

Porter determined to win CIAA championship ring

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE
FOR THE CHRONICLE

When Ashley Porter left home three years ago to play basketball for Winthrop University (in South Carolina), the future looked promising. Porter, a two-time all-conference pick at Carver High School, was expected to flourish at the next level.

Instead, the 6-foot-3 center suffered from burn out. Convinced that it was time for her to leave the game for good, Porter left Winthrop after her freshman year. The summer of 2013, however, proved to be a pivotal point.

Porter attended summer school at Johnson C. Smith University and decided to give basketball one more try. Since then, she has evolved as a formidable presence in the paint for the Golden Bulls, who are expected to make a strong run at the CIAA title next season. Because Winthrop is a Division I school, Porter didn't have to sit out a season as a transfer because J.C. Smith competes in Division II.

In her sophomore sea-

son, Porter averaged 6.2 points and 5.2 rebounds and was voted All-CIAA as a key figure coming off the bench. This past season, Porter moved into the starting lineup and further solidified her reputation as a low-post threat at both ends of the floor (9.4 points, 6.9 rebounds and 1.3 blocks per game).

"As a team, all of us feel like we can go a long way next season," said Porter, a rising senior and sports management major. "We're deep at every position. It's just a matter of everybody getting on the same page. The No. 1 goal is to get that (conference championship) ring."

Porter's arrival at J.C. Smith was somewhat ironic. Stephen Joyner Jr., the Golden Bulls women's coach, knew all about Porter during her high school days. At that time, Joyner was the women's coach at Winston-Salem State University.

"Having watched Ashley for two years, I was already very familiar," said Joyner, whose team posted a 20-8 finish this past season. "There was never a



Photos by Johnson C. Smith University Athletics

Ashley Porter (14) has blossomed as a bonafide low-post force at both ends of the floor for Johnson C. Smith.

doubt that she would go Division I. But we still reached out to her to let her know that she could always join us if things didn't work

out at Winthrop." As things turned out, the timing couldn't have worked out better for the Golden Bulls and Porter,

who was also recruited by Clemson, South Carolina, East Carolina and Norfolk State. At the time of Porter's departure from Winthrop, Joyner had just completed his first season at J.C. Smith. Once the coach and former recruit reconnected, it was hardly surprising that Porter would resume her basketball career at JCSU.

"With me being a familiar face, I believe that had a lot to do with her joining us," said Joyner. "Ashley has grown and matured so much. If she controls the paint, Johnson C. Smith will be successful. She's so effective that she commands double-teams every time she touches the basketball."

"I've told Ashley that the paint is her home. Nothing should happen in her home unless she allows it to happen. We have a lot of pieces on our team for next season, but she's clearly one of the key pieces that have helped to turn our program around."

Aside from Porter's low-post skills, she's evolved as a leader who sets the emotional tempo with her energy, dedication to the game, and words of encouragement to teammates. Entering her final college season, Porter has

fully embraced her role.

"Ashley has never been the type of athlete who looks for the limelight," said Joyner. "She could produce a double-double and not want to talk about it. She would rather talk about the point guard who fed her the ball that enabled her to get that double-double. Now she's more at ease in talking about her game and what she's able to contribute."

Porter never envisioned having a basketball career after high school. During her early years at Carver, she never thought about college hoops. It wasn't until after her sophomore year at J.C. Smith that she warmed up to the idea that she is more than capable to hold her own at the college level and beyond. Porter has already attracted interest from women's pro teams overseas.

"When I was in high school, I didn't have any desire to play in college," she said. "Looking back on where I was then and where I am now, I'm way beyond where I thought I would be as far as playing basketball. I've come to realize that my basketball career doesn't have to stop when my senior season of college is over."



Jerrod Hardy, coach of the WSFD team draws up a play during a timeout

Charity Game

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that seemed to give the WSFD trouble. By forcing turnovers and getting easy lay-ups they were able to cut the lead to five before WSFD coach Jerrod Hardy made adjustments during a timeout.

"That press gave us a few problems but after that first timeout we were ready to go," said Hardy.

Hardy who said he was aware of the teams struggles against the Warcats in the past was pleased with the way his team played and was happy they got the win.

"It feels good to get our redemption after losing last years game, they say revenge is a meal best served cold and we got it today," laughed Hardy.

A number of members

from the WSFD were in attendance to watch their co-workers play, including assistant fire chief Frank Stowe, who said he was their to see a good competitive game.

"I'm not playing this year but I am here to represent the fire department," Stowe said. "Anytime you can support a positive community organization like this everybody wins."

Admission to the game was \$7, during half time a raffle was drawn for a 32 inch flat screen television. It is unclear how much money was raised during the game but the Warcats hope to have a grand total by the end of this week.

For more information on the Lady Warcats or the WBCBL visit www.lady-warcats.com



Photos by Craig T. Greenlee

T.J. Williams was promoted to the Winston-Salem Dash in mid-May.

Roots

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point).

Since his arrival in Winston-Salem, Williams has had his ups and downs in getting adjusted to Carolina League pitching. As the Dash's designated hitter, Williams' batting average was .200 with 6 RBIs in his first 20 games. Williams understands that it's crucial for him to continue working on pitch recognition and swing mechanics.

One of Williams' better moments came in Winston-Salem's 9-8 come-

back win over the Salem Red Sox on June 1. Williams delivered a run-scoring single, which contributed to the late-game resurgence.

"In that comeback game, there were times when I felt like I tried to do a little too much in my first two at-bats," he said. "I was hard on myself after I missed two fastballs that I should've hammered. When I step into that box, I just want to live in the present and focus on what's happening right then at that moment as opposed to what I succeeded at or failed at earlier in the game."

Strategy is a huge part of baseball. Players, coaches and managers

employ a variety of strategies to produce the desired results. On the other hand, Williams focuses solely on the basics.

"Baseball is a mental game," he explained. "At the plate, sometimes you can overanalyze. At the end of the day, it's a game where you have to put the barrel of the bat on the ball. So, it comes down to being consistent each day."

"Even though you have to know what to do based on the situation, you can't think too much. If you do, it will slow your reactions down. This game really is about reactions."

Coach

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experience as a golf coach at R.J. Reynolds High School. Initially, he coached football, but in the late '90s, he stepped in as an assistant golf coach to help former head coach Howard West, who also coached boys' basketball.

During that time, the Demons won three straight state championships in basketball and as a result, the extended post-season for basketball created conflicts with the start of pre-season practice for golf. Green conducted try-outs and ran team practices until West became available once basketball season was over.

Green has been in charge of the golf program since 2005 when West resigned and went to Reagan High School. During Green's head coaching tenure, RJR has won six Central Piedmont Conference titles, which

includes three straight from 2013 through this year.

The Demons got off to a slow start this spring. But midway through the season, they began to play up to their potential. Aside from bagging another conference tournament championship, Reynolds won its regional and qualified for a spot in the Class 4-A state tournament. RJR finished ninth in the team standings. It was the third year in a row in which the Demons placed inside the top 10 at the state.

The golfers that Green coaches at RJR are not novices. Most started playing the game as elementary-school-aged youngsters at private clubs. Green's points of emphasis have more to do with handling the mental aspects of the game as opposed to teaching shot technique and swing mechanics.

"Golf is a tough sport, so having ups and downs can be expected," he said. "I talk about that a lot. In

this game, it's inevitable that you'll hit bad shots. If you dwell on what happened on an earlier hole, it could carry over to the next hole, or maybe the rest of the round."

"These kids know how to play. I'm just there to help keep them calm and focused. Every now and then, I'll give them a pat on the back. At other times, when needed, I might have to give them a kick in the butt."

Green, who retired from teaching three years ago, points to several factors which have paved the way for Reynolds' success on the golf course.

Factor 1: Five years ago, he made the decision to change practice sites from the Reynolda Park Golf Course to Winston Lake, which features its share of challenging slopes and narrow fairways. Making that switch, he explained, has produced satisfying dividends for Reynolds golfers.

"I knew that if my kids could play well at that course, they could play anywhere," he said. "Winston Lake is one of the toughest courses in this county. It's tight. You just can't pick up your driver and bomb it. You have to know where to put the ball and if you put it in the right place, you have a very good chance of posting good scores. If you don't do that, you're in trouble. Other high schools hate playing at Winston Lake because it's such a difficult course to play."

Factor 2: Reynolds golfers tend to be highly self-motivated, so there's seldom an issue as it relates to work ethic and willingness to put in the necessary time to improve one's game. "These kids want to play and they want to be good," Green said. "And they have a great support base from their parents. Most of the players have parents who play the game, and they continue to give

me their undying support."

"That makes things a lot easier for me. If I have to discipline a kid, the parent agrees with me wholeheartedly. I don't have to argue with a parent about why I did this or why I did that."

Factor 3: Reynolds plays six players in conference matches. But there's no set rotation for which six players will play in any given event. The top four scores among team members automatically leads to their advance to play in the next competition. The players who finish fifth and sixth have to battle other team members in practice to determine who earns the last two spots to play in the next match.

"This keeps everybody hungry," said Green. "If they're not in the top four, they have to go back to the drawing board and work on improving. They have to earn the opportunity to play."

The measure of satisfac-

tion for Green, a six-time conference Coach of the Year, transcends winning tournament titles. What he enjoys most is the coach-player dialogue, which can help them perform to the best of their ability.

"Accolades are fine, but interacting with young people is the most important thing," he said. "Our last group of seniors all started out together as freshmen.

I watched them learn, grow and mature. That gives me a good feeling to see how much they developed during that length of time."

"Maturity plays an important role in golf. Yes, it takes physical ability to play this game, but it also takes a lot of mental ability. You have to be mentally focused, but not to the point where you're tight all the time. You have to be loose, but focused."