

Bishoops Rebound in 2018, Take First in Division **Quinn Tobias**

Decree Staff Writer

The NC Wesleyan men's basketball team won its last 11 conference games to capture first place in its division and earn a number-one seeding in the conference tournament.

The Bishops finished with a 13-3 record in the USA South, one year after compiling a 6-8 mark. The team was 15-10 overall, after losing its regular-season matchup to Pfeiffer, 132-76

All season NCWC combined aggressive defense and balanced scoring as it went on its second-half streak. The first-place finish means the Bishops will host rival Greensboro College in the first round of the conference tourney on February 20

Staff writer Quinn Tobias filed the following reports on recent home contests: NCWC 85, William and Peace 70

The Bishops defense stifled the Pacers and stole their way to an 85-70 victory as senior Adrian Moore led the way with an efficient 21 points.

Defensive pressure fueled the Wesleyan victory. The Bishops generated easy baskets off the Pacers' 27 turnovers. Leading the Bishops in steals was Moore with six. According to Moore an aggressive mindset helped him lead the team in steals, points, rebounds and assists.

The Bishops overcame a sloppy opening to the game when the Pacers' full-court trap forced three turnovers in the

first three possessions of the game. The Pacers held the Bishops to two points in the first 6 minutes and started the game on a 14-4 run. Turnovers plagued both teams, but as the Pacers got away from the full-court press, the Bishops

began to enforce their will later in the first half Junior Chris Braswell and

sophomore Ricardo Bullock infused the Bishops with hustle plays that ignited a 25-12 run to end the first half. "I think we needed to find a fire and the team did that," Braswell said. "Basketball is a game of runs and it all starts with defense, because defense turns into offense."

After struggling from the field early in the half, easy transition baskets helped the Bishops take a 29-26 lead into half time.

According to freshman Josh Covington, Coach Thompson was displeased with the team's performance in the first 13 minutes of the game, remarking that the team

made history with how poorly it played. The Bishops came out of half time with a renewed defensive energy and executed their traps to perfection, forcing seven turnovers in the first five minutes. In the first half the Bishops were cold from the field, shooting 31 percent, but the second half told a different story and they shot 51

percent from the field. During that time they extended their lead to 15, making the score 50-35. Two dunks by the Bishops put an exclamation point on the run.



Adrian Moore was among the scoring leaders as the men's hoops team went on an 11-game conference win streak. SI photos

The Bishops widened the margin to 23 in the second half and despite the Pacers' best efforts, they were unable to cut the lead below 15 for the remainder of the game. The Pacers dropped to 4-13 and the Bishops improved to 9-8.

NCWC 101, Averett 88

Freshman Damon McDowell scored 18 of his 25 points in the second half to

Women's Basketball Team Falls in Second Round

Greensboro-The NC Wesleyan women's basketball team saw its 2017-18 season come to an end on Saturday with a 70-54 loss to Greensboro College in the USA South Tournament quarterfinal round.

The top-seeded Pride forged an 11-point lead at intermission and out-scored the 4th-seeded Bishops 34-29 in the second half to seal the win.

Deep, Experienced Softball Team Eyes **Conference** Title **By Johnathan Pickler Decree Staff Writer**

Projected to finish sixth in the USA Šouth by the coaches in the conference, the Bishops are looking forward to proving the pundits wrong and coming out as champions.

The Bishops are returning many players and have a "big recruiting class that is loaded with potential," according to Head Coach John Brackett, whose team finished 13-9 in conference last season (18-20 overall)

"I feel good about our preparation so far, the weather has caused a few problems but overall our practices have gone well," said Coach Brack-ett. "Our intra-squad scrimmages have been very competitive.

Coach Brackett stated that the Bishops' strengths will be their depth as well as their experience. They only had four players who graduated last season, three of them starters, "We also have some impact players in the freshmen class who will challenge for a spot in the starting line-up," stated Coach Brackett.

The team is returning two

Junior Nadiya Holley paced the Bishops with a team-high 11 points off the bench, and she completed her first career doubledouble with 10 rebounds. Freshman Javana Jones joined her in double-figures with 10 points. Playing her final collegiate game, senior KeChae Parker wrapped up her solid career with five points and eight rebounds.

As a team, the Bishops out-rebounded the Pride 53-46 on the day. But Greensboro shot a little better than 37 percent from the floor while holding Wesleyan to just 29 percent accuracy. Shaniah Haynes led four Pride players in double-figures with a game-high 15 points.

Wesleyan ends the season with a 13-14 overall record, which included a 9-7 mark in USA South play. With a young roster that included just one senior, the Bishops will now begin preparing for the 2018-19 campaign. (Article courtesy of Sports Information)

Senior KeChae Parker paced her team with a 12.6 scoring average.

Baseball Team Features Lethal Offense, Young Pitching Staff

By Quinn Tobias **Decree Staff Writer**

The Bishops baseball team returns to the diamond in 2018 with plans to improve on last year's performance, relying on a lethal offense and a young pitching staff to catapult them to a conference championship. The 2017 campaign fell short of the

Bishops goals. After a strong regular season performance (24-16 and 11-7 in the USA South), the team lost to top-seeded LaGrange and 8th-seeded Piedmont in the semi-finals of the conference tournament.

Entering the 2018 season the USA South pre-season coaches poll predicted Wesleyan will finish 5th out of 12 playoff-eligible teams. The Bishops lost 10 players to graduation last year including their top two pitchers, Rvan Grant and TJ Wilkie, who combined for 112 innings pitched and nine wins. Coach Charlie Long acknowledges some of the challenges his ball club faces in the upcoming season. "Young pitching scares me," he said. "The keys to success will be young players. This is the first year in a long time we're entering the season unsure of the three starters because we have an abundance of talent. I think that's a good thing.' Despite the middle-of-the-pack prediction, Long believes the Bishops can dethrone LaGrange as the conference champion. "We have a really good team," he said. "On paper we have a chance to win the conference. As always it comes down to pitching and our defense. The Bishop defense should be a strength. since the team returns both double-play partners, Brad Pennington at 2nd base and Alec Titmus at shortstop. The pair ranked second in the nation last year in double plays turned. Long feels confident that this season will be a success in large part due to a dominating offense. "We're as deep offensively as we've been in a long time," Long said. "Some people that should be playing will be watching." Long believes the offense can keep them in any game and will help make a push to break the 30-win plateau.

The Bishops have come a long way since two dreadful seasons in 2014 and 2015. Part of the resurgence in the program can be attributed to an active JV program, which helps develop younger players. Long recognizes the importance of developing underclassmen in order to replace talent that graduates.

Long sees the payoff from the JV schedule during practice. "I feel like we're making some small steps in the right direction and we're getting the offense and defense in place," he said.

The Bishops will rely heavily on their offense to keep them in games while the young pitching staff finds its stride. Five returners had 20 or more RBI last season, four of whom had over a 300 batting average. The team will need to find some power in the newcomers to replace the six homers that graduating senior Tony Sanchez hit last season. Sophomore second-baseman Brad Pennington returns this season after making an indelible mark last year, when he was named D3baseball.com's All Regional Rookie of the Year. He led the team in batting with a .390 average, a .472 on-base percentage and .643 slugging percentage. Junior Nate Gardner returns as the only regular starting pitcher from last year's team. Gardner started nine games last year, posting a 3-3 record. He pitched his way to a 2.49 ERA through 50 innings of work and posted less than one Walks and Hits per Innings Pitched (WHIP)

ignite the Bishops second-half scoring explosion as the team posted 59 points en route to a 101-88 victory over conference opponent Averett.

McDowell provided a spark off the bench shooting 55 percent from the field and 60 percent from beyond the arc. His performance earned him the USA South's Rookie of the Week honors. Besides leading the team in scoring, McDowell led in assists with six, and chipped in six rebounds in the winning effort.

Junior Robert Wilson played a pivotal role in the win scoring 21 points, going 75 percent from the field and hauling in eight rebounds. Wilson led the team in minutes with 32 and his hustle was vital to the team's success in the first half.

Averett relied on senior James Contreras, who carried the Cougars in the first half. Contreras scored 30 points going 9-19 from the field and 12-13 from the foul line. He also led his team in steals with two and played 32 minutes.

The two teams entered the game with different approaches. The Bishops relied on moving the ball around to create open shots while Averett looked for Contreras to create plays in isolation. The Bishops had more than twice as many assists as the Cougars.

The Bishops jumped to a quick 5-0 lead before the two teams settled in to exchange baskets the remainder of the first half. Averett played aggressive defense, extending their pressure while Wesleyan prevented the Cougars from getting in the paint by blocking six Cougar shots. Averett held onto its advantage, leading the Bishops at half-time, 44-42.

Tough defense stifled both teams and after five minutes in the second half both teams only had recorded eight points. The Bishops' depth became a problem for the Cougars as the second half progressed. Capitalizing on Averett's fatigue, Wesleyan increased its defensive pressure and forced Cougar turnovers, which led to easy baskets during a 24-5 run midway through the second half.

The run put the game out of reach at 74-57. During the run the momentum shifted when Darin Kettner of Averett got hit with a technical foul.

The lead got as large as 20, but the Cougars trimmed the margin to 13 before the final buzzer. Ricardo Bullock put on exclamation mark on the end of the game with a slam dunk to increase the score to 100 in the closing minute.

The Bishops improve to 11-9 overall and 9-3 in conference while the Cougars fall to 10-10 and 5-7 in conference.

NCWC 82, Berea 62 The Bishops welcomed Berea College to Everett Gym with an 82-62 thumping as junior

Robert Wilson scored a double-double in the win. A new member of the USA South Conference, the Kentucky school was

unable to keep pace with Wesleyan, which played aggressive defense and

Lacrosse Returns To NCWC Campus **By Quinn Tobias Decree Staff Writer**

On February 13th North Carolina Wesleyan reintroduced its women's

lacrosse program after a three-year hiatus. The team lost its opener, 20-3, at Barton, made plenty of substitutions during the game, held February 3.

Wilson scored 19 points, many in close, and grabbed 10 rebounds, as center A.J. Frye sat with an injury. The Bishops trailed Berea early in the first half, but held a four-point lead at half-time and pulled away in the final 20 minutes, outscoring their opponent, 45-29.

"I was able to get to my sweet spot," Wilson said. "My midrange shot is one of the strongest attributes to my game. I got to the spots either off the dribble or a great pass by my teammates. Berea's defense was solid, but I dictated where I wanted to shoot. Along with the dribble penetration from our guards and kick-outs to open shooters, I got more looks close around the rim."

Guard Chris Braswell scored 19 points to tie Wilson for the team lead. Riccardo Bullock collected a game-high 12 rebounds. Damon McDowell and Justin Tankelewicz scored 11 piece, while guard Adrian Moore (15.7 ppg) was limited to 8 on 4 of 15 shooting.

Wilson said the Berea game showcased the balanced scoring that has characterized the Bishops' offense all season. When one shooter is off, others pick up the slack.

"We have scorers at all levels on our team, from the starting line to the last man on the bench," he said. "We have guys who can score in the post, shoot the midrange, shoot the three, and drive and get to the basket. We also have a few guys that can score multiple ways, Adrian Moore, being one of them. So, when one of us is having an off-night Coach Thompson has multiple options to pick off the bench."



see Italian art in many manifestations, in both Venice and Florence.

"There were so many artisans out painting and selling their pieces and I just loved watching them work," she said. "I also thought the artistry of the buildings in these two locations was wonderful to see. It was exciting to find the hidden graffiti throughout these two cities."

Like Davids, teammate Marissa Aguilar said the art made the strongest impression on her.

In particular, she enjoyed the visit to Vatican City and called the artwork in the chapel and basilica "mind-blowing. It was very overwhelming, intense, and exciting, because of all the history there," she explained. "The experience was indescribable.'

Davids added that the educational aspect of the two trips enhanced her experience. "It helped me to see and enjoy the two European countries in a way that I might not have if I had taken the trip just for the heck of it," she said, noting that due to music professor Tony Sawyer's instruction on the Italy trip, "Wherever we went, I found myself keeping an ear open because of the musical focus of his class.'

Samantha Morton, a senior on the volleyball team, was most excited by the volleyball competition. In particular, she'll retain happy memories of a match against a team in Rome.

"We got to eat dinner with the other team." she related. "We had fun learning about each other and our countries. By the end of the night we didn't want to k we had made such great connections. We traded contact information so that we could keep in touch. I really wish that we could have spent more time with them." Though she is set to graduate, Morton believes the trip will help members of her team to bond. "I'm hopeful the experience will get all of the players on the same page as a team," she said. "The trip really brought us together and allowed us to get to know more about each other." Rankin, a junior, agreed that the trip provided a beneficial team-building experience. "You spent 24/7 with most of you teammates, staying in rooms with some of your teammates that you don't necessarily hang out with outside of school," she said. She noted that all the players got the chance to play in the matches, another benefit. "You learn how to play with different teammates, since we all got an equal amount of playing time," she explained. "It was good to build relationships. Having a better relationship with one another can only help us be better on the field next season."



previously awarded all-conference pitchers, Shelby Godwin and Logan Lowery. Godwin started and appeared in 18 games for the Bishops last season and finished with a record of 8-8. Lowery started 15 games last season but appeared in 19 games. She finished the season with a record of 9-8 with one save. The Bishops also have "a number of freshmen pitchers who had plenty of success in high school," according to Coach Brackett.

The Bishops will play against the defending national champions this season as well as some other nationally ranked teams. "I'm not overly concerned about our schedule because I feel as if our team is up for the challenge," Coach Brackett said. "Our tough out-of-conference schedule will prepare us for the USA South, which as always is very strong and balanced." In the USA South preseason poll,

Meredith College was first, Averett University was second, and Ferrum College was third. "Meredith won the regular season championship last season and has a lot of returners." Coach Brackett said. "Averett won see Softball pg 4

Gardner believes he will lead a strong rotation this year and his numbers will continue to improve. "My pitching has improved a lot because I have started to challenge guys," he said.

Gardner also wants to make an impact at the plate and in the field. Last year Gardner hit .333 with two home runs.

The Bishops begin their conference action February 24th at Maryville. They avoid last season's champion, LaGrange, which also finished first in the pre-season coaches poll. The conference tournament is scheduled to begin on April 12th.

and then fell in its first USA South Conference match, 17-2, at Averett.

The Bishops entered the season with a young roster, hoping chemistry will carry them to the post season.

Coach Bridget Walker was appointed to restart the program in June 2016 and since then she's been hard at work rounding out a roster and preparing the new team. During the fall of 2017 the team participated in "Fall Ball Play Day" where it played three abbreviated games.

Coach Walker has been impressed by her team's early efforts. "The new kids figured out the game," she said. "All the players are coachable and everyone is all in.'

Sophomore Ashlee Johnson has stood out to the coaches and her teammates. She will serve as the primary goalie and team captain. Johnson has five years of experience as a goalie and wants to bring her knowledge of the game to a roster that includes many newcomers to the sport. "I want to build a bond with my teammates and hopefully generate interest that leads to a good foundation for the program," Johnson said. She was one of 11 athletes recruited by Walker.

see Lacrosse pg 4

(Sports Information contributed to this report.)