



Under the guidance of coach LaTaya Hilliard-Gray, the Lady Rams have advanced to the NCAA Division II softball playoffs twice over the past three years.

Lady Rams suffer setbacks in NCAA softball playoffs

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE
FOR THE CHRONICLE

When it comes to winning in the national playoffs, there is no margin for error. Nothing comes easy. At this level, if you make mistakes, your opponent will make you pay.

That's a brief summation of what happened to Winston-Salem State in NCAA Division II Atlantic Region softball last week. The Lady Rams didn't play badly in suffering shut-out losses to West Virginia Wesleyan (3-0) and Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania (6-0).

They just didn't play well enough. WSSU, which finished the season at 30-23, delivered a comeback win (5-4 over Chowan) in the finals of the CIAA Tournament to earn its second trip to post-season play in three years. Even so, the make-up of this year's squad is not quite the same as the team that advanced to the

playoffs in 2014.

Mercedes Hargett and Chyna Riley are the only players who were on the WSSU roster three years ago. By comparison, their teammates are relative newcomers. But that's good news because every player from this year's team will be back for next season.

"This was a learning experience for a team that didn't have any seniors," said coach LaTaya Hilliard-Gray. "Now that they've gotten their feet wet, they have a much better understanding of what to expect (at the regionals)."

The chief issue for the Lady Rams in both games was their inability to put the ball in play and get runners on base. In two regional games, they had six hits and only eight runners reached base.

"We weren't very consistent offensively or defensively and that really hurt us," she said. "The energy, the fight, and the



Sophomore utility player Tiarra Delaney of the Lady Rams had two hits in three at-bats in the first game of the NCAA Division II Atlantic Regional last Friday.

hunger to win, was not at the level it should have been. When you make it to regionals, you have to take your game up another notch.

"There's no doubt in my mind that we have the skill to play with anybody. Everything came together for us at the CIAA Tournament. But a week later (at regionals), it didn't happen. It was a case where we didn't play up to the talent level that we have on this team."

In the opening game against No. 1-seed West Virginia Wesleyan, the only WSSU batters to hit safely were Katherine Zimmer and Tiarra Delaney (both went 2-for-3). Defensively, a couple of fielding errors proved to be contributing factors in allowing Wesleyan to push runs across the plate.

Bloomsburg closed the curtains on the Lady Rams season with a four-run explosion in the third inning of the elimination game. WSSU was held to two hits by Bloomsburg pitcher Sarah Bortner, who

finished with seven strike-outs and one walk.

Hargett, who went 2-for-3 at the plate, had a single and a double. The junior from Havelock got all of WSSU's hits vs. Bloomsburg.

The stinging feeling of losing in the post-season will more than likely linger among the Lady Rams to some degree. But at the same time, the memories from earning a playoff bid will serve as strong motivation to make a return trip and make amends for this year's disappointment.

"Winning and playing at the highest level possible does not stop with the CIAA Tournament," said Gray. "That's the message I shared with the team after our last regional game. The main goal is to make it back to post-season and prove that we can win at the national level. It's not enough to get to regionals. The focus is to get past the first round and make a strong run that will take this team deep in the playoffs."



Charity game highlights awareness of domestic violence



Members of the Winston-Salem Lady Warcats and Winston-Salem Police Department basketball teams take time for a photo on May 7.

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Since they became members of the Women's Blue Chip Basketball League in 2010, the Winston-Salem Lady Warcats have held a charity game to mark the mid-point of the season. This year's charity game was unlike any other.

Last Saturday, May 7, the Lady Warcats faced off against members of the Winston-Salem Police Department (WSPD) in the first ever S.M.I.L.E.S

(Supporting Many Innocent Lives Enabling Success) Charity Game. Unlike games in the past that charged admission, this year spectators were asked to bring an item to donate to Eliza's Helping Hands and their year long domestic violence campaign.

During the game held at Fulton YMCA, the Lady Warcats were able to collect dozens of personal hygiene products, household linens and other items for women and families who have been victims of domestic violence.

Although the Lady Warcats didn't win their matchup with the WSPD, team officials noted the real winners of

the day were the women who will receive the items collected during the game.

This season the Lady Warcats are operating under a new owner and management team and are becoming more known throughout the city for their work to improve the quality of life of residents. In coming weeks the team will host a youth basketball camp for children ages 6-12. For more information on the Lady Warcats and upcoming community events, visit www.ladywarcats.com.

WSSU gains new cheerleading coach

SPECIAL TO
THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem State University Department of Athletics has named Eboni Graham as the new coach of the Powerhouse of Red & White Cheerleaders at WSSU.

"I would like to thank Mrs. Walker and committee for giving me this opportunity. I'm excited and looking forward to helping my student-athletes

exceed the standards academically and athletically," said Graham of her new position.

Graham is a 2009 graduate of Winston-Salem State University, where she was co-captain of the Powerhouse of Red Team cheerleaders. Currently, she is a candidate for a Juris Doctor degree from the Charlotte School of Law.

Graham has coaching experience from stints at

"I'm excited and looking forward to helping my student-athletes exceed the standards academically and athletically."

—Eboni Graham, new coach

West Mecklenburg High School (Charlotte), where she choreographed and designed a competitive cheerleading routine to compete in a stomp-and-shake style cheerleading competition.

She was also the direc-

tor and head coach at the Lady Norsemen Cheerleading Program, where she helped train young ladies from ages 4-12 to cheer on the Golden Norsemen AAU Sports Club.

While at Winston-



Salem State University, she was the stunting and tumbling coach, as well as choreographer. Graham helped train the WSSU cheerleaders, as well as instructed

them in cheers/dances, and coordinated and facilitated youth camps. She also taught stunting and tumbling classes.