

BU fans see turnaround on horizon

By Kevin Stevens - Press & Sun-Bulletin - March 27, 2007

VESTAL -- From Gio Yannuzzi's vantage point, Binghamton University's basketball program hit the proverbial home run with the hiring of Kevin Broadus as its new coach.

"How great was it to pick up the paper (Monday) morning and see a photo of the new coach of our program cutting down the nets and heading to Atlanta," said Yannuzzi, a BU junior from Binghamton and pitcher on the university's baseball team.

"He's got the tools, he's obviously got the brains. Now, he just has to instill that in his guys."

Broadus was formally introduced to BU supporters and members of the media during a Monday afternoon gathering in the Events Center. Obvious cause for widespread optimism regarding BU's basketball fortunes is Broadus' ongoing role as an assistant for a Georgetown squad two victories shy of national NCAA supremacy.

The new coach's mission will be to steer BU's program from America East Conference mediocrity to a position of prominence within the conference -- and, supporters hope, beyond.

"It's a good look for the team, a new face, a new tempo, shake things up a little bit," said Troy Hailey, a senior from Hyattsville, Md., who recently completed his fourth season in a Bearcats uniform. "It's new, it's exciting. A lot of players have nothing but good thoughts right now."

Binghamton has played six seasons at the NCAA Division I level, completing two of those with winning overall records, and over that span has posted an aggregate 51-49 America East record. BU teams have finished in better than fourth place in conference standings once since its inaugural 2001-02 season.

As for what tweak might be in order to elevate the program, Hailey said:

"It needs to be a little bit more up-tempo, a little bit more, I don't want to say run-and-gun because we have to defend. But at the same time, we had a lot of people on the court who could score and everybody wasn't taking advantage of their talents."

Joel Thirer, BU athletics director and the man largely responsible for Broadus' hiring, was asked to articulate just what it was during the interview process that he found appealing about Broadus. Thirer addressed on-court matters, an interesting style of play and the like, as well as the new coach's background of success at high-level academic institutions.

But also grabbing Thirer's attention was Broadus' attention to the entirety of the student-athlete's responsibilities to the university.

"Comportment, the way the players carry themselves, appearance, what he expects from the players off the court not just on the court," Thirer said. "The commitment to academics is primary, the graduation rate is primary, just in the way the players carry themselves and the comportment."

"The players, with all due respect, haven't always looked like basketball players, they've kind of blended in with any kind of sloppy college student. When we travel, Kevin will lend a dignity and pride in appearance. In the big picture, it doesn't make you a better basketball player, but it's a mind set."

"Discipline carries throughout a lot of things. If you want to be disciplined on the court, you have to be disciplined off the court. He will bring that kind of discipline."

Mark Robles, a BU junior from The Bronx, has seen his share of Bearcats games. He is in favor of the coaching change, as well

as hopeful that it may tap the program's full potential.

"It's definitely a good thing," Robles said. "Other coaches within our conference have always said we had some of the best recruits, the best players in the league. ... We were at one point (last season) in last place, I just thought we should do better than that and I have high hopes for the new coach now."

Erik Dienna, a BU graduate student from Long Island, is no Bearcats basketball diehard. For him, hockey, specifically the New York Rangers, is of primary concern in the sporting world.

Admitting to limited knowledge of BU's basketball fortunes, he said, "A couple years ago I know we got on SportsCenter because we got dunked on by Michigan, and we were like really excited to see them on (TV). It's just cool to see them anywhere, even if we're getting our butts kicked."

However, when informed of the new coach's pedigree, Dienna said, "If I heard that someone from Georgetown was coming in to take the job, I'd probably think that was a good thing. Georgetown's highly regarded, they're in the Final Four."

Blaise McNamee is a BU senior from Long Island who was informed of Broadus' hiring via the marquee in front of the West Gymnasium. He said he followed the Bearcats closely in the 2005-06 season -- "This year, not so much because they weren't doing too well. But I still follow it," he said.

"I think (former coach Al Walker) was all right. Talking to other people, they were a little disappointed in Walker, just his coaching methods, his subbing methods."

Of the change atop the program, McNamee said, "I think it was a good move. It's time for a fresh start. We keep blowing it in the playoffs and we're just not getting to where we want to go. I think a new look for the team would be beneficial."

Among the most optimistic of followers is Yannuzzi, an Events Center regular for BU basketball games who played four seasons of high school basketball.

"Coach Walker has built the program this far, maybe it's just time to hand the baton to somebody who can get us over the top," Yannuzzi said. "With what Georgetown has accomplished this year, there's no better candidate."

"To be able to sit down on selection Sunday and see your team in the national spotlight, just like Albany and Vermont have been. ... I think it'll start with his work ethic and his ability to get that across to the team."

Yannuzzi added, "I think we're really close. The core we have coming back, I think the sky's the limit for them. I think next season will be a great opportunity for them. I think we just need a little shove."

"One of the biggest contributors (Broadus) will have by his side is the community. I think he'll be shocked at how much support the program has. "