

C. JEMAL HORTON

Show some love for my Homies of the year picks

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Edging out South Mecklenburg basketball star and Duke recruit Joy Cheek for the Homie, Hayes, then just a sophomore, proved she is destined to be a star of national proportions.

Hayes set a state record in the shot put (51 feet, 1 inch), eventually winning the N.C. 4A championship, and also won the discus in the state meet. Her shot put was the second-best mark in the country last season.

• Men's Professional Coach of the Year: Bernie Bickerstaff, Charlotte Bobcats.

Don't talk to me about how bad a season the Bobcats had their first year. With an undermanned, inexperienced roster for the first-year franchise, Bickerstaff led the Bobcats to 18 victories - five better than Atlanta. Plus, the team swept Houston in the

season series and was in position to win many other games.

It was one of the better coaching jobs in the league last season.

• Women's Professional Coach of the Year: Muggsy Bogues, Charlotte Sting.

When Bogues took over for Trudi Lacey, the Sting was 3-21. In the final 10 games, Bogues led the team to a 3-7 mark.

Just imagine when he has a whole season.

• Men's College Coach of the Year: Bob McKillop, Davidson basketball.

Heading into Wednesday's game with Clark (Mass.), McKillop was set to become the winningest coach in Southern Conference history. At 243 wins, he was tied with Chattanooga's Mack McCarthy (1985-1997) and Maryland's Burt Shipley (1923-1947).

• Women's College Coach of the Year: Vanessa Taylor, JCSU basketball.

In 2005, Taylor led the Lady Bulls on a 13-game winning streak and a No. 21 national ranking. The future looks bright for both teams at Brayboy.

• Boys' High School Coach of the Year: Tommy Knotts, Independence football.

The man leaves for Duke, returns to an Independence team that isn't supposed to have a whole lot left, yet, wins another state championship. Genius.

• Girls' High School Coach of the Year: Rudolph Brown, Harding track and field.

Brown led Harding to its second consecutive state championship this year.

And with Kamorean Hayes a junior, you have to believe more titles are to come.

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Slump a non-issue, Okafor insists

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Okafor was the second leading scorer with 14 in 35 minutes.

"We're still going through some growing pains but will continue to work hard and get through it," he said.

Okafor's hard work began during the off season when he trained with former Houston Rockets center Hakeem Olajuwon to get better defensively. Okafor said it's going to take time for him to incorporate what he learned into his game. He said that he's working to block more shots. "My shooting percentage isn't as high as last year," Okafor said.

Not only is Okafor different from last year, so are the Bobcats. Gone is the team that

fought hard only to lose in the end. Even head coach Bernie Bickerstaff has called out players for their lack of intensity. But Okafor said the players need time to gel.

"I'm doing a couple of things differently than last year," he said. "When I get more comfortable, I'll be able to do more things."

Okafor said he has very high expectations for himself and he's not there yet. "Everybody wants results faster than the way they show up, but the key to this thing is just patience," he said. "That's what I had to learn and what I have to learn and that's going to get me where I want to be."

The Bobcats face the Los Angeles Clippers at Bobcats Arena Friday at 7:30 p.m.

MEAC preps for Raleigh tourney

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Ferguson said.

Then he spoke those words that fans of black college sports know so well: "Yes, it is a basketball tournament, but it's also about entertainment."

The MEAC will follow the successful six-year run of the CIAA tournament, which generated almost \$13 million in its last year. The tourney has a three-year con-

tract in Charlotte, but Thomas believes he has a better product.

"We have to build our tournament, but I feel we have a better product, more alumni, bigger institutions and our fans travel," he said. "I can feel the synergy in Raleigh and Wake County. We hope to have 55,000 people the first year and progressively build from there."

Events scheduled during

the MEAC tournament:

- Concerts with Mary Mary, Kirk Franklin, Patti Labelle, TI, Bobby Valentino
- Tom Joyner Sky Show
- Vibe Magazine Yardfest
- Black Enterprise seminars
- High School Day
- Showtime at the Apollo On Tour Show
- Mayor & CEO reception
- College step show

Ex-NCCU coach takes over Columbia

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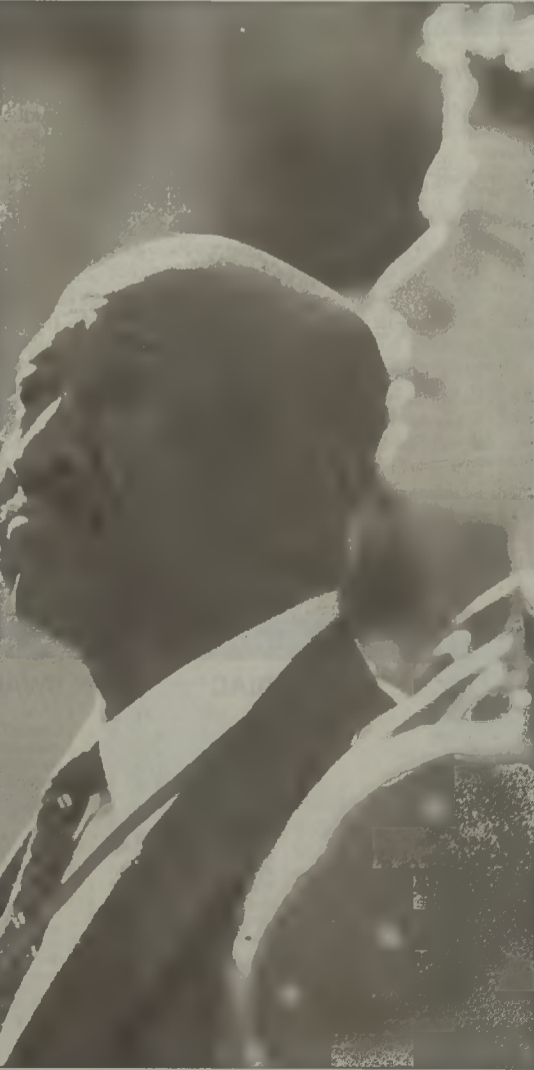
Norries Wilson, one of the top assistant coaches in the nation while at Connecticut, is Columbia's 18th head coach. He becomes the first black football coach in Ivy League history.

Wilson, who served as offensive coordinator at UConn for the past four seasons, was one of five finalists for the Frank Broyles Award as the nation's top assistant coach in 2004, a season in which the Huskies led the Big East in both total and scoring offense. In 2003, he guided UConn's offense that posted 477.5 yards per game, which ranked eighth in the nation.

Before UConn, Wilson spent four seasons at Bucknell. He was the Bisons' offensive line coach in 1995 and 1996 before a promotion to offensive coordinator in 1997 and 1998. He was also defensive coordinator at Livingstone (1993), offensive line/tight ends coach at N.C. Central (1991-92) and graduate assistant at his alma mater, Minnesota (1989-90).

Wilson was a captain and two-year starter for the Gophers. In 1985, Minnesota won the Independence Bowl and competed in the Liberty Bowl in 1996.

SHRINE BOWL FIRST



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Waddell High football coach Bennie McMurray (left) made history last week as the first African American head coach in North Carolina Shrine Bowl history. McMurray's team beat South Carolina in the game in Spartanburg, S.C.

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