

# Players bounce racial lines

*St. Bonaventure basketball continues its tradition of diversity*

By **Brian Moritz**  
Features Editor

Forty-one years ago, Sam Stith arrived at St. Bonaventure like so many basketball players before him. He looked to get a high-quality education and to lead the then-Brown Indians to on-the-court success.

Unlike anyone before him, however, Sam Stith faced a unique set of challenges. Sam Stith was the first black basketball player ever to play at St. Bonaventure.

"It was very difficult adjusting, but we made it good," Sam Stith said of himself and his younger brother Tom, who both have had their numbers retired and are members of the St. Bonaventure University Hall of Fame.

Sam Stith, who grew up in Harlem, said being far away from home was the hardest thing about coming to the university. Easing Stith's transition, however, was the religious aspect.

"The good news was that we went to a Franciscan high school. So coming from that to a Franciscan college made things easier," Sam Stith said.

Being racial pioneers was nothing new for the Stiths. The two broke the color barrier as the first black players at St. Francis Preparatory High School in Harlem as well.

"I think at St. Francis it was what they called an 'experiment,' to see how the students would react and how they'd accept it," Tom Stith said. "It was the same thing here with my brother, Sam."

John Connors, a senior when Sam Stith joined the varsity team as a sophomore, said that the white players also had to make adjustments.

"I was a product of the times," Connors said. "I came from white Syracuse, and there were only about three or-four other black students here."

At the 1961 NCAA tournament in North Carolina, the

Brown Indians experienced the ugliness of segregation firsthand. "At the place we stayed at, the four of us weren't able to eat in the same room as everyone else," Tom Stith said. "The four of us were told that we had to go and eat in the back room."

The four black players walked to the back room to eat, with their white coaches and team-

*See Cover, page 2*

## Diversity increases for Bona women

By **Bob Keyser**  
Assistant Sports Editor

Since the St. Bonaventure women's basketball team made the jump to Division I in 1986, only four black athletes have played for the team.

Under head coach Mary Jane Telford (1986-1993), the St. Bonaventure women's basketball team's white-to-black ratio was 33-to-1.

That one black recruit was 6-foot-4-inch center Vachelle Manley, one of the tallest women's players and the school's all-time leading shot blocker with 123.

Since Marti Whitmore took over the head coaching job before the 1992-93 season, the Bonnies white-to-black ratio has improved to 20-to-3.

In terms of her recruiting style, Whitmore said, "I recruit an athlete and a basketball player and a good student athlete."

"It really doesn't matter to me if they are black or if they

are white. To me it is a non-issue."

Brown said since she has been at St. Bonaventure, she has not had any problems with racist attitudes.

"A long time ago, athletes were thought of as dumb jocks, especially black athletes," Brown said. "But as the years go on, they are getting more respect, people are realizing that they are actually student-athletes."

Whitmore's first black recruit at St. Bonaventure is freshman center Angela Scott.

Scott has not experienced different treatment while playing for the Bonnies, she said.

"We are all equal; we love each other like a family," she said.

Scott added there are more black women athletes who want to play now, which helps to balance the number of black and white athletes.

"It's not about race; it's about black athletes coming out to play," Scott said.

**Basketball** from page 1  
mates proudly walking alongside them.

"We were a team," Tom Stith said. "We couldn't eat in the main room, so no one did.

The discrimination continued during their game against Wake Forest.

"At the place, they booed us unreal," Tom Stith said. "The Wake Forest coach, when the ball would go out of bounds, he would hold it, so we couldn't inbound the ball."

Despite the troubles the team faced at the NCAA tournament, the team did not have problems during the regular season.

"At the time, we played mainly East coast schedule," Connors said. "All the best black players were at East coast schools — St. John's, Canisius, St. Bonaventure. So no racial incidents really stand out."

Sam Stith said he never experienced racial problems during the regular season.

"It was just the rivalries," he said. "Like when we played Canisius, their fans hated us, mostly because we kept beating them."

At the time Connors and the Stiths played for St. Bonaventure, only a handful of black students attended the university. Despite the inequity, racial problems never occurred

problems among team members or the student body.

"There was not one incident in my four years at the university. Not one," Sam Stith said. "The issue of race never came up."

The amount of time the team spent together led to understanding, Connors said. "When you're around people seven days a week in a close environment, you forget about black and white."

Tom Stith said the team's success helped things a great deal.

"Back then, if we lost three games it was a lot. I think winning especially made it easier," he said.

Although segregation has ended, race remains an volatile issue in college basketball. This is especially true for white, rural schools like St. Bonaventure.

Sophomore and current Bonnies' point guard Tim Winn knows firsthand about coming to the university from a different background. Winn grew up in Niagara Falls and attended LaSalle High School, a predominately black, inner-city school.

Winn said he did not experience any culture shock when he first came to St. Bonaventure.

"It wasn't hard to adjust. It's just a part of being in the real world. It's a learning experience," Winn said.

Although the times have changed, the legacy of the Stiths

and their on- and off-the-court triumphs remains palpable.

"I can still feel their presence in the RC when I walk in and see their shirts hanging up," Winn said. "How many get their jerseys retired?"

The same recruiting princi-

ples coach Eddie Donovan used in recruiting players in the '50s and '60s are applied by Jim Baron today, Tom Stith said.

"The guys we recruited, all the players we got here were all good guys," Tom Stith said. "This is still true today."



*Photo courtesy of Sports Information*

**SBU Hall of Famer Tom Stith**