

C. JEMAL HORTON

# Bobcats have chance to win over hoops skeptics

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competitive spirit and class. And, well, maybe seeing the team exhibit the ability to pull off an upset or two in big home games.

That's not much to ask. After all, the neophyte Bobcats owned the Houston Rockets last season.

What basketball fans mostly want to know is that better days are on the horizon, that the team has the potential to be pretty good in the not-so-distant future.

And, of course, fans want to see a star or two.

Now, while the Bobcats don't have a bona fide star yet — perhaps Emeka Okafor's back will allow him to ascend to that status in a few years — they have something almost just as good: semi-local heroes.

Rookie power forward Sean May and first-year point guard Raymond Felton are former stars at North Carolina, which won the national championship this past April. And let's just say there are a whoooooooooole lot of Tar Heels fans around here. And during training camp, diehard UNC fans can triple their pleasure, with former Tar Heel Jason Capel, son of Bobcats assistant coach Jeff Capel, on the roster.

May will miss most of the preseason after minor knee surgery, but that certainly won't douse UNC fans' regular-season enthusiasm. And it doesn't hurt that the Bobcats have been promoting the you-know-what out of the fact that May and Felton are ex-Tar Heels.

And, hey, after a few more years in the draft lottery, some bona-fide stars might surface.

Lastly, the C-SET debacle is over.

It's horrible so many folks

lost their jobs with owner Bob Johnson's regional sports network, but making C-SET available only on Time Warner's digital cable channels kept far too many potential ticket-buyers from seeing the product before paying money at the arena.

C-SET aired 60 of the Bobcats' 82 games last season. If Johnson thought people would pay the extra money for the digital package, he was expensively mistaken. That had a direct impact on the Bobcats' horrific attendance, which ranked 28th out of 30 teams.

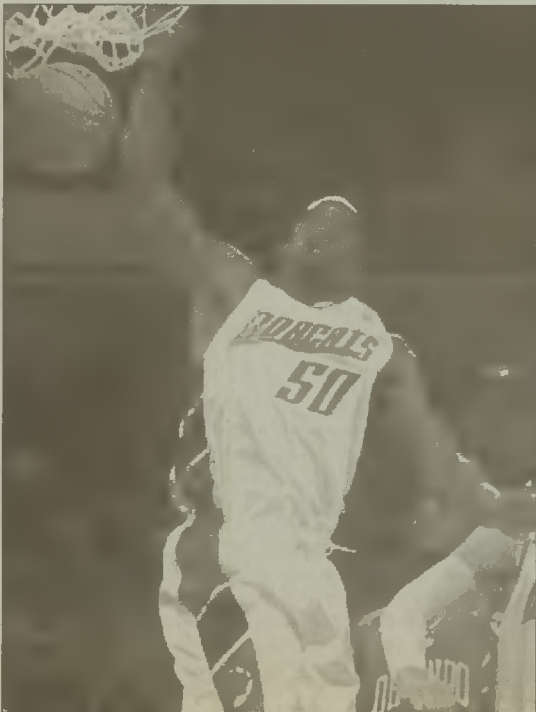
The Bobcats are working out a deal to show more

games on free TV. So expect attendance to improve this year.

But it all has to get rolling now, with training camp just days away. People will be watching on Oct. 12, when the Bobcats open the preseason in Birmingham, Ala., against the Atlanta Hawks. And many more will be watching on Nov. 5, in the first-ever regular-season game in that shiny new arena.

After that, pretty much everything else is up to the Bobcats.

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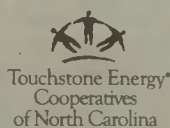
FILE PHOTO/WADE NASH

The Charlotte Bobcats don't have a bona fide star, but drafting 2004 rookie of the year Emeka Okafor (above) and former North Carolina stars Sean May and Raymond Felton in 2005 is a step in the right direction.



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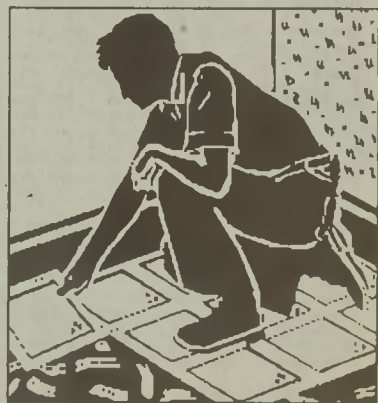


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