

WSSU

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The Blue Bears are the first team since Johnson C. Smith in the 2008 and 2009 seasons to repeat as CIAA champions.

"This is probably the best feeling I've ever had," said Mayo, an All-CIAA player who was on both Livingstone championship teams. "We did it. It means the world right now."

Traynham and Mayo paced five double-figure scorers for the Blue Bears. All-CIAA Guard Eric Dubose scored 18 points and guard Ty Newman, the tournament MVP, scored 13 points. All-CIAA Center Hakeem Jackson chipped in 10 points for the CIAA champions, who shot 57.9 percent from the floor.

Four-time All-CIAA forward WyKevin Bazemore led the Rams (18-10 overall) with 24 points and All-CIAA Rookie Team guard Terrell Leach pumped in 23 points. All-CIAA Forward Donta Harper scored 20 points for the Rams, who shot 51.7 percent.

Both teams split the regular-season series and shared the Southern Division title, but there was no doubt who was the better team Saturday. The Blue Bears (19-9 overall) hurt the Rams inside in the first half of the high-scoring affair. In the second half, the Blue Bears buried the Rams with their 3-point shooting.

Bazemore tried his best to keep the Rams in the game. He attacked the basket with abandon in the second half, which led to him making 16 of 20 free throw attempts overall. However, the Blue Bears had too much firepower in the end.

The Blue Bears flexed their muscle in the paint as they outrebounded the Rams 37-24. They also canned 6 of 12 three-point attempts for 50 percent and hit 34 of

42 free throw attempts for 81 percent.

The Blue Bears outscored the Rams in the paint (44-34), in bench points (44-27) and off turnovers (30-16) which led to a decisive win.

"This is a great day for Livingstone basketball," Blue Bears' Head Coach James Stinson said. "The guys came out with a purpose. I loved their focus throughout the game. Overall, they persevered and did the job at hand. When I walked into the locker room, they were fully tuned in to what the goals were."

The Rams put a brief scare into the Blue Bears after Leach's 3-pointer cut their deficit to 96-88 with 1:14 left. But the Blue Bears finished with a 10-3 run to claim their second straight crown.

Guard Dwight Williams of the Blue Bears got the championship game off to a rousing start. He blocked a shot in transition, then dribbled coast-to-coast for an emphatic one-handed dunk over a Rams' player which left the Time Warner Cable Arena crowd, especially the Livingstone fans, buzzing.

"I feel I am pretty athletic and I was able to take advantage of it [on the play]," said Williams, who scored eight points. "[My teammates] fed off of it and we won the game."

His dunk jumpstarted the Blue Bears, who went on a 20-9 run for a 24-13 lead on Mayo's jumper. The Rams sliced their deficit to single digits, but the Blue Bears stretched the margin to double digits for the rest of the half.

The Blue Bears established their lead with 58.1 percent shooting and strong play in the paint in the first half. They outscored the Rams in the paint 28-8 and won the rebounding battle 24-11.

The Rams didn't find much success inside, but they stayed within striking dis-

tance with their perimeter shooting. They connected on five of 11 three-point attempts for 45.5 percent including 3 of 3 shooting behind the arc from Leach.

It was Leach who gave the Rams a spark right before halftime. He launched a 3-pointer behind the mid-court line, which swished through the nets before the horn sounded. The 3-pointer trimmed the Blue Bears' lead to 46-36 heading into the break.

Leach led all scorers with 14 points in the first half for the Rams. Dubose and Williams both scored 8 points for the Blue Bears.

Despite the long-range three from Leach, the Rams could not carry the momentum into the second half against a Blue Bears' squad that had plenty of depth.

"We can go deep into our bench, and it has helped us get over the hump by systematically wearing teams down," Stinson said.

Despite the Rams' hot shooting, Head Coach James Wilhelmi says the Livingstone defense gave his team fits early on.

"It was a 2-3 zone and it did disrupt our flow early," Wilhelmi said. "We had a couple of quick turnovers and we were down eight. From there, it was tough to battle back. We never got into a true flow."

Though winning back-to-back titles is a great feat, the Blue Bears have more goals in sight.

"We can celebrate

tonight but tomorrow, we have to get prepared to play in the national tournament," Stinson said. "Our ultimate goal is to get to the Sweet 16 or Elite Eight. We want to continue playing the way we have been playing of late. We have to do the CIAA some justice in getting the job done. The team is starting to see what they can achieve if they play together."

The All-CIAA Tournament team consists of Newman, Dubose and Mayo of Livingstone; Harper and Bazemore of Winston-Salem State; Joe Reid of Shaw, Anthony Gaskins of Saint Augustine's, Joshua Dawson and Anthony Beck of Fayetteville State and Justin Beck of Bowie State.

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