

sports

softball takes Chowan to first NCAA tourney

College students, at least those with early classes, are accustomed to rolling out of bed near the crack of dawn. However, early on May 6, nine Chowan women loaded into a van and headed off to a new berth—the NCAA Division III Softball Championship Tournament.



For the first time in history, Chowan proudly sent one of its athletic teams into a national tournament sporting the NCAA label. The Division III tournament featured 40 teams divided into eight regions, with five teams competing at each regional site. Nine teams automatically qualified by winning their respective conference championships and the remaining 32 teams were selected at-large within their respective regions.

It came as no surprise that the team breaking the historic barrier was the fast-pitch softball squad. Since joining the NCAA ranks in 1993 the Braves have posted a sparkling 177-55 overall record, but until this season were barred from entering a national tournament.

"This was our goal from the beginning and we've worked extremely hard to get to this stage of our season," said coach Karen Burke upon notice of the invitation. Burke, who took the reigns of the program two weeks into the 1998 campaign, continued, "We've got to go into this from the standpoint that this is an entirely new season for us and the 39 other teams in the NCAA field."

And, go into it they did. With



two key seniors, Kelly Rothery and Tracy Bennett, not making the trip, Chowan took what was to become known as the 'Iron Nine' to their first national tournament.

Although they came home without a trophy, the team won much respect. Playing against talented clubs with as many reserves on the bench as Chowan had on the field, the Braves held their own in the five-team event despite suffering a pair of losses.

The first loss went to NC Wesleyan on May 7 after pitcher Jamie Witt locked into a scoreless pitching duel for five and one-half innings before the Lady Bishops plated two runs in the bottom of the sixth.

The final setback, one that eliminated Chowan

from further competition, came Saturday, May 9 when the Braves rallied to take the lead against Western Maryland before dropping a 6-5 decision in extra innings.

"The team showed a lot of heart by never giving up," stated Burke. "We lost two tough games but certainly earned respect from the other teams and coaches."

Chowan concluded its 1998 softball season with a 24-15 overall record.



Steve Lee named to pilot football program

With thirteen years of football coaching experience at the collegiate level, Steve Lee, Chowan's former defensive line and recruiting coordinator, is anxious to take the helm of the NCAA Division III team.

"I am very excited about the opportunity to lead the football program at Chowan," declared Lee. "We will build on the excellent foundation and traditions that were well developed by my predecessors and make the program one to be proud of."

The new head coach continued, "Chowan has an excellent administration that understands the role our athletic program plays within the college community, a good nucleus of athletes who are working hard to develop a winning program and the ability to recruit excellent student-athletes. We will play with enthusiasm and intensity . . . and . . . with high expectations."

Lee came to Chowan in 1996. His prior collegiate football coaching experience



includes stints at Fairmont State College and Waynesburg College, where his teams were nationally ranked.

"Steve brings Division III coaching, teaching and administrative experience to a program that has enjoyed tremendous success as a junior college," commented Athletics Director Diane Morea. "His

experience and strong work ethic will now play a major role in leading Chowan to that success at the Division III level."

Morea explained, "Coach Lee works hard to recruit student-athletes who want to be successful in the classroom, as well as on the playing field. I look forward to the fall football season where an exciting display of football talent awaits Chowan fans."

The multi-talented coach also carries a few baseball tricks in his bag. While head baseball coach at Waynesburg College, his team won three Presidents Athletic Conference Championships and Lee was named Coach of the Year for three consecutive years.

Lee holds a B.S. in geography and social science from Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania and an M.S. in physical education/major sports management from West Virginia University.

Chowan's football program will participate as a charter member of the Atlantic Central Football Conference in the fall.