

Boys Club Team Proves Itself Among Top AAU Squads In Winston-Salem



The Winston-Salem Boys Club AAU team are in Orlando, Fla. this weekend to play in the Easter Invitational.

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David Solomon could barely contain himself when talking about the Winston-Salem Boys Club AAU team. Well, sort of.

"We're undersized, so we have to attack everyone with our press and use our quickness and conditioning in order to beat teams," he said. "We can't hope to beat any team unless we run."

On Sunday, the Boys Club team scored a major upset by defeating Laurinburg Academy 87-83 in its first game of the year. After falling behind as many as 12 points in the first half, the Boys Club team came back thanks to a 51-point second half. The team rallied behind the precepts of Solomon, who stresses a hectic, fast-break style.

Today the team is in Orlando, Florida for the Easter Invitational Shootout, where they are one of eight teams — and the only one from North Carolina — playing. Most of the teams are from Florida and Jamaica and will play a minimum of four games until April 3.

The win is of significance because of both teams. Laurinburg is one of the most prestigious military institutions in the country, where many Division I basketball players go for academics and athletics. Among famous alumnus of the school include Charlie Scott, Jimmy Walker and Chris Washburn. The Boys Club team consists of nine local high school players, most of whom did not join the bigger name AAU programs in the Triad.

"I stood in awe walking down the halls, watching some of the big names that played there," said Solomon, who has been the Boys

Club coach for four years and serves on its board. "But our players didn't stand in awe of them. We'll go up against bigger competition every game and our guys hung in there and we got the win."

"That type of attitude is what's going to keep us in games this year. These players work hard and it's going to take a team effort for us to win games."

Though Solomon talked down the win, the upset was a big step for the program. The Boys Club team has only nine players on its roster and not a player taller than 6-3. The team also plays in the 17-under and 19-under divisions, which means one of its taller players must sit out some games because he turns 18 after the Sept. 1 deadline.

To compensate for its shortcomings, Solomon puts the team under three-hour practice sessions, while going through wind sprints and conditioning drills. The team also uses a motion offense, which picks and down screens must be used.

"It's not of the most popular programs in town, but it's of the best," said Charles Ingram, a sophomore at West Forsyth who did not play basketball this year. "Now with that win, we can be looked at like the other AAU programs, like Winston Lake and Kernersville."

A trademark of the team is its unselfish play. Five players scored in double figures, led by Curtis Lipscomb's 27 points. Lipscomb, who stands 6-2, scored his points inside against a team that starts a frontline of 6-8, 6-5, and 6-6. Because of the motion offense, a lot of players are left free for uncontested shots and layups. And the team's pressing philosophy keeps them in games.

"We've got to be in great shape when we play because we don't have a lot of depth," Solomon said. "When the fourth quarter comes, we have to be in great shape or we don't have a chance."

Unlike most AAU programs, the Boys Club team has limited resources; \$ 5,000 must be used for the entire year. Donations come from parents and organizations, which are used for travelling expenses. The team only plays in Winston-Salem once this year because other teams do not come to them. And unlike most AAU programs, the Boys Club team does not pick from among the top-flight talent in the area.

"This is like the AAU for the underrated players in the area," said Lipscomb, who will not be playing in Orlando because of his age. "Last year, we played not to get blown out as bad. Now, we want to win every game. As long as we have confidence and play unselfishly, we can do it."

The team looks at the Laurinburg win as a monumental step toward qualifying for the National AAU championships, which will be held in Winston-Salem this July. Solomon said he chose these players because they are dedicated to winning and the Boys Club players feel that run-and-press offense will keep the team in every game they play in.

"We needed a big win before we went out of town to Florida," said James Fleming, who attends West Forsyth and is in his second year in the Boys Club. "The win was emotional for us, but we worked hard for it. The coach works us hard and we really play together. If we play like this the rest of the year, then we'll be all right."

mous selection on The Associated Press All-America first team.

Many NBA scouts have said the 6-foot-8 Robinson, nicknamed Big Dog, is the likely top pick in the draft if he decides to give up his final year of college eligibility.

The Boilermakers finished the season 29-5, losing 69-60 to Duke Saturday in the championship game of the NCAA Southeast Regional. Robinson was held to a season-low 13 points in that game.

Robinson, the 15th player in NCAA Division I history to score 1,000 points in a season, set a school single-season record with 1,030 points during the 1993-94 season. He is the only Boilermaker to record at least 1,000 points, 500 rebounds, 100 steals, 100 assists

and 50 blocked shots. And he did that in only two years, having sat out his freshman year under Proposition 48.

The last player from Purdue to be named the national player of the year was three-time All-American John Wooden in 1932.

Robinson, the first player to lead the Big Ten in scoring since Purdue's Dave Schellhase in 1966, has scored in double figures 56 consecutive games and has had 30 or more points in 25 of them, including a career-high 49 against Illinois in the final game of the regular season. He's also the first player to lead the Big Ten in both rebounding and scoring since Minnesota's Mychal Thompson in 1978.

Girls AAU

"I've also noticed how more serious the scrimmages have become. Last year, the players used to be more selfish and more one-on-one, now they're taking this seriously."

With the continued development and exposure of the program, more girls players are becoming aware of AAU's existence.

"Last year a friend of mine played and she told me about the team and I felt it was a good way for me to get more experience," said Mount Tabor player Varnetta

Hawkins, a member of the 18-under team. "I've learned how to play a different position here, which will help me develop my game further next year."

Romelia Allen said she could have added a fourth team this year if she would have known about the amount of interest before submitting the teams to the U.S. NCAA Olympic Competition. And while she concedes the program being "three to five years away" from becoming a top-flight program,

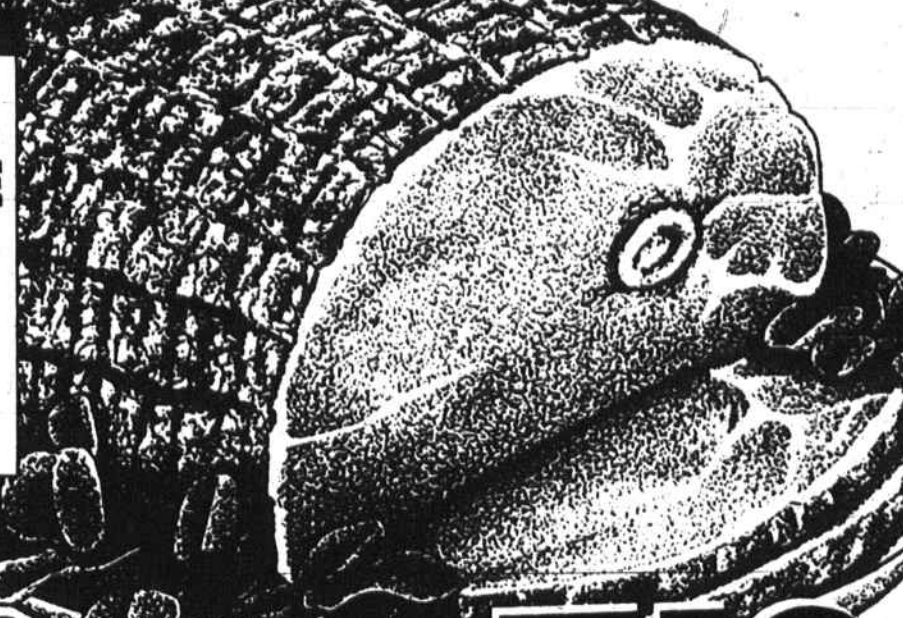
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Romelia Allen said the inroads have been made.

"We've taken people by notice we will be a good program, but it's going to take some time educating the players and the parents that this is not like anything they have known in terms of basketball," Romelia Allen said. "Players realize that you earn time here and you play to hang on in there in the end. The games can be ferocious, but if you can't make it here, you can't expect to compete in Raleigh."

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