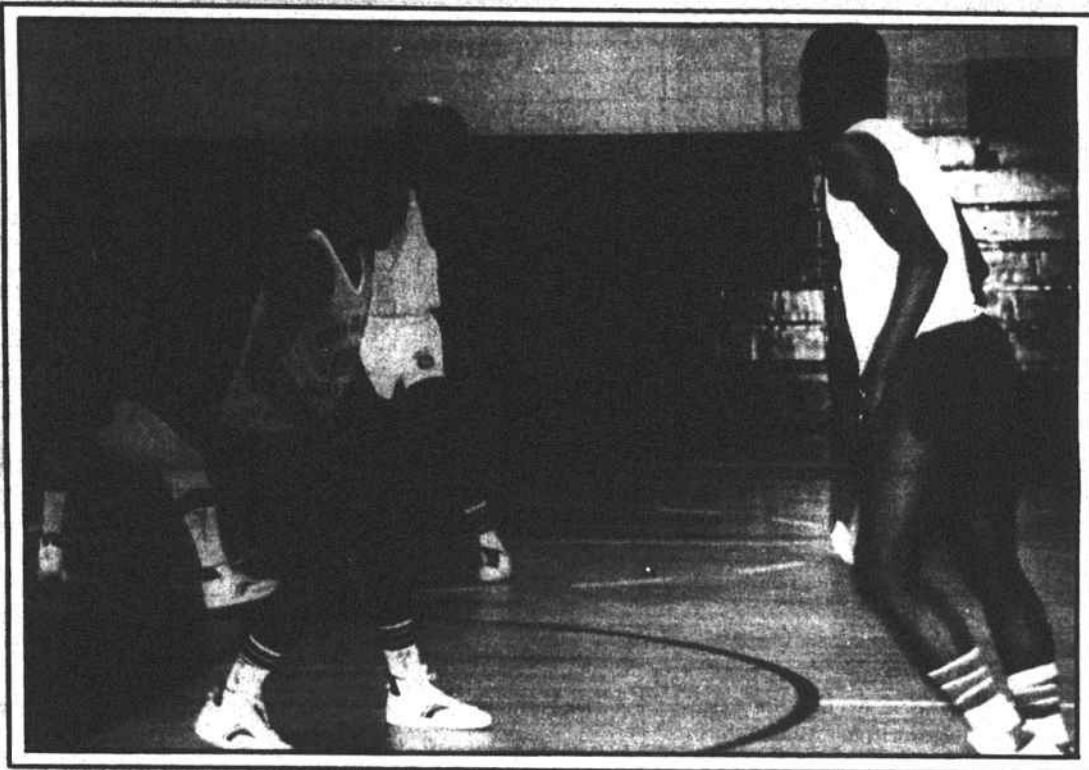


Exercise in skill

The Hoke Bucks get in a few warm-up exercises during practice last week. According to Killingsworth, warm-up exercises such as this "get the blood pumping and the boys ready for a good workout."

Cinderella

The Hoke High Bucks' dreams for a state championship were dashed Friday night in Wilson



All eyes on the ball

In a simulation drill, the Bucks show off their skill at keeping a close eye on who has the ball and where it is going next. Although practice drills like this one

did not help the Bucks through Friday night's loss to Wilson-Fike, Killingsworth believes the practices are "very helpful to any team."

By Sherry Matthews

Trying to stay afloat in the basketball world with a new coach, a new system and a 15-11 record is no easy task but for the Hoke High Bucks Varsity basketball team, the three have "turned out to be the perfect combination."

Despite earlier problems, the varsity squad pushed an 11-11 regular season record to 15-11, taking the 4-A conference championship and before losing in the second round winning of the state playoffs.

Some have said the winning streak is "just luck," but both coaches and players no "that just isn't so."

"You don't get this far on just luck," Head Coach Greg Killingsworth said.

"We have had to beat the top teams in our conference to get where we are. We should have already earned respect," he added.

"We have not just been lucky. We have worked really hard for this," Killingsworth said.

The hard work and two hour-a-day practices propelled the Bucks into the state semi-finals in Wilson where they bowed out in first round action to a "quicker" Wilson-Fike team.

"We had the material to go all the way," Assistant Coach George Drawhorne said.

Although the Bucks fell to Wilson-Fike 67-54, Killingsworth said he was very proud of his squad.

"We played a great ballgame," Killingsworth said.

"We don't have a thing to be ashamed of. We want a lot further than most people thought we would," he added.

"The guys could have hung their heads and given up a long time ago but they didn't. Instead they did a

heck of a job for Hoke High and they didn't quit," Killingsworth said.

"We met our goals and were only two games short of having everything," he added.

"I think that is something to be proud of," Killingsworth said.

Despite "a great deal of optimism and sheer determination" that has been rooted in the coaches and their players since the beginning of the season, most admit that it was not an easy road to Wilson.

"We all had a lot to get used to," Killingsworth said.

"There was a big transition to get through," he added.

"The boys did not know what to expect from me...we had to learn each other," Killingsworth said.

"I think we shaped up at just the right time," Drawhorne said.

"We are playing good when it really counts," he added.

"While everyone else was worried about the regular season, we were already planning for the tournament," Drawhorne added.

"Our goal from the beginning was to win the conference and to get into the state playoffs. We did that," Killingsworth said.

"I couldn't be prouder of this team," he added.

"They are working together...we all are," Killingsworth said.

A team spirit is now evident among the Buck team. They now play for each other and towards a "common goal."

"We are like one big family," Buck player Harry Southerland said.

"That feeling has helped us get through the good and bad times," he added.

Although Southerland "does not score many points," Kill-

ingsworth readily admits "he is the inspiration for the team."

"He plays with his heart and fills the whole team with inspiration," Killingsworth said.

"I try to keep everyone pepped up," Southerland said.

"If you get down, you don't play as good," he added.

"We have been called the underdogs from the beginning of this tournament," he added.

"They can say that but look at what N.C. State proved last year," Southerland said.

"I think we can win it. I want lose hope," he added.

Buck lead scorer and team captain Tony McRae also believes he and his teammates can come home "winners."

"Even if we don't win it all, we have something to be proud of," McRae said.

"As long as we play together, I think we can beat anyone," he added.

McRae, who averages 16 points a game and 12 rebounds, is optimistic about his team.

"We had a tough time at first. Now we have got it all together," McRae said.

"We are going to show everyone just where Hoke County is before the tournament is over," he added.

"We want to win this real bad," Hoke point guard James Graham said.

Graham, who has averaged 12 points in tournament play, believes the key to the Buck's success has been their "total team effort."

"We are working hard as a team now. That is important," Graham said.

In addition to a "total team effort," Killingsworth credits a "terrific coaching staff" for the Buck's winning streak.

"George Drawhorne, Dan

McGougan and myself work together," Killingsworth said.

"The two of them have been one of the biggest and most positive factors in the tournament," he added.

"We are co-coaches...we compliment each other well. It seems to be a good combination," Killingsworth said.

The 14 team members hold a "deep respect" for their coaches and seem "determined" to make them proud.

"We know that every game could be our last. We are not ready to hang up our uniforms this year," Senior player Barriet Easterling said during a practice game last week.

"These boys are showing a lot of strength and sheer guts," Killingsworth said.

"They want to win this tournament very much," he added.

"There is a lot of desire among the team," Graham said.

"We have become a family...together we can win this," Drawhorne said.

"The boys are tired of losing. They want to get the respect they have already earned," Killingsworth said.

"If for some reason we don't win...well, we tried," he added.

Even if the Bucks end their season shy of a state championship, Killingsworth believes "it has been a good year."

"Our record may not be the most impressive but if you look at us overall you can see the improvement," Killingsworth said.

"It may not be the best record but I will put our 15-11 record and where we are against anyone else," he added.

"We didn't get this far by accident. We deserve to be here," Killingsworth said.



Headed for two

Hoke basketball senior Barriet Easterling demonstrates a two-handed dunk during a recent practice session.