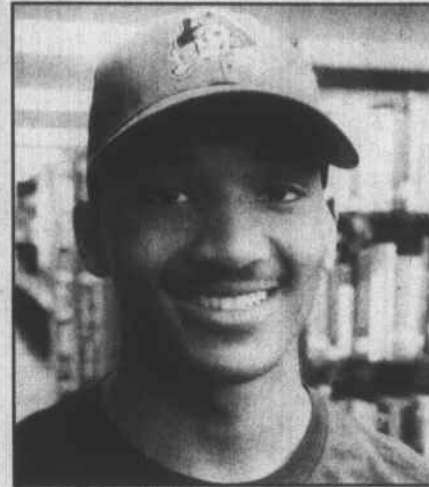




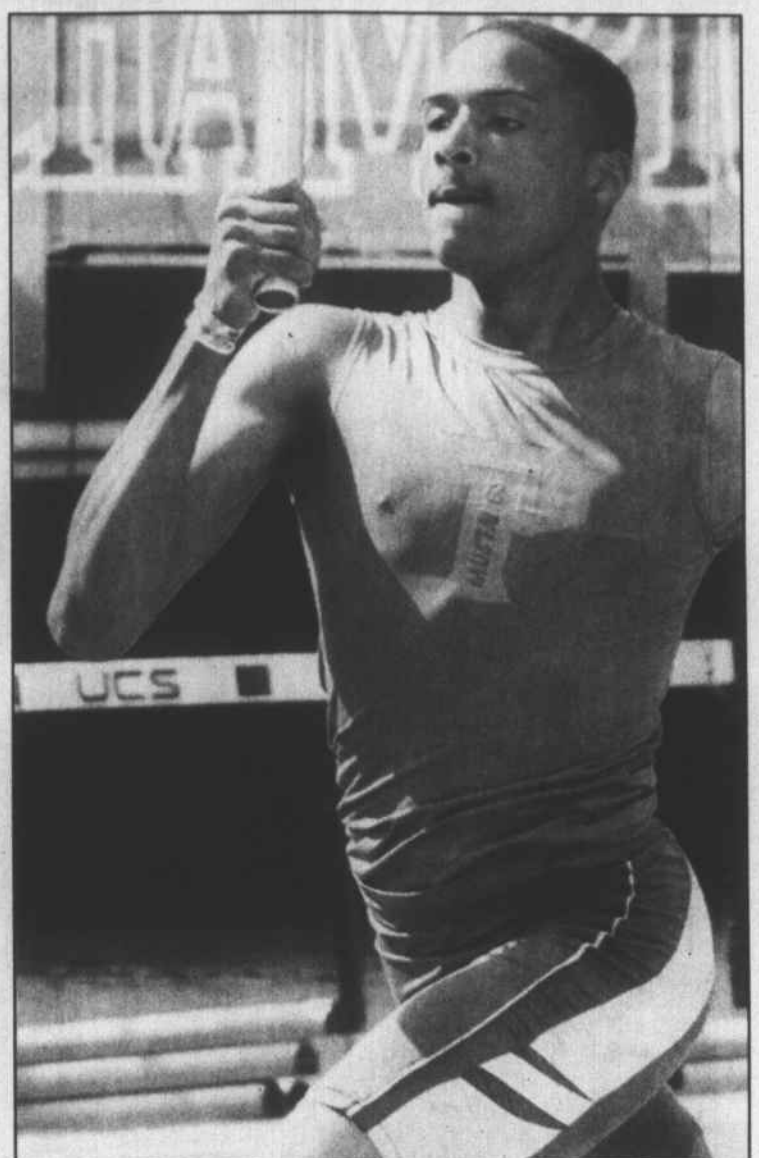
Class 4-A state outdoor 400 champ McKinley McNeill of Parkland had over 20 scholarship offers.



McNeill



Graise



Photos by Craig T. Greenlee

Parkland's Lorenzo Graise expects to improve on his breakthrough performances from last season.

Parkland quarter-milers are good to go for college

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Parkland's best 400-meter sprinters recently realized their dreams of attending college on a scholarship when they signed letters of intent last week.

McKinley McNeill, the girls Class 4-A state outdoor champ, will go to North Carolina. Lorenzo Graise, the boys' fastest quarter-miler, has chosen East Carolina.

Both have traveled different paths to get to where they are now.

McNeill is looking to continue the winning legacy established by six seniors from last year's squad who helped Parkland win four state championships (two indoors and two outdoors) over the past two years. Graise, on the other hand, is the lead performer in a much-improved boys' program. The focus for the boy's team is make their mark just like the girls have in recent seasons.

At UNC, McNeill will reunite with former Mustangs teammate Katlin Sherman, who is now a freshman sprinter for the Tar Heels. "When I made my visit (to Chapel Hill), I saw that Carolina could offer me more as a student versus me being an athlete," said McNeill. "They combine the two really well. I'm really excited about going. Katlin has always been like a big sister to me."

It came as no surprise that Graise opted for the Pirates. He readily admits that ECU has always been among his top choices of schools to attend. "The track team is strong and it's the same for academics," said Graise, who has a 3.7 grade-point average. "I thank God for how far He's brought me from, and for my family and support system."

Aside from being a state champ, McNeill, was the state indoor runner-up at 500 meters last year, and she placed fifth at the national outdoor championships in the 400. McNeill had over 20 college offers, but chose UNC over a field which included South Carolina, Notre Dame, Syracuse, Stanford, Florida State and Miami (Fla.). In the national outdoor 400 rankings for next spring, she's projected to be No. 8, according to the NCRunners site.

McNeill took a quantum leap because of year-round training, which she participated in for the first time last fall. Given those results, she looks forward to what the future holds. She understands that the lessons she learned from last year can take her to an even level this time around.

"It's important for me that I don't hold back," said McNeill, who has a 4.4 weighted grade-point average. "That was a huge issue for me last year. There were times when I would come off the track and realize that I wasn't tired at all. So, this year, I'm going to lay it all out there and

whatever I run, then that's what I run. By using that philosophy, I'm sure I'll run great times."

One of McNeill's goals for the outdoor season is to erase the state record of 52.9 seconds in the open 400. Right now, she's only .5 seconds away being North Carolina's fastest ever in the one-lap race.

"The biggest thing about McKinley is that now she believes in herself," said Parkland assistant coach Jarrell Elliott, who works with the team's quarter-milers. "It's a big difference between believing you're good and believing you're great."

"There were times when she wasn't sure if she could compete against the national elites. But now, she knows that she's one of the elites and the roles have changed. Instead of her going after them (elites), people will be gunning for her. That's the biggest mindset adjustment that we'll have to deal with this season."

As the Mustangs best male track athlete, Graise is considered to be the foundation for the resurgence of the boys' track program. Last spring, he placed third in the Midwest 4-A Regionals with a career-best time of 48.99 seconds.

At the state meet, Graise had a below-par race and finished 12th. Entering the outdoor season for 2016, he's ranked fourth in the state in Class 4-A by the NCRunners website.

Graise is confident that he will emerge

as a viable contender for state titles in the 400 (outdoors) and 500 (indoors). "For me, there's going to be more weightlifting and more training, but I know I can do it," he said. "Not only am I coming strong in my final high school season, but I'm going for state championships."

Based on his development up to now, Graise's championship vision shouldn't be viewed as wishful thinking. In his three years of high school competition, he's improved his 400 time by an average of 2.8 seconds each season. Whether he's able to maintain that same rate of progress remains to be seen. Looking back on previous results, the future looks promising.

"This year I'm looking to break 46 or 47 (seconds) in the 400," Graise said.

Elliott believes that Graise, who transferred from Carver, is just beginning to tap into his potential as a runner. Given his mental approach to the sport, coupled with his desire to excel, Elliott envisions superlative performances from his top boy's senior.

"I see Lorenzo being a strong state (championship) contender and a Parkland record-holder in his events," said Elliott. "That will happen as long as he keeps working hard and develops the way he's supposed to. Since he had that break-out season last year, he's learned how to trust in his training."

Wildcats continue to add talent

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

With their inaugural season drawing near, the Winston-Salem Wildcats are visibly getting better.

Last week the team announced they had come to contract terms with linebacker Donnie Owens.

According to team representatives, there were issues with initial contract negotiations, but both sides have now reached an agreement.

Posts on numerous social media platforms suggest the team is happy to have Owens join the city's first indoor football team.

The 6'3, 295-pound Owens is very familiar with the city. From 2011 until 2013 he was a team captain for Winston-Salem State University. Owens was a pivotal part of a Rams defense that was arguably the best in the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) conference. During his senior season, the run-stopper from Fayetteville led the Rams in sacks and was an All-CIAA selection.

In 2013 Owens was also selected to play in the NFL Players Association Collegiate Bowl in Carson, CA. The game is designed to give college seniors a chance to show their talents to college scouts and coaches.

In limited action, Owens proved he is a force to be reckoned with. He finished the game with an impressive three tackles, one sack, and a forced fumble.

Although he has split time between linebacker and defensive line in the past, Owens is expected to play linebacker full-time with the Wildcats.

In 2016 the Wildcats will compete in the American Indoor Football (AIF) league and will play their home games inside the Lawrence Joel Coliseum Annex.

AIF CEO John Morris said he was proud to bring the organization to the Winston-Salem community.

"We are cementing our footprint in the South," he continued. "With this addition to the league, the AIF blueprint for success is further cemented."

According to AIF league officials, other key additions to the team's roster last week include Roosevelt Harvin of Asheville and Rockshawn McNeil of Lithonia GA.

The next open tryout will be held Saturday, Jan. 9, at the D1 Sports Training facility located at 1901 Mooney St. For more information on the Wildcats or to pre register for the tryout call (336) 722-4354 or (336) 582-9440.

WSSU BASKETBALL

WSSU Rams break even with win, loss in Challenge

SPECIAL TO
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) picked up its first win of the season with a 75-66 victory in the CE Gaines Center on campus on the final day of the CIAA-Mountain East Challenge on Saturday, Nov. 14.

WSSU had five basketball players to score in double figures, and out-rebounded the University of Charleston (West Virginia).

Earlier, the Rams dropped their season opener, 83-79 to Concord University in the Challenge.

With the victory, WSSU improves to 1-1 on the young season, while the University of Charleston falls to 1-1.

After falling behind 7-2 early, the WSUS Rams picked things up and took their first lead of the game, 10-9 on a Carlos Rankins lay in. The game would go back and forth for several minutes before the Rams jumped out to a three points lead at 17-14, with 9:27 left, on a Jerome Simmons layup.

WSSU surged ahead 27-20 on a CJ Ford put back with 3:08 to play in the first half, but the Golden Eagles came right back and retook the lead on a made three with 54 seconds on the clock.

WSSU's Jerome Simmons would sink two free throws with 15 seconds to go to give the Rams a 31-30 lead they would take into the locker room at the half.

The second half would play out much like the first, with the University of Charleston jumping back out in front and opening up an

eight point lead with 10:44 left to play.

That's when WSSU ramped up their defensive pressure, and began to chip away at the Golden Eagle advantage.

Two free throws and a layup from Keith Armstrong, three pointers from Rayvon Harris and Demone Harrison gave the lead back to the Rams. With 7:50 to play.

Winston-Salem State would go on a 11-1 run to pull ahead 65-56 with 2:50 to play. It's a lead the Rams would maintain and stretch out to 12 points at 72-60 with 48 seconds remaining on two CJ Ford free throws.

Winston-Salem State's clutch shooting and free throw shooting down the stretch sealed the win for James Wilhelmi and his WSSU Rams.

WSSU was led in scoring by Rayvon Harris who scored 15 points and pulled down seven rebounds. CJ Ford added 12 points and six rebounds, and Carlos Rankins also added 12 points and three rebounds. Demone Harrison finished with 11 points, and Jerome Simmons chipped in 10 points and pulled down four rebounds to go with two blocked shots. Keith Armstrong scored eight points and had seven rebounds.

Earlier, Winston-Salem State battled all night long, but could not erase a 10-point halftime deficit. The Rams lost, 83-79 to Concord University in the CIAA-Mountain East Conference Challenge.

The Concord Mountain Lions of the Mountain East Conference

jumped out early on the WSSU Rams, 8-2, but another 13-7 run pushed their lead to 21-9 over the Rams at the under 10 media timeout.

The Mountain Lions would increase their lead to 19 points with 6:17 on the clock in the first half, 38-19.

The WSSU Rams would rally in the final moment of the half, and with 1:17 to play before halftime, and cut the lead down to nine points at 42-31 on a Demone Harrison free throw. CJ Ford would score on a layup with 30 seconds left, but Concord would take a 45-35 lead into halftime.

The second half began with both teams trading baskets, and the WSSU Rams could not seem to trim the lead, but their defensive effort would increase, and kept them within striking distance.

With 10:21 left to play, WSSU cut the lead down to just six points at 59-53 after back-to-back baskets from Jerome Simmons and CJ Ford.

WSSU made a furious late rally and eventually cut the lead to five at 75-70 on two Demone Harrison free throws. CJ Ford would get the Rams closer at 76-72 on a made layup, but the Mountain Lions would convert free throws down the stretch to keep the home sending Rams at bay.

The Rams Demone Harrison got WSSU to within two points at 81-79, after making five straight points. But two free throws from Concord's Rob Reed with four seconds remaining, would seal the game for the visiting team, 83-79.