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Byers, Wake Forest Eyeing Improvement

GREENSBORO - Layups and double dribbles from last weekend's exciting Big Four tournament at Greensboro Coliseum:

Tony Byers, former Bessemer City High All-American who is leading Wake Forest in scoring, feels the Deacons could have a lot to say about who wins the Atlantic Coast Conference title.

"We're much improved over last year," noted Byers following Wake's opening round victory over Duke's Blue Devils Friday night. "Both years I've been here, we've had good guards but this year our inside game is better."

With Byers doing most of the damage, the Deacons had N. C. State on the ropes early in Saturday's championship game but the Wolfpack's height and bench strength proved too much in a 91-73 conquest.

"State's bigger and stronger but we're quicker than they are," noted Byers. "In order to beat State, you have to control the game. You can't let them get the ball off the boards and get down court quick."

Byers, who is averaging better than 20 points per game, says he isn't bitter about State's David Thompson and Tommy Burleson getting most of the good ink from Big Four sportswriters. "State and Carolina always get the publicity in the Big Four," noted Byers. "We're always the underdogs but we don't mind. We just try to play our best and try to win."

Saturday's loss was only the second for the Deacons of Carl Tacy, who are trying to turn Wake basketball around. Their only other loss was to Florida State in the Big Sun tournament in Florida. Byers said the Deacons didn't play well at all against the Seminoles.

"I talked to Otis Cole down there," Byers related, "and he's averaging about 14 or 15 points a game but says he's not happy with the way he's playing. I won the most valuable player trophy down there and made the all-tournament team and Otis didn't make the team. But he won the big trophy and that's what counts."

Byers had nothing but praise for the Wolfpack, who won their third Big Four title in four years. "State's doing the same thing they did last year," he noted. "They really impress me with Tommy Burleson and David Thompson."

Byers pointed out that he played with Thompson once last summer, following Thompson's knee operation.

"It didn't seem to bother him," noted Byers. "In fact, he looked better. He's played in the World Games with the best talent in the world so he has to be better."

Byers feels the Deacons will hold their own in the ACC, even though the Winston-Salem school is lacking a big man. Cal Stamp, a junior center, is the team's biggest player at 6-8.

"This time last year," Byers recalled, "we were only something like 3-5. This year, we've built confidence and that's what we want."

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Friday's barnburner between State and Carolina didn't prove a thing except that it's going to be quite a year in the ACC. Coach Dean Smith of the Tar Heels and Norman Sloan of the Wolfpack



Gary Stewart
 Mirror Sports Editor

both noted that the game didn't mean anything as far as conference play is concerned but pointed out it was good in that it gave them a chance to see their teams in a pressure-packed game.

The difference in the 78-77 State victory turned out to be a technical foul on Smith at the start of the second half. The score at the time was 44-41, UNC. Thompson hit the foul shot to make it 44-42, and Burleson scored on the inbounds play to tie the score.

Of course, Burleson, the 7-foot-4 giant from Avery County, was the difference in the game. When the Wolfpack started their comeback, it was Burleson who was getting all the rebounds and batting away Tar Heel shots.

State's Sloan was misquoted in some papers following Friday's contest, claiming some sportswriters quoted him as saying the Big Four is a meaningless tournament.

"I didn't say that at all," remarked the Wolfpack mentor Saturday following his team's victory over Wake Forest. "I said the game with Carolina didn't count as far as the conference standings is concerned. In the long run the tournament is a good thing because it eliminates chance. By that, I mean, we'll be facing the other three teams in this tournament two more times. And when teams see each other three times, wins won't come by chance. The best team will win in the end."

Sloan had praise for the Deacons, by far the biggest surprise team of the ACC.

"Wake Forest is a very fine team," he said. "Our size was definitely the key factor. Wake's a great shooting team but late in the first half we had a tremendous defensive spurt that turned the game around."

Sloan called several timeouts late in the game when his team had the contest sewed up and said his reason for it was that his charges were "getting sloppy."

"I don't want us to ever play the scoreboard," he said. "This is not the time of year to become careless. We should have been playing better than we were and that's why I called the timeouts."

Sloan said the fact that State had two tough games in the Big Four will help the team in its big weekend games this week against Clemson and Maryland.

"In the Big Four," he said, "we had to play two good teams in a span of 24 hours and we have two

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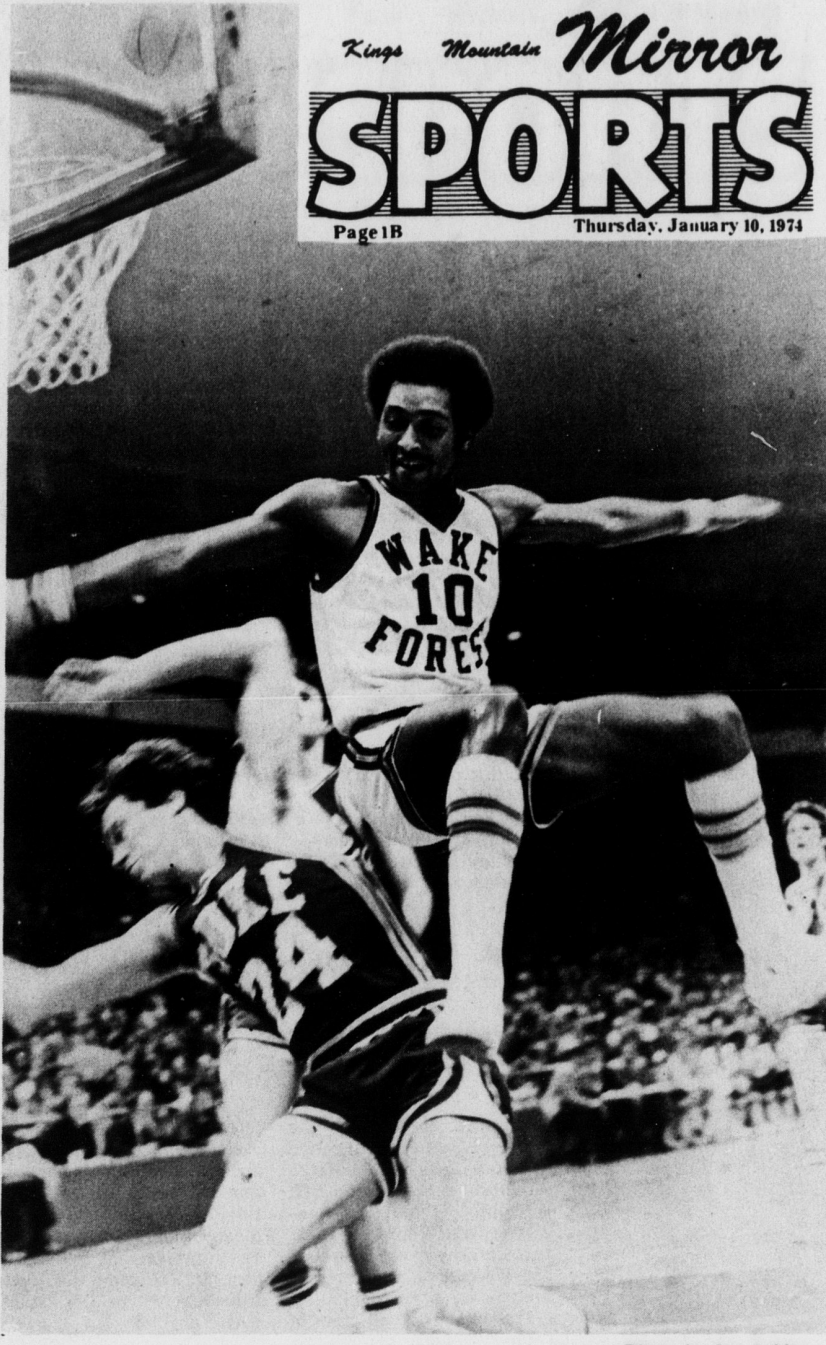


Photo by Jay Ashley

FLYING HIGH - Tony Byers (10) of Wake Forest soars into Duke's Kevin Billerman (24) during Wake-Duke action in Big Four tourney in Greensboro Friday night. Wake whipped the Dukes but lost to powerful N. C. State in Saturday's title game. Byers, who hails from nearby Bessemer City, made the all-tournament team.

G-W And Livingstone Play Here

Two of the top basketball teams in District 26 of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) clash at 8 o'clock tonight in Kings Mountain's 2,000-seat community center.

Gardner-Webb's Bulldogs, having another banner year under Eddie Holbrook, take on Livingstone's Bears, who at last count were leading the CIAA with a perfect 3-0 conference record.

Coach Holbrook, whose club is being regarded as possibly the best in the district, expects an exciting contest.

"Livingstone's a seasoned ballclub," he noted. "They've got everybody back from last year and have a real good guard in Jerry Hamilton. He's real quick and is a good shooter and ballhandler."

Holbrook says he's been pleased with the performance of his players but added the Bulldogs have a tough schedule the rest of the season.

"We've been playing about eight or nine guys," he said, "and have gotten a pretty decent contribution out of all of them. But we still have a long way to go."

John Drew, a sophomore All-American candidate, leads the Bulldogs in scoring with a 22.7 average and junior Jim Blanks is close behind with a 22.5 mark. Junior Billy Ellis is also hitting double figures with 11 points per game.

Holbrook pointed out that his charges gave exceptional efforts in big victories over Belmont Abbey and Lenoir Rhyne. The Bulldogs scored over 100 points in an unexpected waltz past the Abbey and downed LR for their Holiday Tournament crown.

Tonight's game will serve as a warmup for a tough district game Saturday at Catawba. The two clubs meet again Jan. 17 at Boiling Springs.

Also upcoming soon is a European trip which will take the Bulldogs to Rome and Czechoslovakia Jan. 26-Feb. 3. After returning home, the Bulldogs will play Barber-Scotia in Charlotte and Belmont Abbey in Belmont and those two games should have a lot to say about which of the three teams gets the independent berth in the District 26 playoffs.

Cavaliers Here Friday

Kings Mountain High's varsity cagers return home Friday to begin a two-day homestand against a pair of tough Rutherford County outfits.

East Rutherford, always a contender in the Southwestern Conference, is here Friday for a twinbill, beginning at 6:30, and R-S Central pays a visit next Tuesday night.

The Cavaliers, coached by Connie Hamrick, got off to a slow start, losing three games by four points, but are beginning to jell and should shape up as one of the con-

ference's best teams. They dropped a one-point decision to Crest, the SWC leader following a 65-59 conquest of Shelby last Friday night.

East sports one of the league's top performers in guard Melvin Watkins, considered by many as a top college prospect.

Butch Blalock continues to lead the Mounties and the SWC in scoring. The 6-1 senior standout carried a 32.1 scoring average into Tuesday's game at Bessemer City and has had only two games under 20 points. Blalock's averaging

37.3 in conference play.

Mountaineer Coach Allen Dixon is still looking for some scoring help for Blalock. Several other players have had outstanding games but none have been consistent.

Kathy Ledford continues to pace the Mountainettes in scoring. Heading into the BC contest, she had scored 121 points for a 12.1 average. Sandra Byers was close behind with 113 points and an 11.3 average. Ledford's averaging 13.2 in conference play and Byers is hitting 9.0.

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