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Editorial: **Memories still being made on area's college diamonds**
Friday, May 14, 2010
East Carolina University baseball may traditionally be the crown jewel of local college athletics in the spring, but this year three other teams are stealing the spotlight from the Diamond Bucs. The Pitt Community College softball and baseball teams recently captured regional titles and the East Carolina softball team finished the regular season atop the Conference USA standings. While postseason prospects look uncommonly grim at Clark-LeClair Stadium this year, these young women and men have held up the community's championship tradition. These successes may have gone unnoticed by those focused exclusively on Pirate baseball, but they are remarkable and praiseworthy all the same.
When the weather warms and the days grow longer, most college sports fans in the region turn their attention to the Pirate baseball team, one of the university's most successful athletic programs. After entering the season with high hopes, the Pirates have scuffled this year, and will need to play stronger baseball to assure their presence at the Conference USA baseball tournament and keep hope alive for the NCAA postseason. Yet, even as that team has struggled, others in Pitt County have risen to the occasion and championship aspirations.
The Pitt Community College softball earned a bid to the National Junior College Athletic Association Division I Fast-Pitch Softball Championship by winning the team’s first Region X Tournament title last week. Their 3-0 win against Spartanburg Methodist on Sunday clinched a trip to the World Series, which begins on May 20 in St. George, Utah.
Not to be outdone, the PCC baseball team is also Regional X Tournament champs after a dominant performance, capped by an 18-2 win over USC-Sumter. The 39-11 Bulldogs will next host a district tournament beginning on May 21, and can surely use the lively support of a boisterous crowd when they open the series.
And East Carolina’s softball team has also done the Pirate faithful proud with its first Conference USA regular season title and a No. 1 seed in this week’s conference tournament. Toni Paisley earned her second Pitcher of the Year award and head coach Tracey Kee was named the league’s Coach of the Year as the team compiled a 39-16 record.
While no one will soon forget the electrifying comeback the East Carolina baseball team mounted last year in the NCAA Regional Tournament, the first hosted in Greenville, memories are still being made on local college fields. They have certainly earned accolades for their array of athletic achievements.
Letter: Athletics part of quality education
Friday, May 14, 2010

I am responding to an item printed in the May 12 Bless Your Heart column regarding Pirate Club members putting their money in the stadium expansion rather than a “more meaningful purpose.” It appears to me that this person or persons are not supporters of ECU athletics or even sports fans of any sort. But, believe me, in sports and athletics, they are learning the important things in life that they cannot possibly learn in the classroom: sportsmanship, teamwork, the thrill of victory and agony of defeat with respect to the other team and coaches and other positive attributes. Evidently, the person/persons submitting this article are not aware that many of these Pirate Club members and their spouses are graduates of ECU and other fine colleges and universities and they contribute heavily to the educational programs in their respective schools. To be specific, the stadium and other athletic facilities are supported by these individuals and other contributors and no tax money is used for these purposes. So I believe it is only their business as to how these investments are made. Athletics are an integral part of a well-rounded education and East Carolina University is no exception. The expansion of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium is a plus for ECU, Greenville and all of eastern North Carolina. It must be worthwhile or we would not have averaged more than 40,000 people per home game last year. We invite you to join us this year to enjoy the Purple and Gold. Go Pirates!

DAVE MARTIN
Greenvillee_SPgB
Sampson signs to play with Pirates
By Tony Castleberry
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, May 13, 2010
Robert Sampson, son of former Virginia and NBA star Ralph Sampson, has signed a letter of intent to play basketball at East Carolina, ECU officials confirmed Thursday morning.
The 6-foot-8, 200-pound forward from The Bullis School in Potomac, Md., is the second recruit in new head coach Jeff Lebo’s inaugural class. Former J.H. Rose standout Tony Smith, a 6-5 guard, signed with the Pirates in late April.
“We are excited about Robert’s decision to be a Pirate,” Lebo told the ECU athletics website.
“Robert has a tremendous upside, potential and pedigree. He has just started to scratch the surface as a player. We are delighted that he has chosen ECU to further his career.”
The newest Pirate recruit spent just one season at The Bullis School, his third school in three states in three years after spending time at Atlanta’s Northview High and Henderson International School in Las Vegas. Sampson was offered scholarships by St. Mary’s and Seton Hall, with Clemson, Georgia Tech, Alabama and Minnesota reportedly showing interest as well.
Bullis went 13-13 last season. Sampson missed seven games due to an illness from mid-December to mid-January and he finished the season with averages of 10.4 points and 9.6 rebounds per game for coach Bruce Kelley’s Bulldogs.
After playing only a handful of games as a junior and 19 last season, Kelley admitted that he didn’t think Sampson would be able to grab guaranteed playing time as a true freshman.
“In talking with his mom and dad, I kept saying, ‘I wish he was a junior,’” Kelley said. “That’s why I think his best days are in front of him. Not only because of his size and potential, but because of the emotional part of staying in the same place and working with the same system (for more than a year).
“Guys his size who can move like him, there are not many like him. ... He’s got some work to do, but I expect him to go down there with the right attitude and just get better and better.”
Even though Sampson is 6-8, and likely still growing, he’s not a typical power forward who spends all his time in the paint. His shooting touch from outside — Sampson shot nearly 40 percent from 3-point range for Bullis last season — should allow him to stretch defenses.
“I think Robert sees himself as a perimeter player, but it really depends on what (coaches) want to do with him,” Kelley said. “The term recruiters kept on using was ‘face-up four.’ That’s what everybody called him. He’s a legit 6-8, but he’s maybe 198 pounds. (ECU) will get him in the weight program and help him fill out some I’m sure.
“But he can shoot. He’s got a nice 3-point shot, very solid for a 6-8 kid.”
Ralph Sampson played for ECU athletics director Terry Holland while Holland was the head coach at Virginia in the early 1980s. Sampson, a 7-4 center, was named NCAA Player of the Year three times and made four NBA All-Star teams as a member of the Houston Rockets.
Doubters say college isn't for everyone

COLUMBIA, Mo. -- In a town dominated by the University of Missouri's flagship campus and two smaller colleges, higher education is practically a birthright for high school seniors like Kate Hodges.

She has a 3.5 grade-point average, a college savings account and a family tree teeming with advanced degrees. But in June, Hodges is headed to the Tulsa Welding School in Oklahoma, where she hopes to earn an associate's degree in welding technology in seven months.

"They fought me so hard," she said, referring to disappointed family members. "They still think I'm going to college."

The notion that a four-year degree is essential for real success is being challenged by a growing number of economists, policy analysts and academics. They say more Americans should consider other options such as technical training or two-year schools, which have been embraced in Europe for decades.

As evidence, experts cite rising student debt, stagnant graduation rates and a struggling job market flooded with overqualified degree-holders. They pose a fundamental question: Do too many students go to college?

"College is what every parent wants for their child," said Martin Scaglione, president and chief operating officer of workforce development for ACT, the Iowa-based not-for-profit best known for its college entrance exam. "The reality is, they may not be ready for college."

President Barack Obama wants to restore the country's status as the world leader in the proportion of citizens with college degrees. The U.S. now ranks 10th among industrial nations.

But federal statistics show that just 36 percent of full-time students starting college in 2001 earned a four-year degree within that allotted time. Even with an extra two years to finish, that group's graduation rate increased only to 56 percent.

Spending more time in school also means greater overall student debt. The average student debt load in 2008 was $23,200 - a nearly $5,000 increase over five years. Two-thirds of students graduating from four-year schools owe money on student loans.

And while the unemployment rate for college graduates still trails the rate for high school graduates (4.9 percent versus 10.8 percent), the figure has more than doubled in less than two years.

From campus to mall

"A four-year degree in business - what's that get you?" asked Karl Christopher, a placement counselor...
at the Columbia Area Career Center vocational program. "A shift supervisor position at a store in the mall."

At Rock Bridge High School, one of Columbia's two high schools, 72 percent of the class of 2008 moved on to four-year colleges, with another 10 percent attending community college. That college attendance rate is consistent with national statistics.

Only 4 percent of Rock Bridge students chose technical training like the Oklahoma welding school where Hodges is headed.

Roughly 1,200 students from central Missouri take classes at the career center, supplementing their core high school courses with specialized training in automotive technology, culinary arts, animal science, robotics, landscape design, electrical wiring and more.

Hodges has been set on a welding career since she was 13. She craves independence and has little patience for fellow students who seem to wind up in college more from a sense of obligation than anything else.

"School is what they've been doing their whole lives," she said. "So they just want to continue. Because that's what they are used to."

Sue Popkes doesn't hide her disappointment over her younger daughter's decision. At the same time, she realizes that Hodges may achieve more financial security than a college degree could ever provide.

"It's sad to know she's going to miss that mind-opening effect of an undergraduate degree," Popkes said.

Ohio University economics professor Richard Vedder blames the cultural notion of "credential inflation" for the stream of unqualified students into four-year colleges. His research has found that the number of new jobs requiring college degrees is less than number of college graduates.

Vedder's work also yielded something surprising: The more money states spend on higher education, the less the economy grows - the reverse of long-held assumptions.

"If people want to go out and get a master's degree in history and then cut down trees for a living, that's fine," he said, citing an example from a recent encounter with a worker. "But I don't think the public should be subsidizing it."

Margaret Spellings, former federal education secretary under George W. Bush, remains a strong proponent of increased college access. She points to research showing that college graduates will on average earn $1 million more over a lifetime than those with only high school degrees.

"It is crucial to the success of our country and to us as individuals to graduate more students from college," she said at a National Press Club forum earlier this year.

For many, the dream of earning a college degree - and the social acceptance that comes with it - trumps a more analytical, cost-benefits approach.
John Reynolds, a Florida State sociology professor, found that unrealized educational expectations do not lead to depression or other long-term emotional costs.

"Rich kids, poor kids, 'A' students, 'C' students - we really didn't find any lasting impact on not getting the degree," he said.

Scaglione suggested that nothing short of a new definition for educational success is needed to diminish the public bias toward four-year degrees. He advocates "certification as the new education currency - documentation of skills as opposed to mastering curriculum."

"Our national system is, 'Do you have a degree or not?'" he said. "That doesn't really measure if you have skills."
Education of a Point Guard Comes Full Circle

By GEORGE VECSEY

Second chances are harder than first chances.

After the child support and the squandered millions, Kenny Anderson was the one who registered for college, who mastered the digital classroom, who studied in his spare time.

“My son sees me with books in my knapsack and he says, ‘You’re 39 years old, you’re still going to school?’” Anderson said of his son Ken Jr., 9.

The payoff will come Saturday at St. Thomas University in Miami, when Anderson will don his cap and gown and graduate, 19 years after leaving Georgia Tech.

The degree is a statement that his life did not end after 14 years in the N.B.A., after the tangled relationships with his seven children with five women — much better now, he said — and the vanished salary, somewhere above $60 million. He did that himself, too.

“Kenny was a little too generous,” said Jack Curran, 79, the longtime coach at Archbishop Molloy in Queens, acknowledging that Anderson was a soft touch in the old neighborhood. Then there were all the cars and the night life and the rest, a common story among pro athletes.

As a freshman at Molloy, Anderson sat out the first quarter of every game because it was good for him, Curran thought. It probably was: Anderson became the only New York player to be named all-city for four straight years — “the best high school backcourt player I’ve ever seen,” said Tom Konchalski, who runs the HSBI Report, a scouting service, and has been
following the sport for half a century.

Curran said he always saw the disciplined side of Anderson, who went to a remedial program at St. John’s University for two summers. After being admitted to Molloy, he would seek out science and math teachers to keep on track, Curran said.

“He was always persistent to get what he wanted,” Curran said, adding that Anderson is also thoughtful, calling on Curran’s birthday and holidays, more than any other former player.

Anderson is proud of the 37 credits he was able to transfer from Georgia Tech — proof he was not ducking the work, he said. He helped Georgia Tech reach the Final Four as a freshman and then did not perform the one-and-done shuffle so common today among talented freshmen.

“He had to leave,” Bobby Cremins, his coach at Georgia Tech, now at the College of Charleston, said Wednesday, explaining why Anderson turned pro after his sophomore year to support his mother, Joan.

Promising he would go back to school someday, Anderson bought his mother a home on Long Island after signing with the Nets, a franchise as transient and appealing as a turnpike rest stop. He soon became a vagabond, a good pro player but not a great one. When the Los Angeles Clippers released him in 2005, he was broke, and his mother died a few months afterward.

Anderson settled in Pembroke Pines, Fla., and watched his third wife, Natasha, work as a clinical social worker in a hospital. He made contact with all of his children, gained custody of Ken Jr. and realized he needed a degree to get a job.

“I didn’t know if I could handle it,” he said. “I didn’t use my brain for 20 years.”

* *

A neighbor told him about the Institute for Professional Studies at St. Thomas, so he enrolled for his online program by himself — without a cadre of helpers hovering over him. He began working with an adviser, Jennifer Booker, who is a professor.

“What surprised me,” Booker said, “was the way he was willing to give credit to people who helped him, like a former trainer.” She watched him handle the online classes, but from the other side of the electronic connection she could not gauge the terror of a star who had once performed in arenas and now had to produce a paper.
“I’d ask people for help,” Anderson said. “This wasn’t like college. They’d say, ‘I’ll give you an idea, but you have to do the work yourself.’ ” He almost quit a few times but found a comfortable routine, helping get Ken Jr. and his wife’s daughter, Tiana, also 9, off to school. Then he would take off to Starbucks and study.

“People would recognize me and congratulate me on what I was doing,” Anderson said.

His mornings usually begin with a call from the Rev. Al Taylor of the Infinity Mennonite Church in Harlem, a childhood friend who married Kenny and Natasha.

“The message fluctuates,” Taylor said, adding that he often talks about children, helping Anderson grow as a parent.

Now that he has earned his bachelor’s degree in organizational leadership, Anderson is pursuing his next career. He gives private basketball lessons to young players but would like something more structured.

Curran said he thought Anderson would be an excellent coach in pro ball (“he’s been through the mill”) but would also be good in high school (“he’s great with kids.”).

Why not aim for the Molloy job? “Coach ain’t goin’ nowhere,” Anderson said with a laugh, using gym grammar to make his point. There will be a job somewhere, now that Kenny Anderson has earned his degree.

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