

Bobcats ready to shop

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ly have all our scenarios together. Whatever conceivably can happen, we have plans for those. For instance, if there are trades, we'll be ready. Whatever we needed to do, we've got our plans laid out. We've got all our scouts coming in (to Charlotte), and we (had meetings) - just to listen to see where everybody is, to see what their rankings are."

The Bobcats' scouting staff consists of: Gary Brokaw, director of player personnel; Kenny Williamson, director of scouting; Tim Shea, director of international scouting; Frank Ross, scout; and about four people located in different regions across the country.

But to reach its current level of preparation, the heavy lifting wasn't left up to the main scouts. Even top Bobcats brass has been put to work.

Ed Tapscott, the team's executive vice president and chief operating officer, has gone out on occasion, Bickerstaff said. So has assistant general manager Karl Hicks. Former Charlotte Hornet Dell Curry, the Bobcats' director of basketball operations, has done

some scouting, too.

And Bickerstaff himself has traveled overseas to observe potential Bobcats.

"I've been to Spain, Italy, France, you name it," Bickerstaff said. "I've been to NBDL cities, the McDonald's high school game, college games. I've really been across the spectrum. We're doing whatever needs to be done."

When asked if one draft was more important than the other, Bickerstaff paused.

"Well, the expansion (draft) is," he said. "For one reason: It gives you numbers. If we can get some young players out of (the expansion draft), a core group of players, or some draft choices from some of those players, that will be good. But we want to build around the (NBA) draft also. So I think they both are important."

In the expansion draft, each team will make a maximum of eight players available for the Bobcats to select. The Bobcats have to select at least 14 players, but can take no more than one player from any team.

However, the NBA draft, which features big-name college and high school players,

is what gets most of the attention in June. The Bobcats have the fourth-overall selection this year. And, yes, everybody wants to know whom the Bobcats will take with that pick.

Bickerstaff can't talk about individual players until the early-entry deadline for college players - May 10 - passes.

However, Bickerstaff did say that the Bobcats would not rule out drafting a high school player over a college senior or an experienced foreign player.

"I think we have to keep an open mind about everybody," he said. "We just have to do our homework. What we have to do is take the best basketball player. And I don't think we can worry about position."

"Ideally, we'd like the big center. We'd like the two people up the middle - a good point guard and a big man. But what we've got to do is make sure we take the best basketball player. To me, talent is the deal. Even if you draft the same kind of people, you have to be sure about their talent. You can always take talent and move it to satisfy needs. We'll do what's best for the Bobcats."

Sting roster spots going to fittest

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with Nicole Powell, a 6-2 guard/forward who adds size to the backcourt. As a rookie, Powell said her priority is learning the professional style of play.

"Playing time, I'm not too concerned about that," she said. "At training camp, everyone's not even back yet, so for me I'm just trying to learn every day and figure out what they want from me kinda see what coach (Trudi) Lacey is looking for."

Newcomers like Powell will have to adjust to Lacey's defensive philosophy, which puts a premium on man-to-man pressure but has been vulnerable inside.

"Defense is a focal point for us, so new people coming into our system always takes them a little time to learn that because the pace with which you have to play in the WNBA is very fast," Lacey said. Defensively, it's very tough to defend the players in this league."

"Every single player was either an all-American or the best player on their team back in college. Right now, everyone is bigger, everyone's faster and everyone's stronger, so

the same kind of move you did in college is definitely not going to work here. I'm just trying to bump my game up to the next level and be more intense."

"There's never enough room because all you can put is five players and have up to five players on the roster. I take my hat off to the coaching staff because it's a difficult job to manage all this talent while at the same time trying to keep everyone happy."

"We all have the same common goal - to win the WNBA championship and so it all boils down to whatever it takes."

"Everybody has to come in with their A-game," Smith-Taylor said. "There's definitely a lot of talent in this training camp, probably more than there's ever been in any (previous) training camp, so good luck to everybody and hope they do their best because it's definitely competitive."

"There have been a few changes that are going to help," guard Andrea Stinson said. "Every team has to make some changes and I think we have some that will really neat talent that will help us out. I'm looking forward to it. I'm excited."

Sifford gets long-awaited call

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her sixth decade of winning an elite amateur title.

That brings membership in the World Golf Hall of Fame to 104. No one from the LPGA Tour will be inducted unless Laura Davies wins two tournaments or a major this year.

Sifford was a true pioneer, along with Teddy Rhodes, Pete Brown, Lee Elder, Bill Spiller and other blacks who kept playing with hopes of getting a chance on the PGA Tour.

Tiger Woods paid tribute to them when he won the '97 Masters for his first major, and he spoke in October about the absence of blacks in golf's Hall of Fame.

"They never had a chance to play," Woods said. "Whether it's pioneers like Teddy Rhodes or Bill Spiller or Charlie, they fought all those years just to get on the tour. It's going to be very difficult for them to gain acceptance because of the fact they had no playing record on tour."

"One person who should get in, without a doubt, is Charlie."

Sifford was elected through the Lifetime Achievement category and said he was stunned when PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem called with the news.

"It's a wonderful honor, one I've been waiting on a long time," he said.

Sifford was among the stars on the United Golf Association Tour, where blacks could compete for small purses on public courses. He was able to play a couple of PGA Tour events that allowed blacks, although he paid a price.

In the 1952 Phoenix Open, Sifford and his all-black foursome found excrement in the cup on the first hole, and waited nearly an hour for the cup to be replaced.

Sifford won the 1957 Long Beach Open against a field that included Gene Littler, Jack Fleck and Tommy Bolt, although it wasn't an official PGA Tour victory because it

was only 54 holes.

As pressure increased on the PGA Tour, Sifford was granted a tour card in 1960, and the Caucasian-only clause was lifted a year later.

Still, Sifford's homecoming to North Carolina to play in the 1961 Greater Greensboro Open included a telephone death threat and racial slurs hurled at him as he walked the fairways. He tied for fourth.

In his book, "Just Let Me Play," Sifford wrote, "I hadn't won the tournament in Greensboro, but I felt a larger victory. I had come through my first Southern tournament with the worst kind of social pressure and discrimination around me, and I hadn't cracked. I hadn't quit."

Sifford won the 1967 Greater Hartford Open by closing with a 64 for a one-shot victory over Steve Oppermann. Two years later at Rancho Park, he birdied the first hole of a playoff to beat Harold Henning in the Los Angeles Open.

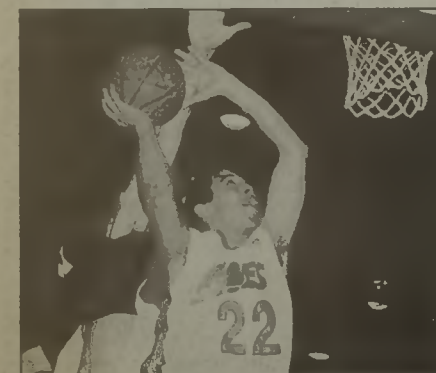


PHOTO:WADE NASH

ACE to the hole

Gabriel Giron of the Charlotte ACES goes up for a basket in the semifinals of the N.C. AAU under-17 basketball tournament last week in Belmont. The ACES lost to the Fayetteville Warriors 58-50, but advanced to the national tournament as one of the state's top four teams.

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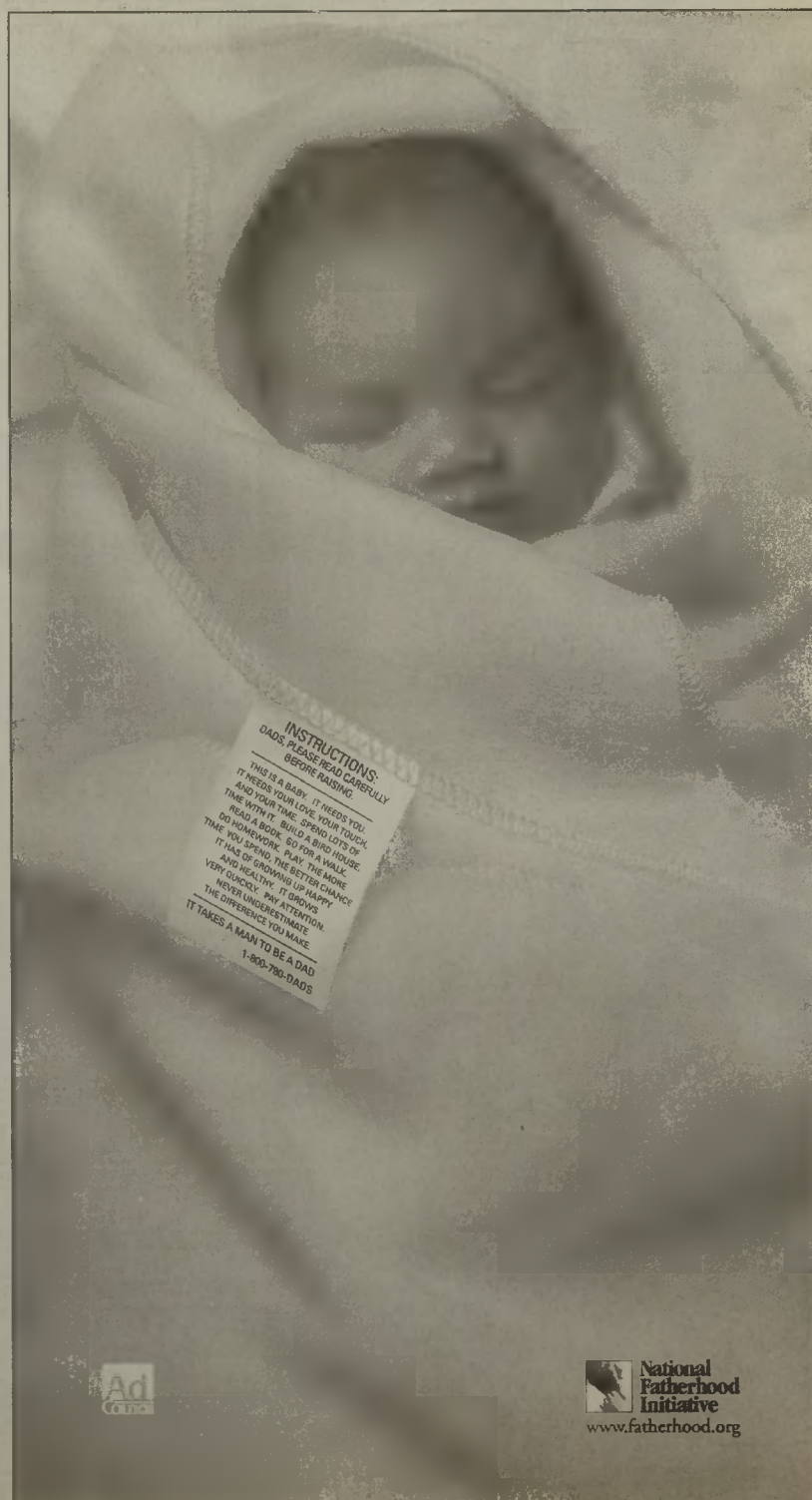
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