

Davis takes J.C. Smith reins

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recruiting, hoping to land players who can make an impact.

"It's just like when you go to the Kentucky Derby," Davis said. "When they go to the Kentucky Derby, the only thing there is thoroughbreds. The others are out there in the field eat-

ing briars, grass, onions and all that other stuff. We want to find that good student-athlete."

Following McNeill will be a challenge, but Davis said he looks forward to the opportunity to keep Smith moving forward. He knows there will be more than a passing interest in the program's progress.

"Coach McNeill laid a good foundation, and we want to build on that foundation. We're not replacing a team that was 0-10 and had nowhere to go," Davis said. "Everybody wants to follow a winner. The world appreciates effort, but gives credit for results. We're going to work at it."

Biakabutuka recovery speedy

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running backs, so injuries are always going to happen. The key, he says, is playing despite the risk.

"You can play linebacker, (defensive back) or whatever," Biakabutuka said, "and you're going to be exposed to situations where you might get hurt. I can't be thinking like that. If I approach it like that, it'll slow

down my game and in the NFL you can't do that. If you lose a step, you lose the game."

Biakabutuka will have some competition for the halfback job this season in Anthony Johnson, who rushed for more than 1,000 yards in Biakabutuka's absence. The Panthers, however, are betting on Biakabutuka returning to the lineup as the featured back.

"It feels good because it's telling me they trust me, they believe in me," he said. "As a running back, a football player, an athlete, competition is what drives you. Once I get back, there's going to be a competition. It's going to help him and me get better because if we compete and work hard because the other guy's working hard, it can do nothing but make you better."

McMillon checks his prospects

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whenever the opportunity presents itself, that I can take advantage of it."

Factor in two new expansion teams, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and the Arizona Diamondbacks, creating 50 new jobs at the major league level next season. McMillon doesn't want to close the door with the Marlins but realizes it may open wide somewhere else.

"I really don't know," he said. "They're always making trades and guys are getting hurt and stuff, it's just the nature of the game. I think it would be a bit premature to say right now there's no possibility with me in the future with the Marlins. "But the big goal is to be in

the big leagues. If I had to play against the Marlins, I would have no problems with that."

For now McMillon is a Knight and he wants to have a good year. He's close to home, having played baseball at Clemson, so family and friends will be regular visitors to Knights Castle. The Knights also have a new manager, 43-year-old Carlos Tosca, Baseball America's 1996 minor league manager of the year. Tosca's a winner, 239-165 in three years at Double-A Portland.

"Tosca is a really good baseball guy," McMillon said. "He's a player's manager and he knows the game."

"We've got some prospects here this year, last year we lost a lot of close ball games, hope-

fully with what Carlos brings, with what Rick Williams, the pitching coach brings, with the new prospects. Maybe these one-run games can be one-run in our favor, so I'm looking forward to a good year this year."

McMillon loves the cozy confines of the Castle but that can also work against you if you have a weak pitching staff. The Knights feel they have a pitching staff this year that can keep the score down and give the hitters a chance to pull out some games.

"Playing in this park, it's a great hitters park but it's a pitchers nightmare," McMillon said. "But we've got some pitchers who should be able to make some adjustments and be a lot more competitive. All in all, we're going to be OK

All-stars in Yadkin Valley 2A

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easy to coach and has been a well-mannered, sweet young lady for as long as I have known her."

The 6-foot, 1-inch all-star averaged 16 points a game during the 1996-97 campaign. Atwell

said that Wood "came into her own" during the mid-point of the season, dominating the paint and scoring 32 points a game.

In addition to Yadkin Valley honors, Wood was also named to the all-conference and all-regional teams, as well as all-

Piedmont.

Other Rowan players named to the team include: West Rowan's Latoya Ramsey, Ebony Pharr, and Kari Schenk, and Salisbury High's Ellanean Phifer.

Woods primed for the Masters

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"Whether it's realistic or not remains to be seen in tournament play. It all depends on if you're hot and you get all the right breaks."

When it comes to Woods, the scope of what can and can't be done on the golf course - even a course like Augusta National, which extracted a 78 out of Greg Norman in last year's final round - has broadened considerably.

Woods, less than a year removed from Stanford, arrives at the Masters as one of the favorites. It's a role that suits him just fine, even though most Augusta experts seem convinced that the balance between talent and experience leans considerably toward the latter.

"I think there's a learning curve of playing Augusta and the discipline of playing the golf course, when to hit the ball, when not, when it's great,

when to make that par and walk," defending champion Nick Faldo said. "It's not impossible (for Woods to win), but I think that experience does help here."

Of course, Tiger doesn't mind being called a favorite. For him, winning is the only thing that matters each week, so it's quite natural that he expects to be wearing a green jacket Sunday. He's a pro now, not some schoolboy from Stanford. "I didn't take finals last week. I didn't write papers," he said. "I was able to practice getting ready for a tournament like I normally do."

Woods made the transition to the pros with remarkable ease, though he did run into a setback at his last event, The Players Championship. Going against the strongest field he has faced since leaving college, Woods wound up tied for 31st with a 1-over-par 289.

"I could feel what I was doing

wrong, especially at TPC," Woods said. "So I just went back home, worked on a couple of key things that Butch (Harmon, his instructor) and I have worked on over the years, and the swing came back."

His father, Earl Woods, will be at Augusta National this week even though he is still recovering from heart bypass surgery.

Woods faces staggering expectations, which are only heightened when someone like Jack Nicklaus says he expects Tiger to win more Masters than Nicklaus (six titles) and Arnold Palmer (four) combined.

"Only time will tell," Woods said. "He sees that there's definitely a chance that my game is such that it suits this golf course, and maybe one day I may do that."

And maybe he'll shoot a 59 along the way.

Cardinals try to jump-start season

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games, and aren't getting any clutch relief pitching.

It all adds up to a big, fat zero. That's a big comedown for a team that was 88-74, swept San Diego in the first round of the playoffs and then came within one game of the World Series before collapsing in the NL championship series against Atlanta.

La Russa predicted a repeat division championship on consecutive days in February, and he's never backed off that. He noted that last season was no wire-to-wire accomplishment.

Last year the Cardinals were 17-26 in mid-May before taking

off.

"This isn't going to be a fairy tale ride," La Russa said. "It wasn't last year and it never is."

"You've just got to deal with the adversity. It's part of the season."

The Cardinals have already had more than their share.

They began the year with starting pitchers Andy Benes and Danny Jackson on the disabled list with rib-cage muscle injuries. They lost set-up man T.J. Mathews to a six-game suspension after he admitted throwing at the Reds' Bret Boone in an exhibition game, and left-handed relievers Rick Honeycutt and Lance Painter went down with injuries. Outfielder Brian Jordan has

an injured back, Willie McGee has a calf injury and second baseman Delino DeShields landed awkwardly on first base last week, severely spraining his ankle. Center fielder Ray Lankford won't be back until at least May after off-season rotator cuff surgery.

"We haven't had a lot of luck," general manager Walt Jocketty said. "But it won't be long before we get a lot of these guys back."

Mathews, whose presence was sorely missed, returned to the roster Tuesday. DeShields is hopeful he can play by the weekend.

Still, reliever Tony Fossas isn't one to look ahead to presumably rosier times.

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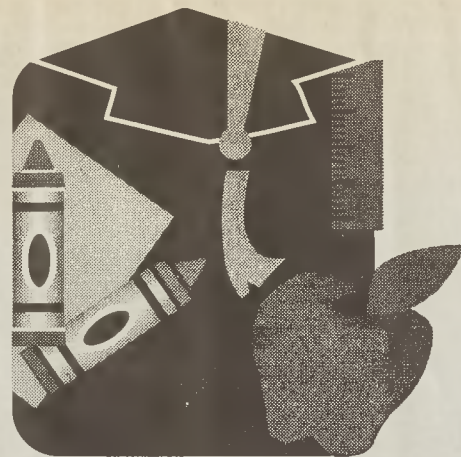
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