

Top draft pick fits mold for Bobcats

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"The fans have been coming out, it's kind of hard not to support the way these young men play basketball," Bickerstaff said. "I think (Morrison) is a positive addition to what we do and what

we're trying to do in building this franchise and we're making progress."

Morrison was the NCAA's leading scorer last season, averaging 28.1 points per game. Morrison shared NABC and USEWA National

Player of the Year honors with Duke's J.J. Redick and was named Chevrolet Player of the Year as selected by CBS Sports as a junior. He finished second to Redick in voting for the Wooden Award and was a top four finalist for

the Naismith Award.

"The thing I see most is his desire to win; you can't teach that," Michael Jordan said to the Associated Press about Morrison.

Morrison said he knows many of the Bobcats players

"and one of the things I like about the core guys here is that they were all winners in college."

But college success that players like Emeka Okafor, Sean May and Raymond Felton had before coming to

Charlotte hasn't translated into professional success. May and Okafor battled injuries most of last season and though Felton shined, the Bobcat's record didn't reflect it at 26-56.



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Charlotte point guard Helen Darling has struggled with injuries and inconsistency during the Sting's 3-13 start. Darling averages 5.2 points, 1.9 assists and 3.18 turnovers per game. Her backup, rookie LaToya Bond, averages 7.3 points, 2.3 assists and 3.25 turnovers.

Sting struggles at midseason

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at the season's halfway mark, an admission that very little has gone right.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT Bogues wants to run, but this group isn't suited for that style. Three of the top four scorers are in the frontcourt: Tangela Smith (12 points per game), Tammy Sutton-Brown (11.1) and Sheri Sam (10.1), which indicates Charlotte has too many plodders and not enough sprinters.

BOARD TO DEATH: Of course, to run, you've got to rebound, and the Sting doesn't do that well enough to trigger the fast break. Charlotte averages 30.8 boards a game, compared to opponents' 37.4. There's no dominant inside presence on either end of the floor, and opponents are taking advantage.

THE ROOKIES: The draft class has been solid if not spectacular. Top pick Monique Currie is that rarity in Sting history, a No. 1 with a real future in Charlotte. The guard is third in scoring at 10.9 points per game and fourth in rebounding with an average of 4.38. Currie is a scorer because she's not afraid to go to the basket, something more of the Sting could benefit from. A 32.4 percent shooter, Currie needs to improve her accuracy, especially from the perimeter.

Point guard LaToya Bond has struggled with decision-making, averaging more turnovers (3.25 per game) than assists (2.3).

SOMETHING LEFT IN THE TANK: Center/forward Tangela Smith has been Charlotte's most consistent player. She leads the Sting in scoring (12 per game) and rebounds (5.5), and has proven to be a good acquisition. In the absence of improving the running game, the Sting would be better served by getting the ball inside to her more.

SLOW RETURN: When Allison Feaster went on maternity leave last season, she was the Sting's best asset. That's not the case now. Reduced to cameo roles, Feaster averages 1.1 points per game and she's a step slower. This recovery is going to take some time.

MISSING THE POINT: Charlotte might have given Dawn Staley a going away gift by trading her to Houston last year, but the Sting still hasn't begun to fill her sneakers. Helen Darling has struggled with injuries and has yet to master floor management (3.17 turnovers a game compared to 1.9 assists). Bond is raw, but has potential. You'd think Bogues, a brilliant floor general during his NBA playing days, would be able to coach these two up a notch.

PROGNOSIS: The Sting hasn't played a complete game yet this year. The defense is lacking and the uptempo offense Bogues has preached is nowhere to be found. Is it the coaching or the players?

Both, which means it's the coaching.

U.S. soccer needs more flash

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ter with a style of its own, especially if it resembles the improvisational approach adopted by most teams in the New World. Besides, as any Wall Street denizen will tell you, risk-taking is and always has been the American way.

To pull it off, the team would need more African-Americans and Latinos, including immigrants. There aren't enough players from either minority group on the current team. A Latin American coach would be a good idea, too.

The 2006 squad recalls memories of the NBA in its formative decades, when players on all-White teams ambled up the court and passed the ball around until someone took a set shot or eventually got open for a layup. The arrival of Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain,

Elgin Baylor, Oscar Robertson and other Black players transformed pro basketball into a faster, more creative game literally played at a higher level.

Other soccer-playing nations have figured out the value of Black players. Pelé, the Afro-Brazilian, is regarded as the best player ever, and Ronaldo and Ronaldinho, his most talented successors on Brazil's 2006 team, obviously have some African ancestry. So too do two top players for France, which plays with more finesse than most European teams.

Even Sweden and Japan, neither known for social diversity, get it. The Swedes started a Black player of Cape Verdean ancestry, and the Japanese squad featured a Brazilian who appears to have some African blood in his racial mix. Ecuador's

starting 11 even looked more pepper than ginger, modern evidence of slavery in Spain's former colony.

More African-Americans and Latinos on the U.S. squad could create the athletic equivalent of the cultural blend heard in the musical beats of salsa, meringue, reggae and Afro-Cuban jazz.

That's not to say white players need not apply. Anyone can play jazz, and anyone could race up and down the field in tune with an Afro-Latin rhythm that flows and riffs its way into the goal. That style of play could take the world's only superpower to the next level in the World Cup and, to boot, make the team much more interesting to watch.

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Jamott Duncan.

Holsey wins Upstate Birdies title

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tim Holsey won the Upstate Birdies tournament July 1 at Bonnie Brae Golf Club in Greenville, S.C.

Holsey fired a round of 72, one shot ahead of Mike Wallace and four ahead of Reginald Epps.

Gregg Renfro won the Elite Golf Association tournament June 24-25 in Greenville, S.C.

Renfro's two-round total of 147 was three shots better than Terrain Gill and six ahead of

The first round was played at Carolina Spring Golf Club, the second at Verdae Greens Golf Course.

The Par-Busters Golf Group will host its annual open tournament Aug. 19-20 at Crystal Creek Golf Club in Pineville.

It'll be the 34th tournament sponsored by the club, with Chris Hamilton the 2005 champion. Donald Littlejohn has the most wins in tournament history with nine

Hornets sign Salisbury's Jackson

By Murray Evans

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OKLAHOMA CITY — The New Orleans Hornets agreed to terms Sunday with free-agent guard Bobby Jackson, adding another veteran presence to an improving team.

Jackson's agent, Andy Miller, said Jackson had agreed to a multiyear deal with the Hornets but wouldn't disclose the terms.

NBA teams were allowed to begin negotiating with free agents on Saturday but cannot officially sign players until July 12. Hornets general manager Jeff Bower said the team planned to sign Jackson after the moratorium ends but declined further comment, citing league rules.

Jackson, a Salisbury native, averaged 11.4 points and 2.7 assists per game and shot 39 percent from 3-point range last season, coming mainly off the bench for the Memphis Grizzlies.

Word of his plans to sign with New Orleans came a day after the Hornets confirmed they had reached agreement with three-time All-Star Peja Stojakovic. Stojakovic's agent, David Bauman, said that five-year deal would be worth \$64 million.

Jackson and Stojakovic, who were teammates with the Sacramento Kings for five seasons, will join a Hornets team that had a 20-win improvement this past season and stayed in the Western Conference playoff race until the season's final week, finishing 38-44.

"We want Bobby to be in a position to play in a wide-open style and in a very specific role," Miller said. "With the personnel that Jeff has put in place ... and what they did last year, we felt this was the right time and the right place to put ourselves in a situation where we could have a major impact."

The 6-foot-1 Jackson, who won the NBA's Sixth Man Award in 2003, became a free agent after one season with Memphis. He made \$3,375 million last season, the last in a six-year deal he signed with the Kings in 2000. Sacramento traded Jackson to Memphis last August.

Jackson played 71 games for the Grizzlies last year, but missed big portions of his final three seasons with Sacramento because of injuries. He sat out 51 games in 2004-05 because of a torn ligament in his wrist. Jackson has a 10.2-point

career scoring average in nine seasons with the Denver Nuggets, Minnesota Timberwolves, Sacramento and Memphis.

Hornets coach Byron Scott said last month that the team's top offseason priorities were to add a shot-blocker and rebounder and a shooter or two to open the game up for leading scorers David West (17.1) and Rookie of the Year Chris Paul (16.1).

The Hornets used their two first-round draft picks on big men, Hilton Armstrong of Connecticut and Cedric Simmons of North Carolina State.

Jackson plays the same position as free-agent guard Speedy Claxton, a seven-year veteran who both backed up and teamed with Paul last season in the Hornets' backcourt, averaging 12.3 points and 4.8 assists per game. Team officials had said resigning Claxton would be a major offseason priority.

Miller, who also represents Rasual Butler - another of the Hornets' free agents - said it's unlikely the 6-foot-7 forward will re-sign with the team. Butler led Hornets regulars in 3-pointers (92) and 3-point shooting percentage (38.0) last season.

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