

Hill

from page B1

The first player landed by Hill was Steve Bynes, the Bears' 6-9 All-CIAA center. Bynes, a former McDonald's All-American from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., fell short of the NCAA entrance requirements and attended junior college. He was slated to attend Nebraska but didn't gain eligibility because he didn't graduate from junior college. Division II regulations allow players with enough transferable hours and a corresponding grade-point average to become immediately eligible. Bynes then decided to come to Shaw.

Kenyon Booker, a 6-9 forward, was left out of the loop after a coaching change at Nebraska. Hill contacted Booker and Booker came aboard for the 2001-2002 season.

Two other Division I players followed. One, Gerald "J.R." Raymond, transferred in after having personality conflicts with coach Kelvin Sampson of Oklahoma. Raymond, a 6-1 guard, started last season and averaged double figures for the Sooners as a sophomore

after being among the Big 12's top freshmen two years ago. Raymond played at Mount Zion Academy. Jarrett Kears, a 6-8 guard/forward from Philadelphia, came to the Bears from the University of West Virginia.

"These are guys who are proven on the Division I level," Hill said. "They just had situations that were not working out for them and they needed a place to come where they felt comfortable and we tried to provide that."

Hill arrived at Shaw before the 2000-2001 year with impressive credentials. He took a high school coaching position at home in Orange, N.J., after his graduation from NCCU.

He was part of a staff that took the team to two state championships. From there, he came back to North Carolina, where he became the assistant to Joel Hopkins at Mount Zion.

From there, Hill went to Nebraska before getting the call from Hopkins to come to NCCU.

"Those were all good experiences for me," Hill said. "It prepared me well for what I'm doing now. Hill does the majority of the recruiting and Hop-

kins also relies on him for providing strategy before and during the Bears' games.

Mapping strategy is something that comes easily for Hill. He's been around the game all his life. His father coached Essex Community College for many years and he went along whenever he could.

Like his father, Hill decided to come to the South to go to college. He considered coming to Winston-Salem State to follow in his father's footsteps but decided to carve his own path.

"That was the big thing," he said. "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. I really wanted to stand on my own and have my own identity."

As he looks back, Hill said he's glad he made that choice.

Things worked out well, he said. "I had a great college experience and I played at a great school. Now I'm just trying to use my experience to give some other guys a chance to play basketball and feel comfortable in their surroundings."

Press Box

from page B1

season as a team on a mission – wanting to go out on top of the CIAA and prove that Stitt should have the interim label removed from his job.

However, their final season at WSSU was a mixed bag. The Rams had a lot of high points in the season, including a 76-69 victory over Shaw in Raleigh in January. But what might be remembered most by the Rams and their fans could be the low points, which include an 87-82 loss to Lincoln University in the Bighouse Gaines Classic; two lopsided losses to Johnson C. Smith, which gave the Golden Bulls the Western Division CIAA championship; and the two losses to Shaw.

The Rams could have made up for their disappointments by capturing a victory over Shaw and then going on to win the regional championship for the first time since the 1967 team went on to win the national

championship. But instead, the Rams couldn't get a shot off in the final 12 seconds and had their season and careers come to an end.

Despite being an underdog and the worst seed in the six-team regional, the Rams nearly reached the championship game. WSSU struggled early in its opening-round game against third-seeded Wingate University. But just when it looked like they would be knocked out, the Rams bounced back themselves and dealt Wingate a knockout punch in the second half on the way to a 90-75 victory.

WSSU's outside shooting, which had failed the Rams in the CIAA tournament, came around in the second half and the Rams rolled to the victory to set up a rubber match against Shaw after each team won one of two games between the two teams.

Henry, the 6-2 power forward, led the way for the Rams with 26 points. Shawn Alexander scored 25, and Kamal Oliver came off the bench to score 15 for the Rams, who made 14 of

24 second-half field goals, including six of 11 from beyond the 3-point arc.

The momentum from the opening round carried over into the Rams' battle with Shaw. The Rams battled tooth and nail early to stay in the game and held an 18-17 advantage after Deas' 3-pointer with 13:29 to play in the first half. The Rams fell behind by as many as 11 points in the half after Shaw went on a 9-2 run. But the Rams battled back to cut the margin to 37-35 at the half.

The second-half proved to be a battle of wills. Shaw's powerful inside game allowed the Bears to take an 8-point lead with 10:20 remaining, but the Rams kept battling back and evened the score, 54-54, at the 6:23 mark. The Rams tied it again, 58-58, with 2:08 left. The Rams then had a chance to capture the victory on Deas' layup with 29 seconds left on the clock.

However, they couldn't hold on and that allowed Shaw to win the game on Bynes' dunk.

Shaw

from page B1

here with a lot of goals, and these kids have accomplished a lot of them already."

The Bears' victory snapped two long winning streaks by Carson-Newman. The Eagles, winners of the South Atlantic Conference, had not lost a game since Jan. 5 (19 games) and had not been defeated on their home court since Jan. 6, 2001.

"I'm very proud of the way we stayed focused and fought through everything," Hopkins said. "This is a big victory—not only for Shaw University, but also for the entire CIAA."

Murray, a 6-5 senior guard from Philadelphia, took over

the game in the second half and carried his team to the title. Murray, the CIAA's Player of the Year, had only 7 points in the first half on 3-for-7 shooting from the field and converted one of two free throws as Shaw fell behind 34-26. But he elevated his game in the second half, scoring 29 points.

Murray was 7 of 10 from the field, including two for two on 3-pointers, and made 13 of 15 free throws to finish the game with 36 points. The only other player in double figures was Bynes, Shaw's 6-9 center, who scored 12 points.

"I told my teammates that we had to step our game up in the second half," Murray said.

"We knew it was going to be tough to come in here and

beat them (Carson-Newman) on their home court. But we really wanted to win this game and continue reaching the goals we set at the beginning of the season.

"Our first goal was to win the Eastern Division of the CIAA, and we went out and did that," Murray said. "Next we wanted to win the CIAA Tournament. Our third goal was winning the regional and making it to the Elite Eight. Now we've done all those things and we can focus on winning the national championship, which is our dream."

With three more victories the Bears can do just that. They will open up play in the quarterfinals of the Division II championships on March 20 at Evansfield University in Indiana.



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