

Local legend Joe Johnson continues storied golfing career



Ralph Gaillard
Golf-N-Around

He started caddying at Reynolds Park Golf Course during summer vacations when he was 10 years old. Segregation and Jim Crow politics did not allow African Americans to play golf at local golf courses. Together with some of his friends, they made a makeshift three-hole golf course in the schoolyard at 14th Street Elementary School.

It was on that makeshift course that he taught himself how to play golf.

He entered the prestigious Forsyth Invitational Golf Tour-

namment in 1967. It was the first time African Americans were allowed to participate in the tournament. In his first outing, Joe Johnson became the first African American to win the tournament.

Johnson recently reminisced, "When I was 12 years old, Reynolds Park Golf Course allowed African Americans to play on Mondays and Fridays."

During the summers, Johnson and his friends would head for Reynolds Park on Mondays. Spending their caddy earnings, they would rent clubs and play at Reynolds Park. The first nine holes at Winston Lake Golf Course were opened when he was a sophomore at Atkins High School. It was at this time that he dropped his interest in other sports, devoting all of his

free time to golf.

Johnson posted 25 amateur tournament wins, including the Forsyth Invitational. After the Forsyth win, he turned professional in 1967. He traveled on a local "minor league" pro tour and has posted two wins on that tour's senior circuit: the Skyview Open in Asheville and the Black Hall of Fame Tournament in Greensboro.

Johnson looked up to Waddell Fair, one-time assistant pro at The Lake. Johnson said, "Waddell used to win all the tournaments. The way he played motivated me to get better."

James Black and Chuck Thorpe were two pro golfers that also inspired Johnson. "They both had confidence, believed and were cool under

pressure."

Johnson advises new golfers to "go to a teaching pro and get the basic fundamentals before beginning to play. Starting out on your own can breed bad habits that are very difficult to correct. Family and friends can teach you to drive a car, but they cannot teach you to play golf."

Johnson said there are many outstanding golfers in our area, and in another time, they had the ability to play on the PGA Tours. They include Gene Williams, Floyd Green, Richard Carter, Lester Kimber, Leonard Jackson, Robert and Willie Bethea, just to name a few. "These guys can play, and they motivated me to practice and get better," Johnson said.

Johnson told the following

story that occurred after he won the Forsyth Invitational. The tournament director advised him there would be a banquet in which he would be honored and presented the winning trophy. The director said he would call him with the date, etc. Johnson has never gotten that call. Jerry Jones, then the pro at Winston Lake Golf Course, put on a banquet, with more than 100 people in attendance, where Johnson was honored for winning the tournament. Johnson said it was a "very emotional experience and something I will never forget."

He said, "Golf taught me discipline and patience." He credits his wife, Carolyn, with his successes in golf. "She has always supported me 100 percent. I could not have done it

without her support and encouragement."

Like the before-mentioned local golfers who did not have the opportunities, Joe Johnson also possessed the talent, skills and game to play on the PGA Tours. Ask anybody around who knows golf and they will echo that statement. For that matter, he is still one of the best golfers around. Johnson is a fine person, one of the good guys, and a credit to his people and this community. If you know Johnson, you are better for having passed his way.

Also, in this writer's opinion, Forsyth Invitational Golf Tournament still owes Johnson a banquet for winning the 1967 tournament.

Until next time, keep it in the fairway.

Wake women fall short in comeback at ACC tourney

BY SAM DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

GREENSBORO

Being cast in an unfamiliar role might have taken a toll on Wake Forest's women's basketball team in its opening-round battle against Maryland in the ACC Basketball Tournament. The Lady Deacon players found themselves the higher-seeded team in a tournament game for the first time in their careers.

And judging from the way they came out in the second half, it might have been too much for the Lady Deacons.

"This was a different situation for us, as (we) were

the higher-seeded team," said coach Charlene Curtis of Wake Forest. "This is the best season we have had at Wake Forest in a long time. Our players played a little tight. We played like we had a lot to lose rather than relaxing and playing basketball."

Wake went 10:11 without scoring and watched Maryland stretch a tenuous 29-28 advantage to a 54-28 margin before the Lady Deacons began a comeback attempt.

The Lady Deacons finally reached their stride in the second half, getting three 3-pointers from Jennifer Johnson, but their deficit

was too much to overcome and Maryland put an end to Wake Forest's season.

"Obviously, the best team won tonight in terms of execution," Curtis said. "Maryland did a great job pushing the ball in the second half and their players did a great job of running the floor."

The Lady Deacons made only 11 of 40 second-half field goals after connecting on 11 of 19 in the first half. Maryland made 12 of 17 from the field in the second half and had most of them as the Terps ran out to their wide margin.

Wake Forest went on a 24-6 run to get within 60-52

with 3:35 left to play. However, the Lady Deacons couldn't get much closer until the final seconds of the game.

"We could have given up and rolled over when we were down by 21 points," Curtis said.

"We tried to fight back, but we let it get away from us.

"I thought we missed some crucial free throws, and Maryland made theirs down the stretch," Curtis added. "At the end of the game when we were trying to come back, we took the ball to the basket and we got some good looks and timely offensive rebounds."

Lady Rams

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sha Harris. However, the Lady Rams went on a drought late in the first half and Virginia State went on a 12-0 run to take a 30-25 lead at the half. The Lady Rams' offensive woes continued in the second half, and they found themselves down by 11 with 6:48 left.

That's when coach Daymond Lindell's team began to force tempo with its defense and the Lady Rams forced four straight turnovers.

Becky McKee, who was named the game's MVP, had several big plays to help the Trojanettes push the lead back to 13 with 4:26 remaining before WSSU started a run that helped the Lady Rams cut the

lead to 61-57 with 47 seconds left. However, the Lady Rams couldn't make a basket and the Trojanettes held on for the win to earn an automatic berth in this week's NCAA Division II South Atlantic Regional playoffs.

Despite the loss, the Lady Rams have much of which to be proud. They finished the season with a 17-12 record. If

Lindell's team had captured the victory, he would have become the first rookie coach to win the CIAA tournament in either the men's bracket or women's bracket.

After defeating Virginia Union 75-60 in the opening round, the Lady Rams defeated Elizabeth City 49-44 in the quarterfinals and N.C. Central 65-53 in the semifinals.

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