

Fall

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a phenomenal job running his team."

Dealing with Jackson wasn't the only issue that plagued QEA. The Pharaohs had a lot less bounce in their step after winning their semifinal game against Sunrise Academy (Kan.) six hours earlier. The semifinal round and championship game were played on the same day.

"With us playing two games in one day, we simply didn't have our legs," said Pitts. "As a result, we couldn't attack and press like we normally do. We didn't look anything like the QEA team that people had seen all season. In that second half, we looked like we were walking in quicksand."

With the exception of senior forward Keith Stagg, the Pharaohs had a horrible shooting night. Stagg, who led all scorers with 28 points, closed the curtain on his high school career with his best offensive game of the season. He was 4-of-5 from the field and 6-of-8 on 3-pointers. The rest of the team shot 34 percent for the game.

Top scorer Deshawn Corprew had his worst output of the season with six points on 3-of-9 field goal shooting. Corprew did compensate to some degree with 5 rebounds and 4 assists. Jaylan McGill contributed 10 points, but had an icy shooting touch from long distance (1-of-11 from 3-point range). Renathan Ona Embo added 9 points and 5 rebounds and

Marsellis Purvis chipped in with 9 points, 7 rebounds and 2 assists.

"Our guys played a very good basketball team," said Pitts. "They kept fighting and they never quit."

In the semifinals, QEA got a huge lift from McGill, Embo and Purvis in a 73-67 win over Sunrise Academy. With Corprew (12 points, 5 rebounds, 6 assists and 3 steals) commanding so much attention whenever he touched the basketball, those three provided all the offense the Pharaohs needed.



Coach Pitts

McGill hit all six of his 3-point attempts and finished with 20 points. Embo, who was a perfect 7-of-7 from field, added 15 points. Purvis contributed 12 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists and 2 steals.

For Sunrise, Bryan Trimble and Rashad Davis were the leading scorers with 11 and 10 points respectively.

QEA started its title run with a 74-69 victory over Athlete's Institute (Canada) in the quarterfinals. Corprew turned in a solid night's work with 15 points and 8 rebounds and he got ample assistance from his

teammates. Purvis went 8-for-9 from the field and finished with 19 points and 7 rebounds. McGill and Stagg chipped in with 13 points apiece.

The Pharaohs turned in one of their best defensive performances against a team that features one of the nation's most coveted major-college prospects. Even though Thon Maker, a 7-1 post player scored 24 points and pulled down 10 rebounds, he never dominated for lengthy stretches. For the game, he was only 3-of-13 from the field. Most of his point total came from beyond the arc (6-of-6 on 3-pointers).

Notes: The format for the Grind Session national championships was different from what teams experienced during the regular season. In high school games, teams play four quarters which are 8 minutes long. In this GS event, the college format was used. Games were played in two, 20-minute halves with a 30-second shot clock.

*QEA's Corprew, who averaged 30 points per game during the regular season, was one of 12 players named to the All-Grind Session team. The players were chosen by coaches whose teams participated in the Grind Session this season.

*Corprew, who's currently being pursued by a number of high-profile programs such as UCLA, Texas, Texas A&M, Louisville and Kansas, is expected to announce his choice of schools in the coming weeks.

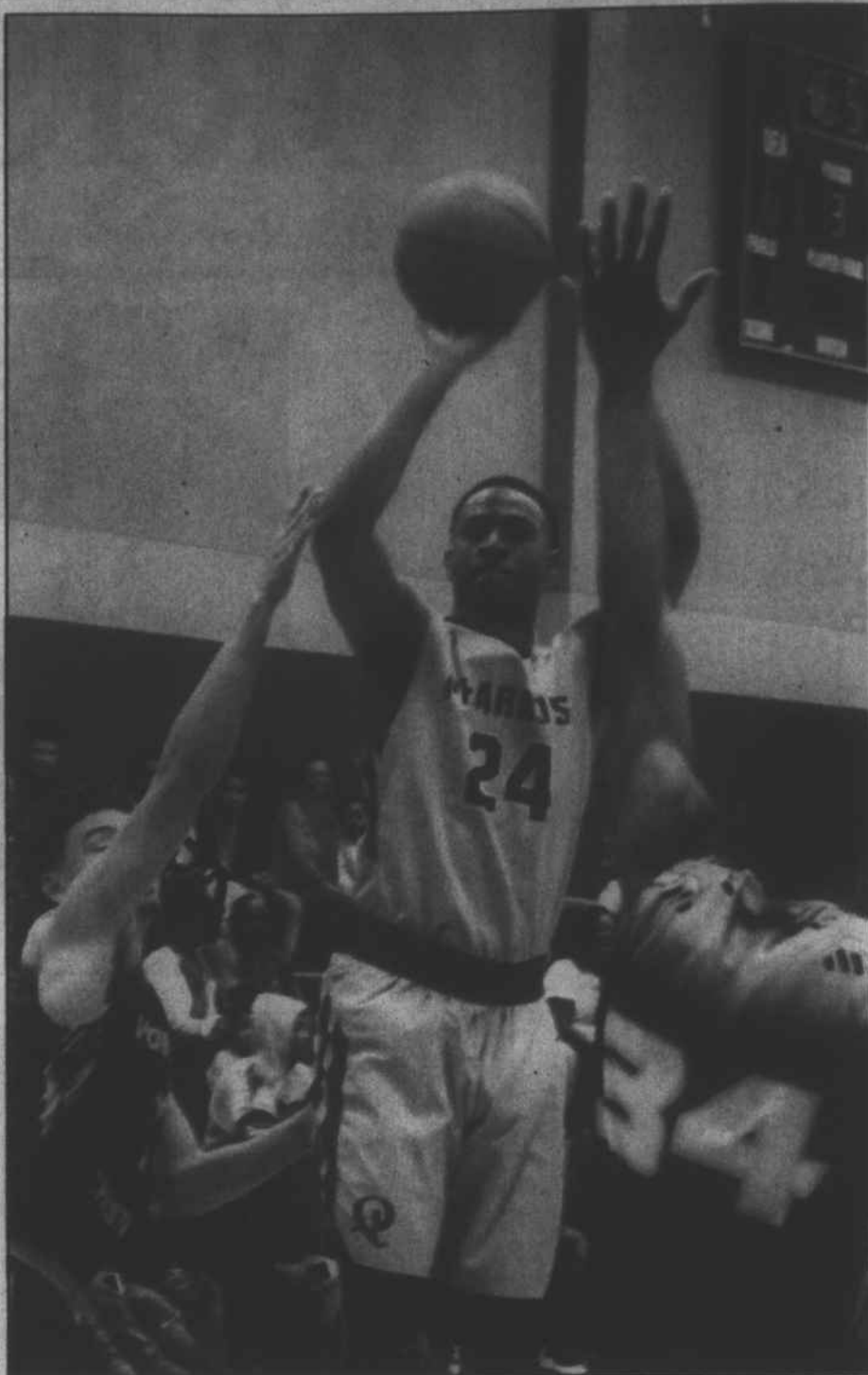


Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

QEA's Keith Stagg had his best offensive performance of the season in the championship game of the Grind Session nationals.



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

Will Tibbs, who played at Winston-Salem Prep, flourished in his first college basketball season as a multi-purpose performer for Fayetteville State.

Tibbs

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Eastern Shore. That season, however, was uneventful. Tibbs was red-shirted and did not play. In the meantime, he became dissatisfied with his situation and started to think about alternatives.

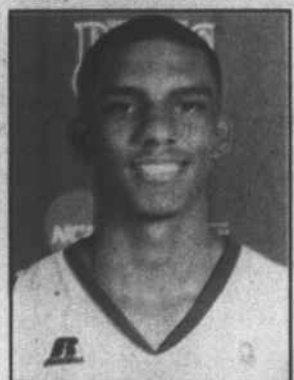
Teammate Jaiquan Manning wasn't happy either. So they talked at length about possibilities during the car ride from Maryland to North Carolina in December 2014. Before coming to Winston-Salem, though, Tibbs had to drop Manning off in his home town, which is Fayetteville.

The subject of Fayetteville State basketball came up. So he decided to visit and have a talk with the head coach. The following summer, Tibbs made his move from UMES to Fayetteville. Manning also left and now he's playing at Pitt Community College.

Tibbs, a 6-6 forward who graduated from Winston-Salem Prep, flourished in his first season of college basketball. As a red-shirt freshman, he averaged 8.1 points, 7.2 rebounds and was named to the CIAA's All-Rookie

team. Perhaps the truest measure of Tibbs' value was the fact that he started all 29 games and was second on the team in minutes played at 31.2 per game.

"Will had an outstanding season," said coach Alphonza Kee of



Tibbs

Fayetteville State. "Since he came from a (high school) program that has a winning tradition and the right kind of tutelage, I knew that he'd come in and be ready to play."

As a newcomer with the Broncos, Tibbs proved himself as a valued contributor with a multiple skill set. He's usually penciled in at small forward. But over the course of games, there are times when he'll play every position.

"We asked him to rebound, defend and finish

around the basket," said Key. "But he can also help out at point guard and there are times when he's at the 5 (center). Next year, he'll do that and even more. He'll be more involved in initiating our offense as a point forward and we're looking for him to expand his shooting range from the perimeter."

Looking back on his first year in college, Tibbs learned a few lessons. As a key player at Winston-Salem Prep, he was accustomed to competing every season. So, it's easy to understand how difficult it was for him to sit and watch from courtside.

"It was tough," Tibbs recalled. "While I was sitting out, I learned a lot about work ethic from the players at Maryland-Eastern Shore. At the college level, you can't afford to take any days off. If you do, you could end up losing your spot (on the team). That's why you have to bring it (focus, intensity and desire) every day."

After having his initial conversations with Key, it became clear in Tibbs' mind that he wouldn't have to do any more searching for a new college home. "I was sold from the beginning," he said. "I really liked the environment.

There were no cliques or anything like that. It was so much like family. That's what I was looking for."

Tibbs is part of a high school state basketball championship legacy. During his time at Prep, the Phoenix pulled off a threepeat by winning Class 1-A state championships in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Playing under the guidance of coach Andre Gould, he explained, served as good preparation for the college level.

"It's all about working hard and playing hard to be the best you can possibly be," said Tibbs. "That's what I learned while playing at Prep."

Now that Tibbs has his first college season behind him, he's keenly focused on helping Fayetteville State improve on its 14-15 record from this past season. In the CIAA Tournament, the Broncos had a strong run and won two games before bowing out to eventual tournament champion Virginia State in the quarterfinal round.

"The season didn't end the way we wanted, but we learned a few things," said Tibbs. "We have a better idea of all the things we need to work on as a team. That's really going to help us in the long run."

Softball

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young team with no seniors on board. Nine new faces are on this year's roster, which includes six freshmen and three transfers. "Yes we have a lot of new people," added Hilliard-Gray, "but with all the games we've played up to now, they no longer can be considered rookies."



Coach Hilliard-Gray

At this point in the season, WSSU, picked to finish second in the CIAA, has performed well at the plate. Against UNCP, the Rams had 18 hits in two games. The main issue, however, is defense. A throwing error in the seventh inning of

the first game allowed an unearned run, which helped to set the stage for the Braves comeback. In extra innings, a lead-off walk led to the game-winning run.

"Overall, we have to get better defensively," Hilliard-Gray said. "We've given games away by committing errors at crucial times. Still, I'm pleased with where we are right now. So far, we're 5-1 in the CIAA and we played well in a 5-1 loss to the 13th-ranked team in the country (West

Virginia Wesleyan.)"

It hasn't taken long for WSSU's new additions to make their presence felt. Freshmen Destiny Snipes and Taonya Stanley rank among team leaders in RBIs (15 and 11 respectively). Sophomore outfielder/catcher Tiarra Delaney tops all Rams with a .341 batting average, and junior college transfers Rebecca Demko and Idaysha Quinones provide stability and veteran leadership for a young group.

"Snipes is extremely versatile. I can play her in the infield or the outfield," said Hilliard-Gray. "And she's good enough at the plate where I can put her in the lead-off spot or at No.2 in the batting lineup. Quinones is an asset for us defensively. Her ability to throw runners out at the plate (from centerfield) makes her very valuable."

The make-up of this year's team, while young, could help the Rams go further than they did a year ago, when their season ended in the semifinal round of the CIAA tournament. Their only league loss so far is to Chowan, who was picked to win the conference in the pre-season voting.

In Hilliard-Gray's mind, this year's team is one of the most seasoned that she's ever had during her 13-year tenure at Winston-Salem State. "We have a little more speed and more versatility," she said. "We have several people who can play multiple positions. My job now is getting them to embrace our growth as a team, so that we can continue to enhance what we're building."



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

Tiarra Delaney of the Rams lays down a bunt during last week's doubleheader against UNC Pembroke.