

Spring overhaul underway at J.C. Smith

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Today, he's 187 pounds and has improved his mechanics. Richardson has to. He's being pushed by Donja Goodson, a three-year starter who missed last season for academic reasons.

"These people are coming out here to help us out," Richardson said. "I know I can be replaced, so it makes everybody out here work harder. In the long run, it's going to help the team out."

That's what coach Daryl McNeill is aiming for in his second season. Last spring, the Bulls didn't have enough

players to go two deep on either side of the ball. This year, there are more than 50 players taking part in drills, which end tonight with an intrasquad scrimmage at 7 p.m. at Belk Complex.

"It's a testament to the program and the university that we were able to do some things this year," McNeill said. "Last year, we had a total of 16 or 17 kids who had less than a 2.0 (grade average) that couldn't practice at all, which took our numbers down to the 30s for spring ball. This year, we have two." Smith will need all of them.

The Bulls were near the bottom of the CIAA in nearly every meaningful statistical category, especially on offense, where they were last in yardage and points scored. Defensively, Smith has to replace its best players, linebacker Chris Nelson and safety George Pope. Jerrell Goodwin, a linebacker who decided to use his final year of eligibility after graduation, helps.

"The first thing we want to do is...find the people to replace them as the quarterbacks of the defense," McNeill said. The main thing we want

to do is find the people who want to play defensively, still keep that same type of mentality that they had last year."

The offense is due for an upgrade as well. The line returns intact, and McNeill believes Travis Lee (Shelby Crest High), a transfer receiver from South Carolina can give relieve Marquis Belton (North Mecklenburg) of constant double-teaming. Kevin Allen, a transfer from now-Division I-AA Winston-Salem State, is expected to bolster the running game. Offensively, we just want to

find some more playmakers that will help Marquis as far as getting the ball into the end zone," McNeill said. "That's the kind of kid who's going to help us stretch the zone a little bit, get the ball in his hands. We want to be a little more productive on offense, keep the defense off the field a little bit more."

Said Richardson: "I think the No. 1 priority for me is to get the offense to clicking where it needs to be to win games. Everybody's got that main focus on getting better and getting points on the board so we have the chance

to win."

With spring drills ending with an intrasquad scrimmage today at Belk Complex at 7 p.m., McNeill is optimistic Smith's fortunes will turn around. With a school record 23 straight losses, everyone is ready to move forward.

"They believe right now, but I'm trying to get them to that next level of knowing, which is different," McNeill said. "We believe we're going to win games, but we want to know that we're going to win games. I think that's going to come in August."

Ely valuable in two roles

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ers it's rebounding, blocking shots and maybe an assist here and there.

"Being able to get (into) the tempo of the game" is an asset Ely said. "Come in and not mess up, don't do anything to hurt the team."

Statistically, Ely is a major help to the Bobcats. He has seen starter minutes this season although he was hired as a back-up for starting front court players however, Ely started 18 of 50 Bobcats games this year. He averages 10 points and 19 minutes a game.

"It's a slow process" coming off the bench, Ely said. "Get in and knock down shots." In coach Bernie Bickerstaff's system, most of Ely's minutes come in the second half against the opposing team's starting power forward or center. "When you got someone like (New York's Eddie) Curry leaning on you, (it) tends to warm you up pretty quickly."

Ely does. Against New York Knickerbockers on Saturday, Ely scored all 11 points in the 14 minutes of play in the second half. Grimming from ear to



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

ear, Ely wasn't pleased about how many points he scored. "Coach told me to go out there and rebound in the second half," Ely said. "I was particularly proud of those (four) assists I had," one short of his career high.

Start him up: Nuggets star has stake in Indy racing team

By Herbert L. White
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Add major-league race team owner to Carmelo Anthony's resume.

The Denver Nuggets forward has signed on as a partner with Indianapolis-based Hemelgarn Racing, which campaigns in the Indy Racing League.

Anthony's involvement includes sponsorship through Nike's Melo brand of athletic wear. He is joining forces with musician Gene Simmons of KISS fame as a sponsor of IndyCar rookie P.J. Chesson's Honda.

The IRL season starts March 26 at Homestead, Fla. The team is also entering the Indianapolis 500.

"Every kid has a dream of owning and driving a race car," Anthony said, "I have always had a love for cars, especially fast cars, and this is a dream come true."

Anthony's involvement gives the IndyCar series its first black owner. Comedian Cedric the Entertainer is part-owner of a team in the rival Champ Car World Series.

Hemelgarn Racing won the 1996 Indianapolis 500, the world's largest single-day sporting event, and 2000 IndyCar cham-

ampionship with Buddy Lazier. Last year, the team struggled with drivers Paul Dana, who was injured in practice at Indianapolis and his replacement, Jimmy Kite.

Will Anthony take a spin in the car that pushes his corporate image at speeds topping 225 miles an hour?

"I'll stick to driving the basketball lane and let P.J. handle the fast lane," he said.

NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series regular Bill Lester will be the first African American to qualify for a Nextel Cup race in 20 years this week in Atlanta.

Lester will drive the No. 23 Bill Davis Racing entry sponsored by Waste Management at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

"To say I am proud and honored to have this company behind me is an understatement," he said. "Their commitment to diversity alone is laudable, but the fact that they really believe in me and support me so thoroughly is really meaningful."

Lester is coming off his best season in the Truck Series, where he won two poles and surpassed the \$1 million mark in career earnings.

The last black driver to race in NASCAR's top division was Willy T. Ribbs in 1986. Ribbs was also the first black to race in the Indianapolis 500, in 1991.



Anthony



Lester



Chesson

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