

Women's Final Four offers compelling scenarios

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Women's college basketball takes center stage in Charlotte this weekend.

The NCAA Final Four features the nation's heavyweights in Stanford vs. Georgia and Connecticut vs. Tennessee Friday at Charlotte Coliseum.

Connecticut-Tennessee starts at 7 p.m. Friday, with Stanford-Georgia tipping off at 9:30 p.m. Both games will be televised by ESPN, with the championship game Saturday.

The teams are familiar with each other as repeaters from last year's semifinals. There are enough plots to stock a novel. For starters:

- Can Stanford (29-2) win for interim coach Amy Tucker, who is running things while Tara VanDerveer leads the U.S. Olympic team? The Cardinal have a Pac-10-record 23-game winning streak going, due in large measure to some of the best depth in the land.
- Connecticut, which completed an unbeaten season last year with the championship, will be

out to make it two in a row. The Huskies (34-3) have the memories of the '95-96 team to live up to, but have plenty of weapons starting with 6-7 junior Kara Wolters. If UConn wins, it'll be the first repeat winner since Southern Cal (led by TBS basketball analyst Cheryl Miller) in 1983-84.

- The Southeastern Conference's basketball domi-

nance of the college game. Georgia (27-4) and Tennessee (30-4) are making another Final Four appearance. Southern Mississippi and Kentucky have teams in the men's Final Four.

- Tiffani Johnson's homecoming. The former Garinger High product and high school All-America is an important part of the Volunteers, but the

star player label goes to freshman sensation Chamique Holdsclaw. Still, it makes for interesting drama when Johnson takes the floor in front of family and friends.

The Vols have one of the nation's top backcourt tandems in Michelle Marciniak and Latina Davis, who have helped Tennessee to a 13-game winning streak.

Davis not quite Eric the Red

By Joe Kay
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PLANT CITY, Fla. — From the uniform number to the red high-tops, he looks like the Eric Davis that led the Cincinnati Reds to a World Series championship.

Back after two years in retirement, he still slaps his glove on his thigh before making a catch, still attacks pitches with that looping swing, still runs balls down so effortlessly with those long strides.

As far as Davis is concerned, that's where the similarities end. Appearances

aside, he's not the same player he was just a few years ago, and he's doing all he can to make people realize it.

"I'll never get back to where I was," he said firmly. "When I did that, I was 22, 23 years old. But that doesn't mean I can't be successful. That's the way I approach it."

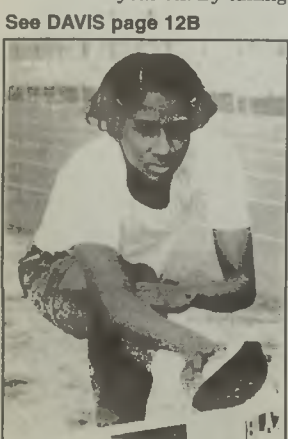
"I mean, every time someone's seen me, they think about the things I've done and they say, 'Well, he wants to get back.' If I don't get back to that, am I a failure? Why do I have to go back and reach that plateau? I can come back and set my own plateau."

Davis is partly responsible for those high expectations. His last two weeks of training camp have assured him a spot on the team and started everyone around him wondering what he's got left at age 33.

There are moments when he looks like the old Eric Davis, who was one of the most splendid players in the game. He can still run down fly balls in the gaps, still steal bases, still present a triple threat with his hitting, running and fielding.

Then there are times when he looks, well, a little off. He has lost at least a step on the basepaths, he goes to right field more often, and he doesn't get that explosive jump when stealing.

"It might take a year to get the rust off. Who knows?" Davis said. "There will be some good days and some ups and downs. It's already an up-and-down game when you don't take a year off. By taking



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III
Abram

GOTTA RUN



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Demetrius Campbell (39) is expected to help Johnson C. Smith improve a ground game that averaged 1.8 yards a carry in 1995.

Ground game key for JCSU

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Demetrius Campbell is looking for some guys who won't mind helping him move ahead.

The Johnson C. Smith running back is expected to help boost a pedestrian ground attack that averaged 1.8 yards per carry in 1995. For

the Golden Bulls (2-8 in last season) to improve those numbers, the senior will need help from an offensive line that returns four starters.

"I feel like if the offensive line works hard, everything's going to be all right," he said. "If the offensive line can produce, I can produce."

Campbell was the lone bright spot in Smith's rushing

attack last season with 525 yards on 113 carries and two touchdowns. The junior college transfer ran for more than 100 yards in his first game, then hurt his ankle, which limited his effectiveness. "Right now, Demetrius will be a very big key to it," Smith coach Daryl McNeill

See SMITH page 12B

Minutemen on time for first Final Four

By Paul Newberry
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Edgar Padilla couldn't wait to show his coach the stat sheet. He pointed to a line that ended with "18."

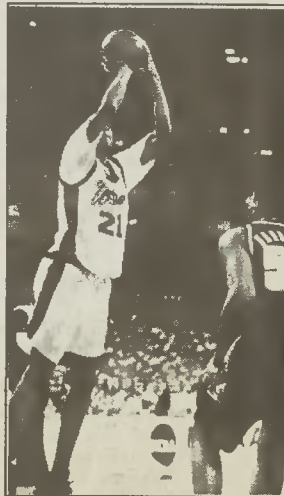
Massachusetts coach John Calipari thought that meant points. Padilla quickly set him straight: 18 was the number of minutes played by Georgetown's Victor Page, the man Padilla had been assigned to guard.

When it came to points, Page had a big zero.

"That's the way this team is," said Calipari, whose team is on its way to the Final Four for the first time in large part because of its unselfish attitude.

"When our guys pick up the stat sheet, the first thing they look at is what their guy scored. They don't look at their

See UMASS Page 12B



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Massachusetts center Marcus Camby leads the Minutemen into the Final Four. It's UMASS' first trip to the men's national semifinals.

S.C. State tops final Division I black college hoop poll

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

S.C. State's men's basketball team has won postseason honors. The Bulldogs finished first in the final rankings of America Sports Network's poll of Division I historically black college teams, and coach Cy Alexander was named coach of the year.

S.C. State (22-8), the MEAC champion, gathered 11 first-place votes and 79 points to win the top spot. SWAC champion Mississippi Valley State (22-7) was second with eight first-place votes and 76 points. Both teams made the NCAA playoffs.

Coppin State of the MEAC was third in the balloting with 71 points, while Jackson State of the MEAC was fourth and Tennessee State of the Ohio Valley Conference was fifth.

In the tightest results ever for coach of the year, Alexander received 77 points to edge past Princeton's Pete Carril (75) and Arkansas' Nolan Richardson with 74. All three led their teams into the NCAA tournament.

S.C. State (22-8) tied for the MEAC regular season championship, then won the conference tournament to advance to the national playoffs. The Bulldogs were unbeaten in 13 home games and won 18 of their last 21 regular season games before claiming the tournament. S.C. State lost to Kansas 92-54 in the first round of the NCAA tournament.



Alexander

Barber-Scotia's Abram shows versatility on track

By Clarence Thomas Jr.
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

CONCORD — Amid the financial woes and other negative perceptions of Barber-Scotia College lies a glimmer of hope named Angela Abram.

The junior track star is one of the National Athletic Intercollegiate Association's best, and Barber-Scotia's pride and joy. Abram is anxious to prove that her freshman year was no fluke by getting All-

American numbers in her junior season. During her initial season, she finished first in the EIAC in the 3,000 and the 1,500 and was named team MVP by her coaches and teammates.

The Sabers did not compete last season due to budgetary problems, but are off to a good start this year. They finished third on two different occasions and first-year coach Frank Hyland feels Abram, who was named team captain

at the start of the season, helped make a difference.

"We have the quality athletes and Angela is one of them," he bragged. "She's very versatile and she's always up to doing what I ask her. Her willingness to run in the 3,000, 1,500 and 800 individual races this year is a testament to the kind of person Abram is."

Abram's teammates, James Bryant III, said her dedication and tenacity boosts the entire team. "I'm inspired by her," he

said. "When I feel like slowing down, she gives me a lift."

"Angela has a good personality and good leadership abilities," Hyland said. "A lot of her teammates really look up to her."

To hear the Fairmont, N.C., native speak, one would not think that she is one of the Barber-Scotia's most important people. "I'm always trying to do the best I can do," she said.

Abram's track career is

indicative of this attitude. She started running at 13 in a fitness class and eventually ended up at Johnson and Wales University in Providence, R.I. It was there that she decided to return south. She then became the target of some heavy recruiting efforts. Livingstone, N.C. Central and St. Augustine's, the 1995 NCAA Division II track champions, were among

See ABRAM page 12B