

SECTION B Bison



January 29, 2010

Deeper tennis teams hit for nationals



Photo by CRAIG RAINBOLT | The Bison
Sophomore Gina Cielo returns to a Lady Bison roster that is deeper than a year ago. Cielo is one of several Lady Bisons competing for a top spot on the team.

by **CHRIS O'DELL**
sports editor

The Bison and Lady Bison tennis teams will open the spring season with deeper teams from top to bottom. Although each team lost its No. 1 player, both teams have made up for any losses to the program by adding several talented players.

"I think we had an outstanding recruiting year," head coach David Elliott said. "We're young, but we have very talented players."

The Bison team will have to replace last year's top player, Olzhas Taniyev, while the Lady Bisons look to fill the shoes left by last season's Gulf South Conference West Player of the Year, Alicia Williams.

"Alicia Williams is for sure the player who was the most successful on the team," senior Lola Pardo said. "She set a lot of records tennis-wise and study-wise. She has been a great example and influence for all of the team."

Elliott said that despite

bringing in new recruits, the loss of players like Taniyev and Williams are hard to get over.

"You can't really replace someone like that," Elliott said. "But we are much deeper this year which overall makes us a better team."

Returning for the men's team will be brothers Marco and Henrique Ruiz. The Brazilian duo will once again pair up in doubles competition and each player will also play singles. Elliott said Marco, who went 16-1 in singles last season, has been one of the team's go-to guys throughout his career as a Bison tennis player.

"Marco is a great leader," Elliott said. "He sets an example for other players because he practices and plays with such a high level of energy that it's contagious to the rest of the team."

After posting an 11-5 doubles record with Taniyev last season, junior Chris Beach will be performing with a new doubles partner

see TENNIS page 2b



Photo by CRAIG RAINBOLT | The Bison
Junior Chris Beach smashes a serve during a recent match in Searcy. Beach will be playing with a new doubles partner this season.

Brown always a threat from 3-point range

by **ALEX MCCLAIN**
student writer

Sam Brown, a junior guard for the Bison basketball team, is having an incredible season on and off the court.

When Brown transferred to Harding in the fall of 2008, one of the best aspects of the move for the Little Rock native was being closer to his family. After spending two years at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M, it was a blessing to see his family in the crowd at all his home games.

"I can count on one hand how many times I saw them when I was at [junior college]," Brown said. "Now my family comes to all my games."

Head coach Jeff Morgan echoed Brown's thought saying his parents were incredibly supportive of Bison basketball.

However, junior college did help Brown's game. Morgan showed interest in Brown when he was in high school, but Brown chose to play for a junior college with hopes of attracting Division-I teams.

Morgan said Brown's tenure at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M really improved his defensive abilities.

Since transferring to Harding, he has played 47 games, and Morgan praises him for his versatility.

"He has a soft touch from the field but can also drive and create opportunities for other players," Morgan said.

"Last year was my first year, and I didn't really step up," Brown said. "I'm shooting the ball more this year."

Morgan said Brown's work in the offseason improved his game all around.

"Sam's one of the best shooters we've got," Morgan said. "Now

he's better off the dribble and has a softer touch on the 3."

Brown has a talent for driving in and collapsing the defense to get other players open and his jump shot off a screen is an asset to the team. Morgan said he can finish a jumper from anywhere on the court in any situation.

Brown spent much of the summer weightlifting and is probably in better shape than he has ever been according to Morgan.

"The stronger Sam gets, the better he gets all around," Morgan said.

Morgan also mentioned that Brown is a wonderful player to coach and a great teammate.

"He's really levelheaded," Morgan said. "The way he plays - never hot, never cold - that's how he always is."

Morgan expects Brown will step up even more next year in his senior season.



Photo by CRAIG RAINBOLT | The Bison
Junior guard Sam Brown dribbles past a defender during a recent home game at Rhodes Fieldhouse. Brown is averaging 8.3 ppg.

Kobe vs. LeBron debate raging hotter than ever

CHRIS O'DELL

The Leadoff



There is no debate as to who the NBA's best player was last decade. Kobe Bryant's domination in the league raised questions about the best player in basketball history. However, with LeBron James improving every year in Cleveland (not to mention the ongoing Nike puppet commercials), the Kobe vs. LeBron debate is raging hotter than ever.

So who is truly the best basketball player on the planet? Well, in order to answer that question we must first dive into several questions that might ultimately end the No. 24 vs. No. 23 debate.

First off, is there any other player in the league that could challenge Kobe or LeBron as the NBA's best?

Several players such as Chris Paul, Dwayne Wade, Dirk Nowitzki, Carmello Anthony and Kevin Durant could have legitimate arguments as the third best player in the game. However, none of these, or any other player in the NBA, can truly compare with Kobe and LeBron in today's NBA.

Who would win a one-on-

one game between the two players?

I think this is one of the easier questions because of how multi-faceted Kobe is. Not only can Kobe hit the contested 3, but he can also drive in for a difficult lay-in, post-up with his back to the basket or even dribble right around a defender after a ridiculous crossover. LeBron might have more hops than Kobe, but LeBron's main offensive strength is penetrating to the basket. However, without the help of screens and fast breaks LeBron would find it much more difficult to get to the hole and finish with a high-flying dunk against a player with Kobe's defensive skills.

Who is the better leader?

This question might be the most difficult to answer because these two players might possess more leadership skills than any player in the league. If I had to choose one though, I would go with LeBron. Although Kobe could very well be the league's second best in this category, I feel like LeBron's teammates enjoy playing with him more and ultimately get more open looks than Kobe's teammates in LA.

Who is the most clutch player between the two?

This is one of the more important questions to answer, as I believe closing out games is one

of the most under-appreciated parts of a player's game. I don't think it's any secret that Kobe is the league's most clutch player. LeBron is scary down the stretch but has missed too many key free throws and last-second shots to even be mentioned in the same category as Bryant. In fact, with 20 seconds to go and down by two points, there might be at least 10 players in the league I'd rather have shooting for the win than LeBron. However, there is no one I'd rather have in that situation than Kobe.

With one game to play and only one player to choose, which player would you rather have on your team?

This is a tough one because I believe both players are capable of single-handedly beating an opposing team. But between these two, Kobe has four NBA championships while LeBron has a goose egg in the category. LeBron has only made one NBA Finals appearance and it came as a sweep at the hands of the San Antonio Spurs. Kobe has been to six championships and has won over half of them. You can make the argument that Kobe has had better teams than LeBron, but the bottom line is that Kobe is a better winner than LeBron James. It should be noted though that LeBron will likely win a few championships in his career, but I doubt he will ever reach the

number of rings Kobe ultimately acquires throughout his career.

Who is the better athlete?

This couldn't be more obvious. LeBron is a freak of nature athletically, and you could make the argument that no athlete on the planet is more athletic than James. While Kobe has amazing athletic abilities of his own, they still don't compare to LeBron's.

Who is more skilled at basketball?

Kobe definitely possesses more skills than LeBron does. No. 24 is a better shooter at any position on the court, is a better ball-handler, a better passer, has more finesse moves and also has an uncanny knack for defense. LeBron's game is almost solely based on his athleticism while Kobe relies mostly on skill and preparation.

Who has the better nickname?

Although this has nothing to do with their skills on the court, I just thought we should hit on this question to see what their peers think. LeBron is commonly known as "King James" or "The Chosen One," but Kobe's nickname "Black Mamba" might be as good as it gets. Not only is it intimidating; it's also the perfect metaphor for Kobe's game on the court.

Who is the better defensive player?

Earlier in Kobe's career, he

was one of the top three defensive players in the league. With multiple All-NBA Defensive Team selections, he is clearly one of the most feared defensive guards in the league. However, at this stage in each player's career, LeBron gets my nod as the best defensive player between the two. Not only is he strong enough to guard you in the post, but he can also keep up with the quicker guards in the league. Not to mention his knack for swatting a lay-up attempt eight rows into the crowd.

With these questions now answered, let's now solve the Kobe vs. LeBron debate once and for all.

Who is the better player?

While many LeBron supporters think "King James" has clearly taken the torch from Kobe, the NBA's top player is still the "Black Mamba." Kobe is the best all-around player the game has to offer and will likely win his fifth title later this year. I do feel LeBron has a higher ceiling for greatness than Kobe did because of his freak athleticism, but at this point in the game No. 24 is still one better than No. 23.

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