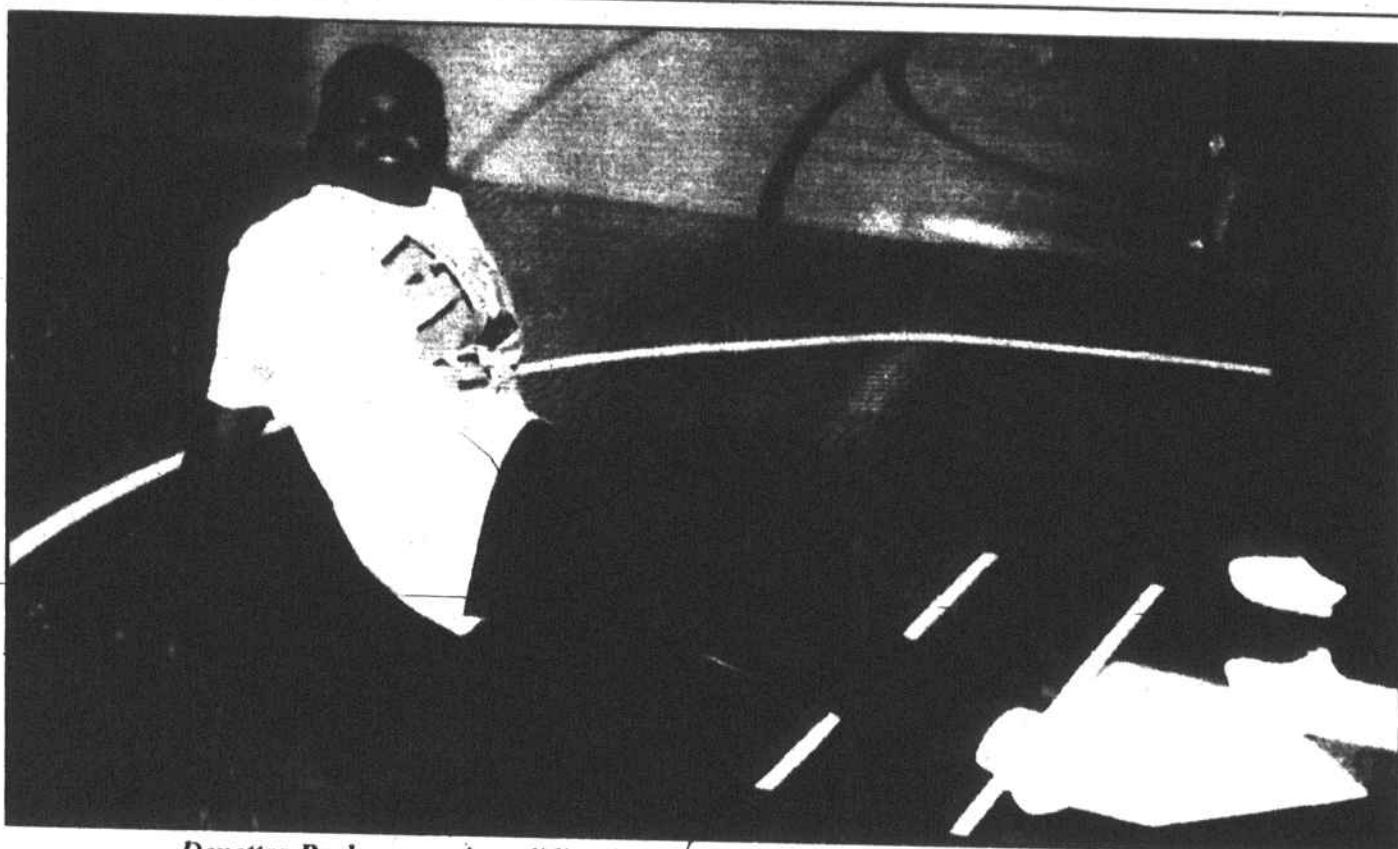


# SPORTSWEEK

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 1996

Page 17



Denetra Parker practices sliding into home plate during a recent WSSU practice.



Photo by John Hitton  
Shavonda Smith takes a cut during batting practice at WSSU.

## Rams Softball Team Hoping To Make Title Run

By Sam Davis  
Special to the Chronicle

Could this be the breakthrough year for the Winston-Salem State softball team?

With an infusion of talented young players and the return of several outstanding veterans, Coach Mike Winbush hopes the Rams will have a chance to play for the CIAA softball championship this spring.

The Rams have gotten off to a 4-2 start thus far. But the real test for WSSU won't come until early next month when the Rams get into the heart of their schedule.

"Right now I think we're making progress," Winbush says. "With a few breaks we could be a very good team. But we need a lot of things to go our way."

After finishing near the .500 mark last year, Winbush hit the recruiting trail hard and signed a talented group of freshmen to go along with a solid nucleus that returned from last year.

"This team is a mixture of young and old," Winbush says. "We have a very outstanding veteran outfield, but our infield

is almost totally new."

The Rams' outfield is anchored by Bridgette Speaks, who finished the 1994 season as the Division II RBI leader. Speaks' .673 batting average is currently the tops on the WSSU squad.

Speaks is equally talented on the defensive end from her centerfield position.

Not far back are Letitia Jones and Kelly Alburry. Jones, who is hitting .474, captured the Division II national title in RBI's and batting average last year. Alburry, a transfer from Univ. of Nebraska, is batting .462.

"The three of them are all tremendous outfielders and hitters," Winbush says. "Kelly might be one of the best baserunners in college softball."

The most noticeable change in the Rams' roster this season is the presence of an outstanding pitcher. Winbush brought in Vanessa Nieson to shore up the Rams' pitching corps and she has been impressive thus far. Nieson, a freshman from Detroit, lost a doubleheader at the start of the season, but has produced a 4-0 record since

then.

"The biggest thing we have going for us right now is we have a good freshman pitcher," Winbush said. "She has really kept us in some games and given us a chance to win."

Nieson isn't the only newcomer in the Rams lineup. Ajila Thomas, a freshman from Carver High, has started at both second base and shortstop. Michelle Woodard, a freshman from Winnsboro, S.C., has taken over the duties at shortstop.

"Michelle and Ajila have stepped in and done a good job for us," Winbush says. "Michelle has a lot of talent and Ajila has the heart of a lion."

Rounding out the Rams' starting lineup are NaKendra McGee at catcher and Shavonda Smith at first base. Smith has played a key role thus far with her leadership and savvy.

"Shavonda has played with a lot of heart and played through some injuries," Winbush says.

Denetra Parker, who started nearly every game at pitcher last year, joined the team this week. Winbush allowed Parker

to take time off after a demanding basketball season, in which she led the Rams in rebounding and was second in scoring.

If Winbush can get all of the players to form a cohesive unit, it just might be the league's surprise team.

"This team is going to be pretty good," Winbush says. "We just have to jell as a unit and hopefully by tournament time we'll be ready."

"We have to learn to make the right plays at the right time. We have to stop playing to the level of our competition. We have a tendency to get very lackadaisical out on the field. The key for us is going out and doing everything in a positive way."

The Rams begin a crucial stretch of the season next Monday when they play host to Fayetteville State at Civitan Park at 2 p.m.

"We have the kind of players who can be successful," Winbush says. "Now I think we can compete with anyone in the league and we need the support from the people in the city. I think that would be a big boost for us."

## Twin City To Kick Off '96 Season With Pig Pickin'

◆ Fundraiser Coincides With Final Registration

By Sam Davis  
Special to the Chronicle

Twin City Little League will officially begin its 35th season when it hosts a Pig Pickin' Barbecue at East Winston Shopping on Saturday.

League officials will also be on hand to register players for the upcoming season. Parents can register their children between the ages of six and 18 years-old at Saturday's festivities.

League president Melvin "Rip" Wilkins says that fundraising events such as the one being held on Saturday is vital to the success of the program.

"This is one of the methods we use for fundraising," says Wilkins. "We are totally dependent upon donations to keep this program in operation, so we have to have events like this one on Saturday to make sure we will have an operating budget for the season."

This year, the organization is hoping to increase its number of volunteers, coaches and supporters commensurate with its increase in participants. The program now has a total of 40 teams. When the program began in 1961, it only had eight teams.

"You can see the number of kids that have come through this program over the years and lately the number of participants has increased tremendously," Wilkins says. "But the involvement from the community has not increased the way we would like. We really need umpires, coaches, sponsors and other volunteers."

Wilkins is in his second stint as the president of the league. He says this tenure, now in its third year, has been the most productive. The organization has a permanent home at its complex on

Waterworks Road, but now it needs to look to upgrade for the future.

"There's a lot still left to be done," he says. "People don't understand the kind of impact this program has on the kids. We're talking about a program with over 600 kids. That's touching the lives of a lot of people."

One of the emphasis of this year's program will be on improving girl's softball.

"We really feel that this is an area that needs to be improved upon," Wilkins says. "This is something that can really help them as they move on to the high schools and beyond."

Wilkins says the league is stronger than ever because of the work being performed by the members of the Board of Directors.

"We have a lot of expertise and we have people who don't mind going the extra mile to help these kids," Wilkins says. "That's the big thing this league has going for it. It's not about us, it's about the kids."

Alfred Mitchell, who has been with the organization nearly all of its 35 years, is the vice-president. Patricia Jacobs serves as executive secretary and Gail Hayes is the treasurer. Each division of competition has a vice-president responsible for baseball operations. They are: T-Ball-David Duncan; Major and Minor League - Stanley Mitchell; Senior League: David Duncan;

"I couldn't ask for a better group," Wilkins adds. "They make it easy on me."

But ultimately, Wilkins says, the tale will be told on the community's input.

"We have to have more sponsors and supporters."

## Spring Football Underway at WSSU

◆ Candidates Line Up To Replace Huntley at Tailback

By Sam Davis  
Special to the Chronicle

Spring football has begun at Winston-Salem State and Coach Kermit Blount has a lot of question marks surrounding the team for the 1996 football season.

First and foremost on his mind and the mind of Ram fans is finding a replacement for Richard Huntley, the All-American running back who finished his career as the No. 2 rusher in the history of NCAA football.

But not only did the Rams lose Huntley, they also lost Hayward Cloud, who backed him up at tailback and also started at fullback.

A host of prospects have lined up for the vacant backfield positions already and, with a talented freshman class entering WSSU next fall, Blount said he feels confident that he will be able to find competent players to carry the football next fall for WSSU.

"Obviously you don't replace a player like Richard Huntley very easily," Blount said. "But I think



Richard Huntley carried the ball most of the time in Coach Blount's tailback-oriented system for the past three seasons. This spring Blount and the Rams look to find his successor.

we'll have a bunch of guys jockeying for the opportunity to play.

"I think they have a lot of motivation because of the success that Richard had," Blount added.

"When the players look up and see 28 or 29 different (NFL) teams coming to the weight room to

watch Richard work out, they're going to be motivated to work hard.

"With Richard vacating the tailback spot, I look for a strong competition to see who's going to step in."

Tyrone Murphy heads the list of returnees from last year's team. Murphy, a redshirt freshman, has shown a lot of progress, according to Blount.

"We expect Tyrone to step up and be productive for us this season," Blount said. "He's gotten a lot stronger and he's had a full season under our system."

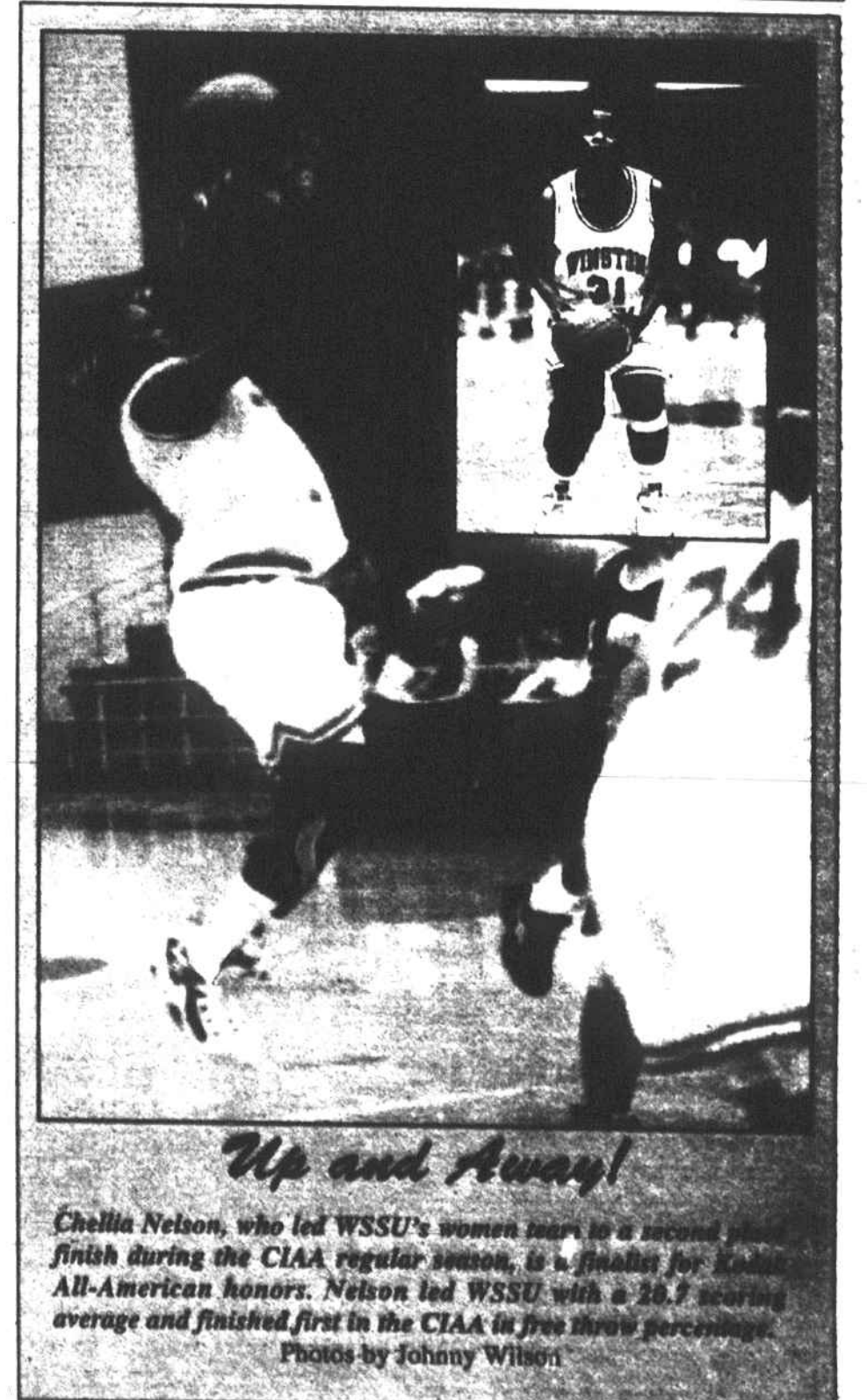
Murphy's stiffest competition in the spring will come from two newcomers, who will have their first opportunity to get on the practice field at WSSU.

Shawn Dorley, a 6-0, 210-pounder might be the most physically imposing runner. Dorley, who transferred from Western Carolina, runs the 40 in 4.6 and bench presses more than 400 pounds. But Blount isn't sure whether he'll get his first shot at tailback or fullback.

"He could be a combination player for us," Blount said. "He's a bruising type runner."

Although it has been more than two years since he's put on a uniform, Chris Petty, who played at Eden Morehead, might be the most impressive prospect. Petty has tremendous speed (4.4 40-yard dash) and is also among the strongest running backs on the team (360 bench press). The 5-10, 185-pound Petty was one of the most highly recruited backs in the state as a senior, but didn't qualify academically. Petty sat out the 1994 season and was set to back up Huntley last season. But Petty returned home prior to the 1995

see SPRING page 20



Up and Away!  
Chellin Nelson, who led WSSU's women team to a second place finish during the CIAA regular season, is a finalist for NCAA All-American honors. Nelson led WSSU with a 20.7 scoring average and finished first in the CIAA in free throw percentage.  
Photos by Johnny Wilson