

Basketball backstage

by Palash Islam
Contributing Writer

"Concentration. Effort. Discipline. Not one. Not two. All three."

- Coach Bender, discussing what the team needs to focus on for the season during a team meeting

These three words described the Washington coaching staff's desires for the 1998-99 team during a team meeting held the day after the exhibition win against Brewster Packer. With these three words, it hopes to mold the No. 14 Dawgs into Pac-10 perennials.

After the Brewster Packer game, there was a sense of urgency with the coaching staff. Why? Two things: unforced turnovers and pressure to live up to this year's expectations.

Turnovers

Against a Brewster Packer team that assistant coach Eric Hughes described as being "a bunch of old men that switch (screens on defense)," the Huskies committed 29 turnovers — a cardinal sin against a switching defense because of the simplicity of the defense. Between the ugly Brewster game and the game played on Monday night against UNC-Wilmington, the team charted every drill and scrimmage

throughout the week for turnovers. After practice, for every turnover committed during the drills, players ran. And ran. And ran some more.

During one particular practice, the players ran 20 sprints with a 10-second "rest" between each sprint. They weren't done yet, as after this each member ran extra sprints for each individual turnover. Though these personal sprints weren't timed, freshman forward Grant Leep said, "These are a lot harder (not being timed) because then you don't know how fast you are going, and you don't want to have to do more if Coach thinks you are slacking off."

The result of all the running? Against a team whose players "weren't a bunch of old men who switched," the Huskies finished with nine turnovers — with only one player who had more than one turnover.

Expectations

Throughout the week of practice, there was a mystery person who watched each drill every day and took notes. During breaks, coach Bender discussed different issues and took comments from this unidentified man. Who was this person? He was, in fact, one of the most highly respected coaches in all of college basketball. His name? Pete Gaudet.

Coach Gaudet and coach B started coaching together at Duke, and Gaudet took over for Mike Krzyzewski, Duke's legendary coach, for one year during coach K's sabbatical away from basketball.

During this week's practice, Gaudet offered Bender tips from the stands, and on Friday after practice, he gave a motivational speech in the team locker room about what it takes to be the best. He did this all with an enormous ring on his finger — a big "#1," his National Championship ring from Duke.

Final thoughts

During the week of preparation for the UNC-Wilmington game, the Husky coaching staff was intense and demanding. They started with a 5:30 a.m. practice on Monday morning, and ended on Friday evening with Gaudet's speech and Bender saying that "this may be the toughest that I've ever been on a team." With the week behind them, the players responded with a 70-63 win against the Seahawks on Monday.

Palash is a student team manager on the men's basketball team. He will be regularly writing an analysis of the team for The Daily.



Point guard Dan Dickau drives up for a layup on UNC-Wilmington during the Huskies' season-opening 72-63 victory. Senior Todd MacCulloch watches the action.

JOE NICHOLSON/The Daily