**Men’s basketball aims for first conference title and NCAA tourney play**

Following a two-year provisional period, Birmingham-Southern’s men’s basketball team began the 2003-04 campaign as a full-fledged member of NCAA Division I and the Big South Conference, meaning the Panthers are eligible for the regular season title and NCAA postseason consideration for the first time in school history.

Fifteen-year Head Coach Duane Reboul returns eight lettermen from last year’s squad that went 19-9, including an 11-5 record against Big South Conference opponents. That mark would have been good enough for second place in the league standings had BSC been eligible.

The Panthers return an explosive backcourt, a pair of veteran frontliners, and a crop of talented newcomers to help fill the void left by departed seniors Josiah James, Corey Watkins, Matt Burke, and Barry Moss. In senior point guard Derrick Williams and junior shooting guard Jakob Sigurdarson, the Panthers will possess one of the most potent backcourts in the league.

A pair of veterans return to anchor the BSC frontline in versatile senior Grant Davis and defensive stalwart junior Shema Mbyirukira. Plus, with the addition of talented junior college transfers Sredrick Powe, Rostislav Vergun, and Augustinas Vitas, the prospects appear much brighter. Vying for time at small forward is veteran Jimmy Walker, and Woods will all see time on the perimeter. Sophomore Anna Morton offers versatility in the lineup, and Diana Isbell, Thornborrow and Muneca Oliver will push for time at the guard spots. Freshmen Pam Anthony, and a host of newcomers join the mix.

Senior point guard Derrick Williams drives for the basket in an intra-squad matchup.

**Experienced and talented women cagers are gunning for a conference championship**

The 2003-04 season marks a new era for the Birmingham-Southern women’s basketball program. Not only is this the first year that the team will be eligible to win its first NCAA Division I conference championship, but is the first year the program has included four full classes of players.

The freshmen who began at BSC four years ago have witnessed the team’s full circle, and the ability to win an NCAA Division I championship, for the first time in the program’s short history, is in their control.

The five freshmen who helped build the program into what it is today, a team that finished the 2002-03 season with a 16-10 record, are Lindsay Boyett, Brooke Gentsch, Ricka Spears, April Walker, and Amy Woods. Those five led BSC to an 11-4 mark against league opponents last year, which would have put the Panthers in second place in the Big South had they counted then. They will this year.

The impending regular season schedule for the Panthers poses an SEC battle with Ole Miss on the Hilltop, two in-state tilts with Jacksonville State and Troy State, and tough contests with Jacksonville (Fla.), Belmont, Florida Atlantic, and Centenary, in addition to the daunting regular season contests with Big South Conference foes.

Boyett will again be counted on to bear the brunt of the scoring load, though talented junior Candace Byrd, sharp-shooting sophomore Stacey Anthony, and a host of newcomers join the mix.

Junior college center Martina Knotkova and freshman Jamel Grandberry will battle Gentsch and Spears for time inside. Freshmen Pam Thornborrow and Muneca Oliver will push for time at the guard spots. Sophomore Anna Morton offers versatility in the lineup, and Diana Isbell, Walker, and Woods will all see time on the perimeter.

With 10 letter-winners returning to the team and an influx of talent in the five newcomers, the Birmingham-Southern women’s basketball team has more experience and more depth than any team the program has seen. Finally, after three years of patiently stepping aside after the regular season is over, the table is set for the hungry Panthers to feast on Big South Conference opponents and bring home the first conference title in the program’s history.

The Panthers were picked to finish third in the Big South this season in a preseason vote of league coaches and sports information directors.