

Lady Tigers capture SWAC title; set sights on conference championship

Written by Yolande Y. Lezine

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The Texas Southern University Lady Tigers basketball team captured the school's first-ever Southwestern Athletic Conference regular season title and they are setting their sights on winning the conference championship next weekend at the Toyota SWAC Basketball Championships in Garland, Texas.

Led by first-year head coach Cynthia Cooper-Dyke, the Lady Tigers went on a 15-game winning streak and won a school-record 19 games this season. They finished the regular season at 19-10, 16-2 (SWAC). The only two conference losses came at the hands of the Southern Jaguars. In the two years before she arrived on campus, TSU posted consecutive five-win seasons.

Cooper-Dyke, 49, who was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame three years ago, has done remarkable job in turning around the women's basketball program. She is now 3-for-3 on reclamation projects as a college coach, all accomplished in a very short amount of time.

Prior to coming to Texas Southern, Cooper-Dyke coached at Prairie View and at North Carolina-Wilmington. Her second squad at Prairie View A&M (2006-07) claimed the SWAC regular-season and tournament titles and advanced to the NCAA Tournament, which was three firsts for the school.

In her first year at North Carolina-Wilmington, her squad set a school record for victories and made the program's first postseason appearance. She should be a hands down favorite to win the SWAC Coach of the Year honors, which would be her fourth such honor in eight seasons as a college coach.

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“I didn’t expect us to turn around this fast,” Cooper-Dyke stated. “At the beginning of our season, we struggled with buying into the system, with finishing games and believing in ourselves, but once we hit conference play I felt we really started to buy into some concepts and believing in ourselves more.”

The former USC Trojans point guard has always been a familiar sight in the city of Houston, after helping the Houston Comets win the first four WNBA championships. No other WNBA team has accomplished what the Comets did!

Cynthia Cooper-Dyke is very passionate about the game of women’s basketball and if you watched her play professionally, you would understand her way of coaching. Nevertheless, despite the toughness that she requires of her players both mentally and physically, the ladies have responded.

Freshman guard Te’era Williams from Oklahoma City, and Kayla West, a sophomore from South Carolina are the lone Lady Tigers averaging in double-figure scoring. Senior Gianne Fleming and freshman Briana Sidney, who are both from New York City are averaging 9.7 points respectively.

In their final home game of the regular season, the Lady Tigers defeated the Lady Braves of Alcorn State 70-43 at the H&PE Arena. Brianna Sidney led the team with 18 points and 5 steals. Teera Williams and Morgan Simmons added 16 and 11 points respectively. Simmons also led the team with a game-high 7 rebounds.

The 2013 Southwestern Athletic Conference regular-season champions received their championship trophy at halftime of the men’s game from a SWAC official.