

CIAA Basketball Tournament

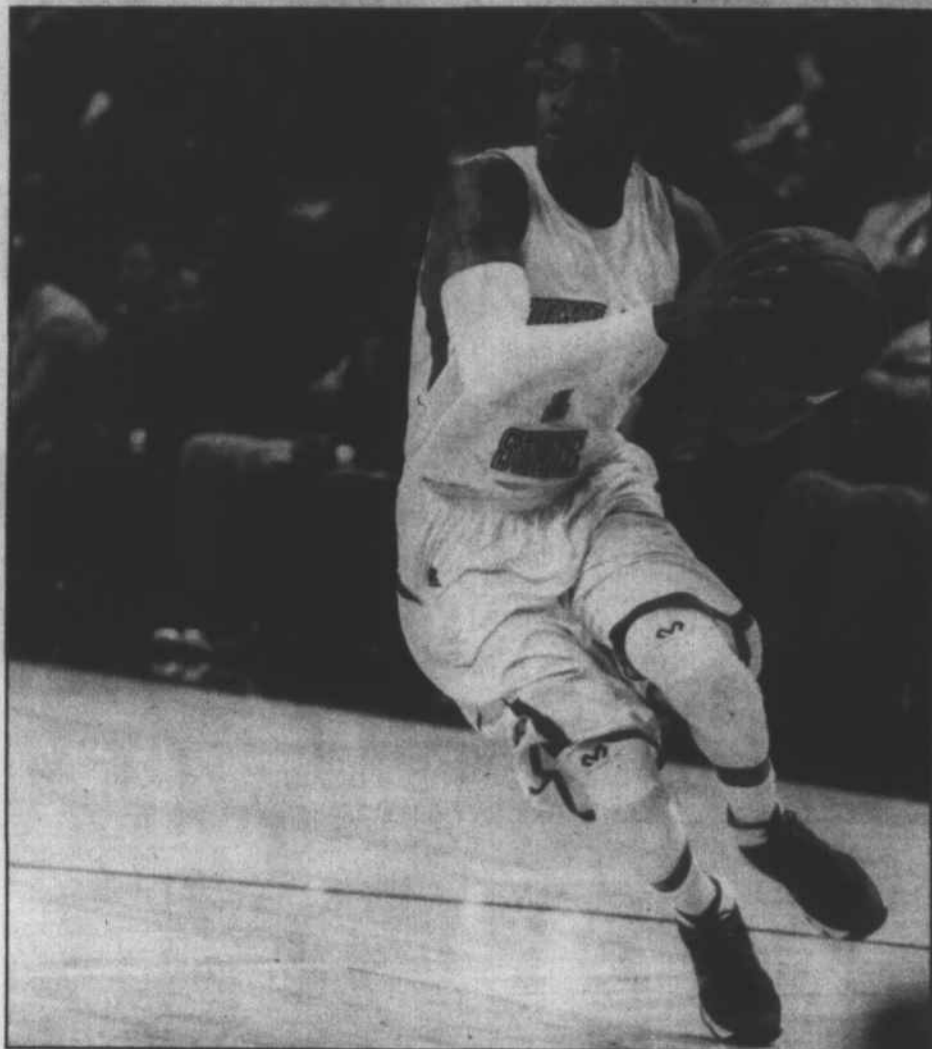


Photo by WSSU Athletics
WSSU's Javan Wells is an offensive threat who can score off dribble penetration or from 3-point range.



RKesheria McNeil comes off the bench to provide a spark for the Lady Rams



Rams forward Donta Harper averages 13.2 points, 4.7 rebounds and 1.9 assists



Dionna Scott delivers consistency as the Lady Rams top scorer and re

“This is as good a time as any to take a look at the prospects for Winston-Salem State University's teams”

WSSU men and women rev up for CIAA tourney

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE FOR THE CHRONICLE

The basketball regular season is winding down, and the CIAA Tournament is only days away from tip-off. So, this is as good a time as any to take a look at the prospects for Winston-Salem State University's teams.

Record-wise, the men's team (15-8) has had a better season than the women (11-13). But when you take a look at what's happened so far in February, it's difficult to determine which team might have an edge when the conference tournament opens in Charlotte on next Tuesday, Feb. 24.

The Rams do occupy first place in the CIAA's Southern Division. WSSU, however, earned a split in the four games it has played this month. So, there's no clear indication at this time as to how well the Rams might fare in the league tournament.

WSSU played at home on Feb. 18 versus Johnson

C. Smith and will close out the season with a road game at Livingstone on Saturday, Feb. 21.

Over the course of the season, the Rams have developed a multi-pronged attack. Five players – Donta Harper, WyKevin Bazemore, Javan Wells, Marquez Jones and Terrell Leach – average double figures in scoring and two of those five are not in the starting lineup. Offensive diversity could work very favorably for a WSSU team that doesn't have any designated “go-to” players.

Even so, the ability to spread the offensive wealth might not be enough to survive in the post-season. Tournament games involving fierce rivals tend to be tightly contested. Making free throws often spells the difference between moving on to the next round or going home. Sinking foul shots – WSSU has converted 57.4 percent from the line this month – could be problematic for this group.

The Rams might be able to sidestep that pitfall

if Harper and Bazemore continue to play at their current level. Over the last four games, Harper (16.5 points per game) and Bazemore (14.8 points per game) are scoring at a clip that's nearly three points higher than their respective averages for the entire season.

WSSU women

Overall, the regular season has been a struggle for the Lady Rams, who can reach the .500 mark by winning their remaining regular-season games. What's most encouraging is the body of work the ladies have put together in recent weeks.

After winning three of their four games this month, WSSU's women are trending upward. Dionna Scott (12.3 points, 5.6 rebounds per game) and Taylar Wells (8.6 points per game) are the veteran leaders who serve as a steady influence.

The Lady Rams are getting major contributions from guard Kesheria

McNeil, who's usually the first player to come off the bench. In this recent four-game stretch, McNeil has averaged 13.8 points per game.

McNeil is far from being a solo act, but in order for this team to pull off a few tournament upsets, others will have to deliver consistency. Freshman guard Tiana Edwards put on a masterful shooting display in a single-digit road loss to Shaw. Edwards poured in 24 points on 6-of-11 shooting from 3-point distance.

Other members of WSSU's front line have shown that they're capable of providing additional support for

Scott in the paint. In the loss to Shaw, Tabitha Fudge contributed 13 points on 6-of-9 shooting from the field. In a home victory over Fayetteville State, Jovanah Graham finished with 10 points, 6 rebounds and 3 steals.

The play of the Lady Rams bench is a major plus, and February has

been a productive and dominant month for the back-ups. Through four games,

WSSU has enjoyed a decisive advantage in bench points (128-74).

WSSU's women's team

may not be a dark-horse candidate. But there's enough experience and skill on the roster to spring a few surprises in Charlotte. This is not a team to be dismissed.

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