

DUKESTURF

A record, four years in the making

Local women's hoops stars led JMU to national prominence

"The atmosphere was crazy in here," says senior Nikki Newman ('13, '14M) of the Convo's record-breaking 6,590-member JMU Nation crowd at the 83-42 win over William and Mary on March 2. "It was a lot of fun to play in and to just go out on that note."

The JMU women's basketball team finished one of its best seasons in school history, as the Dukes entered the 2014 Colonial Athletic Association Tournament with a 25-5 record, including 15-1 in conference play and taking the league's regular season title. In their ninth consecutive postseason appearance under head coach Kenny Brooks ('92), the women finished 29-6 and won the program's first NCCA Tournament game since 1991.

The 11th-seeded Dukes beat Gonzaga 72-63 in the first round of the NCAA tournament on March 23, before losing to Texas A&M on 85-69 on March 25.

During the past several seasons, local Turner Ashby High School graduates Kirby Burkholder and Nikki Newman have helped lead the team to post-season play. This season included wins over nationally-recognized Virginia, U.C.L.A. and St. John's and narrow misses against No. 10 North Carolina by three points on the road and a home overtime loss to Vanderbilt. Burkholder led the CAA in scoring for the majority of the season and was voted by coaches as the league's Preseason Player of the Year.

Newman has again shown the defensive prowess that earned her the 2012 CAA Defensive Player of the Year award, as she has led JMU to a league-best and 11th in



NCAA Division I scoring defense at 55.5 points per game.

In the duos' final home game, not only did they lead JMU to a resounding 83-42 victory over visiting William & Mary, but they also did it in front of a record-breaking crowd of 6,590 at the Convo. Burkholder also got to be the fan hero of the game, knocking down a late three-pointer that pushed the JMU total above 79 and ignited the crowd. That scoring total provided JMU fans — for the eighth time this season — an opportunity to cash in tickets for a free eight count of chicken nuggets at Chick-fil-A of Harrisonburg.

"I think it's everything we expected and more, with the biggest crowd in history," Burkholder says about the Senior Day ceremony. "It was great to be able to have that

moment in front of all our fans, families, coaches and teammates; and it was a really good moment before the game. And then in the game, I hit a three and Nikki hit a three and the crowd erupted, so it just made it more special."

Newman adds, "We really needed that to get back into the groove of what we do as a basketball team. We came out and showed that from early on in that game. It's been nice playing with [Burkholder] for however many years it's been going back to high school. Having that connection on the court, and knowing where each other is going to be, is big."

"I had no idea if it could be done but hats off to JMU for the amount of promotion," Newman continued about the record-breaking crowd. **M**

2014 Champions Weekend

JMU Athletics will celebrate history, individual players and JMU Nation during Champions Weekend (Nov. 21-22), when the university remembers the championships that helped shape the athletics department. JMU will honor the 20th anniversary of the 1994 Field Hockey National Championship team and 10th anniversary of the 2004 Football National Championship team. The weekend will laud team members at the Annual Letterwinners Weekend celebration and the newest Hall of Fame class at the 27th-Annual JMU Athletics Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. Make plans now to come home and celebrate our champions and the biggest moments of JMU Nation.

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NOV. 8
at Stony Brook

NOV. 15
at Richmond

NOV. 22
Elon (H)
CHAMPIONS WEEKEND