

# Storm faces must-win situation in tournament

BY MIKE DUPREZ  
The Dispatch

February 21, 2008

The rebirth of basketball has proven to be plenty of fun for Davidson County Community College with 21 wins and loads of points.

Now it gets serious for the Storm. DCCC begins Tarheel Conference tournament play at 5 p.m. Friday at Caldwell Community College. The mission is simple: win two games, capture the tournament title and advance to a regional playoff game. Lose once and the season is over. "This is what we've been working toward for seven months," said DCCC coach Matt Ridge. "There is a sense of urgency because if you lose one, you're done. It should be an exciting weekend."

DCCC, 21-7, and host Caldwell finished tied at 6-2 for the regular season conference championship. Caldwell won the coin flip for the top seed in the tournament and will face fourth-seeded Catawba Valley Community College in the second game Friday. DCCC takes on No. 3 Central Carolina Community College in the first game. Losing the coin flip might not have been a bad deal for DCCC, which lost at Catawba the second time the two teams played. The Storm swept CCCC in the regular season. Caldwell and Catawba are archrivals, meaning a hard-fought battle could leave the victor vulnerable in the title game.

The winners square off at 2 p.m. Saturday for the tournament championship. DCCC is hopeful of a better trip to Caldwell than the one the Storm took Saturday for the regular season finale. Caldwell routed the Storm 131-111 to force a tie for first place. "We just weren't ready to play," Ridge said. "We didn't play well on either end of the floor. We didn't play together." Given what was at stake, it might have seemed like an odd time to not play well for a team that has performed at a high level most of the season. "I don't know why," Ridge said. "I've got to do a better job of getting them mentally ready to play." Ridge is also seeking another source of help for his team. "I want to thank our community for all the support they gave us this year," Ridge said. "We didn't lose a home game this year. They're our sixth man, and we'd love to have them come up and support us because this is the biggest weekend of the year."

If the Storm win, it will be because they execute the way they did for most of the regular season. DCCC runs to the tune of 110 points per game and shoots an impressive 50.7 percent from the field as a team. The Storm have plenty of weapons, players who can shoot outside and dribble penetrate. It all starts with 6-0 sophomore guard Justin Strickland, who is averaging 35.2 points per game and is hitting 43.7 percent of his 3-point attempts. Strickland is a scoring machine who surpassed 40 points several times. The other big scoring threat from the backcourt, 5-6 freshman Landon Bowers, is averaging 19.2 points per game. DCCC got some help inside when 6-6 sophomore Justin Reissmann enrolled in time for the spring semester. Reissmann is averaging 17.2 points and a team-leading 8.6 rebounds a game. Another player who has come on strong for DCCC is 6-2 freshman forward W.J. Parks, the team's fourth-leading scorer with 9.8 points per game. If there's an Achilles' heel for DCCC, it's defense. The Storm are giving up 85.3 points per game. Caldwell blistered the Storm with 63 percent field goal shooting. "A lot of those were layups," Ridge said. "We didn't do a good job of getting back on defense."

DCCC beat Central Carolina 119-109 on Jan. 13 in Sanford and then cruised to a 110-96 win on Feb. 9 at Brinkley Gym. If the Storm can make it three straight, they might get another shot at Caldwell. "All we're concentrating on now is Central Carolina Community College," Ridge said. "We've got to win that game."