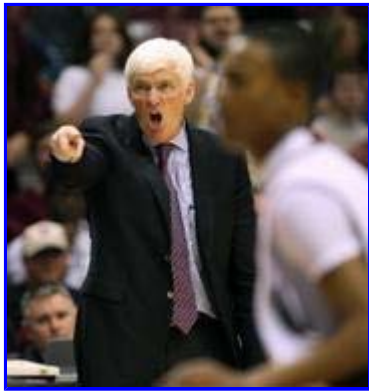




Cremins gives tourney boost

By Charles Bennett
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As coach of the host school, the College of Charleston's Bobby Cremins obviously wants the ESPN-sponsored Charleston Classic basketball tournament to be an unqualified success, but he's doing more than just getting his team ready to play in it.



STAFF

Bobby Cremins and the College of Charleston are hosting the Charleston Classic, which tips off Nov. 14 at the Carolina First Center.

Cremins also pulled out his wallet and forked over \$1,500 in sponsorship money, and then he went out and met with local business leaders in an effort to bring in sponsors for the tournament, which will be held Nov. 14-16 in Carolina First Arena.

"We put this thing together kind of quickly," Cremins said. "All of sudden we realized we didn't have anything near the sponsorship we needed. I've learned a lot about the city of Charleston from going through this experience. I've met a lot of wonderful people and a lot of people who have stepped up to hopefully make this tournament happen for a long time."

Tournament organizers credit Cremins' contributions of both his time and his money with giving the event a kick-start.

"Coach Cremins has led the way in getting the word out," said Kathleen Cartland, executive director of the Charleston Metro Sports Council. "This is an ESPN owned and operated event, and if we hope to keep this tournament for years to come we really need to step up to the plate and show what we can do as a community."

Sponsorship levels range from \$1,500 to \$7,500. The Charleston Area Visitors and Convention Bureau, Pearlstine Distributors and Select Health of South Carolina all signed on recently as major sponsors.

Dan Shoemaker, vice president of collegiate development for ESPN Regional Television, said he's pleased with the progress that's been made.

"We had a slow start, but it's picking up," Shoemaker said. "Cremins has been phenomenal. If it wasn't for Bobby, I don't think we'd be nearly as far along as we are. His enthusiasm, not only for this event but for the College and for basketball in general, is just off the charts."

The Charleston Classic will be the first games played in C of C's new 5,000-seat Carolina First Arena, which remains on schedule to be completed by Nov. 10.

Ticket sales for the eight-team tournament have been sluggish, but Charleston athletic director Joe Hull said he expects sales to pick up significantly as the tournament draws closer.

"We've sold a little more than 1,000 tickets so far," Hull said. "Obviously, we think we'll do much better than that."

Tickets are priced at \$30 per two-game session, but Hull said discounts will be offered for the afternoon session on Friday. Student tickets are priced at \$10 each.

The tournament will feature "festival" seating, meaning no reserved seats.

Charleston plays Southern Illinois-Evansville in the third of four first-round games at 7 p.m. Nov. 14.

Other first-round pairings in the tournament have TCU playing Western Michigan at 12:30 p.m., East Tennessee State playing Temple at 3 p.m. and Clemson taking on Hofstra at 9:30 p.m.

Plans are already under way for next year's tournament. ESPN already has commitments from eight teams, including South Carolina.

The entire field will be announced once contracts are returned.

"We've got what I think will be a very good field," Shoemaker said.

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