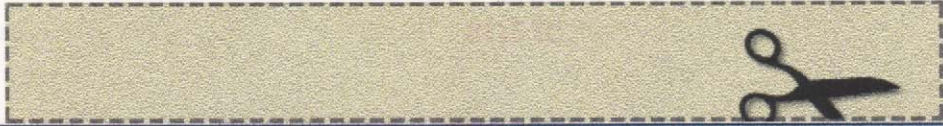


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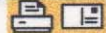
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University of Pittsburgh A Howland success: Demanding coach turns Pitt into winner

Sunday, March 17, 2002

By Phil Axelrod, Post-Gazette Sports Writer



The life and times of Ben Howland and the revitalization of Pitt's basketball program were the recurring themes yesterday, the off day for the four remaining teams at Mellon Arena for the NCAA tournament.



Pitt's rise to this level of college basketball has been lurching along since Howland took the job three years ago after transforming Northern Arizona into a winner.



"I think I'm demanding. I'm in charge of running our program," said Howland, whose third-seeded Panthers (28-5) meet No. 6 California (23-8) at 2:36 p.m. today in the second round of the South Region.



No. 1 Cincinnati (31-3) plays No. 9 UCLA (20-11) at 12:10 p.m. in the second round of the West Region.



"At my first press conference three years ago, I talked about in five years establishing a program that could be in the postseason on a yearly basis," Howland said. "We've already had a great year that we want to continue on. Who wants to stop now?"

It took Howland a while to jump-start the program because there was a faction of players his first two years that had difficulty making the transition from Ralph Willard as coach to Howland.

"Definitely, I've seen a lot of change," said forward Chad Johnson, the only senior on



Mellon Arena satisfies NCAA

MELLON ARENA GAMES

Pitt Report: 3/17/02

Pitt's roster. "There was a lot of hatred toward Howland. Not because who he was, but who left. We were in the in-between stage that first year. We were trying to trust Howland and the players in the system."

When Johnson was asked to elaborate on his use of the word hatred, he calmly said: "If I chose the wrong word, I apologize. Some of the players before didn't want to let go of Ralph."

"Coach Howland is not the same person. You had to learn to get along with him on and off the court."

Asked to describe Howland's coaching style, Johnson answered with a grin: "What he wants done, he wants it done. You're going to do it, that's just the way it is."

Howland smiled when he was told of Johnson's comments.

"I'm Mr. Nice Guy," he said. "I don't know where that [being demanding] comes from. I take offense to nothing. It wasn't an easy start."

Pitt was 13-15 in Howland's first season, finishing with only seven scholarship players. Last year, Howland booted center Chris Seabrooks off the team in December and kept Brandin Knight out of the starting lineup several times for disciplinary reasons. The Panthers finally got their act together in March to reach the championship game of the Big East tournament for the first time and advanced to the second round of the National Invitation Tournament.

They fed off that late rush to set school records for victories in a season and most victories (13) in the conference. Pitt's 71-54 victory against Central Connecticut State in the first round Friday was the school's first tournament win since 1991, when the Panthers defeated Georgia in overtime, 76-68.

NCAA South

California freshman has seen 'madness'

Kent State might not be done yet after upsetting Crimson Tide

NCAA West

UCLA's Knight worked to get his shot

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NCAA West

Ohio State latest victim of surging Missouri, 83-67

Arizona has the cool hand in 68-60 win

NCAA South

Pressure proofed Duke withstands Irish's best shot, 84-77

NCAA Midwest

Oregon threesome wards off Wake Forest

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Women

The Wright time to step up

Jones, Cash sparkle as Huskies overwhelm St. Francis, 86-37

... a word from our columnists

Pitt hasn't won two games in the tournament since 1973-74, when the Billy Knight-led Panthers reached the Elite 8.

Ron Cook
Pitt's Brown longs for trip to his old Kentucky home

"None of the players on this team ever played for Ralph Willard," Howland said.

Bob Smizik
History isn't bound to repeat itself

"These are my players. These guys are very coachable. I've got my back covered with my point guard [Knight]. You want the leadership to come from within, having your owns guys coaching each other."

It all starts with Howland.

"I do enjoy preparation," he said. "Preparing to win is a big part of being successful. I have my assistants living in the film room. Every team, every player, has tendencies, and you're always looking for an edge."

Howland and his staff started to break down film on California at 5:45 p.m. Friday.

"The projector started burning out at 10:45," Howland said. "It had been on for five straight hours."

They found another projector and continued the film study for several more hours.

"Every coach in the country has the same film sessions. Some teams just don't watch it. If people are not paying attention, it's not going to help," Knight said. "We're watching the film."

Knight is a student of the game.

"He's a very smart player, that's why the ball is in his hands so much. He makes great decisions and sees things other people don't see," Julius Page said. "He's as smart as a point guard can get."

Knight and his teammates have learned their lessons well under Howland.

"We try to be really efficient with our time," he said. "We've done a good job of not over-practicing. There's a fine line between doing too much and not doing enough."

Although Knight hasn't played against a team from the Pac-10, he's familiar with the conference because his brother, Brevin, starred at Stanford before heading to the NBA.

"He thinks the Pac-10 is a better conference than the Big East," Brandin said. "It would be a little better if we were playing Stanford, but I guess

California will do."

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NOTES - Howland got his first victory in the NCAA tournament with Pitt's win against Central Connecticut State. In his only other appearance, Howland's Northern Arizona team lost to Cincinnati, 65-62, in 1998. ... Pitt is 9-14 in 14 NCAA appearances. ... Pitt hasn't played a team from the Pac-10 since it defeated UCLA, 91-79, at Mellon Arena (then the Civic Arena) in 1992. The Panthers are 6-18 against the Pac-10. ... California Coach Ben Braun was the coach of Eastern Michigan when Pitt defeated Eastern Michigan, 108-90, in the first round of the 1988 tournament.

20'00

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