

Durham looks to rebound in '04

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The 32-year old Durham spent the first 7 1/2 years of his major league career in the American League with the Chicago White Sox before he was dealt to Oakland for the final two months of the 2002 season. Last year was Durham's first in the National

League and his San Francisco Giants led the NL West from start to finish while capturing the top record in the league. Despite making it to the post season for the second straight year, does Durham feel he has anything to prove to his critics who say age may be catching up to him?

"No I don't have anything to prove, I think my numbers speak for themselves, they show what I've done over my career when healthy," Durham said. "My numbers show what I've done and what I can do."

What Durham can do is bring the rare combination of speed and power to the lead-off position. He has 25 career leadoff homers, including

four last year which ties him for 12th on the all-time list. When he's healthy Durham can also burn up the base paths. He was slowed to seven steals last season but had 26 in 2002 and as 34 just four years ago. He's been to the post season three times but has yet to win a series. Last year the upstart Florida Marlins, the NL wild card team, bumped the Giants in four games in the opening round. The Giants have the talent to win the west again this year but Durham wants more than just a first place finish.

"You definitely want to get to the ultimate goal, I've been fortunate to be in the playoffs two years in a row now and just when you think you've got it you get snake-bitten," Durham said. "I definitely feel we have a tremendous shot of going back to the playoffs and getting further."

Any talk of the Giants always centers around superstar slugger Barry Bonds. As spring training opened last month, the BALCO Laboratories controversy

exploded and several major league stars including Bonds, were reportedly connected to the company's involvement with illegal steroids. Does Durham think this distraction will plague the defending NL West champs all year?

"I think it's there and the media is going to bring it up all year regardless," he said. "We're not really worried about it, we're going to be tested. I was told by people before that the truth is going to come out and it's going to shut everybody up."

The 5-8, 180-pound Durham still spends his off-season in Charlotte. The Harding High grad says he has too many family and friends and can't move from Charlotte. Just like everybody else in the Queen City last winter, Durham, a former all-state football player, got caught up in the Carolina

Panthers' run to the NFC Championship and first Super Bowl appearance.

"The city was going nuts, I think that was good for the city because now I think with all the big name free agents out there, they're going to possibly want to go to Charlotte," Durham said. "The NBA is going to come back. It's going to be fun, it's going to definitely be interesting, I can't wait, it's going to be a lot of fun when my off season comes."

Durham is hoping his off season doesn't start until late October this year. He likes it in San Francisco and says the Giants fans have been terrific to him.

"They've definitely opened their arms to me, I think they are some of the greatest fans in baseball. Hopefully I can bring a championship to San Francisco and bring some of the big name free agents out here."

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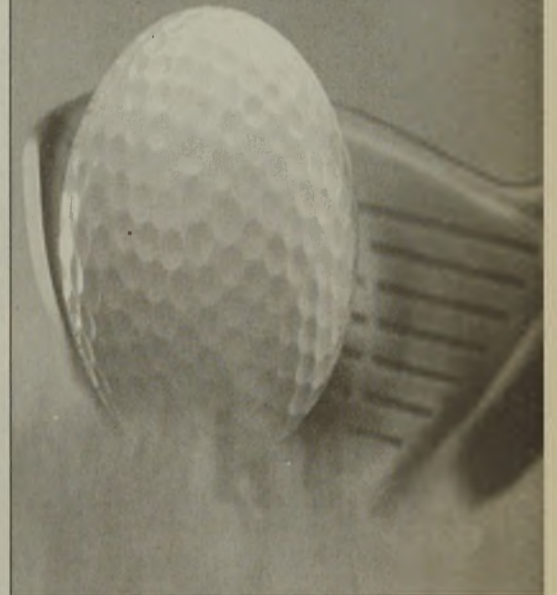
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KENNESAW (GA.) STATE

Division II champions got help in Charlotte

A couple of Charlotte natives play on Kennesaw State's NCAA Division II national championship basketball team.

Reggie McKoy (East Mecklenburg High) and Kevin McDonald (Northwest Cabarrus) scored five and 10 points respectively in the Fighting Owls' 84-59 win over Southern Indiana in the national title game last week. McDonald converted 3-of-4 shots from the floor, against SIU while McKoy went 2-of-9 and added six rebounds for the champions. Kennesaw, which won the Peach Belt Conference and South Atlantic Region titles to advance to the Elite Eight, beat Pfeiffer 86-79 in the national quarterfinal.

The Owls finished the season 37-5.

Herbert L. White

RETURN TO SENDER



PHOTO: WADE NASH

Lauren Goss returns a shot during Johnson C. Smith's women's tennis match against Virginia Union last Saturday in Charlotte. The Golden Bulls women and men both won, with the men improving to 10-1 in the CIIA. Smith plays at Shaw Saturday against the only league team to beat Smith's men in the last five seasons.

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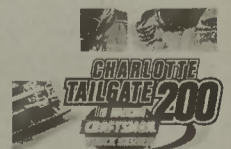
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