

Kids enjoy the CIAA Tournament experience in Charlotte

Special to The Chronicle

Other than watching the 2014-2015 men's basketball champion the Livingstone College Blue Bears and 2015 women's basketball champion from Virginia State University, 40 youth had a chance to be exposed to the rich history of the CIAA Basketball Tournament through the eyes of ball boys and ball girls.

City of Winston-Salem rec center Captains Ben Piggott and Robert Chadwick took the kids to the Time Warner Cable Arena in Charlotte.

"We are very thankful to God to have a CIAA commissioner like Jacque McWilliams, who continues to allow us to attend the games with the kids in order

for them to learn about college life," said Piggott, who is supervisor of the Carl H. Russell Sr. Community Center in Winston-Salem.

The children have seen the following stars: Tom Joyner, John P. Kee, Donnie Simpson, D. J. Skillz, Sytonnia Moore, Ben Wallace (former NBA and CIAA basketball player from Virginia Union University), Sam Jones (former NBA and CIAA basketball player from North Carolina Central University), D. J. McLyle, Chante Moore and singer Tank.

"The children were blessed by being CIAA ball boys and ball girls. God really blessed them in a mighty way," Piggott said.



City of Winston-Salem rec center ball Captains Ben Piggott and Robert Chadwick are shown with CIAA Commissioner Jacque McWilliams and CIAA ball boys and girls during the CIAA Tournament, which ended Feb. 28.



Ben Piggott is shown with cameraman Carl H. Russell III, who played football at Carver Senior High School, and ball boys.



Ben Piggott and ball boys take a photo with Coach Isaac Pitts of Quality Education Academy, who is a former Shaw University basketball player.



Ben Piggott and Sam Jones, former NBA and CIAA basketball player from NCCU, is shown with ball boys and girls

Early injuries hamper Lady Rams' season

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE FOR THE CHRONICLE

The pre-season proved to be a bad omen for the Winston-Salem State women's basketball team. A rash of injuries conspired to derail the Lady Rams' chances to finish among the CIAA's upper echelon.

"We encountered a lot of obstacles," said third-year coach A.G. Hall, whose team finished the season at 11-17. "We had a lot of injuries before the season even started. It was difficult to establish any kind of continuity and that carried over to the entire season."

Hall admits that there were times when he believed his team was on its way to turning its season around. An eye-opening 66-57 home-court victory over eventual CIAA tournament champ Virginia State was encouraging. The same goes for the Lady Rams' valiant effort in a 64-58 home loss to Livingstone, ranked No. 8 in the country at that time.

"Those games showed what we're capable of," Hall said. "We proved we could more than hold our own against the top teams."

Entering the CIAA Tournament, not much was expected of the Lady Rams, who lost their last two games of the regular-season. And then there was the memory of last year's early tournament exit, which had not been forgotten.

Even so, WSSU came through with a convincing 73-58 first-round win over Chowan. The Lady Rams used their depth to wear down the Hawks in the second half. In the meantime, Kesheria McNeil scored 21 points to lead the way. McNeil averaged 15 points in two games at Charlotte and was a CIAA All-Tournament pick.

There was a flip side, though. Against other

teams, Shaw in particular, the WSSU women never performed like contenders. The Lady Bears, who made the CIAA Tournament final, beat the Lady Rams three times, which included an 88-59 blowout in the CIAA quarterfinals. "We never found a way to deal with their inside presence," he said. "They made it so difficult for us to score."

In large part, the inability to put points on the board prevented WSSU from rising above the .500 mark. Ironically, the defense was fine. The Lady Rams allowed the fewest points in the league (61.9 per game). On the other hand, they were last in scoring in the 12-team CIAA (59.6 points per game).

The absence of High Point University transfer Jatzmin Johnson didn't help matters. Johnson, a 6-foot-1 sophomore

center, sat out the season with a knee injury. With Johnson coming back at full strength, Hall is looking to recruit another center to provide frontline depth.

"Our lack of scoring hurt us badly," he said. "What we need is a player at the 5 position (center) to control the middle, which will make the game easier for everybody around them. It's a matter of adding the right pieces and that's a good place to start. We'll replace our seniors and build on what we already have."

WSSU loses four seniors, which includes power forward Dionna Scott (12.2 points, 5.6 rebounds) a two-time All-CIAA pick. Starting point guard Taylor Wells is also gone, along with post player Jovanah Graham and forward Briana Wilder.

The future looks promising at the guard spots with the return of Awa Kalmstrom, Angela Porter, Morgan Smiley and Tiana Edwards. All were newcomers who gained valuable game experience. Kalmstrom, a

gifted floor leader, joined the team in early January after transferring from the University of Utah. Edwards delivered as a 3-point shooting threat until illness hampered her effectiveness during the late stages of the season.

The backcourt could be very formidable, pending the return of McNeil, a junior who came off the bench to average 11.7 points per game, second-highest on the team. At presstime, the status of McNeil's availability for next season was unknown.



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee
A.G. Hall, WSSU women's coach

Among WSSU's remaining post players and forwards, Shaquira Palmer, Jeri Craine, Briana Arnold and Jasmine Carter will be counted on to provide added depth.



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee
Lady Rams point guard Angela Porter (3) goes strong to the basket.



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee
Jasmine Carter (33) is one of the top returning players on the Lady Rams front line.

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