public concern.").[5]

Accordingly, the Tort Claims Act bars the action as Cruce was required to prove actual malice because he was a public official. Therefore, the circuit court's denial of the District's motion for directed verdict and JNOV on Cruce's defamation cause of action is

REVERSED.

GEATHERS and MCDONALD, JJ., concur.

[5] The District also contends the circuit court erred in denying its motion for directed verdict and JNOV because Cruce failed to prove each element of his defamation cause of action. It contends the email was not false and defamatory. It also asserts Cruce presented no evidence the email was sent with common law malice or recklessness as to show conscious indifference or that the email proximately caused any damages. Based on our holding that Cruce is a public official or limited public figure, we need not address this issue. *See Futch v. McAllister Towing of Georgetown, Inc.*, 335 S.C. 598, 613, 518 S.E.2d 591, 598 (1999) (holding an appellate court need not review remaining issues when its determination of a prior issue is dispositive of the appeal).

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THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM BERKELEY COUNTY
Kristi Lea Harrington, Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No. 2018-000791

Jeffrey Lance Cruce, Respondent,

v.

Berkeley County School District, Appellant.

RESPONDENT'S PETITION FOR REHEARING

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LEGAL ARGUMENT

I. The Court overlooked the fact that Appellant failed to argue Respondent was a public official in its motion for directed verdict so this issue was not preserved for appellate review. Additionally, the Court misapprehended the fact that the terms "public official" and "limited public figure" describe two separate legal doctrines.

Appellant never argued in its directed verdict motion that Respondent was a public official. Rather, Appellant stated three (3) bases in its directed verdict motion as to why Respondent's defamation claim should not go to the jury: 1) Respondent was a "limited public figure" (R. p. 425, line 21—p.445, line 8); 2) the January 7th email was not false and defamatory (R. p. 461, lines 11-18); and 3) the January 7th email was privileged. (R. p. 470, lines 1-4.) At the end of its argument, Appellant repeated the "[t]hree bases for a directed verdict." (R. p. 470.) The issue of whether or not Respondent was a public official was not preserved as it was not part of Appellant's motion for directed verdict, and it should not have been addressed or ruled on by this Court.

Although Appellant did not raise the issue of "public official" in its motion for directed verdict, the Court held the issue had nevertheless been preserved for appellate review. The Court held the issue of whether Respondent was a public official was preserved as the term "public official" was mentioned in Appellant's oral argument. In support of its holding that the issue of "public official" was preserved, this Court misapprehended the holdings in the two (2) cases it relied on in its Order, Herron v. Century BMW, 395 S.C. 461, 466, 719 S.E.2d 640, 642 (2011) and Atlantic Coast Builders & Contractors, LLC v. Lewis, 398 S.C. 323, 330, 730 S.E.2d 282, 285 (2012).

The Court misapprehended the holding and rationale of Herron v. Century BMW, 395 S.C. 461, 466, 719 S.E.2d 640, 642 (2011) when it held that Herron stood for the proposition that "[A] party is not required to use the exact name of a legal doctrine in order to preserve the issue." This particular sentence is actually qualified by the sentence following it: "Nonetheless, the issue must

be sufficiently clear to bring into focus the precise nature of the alleged error so it can be reasonably understood by the judge." Herron, 395 S.C. at 466, 719 S.E.2d at 642. (emphasis added). As the Supreme Court held in Herron:

> Issue preservation rules are designed to give the trial court a fair opportunity to rule on the issues, and thus provide us with a platform for meaningful appellate review. At a minimum, issue preservation requires that an issue be raised to and ruled upon by the trial judge. It is axiomatic that an issue cannot be raised for the first time on appeal. Imposing such a requirement on the appellant is meant to enable the lower court to rule properly after it has considered all relevant facts, law, and arguments.

395 S.C. at 465, 719 S.E.2d at 642 (internal quotations and citations omitted).

Similarly, in the second case the Court cited as support for appellate review of the issue of whether Respondent was a public official, Atlantic Coast Builders & Contractors, LLC v. Lewis, 398 S.C. 323, 730 S.E.2d 282 (2012), the Court's Order takes another statement out of context to justify preservation, "…it may be good practice for us to reach the merits of an issue when error preservation is doubtful." The full sentence in this case actually reads, "While, it may be good practice for us to reach the merits of an issue when error preservation is doubtful, we should follow our longstanding precedent and resolve the issue on preservation grounds when it is clearly unpreserved." (398 S.C. at 330, 730 S.E.2d at 285) (emphasis added). The Court misapprehended the significance of these two (2) cases. These two cases do not support the Court's holding that the issue of "public official" was preserved. The term "public official" is not the same as the term "limited public figure," the meaning of the term "public official" was never in doubt, and Appellant only argued in its Directed Verdict motion that Respondent was a limited public figure. Appellant did not preserve the argument that Respondent was a public official.

As the terms "public official" and "limited public figure" are two (2) distinct legal doctrines, this is factually not a case where there could be confusion about a doctrine or where

a doctrine was mislabeled. The issue in this case was not whether Appellant used the correct name to reference the doctrine of "public official." The legal doctrines of "public official" and "limited public figure" are separate legal doctrines which are analyzed using different tests[1] and in every brief filed in this case by Appellant, Appellant addressed these two (2) legal doctrines separately and never failed to use the exact name of each. In South Carolina, in order to be considered a "public official," a plaintiff must "achieve such pervasive fame or notoriety that he becomes a public figure for all purposes and in all contexts." Goodwin v. Kennedy, 347 S.C. 3, 552 S.E.2d 319 (Ct. App. 2001) (internal citations omitted). Whereas, to determine if someone if a "limited public figure" there is a separate five-prong test: (1) whether the plaintiff had access to channels of effective communication; (2) whether the plaintiff voluntarily assumed a role of special prominence in the public controversy; (3) whether the plaintiff sought to influence the resolution or outcome of the controversy; (4) whether the controversy existed prior to the publication of the defamatory statement; and (5) whether the plaintiff retained public-figure status at the time of the alleged defamation. See Erickson v. Jones St. Publrs., LLC, 368 S.C. 444, 473, 629 S.E.2d 653 (2006). The Court overlooked the fact that Appellant only cited one of two legal doctrines as the basis for its motion for directed verdict, the doctrine of "limited public figure," so the doctrine of "public official" was not preserved.

The record is clear as to the three (3) stated bases of Appellant's motion for directed verdict. The transcript of the trial indicates that twice Appellant named only three (3) bases, and whether Respondent is a public official was not one of the bases. Appellant knew the difference between

[1] "Limited public figures," as enlarged by subsequent cases, are "those persons who, though not public officials are 'involved in issues in which the public has a justified and important interest'" and "include artists, athletes, business people, dilettantes, anyone who is famous or infamous because of who he is or what he has done." Time Inc. v. Johnston, 448 F. 2d 378, 380 (4th Cir. 1971) (internal citations omitted).

the legal doctrines of "public official" and "limited public figure," and it did not argue Respondent was a public official in its directed verdict motion. The Court misapprehended the holdings in Herron and Atlantic Coast regarding issue preservation, and overlooked existing law regarding preservation. The issue of whether Respondent was a public official was not preserved so the Court should not have addressed or ruled on that issue on appeal.

II. The Court overlooked and misapprehended state and federal law regarding the legal definition of "public official."

Notwithstanding the above, the Court overlooked state and federal law precedent when it held Respondent was a public official. The test for determining whether a person is a public official and, thus, whether actual malice must be proven in a defamation suit is set forth in Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc., 418 U.S. 323, 94 S. Ct. 2997 (1974). In Gertz, the Supreme Court held a person is considered a public official by achieving such fame and notoriety that he becomes a public figure for all purposes and in all contexts. Gertz also held that "[a]bsent clear evidence of general fame or notoriety in the community, and pervasive involvement in the affairs of society, an individual should not be deemed a public personality for all aspects of his life." Gertz, 418 U.S. 323, 352, 94 S. Ct. 2997, 3013. This Court overlooked the requirement that a public official must have general fame or notoriety and pervasive involvement in the affairs of society and failed to address these issues in its Order.

The holding in Gertz was based on the recognition that "[p]ublic officials … usually enjoy significantly greater access to channels of effective communication and hence have a more realistic opportunity to counteract false statements than private individuals enjoy." 418 U.S. 323, 344, 94 S. Ct. 2997, 3009. Here, the Court overlooked the fact there is nothing in the record indicating that at the time the defamatory email was published Respondent had significantly greater access to channels of effective communication then other private individuals. The Court's

misapprehension of the law results in what the Supreme Court was concerned would happen in Gertz when the Supreme Court refused to hold lawyers in a very public case were public officials because such a holding would "distort the plain meaning of the 'public official' category beyond all recognition." 418 U.S. 323, 351, 94 S. Ct. 2997, 3012.

This Court overlooked federal and state law when it held Respondent was a public official based on the Garrard case without any analysis as to whether Respondent had achieved fame and notoriety and had pervasive involvement in the affairs of society. Garrard v. Charleston Cnty. Sch. Dist., 429 S.C. 170, 838 S.E.2d 698 (Ct. App. 2019), *pet. for cert. filed*. In fact, the Order is silent as to why maintaining high school student athlete files involves fame, notoriety, or is involvement in an affair of society.

Further, this Court completely overlooked the law in this state that requires a public official to have substantial responsibility for or control over the conduct of governmental affairs. See Goodwin v. Kennedy, 347 S.C. 30, 44–45, 552 S.E.2d 319, 327 (Ct. App. 2001). Goodwin addressed the issue of whether an assistant principal was a public official and relying on New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, 376 U.S. 254, 84 S. Ct. 710 (1964), held:

> ("[U]nder normal circumstances, a principal simply does not have the relationship with government to warrant 'public official' status under *New York Times.* Principals, in general, are removed from the general conduct of government, and are not policymakers at the level intended by the *New York Times* designation of public official."), *cert. denied,* 507 U.S. 1025, 113 S. Ct. 1833, 123 L.Ed.2d 460 (1993)…. *McCutcheon v. Moran,* 425 N.E.2d 1130, 1133 (1981) ("The relationship a public-school teacher or principal has with the conduct of government is far too remote, in our minds, to justify exposing these individuals to a qualifiedly privileged assault upon his or her reputation…..Goodwin was an assistant principal whose duties included ninth-grade discipline. In the context of this case, we believe Goodwin was not a public official. His position as assistant principal is not one "among the hierarchy of government employees who have, or appear to the public to have, substantial responsibility for or control over the conduct of governmental affairs." *Rosenblatt v. Baer,* 383 U.S. 75, 85, 86 S. Ct. 669, 15 L.Ed.2d 597 (1966). Accordingly, we agree with the trial judge that Goodwin, as an assistant principal, is not a public official.

Goodwin v. Kennedy, 347 S.C. 30, 44–45, 552 S.E.2d 319, 327 (Ct. App. 2001) (emphasis added). The Court, thus, overlooked existing South Carolina case law when it concluded Respondent was a public official simply because he "was an athletic director, a football coach, and a teacher, similar to Coach Wadpole in Garrard." A high school coach does not have substantial responsibility for or control over the conduct of governmental affairs.

> The theory of our Constitution is that every citizen may speak his mind and every newspaper express its view on matters of public concern and may not be barred from speaking or publishing because those in control of government think that what is said or written is unwise, unfair, false, or malicious. In a democratic society, one who assumes to act for the citizens in an executive, legislative, or judicial capacity must expect that his official acts will be commented upon and criticized. Such criticism cannot, in my opinion, be muzzled or deterred by the courts at the instance of public officials under the label of libel.

New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, 376 U.S. 254, 298–99, 84 S. Ct. 710, 736, 11 L. Ed. 2d 686 (1964) (emphasis added).

Additionally, this Court erred when it overlooked the requirement that a person who is a public official is someone who acts in an executive, legislative, or judicial capacity; football does not fall into any of these categories. The Court also misapprehended the relevancy of cases it relied upon in determining Respondent was a public official, as these on cases do not involve teachers or football coaches.[2] The Court overlooked the fact that the law in South Carolina at the time Appellants made their directed verdict motion held an assistant principal was not a public official. In no case until Garrard has a South Carolina court held someone who is not in law enforcement,

[2] The Court cited two (2) South Carolina cases in support of its holding that Respondent was a public official but both of these cases concerned elected officials. Sanders v. Prince, 304 S.C. 236, 403 S.E.2d 640 (1991) involved elected school board members and Scott v. McCain, 272 S.C. 198, 250 S.E.2d 118 (1978) involved an elected school trustee. Respondent is not an elected official.

or elected or appointed, is a "public official."[3] This Court also misapprehended Goodwin's requirement that a public official have responsibility for or control over the conduct of governmental affairs when it held a football coach has responsibility for or control over the conduct of governmental affairs, but an assistant principal does not.

Finally, rather than focusing on the requirement that there be a serious social or governmental issue involved in any defamation case brought by a public official, the Court focused on language taken from Garrard that held a "public interest in that official's activity in a particular context" is relevant to a determination of whether someone is a public official. 429 S.C. at 208, 838 S.E.2d at 718. The Court overlooked the fact that this language was taken from McClain v. Arnold, 275 S.C. 282, 284, 270 S.E.2d 124, 125 (1980) which was a case involving a police officer. As the Court held in McClain:

> In State v. Crenshaw, S.C., 266 S.E.2d 61 (1980), we held policemen were "officers" within the meaning of the statute prohibiting public officers from accepting bribes. See Code Section 16-9-220 (1976). It is both rational and logical to extend this classification to the defamation area. Simply speaking, the status of a public official may be deemed sufficient to warrant application of the New York Times privilege, not because of the government employee's place on the totem pole, but because of the public interest in a government employee's activity in a particular context.

McClain v. Arnold, 275 S.C. at 284, 270 S.E.2d at 125. Law enforcement personnel have been considered public officials in South Carolina for many years but there is a significant difference between a football coach and a police officer and the Court overlooked this important distinction.

[3] Some states have affirmatively held principals are not public officials. See, e.g., Ellerbee v. Mills, 422 S.E.2d 539 (Ga. 1992) (a high school principal is not a public official as they are removed from the general conduct of government and are not policy makers); Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Lipscomb, 362 S.E.2d 32 (Va. 1987), cert denied, 486 U.S. 1023, 108 S. Ct. 1997 (1988) (public high school teacher was not a public official as he did not influence or control any public affairs or school policy)

III. The Court misapprehended the relevancy of *Garrard v. Charleston County School District* to this case.

The Court overlooked significant factual and legal differences between this case and Garrard and, thus, misapprehended the relevancy of the Garrard case. 429 S.C. 170, 838 S.E.2d 698 (Ct. App. 2019). This Court held Respondent was a public official based entirely on its holding in Garrard. The Court failed to make the legal analysis required to determine if Respondent was a public official. Rather, it merely assumed Respondent was a public official based on its holding in Garrard. Specifically, the Court held Respondent was "an athletic director, a football coach, and a teacher, similar to Coach Walpole in Garrard" and "[a]ccordingly, Cruce was a public official."

The Court overlooked that this case and Garrard are distinguishable. In Garrard, a football coach allowed his team to perform a watermelon ritual before games which included making monkey sounds, and this ritual was publicized and resulted in allegations of racial insensitivity and stereotyping. Garrard, 429 S.C. at 181-182, 838 S.E.2d at 704. The school released a press statement and held a press conference to address the issue. Id. Here, the facts do not involve any racial issues and there was no press release or press conference. Here, the defamation involved an email about Respondent, published after Respondent had been replaced as coach. Additionally, in Garrard, there were freedom of press issues involving statements published in newspapers, which newspaper articles were not present in this case as there was no press coverage of the defamatory email. This Court misapprehended the significance of the Garrard case to the facts in this case.

CONCLUSION

The Court overlooked the fact that the legal doctrines of "public official" and "limited public figure" are different and, as Appellant was not confused about the two (2) doctrines and did not mislabel the doctrine of "limited public figure" in its motion for directed verdict, the issue of

whether Respondent was a public official was not preserved for appellate review. Further, the Court overlooked and misapprehended state and federal case law regarding the doctrine of "public official" when it held Respondent was a public official. Finally, the Court's holding that Respondent was a public official was based on a misapprehension that the Garrard case was factually similar to this case, but the Garrard case involved first amendment issues and racism which are not present in this case. For these reasons, Respondent respectfully requests the Court grant a re-hearing in this matter and require Appellant to argue only the issues preserved in its motion for directed verdict.

Respectfully submitted,

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The South Carolina Court of Appeals

Jeffrey Lance Cruce, Respondent,

v.

Berkeley County School District, Appellant.

Appellate Case No. 2018-000791

ORDER

After careful consideration of the petition for rehearing, the Court is unable to discover that any material fact or principle of law has been either overlooked or disregarded, and hence, there is no basis for granting a rehearing. Accordingly, the petition for rehearing is denied.

_____ J.

_____ J.

_____ J.

Columbia, South Carolina

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