



*Chuma Nwobosi*

By Colby Cosh

You can't help wondering if NAIT men's basketball coach Chuma Nwobosi is feeling a little pressure. His predecessor, Marc Dobell, became an instant legend in 2003 by steering the Oaks to their second national collegiate championship. His teams posted a 122-32 record in five years of league play, and this spring he was named the CCAA's Canadian Coach of the Year. But over the summer - shortly before a season in which NAIT is hosting the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association National Championships - Marc got an offer he couldn't refuse from his own alma mater, Calgary's Mount Royal College. With mere weeks left before the start of play, the athletics department turned to Chuma.

Fortunately, he comes to the top job with impeccable credentials: head coaching experience at Grant MacEwan, a four-year collegiate career as a devastating outside shooter, a university degree in physical education, and two years as Mark's Oaks assistant. He has done as much as anyone to recruit a new-look team with just three returning players. And when you ask him about the pressure, he just laughs.

"The trick is to focus on the process instead of the outcomes of the games," says Chuma. "If you do everything right, the results will come. If this were my first coaching job, I might feel pressure."

Leadership comes naturally to Chuma. When he was playing for the Grant MacEwan Griffins, the coaches relied on

# H o p d r e a m s

him so much that he was asked to join the staff halfway through his last year of eligibility. He's been a crucial talent-spotter for the Oaks, checking out hundreds of promising high-school players.

"Above all, you look for players who are fundamentally sound—guys who know the proper way to hold the ball, pass, shoot," he says. "We haven't been afraid to approach guys who might have been the third or fourth-highest scorers at their high schools, as opposed to the marquee player who may sometimes be effective solely as a result of superior strength and athleticism."

One new member of this year's squad didn't even play high-school ball; Chuma spotted him playing pick-up in a gymnasium and liked his ball-handling enough to sign him as a forward (and welding student).

Chuma also spends time every summer visiting basketball programs at American schools—Stanford this year, UConn the year before. He can only bring back the gung-ho American attitude in bits and pieces ("Oh my—they eat, sleep, and breathe basketball down there"), but every trip reminds him that the U.S. powerhouses have no trade secrets. It's the same game, he says; the difference is in the work ethic. Although NAIT hopes to ensure continuity in the program by putting Chuma in charge, he can be expected to put a personal stamp on the team.

"My philosophy is a little more flexible [than Mark's]. We're going to prepare differently for different teams.

If you see us playing man-to-man, next weekend we might go to the 2-3 zone. We might use the full-court press one game and not press at all in the next."

Learning so many different tactical schemes will be a challenge for a novice squad. But if hosting nationals in March raises the ante, it also gives the team a bye into the tournament—and an outside chance at a place in NAIT athletics lore.

## 2005 Canadian Colleges Athletic Association National Championships

The National Men's Basketball Championship features the top eight college teams in Canada, including five conference champions, a host team and two wildcards.

This year's event will be held at NAIT from **March 17 – 19, 2005.**