

## SIAC WOMEN

# Lady Wildcats Blessed With Success!

## ▲ Ft. Valley in Seven Post Season Tourney, and have won two championships.

Ever since its inception, the Fort Valley State College Lady Wildcat Basketball program has been blessed with success that has made it one of the most respected in the SIAC, if not in the country. For the past eight seasons, that reputation has grown and prospered under head coach Lonnie Bartley. With Bartley at the helm, the LadyCats have tasted post season play for seven consecutive years, won two SIAC championships, and have earned two invitations to the Division II basketball tournament. So far this season, Fort Valley has posted a record of 15-2 (5-1 SIAC) and is once again in the running for another berth in the all important SIAC Tournament that will be held in Birmingham, Alabama (March 3-6).

Bartley feels that the reasons the LadyCats have bolted out to such a strong start are experience and enthusiasm. "We had quite a few people to return from last year's team (which won the SIAC Championship and qualified for the Division II Tournament), and that gave us a good nucleus on which to build for this season. In the off season, we recruited some new personnel that we felt would help us in several reasons, and their eagerness and ability to get adapted to our system has paid off well."

Looking at the statistics, Fort Valley's roster sports four individuals who are scor-

ing in double figures, a big reason for the team's scoring average of 85.6 points a game, and two guards (Dionka Davis and Lisa Draper) with over 70 assists. Debbie Ray (18.4), Davis (17.3), Cynthia Bridges (12.5), and Natoshia Williams (11.3) have helped Fort Valley with their ability to step up and score points when needed. "We have a squad that relies totally on the team concept. They are constantly looking for the open person and getting the ball to

and (DeeDee) Davis has become a better shooter. As for myself, I want to improve on my field goal percentage (she is shooting 54% from the floor in 92-93) and free throw shooting. We know its going to take a lot of hard work. The new players have developed well as the season wears on, and they have confidence now when coach calls on them. However, if we are to do well in post season play, our intensity on defense and ball control must be at its

are over. "We try not to instill basketball as a way of life for our players, and they are prepared for the working world when their playing days are over," says the

*"We had quite a few people to return that gave us a good nucleus on which to build for this season"*

*— Coach Bartley*

them." As one glances at the numbers, it is evident that the LadyCats can have several options as to who may score the points, which underscores the team concept even more. "We basically don't have what many would consider to be the 'go to' person. Our team does certain things according to what phase the ball game is in, and everyone is aware as to where the ball is located," says Bartley. Fort Valley does a great job of finding the open person, and the one spotted more than anyone is Ray. The 6'1" Senior from Cairo, Georgia is having another productive season, leading the team in both scoring and rebounding (10.6). Last season as a rookie in the FVSC program (as a JUCO transfer), Ray led Fort Valley in both scoring (18.2) and rebounding (10.3) as she helped Fort Valley to 21-9 record, the SIAC title and a Division II Playoff invitation. "Debbie's presence has been a real plus for us. She concentrates well and remains consistent with her style of play." Ray, who does most of her talking with her performance on the basketball court, has set some personal goals for the season. "We are out to win 20 or more games again this season. Last year, we won the SIAC Championship, but as a team, we would very much like to repeat as champions again this year. In order to do so though, we all have to improve, or continue improving on our games. Cynthia (Bridges) has done better on the rebounding end this year,

best." Ray also noted that while she was in Junior College at Brevard in Cocoa, Florida, she didn't think that she would have the success that is now associated with her. Last year, Ray was named to the All-SIAC team and was also voted the SIAC Tournament MVP.

Fort Valley also has a reputation for playing its freshman recruits right away, and getting positive results from the move. Keeping that tradition alive are rookies Williams and Catandra Stephens. Williams has developed quickly, earning a spot in the starting rotation, averaging 11.3 points a game and just over 5 rebounds. Williams has even led the team in a couple of games, exploding for 29 points against Valdosta State and providing the lone glimmer of hope in a 75-66 setback against Albany State with a 19 point performance. Stephens has stepped in and provided depth for the LadyCats in the low post, enabling starter Bridges (who leads the nation in field goal percentage at 72%) to get some needed rest. "It has been our custom to find good athletes that can come in and be able to produce right away. We have been fortunate enough to get some blue chippers along the way, and that in itself has helped the program immensely."

Winning basketball is not the only thing associated with the Lady Wildcat program as many former players have gone on to do well after their playing days



*Coach Lonnie Bartley*

coach. "A lot of the discipline and pride that they pick up as members of the team stays with them and carries over to everyday life. A lot of that comes from my experience with coach (Jessie) Brown (Bartley was her assistant during Brown's reign as FVSC coach), who was always stressing a good work ethic." All coaches are thrilled with winning, but Bartley finds more enjoyment seeing his players reap the benefits of their efforts both on and off the court. "I really enjoy seeing players go and pick up awards, whether it be MVP, All-Conference or some sort of academic achievement. Seeing others do well is just as good as winning a game."

As the season begins to enter the final month, Bartley knows that the road will only get tougher, and the team will have to take one game at a time. "the time has to keep playing together and not become selfish of we are to come close to the type of campaign we had last season. The ladies have got to stay hungry for success and not let complacency set in. We have some good teams in this league, and doing just enough to get by could cost you dearly."



*Cynthia Bridges*