

SPORTS WEEK

B SECTION

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Reynolds, Parkland looking for state basketball titles

Surprising Demons vying for third consecutive state 4-A championship

BY SAM DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

The prospects for a third consecutive state 4-A basketball championship looked slim when R.J. Reynolds began the 2001-2002 basketball season. However, the Demons are within one game of accomplishing that feat. RJR will travel to the Dean E. Smith Center on the campus of the University of North Carolina on Saturday night for a battle against Fayetteville 71st in the state 4-A championship game.

Coach Howard West of Reynolds said his team has exceeded expectations and with a few pieces falling in place stands a good chance of raising its third banner inside its gym. The Demons earned

See Reynolds on B3



Photo by Bruce Chapman
Travis Holcomb-Faye scored 25 points in Reynolds' victory over West Forsyth in the 4-A West regional championship game.



Photo by Bruce Chapman
The leadership of seniors Mark Mason, left, and Ray Bristow has been crucial to Parkland's championship run.

Mustangs pull off another big upset to earn state 3-A championship berth

BY SAM DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

Parkland had every reason to believe it didn't belong among the state's elite basketball teams when the Mustangs ventured into Minges Coliseum at East Carolina for last week's 3-A East Regionals.

The nine losses sustained during the season by the Mustangs were more than the other three teams entered in the regional combined. However, Parkland never doubted itself and came away with the regional championship title last Saturday night and with it the right to play in Saturday night's state 3-A championship game in Chapel Hill.

The Mustangs accomplished the feat in dramatic fashion. They went up against perhaps the state's finest player and came away with the victory despite

See Parkland on B3

Rams' seniors end careers with heart-wrenching loss



FROM THE PRESS BOX

SAM DAVIS

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. — It took only a matter of 29 seconds for Winston-Salem State to go from sheer jubilation to pure heartache.

After taking a 61-60 lead on Devonaire Deas' layup with 29 seconds left to play, the Rams could not hold on for a victory against Shaw. The Rams

played great defense on the Bears first thrust, forcing Shaw to take a timeout with 17 seconds to play. But the Bears regrouped and Ronald Murray found Steve Bynes for an open dunk with 13 seconds remaining to give the Bears a 62-61 lead. WSSU rushed the ball upcourt but failed to get a final shot off.

When the final horn sounded ending the NCAA Division II South Atlantic Regional semifinal game, it also ended the collegiate careers of eight Winston-Salem State seniors.

As soon as the buzzer sounded, most of the seniors lay sprawled on the court of Holt Fieldhouse on the campus of Carson-Newman College. They lay there motionless for several minutes before finally making their way to the WSSU dressing room. The heartbreak of having played their final game in the Rams' crimson and cream seemed to have hit them over the head like a ton of bricks.

It came in dramatic fashion, but then that's the way their careers unfolded after coming to WSSU with former coach Rick Duckett four years ago. Five members of this year's squad were around when the Rams shocked the field and captured the 1999 CIAA Tournament championship. The Rams burst on the scene out of nowhere in winning the tournament for the first time in 21 years. The Rams repeated the following year when Corey Thompson,

Russell English, Marcus Best, Kamal Oliver and Kevin Henry were sophomores. Even though they didn't win the tournament title in 2001, the Rams still

advanced to the South Atlantic Regional and made a run at the title before bowing out in the title game.

At the start of this season, the Rams had even more to prove after losing Duckett, who chose to move on to the University of South Carolina and become an assistant to former Wake Forest coach Dave Odom. When Duckett left the scene, the Rams' players rallied around Philip Stitt, who was Duckett's chief recruiter and the No. 1 assistant coach. The seniors openly endorsed Stitt, who was given the job on an interim basis. They began the

See Press Box on B2

Murray leads Shaw to Division II regional title

BY SAM DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. — Maybe Shaw University really is a team of destiny. Judging from the way the Bears captured their final two games to win the NCAA Division II South Atlantic Regional, you could certainly make the case for them.

Shaw defeated Winston-Salem State on a last-second basket by Steve Bynes in the semifinal round last Friday night, then got three clutch free throws by Ronald Murray in the final minute and withstood a final errant shot at the buzzer to defeat Carson-Newman to capture the regional championship game.

The Bears' victory earned them a berth in the Division II's Elite Eight in Evansville, Ind., where Shaw will begin pursuit of a national championship on March 20.

Shaw's regional title was one of many firsts that the Bears experienced during the 2001-2002 season. The Bears had never captured a CIAA championship before their victory over Johnson C. Smith in the CIAA Tournament's championship game on March 2. The Bears' sudden rise has come in only two seasons under coach Joel Hopkins, who played on N.C. Central's 1989 Division II national championship team.

"This is definitely a team of destiny," Hopkins said



Photo by Bruce Chapman
Ronald "Flip" Murray, of Shaw, celebrates after his team's CIAA Tournament Championship. Murray scored 36 points to lead The Bears to victory in the South Atlantic Regional championship game.

after the Bears' 69-68 victory

over Carson-Newman, the No. 1 seed in the regional and the host team. "These kids really believed in themselves, and I'm very proud of the way they held together and fought back to win the

game.

"I just thank God for this team and this opportunity," said Hopkins, who was ordained into the ministry during the season. "We came

See Shaw on B2

Cleo Hill Jr. figures prominently in Shaw's recent turnaround

BY SAM DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. — How did the Shaw University basketball program, which only two years ago posted an 8-18 record, come so far so fast?

One of the reasons for the quick turnaround is the efforts of Cleo Hill, the Bears' top assistant coach.

If the name Cleo Hill sounds familiar to Winston-Salem State fans, it is because Hill, officially Cleo Hill Jr., is the son of the former WSSU standout who led the Rams to two CIAA championships under coach "Bighouse" Gaines and became a first-round NBA draft pick. Cleo Hill Jr. played at N.C. Central from 1984-88 and finished his career among the school's all-time leading scorers, with more

"Coach Gaines did a great job of recruiting me, and I really liked him and Winston-Salem State. But I thought there would be too much pressure because of all the things that my father did there."
— Cleo Hill Jr.

than 1,000 points.

Hill is responsible for obtaining many of the talented players on the Shaw University team.

Hill spent several years at Mount Zion Christian Academy working alongside Joel Hopkins before heading off to the University of Nebraska. At Nebraska, Hill made contact with many of the current Shaw players. When Hill left Nebraska to come to Shaw two years ago to become an assistant to Hopkins, his contacts led to several of them following Hill.

"The main thing was maintaining contact with them," Hill said. "That's something I learned from the coaches that I've been around. You have to network to be successful in this business."

See Hill on B2

J.C. Smith falls to Carson-Newman

Controversial call spells doom for Steve Joyner's Golden Bulls

BY SAM DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. — All coach Steve Joyner could do was shake his head. His Johnson C. Smith team fought through several rough spots and had put itself in position to make one final run. But the Golden Bulls were dealt a death blow and their chances for an upset victory over top-seeded Carson-Newman evaporated on one call.

Joyner's team, which had been the recipient of several unfavorable calls, couldn't pick itself up after this one. With the lead finally down to 7 points, Antoine Sims appeared to have a clear path to the basket. However, a Carson-Newman player reached out and tried to swat the ball out of Sims' hands. Sims gathered the ball in both hands and then

made a basket.

However, Sims was called for an offensive charge and instead of cutting the lead to 5 and having a chance to go to the free-throw line and cut the lead to 4, Carson-Newman was given possession. The Eagles went down and converted to increase their lead to 9 and that was basically it for the Golden Bulls' chances for a win.

Carson-Newman, hosting the NCAA Division II South Atlantic Regional at Holt Fieldhouse, made key shots down the stretch to escape with a 77-66 victory to



Joyner

advance to Saturday night's regional championship game against Shaw.

"That had to be the most crucial play in the game," Joyner said. "I thought the kids had done a great job of fighting back and getting in position to make that final run. But we just couldn't overcome that call."

Joyner, a Winston-Salem native, was gracious as always in defeat. "Certainly I have to give credit to coach Dale Clayton and his team," Joyner said. "They played a good game and took us out of some of the things we wanted to do."

The Golden Bulls fell into a deep hole in the first half, trailing by as many as 14 points.

Antoine Sims, who finished the game with 20 points to lead the Golden Bulls, struggled with his

outside shot. Sims had been mired in a shooting slump since the final two games of the regular season and had difficulty hitting his outside shot in the CIAA Tournament.

That was one of the reasons the Golden Bulls lost to Shaw in the CIAA Tournament championship game. With the Golden Bulls struggling to find points in the first half, Gardner-Webb jumped out to a 29-19 advantage at the half. Sims made only one of eight shots and had only 3 points at intermission.

Sims began to penetrate with the ball rather than rely on his outside jumper in the second half and the Golden Bulls cut the Gardner-Webb advantage to 4 midway through the second half. The Eagles pushed the margin back up to dou-

See J.C. Smith on B3