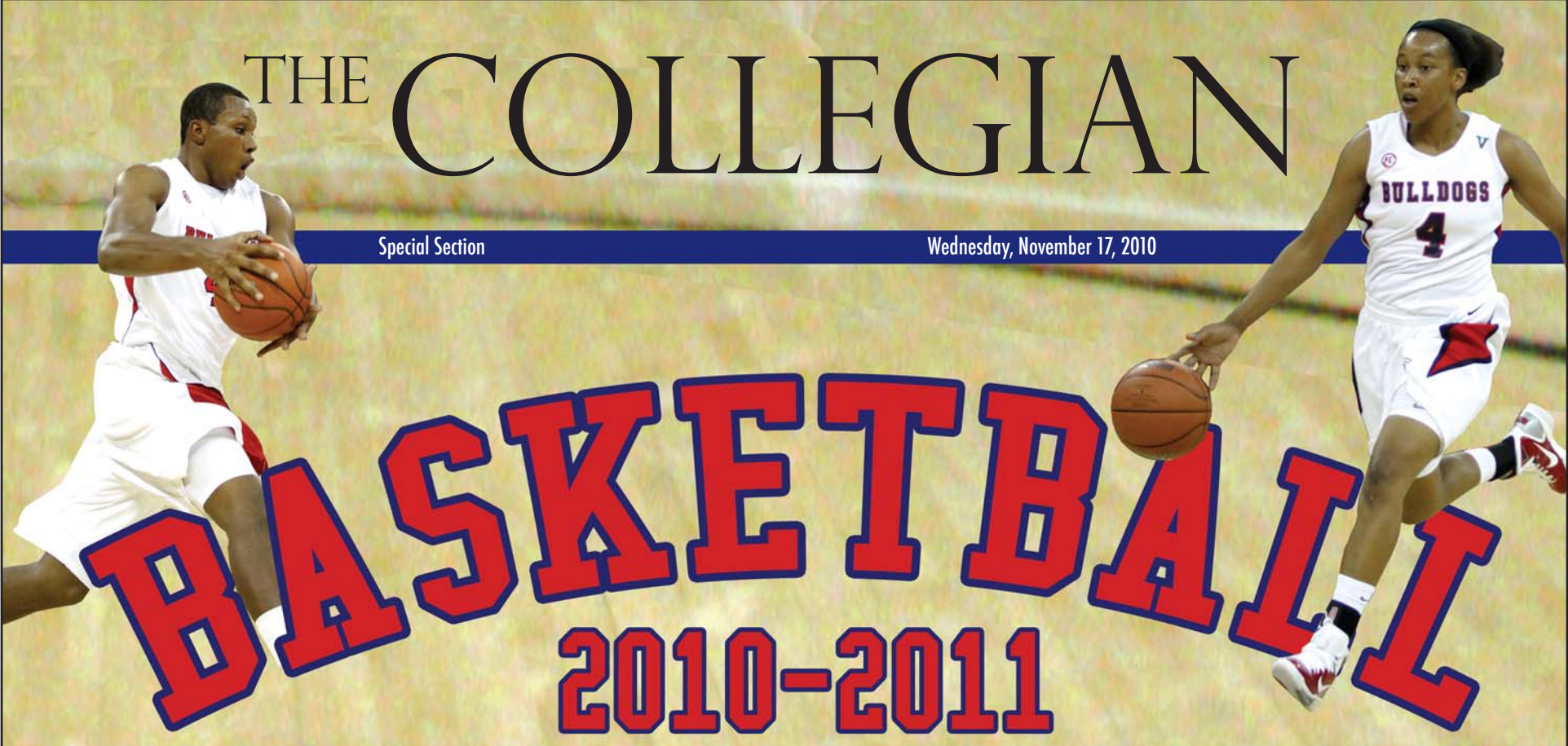


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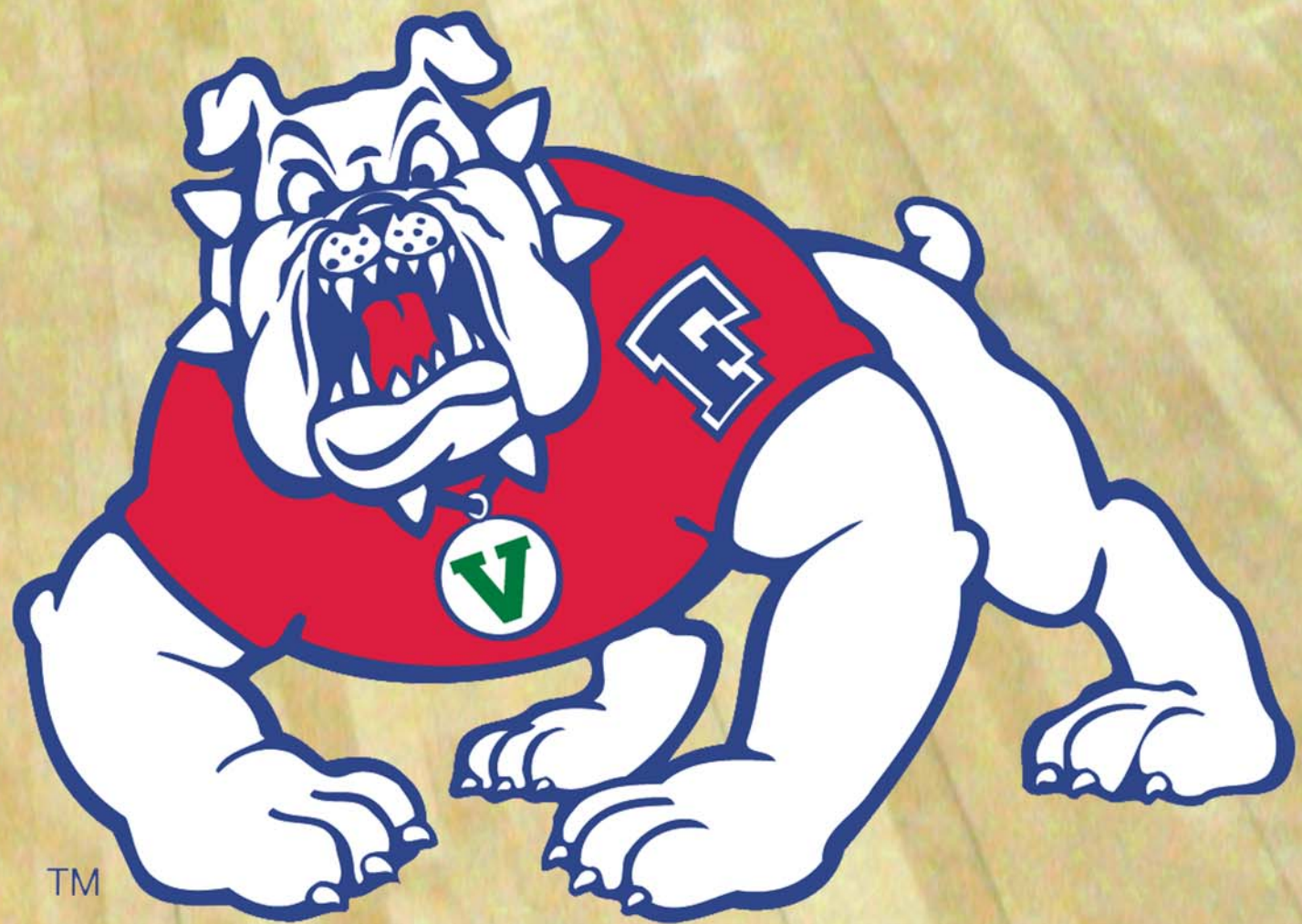
Special Section

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BASKETBALL

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Smith aims high

By Vongni Yang
The Collegian

Growing up Greg Smith idolized former Bulldogs Courtney Alexander and Melvin Ely.

The sophomore center remembers watching the dynamic duo as a youngster in his early playing days as a child in Vallejo, Calif.

"Those guys were amazing to watch," Smith said. "Courtney Alexander was a great scorer. I remember Ely; he was a perfect big man to watch because he had the shot off the glass. He hustled. He rebounded a lot. He was one of the best big men in the country, so it was good watching those guys."

Alexander and Ely led the 1999-00 Fresno State men's basketball team to its first appearance in the NCAA tournament since the 1983-84 season after capturing the Western Athletic Conference tournament title and compiling a 24-9 record.

Alexander led the entire country in scoring during that season after averaging 25.3 points per game as a junior and was the 13th overall pick in the 2000 NBA draft.

Ely returned the following year to guide the 2000-01 Bulldogs to its first regular season WAC championship, its first conference crown since 1982, while making a second consecutive appearance in the NCAA tournament.

Ely led the No. 9 'Dogs to the program's first NCAA tournament win since 1982 with an 82-70 upset victory against No. 8 California in the first round. The 'Dogs eventually fell to Michigan State in the second round, and Ely was selected a year later by the Los Angeles Clippers with the 12th overall pick in the 2002 NBA draft.

Ely finished his career at Fresno State as the all-time leading scorer. Smith hopes that he can achieve the same kind of success that Alexander and Ely had. He remembers the

glory days when Fresno State basketball was on the national radar. He wants to be able to reestablish a once proud program.

"I want to be able to bring this program and this school back up to the high major where it was in 2000 when everybody knew the teams could compete for a championship," Smith said. "I want to be able to bring that back here and have people thinking about us not just winning WAC, but going to the tournament and making some noise."

Smith had a standout season as a freshman last season when he averaged 11.5 points and 5.8 rebounds per game with a team-high 40 blocks en route to being named the WAC's Freshman of the Year by conference coaches.

Expectations for Smith will be higher as he heads into his sophomore campaign. Smith was named a pre-season All-WAC selection by both the media and coaches.

But Smith's playing days as a Bulldog almost didn't come to fruition. After playing for three seasons at Edison High School in Fresno and leading the Tigers to a Division II Valley Championship, Smith transferred to Westwind Academy in Arizona and caught the eye of former Arizona head coach Lute Olson.

Smith made a soft verbal commitment to play for Olson before his senior season, but when Olson retired, Smith decided to come back home and play for his hometown team.

"My dream school was to stay home, and Fresno State was my dream school," Smith said. "I had other options, but at the end of the day I just knew that this was the place that I just need to put a jersey on at."

Although Smith only spent a few years as a teenager living in Fresno, he has embraced Fresno as his home.

"I love this city," Smith said. "I love this community. I love the school and I love the program. I had a chance to go anywhere I wanted in the country, but this is my home. I love being here, and I'm glad I'm here for the next four years and I'm just happy to be here."

Ross eyes Sweet 16

By Ben Ingersoll
The Collegian

Most fans are unaware that senior point guard Jaleesa Ross' first three-point attempt in a Bulldog uniform hit nothing. It was an air ball, possibly the most degrading aspect of the game and one that fuels opposing fans like nothing else.

With 287 makes from beyond the arc since that moment in 2007, it is safe to say Ross is doing pretty well now.

Coming off her strongest season statistically with Fresno State, Ross is eyeing a fitting conclusion to what has been an amazing collegiate campaign so far. Last season, the Bay Area native garnered First-Team All-Western Athletic Conference honors, was named the WAC Defensive Player of the Year and averaged a conference-best 17.4 points per game.

But despite Ross' numerous accolades and accomplishments a year ago, the 'Dogs dropped their final two games after posting a school-record 19-game winning streak. The first loss came to Louisiana Tech in the WAC Tournament Championship and the second was to Baylor in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, the two most important contests of the year.

Since the demoralizing conclusion to last season, Ross' performance has caught the attention of conference voters as evident of being picked as this year's pre-season WAC Player of the Year. But no matter how much attention she gets, Ross has her goals set on a bigger picture.

"I don't think too much about that stuff," Ross said. "The biggest target we have is being picked first. I know there's a couple teams in WAC who don't feel that way."

In her first season as a Bulldog, Ross proved she was anything but shy by jacking up a team-high 211 three-point attempts.

That same season, Ross was second on the team in scoring, but has acknowledged how far she has come the past four years.

"I've grown a lot," Ross said. "I've matured a lot as a leader. It was definitely hard to learn to follow first. But to be able to actually follow some pretty great leaders before us was actually good for me. It's got me to where I am now."

Ross was highly touted out of Pinole Valley High School when as a senior her team posted a 30-3 record under head coach Dan O'Shea. Ross' talent drew the attention of Pac-10 schools such as Washington, Washington State and Oregon, but in the end, Fresno State was the right choice.

"It was just like the perfect fit," Ross said. "When I took my visit I knew this is where I wanted to play. I love the coaches. I love the community and I really liked the way that the team was structured at the time. It was more of a family atmosphere."

For Fresno State head coach Adrian Wiggins, who constantly stresses the family aspect of the game, Ross' on-and-off-the-court leadership has been a coach's dream.

"She probably retains information and can reuse that as good or better than anyone I've ever coached," Wiggins said. "She's very intelligent. She's a quick learner so to speak. She can hear something once and do it. That's special when players can do that."

With three of the top four scorers returning for Wiggins' squad from a year ago, Ross and company have hopes of advancing to the Sweet 16 in the NCAA Tournament this year, if not even better.

"I'd say really they could probably even go further if they were clicking at the right time and had the right mentality, and I think we're getting there," former Bulldog and current assistant coach Amy Parrish said.

And if the 'Dogs do get to that point, and advancing in

the tournament needs the help of a last-second shot, there is one player in the huddle humble enough to not demand the shot, but talented enough to take it.

"She's definitely never shied away from that stuff," Parrish

said. "With her being unselfish I don't think she would necessarily even have to raise her hand and say I want to take that shot. That would be something that we'd say we want Jaleesa to have it."

Meet the starters



2

Jonathan Wills
Junior
Guard
6-6, 185

- Transfer from New Mexico
- Played quarterback in high school



4

Greg Smith
Sophomore
Center
6-10, 250

- 2009-10 WAC Freshman of the Year
- Started every game as a freshman



15

Ned Golubovic
Sophomore
Forward
6-8, 240

- Three-time Academic All-WAC
- Born in Montenegro



11

Bennie Rhodes
Junior
Guard
6-6, 190

- Transfer from CC of San Francisco
- Began collegiate career at SMU



5

Tim Steed
Junior
Guard
6-4, 215

- Transfer from Highland CC
- Expected to fill void left by Paul George



45

Veronica Wilson
Junior
Center
6-3

- Transfer from Boston College
- Originally from Pickering, Ohio



25

Rosie Moulton
Sophomore
Guard/Forward
6-1

- 2009-10 WAC All-Freshman team
- From Olinda, Victoria, Australia



2

Hayley Munro
Senior
Guard/Forward
6-1

- 2010 WAC All-Tournament team
- Ranked 10th on Fresno State all-time rebounding list



4

Jaleesa Ross
Senior
Guard
5-8

- 2009-10 WAC Defensive Player of the Year
- Pre-season WAC Player of the Year



33

Taylor Thompson
RS Freshman
Guard
5-5

- Used medical redshirt last year
- Hometown is Cache, Okla.