

SPORTS

Homecoming 2006



Jaime Russell/THE BEHREND BEACON

Homecoming King and Queen Stephen Oyler and Brittany Yost pose for a picture after the crowning on Friday, February 17, 2006 at the Junker Center.

Behrend women head to Olympic Training Center

By **Nicholas Underhill**
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The women's water polo team has a few obstacles to overcome when they splash into the pool to kick-off their season at the Bucknell Invitational Tournament this Saturday. The ladies will enter the pool without two of their leading scorers from last season and also without their goalkeeper at the start of the season. Despite the obstacles, the girls are ready to compete and hopefully improve upon what they accomplished last season.

The women will return eight players from last season's team that finished 6-18, most of which were played against division one schools. They will compete in four matches at Bucknell, all against Division I teams, which include Wagner, Marris, St. Francis University, the University of Maryland, Michigan and Indiana. Coach Joesph Tristan explained that due to the difficulty of the games that he schedules his team's record can be very misleading.

"One of the biggest goals this season is to just be competitive; we can do this and not have a winning record. The girls are excited, skilled and are just excited for the season." Tristan explained. "I think were going to have a really good year, and the focus is just on player development, so we are ready to compete at our highest level come tournament time in Indiana."

The girls will have to overcome some adversity this season with the loss of two of their top members, all conference player Cara Ludwig and

Amanda Weist, who were Behrend's number one and three goal scorers from last season. Both have been sidelined due to illness. Weist with mononucleosis and Ludwig is recovering from bronchitis and pneumonia. It is unknown when they will return to action. Although losing these ladies has led to a rocky start, they have not let it break their spirit. Team captain Brittany Yost gave some insight on the situation. "We just want to get through this and get everybody healthy right now, and after that we can focus on having a really good season." Coach Tristan stated that this is a good opportunity for the other players to step up and take over. "It kind of brings things down, we took a major hit, they were our number one and three goal scorers from last year, but we have a strong backbone and we will be relying on our returning players."

The team is also very excited for their trip to the Olympic Training Center in Colorado where they will have a training session. Coach Tristan said that he will use what he sees at the Bucknell Tournament to measure what areas his team needs to work on. He stated that this tournament is more for bonding than for skill training. "It's nice to get the girls out of Erie and have them not focus on school work, not that the focus isn't there, they are just free from classes." He also said, "The biggest thing about these trips is the essence of team unity, they have to do things together, to become better as a team, not in a skill sense, but they will be a better team just from becoming closer." They will also play two games while they are there against Colorado University and Colorado State.

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NBA gets set to recover from All Star Week and play

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History always repeats itself, and the world of sports is no exception. The NBA has reached its midway point, and just like the Boston Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers of the 1970's and 80's, it appears that two teams, the San Antonio Spurs and Detroit Pistons, are virtually unbeatable. The two titans have been dominant over their respective conferences for the past three years and clashed in the finals last year with the Spurs emerging victorious. On paper it would seem that this season is headed for the same ending.

The Spurs are quickly becoming a dynasty, but along with that title comes the twisted logic of the fans and media, where they believe that anything less than humiliating their opponent on the court is a disappointment. San Antonio took the title last season with an amazing playoff run that showed they can run and gun with the Suns and Nuggets as well as slugging it out with the Pistons. Since then they have added two veteran players with a lot of playoff experience, Nick Van Exel and Michael Finley, to the main cast of Tim Duncan, Manu Ginobili and Tony Parker. They posted a record of 31-10 in the first half of the season, but this team does not seem as dominate as they have been in the past.

Their post-season hopes can go only as far as Duncan can carry them, and with his health in question, their trip may be shorter than they wish. He

has been plagued by plantar fasciitis all season and his production fell sharply in February, where he averaged a meager 15 points per game. Ginobili is also nursing health problems.

Although the Spurs may appear vulnerable in the Western Conference, the Pistons remain the Beast of the East, where they sit atop the standings with a record of 43-9 and have an 11 game strangle-hold on their closest opponent, Miami. With the title appearing to be a foregone conclusion, they have set up a compelling story line for the second half of the season, where they could possibly make a run at the league record of 72 wins.

These two teams' first-half dominance can not be fully attributed to their play, and come playoff time, if a few squads get it together and get healthy, their regular season success may not matter.

The Spurs may have had success in the first half of the season, but they aren't even the best team in the West, let alone their state. The Dallas Mavericks hold a one game lead over San Antonio in the Southwest division and appear to be the better team of the two. The Mavericks appear to be a better team than in past years and have finally added a defense that can compliment their sharp shooters on offense. The two teams will play on March 2 and April 7, and could possibly be a preview of an unavoidable second-round collision for the Texas rivals. The Phoenix Suns are another team to look for. They have played extremely well but will get much better once Amare Stoudemire returns. If he can return to full health before the post season, they would have to be considered the

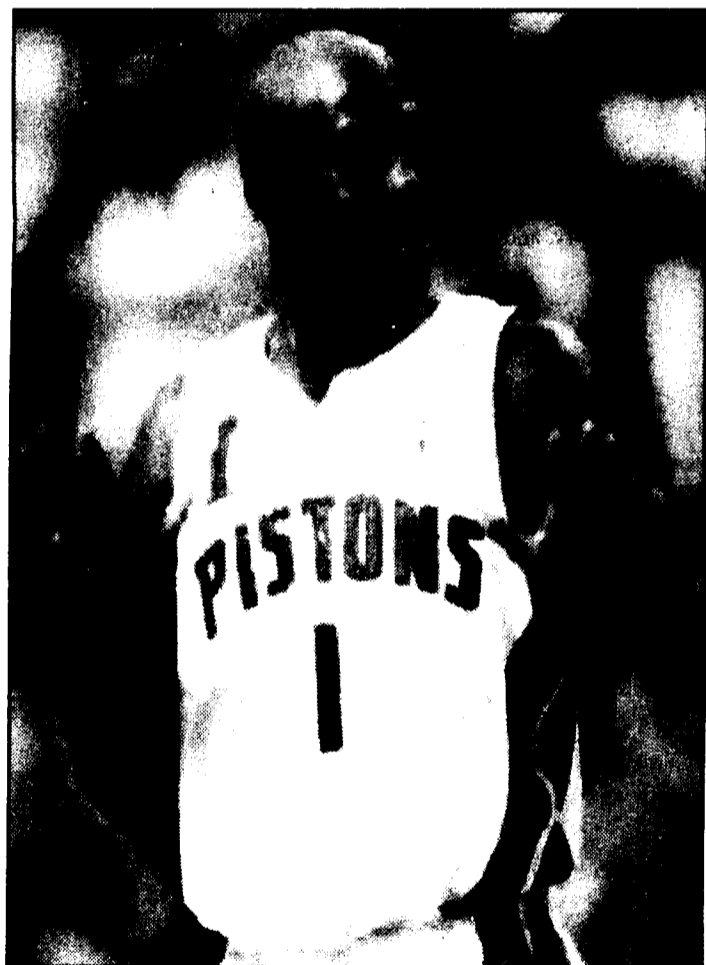
favorite to end the Spurs' run. There are also a few teams sitting in the shadows waiting for their chance at the Finals, the Los Angeles Clippers and the Nuggets, whose chances at getting by them in the first or second round would be greatly increased if Duncan comes limping on the court.

Some of the Pistons' success thus far is due to many shortcomings and injuries. The Cleveland Cavaliers lost off-season addition Larry Hughes early on and hope he can return by the playoffs.

The Miami Heat are the most formidable contenders, and if Shaq can fully recover from his injury and their offense finally begins to play together, they could find themselves in the Finals.

The Pacers can't be counted out either, especially since they have solved their chemistry problems by getting rid of Ron Artest and adding Peja Stojakovic. If Jermaine O'Neal recovers from a serious groin injury they could also become serious contenders.

The second half of the season should be very interesting as everyone gears up for the playoffs and fights for the open seeds.



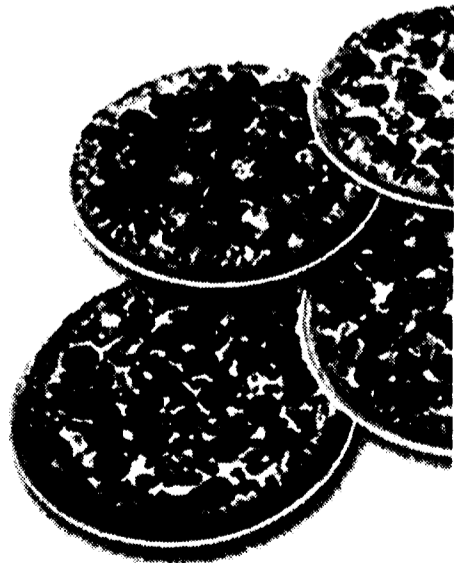
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Detroit Pistons point guard Chauncey Billups keeps his cool on the court as he leads his first place squad into battle.

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