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Daily News-Record (Harrisonburg, VA)

February 1, 2012

Section: Sports-Local

Eagles' Refrain: Ouch

MIKE BARBER

BRIDGEWATER - One by one, his teammates filtered out of the locker room. Cody Griffith just sat and suffered in solitude.

Griffith - the lone senior on the Bridgewater College men's basketball team - had just seen his squad absorb an 80-41 beating on its home court on Jan. 18, at the hands of its biggest rival, Eastern Mennonite University, no less.

Griffith, a 5-foot-11, 170-pound guard, had posted one of the worst games of his college career. Playing on a partially fractured right ankle - an injury he suffered in a game on Dec. 9 - Griffith went 0-for-9 from the floor and committed three turnovers.

"Physically that day, I felt great," Griffith said Tuesday before practice at Nininger Hall, though truthfully, he hasn't felt "great" any days since the injury, limping to and from his classes and struggling with stairs. "My ankle wasn't hurting as bad. I stepped out on the court and missed my first two or three shots and that was just a wrap. It was in my head.

"After the game, I even left out of a side door. I didn't want to come out."

His teammates could tell, and most kept their distance, showering, dressing and going on their way.

"I just saw him down," freshman guard Benaiah Wise said. "I could see he was beat. He really wanted to win. I could tell it hit him pretty hard."

That loss was the Eagles' 10th in a row, a streak they snapped the next time out when Griffith had 15 points, four rebounds and three assists in a road win over Roanoke.

It's the kind of impact BC coach Don Burgess was counting on from Griffith, a Pembroke native whose mere presence on the floor as a shooter opens up offensive opportunity for his younger, less experienced teammates.

"You feel for him because you want him to have that breakout senior year," Burgess said of Griffith, who missed six games after injuring his ankle and hasn't been near full strength since returning. "And the numbers he was putting up early on, who knows?"

Griffith led the Eagles to a 4-2 start, dropping 23 points in the season opening win over Averett and adding 25 in a road upset of Guilford.

But then things started going wrong for the Eagles. It started with Griffith's ankle injury in the opening minutes of the annual Don Glick Classis that BC hosts.

Not long after, sophomore forward Daniel McClain - the team's top post player - suffered a season-ending knee injury.

Space-eating center Romie Powell (6-9, 230) came down with mono. And Tuesday, David Larson - emerging as a

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legitimate replacement for McClain - is out with a blood clot in his arm.

Add in an ankle injury that has plagued guard Ronnie Thomas - the team's third-leading scorer - and it isn't hard to figure out why the Eagles are 5-14 overall and tied for last in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference at 2-8.

At 12.1 points per game, Griffith is the leading scorer for BC, which has lost 12 of its last 13 games heading into tonight's game at third-place Hampden-Sydney (14-5, 8-3).

The Eagles' poor record is no surprise. Bridgewater was picked to finish 10th in the 11-team league in a vote of conference coaches in the preseason, a fact Burgess and Griffith said was motivation for the young squad this year. The rash of injuries, however, derailed that.

"Coming into the year, the sky was the limit," Griffith said. "We started off 4-2. Then we had a couple of injuries hit and set us back. Before that, before we were hurt by the injuries, we were right where we needed to be."

Tuesday during practice, Griffith was neither where he needed nor wanted to be. While his teammates went through conditioning runs, he lay on the floor, doing push-ups during their first lap and sit-ups while they ran their second.

"It's awful, man," Griffith said. "It's tough to sit here. I hardly practice. I just shoot free throws."

It might get worse. Griffith is scheduled to see a specialist again Thursday. There's a chance that doctor will tell him to shut it down for the rest of the season, ending Griffith's college career.

"It could possibly put him on the shelf," Burgess said. "I know the fight in him will say no, but if the medical staff says no, I don't have a choice."

Griffith is hopeful he'll get to play his final six regular-season games and at least the one game BC is guaranteed in the ODAC tournament. That slate includes next week's road game at EMU, a chance for Griffith to redeem himself for the disappointing showing in the earlier loss to the Royals.

"I can't wait," Griffith said. "I don't even have to score. Whatever I have to do to help contribute to the team, to help get a win, would be great."

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