

Morrell named director of operations at VCU

BY WES HOLTSCLAW
STAR STAFF
wholtsclaw@starhq.com

An opportunity to work with a Final Four program was something Mike Morrell could not pass up.

The former Elizabethton and Milligan College standout took another step forward in the college basketball ranks by joining rising head coach Shaka Smart at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Morrell will serve as the Director of Basketball Operations and joins the Rams program after one year as an assistant coach at Charleston Southern.

The move reunites Morrell and Smart, who worked side-by-side under Oliver Purnell during the 2007-08 season at Clemson.

"Getting together with him again and getting on his staff is just a great opportunity," said Morrell. "He's a great guy. I'm really just happy to be back with him."

Smart is considered one of the brightest young head coaches in collegiate basketball, working under Florida's Billy Donovan and Purnell prior to guiding the Rams on a memorable Final Four run last March.

"Shaka has worked with Billy Donovan and Oliver (Purnell) and learning from them, so (it's great) having a chance to go back and get under his tutelage again," Morrell said. "I only got to work with him for a year at Clemson, but I built a strong relationship with him during that time. I'm real excited to go back and get with him at a place that's coming off a Final Four (appearance)."

At VCU, Morrell has the same role he held under Purnell from 2008-10 at Clemson, where he helped the Tigers to three consecu-



tive NCAA Tournament berths. He will oversee the team's travel and scheduling, while supervising graduate and student managers and more.

"Shaka's really good at how he looks at everybody on the staff wanting to know what they can do and stuff like that," Morrell said. "I'm excited about that. It's mainly just getting back with him and trying to help get VCU back there, and, again, it's a great time to go

in after a Final Four run."

Last year, after Purnell left Clemson for DePaul, Morrell assisted Barclay Radebaugh at Charleston Southern, where he handled recruiting duties throughout the south and was the team's academic and scouting coordinator.

"It was great getting back out on the floor and kind of taking over recruiting there and stuff," Morrell said. "Coach (Barclay) Radebaugh was phenomenal to me. I learned a lot from him during my time there."

"It was a transition leaving Clemson and going there to a little bit lower level, but there's a lot of coaching and a lot of work - you've got to do a lot more things at that level. It was just a great learning experience."

Morrell, who was also an assistant coach for two seasons at King College, said he knew he could have an opportunity to work with Smart at some point in his career. Smart made the call earlier this month and the move was set in motion.

"I knew at some point we might have a chance to hook back up," Morrell said. "He called offered me the job. Going back and working with him, it didn't take much to accept that."

VCU will return to the court among the favorites in the Colonial Athletic Association, despite losing three players off of last year's Final Four unit.

"I've been up there for a couple of days," added Morrell. "They lost three guys, but they've got a great recruiting class coming in. I've done a lot of research on them. They've still got a chance to be pretty good."

"They're going to be young, but they've got a great chance in that league. Obviously, you've got to beat George Mason. It's a strong league."

ESTAR
June 30, 11 P.7