

## SENIORS

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the court.

"My first game was our first game of my freshman year at Wake Forest and I still remember to this day the feeling of excitement for my first college basketball game. I'll never forget the few moments before the ball went into the air. I was so excited to be a part of the game," Vannatta said.

A fan from the stands is sad to see some of the senior players leave the UNCA court for good because of all the positive memories the players have provided. Sophomore drama student Lea Gilbert said she enjoys going to the basketball games and will miss seeing Vannatta and Thomas on the court.

"(Thomas) has made the type of shots that got you jumping out of your seat. During the Winthrop game after one of his shots, he turned to the student section and waved his arms up and down and it got all of us to go crazy. It is cool to see how our cheering affects them," Gilbert said.

With students and fans in the stands cheering on the team, the athletes use that extra push to play harder and better. Both Thomas and Vannatta said they thrive on the encouragement their fans bring to the court.

"They play a huge role during the games to keep us energized and focused. Our home record over my career has been incredible, one of the best in the country, and that is in large part due to our great students and fan base. Sometimes when I am trying to focus I try my best to block out all of the specific noise like who is yelling what but you can definitely hear the noise and understand when the fans are engaged," Vannatta said.

Thomas said the cheering fans help him with his game while on the court.

"You notice everyone when you are playing. Even though you shouldn't be and be focusing on the

game, you cannot help it but it is all about the game. Cheering is part of the game, it helps the team out a lot, bring out their best," Thomas said.

During the on-season, the team practices intensely, while during the off-season they have regularly scheduled practices, but their regimen is less intense or frequent.

"The team practices about six times per week during the year, and in the off-season we will have a few workouts each day and those may include on-court workouts, weights, conditioning or pickup. Usually it is a multiple of those each day," Vannatta said.

Both Vannatta and Thomas said their memories from throughout their college basketball careers will stick with them for years after they graduate. They both have played basketball their whole lives and they both have always been passionate about playing.

Thomas said his favorite memory from playing here was participating in March Madness with the team. Vannatta's favorite memory was one that happened right on their home court.

"For me, I remember the last few moments during the Winthrop rival game my sophomore year to win the Big South Tournament Championship and receive a start into the NCAA Tournament," Vannatta said.

Vannatta and Thomas are graduating not only from UNCA but as well from the team itself. Playing basketball in college was both a huge part of college for the both of them are going to stay in touch with the team.

"We are brothers, we have lived together since freshman year, we will stay in touch just like any siblings do. We talk every single day, whether we're at school together, or all at home over the summer. Therefore, I know we will continue to keep our brotherly bond after graduation and I start my life," Vannatta said.



Kevin Vannatta runs onto the court at the start of the semi-final of the big south conference.

PHOTO BY NICK HASELOFF