

# Sports

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SECTION B

H.S. VOLLEYBALL

## CHAMPIONSHIP 'CATS



TPS PHOTOGRAPHY

The Draughn volleyball team was named Western Highlands 1A/2A Conference champions after an 8-0 start to league play before Hurricane Helene hit the region.

### Draughn awarded conference title after season interrupted

JUSTIN EPLEY  
Sports editor

**V**ALDESE — For the Draughn volleyball team, an 8-0 start to Western Highlands 1A/2A Conference play was enough to secure the league's crown.

What would have been a 14-game conference slate was trimmed to nine after Hurricane Helene ravaged many of the WHC's mountain communities in late September. In fact, the Lady Wildcats played just one more league contest after the storm, and that didn't come until late Thursday at Rosman, 22 days after DHS won in four sets at Owen.

But by the time DHS (14-7, 8-1 WHC) played the Lady Tigers, they already had been awarded the conference championship in former player Trinitie Lambert's first season as head coach.

"I told the girls from the start that I'm really big about having a positive attitude," Lambert said. "A positive attitude toward yourself, a positive attitude toward your teammates and a positive outlook on how the game's going to go. So, I told them that no matter who we face, we have to go in there and know that as long as we give it our all, it's going to be what we want it to be.

"So, we played some pretty tough teams this season in conference and nonconference. We took some losses, but the important thing that we talked about after every loss was learning from a loss. If you lose and don't learn from it, then it's an even bigger loss. So, we defi-

nately got some good information from all of our losses."

Another key ingredient in Lambert's recipe for success has simply been to have a good time playing on the court.

"We also talked about having fun," Lambert said. "I think sometimes, you have some really good teams that don't go as far as they should because they stop playing the sport for the love of the game. They play for the sport for glory or for something else. When our girls go out there and have fun together, they're unstoppable."

Draughn's run through the WHC included five wins via sweep, and they all came consecutively at Avery County on Sept. 3, at Mitchell on Sept. 5, versus Madison on Sept. 10, versus Rosman on Sept. 12 and at NCSSM-Morganton on Sept. 17. That streak was bookended by four-set victories versus Owen on Aug. 29 and at Mountain Heritage on Sept. 19, and later followed by another four-set win over the Warlassies in Black Mountain on Sept. 25.

"It was really good," Lambert said. "When we finished that first round (through the WHC) undefeated, we had a little celebration. Then, Owen was our biggest competition and we did get to play them before the hurricane hit. When we played them the second time, we lost the first set and we talked about playing our game, having fun, playing as a team and came out there and they were a completely different team the last three sets.

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### H.S. ROUNDUP

## EB's Willis 1st, and Baker 2nd at the CVAC championship

FROM STAFF REPORTS

NEWTON — East Burke's Cadence Willis was first in girls competition and Elijah Baker was second on the boys side at Tuesday's Catawba Valley 2A Conference cross country championships, hosted by Bunker Hill at Southside Park.

The EBHS boys finished second as a team and the EB girls placed fifth.

Willis timed in at 20:30.14 to claim the win, followed by Lady Cavaliers teammates Aubrey Sanders (16th), Gracie Kaylor (23rd), Genevieve Wilson (34th), Maliena Smith (37th), Regan Parsons (39th), Jocelyn Martinez Lopez (43rd) and Eve Sweet (46th).

Baker clocked in at 18:06.23 and was joined in the top 10 by Ethan Bishop (fourth; 18:21.44) and Marc Denton (ninth; 19:14.93). They were followed by fellow Cavaliers Randy Bradshaw (12th), Kade Tolbert (16th), Benjamin Bolynn (20th) and Eduardo Valencia Soria (33rd).

### Patton at MF7 championships

The Panthers participated in the Mountain Foothills 7 1A/2A Conference championships on Wednesday at the Brevard High School Cross Country Course in Brevard, with the PHS boys placing second as a team while the Patton girls did not record a team score.

On the girls side, the Lady Panthers were led by second-place Elise Sawdry (20:43.17) and sixth-place Layla McGuire (21:28.69), along with Nora Wykle (15th).

The PHS boys' top finisher was fifth-place Gabe Wykle (17:07.78), who was followed by Panthers teammates Will Evans (15th), Nicholas Parlier (17th), Eliuth Nicolas (22nd), Carter Phillips (25th), Jude Gregory (39th), Bryant Arrowood (43rd) and Jack Taggart (56th).

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### HIGH SCHOOLS

## NCHSAA sets sites for fall championships

JUSTIN EPLEY  
Sports editor

CHAPEL HILL — The NCHSAA on Thursday announced championship sites for the state's high school sports fall season, which has had some rearranging done due to damage inflicted by Hurricane Helene in the western half of the state.

Football state championship games will be played from Dec. 20-21, with the

2A and 4A contests held at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium and the 1A and 3A state championship games contested at North Carolina State University's Carter-Finley Stadium. Both venues are playing host for the fourth consecutive year, the NCHSAA said. The association also noted that decisions regarding game times will be made once the participating teams are determined.

In boys soccer, state championship games will be played from Nov. 22-23, with all classifications playing at the Mecklenburg County Sportsplex in Matthews. According to the NCHSAA, this marks the first time the venue will host the boys soccer championships after making its debut as a championship site for girls soccer this past spring. The boys title games had been held at MacPherson Stadium at the Bryan Park Soccer Complex in Greensboro following a three-year stay at Cary's Koka Booth Stadium.

For volleyball, all classifications will play on Nov. 2 at North Carolina State University's Reynolds Coliseum. The

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## Miami's Ward, Pitt's Narduzzi headline AP's ACC midyear awards

AARON BEARD  
Associated Press

Miami quarterback Cam Ward, Boston College defensive end Donovan Ezeiruaku and Pittsburgh coach Pat Narduzzi headline the honorees in The Associated Press' mid-season report for the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Ward, a fifth-year transfer who last played at Washington State, was picked as top offensive player and top first-year transfer through the season's first half in voting by AP writers who cover ACC teams. Ezeiruaku was picked as top defensive player while Narduzzi was the top coach for a team that tied as the most surprising so far, as well as featuring the most surprising player in 5-foot-8 all-purpose back Desmond Reid.

Ward has rolled from the opening day and enters this weekend's game at Louisville leading the country in passing offense (369.8 yards) and tied

for the Bowl Subdivision lead with 20 touchdown throws for sixth-ranked Miami (6-0, 2-0 ACC).

Ezeiruaku, a 6-foot-2 senior, is second nationally with nine sacks through six games. He's brought down a quarterback in five of them, including multi-sack games against Florida State, Michigan State and Western Kentucky.

As for Narduzzi, his 20th-ranked Panthers (6-0, 2-0) were picked to finish 13th in the 17-team league. But Narduzzi, who won an ACC title in 2021, hired Kade Bell away from Western Carolina as offensive coordinator in a new scheme helmed by redshirt freshman Eli Holstein, a transfer from Alabama who earned multiple votes for top first-year transfer.

That unit is tied for 13th nationally in scoring offense (40.8) and ranked 11th in total offense (481.3 yards), helping

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JED JACOBSON, AP FILE

Miami quarterback Cam Ward (1) celebrates after defeating California during an Oct. 5 game in Berkeley, Calif.



MATT FREED, AP FILE

Pittsburgh head coach Pat Narduzzi, left, celebrates with quarterback Eli Holstein, right, after defeating West Virginia in a Sept. 14 game in Pittsburgh.