

# SPORTS

## Baseball Team Accents D, Prepares for USA South Tournament

By Decree Sports Staff

Despite an impressive 23-9-1 overall record, Coach Charlie Long continues to preach fundamentals—in particular the importance of sound defense—as his team prepares for the USA South baseball tournament.

The Bishops finished 9-3 in conference play this season and now await the outcome of Christopher Newport's series with Greensboro, which will determine their seeding in the conference tournament. The Bishops entered last weekend in second place.

This season Long has gotten standout pitching, and his offense has flourished by

embracing his signature "small ball" style. But the defense has been unsatisfactory, with the Bishops committing 72 errors in their first 33 games, an average of more than two per game.

"The defense has struggled this season," Long admitted.

Pitcher Jonathan Shearon agreed with Long. "We need to play better defense than we have played" so far, he said. "We've had 72 errors in the first 30-odd games. We need to cut down on that."

Long noted that recent adjustments have helped to stabilize his team. Among the most notable changes, Long has

moved one of his top hitters, Chris Pecora, from his usual position, right field, to third base. Justin Batts and Justin Tuck have established themselves as the regular first basemen. Freshman shortstop Justin



Matt Smith, the new career hits leader SI Photo

the 2008 season with concerns about its pitching depth.

"You put Blake and Bennie P. out there, you didn't ever have to worry about them," Batts said. "We were worried a little at the beginning of the season, but the freshmen and the returning starters have done everything they've needed to do to keep us in the game. There's only been a handful of games where we got hit hard, and that will happen from time to time."

Senior Ben Moore has been the staff workhorse. In nine starts, he has compiled a 7-1 record while eating up 66 innings, or an average of 7 1/3 per game. Of the 38 runs he has yielded so far, only 20 have been earned, giving Moore an overall ERA of 2.73. The team era is 3.06, compared to 6.46 for Bishops' opponents.

"I've been really pleased with our pitching," Long said. "Our starters have put us in a position to win all year and our bullpen has been excellent."

Typical of the bullpen's performance, Batts said, was a conference game at Averett on March 30. With the score tied 4-4, the Cougars opened the bottom of the ninth by putting runners at second and third. But freshman reliever Andrew Webb induced a groundout and fanned the next two hitters to preserve the tie and send the Bishops on to victory with two runs in the tenth.

"That said a lot about your pen," Batts said. "We have a lot of quality pitchers. Pitching has been the biggest improvement" over last year.

As usual, the Bishops offense has been potent. Seniors Pecora and Matt Smith, the leadoff man, have set a torrid pace, both with the bat and on the bases. Earlier this season, Smith reached the college's career hit record (251) while batting a team-high .462, with 9 extra-base hits, 26 RBIs, and 21 steals in 24 tries. The number-three man, Pecora has hit .383, with 11 extra-base hits, 28 RBIs, and 25 of 28 steals.

The duo has been the catalysts for the team's "small ball" approach. Not only have the Bishops been efficient at stealing

bases, but they've excelled at an often overlooked aspect of the game—bunting. The team has recorded 35 sacrifices, led by Travis Beausoleil, who ranks second in the conference with 10.

"We're not a power team," said Batts, the cleanup hitter, with a .376 average and a team-high 39 RBIs. "We're filled with so much speed this year, top to bottom. Our one-two-three guys get on base, and as long as the four-five-six guys string some hits together, we're going to score some runs. We've been getting clutch hits, late in the game. That's been one of our keys to success."

During the season Wesleyan has risen as high as 20th in the national Division III polls, but has fallen from the top 25 in recent weeks.

Because of home losses to unranked non-conference teams Hampden-Sydney, LaGrange (twice) and Tufts, the Bishops cannot count on an at-large bid for the NCAA regionals in the event they fail to win the USA South tourney. According to Wesleyan Sports Information Director Rikki Rich, "had any of those teams been ranked, it may not have hurt us as much; but when you're a ranked team, you're expected to win your non-conference games at home, especially against non-ranked opponents."

A tourney win is crucial, Long said. "The conference tournament is our ticket to the NCAA Tournament," he said. "We're on the bubble for an opportunity to receive an at-large bid, but I'd feel much better with the automatic berth."

If the defense improves and the offense and pitching continue to shine, the Bishops like their chances in the conference tournament.

"We'll have to get key hits and make solid defensive decisions in order to win the Conference Tournament," Long observed. "We're very capable of accomplishing this goal. We'll need to play well for four days and catch a few breaks along the way."

The tournament begins April 18 in Burlington.

## Fulford Pitches First-Ever Perfect Game for Bishops

Senior Libby Fulford became the first pitcher in North Carolina Wesleyan history to toss a perfect game on Saturday afternoon, shutting out Mary Baldwin in game one of the Bishops' USA South doubleheader by an 18-0 score.

Fulford retired all 15 batters she faced, striking out 11 in the process. The game was called after five innings due to the conference's eight-run rule.

Freshman Kacie Brandes picked up the win in game two as Wesleyan cruised to a 7-2 victory. The sweep ups the Bishops' overall record to 16-14 and seals 7th place in the USA South with a 7-11 league mark.

In the opener, the Bishops scored runs in every inning, including a 10-run fourth that erased thoughts of an MBC comeback. Ashlee Bass went 3-for-3 with three runs driven in, while Alexis

Gallop was 3-for-3 with three runs scored. Katie Dunavant chipped in two hits. The Bishops benefited from 11 walks.

After a two-hour rain delay, the Squirrels took Wesleyan the distance in game two. NCWC grabbed an early 1-0 lead on a Fulford RBI-single in the first that scored Denise Pope. The Bishops added two in the third and four in the fourth to open up a 7-0



Libby Fulford SI Photo

## Saari Leads Tennis Team

By Ashley Ball  
Decree Sports Writer

The North Carolina Wesleyan men's tennis team is looking very promising as the USA South Conference Tournament is approaching. The men are 6-6 overall in the regular season with a record of 3-1 in conference matches, only falling to Christopher Newport University.

Antti Saari is the linchpin of Wesleyan's team with a record of 10-1 in the regular season play. But the team is not a one-man show. The other Bishops are holding strong and are more confident and victorious than they have been in the past.

Dominic Modise, the team's new coach, can be given credit for this with his strict practice regimen and eagerness to push the team. But for the team, most of the drive is coming from within. The men's team has three freshmen: Saari, Brandon Coleman and Kalpesh Patel, who are proving to be important contributors.

So what about North Carolina Wesleyan Women's team, you might ask? The team has a lot of heart. There is only one returning player from the team last year; all other team members graduated or transferred to another school.

Jamie Galasso, a freshman, has achieved a 6-9 overall record as the Wesleyan number-one seed.

This season has been a learning experience for all of the players, even Coach Modise who has never before coached at a Division Three school. Modise stresses having a good time and always keeping a good attitude despite what the results of a match may be. "Run for every ball and never give up," is the advice before every match.

The conference tournament is set up in bracket fashion with the first team ranked in the conference playing the last team and the two middle teams playing each other.

The conference tournament begins on Friday, April 18 and can last until that Sunday, April 20.

advantage.

Mary Baldwin recorded its first runs of the day in the sixth and seventh on RBI-singles by Taylor Barela and Christie Hamilton. But it was not enough, as the Bishops secured the sweep, 7-2. Payton Gordon led Wesleyan's offense by going 2-for-4 with three RBI.

Brandes pitched six complete innings, allowing one run on four hits and striking out seven. Tiffany McCord recorded the game's final three outs in relief.

(Article courtesy of Sports Information)

## Intramural Results

**Co-Rec Volleyball (Gold Champion) – Kangaroos**  
Brittany Insley  
Kelly George  
Caitlin George  
Ryan Snyder  
David Kras  
Chris Pecora

\*\*Defeated Team Midnight 2-1 in finals\*\*

**Co-Rec Volleyball (Blue Champion) – Freebe T**  
Dan Jones  
Meredith Hester  
Helen Lettier  
Sarah Hess  
Luke Oakley  
Alyssa Bulzano

\*\*Defeated Africa United 2-1 in finals\*\*

**Billiards Doubles Champion – "8" Ballers**  
Richard Tibbs  
Joey Coleman

\*\*Defeated Island Boys 3-2 in finals\*\*

Rahm has settled into his position after succeeding slick-fielding Nathan West, whose career ended last season.

"The play has been much better lately," Long said. "We continue to work on the fundamentals daily and I feel confident that this effort will pay off in the tournament. Defense is the most important element in the game. Of all the areas—pitching, hitting, defense, base running—defense must be the one constant that will show up at the park every day."

With stronger defense, the Bishops may have won more games for a pitching staff that has often been exceptional. Following the graduation of aces Blake Rice and Ben Pearson, Wesleyan began

## Keeping Up with NBA's Wild West

By Jade Johnson  
Decree Sports Editor

Kidd to the Mavs...again, and Shaq makes his second appearance out West. These are just two of the 11 blockbuster trades that saw players head in all different directions at the NBA's February trading deadline.

The Cleveland Cavaliers, who wanted Jason Kidd and Mike Bibby, had to watch the two guards go elsewhere but did acquire Chicago Bulls center Ben Wallace and forward Joe Smith, Seattle Sonics forward Wally Szczerbiak and point guard Delonte West and a 2009 second round pick from the Bulls.

Denver sent forward Von Wafer to Portland for Taurean Green.

But the question now is, were all of these trades as effective as the teams thought they were going to be?

That seems to be the big question for the Dallas Mavericks and Phoenix Suns, who saw considerable losses after their new teammates stepped on the floor. With the addition of O'Neal it seems that they would be a better offensive rebounding squad, but to get Shaq, they gave up their leading rebounder in Shawn Marion, who was averaging 9.9.

Marion has since struggled on one of the worst teams in the East, the Miami Heat.

At first glance it is odd to pair O'Neal in his 15th year in the league with head coach Mike D'Antoni's quick-paced offensive style. But one has to realize that most often Phoenix never has all five men on a fast break, which can leave behind the lumbering 35-year-old vet with all his health issues.

Is it too late to beg for Marion back? Many fans wonder this as they watch the team fluctuate in the often-changing Western Conference standings.

But for now, Suns fans will have to deal with an aging Shaq who does pretty well working opposite Steve

Nash and Amare Stoudemire's pick-and-roll action to take the occasional lay-up or at least manage a dunk or two.

It looks like there are fewer issues in Dallas, depending on which team you root for. There has been plenty of speculation through the league and with the fans as to whether or not Kidd was on the same page as his new teammates, or even reading from the same book.

On the plus side, Kidd is averaging 9.6 assists in his limited run with the Mavs. (The franchise record in a single season is 9.7, which just so happens to belong to Kidd from the 1995-1996 season). On the down side, after Kidd made his return to the American Airlines Center, the teams had a 0-6 record when playing teams with winning records. Kidd also had a recent game in which he scored just one point. He sat on the bench from midway through the third quarter to midway in the fourth, and played about 11 minutes after the break in that game.

Some even question if the Mavs will make it into the playoffs this year with the streaky play of teams like the

## Bishops Take Second Place At Don Scalf Invitational

The freshmen-led Batling Bishop golf team placed second, three strokes behind the winner, at the 9th Annual Don Scalf Invitational March 29 at Ford's Colony Rocky Mount.

The event, shortened to one round because of rain, was won by Pitt Community College with a five-man team score of 307. The Bishops turned in a solid runner-up finish with a team score of 310. Wesleyan's Dylan Bedy earned medalist honors as the only golfer to finish at even par (72).

The five-team, 24-man field fought dreary conditions to play the 7,095-yard course. Pitt was led by Cameron

Golden State Warriors, who outted the Mavs in the first round of the playoffs last year.

Hey Dirk, remember them?

Then you have to worry about the outstanding play of the New Orleans Hornets, led by the "soon-to-be" league MVP Chris Paul.

Things for the Mavs got seemingly worse in late March as star forward/center Dirk Nowitzki went down with a high left ankle/knee sprain against the always-electrifying San Antonio Spurs.

The Mavs did see Dirk return, but not at 100 percent

As of April 2nd, The Mavs (47-28) were locked in a tight playoff chase with Golden State (45-30) and Denver (46-29) for the last two spots in the Western Conference. Dallas essentially has a three-game lead over the Warriors with seven games to play with the head-to-head tiebreaker factored in. Dallas won season series 3-1.

For now, we will have to wait and see what the rest of April holds for Dallas and Phoenix. So if you're stuck on whom to place your bets with out West, feel free to follow my personal motto, if in doubt...pick the HORNETS!

Taylor (73) and BJ Marsh (75), who finished second and third.

In addition to Bedy, three other Bishops managed top-10 finishes. Ryan Stugis tied for 5th with a 78, while Todd Smith was 7th with a 79. John Tappan tied for 10th place with an 81, and Cole Brantner placed 12 with an 82. All five Bishops are freshmen.

Rounding out the field were Surry Community College in third (335), Johnston Community College in fourth (360), and Chowan University in fifth (373).

(Article courtesy of Sports Information)