

Sports Profile

Earning her stripes in the summertime

By DAVID BULLA
Chronicle Sports Editor

"Just give me a little respect" might be Kim Waller's credo.

For if you were a teen-age male who plays basketball, how would you react to Waller, a female referee? Perhaps you would try to take advantage of her because you doubt her understanding of the game and its rules.

But think again. You'll change your mind once you play in a game called by Waller, who officiated in the Winston-Salem Summer League. Rodney Scott, the rising senior at North Forsyth, was convinced from the start that being a female wasn't a handicap for the young official.

"She's a good official," said Scott, an all-county performer who is among the league's best players. "She's made some good calls and tries to be consistent. She's better than some of the men, and she won't take any backtalk."

Waller earned the players' respect with her by-the-book approach to Summer League games, played in a looser atmosphere than high school games. She worked two games per night two nights a week at Reynolds Park Recreation Center. She wasn't bashful, calling as many as five technicals in a single night. More often than not, more than five could have been called. But she stresses patience with young players and doesn't lose her composure in what is rather staunchly a man's world.

"You need to take more (verbal abuse) in the summer," she said. "What's really bad is when a player is being disrespectful and is obviously out of control and his own coach won't take him out or reprimand him. That's not getting support from the coach."

Waller, who became an accredited official for high school games last year, said she is benefiting from her experience in the Summer League.

"Someone told me it would be a good way to stay in shape," she said. "But it's also given me the opportunity to build my rapport with the players and coaches. I think they respect me just for caring enough to come out in the summertime and this gives me an opportunity to build on what was established in the winter."

Hansel Hentz, director of the Summer League, has been quite satisfied with Waller's work.

"Kim's one of the best ones out there," Hentz said. "She's making the league great. She's a serious official."

Waller said the summertime work is a little dif-

"It's not really difficult to learn the rules and apply them. But the difficulty is that split-second judgment. If you do it quickly and sell your call, you're doing your job."

-- Kim Waller, basketball referee

ferent from regular high school games because players learn bad habits in the summer and conditions are different. Reynolds Park is a cramped, dimly-lit facility that feels like a kiln on midsummer nights. Sometimes the other official might be late, but the games go on with one ref.

"You can tell they play a lot in the summer," she said. "They incorporate street moves into their games. They carry the ball more and put the ball on their hips when they drive (for a layup)."

"But I think this league is good, especially for the younger teams. It gives them an opportunity to work together and find out their strengths and weaknesses. I also think these guys have greater camaraderie in the summer. There seems to be less hostility among them."

Because the Reynolds Park floor is shorter than regulation length, Waller said play is more rigorous and the action often takes place at a breakneck pace. She believes this is good practice for a profession in which instant judgments must be made.

Waller has seen some interesting responses to her officiating. She has learned to tune out most of the peripheral second-guessing, but realizes she must be receptive to requests for clarification from players and coaches.

"You can't seem so objective that you're cold and unapproachable," she said. "You have to establish your rapport with players, coaches and



Official Kim Waller says her Summer League experience is more than an opportunity to stay in shape (photo by James Parker).

athletic directors."

Waller, who played high school ball at Greenville Rose, was introduced to officiating when she was playing intramural basketball as a freshman at Wake Forest University. She made \$2.50 a game for refereeing intramural games.

After graduating in 1984, she joined the association of high school officials for the Northwest part of the state and began to work toward accreditation, which would make her an active official. Last year she was certified by the state association and she called both girls' and boys' games. She traveled as far away as northern Wilkes County to call games two nights a week.

In a year's time on the job, Waller has been able to gain perspective to make some observations about the state of the game. Her biggest surprise is the relative ignorance of the rules among the game's principals.

"The thing that bothers me the most is that many of the players and coaches are not well-versed in the rules," said Waller, who is a grants contract officer in the Development Office at Wake Forest. "Maybe we need to emphasize awareness of the rules in our camps."

Waller hopes to eventually work her way up to the rank of women's collegiate official. She knows it will take a lot of dues-paying and some lucky breaks.

"You have to love this to counterbalance the grief you get," she said. "I also enjoy the game, especially watching players and teams improve as the season progresses."

In addition to her work in the Summer League, Waller has called games in Bob Staak's team camp at Wake Forest.

The experience comes in handy, since basketball fans not only ask the heroic of their players but also of their officials. For instance, it's nearly impossible to be consistent on the block-charge call because it's so subjective. Waller says it would be healthier for fans to realize that officials are human, too.

"We have good nights and bad nights," she said. "Some nights we just can't seem to click with our partners."

Even if officials aren't very successful in changing the attitudes of fans, players and coaches, they still must do the basic job of making the calls quickly.

"We're told that it shouldn't take more than a second from when you see the infraction to when you blow your whistle," she said. "Think about how much concentration that takes, how much court awareness you have to develop. It comes with experience."

"It's not really difficult to learn the rules and apply them. But the difficulty is that split-second judgment. If you do it quickly and sell your call, you're doing your job."

Waller's earning more than just some spending change working the sometimes raucous Summer League. She's earning respect.

Summer League

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"I was patient, though, and went out in the driveway and shot a lot of free throws. About the sixth or seventh game, I started to get my old touch back."

The significance of the tournament championship was that North played without all-county center Rodney Scott, who strained ligaments in his knee three weeks ago. Scott was in a cast for four days and healed quickly. But it was decided he should not compete in any more games this summer.

In the meantime, Patrick Caesar was coming of age for the Vikings. The 6-foot-3 Caesar made life miserable for North's opponents in the tourney, scoring 23 against the Spirits in the quarterfinals, 11 against

Parkland in the semis and 17 against West.

"Pat's improved 100 percent this summer," Denny said. "He played jayvee as a ninth- and 10th grader, and he was a little intimidated by varsity players. When he saw Wil Blackwell (Reynolds' 6-7 center), he said Wil was the tallest person he'd ever faced."

"We like to go inside a lot for the high-percentage shot. Pat made a few shots and gained some confidence. Once he got his composure, he really developed."

The Vikings overcame a 35-point, 15-rebound performance by West's Dwayne Morgan in the championship game. Morgan, who averaged 29

points in three tourney games, was named the Most Valuable Player. Although he received plenty of help from Vince Hairston (16 points), the Titans were unable to contain North point guard Mike Bell. Bell penetrated at will and made good on enough jumpers to finish with 19 points.

Moreover, he caught West napping to start the second half. The Vikings had possession first, and Bell took the inbounds pass from Denny and scored an uncontested layup. The Titans had forgotten to change goals.

"That mistake got us going," Bell said. "We seemed to settle into our tempo. We like to move the ball around, set some picks

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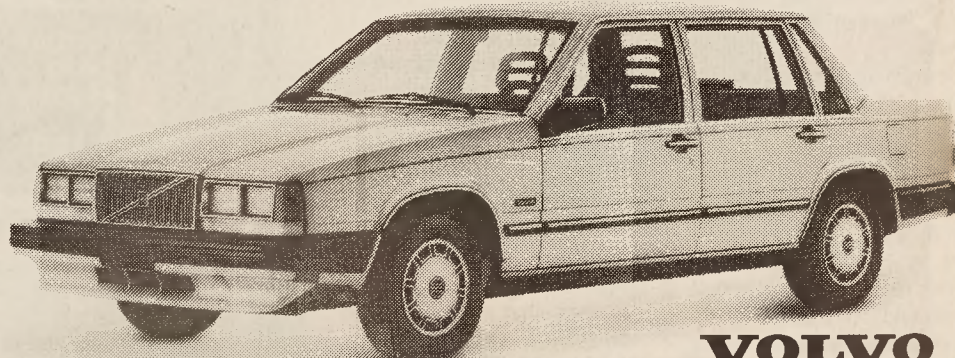
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