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Cancer survivors are getting back in the saddle

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, August 06, 2009

When Hope Freeman climbs on a horse, she feels relaxed, confident and accomplished.

"It doesn't give you time to think about anything but riding the horse," she said. "It's not like driving a car, where your mind can drift off."

The 29-year-old finished receiving treatment for breast cancer earlier this year. Freeman was diagnosed in November 2007 and refused to let the diagnosis take over her life.

"It's what you make it," she said of cancer. "If you let yourself be consumed, you will be. I was a nursing student. I was more worried about passing those tests."

She and Robersonville resident Darlene Arcand recently completed the inaugural 12-week session for breast cancer survivors at Rocking Horse Ranch — a nonprofit ranch off N.C. 43 that hosts therapeutic riding programs for children and adults. The free program was spawned from a partnership between the ranch and Leo W. Jenkins Cancer Center at Pitt County Memorial Hospital. Participants ride every Tuesday for more than an hour and also help groom the horses.

"It's exercise, they support each other, learn new skills they may not have had before," Paula Bowen, a cancer services case manager at PCMH, said. "They're more relaxed each week and become more comfortable with everything."

Neither of the pair were horsewomen before the program. Freeman had been on a pony ride once in her youth, and Arcand, 58, had been on a recreational ride with her children decades ago.

"When I first got on, it was a little scary," Arcand admits. "But after, when you get used to it, it's exhilarating."

And it was a challenge she needed.

"It really got me up and got me out," she said. "I was sitting at home, not sure what I can do."

Arcand is still taking treatment — chemotherapy pills and routine checkups — for the breast cancer she was diagnosed with in 2005. After years of battling the disease through alternative medicine, she started conventional treatment at PCMH last year. It had metastasized, spread all over, she said.

"I wasn't doing very well last year," she said, matter-of-factly. "We almost lost me. But with the help of the Lord ... The combination of alternative and conventional medicine, I'm doing really well."

Both ladies are planning to work as volunteers when the next session begins Sept. 22. Bowen said she hopes it will grow and continue as funding is available.

"It's so fulfilling," Arcand said, adding that she would tell other survivors: "Just do it."

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Game on for ECU football

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, August 06, 2009

For at least the first week of the dormitory confinement that is August college football camp, lots of players spend even their free hours engrossed in the game.

On Thursday night in East Carolina’s Tyler Hall, the roars of that extracurricular football study were likely audible outside the building. That’s because most of the players are doing the kind of football study that’s done with a controller in hand, buttons clicking furiously and trash-talk flowing freely.

Before the wear and tear of real football begins to take its toll this August, some Sony Playstations and X-Boxes will be getting their own workouts.

“We’ll get into it the first couple of nights,” senior offensive tackle Terence Campbell said of life in the dorm. “Everybody is going to play Playstation and we’ll have our little tournaments going on, but after the first week, everybody pretty much just goes to sleep.”

In much the same way the players honor the tradition of being together in close quarters for the month-long preparation for the season, they also carry on the custom of battling it out with their teammates for supremacy on television screens throughout their August home.

The traditional favorites are college and pro football games, and basketball.

Campbell, who sorted out some of his dorm room items on the trunk of his car before heading into the thin tower of Tyler Hall, said he prefers the NCAA football games. But he said he and his teammates draw a distinct line between who they play for in real life and who they play for in the world of video games.

“I don’t use us because I don’t want to mess us up,” Campbell said of his choice to never use East Carolina as his Playstation team. “I might give up a sack or something. We all play with other schools.”

But that doesn’t mean players don’t watch the computer’s rendering of themselves on the games.

In fact, Campbell said watching his likeness on Playstation has forced him to pay greater attention to the fine details of the game.

“Every play, I’m watching every block,” Campbell said of watching himself play on Playstation. “I used to not pay attention to the offensive linemen, but I do now.

“I’m better in real life.”

The Pirates hold their first practice of August camp today in preparation for their Sept. 5 season kickoff against Appalachian State.

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...except for some

The folks in the big-money crowd that supports athletics booster clubs at state universities will be getting one of the few tax breaks out of this General Assembly, thanks to a friend in high places.

State Sen. Tony Rand of Fayetteville, the Democratic majority leader and a UNC-Chapel Hill loyalist, has seen to it that all North Carolina taxpayers will in effect supplement athletic scholarships funded by booster clubs. The way it works is that all full-scholarship students from out of state are for purposes of tuition classified as in-state students, and thus those paying for a student’s scholarship are allowed to pay thousands of dollars less to the institution the person is attending.

This little break was slipped quietly into the state budget four years ago, and when discovered, was defended by its supporters as helping private academic foundations and outstanding students in the arts and sciences. Top academic scholarships for out-of-staters could be increased, the argument went, thus giving the universities in the UNC system a chance at recruiting great scholars.

But then as now, those who watched this blatant exercise of political power over the public’s interest knew the whole story. The beneficiaries of the financial break include to a huge degree the booster club members at UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State University. Some of those boosters also contribute to political action committees that in turn contribute to legislators. A coincidence, perhaps?

That this kind of break for people who don’t need it would be affirmed at a time when state jobs will be cut, mental health services will be reduced, fewer teachers will be hired and all departments in state government, along with most citizens, will be making sacrifices in response to an economic recession is disgraceful.

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ECU has experience, but offense is unsettled

BY J.P. GIGLIO, Staff Writer

GREENVILLE - Skip Holtz did not enjoy the procession of injuries and suspensions that changed East Carolina's starting lineup game by game last fall.

But after watching his team withstand the personnel turnover -- and win the Conference USA title -- Holtz sees the bright side to the Pirates' turmoil of 2008.

"We had so many guys who had to step in because of injuries and suspensions, it hurt us when we went through it," Holtz said. "But it's going to benefit us now."

ECU opens the 2009 season with its first practice today, and in many positions Holtz has a returning starter plus an experienced player returning from either injury or suspension.

With 17 starters back from a team that won nine games, Holtz feels like his fifth team at ECU is positioned to be his best.

That doesn't mean there aren't any questions as the Pirates begin preparations for their Sept. 5 opener with Appalachian State.

Five things to watch during ECU's preseason practice:

Who's going to run the ball?

Maybe the better question is, "Who isn't going to run the ball?" The Pirates have options at running back, but they also have questions.

Neither of the top two running backs on the depth chart played a snap in 2008. Sophomore Brandon Jackson, listed as the starter, sat out after transferring from Kentucky (and he redshirted in '07, so he hasn't seen game action in two years).

Senior Dominique Lindsay, who missed all of the '08 season with a knee injury, is listed as Jackson's backup.
Then there's senior J.R. Rogers, who started the bowl game but had only 33 carries last season.

Neither Norman Whitley, who led the team with 698 yards, nor Jonathan Williams, who scored five touchdowns, participated in spring practice. Both are expected to return for the season.

Freshman DaMonte Terry has the size (6 feet 1, 203 pounds) and talent to play right away if Holtz isn't impressed with the other five choices.

Will the defense keep it going?

The defense carried ECU through the second half of the '08 season to the C-USA title. The defense allowed 21 or fewer points in each of the final six regular-season games, which helped the Pirates close 5-1.

ECU finished the season ranked 30th nationally in scoring defense (21.1 points per game), no easy feat with the pinball offenses in C-USA, and seventh in takeaways (33).

With eight starters back, including stars C.J. Wilson at defensive tackle and Van Eskridge at safety, ECU's strength again is on defense. Eskridge was named Thursday to the watch list for the Jim Thorpe Award, which honors the nation's top defensive back.

The Pirates will be tested right out of the chute by the spread option of Appalachian State in the opener and then by the same scheme the following week at West Virginia.

Will the offense catch up to the defense?

ECU went four straight C-USA games without scoring 20 points. Thanks to the defense, they managed to win three of those games (two in overtime).

The personnel losses at running back and receiver hamstrung ECU's offense, which finished the season 81st nationally in scoring (23.4) and 84th (126 yards per game) in rushing.

Those numbers figure to improve with a healthy, reinstated running back group and a healthy Dwayne Harris at receiver, but August practice is the time to get everyone on the same page, particularly when so many parts were missing during the spring.

What's the future at quarterback?

If NCAA had not granted Patrick Pinkney a sixth season of eligibility, Holtz and assistant Todd Fitch would likely have gone with senior Rob Kass at quarterback.

With Pinkney and Kass, who has eight career starts, both leaving the program after '09, they need to start thinking about the future. Enter redshirt freshman Josh Jordan.

Jordan's college experience consists of throwing passes in the spring game. The Louisiana product needs some reps to get prepared for his future at the position.

Is everyone healthy and out of trouble?

In Williams and receiver Jamar Bryant, ECU lost two significant players to suspension for various portions of last season.

Then there were significant injuries on both lines and at linebacker. There's no way to eliminate injuries, but Holtz needs to hope the suspensions he handed out in '08 will act as a deterrent in '09.

And the players who were given a second chance need to make the most of it.

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