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Section

SPORTS

CIAA is more than week of parties

Basketball is serious for teams looking for place in history

"Psst, psst, where's the party?" This is the normal rallying cry when the CIAA tournament comes to town. Instead of who's going to win, most fans — a term used lightly — just want to know where the parties are.

For us basketball purists, however, the only parties during the weeklong event in Charlotte are the dancing feet on the hard court.



BONITTA BEST

At parties you like to meet new friends and forge new relationships, but this year's basketball social may wind up with the same couple leaving together.

Shaw coach Jacques Curtis didn't fool anyone with his tales of woe at the preseason coaches luncheon in October. The Bears did have their toes stepped on on the dance floor after losing four games last semester, but are ready to swing to a fourth straight championship.

Critics will argue that the CIAA women are down this year — as of Wednesday only five of the 12 teams were above .500 — but no one was beating Shaw the previous three years when the league was up. So shaddup!

Shaw's dancing partner will be one its quite familiar with.

The main worry for Virginia Union fans is whether the team will look past the tournament to the Division II playoffs.

Union's toughest competition for Shaw's attention will be St. Augustine's. The Falcons, predicted to finish third, and who usually self-destruct by early February, have won at least a tie for the Western Division title with the top-scoring offense in the conference.

While the Bears await their date, Johnson C. Smith coach Vanessa Taylor gets the tiara as women's coach of the year. Yes, Smith lost to Shaw twice — who hasn't? — but they are the only blemishes on the Lady Golden Bulls' record. Smith still hasn't lost a division game.

Holding Taylor's hand is Robbins, our men's coach of the year. Robbins has the unfortunate disease called Dean Smithitis. The former UNC

Please see **HANDING/2C**

A's Bradley reports to training camp

The ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Outfielder Milton Bradley reported to the Oakland A's spring training camp three days early Sunday, which pleased his new manager and general manager.

Manager Ken Macha was glad to hear Bradley was on hand on the first day as pitchers and catchers worked out at the Papago Park facility.

"It will be helpful for the staff to get to know him," he said. "Once the full squad gets here, things get a little hectic."

Position players are due to report Wednesday with workouts scheduled for Thursday.

"He's happy to be here," general manager Billy Beane said about his new acquisition. "And he's quick to smile."

Beane acquired the switch-hitting Bradley and infielder Antonio Perez in December from the Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for outfield prospect Andre Ethier.

After the deal went down, Bradley invited Bay Area reporters to talk to

Please see **OAKLAND/2C**

CIAA TOURNAMENT



Title run hardly a passing fancy

PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Johnson C. Smith guard Judene Wright leads the Golden Bulls' fast break during Tuesday's 65-54 win over Bowie State in the quarterfinals of the CIAA women's tournament. JCSU plays Elizabeth City State Friday.

J.C. Smith women eye ultimate prize at home

By Cheri F. Hodges
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Taylor

The West Division crown is nice, but Johnson C. Smith women's basketball isn't resting on that. They want the crown resting on Shaw's head.

With the tournament in Charlotte for the first time, winning at home would be historic for the Golden Bulls (19-9), who've never won a women's championship. But they haven't let the pressure

of being at home get to them. They proved that by beating Bowie State in the quarterfinals to advance to Friday's semifinals against Elizabeth City State at 1 p.m.

"Since we're at home, we're working extremely hard to take advantage of that home court advantage with Brayboy (Gym) being just down the street," head coach Vanessa Taylor said.

Home has been good to the Bulls this season. Smith is 9-

2 at home and if Charlotte Bobcats Arena is home away from home, then a finals appearance is a possibility.

"The challenge is getting ready for the tournament because you have 12 teams fighting to win the tournament," Taylor said. "We're excited about being here. Of course there is a little bit of pressure because we are home."

JCSU center Rochelle See **GOLDEN/2C**



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Johnson C. Smith players and coaches displayed their CIAA West Division championship trophy at the league's basketball banquet Tuesday.

First-round bye affords JCSU extra time for recovery, scouting

By Herbert L. White
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A first-round bye in the CIAA tournament pays off in time.

There's an extra day to rest regular-season aches. More time to fine-tune schemes. It's one less day of wear and tear.

"It gives us an extra day of preparation, an extra

day of scouting," Johnson C. Smith coach Steve Joyner said. "Hopefully, it'll give us an advantage on the two teams we might face."

The Golden Bulls, who play Virginia State today at 9 p.m. at Charlotte Bobcats Arena, earned a bye as West Division champion. The drawback to an extra

day off is establishing flow against an opponent who has already played and won a game. Rust isn't a major concern, but continuity needs to be established quickly.

"You've got to establish a pattern, a rhythm you get only when by playing," Joyner said. "Hopefully,

See **BYE/4C**

He Cut Me: Panthers release Davis, Smart and Buckner

By Herbert L. White
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Age, injuries and income have caught up to three core contributors to the Carolina Panthers' most recent playoff teams.

Carolina cut running back Stephen Davis, defensive tackle Brentson Buckner, and spe-

cial teams player Rod Smart Wednesday.

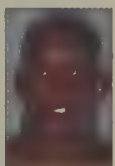
"Each of these men played an important role in the success we have enjoyed here," head coach John Fox said. "It is not easy saying good-bye to them. They were productive players and their contributions played a major role in our going to the Super Bowl in 2003 and

returning to the NFC Championship game last season."

Davis, 32, finished as the second leading rusher in team history with 2,085 yards and set a team record for career rushing touchdowns with 20. He played in 29 games, starting 27, but has been slowed by a knee injury the last two sea-

sons. His best season was in 2003 with a franchise record 1,444 yards rushing.

"Stephen set a physical tone for us in 2003 that played an important part in our run to the Super Bowl," Fox said. "We were fortunate to have him. He is unselfish and a great person as well as team-



Davis

See **DAVIS/2C**

Who's hot, not on court

By Bonitta Best
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Yippy ki-yea, the wait is over! The CIAA tournament is underway.

Sniff, sniff, what's that smell? Upsets a-brewing, blood pressures a-boiling and unemployment a-looming.

In keeping with our traditional tourney celebration, we are going to grade the entire lot. Yep, all 24 teams. Some of you won't like it, but then if you liked CC, we wouldn't be doing our jobs now would we? So let's get to it.

WOMEN

Shaw (23-4, 16-0). Let's break it down for ya: It's the Lady Bears, and then there's everybody else. Shaw has won 20 straight regular-season games and 73 consecutive CIAA contests. The only way Shaw will not win its fourth straight title is if opponents do three things: shut down senior fireball Nastassia Boucicault (15.7 points, 5.2 assists), slow down the Lady Bears' fast-paced offense and hit 60 percent of their shots. That'll about do it.

- Johnson C. Smith (17-8, 12-2). The Lady Golden Bulls had one of their most successful seasons ever under coach Vanessa Taylor. Smith was in the championship final two years ago but was no match for Shaw.

- N.C. Central (20-5, 11-4). The Lady Eagles gave Shaw one of its better games of the season, and matches up well with the Lady Bears. Junior forward Cassie King has a strong supporting cast, but the entire team will have to perform on another level to dethrone the champs.

- Elizabeth City State. A nasty little rivalry has developed after Shaw accused the Lady Vikings of "disrespecting" them a few weeks ago. Sophomore center Celeste Trahan is worth the price of admission alone, but she can't defeat Shaw alone.

MEN

Virginia Union. The No. 1 ranked Panthers have lived up to their billing. The defending national champions are the top defensive team in the league, with the best player in the conference (Darius Hargrove) — according to the SIDs — and the best coach (Dave Robbins). And that will be enough.

- St. Aug's. Can a team shoot its way to a championship? The

Please see **WHO'S/3C**