

# SPORTS

## Bishop Briefs: Men's Hoops Team Upset by Averett in First Round

The men's basketball season came to an abrupt end as the top-seeded Bishops were upset in the first round of the USA-South Conference tourney by a sub-500 team.

Playing before a raucous capacity crowd, Wesleyan lost to the Averett Cougars (9-17), who mounted a strong second-half comeback to win, 82-78.

The teams played a tight first half, Wesleyan holding a 44-42 advantage at intermission. Then in the second half, the Bishops extended their lead to 70-62, only to watch Averett outscore them 20-8 over the final 6:28. Wesleyan held its final lead, 76-74, at the 1:30 mark, but Averett's Montre Cash made a three-pointer. The Cougars then held off the Bishops down the stretch and made their free throws to seal the upset victory.

Wesleyan senior Chris Sause said the locker room was subdued after the game. "Nobody knew what to do," he said. "Everybody just sat there in silence."

Expectations had run high for the Bishops (19-7), who finished first in the East Division with a 12-5 conference mark. They had already racked up an 80-77 road win against Covenant, the West Division champ and the overall number-one seed in the tournament. A conference championship and DIII playoff berth seemed within Wesleyan's grasp.

But first it had to get past Averett, a team coached by former Wesleyan assistant David Doyno. According to Bishop players, the Cougars always seem to play their best basketball against Wesleyan. The two teams split their games during the regular season, the Bishops taking a home exhibition game, 84-82, last December, and the Cougars winning in Danville, Va., 78-65, in February.

Senior Justin Tankelewicz said that Averett put in a strong overall effort in the tourney opener. "They were tougher than us, they wanted to win more than us, and they were more of a team than us," he said.

Rebounding was one key, as the Cougars out-rebounded the Bishops, 39-31, 19-8 on offense. "Second-chance rebounds killed us in the second half," said backup guard Johnathan Pickler. "We were 1,000 percent more talented than all the teams in the conference. We just needed to rebound better."

Senior Chris Braswell led the Bishops with 26 points, including 6 of 9 three-pointers, while AJ Frye contributed 18 points and 3 assists. Top rebounders were Riccardo Bullock (8) and Rob Wilson (7).

In post-game interviews, players were asked whether the top-seeded Bishops were complacent entering the game against Averett.

Tankelewicz denied it was over-confidence, instead blaming Wesleyan's failure to play together as a team.

Said Sause, "I think our over-confidence hit us three weeks before the season ended, and we stopped doing what we needed to do every day."

The Bishops had lost three of four prior to the tournament.

Players rejected the idea that the season was a failure.

"Right now it may seem like a down note, but once we become a few years removed, we'll really understand the full scope of what we accomplished," Tankelewicz said. "I'm very glad to have gone out with five guys that I really like."

Frye, a junior, was disappointed that the team was eliminated so early in the tournament. He said he'll use the Averett loss as motivation in off-season workouts. "It hurt me to see our seniors go out like that since I know how bad they wanted to win," he said. "I don't want to feel that again, so I'll make sure I get myself and the team right for next year."

### Women's Team Finishes 9-7

The women's basketball team was ousted in the first round of the USA-South Conference playoffs, losing to Mary Baldwin, 114-108, in overtime.

After relinquishing a 12-point, second-half lead, the Bishops ended the game on a 13-3 run to tie the score in regulation. Sophomore guard Kayla Johnson hit a key three-pointer—one of six she made in the game—to stave off elimination. But in overtime, MBU outscored the Bishops, 15-9, to advance to the next round.

The Bishops finished with a 9-7 record in conference action, 11-15 overall. The team slumped to a 3-9 record to open the season, before it went on a five-game winning streak to move into playoff contention.

Following the tournament, The Decree interviewed Coach Artina Trader

**Q.** What was the difference in the game against Mary Baldwin?

**A.** I've been told that our first-round game was a good one to watch. I guess I would say the same thing if Wesleyan had won. It was the highest scoring game (between the two teams) I'd ever coached.

**Q.** How would you grade this past season?

**A.** With all the ups and downs, I would say a C.

**Q.** What was the team doing well during the five-game win streak?

**A.** We were scoring and getting stops. There was great ball movement, but the biggest difference was scoring consistently and working hard on defense.

**Q.** And what happened down the stretch? Why weren't you able to sustain the winning ways?

**A.** We went cold on the offensive end. When you're trying to win, consistent scoring is the most important thing.

**Q.** What most pleased you and the coaching staff about the past season?

**A.** Our rebounding. Over the last four years, we've been in the top three in the conference in rebounding, as well as top 10 in the country. This year we tied for first in offensive rebounds per game and rebounds per game, and we finished second in the country in offensive rebounds per game and fifth in the country in rebounds per game.

**Q.** What was the highlight of the season?

**A.** I'm sure everyone would say the last second three-point shot Kayla Johnson hit against Pfeiffer to finish the comeback after we were down by 24. I'd say it was the win at Greensboro because we stayed the course, no matter the score or ref calls, and came out with the win.

**Q.** What spots do you need to fill for next season?

**A.** We have five seniors who'll be hard

to replace, but that's our goal for recruiting. The hope is that the returnees will work hard this summer and show more consistency on the offensive end in the fall.

### Lacrosse Continues to Build

The lacrosse team looks to improve on last season's 1-15 record as Wesleyan continues to build the two-year-old program.

"We have the opportunity to be a well-balanced team," said second-year Coach Bridget Walker.

Sophomore midfielder Ali Cucinotta said the foundation is much stronger this year. The Bishop roster has grown to 16 players. "I'd say we're a lot closer to what an average women's lacrosse team looks like," she said.

Last year the Bishops began the season with 15 athletes, but one quit and a few others were soon lost to major injuries. Of the 15 on the opening-day roster, only seven had ever played lacrosse. This year there are only two members who are new to the sport. "As athletes in other sports, both have picked up lacrosse pretty well," Cucinotta said.

A fuller roster will allow the Bishops to rest players during the game (each team puts 12 players on the field at one time). Barring serious injuries, Wesleyan hopes to the avoid one of the pitfalls it faced last year, when the team had to play many games down a player or two. "When you're down two players, the others have more ground to cover," Cucinotta said. "Having a few substitute players is helpful because of how much running is involved in the sport."

Cucinotta, last year's leading scorer with 56 of the team's 79 goals, said that, dating back to fall practice sessions, she's noticed a dramatic improvement in stick skills and overall team speed. She added that she's had to spend less time educating her teammates on lacrosse strategy.

The Bishops opened the season with two losses at home, 17-9 to Hanover, and 18-3 to Barton.

Then over spring break, the Bishops flew to Texas for two non-conference matches. Coach Walker thought the road trip would give her players a chance to bond.

"Being a very young team, we haven't really had an established group of upperclassmen to unite the players," she said. "Doing something as big as flying and playing in Texas will give them lasting memories off the field that will help them connect on the field. It was the first flight for a few and it was an exciting time for all of us to represent our team and our school."

The Bishops lost their two matches in Texas, 18-10 to the University of Dallas, and 19-9 to Southwestern.

Against Southwestern, Wesleyan trailed 8-6 late in the first half, but the host team pulled away in the closing minutes and added to its lead in the second half. Cucinotta led the offense with six goals, while freshmen Grace look, Madeline Graham and Kailey Andrasko each scored one. Freshman goalkeeper Milenia Crespo made 17 stops in the loss.

In their next matchup, the Bishops will take on Meredith, the team Coach Walker called the favorite to win the conference title.

### Softball Splits First Four

While still a freshman, pitcher Beth Braswell emerged as a team leader in 2018, posting a won-loss record of 10-5 and an earned run average of 2.01. At the plate she led the Bishops with a .384 batting average and 31 RBIs.

In 2019, she hopes to continue to lead. She is an anchor in a pitching rotation that's also comprised of senior Shelby Godwin (2018 stats: 6-9 record, with 101 strikeouts in 82 innings) and sophomore Grace Preston.

Braswell feels that her freshman season, while successful, was a learning experience, as she moved from playing at Princeton High School to the much-faster college game. "This year I'll be less nervous and more comfortable on the field," she said.

The Bishops opened the season at home with a 9-3 loss to a non-conference Guilford team. Braswell took the loss, yielding nine runs, eight hits and seven walks in five innings of work.

"I need to hit my spots more consistently and limit the walks," Braswell said.

Just before spring break the Bishops went on the road to play exhibition games against conference rivals Brevard and Piedmont (Georgia). The Bishops split both series.

In the first Piedmont game, Braswell rebounded from the Guilford outing by winning a pitcher's duel with Piedmont's Melissa Eckman. In the 2-1 victory, Braswell tossed a complete game and limited Piedmont batters to four hits while striking out six.

Braswell believes the pitchers in the Wesleyan rotation complement each other well, making it challenging for opposing teams in double-headers. She noted that Godwin throws the hardest and tends to pitch high in the strike zone, while Braswell works lower in the zone and throws more curves and drops. Preston throws a range of pitches. "Grace has killer off-speed pitches," Braswell said. "It's hard for teams to adjust to us."

### Baseball Jumps to 7-3

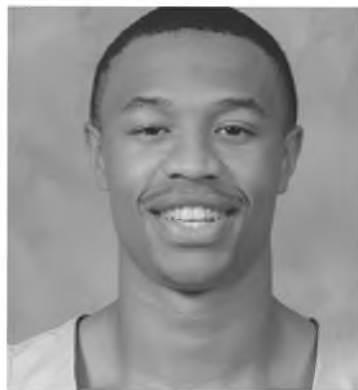
The Wesleyan baseball team opened 7-3, with its two most recent wins coming in a double-header sweep of conference foe Brevard in western North Carolina.

Against Brevard, game-one starter J.D. Makkaukas pitched seven shutout innings, yielding two hits and recording eight strikeouts. Cedrick Komegay and Brandon Wheat led a 22-hit attack, collecting four hits apiece, while freshman third baseman Drew Nichols went 3-5 with three RBIs.

Game-two starter Drew Tubb pitched a complete game shutout as the Bishops won 13-0 to finish the sweep. The offense was paced by Logan Andrews, who drove in five runs with a home run, double and single.

Stats Notes: In their first 10 games, five Bishops have already reached double figures in RBIs: Komegay, Andrews, Wheat, Brad Pennington, and Nate Gardner. Following the Brevard series, Komegay was leading the team with a .512 batting average (21 hits in 41 at-bats).

(Sports Information staff and Decree Sports Writer Jared Joyner contributed to Bishop Briefs.)



All-Conference Basketball Team Members: Chris Braswell, AJ Frye, and Robert Wilson

SI photos

## Profile: Greg Clark—Bishop Base-Stealing Legend, Coach

By Trey Croom  
Decree Staff Writer

It's the bottom of the 9th, and the third-base coach has given the green light. Greg Clark knows if he is not standing on third in two pitches, there will be screaming from the third base coach's box. He gathers a lead off first base, with eyes on the pitcher's back foot. Timing is everything in the art of base-stealing and getting picked off would virtually end the game.

The Methodist right-hander throws over to first and Clark gets his jersey dirty. The hurler then comes set and delivers the pitch. Clark is off like a light and swipes second base. It was as if Methodist players knew he was stealing and there was nothing they could do about it. The pitcher comes set again, eyes Clark, and throws toward the plate. He's timed his jump so perfectly that the catcher has no opportunity to make a throw to third. Moments later, to the cheers of the Bishop crowd, two-hole hitter Tom Haverkamp slams a base hit and Clark scampers home with the tying run. There was no stopping Greg Clark when he's eyeing the next base.

That was more than 30 years ago. Today, following a career as a public-school teacher and coach, Clark is back on campus as an assistant coach for the Bishops baseball team.

Born and raised in Rocky Mount, Clark began playing baseball in the 1960s—first the "Midget League," then the "Small Fry," followed by Little League and Pony League. Well-known for his speed, Clark was a standout player all his way through his career at Rocky Mount Senior High.

In the 1970s, the college recruiting process was dramatically different than it is now, due in large part to advances in communication technology. Today coaches can contact players through cell phone calls and watch their highlight tapes on recruiting websites. "When I was in high school, it was all word of mouth and getting seen by the right scout at the right time," Clark recalled.

Clark had not been seen by many Division-I coaches in high school, so he wanted to try to

walk-on at East Carolina University in the fall of 1978. But at the time North Carolina Wesleyan was hiring one of ECU's graduate assistants, Tony Guzzo, as their next head coach. Having been in touch with him during his recruitment for the Pirates, Coach Guzzo persuaded Clark to stay in Rocky Mount and attend his hometown school.

In the fall of '78, Clark's freshman year, more than 100 Wesleyan students tried out for the baseball team during fall practices (There were only 700 students in the school). Clark made the team and earned the starting center-field position. Until the 1979 season, the Bishops baseball team's best record was 11-18 in 1975. The college baseball landscape was different during that time, with teams such as UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Wilmington and East Carolina University on Wesleyan's non-conference schedule. Clark did not set personal goals before each season, only the ultimate team objective of making it to the Division III World Series and winning it.

The spring of '79 saw the Bishops set a school record of 18 wins. While its goal had not been within reach, the team was moving in the right direction. The next season the Bishops won 22 games and set another school record. Clark said the team was improving and at its best point in school history, but there was still work to be done. He had not established himself as the prominent player he knew he wanted to be. He decided to make adjustments. He worked on his baserunning abilities over the summer of 1980. "Thirty stolen bases a year was not enough," he said.

The 1981 season was a monster year for Clark and the Wesleyan baseball team. At 33-13, the Bishops not only smashed the school record for wins, but claimed first place in Dixie Conference (now USA-South) and earned a berth in the NCAA South Regional Tournament. The off-season preparation had paid off for Clark, as he set a school record with 72 stolen bases and became the program's first All-American. As a dominating presence in the Dixie Conference, Clark had his eyes set on reaching the Division III World Series.

One of Clark's most memorable games came in the first regional game in the school's history.

Played in Trenton, New Jersey, the game was a nail-biter against Trenton State. Trailing by a run in the top of the ninth inning, with a runner on first base, Clark slammed an 0-2 pitch over the right field wall to give Wesleyan the lead. "It's a favorite memory because I wasn't known as a power hitter," he said. "It was a high-pressure situation. The whole atmosphere was electric."

The Bishops held onto the lead in the 9th for the victory and then went on to win the South Regional, with Clark named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. Although Wesleyan would lose its first two games of the World Series to storied Division III baseball programs, the 1981 season was another huge step in the right direction.

The 1982 season saw the Bishops duplicate their success from the previous year. Wesleyan posted a 29-15 record, won a Dixie Conference championship, and earned a return trip to the NCAA Tournament. Clark stole 69 bases during the season, pushing his career total to 202, still a DIII record. His stolen base percentage, .918 (202/220), is still ranked seventh in the nation all-time. He was named the Wesleyan program's first Conference Player of the Year for his efforts during the regular season.

That year in the South Regional, Wesleyan put a beat-down on rival Methodist, earning a spot in the World Series in Marietta, Ohio. At the time, the series featured a six-team format, giving the Bishops a bye in their first game. However, Wesleyan would finish in fourth place for a second year after it was ousted by the eventual national champion, Eastern Connecticut State.

Although Wesleyan had not achieved its goal of winning a national championship, the school's baseball team had established a national name for itself and built a foundation for eventual success. After Clark's graduation, Mike Fox took over the program, leading the Bishops to a national title in 1989 and grooming the talent that allowed his successor, Charlie Long, to take the program's second national title, in 1999.

Clark thought he had played his last competitive baseball game after the Bishops were knocked out of the 1982 NCAA Tournament, but around that time, his father received a call phone call at home. Clark had been selected by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 18th round of the Major



Greg Clark