

UPEI COACH PRAISES RAIDERS

By Patrick McCarthy

In an interview after last weekend's double header at the Lady Beaverbrook Gymnasium, UPEI coach George Morrison had high praise for the Raiders. Morrison felt the team's play certainly did not reflect their 0-8 conference record. The Panthers are currently ranked tenth in Canada; for UNB to challenge them with two close games is indicative of a team which is coming of age!

The weekend of the 14th and 15th the tenth ranked Panthers came to town for two games. Saturday evening the Raiders outplayed the Panthers; the

telling statistic though was a 26-2 point differential favoring the Panthers at the foul line. Yaw Oberg played a great game in holding AUAA scoring leader Curtis Brown well below his thirty-five points per game average. UPEI's big gun was rookie Darren Smith who copped AUAA/Coca-Cola player of the game honors.

On Sunday the opening tip-off went straight into Smith's hands; Smith then went strong to the hoop only to be rejected by Raider Bryan Elliot! Bryan went on to block five more shots in the game while collecting six assists, dumping the ball inside to teammates Mark Hazlett and

Paul Watts for easy hoops. Bryan's play was the leading force in the first half which ended in a 30-30 tie. With six minutes remaining, the Raiders were within four when UPEI's Alonzo Wright hit a string of three-point shots to ensure the Panthers of the victory. The final score was 77-66 and Wright was named the AUAA/Coca-Cola player of the game.

You have by now, no doubt, realized this article should have appeared in last week's Bruns, however, space was limited. It seems, though, there was an abundance of space in the Blood-Thunder section. So much in

fact, that the abyss was filled with a poorly written, hastily thought out, and narrow-minded letter from Mr. Scott Steves. Flaws of democracy, everyone has a say. ----- Mr. Steves, I would hardly consider you a regular at Raider games. If my memory serves me correctly, I did spot you at ONE of the UPEI games and it appears you based your entire judgement on that game.

Intensity? One merely has to observe the strained face of Raider captain Paul Watts and his torn and bandaged knees, or the blood soaked uniform of Bryan Elliot to see this team gives 100%, so long as it is able! Remember Scott - forty minutes is a long

time to play like "a team possessed." If my writing seems to boarder on mellowdrama, it is done so purposely. I wouldn't want you to think my style "passive" Scott. Passive indeed, Phil Wright is one of the most animated coaches I have ever observed. From his demeanor on the court to the slogans on his office wall; nobody, not even you Mr. Steves, nobody wants a winner more than Phil.

I have followed this team all season, every game, and I fail to see any lack of desire, drive, spirit or enthusiasm on the part of any player or coach. It will take time for this team to develop the skill to win consistently. With this in mind, Mr. Steves, I found your criticism premature.

RAIDERS REBUTTAL

This letter is directed to Scott Steeves:

For the third year in a row I have had to sit back, watch, read and listen to some incompetent individual try and assess the Red Raider basketball team and program. This time it happens to be an individual who not only has made a fool of himself trying out for the team, but is also, as he pointed out last week in Blood and Thunder, not an authority on the game of basketball.

Let me clarify one thing - this year's squad consists of 5 veterans and 8 rookies. It does not matter what type of coach you are, meshing such a varied group of experienced and raw talent together is difficult. It is also

important to remember that the Red Raiders play in the toughest conference in Canada.

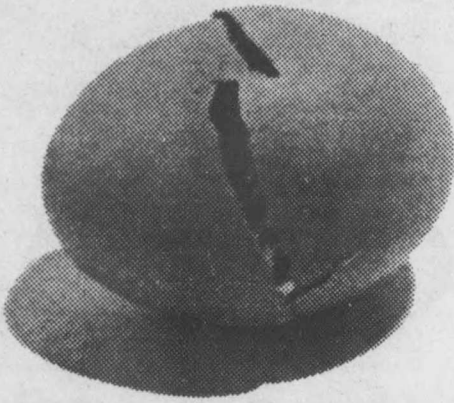
I am not trying to make excuses for our lack of wins, but some considerations are expected. At a time when it seemed like there was a generally upbeat mood toward the Raiders, it is too bad that a not-so-good player had to take out his frustration through the media. I am not going to apologize for our losing (or as Shane so eloquently put it - NOT WANTING TO WIN) to UPEI. Some very obvious improvements came forward and I think that is the important point.

As for your coaching concerns - stick your head back in the sand Shane. I played under coach Nelson, and in my opinion and

those of other veterans, Dr. Phil Wright does not coach the same way. If coach Wright was to get any more involved in a game, he would be shooting our foul shots. How the hell is it possible for a person to characterize two coaches and their style when he has not played under either of them? Both coach Nelson and coach Wright deserve an apology, you ungrateful chump!

That is all for now. Next time anyone wants to criticize the Red Raiders - program, team or coaches, show some balls and do it in person, not through the media.

Mark A. Hazlett
Co-Captain UNB Red Raiders



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