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The Championship Run at a Glance

Game One
Union 76, John Brown (Ark.) 57
Sevenths-seeded John Brown University took an 11-4 lead six minutes into the game, but Djenebou “DJ” Sissoko scored on an Ena Daniels assist with 7:20 to play in the half to give Union its first lead of the night at 19-18. Union then used a 19-2 run to take a 38-20 lead into halftime, and maintained a decided lead throughout the second half. Ena Daniels led Union’s scorers with 14 points, including 7-0-11 from the floor, and six assists. Meredith Richardson followed with 13 points, four assists, and six rebounds.

Game Two
Union 92, St. Xavier (III) 69
The Lady Bulldogs started the second half scoring eight unanswered points to break open a tight game. Josephine Owino led Union with 18 points, while Jessica Graves followed with 15 and Natanya Smith added 11. St. Xavier head coach Bob Halberg told the Jackson Sun “(Union’s) kids coming off the bench are just as good as their starters.”

Game Three
Union 78, Oklahoma City University 64
In a rematch of the 2005 national title game, Union routed highly regarded Oklahoma City to secure a spot in the Final Four. The Lady Stars had qualified for the title game the previous seven years. Meredith Richardson scored 24 of her game-leading 27 points from beyond the arc, where Union shot a blistering 53 percent as a team and tied a tournament record for 3-point baskets at 14. OC’s star center Mariah Sy left the game with an injury in the second half. The entire Union team and bench surrounded her after they had completed the game to wish her well. Sy later was named the tournament’s most valuable player.

Game Four
Union 62, The Master’s College (Calif.) 51
The Lady Bulldogs played a near-flawless first half, leading the Lady Mustangs 40-14 at the break. But The Master’s College had engineered several comebacks during their tournament run, and went to work chipping away at the Union lead. They used a 24-5 run midway through the second half to pull within two possessions at 55-49 with just 1:39 remaining. Crystal Eason sank four clutch free throws, and Ena Daniels blocked a crucial shot with the final minute to seal the victory and send Union to a second consecutive national title game.

Game Five
Union 79, Lubbock Christian (Tex.) 62
Lubbock Christian was the consensus 2006 "Cinderella" team at the tournament. The Lady Chaps came into Jackson unseeded, and had never gone against a tournament game prior to this season. But they’d been top-ranked Vanguard to reach the title game with Union. The Lady Bulldogs fell behind early, but the two teams played evenly until late in the first half, when Union built an 11-point lead at intermission. Lubbock Christian had problems dealing with Union’s post play, and Natanya Smith and Josephine Owino combined for 40 points. This tenth-straight win in national tournament play brought Union a third NCAA Division One national championship since 1998.

Tournament Accolades
• 47 Steals (tournament high)
• 88 Assists (tournament best)
• 19 Three-point baskets for Meredith Richardson (tied for best)

Coach of the Year: Mark Campbell

All Tournament Team:
1. Ena Daniels (first team), Josephine Owino and Meredith Richardson (second team)
When Stephanie Clark transferred to Union University to play basketball, she saw something different in Coach Mark Campbell that attracted her. “He was part of the reason that I decided to come here, because I really respected his vision as a coach,” Clark says. “It was not just to develop quality basketball players, but to make sure that his players develop and leave here with an understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what he did.”

Campbell has enjoyed a tremendous amount of success in his first seven years as coach of the Union Lady Bulldogs – including six straight seasons of 30 or more wins and two straight NAIA National Championships. But despite the success, Campbell’s focus isn’t on winning – it’s on priorities that are much more lasting.

“I think the process is so much more important than the outcome,” Campbell says. For Campbell, that process means emphasizing relationships – both with God and with each other. It means caring more about his players than the outcome of a game. It means developing his players to the best of their ability.

“I think we have a duty as Christians to be excellent in what we’re doing,” Campbell says. “I think a lot of my kids wouldn’t listen to the spiritual things if we weren’t trying to be excellent on the floor. Because we’re excellent on the floor, they realize part of that excellence comes from Christ, I hope.”

“Mark Campbell is a terrific coach and an even better person,” says Union President David S. Dockery. “He exemplifies the mission, values, and ideals of this university as well as anyone on the entire campus. Union University is indeed blessed to have Mark Campbell to lead our outstanding women’s basketball program.”

Excellence on the floor is a given, as Campbell’s career record of 226-36 over seven years is ample evidence. But Campbell is quick to credit others, including former Lady Bulldogs coach David Blackstock, who built the Union women’s program into a national powerhouse, with contributing to his success.

“I’m at a place that allows you to be successful,” he says. “We’ve averaged 30 wins a year for the last 20 years. So, I’m not doing anything that anybody hadn’t done before me.”

Campbell says the entire environment at Union makes it easy to be a winning coach. “The school gives us every opportunity to be successful financially with scholarship, with facilities, with tradition, with people who are more concerned about people than winning,” he says. “If you can be at a place where people are more concerned about people than winning, and you can still win, that’s a special place.”

Blackstock says Campbell has all the ingredients of what makes a winning coach. He’s knowledgeable of the game. He recruits good athletes who come from winning programs. He motivates his players to believe in themselves.

But there’s something extra that Campbell contributes that other coaches don’t. “Mark has been able to sell the girls on the fact that he cares about them and will demand that they care about each other,” Blackstock says. “Once everybody buys into the system and sees that it works, they become confident in their own abilities and in the abilities of their teammates. That’s when you have your good runs. That’s when you win championships.”

Two championships, back-to-back, to be exact. After claiming his first title last year, Campbell knew this year’s team also had the potential to match that performance.

From the team’s first meeting on Sept. 16, Campbell told them they would win the national championship.

“I think you sow seeds of what your expectations are from the beginning,” Campbell says. “That never changes. Our first team meeting last year in April after we won it, the idea was, we’re going to do it again.”

He encouraged this year’s team to look at the banner hanging in the gym. He reminded them that if they didn’t execute, they’d leave early in the tournament. He pointed out how the team was built to win five games in six days.

Even when the team lost three games in a row in December, Campbell wasn’t overly concerned. The team’s point guard, Jennifer Henson, was on the bench with an injury. Still, in each game, the Lady Bulldogs had a chance to win in the last three minutes.

“It turned out at the end that all the pieces improved and got better, and more than anything, the kids really loved each other,” Campbell says. “They liked each other on and off the floor. With girls, I think ultimately that’s one of the most important things.”

That doesn’t mean the relationship between players and coach is always smooth. Clark can attest to that, as she remembers times during her Union career when she’d be angry at Campbell for getting on her during practice. She says the feeling was probably mutual.

“His standards are high,” Clark says. “I would get mad because I felt like I had done the best I could do, and he wanted better.”

Campbell also admits his willingness to be confrontational.

“I don’t mind getting in kids’ faces about things that really matter,” he says. “I don’t care if they like me or not when it comes to those things. But I do care if they love me by the end of the year.”

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Clark, like most of Campbell’s players, will admit that she did.

“You know that when it counts, when it matters, he has your best interests at heart,” Clark says. “It doesn’t mean that he’s perfect, but it does mean that deep down he cares and he loves every single one of his players.”