

Coming on board with the Knights

Catcher signs on with SCC



Paige Honeycutt (front right) signs her letter of intent as the first softball recruit in the history of Surry Community College as Knights coach Amber Reid (left) looks on. (Back row, from left to right) Paige's father, her sister, Brooke, East Surry coach Derrick Hill, Paige's mother, Ann, and Cardinals baseball coach Barry Hall.

Paige Honeycutt will be donning No. 8 for Surry Community College next year. She'll be watched by her mother, Ann, father, Breck and Lady Knights coach Amber Reid.

By Phil Goble Jr.

phil@surrymessenger.com

When East Surry catcher Paige Honeycutt steps on the softball diamond, an attitude follows. Pitchers don't worry where they throw the ball. She'll get it. Runners don't dream of stealing. She'll gun them down. Opposing defenses stand up. She just doesn't go down swinging or looking.

"She really sets the bar high," Surry Community College's softball coach, Amber Reid, said Friday, minutes before Honeycutt became the first signed recruit in the program's history. "That's the caliber of player we need to compete in our conference.

She would easily be able to go to any school in our conference and be a leader." More than that — she could go NCAA Division I and be a leader. At least that's what N.C. A&T believed. The Aggies recruited Honeycutt even when she said no thanks. "At the end of the regular season last year and throughout this year, she's been the best 1A player in the state in my opinion," East Surry Coach Derrick Hill said. "She knows the game better than any kid I've ever coached." Hill should know. He chose to start Honeycutt as a freshman when the then-incumbent catcher chose not to return to the team. Paige has been behind the plate ever since. "This year, I told her if you're going to college to catch, then you call the games," Hill said. "I don't think I've called 10 pitches all year and, most of the time, she knows it before I call it."

Why catcher, though? "It's constantly a mental game," Paige said. "Especially catching. You're responsible for the other players on the field. In calling pitches you are always thinking." And it helps the whole team. Take a recent game against Starmount. Opposing runners were on first and third. Hill called Paige and put on the team's special defense. Honeycutt didn't just take the sign, she trotted out to the mound, called the infield together and made sure everyone was on the same — pardon the pun — page. The move kept her team's head in the game and saved her coach a trip to the mound.

“On the field, she’s very heads up,” Reid said. “I’ve watched Paige play the past couple of years. Defensively, she’s very smart ... she reads runners well. Offensively, she’s such a huge threat. She can battle off anything you give her. She’s a tough out.” Hill agreed.

“If you put her at the plate with runners in scoring position in a big game, she’ll get a hit,” he said. “She might get herself out, but you won’t get her out.”

Through 13 games this season, Paige is batting .385, third best for the Cardinals. She has two doubles, two triples and two home runs with 10 RBI. Paige has walked three times and struck out three times in 39 at-bats. “I think catching has also helped my batting,” Paige said. “I can pick up spins better.” Defensively, she has three putouts, four assists and a perfect fielding percentage. She doesn’t have a cannon to gun runners down, Hill said, but her hair-trigger release makes up for the gun. She has helped the Cardinals to an 11-2 record. They are ranked No. 1 in the state in the latest N.C. Softball Coaches Association poll.

“She’s one of the best seniors coming out in the state,” Reid said. “There is no doubt she could easily play elsewhere. The great thing is she has the opportunity, once she’s used her eligibility with us, to go somewhere else and play.” But she never wanted to play anywhere else. Division I ball, Paige thought, was too serious. “Usually, community college or Division II is more fun,” she said. “It (Surry) is close to home, within driving distance. I can sleep in my own bed.”

Paige plans to finish two years at Surry, focusing on engineering classes. Then, she wants to transfer to UNC-Charlotte and complete a degree in architecture.

She leaves behind a team that won a state championship last year and finished runner-up in 2006 with her on the roster. “Somebody has some big shoes to fill,” Hill said. “We have a couple of good catchers coming up, but they are going to have some big shoes to fill. And you know what the best thing about her is? The best thing about her is she’s a great person.”