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Liberty University

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Todd's Notebook : Flames have clear vision for future

April 01, 2009 | Todd Wetmore

The Liberty University Athletics Department is in the midst of one of its most successful runs in university history. The Flames took home 10 conference championships last year, en route to Liberty's sixth Big South Sasser Cup trophy over the last 11 seasons.

Liberty had its second NCAA Division I national champion when Josh McDougal outkicked Oregon's Glenn Rupp down the stretch to take home the 2007 NCAA Men's Cross Country national title.

The expanse of success continued this past fall, with a pair of repeat conference champions and a near replica on the same cross running trek in Terre Haute, Ind.

After capturing the program's first Big South title in 2007, the football team took its program to new heights in 2008. The gridiron giants knocked off a pair of Top 25 programs during their drive to a second straight league title and a program-best No. 14 final national ranking.

Individually, Liberty's star running back Rashad Jennings grabbed the league's attention when he rushed his way to an eighth-place finish in the final voting for the Walter Payton Award.

Hailing from Forest, Va., Jennings recently showcased his skills before more than 600 NFL head coaches, general managers and talent scouts at the NFL Combine — raising his stock, which could lead to the program's first NFL draft selection since 1993.

On the Vines Center hardwood, the Lady Flames made it two-for-two on the volleyball court, capturing the program's second straight Big South title and the fifth in school history.

Sam Chelanga, an understudy of McDougal's last year, nearly outperformed his master as the Nairobi, Kenya, native went toe-to-toe with Rupp at the 2008 NCAA National Cross Country event. However, the Ducks' senior erased the memories of last year and bested Liberty's sophomore by five seconds to capture this season's national crown.

Success certainly breeds success, and neither of Liberty's basketball programs are wilting under the pressure to keep up with their fellow counterparts.

The men's basketball team has experienced a resurgence under second-year head coach Ritchie McKay and national freshman phenom Seth Curry. The leading freshman scorer in the country, combined with the fourth-youngest squad in the country, has Flames fans packing out the Vines Center and thinking about March Madness.

Liberty, ranked among the nation's Top 25 mid-major programs all season, has produced its first

20-win season in 12 years.

March Madness has fanned the Lady Flames basketball program for more than a decade. Liberty has captured 11 out of the last 12 Big South titles and automatic berths to the NCAA Tournament.

Behind the efforts of a senior-laden squad, guided by two-time Big South Player of the Year Megan Frazee, Carey Green's Lady Flames stand head-and-shoulders above the rest of the league this year again, as they look to make it a dozen league trophies in their awards case.

The Lady Flames wrapped up the month of February on a double-digit winning streak, positioning Liberty to have two 20-win basketball programs for the second time in University history (also in 1996-97) and one of only a few nationally.

The collective sports world now has turned its attention to filling out brackets this mid-March, and whether Flames fanatics have the unprecedented opportunity to follow two teams in postseason play or not, one thing is for sure: Liberty Athletics has a clear vision for its future.

Todd Wetmore is Liberty University's Assistant AD for [Communications](#).