

## Southampton High School's Stellar Athletes Participate in National Signing Day

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Who knew a pen and a dotted line could bring so much joy and hope to families nationwide? On February 1, Southampton High School (SHS) athletes participated in National Signing Day. By signing a National Letter of Intent (NLI), student-athletes commit to attending a particular National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) college or university. In exchange for the student's commitment to play on the NCAA level, the educational institution promises to provide financial aid or scholarships. For many, National Signing Day is a dream come true as the ability to play at an NCAA level is one step closer to playing professionally.

Eight football athletes at SHS participated in National Signing Day. For Southampton High School's Coach, Travis Parker, such an accomplishment is comparable to attaining a trophy. According to Parker, he and a staff composed of nine assistant coaches spent two years preparing the athletes to play at a college level.

"We did it as a football staff. There was no way, shape, or form I could have done this by myself. We have great coaches. We even have coaches who have tried out for the NFL [National Football League]. When they [the seniors] were playing in the tenth grade, we told them this could be a reality for them. They trusted us, followed our guidance, and now they are sitting with smiles," Parker said proudly.

Below is the list of staff on the Southampton High School football team:

1. Athletic Director, Tim Mason
2. Head Coach, Travis Parker
3. Assistant Coach, Anthony Wiggins
4. Assistant Coach and school security at Capron Elementary School, Charles Cooper
5. Assistant Coach and teacher at Meherrin Elementary School, Eric Benton
6. Volunteer and School Board Member, Greg Scott
7. Assistant Coach and Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs (SECEP) teacher, Josh Turner
8. Assistant Coach and teacher at Southampton High School, Kenneth Barnes
9. Assistant Coach, Tim Dawson
10. Assistant Coach and teacher at Southampton Middle School, Vernon Bryant
11. Assistant Coach, Xavier Scott

The players and Parker have a special bond. In many ways, Parker is a parent to them at school and on the field. Senior, Jaden Warren chuckled as he thought about Parker's strict academic standards.

"Coach Parker was on it. He would send us pictures of our class schedules during the summer break. He doesn't play when it comes to grades. He would walk the hallways to check in on us and even pop into our classes to make sure we were sitting in front of the class so that we could pay attention. Coach Parker did not play that," Warren said, shaking his head.

Warren signed his NLI with Elizabeth City State University in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Though Warren will not have Parker watching over him like a hawk, Warren and his teammates will miss Parker's shadow.

“We are about to be grown men. I am not going to lie. It is bittersweet to leave. It’s weird to go from being the hometown hero to going all the way to North Carolina. I am going to miss the county. I will give Coach Parker my schedule, too,” said Warren.

Speaking with Warren, Coach Parker reflected on Warren’s family legacy in the Southampton County Public Schools Division.

“J. Warren is the third generation Southampton County High school football player. His grandfather was MVP in the 70s when Southampton [High School] won the State Championship. His grandfather is Jackie Robertson. I also coached his father, Jackie Robertson Junior,” Parker said pointing at Warren.

Senior, Jaden White had the same sentiment as Warren; Parker gives tough love. However, Parker’s rigorous exercises and demands for a 3.0 GPA from his senior athletes paid off.

“I worked extremely hard for everything. I am excited to sign with Virginia Union University. Coach Parker pushed me with my academics and football, showing me there was more than football,” White said.

White was the only student who did not have Coach Parker in the tenth grade. White transferred from Greensville County High School in Emporia, Virginia, to SHS in his senior year. White’s transition to the high school and football team was seamless. It was as if he was always a part of the Southampton community. White shared how he aspires to go to the NFL after college.

“I just want to play football. My ultimate goal is to be like Coach Parker and coach football. I will use bits and pieces of his game plan,” said White.

The other athletes laughed and reminisced about the up-down exercises Parker made them do. Up-down is an exercise that works the entire body. It involves kneeling, standing, and then kneeling again in a repetitive motion. In addition, the players mentioned that Parker made them run forty yards 20 times, every other day.

One of Parker’s players, Alvin Hicks Jr., is one of the SHS students who will sit for the Part 107 Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems exam later this spring. Students who pass the exam gain a remote pilot certification, enabling them to fly drones. While Hicks prepares to pass the exam, he is also planning for his academic future.

“I am going to Elizabeth City State University to study Kinesiology (the study of body movement) in the Sports Medicine Field. Now, I see the outcome of everything he did. Coach Parker was on my back about everything. He would even text me at 6:00 a.m. I am where I am now because of Coach Parker,” Hicks said.

Parker mentioned how he would continue to train and condition the players.

“They have to finish strong. It is not over. They know it’s not over. Right now, a lot of their attention is on their academics. They are also still working on their bodies to look good for their coaches in August,” Parker said.

“Dr. Shannon [Superintendent of the Southampton County Public Schools Division], the [SCPS] board members, the administration, and the families never got in the way. They trusted us the entire time, and for that we are appreciative,” Parker said with gratitude.

Parker does not take the role he plays in the lives of his athletes lightly. According to Parker, he will continue to hold high expectations for them, even when they leave his nest.