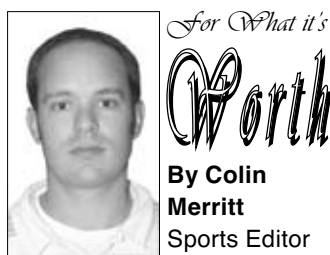


Saban, Crimson Tide unjustly crucified



For What it's Worth
By Colin Merritt
Sports Editor

New Alabama head coach Nick Saban arrived in Tuscaloosa with loads of love and fanfare heaped upon him by the leadership-starved Tide football fans. Unfortunately though, Coach Saban also arrived with much, much more criticism from those outside the Crimson Nation.

Saban's much publicized deceit leading up to accepting the Alabama job - and leaving the Miami Dolphins with three years still on his contract - set off a frenzy from the national media and irrate sports fans, *namely those from Baton Rouge.*

The problem stemmed from Saban's comment two weeks ago when he basically stated that he would not - repeat, not - be the next head coach at the University of Alabama. Well, I guess we know what happened next, Saban accepted the \$32 million offer from the Tide and quickly bolted from Miami with his contract - not to mention his honor - broken.

What followed was a stream of harsh criticism from most media pundits and college football fans. Granted, Saban lied and left for more money - *shame on him, I guess* - but his actions are far from unprecedented. Actually, Saban is just next in a long line of coaches who took-the-money-and-ran after lying through their teeth about their intentions.

How about Auburn's Tommy Tuberville? He was quoted a saying the only way he would leave the University of Mississippi in Oxford was in a pine box. Just weeks later, a still breathing

Tuberville was announced as the Auburn head football coach.

How about our old buddy Dennis Franchione? Coach Fran said that he was staying the course with the fresh-off-probation Tide, and even implored his team to 'hold the rope' while these rumors of him taking the Texas A&M job swirled. Then one morning Coach Fran let go of the rope and came up missing. He was found later that day accepting the head coaching job at Texas A&M.

How about Rick Pitino? This has to be my favorite coaching fib ever. Pitino, after successfully leading the University of Kentucky basketball team to the 1996 national championship, bolted for the big money in the NBA and became the head coach of the Boston Celtics in 1997. In his going-away press conference, the nearly legendary coach promised the Wildcat faithful of Kentucky that he would never return to the college ranks. Then in 2004 he was named head coach at the University of Louisville, Kentucky's biggest rival. Nice!

How about the venerable Don Shula, who openly criticized Saban's departure? Shula left the Baltimore Colts in 1969 for the Miami Dolphins, where he cemented his legend by becoming the NFL's most successful coach with 328 career victories. But, did you know that the Dolphins lost a first-round draft pick because they illegally contacted Shula about becoming the head coach and were charged with tampering by the league. Surely Shula's decision had nothing to do with money, right?

Hey, give Saban and the University of Alabama a break because they are not the first duo to get together over lies and money, just the latest.

Send questions/comments to sports@choctawsun.com

Lady Saints keep marching

■ Fourth-ranked Patrician rolls to 16-1 with easy wins over Southern and Escambia

By Colin Merritt
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Entering this season, the Lady Saints figured to have their work cut out for them if they were going to defend last year's AISA Class 2A state championship. The squad lost every starter from that 24-2 title team and entered this year with just a couple of players that had seen quality playing time at the varsity level.

Even with that apparent lack of experience, the Lady Saints have bolted out of the gate with an impressive 16-1 record that has them ranked fourth in the state, the highest of any 2A squad.

"It's been a pleasant surprise. It shows what hard work and leadership can do for you," head coach Wendell Barr said when asked about his Lady Saints' hot start in their title defense season. "This team has really worked to get to this point. They improve with each



Choctaw Sun photo by Colin Merritt

Senior Anna Lewis (#40) along with juniors like 'Doodle' Caudle (#31) and Jessie Boykin (#34) are major factors in the Lady Saints' success this season. PA, despite losing all five starters from last year's championship team, is the highest ranked 2A squad in the state (No. 4) thanks to their gawdy 16-1 mark.

and every game thanks to solid leaders like Kylie Lewis, Anna Lewis, and Stephanie Caudle. If the combination of determination and character continues then we have a great shot to get back to the final four."

The Saints kept rolling this week on their way to a possible repeat of last year's championship with two blowout wins over Southern and Escambia.

The Saints got a huge game from senior Anna Lewis in their easy 46-18 win over Southern Academy Thursday night. Lewis, one of the few players that saw considerable playing time on last year's title team, poured in 18 points and grabbed 12 rebounds in the win. Kylie Lewis and Savanna Smith each added six for Patrician.

The Saints then got a well-rounded, balanced performance in their 56-40 win over Escambia on Friday night in Butler with seven players making the score sheet. Junior sensation Stephanie 'Doodle' Caudle led Patrician with 20 points and nine rebounds, while Kylie Lewis scored nine and Anna Lewis added eight. Shayna Jimerson and Nancy Dasis each scored six points, with Codi Stafford putting in

five and Savanna Smith adding two in the Saints' win.

Patrician will hit the road this week with a game at Marengo Academy on Tuesday (1/9) and at Marion on Friday (1/11).

Marion is undefeated and ranked fifth in Class 2A, so this game should be a good test for the Lady Saints.

■ TIGERS From 1B

the game into the fourth period with Choctaw County on top 43-41. The Tigers outscored Sumter 14-12 in the fourth to hang on for the important win.

Trent Ruffin finished with 15 points for Choctaw County, while Carter hit 11, and Demetrick Goodwin and Charles Ruffin each had nine in the win. Sumter was paced by Cameron Ezell with 18 points.

"Winning our region games at home is really important," continued Coach Thomas. "There seems to be a bunch of home cooking' going on when we are on the road. But when we get you in Butler or in a game where the calls go both ways, you can't beat these Tigers, baby."

The Tigers experienced some of those road-woes when they took an ugly 74-55 beating at Greensboro on Friday night. Greensboro, an area opponent Choctaw County had beaten by double-digits earlier in the season in Butler, jumped out to a 32-20 halftime lead on their way to the win in a game that saw them shoot 38 free throws. Choctaw County shot just five free throws in the loss.

The B-team took two losses, a 41-38 defeat at Greensboro and a 54-25 home loss against Sumter. In the two losses, Phillip Ollison scored 16 points and Austin Taylor tallied 13.

CCHS will now travel to face Francis Marion on Friday (1/12), then host Southeast Lauderdale in Butler on Saturday, January 13th.

■ INDIANS From 1B

shocker over Keith, Southern Choctaw is now sitting pretty atop the difficult division with a 4-1 overall record and a 1-0 mark in area.

"We play a very difficult area with two quality teams," admitted Indians' head coach Charles Chaney. "It's critical to win the area because the winner is automatically in the second round of the

playoffs, so that was a big win over Keith for sure."

Southern Choctaw's defense set the tone in the first half as the Indians took an 18-6 halftime lead. Keith would finally get going, scoring 19 points in the third period to close the score to 35-25 heading for the fourth. The Indians would hold on to the lead - despite being outscored 11-7 in the fourth - for the important 42-36 win.

Senior David Kirksey scored 11 points to lead an Indian offense that saw ten players make the scoring sheet. Fellow senior Jay Johnson added six in the win for the Indians, while Marty Frost added three points, five assist, four rebounds and two steals.

The Lady Indians and the B-team both lost to Keith.

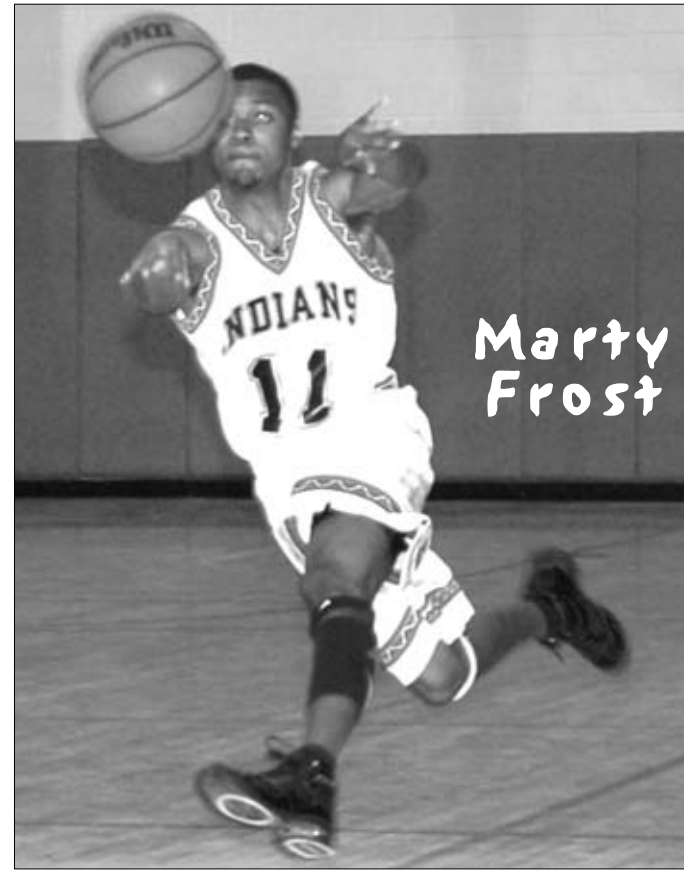
SCHS will play Washington County on Tuesday (1/9) in Chatom and Coffeerville in Gilbertown on Thursday (1/11). Game time is 5 p.m.



Choctaw Sun photo by Colin Merritt

Saints' J.V. combined 19-1

The Patrician boys and girls junior varsity basketball teams are a combined 19-1 after both squads beat Escambia in Butler on Friday. The 9-1 boys won 33-23 thanks to a 12-point game from **Michael Gibson (#12)**, while the 10-0 girls remained perfect with a 38-31 win behind 10 points from Tori Walters and nine each from Harley Glass and Shelby Williams.



Marty Frost

This Week's Hoops Schedule

Tuesday, January 9th
SCA host Sumter
SCHS at Wash. Co.
PA at Marengo
Millry at Fruitdale

Thursday, January 11th
SCHS host Coffeerville
Millry at McIntosh

Friday, January 12th
SCA host Central Chr.
CCHS at Francis Marion
PA at Marion
SCHS at R.C. Hatch

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