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UNCA falls to Radford, Liberty

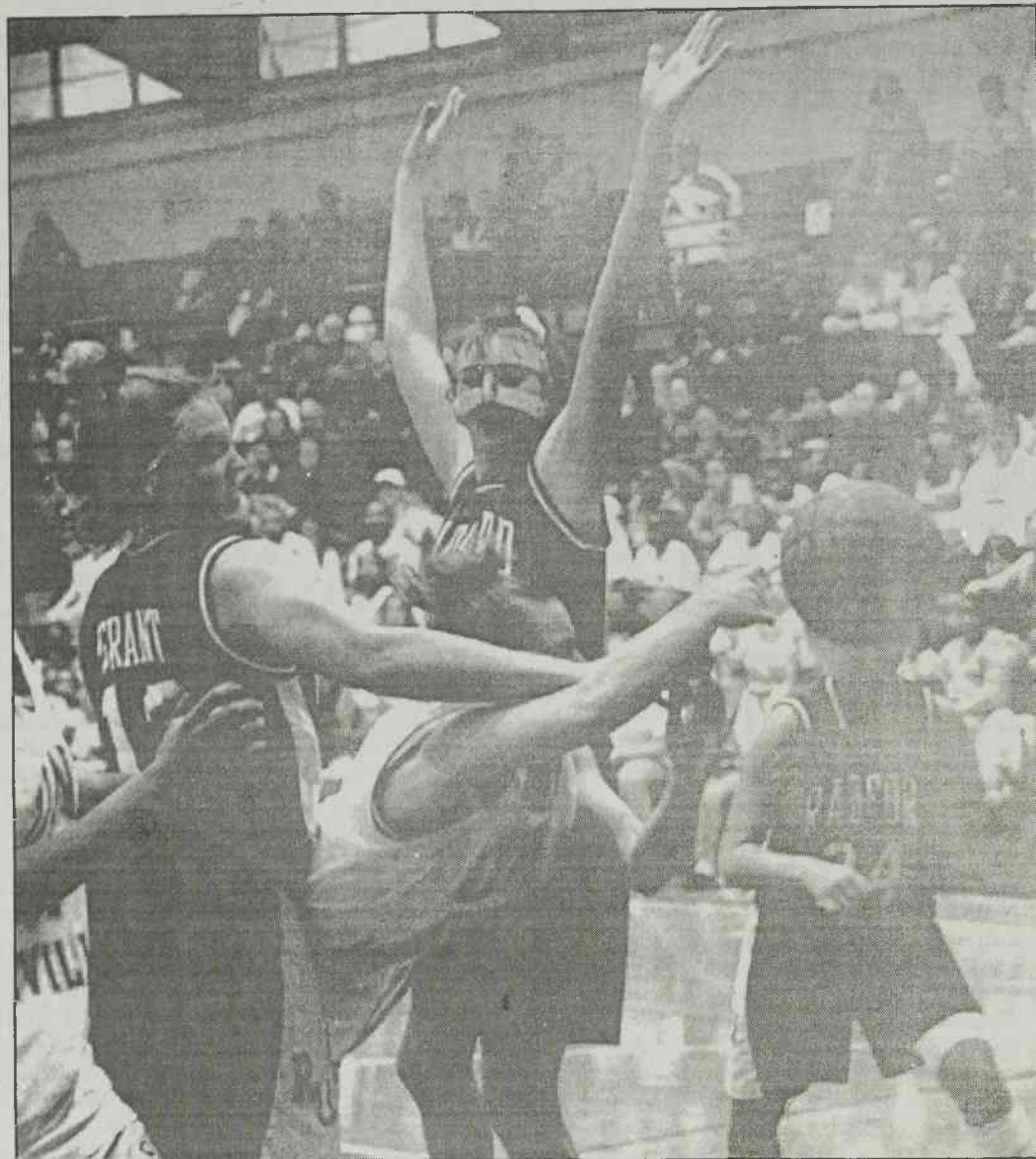


PHOTO BY PRESTON GANNAWAY

UNCA's women's basketball team fell to 2-8 in the Big South after a loss to Liberty Feb. 9

By Andrew Pearson
Staff Writer

The UNCA women's basketball team spent the last week facing the Big South Conference's top two teams, Radford and Liberty. Radford picked up its second one-point victory over UNCA this season, 77-76, to stay in the hunt for the Big South Conference regular season title. UNCA also lost to Liberty 83-61 on Feb. 9 in Lynchburg, Va.

Sophomore Forward Dana Polakowski, who led UNCA with 14 points and seven rebounds, said the team felt let down after the game. "We were very disappointed because we had made an entire team effort and played hard. We really wanted to come out with the win, but unfortunately that wasn't the case," Polakowski said. The Highlanders carried a 43-34 lead into halftime, but the Bulldogs used strong post play by Polakowski, forward Elisa Fellers, and freshman Nicole Sampson in the second half to climb back into the contest.

However, UNCA struggled from the free-throw line, shooting 55 percent in the second half. Mitchell scored her team's last 11 points, and matched her career high with 28 points. She shot six for nine from behind the arc where she currently ranks 12th in the nation in three point shooting accuracy at 45 percent. Highlanders Jennifer Grand and Kelli Tull added 19 and 18 points, respectively. The Bulldogs were led by Polakowski, who scored a team-high 14 points and pulled down seven rebounds.

Guard Amy Freed scored 14 points and Sampson contributed 10 points in the losing effort. Senior Amanda Brewer dished out six assists and Point Guard Mandy Edwards added five assists for UNCA.

The Bulldogs played without Emily Hill, the Big South's second leading scorer.

Hill returned to the lineup for the Bulldog's next game on Feb. 9 as UNCA traveled to the Vines Center in Lynchburg to face undefeated Liberty University.

The Flames (21-0) along with the country's top ranked team, the Tennessee Volunteers, remain the only two undefeated teams in NCAA Division I Women's Basketball.

Liberty forward Elena Kisselva, the odds on favorite to win Big South Player of the Year, poured in 28 points, made four steals, and pulled down 12 rebounds to pace the Flames to a 83-61 victory.

Hill, who led the Bulldogs with 17 points and a team-high seven rebounds, said UNCA came into the game prepared.

"We brought in our game plan and we played as hard as we could but it just didn't happen," said Hill.

Freed scored 14 points, and Polakowski turned in another solid performance accumulating 11 points and three steals.

The Flames held the Bulldogs' field goal percentage down to 33 percent for the game.

UNCA next game will be at home in the Justice Center for Homecoming and their final home conference game against the UMBC Retrievers on Feb. 14 at 2 p.m.

Hill said the team will prepare this week for the UMBC game the same way they have approached all their games this season.

UNCA Head Coach Kathleen Weber also announced a major addition to the Bulldog program this week. North Carolina A&T guard LaTania McIntyre, who has transferred in this semester, and will be eligible to play next season after fall semester exams.

McIntyre, 5'6", from Hyannis, Md., averaged 18.6 points a game and shot 40 percent from three point range on her way to a 1997 first-team MEAC conference selection in her last season at North Carolina A&T.

Bulldog win streak over, holds on to first place in Big South

By Chris Garner
Sports Editor

The UNCA men's basketball team lost its first Big South conference game on Feb. 7 against the Radford University Highlanders 91-87 in Radford, Va. A 75-59 victory over Liberty University at home on Feb. 9 gave the Bulldogs a 9-1 conference record, which allowed them to hold on to first place in the Big South.

"Radford was very aggressive in the game," UNCA Head Coach Eddie Biedenbach said. "We played hard, but we did not play real good."

"We played hard enough that we were in the game, and had a chance to win, but when you do not play really well on the road, then you are just fortunate to be in the game in the end," Biedenbach said.

Junior Forward Kevin Martin led the Bulldogs in scoring with 18. Seniors Robert Stevenson, Josh Pittman, Vincent Krieger, and junior Juelian Flowers all scored in the double-digits.

Pittman also pulled down a team-high eight rebounds for UNCA.

According to Biedenbach, the Bulldogs had a chance to win when they were up 81-80 with two minutes left in the game, but a missed three-pointer by UNCA, answered by a Radford three-pointer gave the Highlanders the momentum to pull off the win.

On Feb. 9 in the Justice Center, UNCA found the key to success again as they defeated the Liberty Flames 75-59.

Pittman had an outstanding night as he tallied 31 points, which boosted him to 1,437 career points and seventh place on the UNCA career scoring list.

Stevenson and Martin both scored in double-digits as well with 19 and 11, respectively.

"Josh was tremendous," Biedenbach said. "He really took the game over in the second half

and played well both on offense and defense."

Liberty gave Bulldog fans a scare as they led at halftime 35-30, but UNCA outscored the Flames 45-24 in the second half to give the Bulldogs the final advantage.

"This is a great win for us against a tough team after a tough loss Saturday," Biedenbach said. "We struggled in the first half, but we really took it up a notch and got the job done."

The Bulldogs face the University of Maryland-Baltimore County on Feb. 14 for UNCA's homecoming game. UMBC, a predominantly freshman team, is third in the conference behind Radford.

"UMBC is really athletic and can shoot the ball really well," Biedenbach said. "But with any young guys that are talented, if they start hitting on the right stroke and hit a couple of three's when the counts, then the game is over."

If Radford wins all of their remaining conference games, UNCA has to win against UMBC, then win their last conference game against Winthrop to clinch the conference championship and receive a first-round bye in the Big South tournament on Feb. 25-28 at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

Biedenbach says the last two conference wins are critical for his team. "We have to win these last games," Biedenbach said. "We only got one at a time, so UMBC is it for us right now, but looking at the overall picture, Radford's last game of the year at Liberty could be significant for them."

"We want to win these games and get ready for the conference tournament," Biedenbach said.

Baseball has high hopes for 1998 season

By Amanda Huston
Staff Writer

Head baseball coach, Bill Hillier, looks forward to a promising season as his team prepares for 1998.

"I like the makeup of our team this year," Coach Hillier said. "We have good athletes at every position now, and this past fall was by far the most competitive fall we have had since I have been here."

The optimism erupted from the success the Bulldogs enjoyed late in the season last year with victories over their last four league games, and wins in six of their last nine games.

These wins pushed the Bulldogs into fifth place in league play, just missing a berth to the 1997 Big South tournament, which takes only the top four teams in the league.

"We have made progress, and I think what we did at the end of the year last season showed that, but we want to make more progress," Coach Hillier said. "We want to make the Big South tournament this year and we want to make some noise when we get there."

According to Coach Hillier, the league will be well balanced this year, and the key to a successful season will be to win the early games.

The Bulldog pitching staff could be one of UNCA's biggest strengths

this season, according to Coach Hillier.

"On every level of baseball, pitching is so important," Coach Hillier said. "We must have good pitching, and if we can build on last year's success with our pitching, then it could be a great year for our program."

With the Bulldogs' experienced pitching staff and talented infield, the team counts on their depth for wins this season, according to Coach Hillier.

The Bulldogs' non-conference schedule is demanding in order to prepare them for Big South conference play, according to Coach Hillier. UNCA will face Georgia, Tennessee, Clemson, and Wake Forest away in addition to home games with Ohio University, Western Carolina, and Samford.

Coach Hillier said he has not sugar-coated things for the club, and has made the team understand that they are underdogs in a lot of their games.

"To be good, you have to play good teams, and that's the way we approach ourscheduling," Coach Hillier said. "We like our schedule, and think we have a good schedule both home and away this season. We have the potential to be a NCAA regional team, but potential is a dangerous word."

On top of winning the early games, Coach Hillier said the key to a successful season is consistency, focus, and concentration.

"Any team that ever wins championships, or wins on a consistent basis, has a tremendous focus and dedication," Coach Hillier said. "It is hard to go out every day to play hard and execute."

The Bulldogs could be playing up to seven games a week, now that the season has begun. They have been training twice a day, and using every minute of the four hours per day practice time allowed, according to senior co-captain Billy Hillier.

Hillier is expected to be a dominant pitcher for the Bulldogs this season, according to Coach Hillier. Coming off an arm injury, Hillier is in good condition, and has the most Division I experience of any pitcher on the staff.

Returning senior pitcher Sonny Moss, along with juniors Josh White, Eddie Woods, Jason White, and Shon Norris will provide a powerful pitching staff nucleus for the 1998 season, according to Hillier.

"I really like this staff because we

have quality arms from top to bottom," Coach Hillier said.

Coach Hillier feels that there are two or three juniors on this year's squad that could be lost to the draft with a good season.

Newcomers for the Bulldogs include catchers Jamie Pietraszko and Jamie Jacobs, infielders Jason Ronai and Steven Thomas, outfielders Bill Nay and Stephen Hull, and junior college transfer Troy Stortz.

The Bulldogs opened their season on Feb. 7 and 8 on the road at Elon College. The Bulldogs lost to the Fighting Christians 8-3, 7-2, and 7-5 in the two-day road trip. A 14-4 loss to the Furman Paladins in Greenville, S.C. on Feb. 10 gave the Bulldogs an overall record of 0-4 on the season.

UNCA's first home game will be against Marshall on Feb. 21 at Greenwood Field.

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