

Former All-American says college has become a breeding ground for pros

By RANDY PETTITT
Chronicle Sports Editor

A lot of things have changed since Charlie Davis was a high school basketball player back in the 1960's. But Davis says the high school level has managed to keep one of it's more favorable assets over the years.

"High school is still one of the few outlets where basketball is played the way it ought to be -- for fun," said Davis, a former All-American guard at Wake Forest who spoke to players and coaches of the Frank Spencer Holiday Classic in a player breakfast earlier this week.



Davis

"Unfortunately, college basketball has become more or less a semi-pro league," said Davis, the first black to be named Player of the Year in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"There is so much pressure for college basketball programs to win these days," he said. "College basketball is a money-making sport and the pressure for the kids to perform is simply too much. They are still unpredictable and growing and it is unfair to burden them with so much pressure to win and excel at the time."

"That is why high school basketball is so refreshing. It is still one of the few chances you have to see the game played just for pure fun and enjoyment. That's the way the game should be played."

Davis, who as a guard in 1971 was the first black to make ACC Player of the Year honors, is also Wake's lone black member of their Hall of Fame. He said high school basketball has changed, but it has suffered some setbacks as well.

"The talent is much greater today," said Davis, who returned to Winston-Salem five years ago and currently works as a financial planner for New York Life.

"The kids are stronger, faster and taller than they were in the 60's. But I believe a lot of the kids today lack the great coaching we had in my generation of high school basketball."

"So much emphasis is placed on winning, that the basics of the game are being overlooked. Things like passing, dribbling, boxing out, squaring up your body and many others."

"When I was a kid playing in New York (Brooklyn Technical High School), we had coaching year round. After the season was over, we had four or five big tournaments and played 40 or 50 games."

"There were a number of coaches who coached the whole year and we took advantage of it. Now a lot of coaches aren't too fired up about letting their kids play in summer tournaments and get outside coaching."

"Most kids these days don't get enough outside playing experience. The ones that go to the camps and play summer ball have a tremendous advantage."

The hot-shooting guard still holds several individual records at Wake Forest -- including a school record 51 points against American University, a career scoring average of 24.94 points per game and a career free throw percentage of 87.3% -- yet he realizes someday they will fall.

"Records are made to be broken," he said. "Mine have stood the test of time, though. But surely someone will come along and put me in the number two spot."

Davis told the players and coaches of the Frank Spencer Classic, that no matter how good you are, there is someone out there better.

"People saw Oscar Robinson and went crazy," he said. "Then when Julius Erving came along, they said there would never be another one like him."

"But along came 'Air' Jordan and people are saying that about him now. Surely, someone will come along in a few years and we'll say the same thing about

them.

"So enjoy the game of basketball and keep that in mind," he said. "It can teach you a lot about yourself, provide you with some fond memories and give new friends. It is a game of character as much as it is ability."

Davis displayed his character when he opened the racial door in the ACC and at Wake Forest.

"The ACC used to be the Dixie Conference," he said. "Oscar Robinson actually got beat up trying to play in the league. Even when the ACC finally allowed blacks to play in the league, it still took a long time to win acceptance."

"John Roach edged Charlie Scott for Player of the Year in 1970. I thought Charlie was one of the greatest players in the country let alone the ACC. It was

their hand a little bit," he said. "Had I not been selected as Player of the Year, then it would've left a tremendous black eye on the ACC."

"No matter how great you are, there's someone out there better."

-- Charlie Davis

a close vote, but I still think he was cheated."

Davis was not to be denied, however, as he put forth a season so great that it would have been obvious racism had he not been selected as Player of the Year.

"I had a great year and forced

"I feel like I opened the door for guys like Phil Ford, Michael Jordan and Ralph Sampson. Once the first step is made, the second and third seem much easier."

Although Wake retired his number 12 jersey and Davis went on to a professional career in the

NBA, he is still a Deacon fan.

"Yeah, I still pull for the home team," he said. "It's a very fine school."

Davis said if Wake is patient, the ingredients from this year's mediocre team may be a force in the near future.

"Wake has five or six good athletes," he said. "A couple of good recruiting years and they'll really have something to look forward to."

"I think Coach (Bob) Staak was not left with the best of situations. He was able to cover it up for a year with a great player like Tyrone Bogues, but the program was really in poor shape when he took over."

"I think Staak is starting from scratch and I hope the school and fans exercise patience with him. I think Staak and his staff realize that they need a big man that can play and they're going to go out and get him."

"I don't understand it. Wake has never been able to land the big man. You have to have the big horse in the middle to win championships."

"Wake has always been known for their forwards and great guards."

Indeed, Charlie Davis is one of the greatest guards to ever play in the ACC -- but with guys like Frank Johnson and Muggsy Bogues, how quickly they forget.

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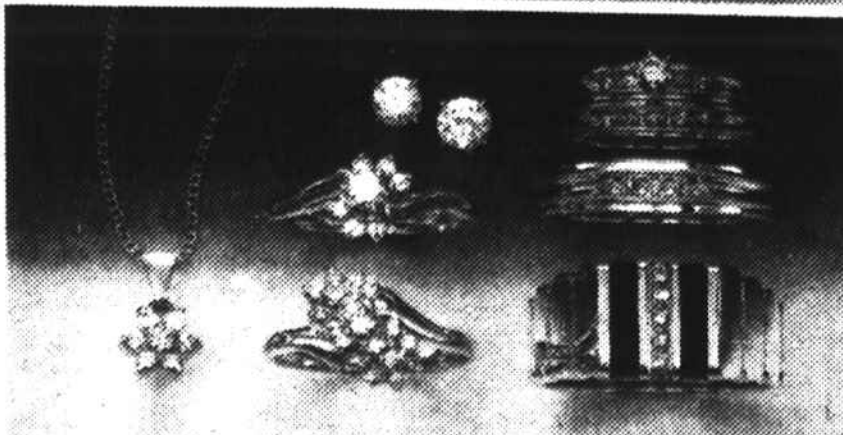
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