

Rams fast-pitch into new softball season

Experience of senior team members is key, Coach Hays says

BY VANESSA L. NIESON
Reporter

It's the seventh inning, there are runners on first and third and your team is down by a run. What player would you want stepping up to the plate?

Is it true that seniors really do play differently than underclassmen when it comes to college athletics?

Michael Winbush, the head coach of the Lady Rams Softball team, says that there is a difference. He says experience is key.

Winbush says, "When players have been in a system for numerous years, it makes them help out younger players and make the whole team better." He

continues, "...senior leadership is the key. You have to have senior leadership in any sport to be successful."

Senior player Rachel A. Hicks agrees. She says: "That's the key to our success, if the seniors can step up and play, it will give us the edge we need to win. We could win the division and even the CIAA."

The Lady Rams finished first in the Western Division last season and hope to take it all the way this year. This could very well be possible with five seniors on the team. Kenisha Williams, Rachel A. Hicks, L'Tona Samuels, Nichelle Woodard and Erica Leggett all have the experience needed to take the team to the top.

Winbush says that the seniors will have a large effect on the team's record. "Seniors here have been here three and four years in key spots," he says.

"Kenisha is at left field, the best in the conference; she's the total package — hitting, running, the best arm that I've seen in years and her attitude is excellent.

"Rachel is dedicated and has overall leadership abilities, and she knows the game and is an excellent hustler, day in and day out.

"L'Tona has speed; she's the leadoff hitter, she gets on base and utilizes her speed for stealing bases. This is important because you have to get on base to win.

"Nichelle has the ability to keep everyone focused and keep them in the game, and she swings the bat well.

"Erica played as a freshman and made all conference. She's got a good glove, speed and is very competitive.

"The seniors are a vital part of what we are trying to get accomplished this year and they have been showing great leadership so far in the pre-season."

Williams thinks that the seniors will have a big effect on the team this year. "We're used to playing together," she says. "The new girls have to adjust to us and how we play. If we play well, we should beat the same teams that we beat last year."

Samuels says "Leadership is the key; that's the effect that the seniors have and it's a big effect."

Seniors have a big effect on teams and their records because they have been in the game situations more. This makes them able to react to new situations on instinct, which is much quicker than having to think before making the play. They also help to teach underclassmen more about the game and bring the team together to play as a whole.

The Lady Rams season opener is Sunday Feb. 28 at 1 p.m. at Civitan Park against Johnson C. Smith University.

Returning players take Rams to new level

RASHEED OLUWA
Sports editor

At the beginning of the basketball season, there thoughts of CIAA championships running around in the minds of Winston-Salem State University basketball fans. For the woman's team.

The men's basketball team on the other hand started the season with little fanfare. With a team featuring a new coaching staff and a roster filled with new faces, no one gave this season much thought.

Fans had trouble identifying with many of the new faces on the roster. CIAA coaches had pretty much written the team off, picking the Rams to finish last in the Western division. Even the the Ram coaching staff didn't know what to expect.

"We were hoping to go .500 and build from that," says Ram assistant coach William McNeill.

"But these thought they can be better."

The Rams have proved to everyone that they were better than everyone's expectations this season.

They finished the season on the top half of the Western Division, with a shot at the CIAA championship, and a berth at the Division II NCAA

championship.

Although the Rams entered the season with four experienced players returning to the lineup, there were plenty of question marks. Windell Owens, the Rams senior forward had been plagued with inconsistency through his career with the Rams.

Ram guard Tyrone Thomas, a senior, had come off of All-CIAA honors the previous year but was now moving from his shooting guard position to the point guard slot.

Three point bomber Larry Patterson was coming off a up and down year, while senior forward Torrian Wynn was coming off a year in which he barely played.

Despite these question marks, the four players emerged and brought their play to another level.

"The returning players have really adjusted to us well," says assistant coach Phillip Stitt.

"They have played surprisingly well with the freshman."

A freshman who has made a big impact with the team this year is Marcus Best. Best, who was recruited by Duckett at Fayetteville State, followed Duckett to WSSU and has become one of the most feared defensive players in the league.

"He's done everything we've asked of him," says Stitt.

"When I recruited him I thought he was the best defensive player I ever saw in high school. He's managed to parlay that to the CIAA."

Best along with freshman Keith Breland have combined to form one of the most formidable perimeter defense duo in the CIAA.

Another freshman who has made big contributions to the team is Corey Thompson.

Thompson, a walk on, joined the team after spending last year on Fayetteville State University's band.

This season, he has surprised everyone and now starts for the Rams.

"We're really pleased with what he has given us," says Stitt.

Now that the CIAA tournament is here, the Rams enter as contenders, a huge improvement from their pre-season doormat status.

According to the coaching staff the Rams success in the tournament hinges on the success of the seniors.

"It's up to the seniors," says McNeill. "If they want to go out as winners its there responsibility."

RASH, from page 8

because you're a gunner.

Kobe Bryant odds for appearing 60:1

Allen Iverson odds for appearing 50:1

J.R. Rider odds for appearing 40:1

Glenn Robinson odds for appearing 25:1

Sam Cassel odds for appearing 10:1 (he's got an early season ankle injury).

And finally, the odds on favorite to take home the team MVP for the Chicago Bulls.

Tony Kukoc odds for winning 100:1

Brent Barry odds against winning 20:1

Ron Harper odds against winning 20:1

Randy Brown odds against winning 50:1

Rusty Larue (Jessie Helms has a better chance of becoming president of the NAACP. Rusty should just be happy he's not in some Cambodian pro-league with Randolph Childress).

It's hard to believe after all these years, the WSSU men's basketball team has a chance to win the CIAA

tournament. Now if I could only afford tickets.

CIAA leaves Winston

Sadly, this tournament marks the last time that fans will see Coach Debra Clark's first recruiting class. Even if they don't win, they should be remembered for bringing the program to the level success that our program has enjoyed. So Ram fan, enjoy Kesha Broadnax, Erica Leggett, Rachel Hicks, and Nikki Blackwell.

By the time you read this column, the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue will be

on the stands, and a lot of people won't pay attention to word of this. So now that I've got this rare opportunity, I'd like to tell everyone that the Knicks will win the NBA championship. I'd also like to tell everyone that the UNC Tar Heels are not that good this year, and will probably get eliminated in the "Sweet 16" of the NCAA tournament.

I know that the last statement about the Tar Heels would normally get me killed in certain parts of this state.

Lucky for me, swimsuit calendars should be shipping out right about now.