

Impatient Hornets fans embarrassing Charlotte

By JEFF NICHOLS
Sports Editor

If patience is one of the seven virtues, then Charlotte Hornets fans must be concentrating on the other six.

Last year, Hornets fans were praised as the most enthusiastic, most loyal fans in the league.

Wins and losses didn't matter. Fans sang and danced in the aisles. Going to a Hornets game was like going to a party.

Now, the second season is here. Suddenly, Hornets fans are having a hard time facing the music. That's mainly because, right now, the tune sounds something like the second worst record in the league.

Not exactly music to the fans' ears. But then, their own music doesn't sound good either. In fact, it is embarrassing.

The "boo birds" are singing in Charlotte. The party is over.

Not everybody is booing, of course. But you might have a hard time convincing Kelly Tripuka of that lately.

A year after leading the Hornets in scoring and narrowly missing out on Comeback Player of the Year honors, Tripuka is having a rough season to say the least.

He has had to overcome a back injury earlier in the year and is now facing what the Hornets fans have placed on his back — the role of team scapegoat.

It is a role he shrugged off for much of the season. But finally, in a recent post-game interview, Tripuka admitted, while fighting back tears, that the boos were getting to him, that he did not appreciate the boos, and he did not feel he deserved them.

Soon after Tripuka's interview, which was shown on all Charlotte TV stations, we learned that he is now trailing only James Worthy for most votes in the Western Conference All-Star balloting.

If Kelly Tripuka deserves anything less than being singled out for a young team's lack of success, it's a place on the All-Star team.

Does this mean Hornets fans, who are obviously stuffing All-Star ballot boxes, are a compassionate bunch after all? No, it



JEFF NICHOLS

Pep Talk

only embarrasses them further.

Fact: Tripuka is having a horrible year. You don't put a man on the All-Star team out of retrospective sympathy for him. There are players in the league who have worked too hard to be left off the team because of fan wars in Charlotte.

Over the holidays, I got a kick out of listening to many of these fans whine publicly. They whined about traffic (suddenly, the fact that Charlotte trails only L.A. for the honor of worst traffic in the country escaped them), they whined about pizza prices, and they whined about guys shooting 1-10.

And when asked to explain why they boo, in just the team's second year of existence, most fans responded with, "Hey, these guys are pros."

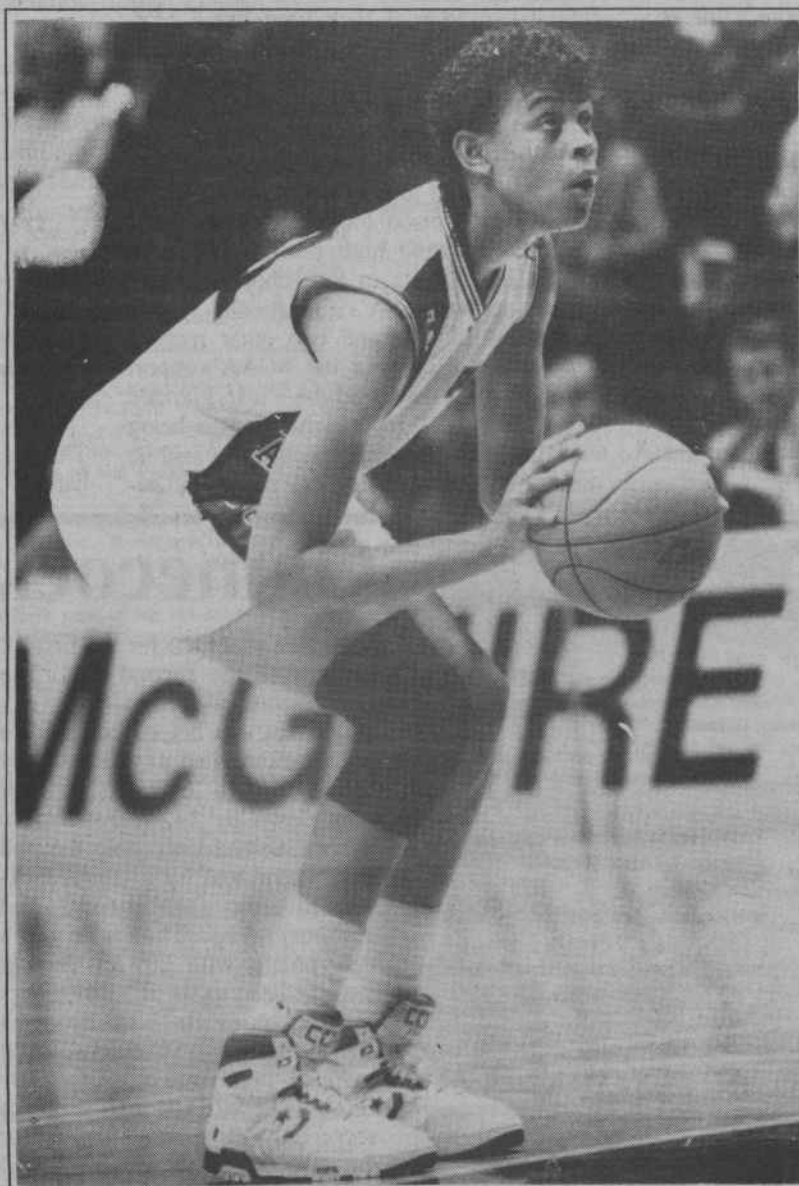
But, in fact, if they really paid attention to what they're saying, the fans might realize that since the Hornets are a pro team, these teams they're playing night-in-and-night-out must not be made up of YMCA All-Stars.

And if they thought about it a little more, while probably realize that the other teams in the league now know what to expect from Charlotte this year. The Hornets are part of the family now. But they are still little brothers, and they are going to get kicked around a while.

Sure, the Hornets have beaten themselves more than once this year. But don't take too much credit away from guys named Malone, Robinson, Johnson and Jordan, just to name a few.

Boos are commonplace in professional sports, but the Hornets

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Senior center Schonna Banner prepares to take a foul shot in a game last season. Banner scored eight points in Tuesday's 65-52 win over Louisville.

Lady Gamecocks get by Louisville

By DAVID CARAVIELLO
Staff Writer

Danny Ford and Nancy Wilson don't have much in common. One is a football coach, the other a basketball coach. One chews tobacco, the other doesn't. One is under investigation by the NCAA, the other is not.

But after USC's 65-52 victory over the Lady Cardinals of Louisville Monday night, Wilson likened her team to Ford's.

"Well, I probably shouldn't quote a Clemson person," Wilson said, "but I remember reading in an article on Danny Ford when he was talking about this year's football team that one mark of a good team is to be able to play flat and still win. I think that's exactly what we did tonight."

The game itself looked like a four-part miniseries. The first half was pretty even. Then, USC exploded in the first few minutes of the second half, going up by as much as 18 points on good defense and transition.

Louisville mounted a furious rally midway through the second half, cutting the lead to as little as six. But the Lady Gamecocks came through in the clutch as defense once again secured the win.

"I thought the defense was pretty good, especially at the end," Wilson said. "I feel like the shots that they made were tough shots, most of the time anyway."

"They're a good team so they're going to create some easy shots for themselves," she said. "It was definitely a feeling throughout the whole game that if we didn't do it defensively it was long gone."

The game seesawed in the opening minutes with USC falling behind by as much as three points at one time. USC boosted the lead to five. Then Beth Hunt converted a three-point play for a 19-11 USC lead.

Sherry David's three-pointer with :01 left in the half put the Lady Gamecocks up by seven at 31-24 and gave them a much needed halftime boost.

USC exploded out of the locker room in the second half. Hunt hit two free throws. David nailed an 18-foot jumper. Freshman Marsha Williams hit three consecutive layups.

By the time the smoke had cleared, USC was up by 19 points at 49-30 with 8:14 left. The Lady Gamecock defense had also kept

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USC declares McKoy academically ineligible

By JEFF NICHOLS
Sports Editor

If you happen to be adept at knocking down 3-pointers, hitting the open man in a motion offense and beating full-court pressure - and if you think you can do it against major college basketball competition, give USC head coach George Felton a call.

He needs you. Sophomore shooting guard Troy McKoy, who failed two courses in the fall semester and finished with a 1.08 grade-point average according to an article in *The State* Tuesday, is academically ineligible.

With Monday's loss of McKoy, Felton has only a pair of guards remaining — sophomores Jo Jo English and Brian Popovich.

Felton may not have McKoy back until next spring. He will be eligible for basketball in next year's fall

semester only if he appeals for admission into summer school and meets academic standards then.

Meanwhile, Felton will have to make due with two guards and only a nine-man roster unless he picks up a walk-on, which he hasn't ruled out.

McKoy, a 6-foot-7-inch guard from East Hartford, Conn., was averaging 4.8 points a game. His last-second shot gave the Gamecocks a 52-51 victory over Maryland in the first round of the Central Fidelity Classic in Richmond on Dec. 1.

There are now three guards missing from Felton's 1989-90 NCAA tournament team.

Starting point guard Brent Price transferred to Oklahoma in the summer. Junior guard Barry Manning was lost for the season three weeks ago with bone chips in his left hand.



Troy McKoy

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