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SPORTS



Headed south?
The Carolina Panthers reach contract agreement with Washington defensive tackle Sean Gilbert. Story on 13A

Despite mounting losses, Jackson a find for Nuggets

By Karl Petraroja
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Not a lot has gone right for the Denver Nuggets this season. At 7-58, Denver is on the verge of setting the NBA record for futility. One of the bright lights shining through those many losses has been the play of rookie guard Bobby Jackson of Salisbury. But even Jackson has had to deal with ups and downs.

Jackson, 25, led the Minnesota Golden Gophers to the Final Four last season and was playing brilliantly for the Nuggets before he broke the ring finger on his right

Salisbury rookie flashes potential in Denver

hand Feb. 19 against the Los Angeles Lakers. He came off the injury list earlier than expected, just in time to play in front of 40 friends and family last week at Charlotte Coliseum. But the Nuggets' first two-game winning streak of the season fell in a 109-87 loss. Jackson also struggled to regain the form he had through the first four months of the season.

"It was a thrill just to come back and play in front of your home

fans, especially when you've been out for about a month," he said. "I had never played here (the Coliseum) before, so it was fun. The only time I've been in here was when the NBA draft was here last year, I had a cheering section that day."

Jackson hit his first two shots against the Hornets but finished only 4-10 for 9 points in 23 minutes. His conditioning wasn't there but he showed dynamic flashes of how explosive he can be

on the court.

"Bobby's going to be a good NBA player," Nuggets coach Bill Hanzlik said. He did some good things, he also made some mistakes. But after being out for so long and only having one practice, he com-



Jackson

peted, he played hard. That's all I can ask of him—play hard."

Jackson got a late jump on his basketball education. He didn't start playing until age 12 and wasn't involved in organized basketball until his sophomore year at Salisbury High.

That wasn't about to hold Jackson back. He played two years at Western Nebraska Junior College before transferring to Minnesota, where he was 47-11 in two years. All that winning must have made it difficult to endure the losing pains of Denver's dreadful season, only seven wins in the first 65 games.

"It's been rough but I don't think I'm the only one who's been in this situation," Jackson said. "I think every player has come from great programs and just to step into a situation like this is tough for everybody but we just have to keep working hard."

"I had a great year in Minnesota but that's behind me. I'm just trying to get better as a player so I can be successful and help the team win."

Jackson's numbers before the injury were good: 13.3 points per game, 4.9 rebounds, 5.3 assists

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Hearing no barrier for Pride

By Paul Newberry
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KISSIMMEE, Fla. — Curtis Pride, despite being unable to hear the crack of the bat or the cheering of the fans, considers himself no different than anyone else on the field.

He's just a ballplayer trying to earn a job in the major leagues.

"I've never looked at my deafness as a handicap," said Pride, contending for a spot on the Atlanta Braves bench. "I just want everyone to treat me as one of the guys."

His big, brown eyes are firmly focused on the world around him. Surrounded by almost total silence, they are his great equalizer, allowing him to tune in to everything from a pitcher's curve to a teammate's chatter to a reporter's questions.

Signed by the Braves last month, Pride has been one of the most impressive players during spring training. He's on the verge of earning a spot as a left-handed pinch-hitter, hitting 318 with two homers, 11 RBIs and three stolen bases.

"They've given me a lot of opportunities and I'm just taking advantage of it," he said. "I came here with the intention of making the team."

In the clubhouse, Pride has fit right in with his new teammates despite the uniqueness of his situation.

"Believe me, it's not a disability," said fellow outfielder Gerald Williams, whose locker is adjacent to Pride's in the spring training clubhouse. "If you spend a little time around him, you realize that he's quicker than most of us in terms of processing information."

Pride has never shied away from his deafness. He talks about it openly and goes to great lengths to put those around him at ease.

"People are always telling me, 'It's real easy to talk to you. You have a good sense of humor,'" he said, smiling broadly. "The only thing is they have to face me when they talk, because I read lips."

Pride's mother, Sallie, contracted German measles while she was pregnant with Curtis. His hearing impairment was diagnosed when he was 7 months old.

"I think he's comfortable with it. That's the main thing," said his mother, who quit her job as a registered nurse after his birth so she could devote extra time to helping him deal with his deafness.

His mother encouraged her son to take up as many extracurricular activities as he could handle at an early age. He tried art. He performed in a play. But sports, where his hearing impairment didn't matter as much as his athletic ability, was his road to acceptance.

"There was taunting and teasing when he was in elementary school," said his father, John Pride. "But once kids realized what an exceptional athlete Curt was, they were more interested in trying to identify with him than

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PHOTO/HERBERT L. WHITE

Johnson C. Smith quarterback Bruce Harrison is the Golden Bulls' only signal-caller during spring drills. He hopes to establish himself as the clear-cut starter for the fall.

Change in plans

Injuries give JCSU's Harrison shot at top QB job

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

No one can touch Bruce Harrison during Johnson C. Smith's spring football drills.

No wonder. He's the Golden Bulls' only healthy quarterback. During a scrimmage last week, a defensive lineman forgot and flattened Harrison, which drew an immediate scolding from coach Bill Davis.

"He's the only one we have out there right now," Davis said. "I was telling them don't hit him because if we do, we might have to call spring practice off."

Injuries to Keith Mack (knee) and Desmond Brown (heart murmur) made Harrison a starter by default, but he's working to cement his hold before fall practice starts. Spring ball, he admits, is his best chance to make an impression.

"I'm putting pressure on myself because it is a make or break year for me," Harrison said. "I've played in games and started games, but I haven't really taken over the team. If I don't step up, I might not get another chance to play. I've got to seize the moment."

Since the end of last season, Harrison immersed himself in the offense, breaking down tapes and working with coaches. Studying last year's 2-8 campaign helped him get a grasp of what's needed to improve.

"I knew I couldn't come in half-stepping, even if the other

quarterbacks were healthy," Harrison said. "I knew if I wanted to play, I would have to put the work as far as studying film, talking to coaches and going over everything a quarterback is supposed to do."

Harrison has shown promise in drills, enough that Smith coaches are talking about making him No. 1 provided he has a strong spring. At any rate, the experience he's picking up now will help come fall.

"We expect him to compete for the starting position next year," Smith offensive coordinator Tim Harkness said. "We hope to recruit some freshmen to come in and make the competition pretty stiff; but I expect Bruce to be one of the guys who could be the main man."

Harrison has the least experience among the returning

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Davis

Evans out as Smith women's hoop coach

Livingstone's Mitchell a possible successor

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

John C. Smith is looking for a new women's basketball coach. Hythia Evans, who led the Golden Bulls for 11 seasons, will not be retained, The Post has learned. Evans, who took over the program when Steve Joyner was named men's coach in 1987, went 15-14 last season with NCAA Division II player of the year and national scoring champion Konecka Drakeford on the team. The contract of assistant coach Julie Hogan was also not renewed.

"We want to try to (hire a new coach) before school's out, Smith athletic director Bill Davis said.

Smith has already held "informal" talks with Livingstone women's coach Andrew Mitchell. Another potential candidate with ties to the CIAA is N.C. Central's Joli Robinson, a Charlotte native who built Independence High into one of the area's top prep programs before taking over at her alma mater two seasons ago.

"Folks have called, but I'm not at liberty to say who," Davis said.

A former assistant to Joyner with the men's team, Mitchell took Livingstone to the CIAA championship game this season, his fourth at the school. The Bears, who had not won a tournament game in 24 years, pulled off three consecutive upsets before losing to national power Bowie State.

"We had some informal discussions," Mitchell said, "but we haven't talked about contracts. It's been more like there's an opening."

A Salisbury native, Mitchell said he's happy at Livingstone, but wouldn't rule out a return to JCSU.

"It seems like a good place to work, but I'm happy at Livingstone," he said. "It's a good situation (at Livingstone). There's a lot of young ladies graduating, and I feel a commitment to them."



Evans

NBA labor peace may be a thing of the past

By Chris Sheridan
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The NBA's current collective bargaining agreement, despised by the commissioner and hated by many of the veteran players, won't be around much longer.

The league's 29 owners voted overwhelmingly Monday to reopen the agreement and scrap its remaining three years. Commissioner David Stern called for talks to begin April 1 on a new deal.

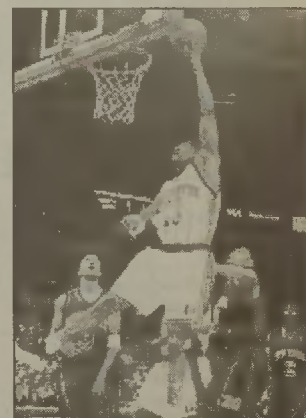
The current six-year agreement was due to expire after the 2000-2001 contract, but instead will lapse June 30.

"We've known for a year now that this was going to be reopened," Celtics coach Rick Pitino said. "Hopefully, it will be a short and sweet (negotiation) and both sides will come together and do the right thing for professional basketball."

If a new agreement isn't reached by July, a lockout—or at least a signing moratorium—could begin.

"I'm not sold that (a lockout) is going to happen, because everybody knows that if there's a work stoppage, it will be a bitter one," Steve Kerr of the Chicago Bulls said.

"It was expected," Michael Jordan said. "I don't really understand it because they voted for it the first time. We thought we were getting a screwy deal the first time, but it turned out to be



PHOTO/KELLY OWEN

NBA veterans despise the collective bargaining agreement because it allows rookies to become free agents after three years.

where we had the advantage in some respects, and now they feel the pact they voted on was not what they wanted."

The 27-2 vote by the Board of Governors, which took place at a hotel near the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, does not affect this season.

Stern refused to say which two teams were against reopening.

"Our goal is to have a successor agreement in place by the time the current agreement expires," NBA deputy commissioner Russ Granik said. "Although the

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