

THE LADY VIKINGS



PAST ...

AND PRESENT

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In 1974 when women's participation in intercollegiate sports became mandatory in all schools in the CIAA, Coach Alvin T. Kelly, assistant coach of the men's varsity team, took it upon himself to recruit young ladies enrolled at Elizabeth-City State University so that together they could formulate a team.

Signs were put up all over campus in an effort to attract the attention of anyone interested in playing women's intercollegiate basketball. Fourteen interested, but unskilled women endured all the running and playmaking, and so the history of the Lady Vikings began.

The first team consisted of nine freshmen and five sophomores, and all but three were native North Carolinians. They were Ora Baker, Evelyn Boston, Marilyn Boone, Janet Boone, Sheryl Brite, Mannie Norman, Linda Bennett, Delthia Patterson, Priscilla Bond, Barbara Jordan, Cornelia Robinson, Vanessa Spruill, Ruth Mathews, and Helen

Eason, the first Lady Viking to score over twenty points in a game.

The first women's game was played in Williams Hall Gym on December 14, 1974 against St. Paul's College. This game was the first win of the Lady Vikings, defeating St. Paul's by a score of 43-33. It was also the only game to be played in 1974.

The new year rolled around, and the new team got a new coach. Ola Goss came to E.C.S.U. in the spring of 1975 to assist Coach Kelly with the progress of the team.

Kelly recalled that adjusting to a women's team was confusing. "Women aren't as tough as men...but I got in the groove." Kelly used the experiences he had with the men's team on a trial and error basis for handling the women's team, and with the assistance of Ms. Goss, the team went to the first CIAA tournament with a three-win four-loss record. The ladies lost to Virginia State College in single elimination by a score of 70-48.

"Virginia State has always been a thorn in our side" said Kelly remembering the loss

and comparing it to the 1980 loss to Virginia State in the finals.

Coach Kelly gave up his position as head coach after the first season, and Ms. Goss became the new leader, along with a new addition- Joyce Bemby assisting for the next season.

The coaching staff made some more changes after the first two years, and in 1978, Joan Hundley came to assist Goss. However another year passed, and Hundley left to be replaced by Jerome Bitch, the current head coach.

The Lady Vikings have not had a championship team in the CIAA tournament, but in the 78-79 season, the ladies won the Division III championship in the NCAIAW, and in the spring of 1980, went to the CIAA tournament losing to Virginia State in the final round by one point.

Who composed this winning team you ask? In 1978, the team consisted of 14 players, nine of whom were freshmen. There are currently seven of those players still active on the team. Other members either stopped playing, or were lost to graduation. One player, Minnie P. White, was

the first Lady Viking to score over thirty points in a single game. White was a graduate of the 1980 class.

The Lady Vikings of today, under the supervision of Coaches Fitch and Goss, assisted by student/coach Cecil Lawrence, are in the middle of another struggle to make it to the CIAA tournament. The veterans from the 1978 team are: Senior players: Mattie Thorne, guard; Alice Spellman, center; Debra Jordan, forward. Junior players: Patricia Sawyer, guard; Grace Bell, guard; Vanisha Gray, forward; Deborah Fogle, forward; Diana Chavers, center; Francine Godwin, forward; and Kathy Fennell, forward. Additional members include Deborah Madison, guard; Eula Woodson, guard; Sheila Parker, forward/center; and Barbara Johnson, guard.

This year's team has all of the returning players from last year with the exception of four players, two of whom are freshmen, one who was lost to graduation, and one returning player.

Fitch feels that the strategies are essential to the

flow of the game. The Lady Vikings are a running team based on fast breaks and an inside game. The "big people," Godwin, Chavers and Parker, post low and are constantly fed the ball inside in an effort to force the opposition into early foul trouble. Fitch capitalizes on the bonus situation, as the numerous fouls cause the opponent to "get out of their game plan."

"This gives us an edge," Fitch explains. The girls "Work well together as a team one complementing the other." And so, the Ladies Vikings can add up points on the foul line as well as on a layup after a fast break.

Despite the slow start in the season, much hope is left for the ladies. Coach Goss speaks about the future. "They were a little timid in the beginning; they're beginning to get and keep composure. As a total team, their abilities are almost the same. They function well together. They can do it."

And perhaps they can, but not this season. The Ladies Vikings lost a crucial game against Hampton Institute which eliminated them from the CIAA Tournament.

