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Small town makes good, too

We won't even get into whether the Charlotte Bobcats made a good decision when they used their first pick Tuesday night to draft Raymond Felton, who is generally considered the third-best point guard available this year.



C. JEMAL HORTON

And we definitely won't discuss the fact that the Bobcats' attendance will be boosted because Felton played his college ball at North Carolina, which he led to a national championship back in April. Not to mention the fact that the Bobcats also selected Felton's Tar Heel teammate, Sean May, during Tuesday's NBA Draft. The thing is: All that stuff really is insignificant.

This is a story about dreams and how they can come true and how they can lift an entire community.

"It's a dream come true," Felton said Tuesday night of being drafted. Then he added: "This is what I wanted. It means a lot because (I'm) still close to home. I love that. People back home are still close. I definitely wanted to be in Charlotte."

See, folks can talk all they want about North Carolina and Chapel Hill and even Charlotte. But the only place that really matters in this story is Latta.

Latta, S.C., is a town of just over a thousand people that for years was known more for being "not that far from South of the Border" and Myrtle Beach.

But over the past few years, it's been known for being Raymond Felton's hometown.

I was fortunate enough to first visit Latta back in 2001, when I went there to write a story about a skinny, high-school junior who had started creating a name for himself. The kid from the I-A school had single-handedly disposed of Maryland's famed DeMatha High School in a national tournament, prompting that school's legendary coach, Morgan Wootten, to declare the kid one of the best he'd seen in a while.

The kid, of course, was Felton. And Felton, of course, went on to fulfill all the expectations that had been put before him.

But what struck me the most was the way that Raymond loved his town - and how the town loved him back. And I'm talking about BEFORE he became a millionaire.

Back then, they used to fill up the Latta High gymnasium at 4 o'clock - just to see Raymond play around 8 p.m. Back then, you could go into a local convenience store and ask for "Raymond" - no last name needed - and they simply would point you toward the gymnasium without missing a beat.

Those 1,000 or so people didn't necessarily EXPECT Raymond to make it all the way to the NBA. Heck, making it to Chapel Hill was a monumental feat. But those folks certainly HOPED Raymond would show the whole world that great things come from Latta, i.e., making it to the NBA.

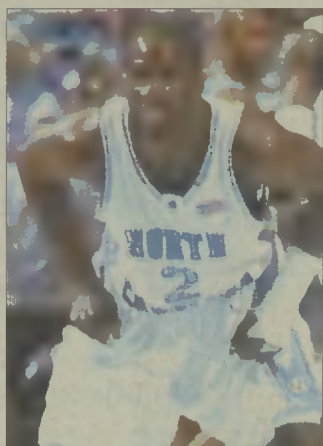
And, after skipping his last season at North Carolina, he did.

Whether it's the NBA or law school or Hollywood, there's just something truly special about seeing dreams come true. It's even more magical when there are thousands of people sharing in the dream. You just know they're still going crazy in Latta, now that Felton's a pro.

But Felton and the fine people of Latta aren't the only people who cheered Tuesday night.

You should have seen the look on the face of Bernie Bickerstaff, the Bobcats' general manager and coach, when he walked in to talk

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PHOTO/CHARLOTTE BOBCATS
North Carolina point guard Raymond Felton was the Charlotte Bobcats' top pick.

First-rounders are Carolina Bobcats

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The Charlotte Bobcats went for the familiar in the NBA draft.

The Bobcats picked North Carolina point guard Raymond Felton with the fifth overall pick and forward Sean May with the 13th pick.

Felton averaged 12.9 points, 6.9 assists and two steals in 36 games for the Tar Heels. The 6-1, 198-pound point guard was all-America third team and all-ACC first team. He was named to the all-ACC freshman team and was the first fresh-

man named team MVP. Felton led North Carolina to two NCAA tournament appearances, including its first national title since 1993.

"Raymond Felton is the point guard on a national championship team and has the skills necessary to be a quality point guard," said Bobcats general manager and head coach Bernie Bickerstaff. "He is very quick and he has improved his shooting. We feel he will continue to develop as a basketball player."

Felton, a Latta, S.C., native, left
See BOBCATS/2C



PHOTO/WAYNE JERNIGAN
Charlotte Sting head coach Trudi Lacey (left) hasn't had the luxury of waiting out easy wins this season. The Sting is last in the WNBA Eastern Conference at 2-10.

Mired at bottom of WNBA East, Sting and coach feel the heat

By Herbert L. White
herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Dawn Staley is uniquely qualified to understand the delicate situation Charlotte Sting head coach Trudy Lacey is in.

Staley, the Sting's point guard, is also head coach of Temple's women's basketball program. With Charlotte stuck at the bottom of the WNBA Eastern Conference at 2-10, there's no denying Lacey's job status - she's also the general manager - may be in the balance.

"I try to see what I would do in this situation and try to help in the locker room just as a player, knowing the pressure she's feeling and I try to explain to my teammates that it's hard," Staley said. "It's a hard job stability wise, her being a black

woman, her being a general manager. She's got a lot of pressure on her."

The pressure's been on since the offseason. Lacey overhauled the roster, adding veterans Sheri Sam, Tangela Smith and Helen Darling and drafting Janel McCarville first overall. But the results haven't translated into a winning record.

The Sting started 0-3 and broke a six-game losing streak Saturday with a 67-61 win over New York before a 66-61 overtime loss Tuesday against Washington. The New York win followed a two-hour team meeting in which Lacy and players cleared the air about where the team's struggles.

"I like input and I accept input from my players," she said. "Whatever they need me to do, I

Pressure

points

want to do it for them. If it's something I'm doing or not doing I'm all about helping them."

As poorly as Charlotte started, there's still hope. The Sting is three games out of the fourth and final playoff spot and three players - Staley, center Tammy Sutton-Brown and guard Allison Feaster - were on the 2001 East championship team that lost 10 of its first 11 games.

"The ones who are still here hold on to that 1-10 year and then going on to the championship" final.

See LACEY/2C

Nationals' postseason vets hope for repeat

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Livan Hernandez disposed of the question about the Washington Nationals' postseason hopes much like his array of tantalizing pitches silencing opposing batters.

"It's too early. It's June," said Hernandez, the Nationals' 11-2 ace. "Nobody talks about winning the World Series in June. Right now, the team is playing good. That's what's important."

Despite sitting atop the Eastern Division at 44-31 - and with a three-game lead over second-place Atlanta - the Nationals are maintaining perspective. Still, Washington players with pennant race experience notice similarities between their pasts and the present.

"It reminds me a little bit of Cleveland," said utility infielder Carlos Baerga, who went to the World Series with the Indians in 1995. "I remember in '91 ... when we lost over 100 games. But then we brought in some new players and turned things around. The new talent was a big part of that."

General manager Jim Bowden doesn't have the deep pockets to sign burgeoning starts to long-term deals like

See NATIONALS/3C

TAKING FLIGHT



PHOTO/WADE NASH
Charlotte Flights Russell Price (left) takes the baton from teammate Johnathan-Cole Bankhead during the 400 meters relay at the USA state track meet at Watauga High last week. Winners go on to the regional meet at N.C. A&T.

JCSU in holiday basketball classic

By Herbert L. White
herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Johnson C. Smith's Golden Bulls will spend the Christmas weekend playing basketball in southern California.

JCSU is one of eight teams invited to play in the Black College Hoops Classic Dec. 27-29 at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. Other CIAA teams participating include Division II national champion Virginia Union, and the Panthers' main East Division rival in recent seasons, Bowie State. Wilberforce (Ohio), Xavier (La.) Lincoln (Mo.) Wiley College and SIAC power Morehouse round out the field.

In addition to the tournament, the classic will include education and social events ranging from a celebrity game and halftime show, comedy show and national collegiate Greek step show. General admission is \$100 per day and reserved tickets are \$75 a day and \$200 for all three days. Students, alumni and seniors can get in for \$20 a day for all games or \$50 for all games.

Los Angeles Sports Arena box office: (213) 747-7111. Web site: boxoffice@lacoliseum.com

Tourney supports minority golf hall

By Herbert L. White
herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

The achievements of minority golfers will be acknowledged next month at a Charlotte tournament.

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department and Minority Golfers National Museum and Hall of Fame will host the Minority Golfers National Pro Am Tournament at Renaissance Golf Course on July 10. The tournament will start at 7:30 a.m. at 1525 West Tyvola Road.

The tournament, in its third year, raises awareness and help provide funding for a hall of fame planned for Charlotte. Amateurs and professionals are eligible to play.

The Minority Golfers Hall of Fame and Museum will commemorate the accomplishments and contributions of minorities to golf, including the era of segregation when black golfers were banned from many courses and clubs. The hall will honor trailblazers such as Charlotte native Charlie Sifford, Lee Elder and James Black who opened the door for players such as Tiger Woods.

The entrance fee for professionals is \$300; amateurs can sign up for \$125. Registration includes medal play with individual prize money for the pros, team scramble with prizes for amateurs. Registration also includes green fees, golf carts, lunch at the course on Sunday, and use of practice range. Deadline for registration is Friday. For information or to register, call tournament director James Ross (704) 597-5529 or William Chandler (704) 575-9309. The field will be limited to 144 players.

A golf clinic will be held at the course July 9.