

## Former Chowan star signs with NBA's Atlanta Hawks

By CAL BRYANT ('73)

Sports Editor, *The Ahsokie News-Herald*

In this day and age of health consciousness, many young people wouldn't know what a lard can was, even if it fell on them while they played Nintendo.

But Margaret Hicks of Murfreesboro can tell you what it is — a container holding the concoction of "yesteryear" cooks — hog fat.

After Hicks had emptied a can following a deep-fat frying frenzy, her youngest grandson, Fred Vinson, would fish the canister out of the trash, cut a hole in the bottom, tape it above a door frame, and — presto — he played indoor basketball!

Now that Vinson has landed a spot with the National Basketball Association's Atlanta Hawks, can it be safe to say that lard cans not only contain the elixir of old-fashioned cooking, but basketball success as well?

"Yes, I'm still finding it hard to believe I've made it all the way to the NBA level," Vinson said.

A product of Chowan College and a former star with the Braves, he completed his collegiate career at Georgia Tech.

"As a matter of fact, I found myself thinking 'what am I doing here' during an exhibition game. But you have to block out that kind of thinking and get on with your business at hand," he added.

Vinson, the 23-year-old son of Victoria Dickerson of Murfreesboro, attributed his professional success to his long, hard struggle to improve upon his talent.

Hicks knows that struggle.

"Fred always loved basketball and what he now knows, he learned the hard way," Hicks said. "I used to have to fuss at him because he would knock the plaster off my walls when he played inside with that old lard can."

Hicks finally got the items needed to move his game outdoors.

"I went to the old Western Auto in Murfreesboro and bought him his first ball and goal," Hicks recalled. "Then his granddaddy went to the woods and cut down an oak tree to be used as a pole. We nailed a piece of plywood on the pole and fixed the goal on that.

"Fred would stay out there shooting until near midnight. I'd have to fuss at him some more to get him to come in and get some sleep."

Vinson, however, wouldn't rest, continuing the long hours of practice. Despite averaging 21 points per game and grabbing all-conference and All-East honors in high school, Vinson still wants to improve.

Then enter Chowan College's Bob Burke.

"I doubted Fred would ever make an impact at the collegiate level, especially after averaging less than three points and one rebound per game for us in his freshman year," Burke noted. "What I didn't realize at that time was Fred's great work ethic, something that was instilled in him by his family. It's kind of like what Georgia Tech coach Bobby Cremins told me over the phone after Fred made the Hawks roster — Fred was on a mission."

That mission carried Vinson to once-thought unreachable heights as a Chowan sophomore — 15.0 points per game on a 50.5 per cent shooting touch, including a 79 of 169 accuracy from the 3-point range. Along with averaging 4.5 rebound and helping to carry a young Braves' team to the NJCAA Region 10 Tournament final, Vinson was tabbed as the Carolinas Junior College Conference Player of the Year.

"Coach Burke and Chowan prepared me for the step I've taken into the NBA," Vinson said. "When I'm on the court, there's voices in my mind reminding me of the fundamentals. Those voices belong to Coach Burke and my high school coach."

## Burke's Braves eye big improvement

*Continued from Page Thirteen*

"Those two have really worked hard over the off-season and I can see both making an impact for us this season," said Burke. "Both are very intelligent players on and off the courts which is evident by both being Dean's List students."

The ninth returnee, 6'5" redshirt freshman Carlton Modlin, spent last season observing from the bench, but Burke likes the strides this Jamesville High School product has made.

"Carlton has shown tremendous improvement," observed Burke. "He's sneaky quick and he will make a contribution at our high post position."

That area on the court belonged to another northeastern North Carolina standout, returning sophomore Thad Forehand, but it's now up for grabs between the likes of Holmes, Fitzhugh and Modlin after Forehand suffered a broken foot on the first day of practice and is out for the season.

"We will definitely miss Thad's presence at the high post," stressed Burke, "but I feel these three guys can do a good job there plus they will have some reserve help from our junior college transfers and freshman recruits."

Those new faces in Chowan's famed "blue and white" total six in number.

The JUCO transfers are 6'5" forward Jonathan Washington and 6' guard Chris Hanburger.

Chowan's four freshman recruits present Burke and the Braves with a variety of talent — strength in 6'8" Brian Blue and 6'5" Brandon Capps, smoothness in 6'4" Tyrone McCreary, and another floor general in 5'10" point guard Justin Morgan.

"Brian and Brandon are our big bangers," smiled Burke. "I can see Tyrone becoming another Fred Vinson (a former Chowan standout now with NBA's Atlanta Hawks) because he is the type that can help in many different areas. Justin has been our most pleasant surprise. He sets a nice tone on the court and he's a waterbug on defense."

"We're really feeling good about ourselves," closed Burke. "Last year at this time I didn't even know all the names of my players. This year, we were ready to play our first game only a week after practice started. That's how confident I am in their willingness to turn themselves around from losers to winners."



Grabbing a rebound for the Chowan Braves, Fred Vinson traveled the long, hard basketball road all the way from shooting jumpers at a lard can inside his grandmother's home to pulling on an NBA jersey when the Atlanta Hawks opened their 1994-95 season opener against Indiana.

"What Fred has now accomplished speaks highly of our basketball program at Chowan College," Burke added. "But in all honesty, this is a tribute to Fred's hard work and determination. I'm happy for Fred Vinson and his family. He beat the odds."

Still, there was one hurdle lying between Vinson and his possible shot at the NBA — Atlantic Coast Conference basketball.

Sure, Vinson was a hot shot against the likes of NJCAA foes Spartanburg Methodist, Louisburg and Hagerstown. But how would he fare battling North Carolina, Duke, N. C. State, Virginia and Maryland?

Evidently, not so well in his first year at Georgia Tech where the 6'4" guard averaged a mere 2.6 points per game.

Following a redshirt season which Vinson used to build both his upper body strength and confidence, he returned for his senior year with the Yellow Jackets.

And what a year it was.

Playing in all 29 games, with 17 starts, he averaged 11.9 points, which included a team-leading 39.8 percent touch from the 3-point range. His 82.4 per cent free-throw accuracy was second on the team and he chipped in 113 rebounds, 37 assists, 31 steals and seven blocked shots.

Following his graduation from Georgia Tech with a degree in management, Vinson was invited to the Hawks' free agent camp. There, the Hawks' management observed his performances against other NBA rookies and decided to give him a try when the Atlanta veterans returned for pre-season practice.

The pieces of the complex NBA puzzle fell quickly into place for Vinson. First, Atlanta's top draft choice, Gayland Nickerson, held out for a bigger check. Then another free agent hopeful left for a tryout with the Seattle SuperSonics. Finally, veteran guard Craig Ehlo injured his knee and the door was left open for Vinson.

He played nearly the entire exhibition game against Phoenix, contributing 16 points and outstanding defense.

"That game got me over the hump," Vinson explained, "but I'm still not satisfied. Sure, I've fulfilled my dream of wearing an NBA jersey, but I don't want to stop and become content with that accomplishment. I still have a lot of work to do to improve each and every phase of my game."

**Vinson's hard work, determination led to his success on college teams and gaining a contract with an NBA team**