

SPORTS

Women's basketball set to begin season

Betsy Blose to start rookie season as head coach for UNCA Basketball

Jason McGill
Sports Reporter

The UNCA women's basketball team prepares for the upcoming Big South Conference (BSC) season. In a BSC poll, The Bulldogs finish last but could surprise people, according to newly hired Head Coach Betsy Blose.

"We're the underdog, and nobody expects much out of us this year. But you watch. We're going to sneak up on people. We're going to do it as a team. We're going to play hard," said Blose. "We're all in this together."

This season will mark Blose's first year as the women's basketball head coach.

Blose coached the previous seven years at Division II Shepherd College. She takes over a UNCA team that went 1-27 last season.

"I'm very aware of the program and what it's been through. I took over a similar situation at Shepherd College. We're not really talking about winning and losing right now. We're focusing on becoming better as a team and as individuals in practice," said Blose.

"We're in this transition stage right now. It's not going to happen overnight just because I've walked in here. It took me three years to have a winning record at Shepherd. The fourth year, we won the school's first championship ever," said Blose.

Blose's personal philosophy emphasizes team chemistry. "In preparation for the BSC season, she tries to have players learn to get along on and off the court, as well as focus on improvement during practice."

"We're talking about the controllables and the uncontrollables, controlling our work ethic and our attitude and

channeling our frustration. Sometimes, you can't control the fact that you're not as fast as your opponent or an official's call. You have to take a step away from that and focus on the things that you can control. That's what I've been trying to get this group to buy into," said Blose. "I'm really big on team and young women committing themselves to something greater than themselves."

A trio of captains will lead the Bulldogs: junior Tonisha Jackson, senior Gillian Murray and sophomore Lindsey Roche. The "Dogs" will play without All-Conference forward Jessica Guarnieri and Ashley Sharpton, who transferred.

The "Dogs" roster will be thin at times, and each of the 10 players will need to contribute to the team, according to Blose. Newcomer Cristy Strickland will be ineligible this semester after transferring from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Guard Kristal Hood is the only freshman on the team, but should make an immediate impact.

"It's a 27-game schedule. Everybody is going to play. They're all going to start at some time or another. Everyone's going to see minutes. We need people to start to buy

into those roles," said Blose. "We're asking a freshman [Hood] to step in and start at the point and lead a team that's not real meshed yet. That's a big thing on her shoulders."

With Hood getting minutes, helping the team at the point guard position, Blose said she expects bright spots and growing pains.

"She has the ability to score a lot of different ways. You'll see her hitting some big shots, but she'll make a lot of mistakes too. We're just going to have to go through those mistakes with her, teach her and

coach her," said Blose.

Blose believes the "Dogs" must build off of strong defensive efforts in order to progress as a team.

"She's had a lot of her players practicing every day of the week with one day off. "Our bread and butter is going to be our defense. We've got to defend people. We want to hold people under 60 points a game. That's where we're going to begin. We're just going to hope to get better every game offensively," said Blose.

"It's very demanding. We want our players to demand excellence from each other and from themselves." Tonisha Jackson (TJ) is coming

into the season after missing the last two due to knee injuries. Jackson has the ability to average a double double (double-digit figures in points and rebounds) if she continues to work on her conditioning, according to Blose.

"She [TJ] can do a lot of things for us. We want to keep her healthy and take it day to day," said Blose. "Some days, she probably won't be able to practice, and we've given her the freedom to trust that she's hurt and she needs to sit out. We need her. She has a presence about her. I think the key to our success is that she stays healthy."

Blose tentatively has Hood, Roche, Murray, Jackson and junior Shantell Waiters starting. However, Blose stresses the importance of team play.

"It's not about one or two people. We need everybody to step up every night, whether it's for two minutes at a time or 20 minutes at a time. We need everybody to step up and play a role and contribute," said Blose. "I don't care who gets the credit. I want to have four or five people in double figures. I want to have balance. We're trying to catch Liberty University. When you start to worry about making people around you better, then that's when you excel. I think it took over a 27-1 team, I'd be doing the same thing."

Before the season, the team has been involved in basketball clinics for girls, the Pop Club and working with the United Way.

A retreat at Camp Pisgah helped to improve building team chemistry.

"We're establishing the foundation of success and excellence. We want to raise the bar. We want our players to take pride in their academics," said Blose. "We're also trying to create a positive environment. It's a whole new ballgame. We're not talking about the past. We're moving forward."

"We are the underdog, and nobody expects much out of us this year, but you watch... We are going to sneak up on people."

Betsy Blose
head women's basketball coach



COURTESY OF MIKE GORE

Sophomore Lindsey Roche passes the ball to a teammate in a game last season. The Bulldog women's basketball team expects to do well this season, despite a low-rank in the BSC preseason poll.

Men's basketball picks up exhibition win

The Target Fitness Challenge returns to UNCA

The Target Fitness Challenge is a fun way to test your fitness levels against the levels of your peers, and it is also lots of fun!

Thursday, Nov. 21 8-10 p.m.
UNCA HFC
● Flexibility: V-sit reach
● Endurance: Biathlon 500-yard swim, 1.5 mile run

Thursday, Dec. 3 8-10 p.m.
UNCA HFC
● Strength: Bench press, Squat competition, Sit-ups, Pull-ups
● Speed/Agility: Obstacle Course

Contact Erin Lesley at 250-3839 or erinlesley@hotmail.com or John Bucher at 252-5637 or HFC 202 for more information.

All participants will receive prizes. Winners from UNCA could win a free trip to Florida and will also receive additional prizes.



COURTESY OF MIKE GORE

Senior Ben McGonigall looks for a shot in a game last season against Big South Conference foe Coastal Carolina University. McGonigall led the Bulldogs in their exhibition win against Mars Hill College Nov. 13.

Julie Stephenson
Sports Reporter
Joanne Stephenson
Sports Reporter

The UNCA men's basketball team claimed their first victory of the season in an exhibition game against the Mars Hill Lions. Nov. 13. Senior center Ben McGonigall led the Bulldogs, scoring 16 points and shooting a perfect six-for-six from the free-throw line.

"I'm looking forward to playing this season, but I'm not looking forward to being over," McGonigall said about his senior season.

The game ended 76-57 in favor of the Bulldogs, who relied on good shooting to seal the win. UNCA shot 57 percent from the field, and made 27 out of 47 attempted shots. The UNCA Bulldogs have seven freshmen this year, an unusual number for many college teams, according to Nick McDevitt, UNCA assistant men's basketball coach.

"Our freshmen are doing well," McDevitt said. "Having four seniors really helps us to be able to bring those guys along. We're relying on having a lot of leadership from our seniors."

The Bulldogs managed to stay ahead of the Lions for the entire game. The halftime score was 38-26 after UNCA went on a 14-3 run to build a good lead to go into the second half.

"We played good," said Omar Collington, a freshman guard from Decatur, Ga. "We didn't play our best, but we played good enough to win. Team chemistry is pretty good, but it has to get better."

The Lions did not give up, and stayed on the Bulldogs' tail until midway through the second half.

"Mars Hill (players) were a better team this year," McGonigall said. "They're running their stuff this year and they're a lot more organized."

"They (Mars Hill) were a little bit more athletic than we expected," McDevitt said. "We did a good job pressuring them, but they came out with a lot of pressure on our guards, especially Andre Smith. It looked like they had a plan to run two or three different guys at him (Smith). Throughout the whole night, they just tried to wear him down and play him real tight and real tough, but I thought we handled it real well."

Mars Hill came within eight points of the Bulldogs with 8:40 left in the game. UNCA responded with an eight-point run that Mars Hill could not counter. "Overall, our effort was a lot better than it was in our first game against Lenoir-Rhyne," McDevitt said. "We worked a lot in between those two games on better ball pressure and our defense. We did a lot better job in the Mars Hill game."

The team seemed excited about the win, but they said they need to work harder to succeed in the Big South Conference.

"I'm glad we won, and we shot the ball well again. That's encouraging," said Eddie Biedenbach, UNCA men's head basketball coach. "We're still a long way from being a good basketball team. We need to play better in all phases of the game. But it's a win, and we'll take it."

"In order for us to be good and to finish first (in the Big South Conference), like we were chosen to be, we're going to have to do a lot more work," said Collington. "We have to play better defense. If we play defense, we'll be a good team this year."

Freshman guard Oliver Holmes is doing a great job for the Bulldogs, according to McDevitt.

"He's playing really well in practice and he's picked up really quickly on our plays," said McDevitt.

KaVoris Bivens, a freshman guard/forward from Norcross, Ga. is also playing well, according to McDevitt. "Bivens is a real physical and aggressive guy," McDevitt said. "He's strong. He's powerful, and he's shooting the ball a lot better."

Collington and Chad Mohr, a freshman guard from Fayetteville, N.C., will add depth to the team this year, according to McDevitt.

"The game was a good learning experience for the guys who have never played before," McGonigall said. "It's good to get experience in those kind of games because it's going to get a lot tougher down the road. We have a lot of potential—we just have to realize it."

Upcoming Games:

Friday, November 22
@ Michigan State

Sunday, November 24
@ Minnesota

Friday, November 29
Montreat College

Monday, December 2
Western Carolina