

Sports

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SECTION B

LOCAL SPORTS

‘WAIT AND SEE’



BURKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Flood waters from Hurricane Helene have receded from Freedom High School's football stadium in Morganton.

Burke high schools in holding pattern as WNC sorts through hurricane damage

JUSTIN EPLEY
Sports editor

All things considered, Burke County's high school athletic departments have emerged on the other side of Hurricane Helene better than might otherwise be expected.

Yes, Freedom High School's football stadium in Morganton was flooded and, yes, there is additional damage to some facilities at local schools caused by heavy rains and high winds, but Freedom, Draughn, East Burke, Patton and NCSSM-Morganton are more or less in a holding pattern while other harder-hit conference schools in surrounding counties sort through the devastation.

"It's a wait and see right now," Freedom athletic director Rob Scott said. "There are way more important things right now than playing a ballgame going on around us. Yeah, we all want to get back to some sort of normal, but we've got to get our community to normal first

before we worry about ballgames."

For longtime Patriots like Scott, previous flooding from 2004's Hurricane Frances provided a blueprint for this time around.

"We were smart enough to evacuate," Scott said. "Equipment-wise, we could play a game tomorrow if we needed to. Not at home, though. It'll be a minute before we're back in the stadium. It's a muddy, flooded mess. Those buildings won't be useable for a while. But the plan is to build back better.

"It's unfortunate, but we evacuated the things we had to evacuate right then. We'll come out of it alright on the other side. What happened (in 2004) was huge for now because we knew to evacuate. That's the biggest thing. You can't move everything out of a building, but we knew what had to go and the things you have to have to play a game, we were able

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WALT UNKS, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

The football field at Freedom High School was flooded with water from the Catawba River and remnants of Hurricane Helene on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024.

NBA

Hornets' Lee wastes no time prioritizing defense

STEVE REED
Associated Press

DURHAM— Charles Lee wasted no time setting an agenda in his first training camp practice as coach of the Charlotte Hornets.

The Hornets opened practice at Duke University this week with four straight defensive drills — a very intentional statement Lee was trying to make to his players after Charlotte finished near the bottom of the league in most defensive categories last season and won just 21 games.

"If we can count on our defense every night, I think it gives you a great chance to win games," Lee said. "You need to

be good on both sides of the ball in this league, but the effort that it takes to play defense doesn't have anything to do with the ball going in the basket. It's just the willingness, that mentality of being a little bit more physical, a little bit nastier."

Lee wore practice shorts and a basketball shoes and had the look of a man who was ready to jump in to drills. Players said he was upbeat, enthusiastic and brought high energy.

"That's the one thing we really focused on today — defense," second-year small forward Brandon Miller said.

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CHRIS CARLSON, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Charlotte Hornets' LaMelo Ball poses during the NBA basketball team's media day on Sept. 30 in Charlotte.

MLB PLAYOFFS

Braves' season ends with playoff sweep

BERNIE WILSON
Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Atlanta Braves' best pitcher, National League Cy Young Award favorite Chris Sale, was back home with a back injury.

Max Fried, who started his career as a San Diego Padres farmhand and won the clinching game in the 2021 World Series for the Braves, was in the trainer's room by the third inning.

Still, the Braves put a scare into the sellout crowd at Petco Park by whit-tling San Diego's lead down to one run Wednesday night. But the Padres closed out a 5-4 win for a two-game sweep of their NL Wild Card Series that ended a most trying season for Atlanta.

The banged-up Braves were decimated by injuries all year and still managed to make their seventh straight playoff appearance — even though their six-year reign atop the NL East was halted.

"We won 89 games. I'm so proud of those guys," manager Brian Snitker said. "I just told them that. It's amazing what they did, I think, to put ourselves in contention. We had a chance here. We got in the tournament.

"Get a hit yesterday, hit today, who knows, we may be playing tomorrow," Snitker said. "But we're not. It's the way this thing is. That's how fragile this is and how hard it is. You just remember how hard it is in this long season for things to go right for you."

Sale was scratched from the night-cap of a makeup doubleheader Monday against the New York Mets with back spasms — a game Atlanta needed to win to reach the postseason. He was left off the roster for the Wild Card Series.

And then the latest in a long line of injuries occurred just two batters into Fried's outing Wednesday night. The left-hander was nailed on the left hip by Fernando Tatis Jr.'s comebacker,

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NFL

Panthers' Johnson not worrying about trade rumors

STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE — With several NFL teams including the defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs in need of a top-notch wide receiver, Diontae Johnson's name has emerged as a potential trade candidate.

The Carolina Panthers' wide receiver said Wednesday that he'd prefer to remain in Carolina and sign a long-term contract, but acknowledged his future is largely out of his hands.

Carolina acquired Johnson in a trade with the Pittsburgh Steelers earlier this offseason.

He has developed into the team's No. 1 wide receiver since 36-year-old Andy Dalton took over at quarterback for Bryce Young in Week 3.

Johnson has been targeted 27 times in the past two games and has 15 receptions for 205 yards and two touchdowns with Dalton at the helm. He was targeted just 12 times in two games with Young and had just five catches for 34 yards and no touchdowns.

"I can't control some of the stuff they put out there," Johnson said. "I can only just come in and here and continue to

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