

Playoffs

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East Forsyth's girls also are in the 4-A West Regional. The Eagles (25-2) have a Thursday night date against Morganton Freedom (25-2).

Of the teams remaining from this area, Parkland is probably the biggest enigma. The Mustangs, whose 19-9 record is the worst of all the teams still alive in the playoffs, were the preseason favorites in the rugged Piedmont Triad 3-A Conference, but came out slow at the outset. One reason was because Parkland's football team won the state 3-A football championship and many of the Mustangs' players didn't join the team until after Christmas.

It took Parkland awhile to get going, but it finally got in high gear during the conference season and finished second.

"We've thought all along that we were one of the top 10 teams in the state," coach Mike Pennington said. "But we haven't played that way all season. We think we've played the best 3-A schedule in the state, and we're playing in the best 3-A conference in the state. We still have two teams from the conference that are still in the regionals (Greensboro Dudley is the other)."

The Mustangs advanced to the regionals by defeating Greensboro Smith and Southern Durham in the sectionals last week. Parkland got strong play from its veteran backcourt, which is led by seniors Ray Bristow, Mark Mason and Marcus Jordan. Pivot man Phillip McCandies also played well in the paint for the Mustangs, but it was the play of the perimeter players that boosted Parkland.

"I think our guards complement each other very well," Pennington said, referring to the one-two punch of Bristow, a three-year veteran, and Mason, who transferred from West Forsyth. "Ray's got the ability to penetrate and make a lot of things happen. Then Mason can hurt you with his ability to hit the 3-pointer."

Last week Mason connected on eight 3-pointers and scored 29 points in the Mustangs' victory over Greensboro Smith. With most teams focusing on those two, Jordan is often overlooked.

"When you get down to it, Marcus Jordan is the forgotten man," Pennington said. "Last year he averaged 15 points, and that's down to 11 this year. But he still gives us a boost and he causes matchup problems for most teams that we play."

Against Kinston, which brings a 26-3 record into Thursday's game, Pennington said the Mustangs will be at a considerable height disadvantage. Kinston's front line goes 6-7, 6-9, 6-7.

"That's going to cause us matchup problems, but we've had that problem a lot this season," Pennington said. "We have to make the game as fast as possible. We have to press, trap and run at every opportunity. If we get into a faster game than they want, it's going to negate their size."

That's what happened last week in the sectional final against Southern Durham.

"Against Southern Durham, we were giving up two or three inches and about 25 pounds per man on the front line," Pennington said. "They were very big. But we put pressure on them early and late. We played the game a whole lot faster than they wanted to play, and that wore them down in the fourth quarter."

With such a decided advantage, the Mustangs can't afford to allow Kinston to set tempo.

Parkland can't afford to get behind by a wide margin.

"We have to keep the score close," Pennington said. "We have to try to stay close and then try to win it in the fourth quarter."

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"The thing I told them was to play as hard as they can and never give up," he said. "Shaw is a really outstanding team with great talent. But sometimes the team with the best talent doesn't always win. We saw that on Thursday night when Elizabeth City came from 21 points behind to beat Virginia Union."

When it comes to today's talent, Jones said there is a wealth of talent throughout the nation. North Carolina, which has produced its share of talent through the years, continues to send top players to the collegiate and professional ranks each season.

"We've had some great talent in this state," Jones said. "The only difference now is the fact that players can pick and choose where they want to go to school. When I was coming along, we didn't have those options. Because of segregation we had to attend black schools. That's what made the CIAA such a great conference."

Even though the teams in the



Jones

C I A A have to battle against the major universities, the talent level still remains high," Jones said. That's one of the reasons NBA scouts attend the CIAA Tournament each season.

"There are some guys here who can play in the NBA," Jones said. "Don't let anybody tell you these guys can't play. Everyone this year wants to see the kid from Shaw (Ronald Murray), but he's not the only guy who has the ability to play in the NBA."

What many of the players lack, according to Jones, is exposure and to be put in the right situation.

"I think every player has a weakness in his game," Jones said. "The thing is, some programs are able to hide them better than others. It all depends on where you end up."

Jones said today's players are

blessed with more natural ability but don't work hard enough on the fundamentals and on their weak areas.

"I meet a lot of people that tell me that I was the guy who perfected the art of the bank shot," he said. "But I really didn't perfect it. I liked shooting straight on, but my coach thought I should work on shooting off the backboard because I was so good making layups with my left and right hands. So I would just go out in practice every day and work on shooting all my shots off the backboard. Then when I got in the game, it came naturally."

The celebrity status that Jones has received since leaving NCCU was somewhat difficult for him to accept in his early years, especially when he returned home to North Carolina and encountered segregation in the '50s and '60s. But he said he has no regrets about the way his life has unfolded.

"People come up to me and say I was one of the best and I was a special player," he said. "I really appreciate hearing that and knowing I've made a contribution to the game."

allowed him to gain valuable experience in sales, marketing, operations and development. He said those experiences helped him immeasurably in his current duties.

"I have to look at the resources available to this program very realistically," he said.

"Obviously we don't have the resources that we did at Wake Forest, but that's no reason why we can't have a top-notch program. As long as we have committed people like

coach (Luke) D'Alessio and others who are very capable and competent, we'll be fine."

Davis and his wife, Linda, who have been married 31 years, have gotten settled in Crofton, Md., near the Bowie campus. Davis said the move has been good for all parties concerned.

"I miss being in Winston-Salem, but I also enjoy what I'm doing," he said. "I'm in a position that I always aspired to be in, and it has been very rewarding so far."

"I took what the defense gave me," Murray said in the post-game news conference. "They opened up lanes for me and gave me wide open shots and I took them."

That struck a nerve in coach Philip Stitt, who said before the game that his team's defense would be the key to the game. After surrendering 80 points to the Bears, the Rams spent a whole lot of time this week in preparation for tonight's game working on their defense.

The Rams also need to work on their half-court offense when they fail to produce turnovers that allow them to get into their transition game. That was a critical point for the Rams in their loss to Shaw. WSSU had trouble scoring points during a stretch in the second half and the Bears went on a 12-2 run to take a 64-54 mark from which the Rams never recovered.

During that stretch Stitt appeared to be frustrated with his team and, rather than diagramming plays to get his team back in gear offensively, resorted to rotating players in and out of the game.

WSSU's inside game also failed the Rams miserably.

The Rams showed in their previous matchup with the Bears that they are capable of handling Shaw's size. In their meeting on Jan. 15, the Rams came away with a 76-69 victory. But first the Rams need a victory over Wingate, of the South Atlantic Conference, to set up a rubber match for the Rams against the Bears and give WSSU an opportunity to put their tournament loss behind them and help them toward their No. 1 goal for the season. If not, the Rams, who carry a 21-6 record into the game, will consider the 2001-2002 season one that got away.

Davis

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Trailblazers in 1974. He later became the first African American named to the Wake Forest Sports Hall of Fame.

After spending more than a dozen years in corporate business, Davis returned to his alma mater to work in its athletic department. From 1995-2000 he served as the assistant athletics director for the student-athlete enhancement and community programs. That position

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day night and appeared primed for a run at this year's crown. However, the Rams had no solution for Ronald "Flip" Murray, the CIAA's Player of the Year, who scored 25 points in the win over WSSU. Murray and the Bears went on to capture their first CIAA Tournament title with an 82-68 victory over Johnson C. Smith.

WSSU, which has been among the league's top defensive teams in each of the past four seasons, had a whole lot of trouble against Murray and defending against the Bears' front line. The Rams went to intermission with a 40-38 lead, but completely broke down defensively in the second half. Murray took charge down the stretch when he scored 19 points in the final 11 minutes.

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