

## Rams swept in doubleheader home opener



Photo by Garrett Garms

Freshman outfielder Andrew Smith runs to third base in the Rams home opener against St. Augustine's Feb. 15.

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For the first time in 38 years, the Winston-Salem State Rams Baseball team 5-5 (2-2) hosted a home game Feb. 15. The doubleheader was against St. Augustine's College 4-4 (2-0) at BB&T Ballpark in downtown Winston-Salem, where the Chicago White Sox farm team Winston-Salem Dash play home games.

The Rams lost both games 3-2 and 5-2.

In the first game of the doubleheader, the Rams jumped out to an early 1-0 lead from a sacrifice bunt by junior catcher Michael Robbins.

"That first inning was big for us," Robbins said.

"We gave our pitcher the lead early."

The Rams were able to hold on to their lead until the third inning, when the Falcons scored on a two-out single. Pitcher Brice Rivenbark got himself out of the inning striking out the next batter.

The Rams fell behind 2-1 in the top of the fourth from an RBI single by Falcons designated hitter Jeremy Wilkins. Rivenbark ended the inning by striking out the final batter.

The Rams struck back in the bottom of the fourth inning, tying the game 2-2. Dual sport athlete Dominique Fitzgerald hit an RBI single that allowed right fielder Andrew Smith to score. Fitzgerald was caught attempting to steal second base, ending the fourth inning.

The Falcons took the lead again in the sixth 3-2 with an RBI triple. The Rams struck out four times in the sixth and seven innings, ending any chance of a victory.

The Rams couldn't manufacture enough runs and struggled with base running in game No. 2 loss to the Falcons.

In the second game, Rams starting pitcher Joseph Herbert loaded the bases in the first inning, but he was able to escape by striking out the final batter.

The Falcons jumped ahead in the top of the third inning on a RBI single that allowed shortstop Rashad Ingram to score from third base.

The Rams bats struggled during the first four innings, striking out five times and leaving two runners on base.

"They [St. Augustine's] hit their spots and made it hard for us to score runs," said Head Baseball Coach Kevin Ritsche.

The Rams had problems with fielding the ball and had a combined six errors in the two games.

"The errors killed us today," Robbins said.

Coach Ritsche said that the teams' defense did not play up to expectations.

"We have a lot of young guys and freshmen who can learn a lot from games like this."

The Rams are looking to bounce back with two of their next three series being against conference opponents, Lincoln University (Pa.) on Feb. 20 and St. Paul's College on Feb. 26.

## Rams blow past Bears, take first place in CIAA

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The Rams protect home court as well as sent their seniors off as winners in their final home game with a 59-49 victory over the Shaw University Bears Feb. 21 in front of a packed C.E. Gaines Center.

The win moves the Rams into first place in the CIAA Southern Division. The Rams have a one game conference advantage over the Bears. For the Rams to win an outright division title they need Shaw to lose their next game or to win their season finale against Fayetteville State Feb. 26.

"We are in first place, but we still need to take care of business against FSU," said senior forward Paul Davis.

The Rams got off to a hot start in the first three minutes of the game jumping on the Bears 7-2.

"We knew we needed to start quickly and the crowd really helped us do that by providing a crazy environment," Davis said.

The Rams defense was smothering, forcing the Bears into horrible shot attempts and forcing them into a two-for-12 shooting performance from three-point land in the first half.

"Coach [Collins] told us to give 100 percent effort on defense," said redshirt sophomore forward Stephon Platt.

The Rams forced the Bears into 13 turnovers in the first half and capitalized off of them by scoring 15 points off turnovers and went into halftime

leading 30-22.

"The guys did a great job of staying focused," said head coach Bobby Collins.

"We knew this was a big night for our seniors, and they didn't let the events during the evening get to them."

In the second half, WSSU continued to emphasize on playing lockdown defense and never trailed in the second half. The Rams also forced the issue of getting the ball inside and attacking the basket drawing fouls and getting to the free throw line.

"The plan going into the game was to go to the post early and often," Platt said

"I give props to our guards; they were looking for us and got us the ball."

The Rams have won six of their last eight home finales, with this victory being the first one since Feb. 25, 2008 when they defeated Norfolk State 68-65.

"We call this class the 'unforgettables'," Collins said.

"When they had the opportunities to transfer they didn't. They stayed and that showed me how loyal they were to the team and to me and I appreciate them so much for that."

After his final home game as a Ram, Paul Davis said that the game was very emotional.

"I love the atmosphere," Davis said.

"I'm going to miss this place. But know we have to refocus and try to win the conference championship."

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