

Rams keep Big House Gaines Legacy Alive

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

April 18, 2005 is a date that will live forever in the hearts of all Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) family, friends, supporters and all HBCU basketball enthusiasts forever.

On that day, the legend, Clarence "Big House" Gaines passed away, leaving a void on the campus of Winston-Salem State University.

"Big House" won 828 games and the 1967 National Championship during his 47-year coaching career at WSSU, and the current athletic administration, coaches and student-athletes refuse to let his memory vanish.

The WSSU Department of

Athletics and its student-athletes wore buttons on Thursday, April 17 and Friday, April 18, that reads, "We Are The 'Big House' Legacy!", in remembrance of Gaines, on the 10th anniversary weekend of his passing.

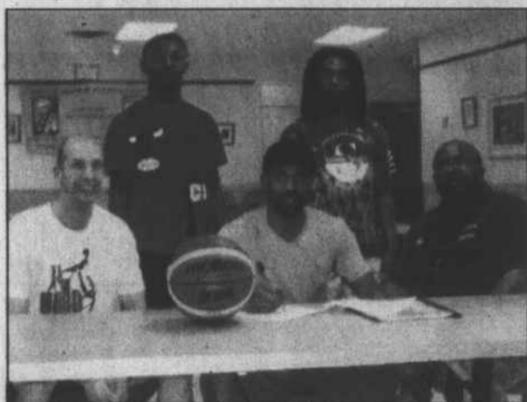
"We are committed to preserving an important legacy of Coach Big House Gaines and other 'greats' who have been of significant impact to WSSU Athletics," says Director of Athletics Tonia Walker.

"Big House made choices about the life he lived, which truly determined the legacy he left behind. He left us with his spirit of sheer will, determination, competition and excellence. I am honored to stand on his shoulders in an effort to move the Rams to new heights," added Walker.

"Nationwide, the name Big House Gaines has represented championship level college basketball and great exposure for Winston-Salem State University, but to us he represents so much more," said James Wilhelmi, WSSU head men's basketball coach.

"He was a mentor, community leader, trailblazer, father figure and had an impact on many, many lives. Celebrating his legacy by wearing buttons donning his name and remembering all that he accomplished is a source of great pride," added Wilhelmi.

"We should all strive to leave a legacy that will have a positive impact on people we will never meet," said A.G. Hall, WSSU women's basketball coach.



At the Carl H. Russell Sr. Community Center, James Blackburn, seated left, an agent for East Carolina University basketball star Antonio Robinson, seated center, signs Robinson to a contract to play overseas. Others in the photo are: front row seated right, Brian Leak Sr., Robinson's father; back row left, Marcus Williams, friend; and right, Brian Leaks Jr., brother.

College star signs with pro basketball team during Easter egg hunt

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Antonio Robinson will be playing professional basketball overseas. The basketball star of East Carolina University is the son of High Point College (now High Point University) Basketball Star Brian Leak, who works at the Carl H. Russell Sr. Community Center.

Robinson was signed by his agent James Blackburn at the sixth annual Easter Egg Hunt on Thursday, April 2 at the Russell Center.

Pre-K children through age 11 attended the event, sponsored by the Winston-Salem Recreation and Parks Department. Beverly Ligons, Brian Leak and Ben Piggott welcomed the children to enjoy the special event.

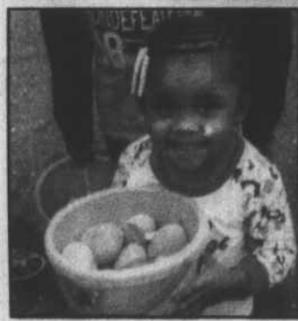
The children had a chance to find many eggs and prizes as well.

Senior Center Supervisor Ben Piggott would like to thank volunteers Wanda Reid, Karen Sterling, Ramona Williams, Kings and Queens Bridge Club and the Carl H. Russell Senior Citizens Club for their help with the egg hunt.

"May God bless them all for helping with the children and showing my mother respect, Mrs. Mae Edith Piggott, who passed earlier this week, with a homegoing prayer," Piggott said.



(Above) Ben Piggott, with hands raised, is shown with the many prize winners at the Easter egg hunt on April 2.



(Left) Alanna Campbell was the big winner. She had the most Easter eggs.

Roberts

from page B1

of taking part in hazing activities on the UNCC baseball team. Roberts and four other players were suspended from the 49ers program. The school has started its own investigation, which is ongoing and not yet completed.

In the meantime, Roberts gave serious consideration to walking away from the game for good. The situation at UNC Charlotte left him wondering if it would be worth his while to continue his career. He had other baseball offers and chose Winston-Salem State over the University of Central Missouri.

As things turned out, the NCAA transfer rules worked in Roberts' favor. As a transfer from a Division I school (UNC Charlotte) to Division II, he was allowed to transfer and be immediately eligible to play at the start of the new semester in January.

"For a while, I wasn't too sure about playing any more baseball," said Roberts. "But I'm happy about the decision I made. Now, I'm in a position to finish what I started. Coming in, it was difficult to determine expectations of any kind. My attitude was to go out, play ball and we'll see what happens. I believe we have a



Des Roberts has hit over .300 this season in spite of a lingering wrist injury.

good chance to do something special and win the CIAA, and hopefully go to the regional championships and make some noise.

"I haven't been here that long, but I'm in a very good situation here. My new teammates are like brothers to me. For the group of seniors on this year's team, I want to do every thing I can to do my part and not let them down."

Roberts is hopeful that he can take his game to the next level. Last summer, he played well for the Thomasville Hi-Toms of the Coastal Plain League, a wooden-bat summer league that helps college players refine their skills for the pros. Roberts hit .358 for the Hi-Toms and was voted in as a starting outfielder on the West team for the 2014 CPL All-Star Game.

"I'm looking forward to showing people what I can do," he said. "It's about playing hard and holding nothing back. If things work out and I make it, that will be fine. If it doesn't work out, I can still be satisfied because I know I would've given my very best effort."

Sprinter

from page B1

Washington-Saunders believed he would make amends during the summer track season. Those hopes vanished when he suffered shin splints while competing in an AAU meet. This turned out to be a severe injury that sidelined Washington-Saunders for nearly four months.

What might have happened if it wasn't for shin splints?

The recovery process didn't go as smoothly as Washington-Saunders hoped it would. He never reached the desired level of conditioning needed to compete up to his capability for the indoor season.

Ironically, Washington-Saunders was widely viewed as a solid pick to win the 500-meter run at the state indoor championships. That's because he had the fastest time of all the returning runners from the previous winter season. At best, the indoor season was so-so for Washington-Saunders, who finished 9th in the 500 and 13th in the 300-meter dash at the state.

That was a low moment, but by the opening weeks of the outdoor season, there was no denying that Washington-Saunders was completely healthy and good to go for the 400. In mid-March, which was early in the season, he ran a blistering 48.48 seconds, which put him in the No. 2 spot in the Class 4-A state rankings on the N.C. Runners website.

At the Brent Invitational two weeks ago, Washington-Saunders won the 400 for the second year in a row. Even though there was nobody in the field who could seriously challenge him, he clocked 49 seconds flat.

What if he had been pushed to his limit? "I'm not where I should be right now," said Washington-Saunders, who has a 3.7 grade-point average. "But I also know that for me to run faster times, I need to compete against the fastest 400 runners. That hasn't happened a lot for me this season."

Washington-Saunders may not get that opportunity until early May at the Class 4-A state championships. That's provided that he finishes among the top four at the regionals. He looks forward to a rematch with Kaylan Love-Soles of Rocky River, who is No. 1 in the state rank-

ings (48.33).

Love-Soles edged Washington-Saunders by .15 seconds in their only encounter of the season at the Marvin Ridge Invitational in March. The other most likely 400 contenders for the state meet include Southeast Raleigh's Jayon Woodward and T.J. Bleichner of Fuquay-Varina. Woodward (48.87 this spring) was fourth at the New Balance Outdoor Nationals last year and Bleichner is this year's state indoor champ in the 500.

"Chace can go 47.6, 47.7 this year," said Donald Grant, Reagan's sprint coach. "His work ethic is outstanding. I don't think you'll find any athlete who's more dedicated to his sport. He's always telling me that the 400 is his baby."

Washington-Saunders' devotion to track and field goes beyond his relentless inner drive to train and push himself to the limit. In recent years, he's evolved as a student of the one-lap sprint.

It's the norm for him to analyze video footage of races run by legendary 400 sprinters Michael Johnson, Butch Reynolds, Jeremy Wariner and Quincy Watts. As he dissects the various stages of each race he views, Washington-Saunders probes for a myriad of details which run the gamut from how to run the turns to how to stay relaxed when fatigue sets in at the end of the race. These efforts are all geared to help him run at peak efficiency.

"I watch the videos closely to find out how they did what they did," he explained. "Then I take what I learn from them and try as best as I can to emulate that."

Washington-Saunders has a vision for his running career, which he hopes will extend past his college years. As a freshman at Reagan, his dream of running in the Olympics one day was born.

That dream, however, isn't his only reason for running and competing at the highest levels possible. Washington-Saunders runs in honor of his late grandmother, Carolyn Washington and his grandfather, Coy Saunders Sr., who's been diagnosed with colon cancer.

"I run so that I can leave a legacy," said Washington-Saunders. "My grandmother passed away when I was a baby and I want to make her proud. I want to do the same for my grandfather because he's been there for me since day one. When I run, I don't do it just for me. I do it for them."

Hargett

from page B1

.645. "There's no question about how much she improved over the summer," said Gray. "She did all the necessary behind the scenes work to take her skill set to another level.

"Mercedes is a huge asset. She's merged her talents to the point where she's now a factor offensively and defensively. I'm just hoping that the consistency stays there."

Hargett arrived at Winston-Salem State as a highly regarded recruit. She emerged as a standout player at Havelock High School and the showcase travel squads that play during the summer months. As things turned out, her rookie season as a Lady Ram proved to be an eye-opener on several levels.

"Time management was a big issue for me when I first got here," she said. "After that first year, I had a much better handle on how I schedule my days. As an athlete, it was a culture shock for

me. When I got to WSSU, I found out quickly that everybody else was a No. 1 at their high school just like I was at my school. So, that means that nothing is guaranteed. You have to compete hard every day to earn your spot on the team."

It's been a season of ups and downs for Winston-Salem State softball. With an overall record of 13-19 as of April 20, the Lady Rams will most likely face long odds to win the CIAA Tournament, which begins next Thursday (April 30) in Raleigh.

WSSU, 8-2 in league play, expects to make a strong run at this year's conference championship trophy. Hargett is confident that her team will be ready to contend.

"We've had our struggles," she said. "But what it all comes down to is what have we learned in going through those struggles. Every day presents an opportunity for us to work on getting better as individuals and as a team. So now, we'll focus on performing well at the CIAA tournament at the end of this month."



WSSU pitcher Mercedes Hargett (33 in white) leads the CIAA in strikeouts.