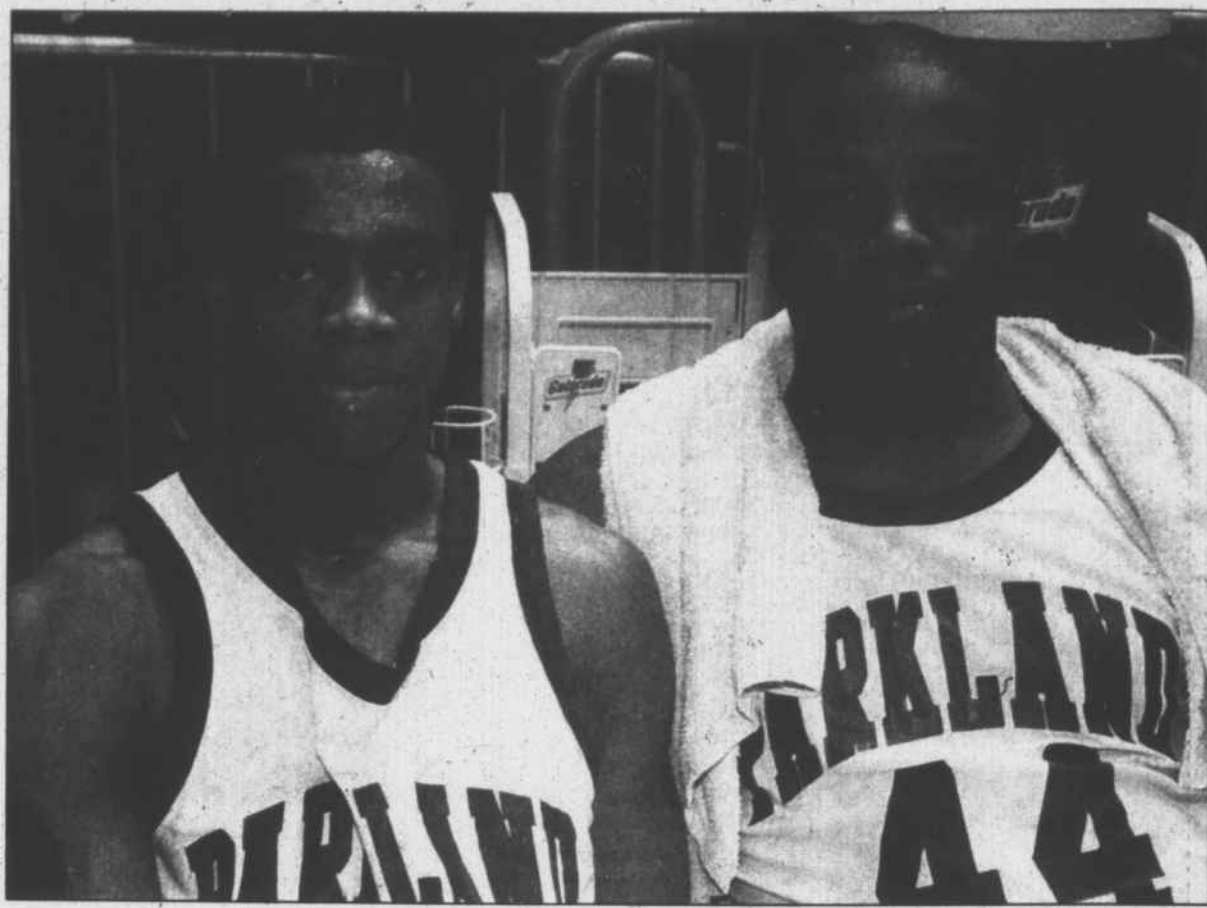




Emotions ran the full spectrum after Parkland's state title.

Photos by Bruce Chapman



Photos by Bruce Chapman

Banner (left) and Wilson endured the tough times and enjoyed the good times.

Parkland

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said. "He has so many of the qualities that you look for in a coach."

Bell, a Greensboro native, served as an assistant at Mount Tabor for eight seasons under Bob Sapp. He has been the assistant head coach for four of those years.

In a recent interview, Bell said he's looking forward to the challenge of leading the Mustangs, who haven't had a winning season in six seasons.

"I'm really excited about it," Bell said. "I'm raring to get over there and get going."

Right now that's a complicated matter, however.

Bell's Mount Tabor track team is just beginning its season.

"It's hard because I want to do a good job with the track team," he said. "I really haven't had a chance to go over and meet with the players or get much going."

From what he's seen, Bell said he expects to be successful leading the program.

"Right now they're enjoying the success of their basketball season," Bell said, referring to the team's State 3-A championship that the Mustangs won last week.

"Right now not many people are thinking about football. But the championship is great for the kids and the school. It's going to be good for the team's morale."

While the Mustangs' basketball team was on the court, Bell was watching with particular interest: Brandon Isaiah, the

team's top reserve and one of its leading scorers, is the tailback that Bell plans to build the offense around.

"From what I've seen on film of him, he's a great runner," Bell said. "He's a hard worker and a great kid. He's a very well-rounded young man. I'm going to be proud to coach him."

Bell said he plans on using a one-back offensive set, with two slots. That will enable the Mustangs to take advantage of Isaiah's talent. Last year Isaiah rushed for more than 1,600 yards.

"It's sort of run-and-shoot style," Bell said. "We'll be balanced on offense and that makes the opposing team have to play an even defense. I think we can dictate what we want the defense to do rather than have them dictate to us."

Lonnie Pulley, who worked alongside Bell at Mount Tabor, will join Bell at Parkland and serve as the offensive coordinator. Linwood Jerald, who also coached at Mount Tabor, will be the defensive coordinator.

"We plan on using an attack-style defense," Bell said. "We want to disrupt the blocking scheme. Whenever you do that, you can create a negative play."

Bell, who played at North Carolina A&T in college, said he thinks good things are on the horizon for the Mustangs.

"There's more to football than just football," he said. "The main reason they come to school is to graduate and get a good education. We want to build good morals and produce good

people, but the main thing we want to tell our players is that mediocrity is not acceptable here any more."

Press Box

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approached the season.

An 0-8 start didn't dampen the enthusiasm. The Mustangs finally found themselves after the Christmas break and went on a tear. They finished the season with a 13-13 record and advanced to the 3-A playoffs.

When Danny Gathings transferred to the Mustangs' program before the start of the 1998-99 season, the puzzle was complete. Rather than focusing on a winning record or a conference championship, Parkland set its sights on Chapel Hill and a state title.

They got it through hard work and dedication. Their defense was consistent all season. With nearly a dozen role players

at his disposal, Pennington had ample ammunition to go along with the high-powered offensive games of Crawford and Gathings.

Learning to fill their roles wasn't difficult for either Banner or Wilson.

"My role was to come in and spark the team," Banner said. "That was easy for me. Usually the team needs me for 3-pointers to open up the defense."

Against West Rowan, Banner showed another side. His slicing moves to the basket caught the Falcons off guard.

"I guess they were playing me to shoot three's," he said. "They probably saw that on our tapes and figured they had to come up on me. When they did that, I was able to go to the basket."

Wilson, who started for the

past two seasons in the pivot, said his role is much more defined.

"My job is to rebound and get the ball to the scorers," said Wilson, who signed a football grant with North Carolina A&T. "I know what I have to do when I'm out there."

It was fitting for Banner to finish his career with the Mustangs with a career-high in scoring, especially considering what he has gone through.

"I knew one day I would have my chance to shine," said Banner, who had 14 points, six rebounds, an assist and two steals in 21 minutes played. "I'm so happy that it happened today."

So are the Mustangs and their fans. Because they had endured the worst of times, they could now fully enjoy the best of times.

Aggies

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first in a series that Howell said he hopes to grow and include all sports. Anyone between the ages of six and 14 can join the club by purchasing a membership. The membership will entitle individuals to receive a newsletter from the school, attend some athletic events and receive a T-Shirt.

Coach Bill Hayes of A&T said he sees a lot of positive things coming out of the program and the clinics.

"We're trying to continue to build interest in A&T, while at the same time provide some positive outlets for kids," he said. "We want the kids to get to know us and that will help sell them on A&T."

As far as football is concerned, Hayes said the clinics will give kids a chance to try their hands at different positions.

"We plan on concentrating on

the fundamentals," Hayes said. "They'll get a chance to move around to different stations and hopefully they can better decide where their abilities are. We'll grade them on how they do at each station and see where their talents are best suited to play."

Following the clinic, the Aggies will hold a practice session, complete with a scrimmage. The youth will also be treated to a cookout and get to meet the A&T players.

An NCAA rule allows teams to hold workouts off-campus if the roundtrip travel to the site is less than 30 miles. Hayes said that by taking advantage of that rule the Aggies can gain increased visibility in the marketplace.

Saturday's clinic won't be the only one the Aggies will host this spring, during spring football drills. A&T will host another on March 27, just prior to the Aggies' spring football game.

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