

CAMPUS LIFE

Coach Thompson Reflects on 10 Years as AD

By Jarad Brown
Decree Sports Editor

"If you don't work hard there's a limit to the amount of success you can have." It's this belief that has led John Thompson from college athlete to college coach and eventual college athletic director. The Wesleyan AD recently completed his tenth year on the job.

Before striving to make Wesleyan athletics as strong as possible, this husband and father of three was a Durham, North Carolina native and athlete at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. There Thompson played both two guard and shooting guard as well as one season of point guard.

"I think I was a fiery guy, high energy. I played hard to the whistle," Thompson said. "I certainly wasn't the most talented guy on the team but I worked very hard and got everything I could out of my abilities."

The path from gym rat to successful coach wasn't exactly planned; in fact it wasn't exactly the plan at all.

"I majored in communications in college and that's what I got my degree in. I figured I'd go into broadcasting like my father," Thompson said.

But this dream was cut short by the passing of the very man Thompson was trying to follow. He then decided to pass on the only TV offer had had gotten, in favor of staying close to his mother and helping her.

So, the next Dick Vitale died before he ever really got started, and was buried amongst a pile of paper work, as Thompson took a job with a marketing firm. The firm may have been a good job, but things just weren't right, and Thompson knew it.

"Every day at five and every weekend I was either watching, playing or talking basketball," Thompson said. "One day it finally just hit me—What the heck are you doing? You're not good enough for the NBA so what can you do? You should coach."

Thompson made some calls and his hard work and gritty persona as a player in college paid off, landing him an assistant coaching job at Saint Andrews College in Laurinburg.

From there, Thompson took assistant jobs at Saint Lawrence University in upstate New York, and Guilford College, before finally earning his first head

coaching gig here at Wesleyan, in 1995.

As the Bishops head coach, Thompson has amassed a .543 winning percentage (188-158) and is the coach with the most wins in NCWC history. He garnered coach of the year accolades in the USA-South Conference for the 1999-2000 season.

Thompson has won both a regular season USA-South championship (1999-2000) as well as a conference tournament championship (2001-2002), making one appearance in the NCAA Division III tournament.

Along the way, Thompson has coached some of the best basketball players in Wesleyan history, including nine All-Americans, 22 All-Conference players, and three USA South Rookie-of-the-Year award winners.

Three years after becoming head basketball coach at Wesleyan, Thompson took over responsibility as athletic director.



Athletic Director John Thompson
Photo by Sports Information

Besides coaching and recruiting for basketball, Thompson is now in charge of all the Wesleyan sports, hiring and mentoring coaches and trainers, developing and overseeing department budgets, working on travel arrangements, purchasing equipment, maintaining facilities, dealing with athlete eligibility issues, and preparing NCAA reports. From 2001-2005, he served as president of USA South, and in September 2007, he began a four-year appointment to the NCAA Basketball Rules Committee.

"It has to be a difficult task to hold both of those titles at the same time," said Mark Henninger, head football coach. "He does a great job at keeping the two separate, and always has the best interest of the college in mind."

Within the first year of accepting his new role, Thompson put in place what is still one of the most stringent substance-testing policies in Division III athletics.

"It's not something I thought was a major problem at the time," Thompson said. "It's just something I thought was beneficial for the college."

Thompson's view is shared by members of the athletic staff.

TILL from page 1

The exhibit is sponsored, in part, by a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council. Wesleyan's Student African American Brotherhood has aided in the promotion of the exhibit and SAAB members attended the lectures given by Dr. Henry Outlaw, an expert on the Till case from Delta State University. Dean Thornell pointed out that both lectures, held on October 13 and 14, were well attended by school groups as well as members of the Rocky Mount community.

NCWC freshman Damian Mercer was one of the students in attendance at the second lecture. He was grateful for the history lesson, as the lecturer drew interesting connections between the Till case, Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama's candidacy. He noted that Till's death, King's "I Have a Dream Speech" and Obama's acceptance speech all occurred on August 28.

"I'm glad (the Till case) was brought to our attention," Mercer said.

"The Murder of Emmett Till" will be in the Civic Gallery until November 10.

(Joyce Collins contributed to this report.)

"It's very important to keep your body healthy as an athlete, and (the testing) is a great way to help athletes ensure that happens," tennis and cross country coach Dominic Modise said. "This is just another example of how (Thompson) does a great job in supporting ALL of the athletic programs."

Fighting against illegal substances may have been one of the first items on the new athletic director's agenda, but it wasn't the only thing.

Thompson's era as director has also seen the creation of the Wesleyan Athletics Hall of Fame, located in the Taylor Center.

"The history was certainly there, and I think it is important to recognize Wesleyan's history," Thompson said. "It is also a great way to recognize the accomplishments of those athletes who came before us."

Thompson has also ushered in the Bishops football team, which won a conference championship in just its fourth season.

"I definitely think football is a positive thing for the college," Thompson said. "I'm a basketball guy, but even I have to admit that there is something about football that draws us as a culture."

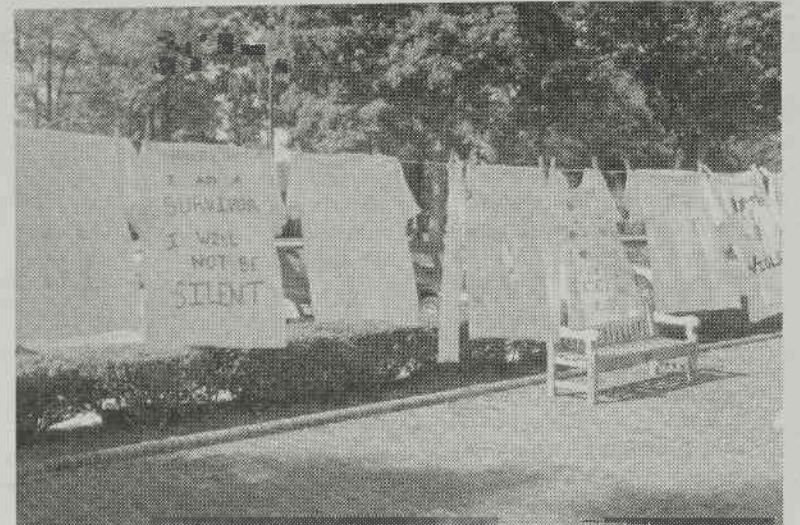
Other than trying to coach his players to another USA-South crown, and solving Wesleyan's athletic challenges, Thompson is working on the home front to help raise his three boys, Andrew (12), and twins Jackson and Walker (5).

"I'd much rather spend a Saturday afternoon with my boys than on a golf course playing 18 holes," Thompson said.

With Thompson's rich athletic background, and the fact that his wife, Laura, was also a college athlete in basketball and softball, it's only natural that he would be raising athletes at home. Although his oldest son does play soccer, and recently became captain of his middle school team, this wasn't exactly a foregone conclusion.

"I really tried not to pressure my boys into being athletes," Thompson said. "If they want to be the best violin player at Edwards Middle school, then we will support them in that. Really I just want them to find something that they are passionate about."

From wanting to become the next Dick Vitale, to becoming the most successful basketball coach as well as one of the most respected athletic directors in Wesleyan history, John Thompson is ready for another decade of success.



To raise awareness of domestic violence, the Wesleyan student group CHOICES hosted a recent weeklong event titled Project Clothesline at the Hardees patio. Photo by C. Thomas.

Student Government Looks To Restart College Yearbook

By Joyce Collins
Decree News Editor

The Student Government Association has revived talks of reinstating the college's yearbook, *The Dissenter*, two years after it was discontinued.

SGA President Jacob Strickland supports the idea of producing a yearbook, even after the idea was rejected this summer. "We wrote a proposal and submitted it to Dr. Perkins, but sadly the school did not have the funding," said Strickland. "Now, as SGA is trying to get back on its feet, I have brought this issue to the voting board to gain support."

Strickland said that as soon as the voting board makes a decision, a plan will be resubmitted to Dr. Perkins. "Maybe we can gain funding in the future," he said.

The most recent yearbook advisor, Grace Wallace, is behind the plan. "I think we should re-instate the yearbook," she said. "It's a great asset to the college; students enjoyed designing the yearbook and earned college credit at the same time."

Strickland likes the idea of having a keepsake to help students reflect on their college years. "A yearbook is important for students because it offers a way to preserve college memories," he said. "Often when we age we forget certain things about the past. Even in the past few years, some of my memories of high school have gotten fuzzy. They are sharpened every time I take a look at my yearbooks."

He added that a yearbook allows

students to check on their progress during college. "You can see how you went from a young freshman to older, mature senior," he said. A yearbook presents "tangible memories that can be opened up over and over again."

As far as the length of time it will take to sign a publisher contract and produce a yearbook, it may not be until next year. "If a plan were approved through the administration, I believe that a yearbook could be published as early as the 2009-2010 school years," he said. "I'm sad that the class of 2009 will have to go without a yearbook, just like the class of 2007 and 2008."

To help with this process, the SGA President would like for the student body to voice their opinions to him as well as the faculty and staff members. "I want students to come to us with their ideas on how it should look, how big it should be, what content it should hold. If a yearbook is something that the students want to bring back, I want them to talk to faculty, staff and administration about it. Speak up about it to everyone that will listen."

Wesleyan has published a yearbook each of the following years: 1963-1980, 1982-1988, and 1990-2006. According to Wallace, *The Dissenter* ceased publication in 1988 and English Professor Vivienne Anderson was instrumental in reestablishing it.

Its most recent reincarnation was halted due to rising production costs and what the college administration considered low sales and an overall lack of student involvement.

Music Critic Reviews New CDs

By Makeda Rose
Decree Staff Writer

N.E.R.D. ("Seeing Sounds") – The title of the album alone shows how this group likes to experiment with both the visual and audio aspects of music. The trio's third musical effort uses the same formula as the two before it, but attempts to further blend the boundaries between the rap and rock genres. Lead singer Pharrell's unique voice takes the band's distinctive sound to a place all their own. "Yeah you" has a smooth jazz fueled beat and the saxophone provokes thoughts of dimly lit jazz clubs filled with smoke. It is preceded on the album by "Everyone Nose," which has one of the most superlative beats I have ever heard.

The use of drums, guitar and the human voice to create a pounding rhythm is one of the N.E.R.D.'s greatest attributes. This is accompanied by catchy lyrics shouted at the top of one's lungs, cementing this song as one of the best on the album. A steady throbbing beat in the first few seconds leads you to believe that "Sooner or Later" could be just another song to dance to, but Pharrell delivers a silken chant about heartbreak and leaving what can be left after a breakup. N.E.R.D. delivers an album like only they can. It is certain they will leave a good impression on the face of music.

Solange ("Sol-Angel and The Hadley St. Dreams") – Solange's first single "I Decided" off her sophomore album is exactly the kind of push she needed to separate herself as a musician and not the younger sister of an already established artist. Her voice floats above the 70's inspired beat and creates just the kind of sound that R&B was missing. However, this same sound is repeated throughout the album and becomes somewhat monotonous. It seems as if she was trying to write an album that channeled the 60's and 70's instead of writing

what came natural to her. Lyrics like "Once in a time where the girls feel like girls/ and the world is painted cotton candy/ where the sweet lemonade of McGregor street was the best the damn thing of the summer breeze" seemed somewhat contrived.

Although "Dancing in the Dark" provides a break from the somewhat similar sounds that "I Decided" and "Sandcastle Disco" convey (with trumpets that pleasantly saturate the bass line), I still expected more. Sampling from Boards of Canada's track "This Bird" gave the impression that something was missing. When borrowing a sound from another band, you must go above and beyond what they accomplished with it and Solange failed to do so. "Sol-Angel and The Hadley St. Dreams" may not create the splash that Solange was hoping for but it was a definite improvement from her last recording.

Oasis ("Dig out your soul") – British rock legends Oasis began scheduling studio sessions for their seventh album in the late summer of 2007 and that album was released earlier this month. The first single off the album, dubbed "The Shock of Lightning" brings Oasis back to their element. Their last musical effort lacked the edginess that they have been known for with previous hits like "Supersonic" and "Live Forever," albeit it was a commercial triumph. Noel Gallagher, who writes most of the band's songs, seems to have found the muse for inspiration that he exhibited when writing songs for their earlier albums. "Falling Down" displays Noel's distinct ability to write a song that new fans will love and that will encourage dedicated fans to keep listening. The arrangement in "I'm Outta Time" possesses the qualities that Oasis has become known for— lyrics that reminisce of times past and instruments that bleed into one

another, creating one solid sound. This band has not been known to stray from their formula but why should they, when their audience and critics alike have been continually satisfied with their work time and time again?

Robin Thicke ("Something Else") – The third album release from Robin Thicke sounds like something old, but also something beautiful. He exudes the classic charm and soulfulness of R&B's greatest artists. With a voice comparable to that of the legendary Marvin Gaye and melodies that suit his sound, Thicke presents a record flowing with memorable love songs. The album opens with a few up tempo songs like "Side Step and Magic" but begins to slow down the pace with "Ms. Harmony" and "Dream World." "Dream World" contains lyrics that divulge Thicke's vision of his perfect world. He croons "For the real world just don't feel right / I wouldn't spend my days searching for, searching for lost time, I wouldn't be so d**n sensitive, I'd let things go by/ No matter what the weather, I'd learn to change, I'd change with the time." In this song, he also touches on what it's like for him being Caucasian and having a wife who is of African and Hispanic descent. He states that in his dream world "There would be no black and white / the world would just treat my wife right / we could go down in Mississippi and no one would look at our stripes." What is most surprising about this record is that Thicke only has one track that features another artist (Lil' Wayne). Most popular artists of today have records that are basically a compilation album, featuring their contemporaries on every track. He does not need the help of mainstream or celebrated musicians to boost his sales. His talent speaks for itself.