

Division II suitable for WSSU

For several years, N.C. Central and Winston-Salem State have laid the groundwork for moves to Division I athletics - spurred by the intoxicating new level of prominence it promises.

But these two public universities, are on divergent paths.

NC Central has made steady progress and recently gained entrance to the Division I Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, a crucial step on the path to full Division I status.

Since beginning its push toward Division I five years ago, WSSU has run up a \$6 million athletics budget deficit; by 2012, that deficit was projected to reach \$12 million or more.

The trend meant further subsidizing athletics with money that could otherwise go to academics.

A few months ago, Chancellor Donald Reaves pulled the plug. WSSU, which had not yet become a full-fledged MEAC member, will leave the Division I conference and return to the Division II Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association.

"It wasn't even close to being self-supporting," said Reaves, a former chief financial officer at both Brown University and the University of Chicago. "If it were in range, that would be one thing. But it wasn't even close."

Meanwhile, NC Central's athletics budget has been balanced - or better - in recent years, thanks to a steady stream of private donations and revenue drawn from campus sporting events, two financial advantages WSSU lacks.

"The arithmetic is very different for the two schools," said

Erskine Bowles, who as president of the UNC system has kept an eye on both schools' processes.

The move from Division II to Division I is a quantum financial leap. It requires more scholarships, larger facilities and more teams and coaches.

The payoff?

Bigger games against better opponents, increased television exposure and the prospect of high-profile athletic glory that prompts alums to donate more money.

WSSU began its process in 2004, and from the start knew the cost would be hefty. Along with new staff positions and additional travel costs, the scholarship requirements are staggering - from a maximum of 38 in football in Division II to a minimum of 55 in Division I.

Additionally, WSSU would

have to add five new sports to meet NCAA requirements.

Students would pay for most of this.

At all universities, students pay an athletics fee that helps support the sports program. A basic rule of thumb: the larger the university, the lower the fee - and vice versa.

WSSU, a historically black institution like NC Central, is not a large school.

This year the school enrolled about 6,400 students, though because many are online-only students, about 5,000 had to pay the fee

When WSSU began its transition, it asked UNC system leaders to approve a sizable increase in the athletics fee.

The increase was granted and several followed in subse-

"If I were to sit down and match the names of some of the people who have given me an earful with the donor list from the foundation, it wouldn't match up."

—Chancellor Reaves

quent years. WSSU students paid \$320 in 2003-04; this year, it's \$579 and accounts for about 80 percent of the athletics budget.

"It was controversial then, but there was so much enthusiasm from WSSU," said Hannah Gage, Chairwoman of the UNC system's Board of Governors.

"It was not something that we had perfunctorily approved. There were a lot of doubts, but we did it anyway."

NC Central has more than 8,000 students who pay a slightly lower athletics fee.

There are other differences.

NC Central plays football and basketball in university-owned, campus arenas that generate ticket, concessions, parking, and merchandising revenue.

By contrast, WSSU has long played football and basketball in municipal venues owned by the City of Winston-Salem and, at best, shares profits.

Last year, there were nights the university had to write the city a check after sparsely attended basketball games, said Reaves, the chancellor.

"That cash flow was going in

the wrong direction," he said.

Those losses prompted Reaves to move all but one basketball game -- the rivalry showdown with North Carolina A&T -- from the city-owned Joel Coliseum back to the smaller C.E. Gaines Center on campus.

Another significant problem: fundraising.

About 7 percent of WSSU alumni donate money to athletics or academics. The national average is 11.7 percent, according to the Council for the Aid to Education.

NC Central alumni giving rate is about 10 percent, but is bolstered by corporate donations, an edge WSSU does not have.

The result: Over the past three years, WSSU donors have given about \$673,000 to athletics; in the same time period, NC Central has received \$2.14 million, the difference-maker for a University taking on the added expense of a more competitive athletics program.

"Private giving is the whole of it," said NC Central Chancellor Charlie Nelms.

"We don't do it with public money."

Though WSSU's financial picture is bleak, many boosters cried foul when Reaves scrapped the Division I plan.

Dennis Brayboy, 57, says he donates money and has held basketball and football season tickets for many years. Now, he's so infuriated by Reaves' decision that he's in the market for a new favorite team.

"It's just a big, bombshell mess over there," Brayboy said. "I don't know [if] they'll be able to recover until they get that chancellor out of there."

But Reaves insists he consulted with governing boards, alumni groups and other constituencies - in public - before making the decision. And while some students may lose athletic scholarships as WSSU returns to Division II, they will receive other financial aid in place of it.

Reaves says more alumni need to put their money where their mouths are.

"They're supporters of the athletic program in spirit," he said.

"If I were to sit down and match the names of some of the people who have given me an earful with the donor list from the foundation, it wouldn't match up."

This article is reprinted with the permission of Eric Ferreri, staff writer of the News & Observer, Raleigh, N.C.



Awarded to Rene Rector

LaTasha Miles
SPORTS EDITOR

Rene Rector, from Winston-Salem, is a junior on the Lady Rams basketball team.

The former student of Mount Tabor High School is a 5-foot-6 point guard who averages 13 points per

game, as well as 2.5 rebounds.

Lady Rams head coach Dee Stokes selected her as the recipient of the Coach's Game Ball. Rector's performance against Morehead State Nov. 22 earned her this recognition. Rector scored 10 points, including five for six from the free throw line.

"She shot the ball well," Stokes said.

"She scored points when we needed it. She was a leader on the floor. She had an outstanding weekend, and we wouldn't have been able to win without her."

Stokes reflects on career, as her last season nears

LaTasha Miles
SPORTS EDITOR

The 2009-2010 season is the final run in the MEAC for the Lady Rams basketball team. The season is also the last of head coaching for Dee Stokes.

Stokes, 39, said she believes she has been called to do something greater and hopes to pursue a career outside of the coaching profession.

"I believe he's [God] called me to work at a Christian school in administration," Stokes said in a recent press conference to Winston-Salem State Media Relations.

Stokes began her tenure at WSSU in 2006 and is fulfilling her four-year contract, but said she is stepping out on faith after this year.

"God has called me away from coaching and that's clear."

After three seasons, Stokes has a 17-69 record with the Lady Rams. Despite finishing each of the past three seasons with single-digit victories, Stokes has her team focused on an achievement that has yet to be obtained while she has been the head coach.

"Our goal is to be above .500 this year," Stokes said.

"This season is going well. We've gained some momentum. Our chemistry is better."

As of Dec. 12, the Lady Rams are 3-6 and began conference play against MEAC opponent South Carolina State on Dec. 5. WSSU did not get their first win last season until Jan. 26. The Rams achieved

their first win in this year's season opener against Southern Virginia Nov. 7.

"I'm going to try to have a lot of fun this year," Stokes said.

"Every day I go to practice, and it's a lot of fun. I like my team."

An early highlight for Stokes' coaching career occurred during her first season as the Lady Rams forced Division I, Atlantic Coast Conference powerhouse Wake Forest into overtime before losing 82-66.

Stokes spent part of her collegiate career playing basketball for the Demon Deacons and said that moment was obviously exciting for her and her players.

Stokes has also enjoyed success recruiting quality student-athletes, who have excelled academically. With Stokes at the helm, the Lady Rams have placed in the higher rankings of athletic programs at WSSU. In each semester except for one, her teams have finished with GPAs of 2.8 to 3.0.

"My team has gotten a lot better academically," Stokes said.

"And we've continued to graduate players, and we will continue to do that."

Mentoring kids and having an impact on them means more than just coaching them to wins, and I think that we've

Stokes
continued on Page 12