

UNC Asheville Basketball: New Coach, New Season
By Larry Griswold

Midway through his 13-year career on the men's basketball coaching staffs of several colleges and universities, Mike Morrell came to UNC Asheville and saw something very promising.

This was in 2011 and Morrell, an assistant coach at Charleston Southern, was here for a Big South Conference Tournament semi-final game against the Bulldogs. That contest was the final college game in UNC Asheville's Justice Center because the home team moved to the 3,200 seat Kimmel Arena in the brand new Sherrill Center eight months later.

Morrell, who already believed Asheville would be a great place to live, saw the construction happening near the Justice Center and concluded that UNC Asheville would soon have the finest basketball facility in the Big South Conference.

Seven years later he interviewed to be the new head coach of UNC Asheville's men's team and saw the arena from the inside. He said, "What really blew me away is how intimate it (Kimmel) is while still being able to sit a good number of people. The size is perfect - there's an arena feel, but also an intimate setting where you can sit in any seat and not feel like you are in an enormous facility."

Continuing, Morrell said, "At Division One schools it's hard for fans to feel connected to the players that represent the institution, but here our fans can have a connection to the players. After a game they go up to the concourse and greet the fans - win or lose we will show grace to those who spent their time and money coming to support us."

UNC Asheville's men's home season begins on Thursday, November 8, against St. Andrews, with a squad that includes eight freshmen and just two letter winners from last season. UNC Asheville's new head coach believes what the team lacks in experience will be offset with their effort.

"Anytime you have that many players who have not been indoctrinated into college basketball there's an enormous learning curve. We're young but I think our team is going to be really fun because our guys have great energy and enthusiasm on the floor. I think fans will see a team that plays extremely hard with a lot of passion."

He added, "People underestimate the impact they can have on a program like ours by coming to games. Even a few more people is a big deal because we're not playing in front of 20,000 people."

If you've never been to Kimmel Arena, you will be surprised at what an easily accessible and comfortable place it is to watch a game. You can stop at the box office, buy a general admission senior ticket for \$7 – that's less than a movie ticket, and support UNC Asheville's student athletes at the same time.