

Publication:The Dominion Post;**Date:**Apr 2, 2005;**Section:**Front Page;**Page Number:**1

Crowd of fans greets Mountaineers women

'All of West Virginia was watching you last night'

BY JUDY BEAVAN The Dominion Post

"Thank you, Mountaineers, thank you, Mountaineers," the fans chanted.

The women's basketball team arrived back in Morgantown at the Coliseum on Friday night, greeted by a crowd of about 70 die-hard fans.

The WVU women lost Thursday night in the WNIT championship game against Southwest Missouri State by a score of 78-70. Neither the loss nor the rain Friday, however, dampened the spirits of both the fans and the players.

Many of the fans were season-ticket holders, including a group of sisters from St. John University Parish and St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church. "We love college basketball," Sister Rachel from St. John's said. "We all had to come out here tonight to tell them we're proud."

WVU President David C. Hardesty Jr. and his wife, Susan, were among the crowd. To the team, Hardesty said, "Thank you. You've written history and taken the Mountain State and the Mountaineers nationwide."

"I don't know if you know, but all of West Virginia was watching you last night. Go Lady Mountaineers," he said.

And he had a message to the team's head coach. "To Mike Carey, we'll continue to ride on your train."

As the fans cheered, Hardesty introduced Carey.

"We are proud of these young ladies," Carey said. "I give credit to our seniors. We did well, but we just ran out of gas. I can tell you that the crowds at our games have increased and there was more than 8,000 at the game last night."

"Thank you for all your support," he said.

Amy and Tom Jefferson of Morgantown said they have attended the women's games since 1997. "That was when there was only 25 people watching the games," Tom said. "We are heading in the right direction."

Amy Jefferson had three photos she asked players to sign and senior Sherell Sowho, who had held the basketball trophy since departing the bus, gave her the trophy to hold as Sowho signed the photo. Jefferson said she was excited to be a fan and meeting the players.

"This is really great," she said.

Former Delegate Barbara Fleischauer said she was pleased so many people came out Friday night to "tell the ladies how proud we are of them."

Senior Yolanda Paige, who "rewrote the record book" and ranked as the seventh all-time player in NCAA women's basketball history, said she doesn't know what her plans are after WVU. "We'll wait and see. But thanks. Thank you all for coming out."



Sherell Sowho (left) looks at the autographs that 8-year-old Luke Meighen collected on a sign that reads "Welcome home," before pointing him in the direction of the players he needs to complete his collection.