

# SPORTS WEEK

B SECTION

MARCH 18, 1999

## It was the best of times for Banner, Wilson, Stephens



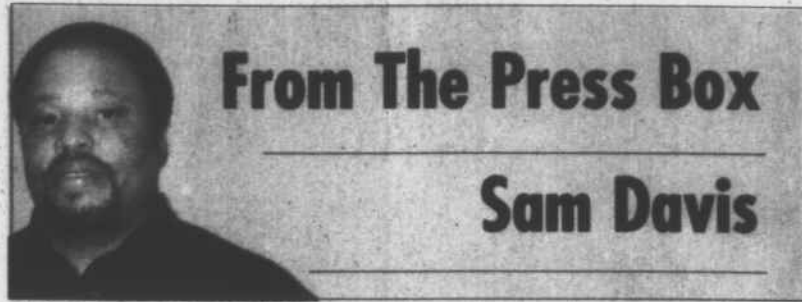
Lamont Wilson

Standing in the winner's circle at the Dean E. Smith Center last Saturday night, seniors Camden Banner, Derrick Stephens and Lamont Wilson could hardly contain themselves.

As they waited to receive their individual awards, following Parkland's 101-83 victory over West Rowan in the State 3-A basketball championship game, their emotions ran up and down the emotional spectrum. One minute there was laughter and jubilation. Then tears began to flow.

The Mustangs' basketball program was enjoying the brightest day in its history. Banner, Wilson and also Stephens had been around to experience the program's darkest.

While many freshmen began their careers inauspiciously as part of a freshman or junior varsity team, Banner, Stephens and Wilson will forever carry the scars of their first season in the Mustangs' program.



### From The Press Box

**Sam Davis**

The Parkland freshman team was practicing at an off-campus gym, which was normal for a team that had to share its on-campus facility with four other basketball teams at the school. The youngest of the Mustangs' squads was going through a routine layup drill when James Rumph collapsed. Rumph went into cardiac arrest and died. His teammates looked on in amazement as paramedics tried to revive him.

Those memories stayed with the team for a long time.

"It was hard at first," Banner said, reflecting on his experiences.

"For awhile, I didn't know if I really wanted to play basketball again. I didn't know if something like that could happen to me."

Banner, Wilson and Stephens had also been teammates of Rumph's on the Mustangs' junior varsity team. Each had begun to build a bond with the soft-spoken Rumph. But that was taken away in a moment of time.

"We were all in a state of shock for awhile," Wilson said. "There was so much going on in our minds. It was the most difficult thing I've ever had to go through."

They got through it, however.

The team went through the mourning process with the Rumph family and remained strong. They finished the season with a winning record and moved up to the junior varsity the following season.

Again the team was successful, posting another winning season. However, the varsity team reached an all-time low. Coach Charles Schoderbek was dismissed from his job midway through the season and the Mustangs limped to a 5-18 record.

By the time they reached the varsity last season, Banner, Wilson and Stephens had lost nearly all of their classmates from their first two seasons in the program. But the arrival of Coach Mike Pennington and the presence of Crawford, who played on the junior varsity as a freshman and on the varsity as a sophomore, and several other newcomers gave the team optimism as it



Camden Banner

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## Right combinations keyed Mustangs' run to state title

By SAM DAVIS  
THE CHRONICLE

To win a championship, a team has to be both good and lucky.

A longheld axiom about luck seems to always figure into the equation. Luck is when preparation meets opportunity.

That assuredly seems to be true of the Parkland basketball team, which captured last week's 3-A State championship.

The Mustangs were able to blend a host of elements together to cook up their title. Coach Mike Pennington, the chef in this particular case, certainly knew the ingredients that he needed to put together to come up with the championship formula.

Pennington, who served as an assistant at Carver under Alfred Poe for seven years, was the right man at the right time for the Mustangs' program. He inherited the team when it was at one of its low points. However, he realized the vast potential the team had.

If Pennington was the team's chef or architect, then Clifford Crawford was its main dish or building block. In Clifford Crawford, the Mustangs had a rarity among high school players. A 6-4, true, point guard with the ability to penetrate past smaller guards is always a plus. So is having a point guard with the size and ability to shoot over a zone defense. When you embody them both in the same person, you certainly have something special. North Carolina State realized that and began recruiting Crawford early in the game. That resulted in Crawford

signing a basketball grant with the Wolfpack during the early signing period last November.

Having one outstanding player isn't enough, however, to ensure a state championship. West Rowan, which had Scooter Sherrill, can certainly attest to that. It was evident early on that Sherrill's individual talents were on par with the top players in the state. However, without ample support, his effectiveness was limited.

On the other hand, Parkland had eight players to log more than 16 minutes of playing time. And even though Danny Gathings scored 36 points, the Mustangs had five players to reach double figures.

Crawford played only nine minutes in the first half and scored 10 points. But the Mustangs hardly seemed to skip a beat when he went to the bench.

Gathings was Parkland's man of the hour and picked up most of the slack. Gathings, who transferred to Parkland from East Forsyth prior to the season, made the most of his opportunities and took home game MVP honors.

"We said 'alright Cliff's out of the game and we've still got to play,'" Pennington said. "That's just the kind of team we are. Our jersey says Parkland. We're a team and there's no I in team. The players knew that. There was no one player that we were looking to go to. The whole team came ready to play."

Because they did, the Mustangs rolled to the win.

"We committed ourselves back last summer to being the



Photo by Bruce Chapman

Clifford Crawford penetrates West Rowan's defense

best, no matter what," Pennington said. "I can't say enough about how hard these kids worked. How they hung in there

together and refused to quit. They wanted this."

Crawford, whose first two varsity teams went 5-18 and 13-13,

said this year's squad was dedicated to achieving its goal.

"It's a great feeling," Crawford said. "Even before the season

started, we knew we were going to have a big year. We always knew we had some good things ahead. Even when we were 5-18."

## Aggies host youth football clinic Saturday at Simeon Stadium

By SAM DAVIS  
THE CHRONICLE

Are you ready for some football?

If you're an athlete between the ages of 6-14, you might want to dust off your cleats and start getting ready to get back on the field.

North Carolina A&T is hosting a clinic for youngsters this Saturday (March 20) at High Point's A.J. Simeon Stadium. The complete Aggie coaching staff will be there to take kids through a series of drills, focusing on the fundamentals.

The clinic is part of a new program that the Aggies are

offering to youth in this area. The program is called the "Junior Aggie Program." Its purpose is to introduce youth in the Triad to the North Carolina A&T athletics program.

Hornsby Howell, athletics director at A&T, said he's hoping the clinic will serve as a boost for the program, which was recently introduced.

"This is something for our young folk," Howell said. "It's just getting off the ground, but we expect it to really reach a lot of kids. We want to introduce them to the fundamentals and bring them along slowly."

Saturday's clinic will be the

See Aggies on B2

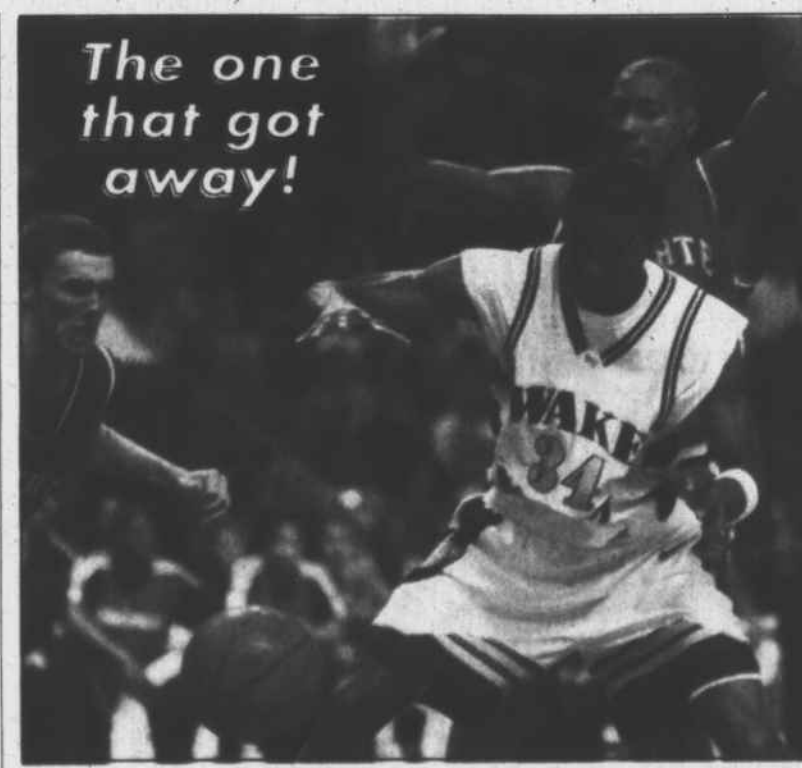


Photo by Bruce Chapman

Both Wake Forest and North Carolina State were knocked out of the NIT last Monday (March 15) to end their seasons.

## Smith, Bell chart course for Mustangs success on gridiron

By SAM DAVIS  
THE CHRONICLE

Staring in the face of a challenge is nothing new for Harold Smith, Parkland's principal. An ex-wrestler and wrestling coach, Smith isn't one who backs down to a good challenge.

That's one of the reasons that Smith is the principal at Parkland High. He wasn't afraid to throw his name in the hat and let the chips fall where they may.

That's also the approach Smith took recently when he went out looking for a new head football coach. Smith said he was looking for someone similar in



Bell

ideology to himself, a self-starter, genuinely interested in the welfare of the kids in the program.

In the end, the person whom Smith had a

gut feeling about was the person who became the team's coach - DeAngelo Bell.

"I think we ended up with the best person for the job," Smith

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