

# Bobcats continue to improve

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better

"It's just a credit to our work ethic, that is the staple of this organization," Knight said. "We'll come in here next year with a lot more confidence that we can win games."

For Felton, who came from the 2004 national college champion North Carolina, he is happy with what the Bobcats accomplished, but is hungry for more.

"I felt good about the sea-

son (but) then I feel bad on the downside because we didn't make the playoffs," Felton said. "We're finishing strong and we'll come back into camp next year with a positive attitude. We'll get everybody healthy and we'll be all right."

"We're going to approach next season the way we ended this one, we're going to scrap, play hard, and get it done. We're going to make it happen, no matter who we play."

When thinking of retooling the nucleus, Bobcats President Ed Tapscott wanted to reflect on the merits of this season before tinkering with the roster for next year.

"It's always good to end on a positive note, and these guys have been terrific," Tapscott said. "But in the off season, the first thing you do is review the year and discuss (what happened). It is way too soon now, we have to go through our due diligence."

## STING OPENS TRAINING CAMP



PHOTO: CURTIS WILSON

Charlotte Sting coaches Shelley Patterson, Muggsy Bogues and Earl Cureton share a laugh during a photo session as part of the WNBA team's media day Tuesday. The Sting, which finished a league and franchise-worst 6-28, open the season May 20 against expansion Chicago. Charlotte returns Allison Feaster, who missed most of 2005 to pregnancy and add first-round pick Monique Curry from Duke.

# NBA's real top 10 players

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is the game's best all-around player. He has single-handedly driven a mediocre Laker team into the playoffs and more importantly established himself as a leader at both ends of the floor and one who should be even better next season if LA management gets him some legitimate help. Love him or loathe him, Bryant has not only rebounded from his off-court personal woes, but improved his game, dedication and even his reputation.

3. Steve Nash

There is not a player in the game who makes more of an impact on all of his teammates than Nash. I believe is ability to elevate his teammates respective games, makes him the league's Most Valuable Player. With the season-long loss of Amare Stoudemire, Nash has elevated his scoring to a career high this season while continuing to lead the league in assists. The thing I'm most impressed about is that it doesn't matter who is on the court with Nash. He plays the same way all the time and makes whomever he's playing with reach their full potential whether they want to or not. Just look at Tim Thomas. Enough said.

4. LeBron James

After the season James has had, I almost feel embarrassed calling Bryant the best all-around player in the game. James has had a season for the ages and will one day be hold the title of the best player in the game. James has dispelled the notion that he fades away down the stretch and has been the driving force behind the Cleveland Cavaliers renaissance. This season James will accomplish a feat that only three other players in league history have completed. By averaging 30 point six rebounds and six assists, James joins the elite company of Michael Jordan, Oscar Robertson and Jerry West. Need I say more?

5. Kevin Garnett

KG is still putting up eye-popping numbers (21.8 points, 12.7 rebounds and 4.1 assists) for a team that is absolutely atrocious. I know a lot of people are really enamored with the ability of Dirk Nowitzki to go out to the three point line and drain jumpers like they're lay-ups, but for me, if I had to choose one player to match up against Tim Duncan, I would choose Garnett. His rebounding ability is unmatched at this point and he would probably be averaging more points if he had any consistent offensive help to help shed the constant double and triple teams he's faced all season long. His professionalism with the T-Wolves has been nothing short of incredible. No matter who his teammates are, KG comes to play every night.

6. Dirk Nowitzki

Nowitzki is obviously, supremely talented. There has never been a man of his size who can do the things that he does. He really is a modern day Larry Bird - without the killer instinct that is. Until he develops that

instinct, which helped carry a lot less talented Bird, to three championships - and the Hall of Fame - Nowitzki will continue to be a bridesmaid to Duncan's bride. Unlike Bird, who was a better passer and rebounder, Nowitzki only affects games with his scoring. If he ever develops a nasty streak, it could be lights out for a lot of western conference opponents, including the Spurs.

7. Dwyane Wade

Not only is Wade one of the most athletic players in the league, he is also a very intelligent player who generally lets the game come to him. Don't get me wrong, he can definitely take over when needed, but his court sense and basketball intellect may be unmatched by any young player in the league. I expect Wade to move up on this list, possibly to a top-three spot in the next couple of years. He's that good.

8. Paul Pierce

Pierce, who has always been an extremely talented player, has raised his game - and his leadership abilities - to another level - one that should have Boston GM Danny Ainge seriously thinking about getting him some veteran help. Pierce is the only player in the league to lead his team in points (a career-high 26.8), rebounds (6.7), assists (4.8) and steals (1.4). If this season is any indication of what lies ahead for Pierce in the next few seasons then he will get some serious consideration for the league's MVP title, especially if the Celtics ever start winning some games again.

9. Elton Brand

Simply put, Brand is a monster who has always been a 20 and 10 guy since he entered the league. However, with a new and improved Clippers team, Brand has elevated his game this season to even greater heights. His career-best 24.8 points per game to go along with 10.0 rebounds and 2.6 blocks would probably be enough to win the league's MVP award in any other season besides this one. Nevertheless, Brand looks like he will be a MVP contender for a long time and with a little more help, who knows, maybe the Clippers themselves can become legitimate championship contenders themselves.

10. Shaquille O'Neal

I've never been a Shaquille O'Neal fan, especially after seeing the way he was used and abused early in his career by Hakeem Olajuwon. I always say that if Shaq weren't 7-1 and 300 pounds, he would be an ordinary low post player. However, he is 7-1 and 300 and even with his rapidly declining skills, his presence alone is enough to turn any pretender into a legitimate championship contender.

So there you have it - the real ten best players in the NBA. Feedback and comments, as usual, are always appreciated.

*Eric Williams has been a sports columnist for the Philadelphia Sunday Sun for seven years.*

# Lincoln (Pa.) wants to re-join CIAA

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Lincoln conducted a student survey in 2004 that showed 83 percent were willing to pay an athletic fee to help offset the cost of moving up to Division II. Ninety-six percent of students surveyed wanted the school to add football and a marching band as well as join the CIAA.

"The university has an honored tradition on providing opportunities for students," Nelson said. "We believe the marching band will provide music opportunities for our young men and women, and that our football program will attract young men who want to be successful in the classroom as well as on the field of athletic competition."

The CIAA will have 10 members after N.C. Central leaves next year. Winston-Salem State will leave at the end of this academic year to move to Division I. Lincoln, which has an enrollment of 2,278 undergraduate and graduate students, competes as an independent, but is a member of the Eastern College Athletic Conference.

The school first fielded a football team in 1894, two years after CIAA members Johnson C. Smith and Livingstone played the first game between historically black colleges.

CIAA Commissioner Leon Kerry has said the league will aggressively pursue new members, but didn't confirm

a time frame or list of possible candidates. Speculation has focused on Benedict (S.C.), which is a member of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. Another possibility is UNC-Pembroke, which will launch a football program in 2007.

But Lincoln has already made its interest clear in joining.

"A more varied campus life experience contributes significantly to the number of prospective applicants and the active engagement of continuing students," Nelson said. "School and campus pride is significantly enhanced by athletic participation with schools of similar size and composition."



## Softball MVP

Johnson C. Smith third baseman Brandi Young was named CIAA softball player of the year. Young, a senior from Columbia, S.C., ranked in the top 10 in 13 offensive categories. Second baseman Nikia Beacham of Rock Hill joined Young on the all-conference team. The Golden Bulls went 30-15 this season.

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*Chris Weiller, executive vice president for marketing and communications, Charlotte Bobcats*

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