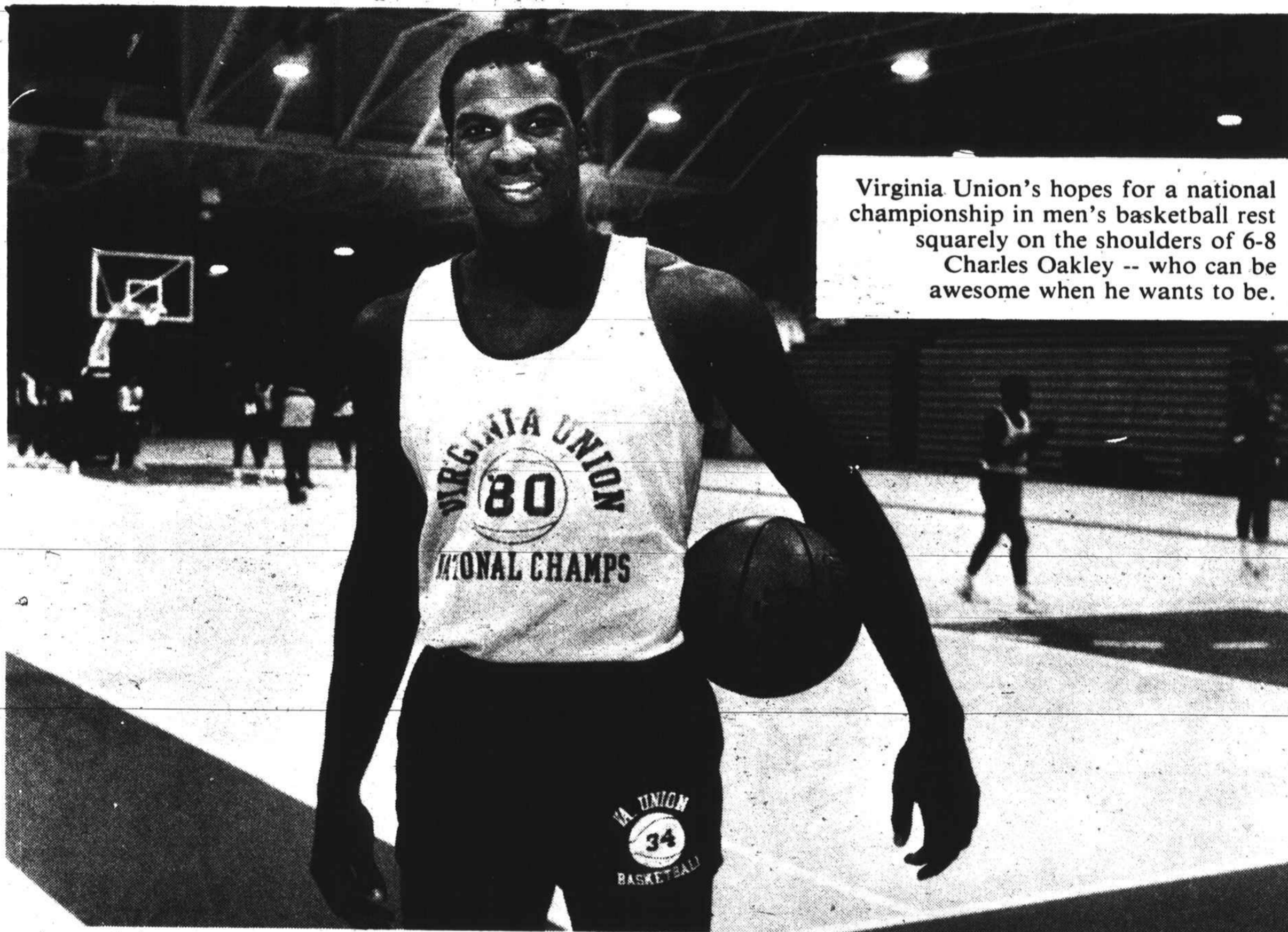


Manchild In The Promised Land

By FRED JETER



Virginia Union's hopes for a national championship in men's basketball rest squarely on the shoulders of 6-8 Charles Oakley -- who can be awesome when he wants to be.

Photo by Clement Brent, *The Richmond Times-Dispatch* and *The Richmond News-Leader*.

This article is the first in a two-part series on Virginia Union's men's and women's basketball teams, which both have legitimate chances to win NCAA titles. Next issue: a look at Union's defending national champion women's team.

Last basketball season, Charles Oakley packed his suitcase and went to the NCAA Division II Final Four in Springfield, Mass.

But he didn't bother to take along his sneakers.

"Last year, I just went to watch," said Oakley.

"This season, I plan to go to play. Makin' it to Springfield, that's my goal."

If, in fact, Virginia Union University of Richmond is to travel to Springfield this March, Oakley will be the one punching the ticket north.

Outside of 7-footer Earl Jones at the University of the District of Columbia, Oakley is likely the finest player in all of small-college basket-

ball.

"There are two sure-fire future pros in Division II," says UDC Coach Wil Jones. "One is my Earl. The other is Oakley."

"He's 20 times better than Rich Mahorn (former Hampton Institute star, now with the Washington Bullets) was as a college junior.

Oakley may be the best power forward in the nation, any level. He's a rebounder personified. Awesome, that's the word for him."

Oakley is a 6-8, 235-pound junior from Cleveland who looks like he was chiseled out of a block of granite.

In little more than two seasons at VUU, Oakley has totaled 1,100 points and 800 rebounds. In spurring the Panthers to a fast takeoff this season, he has averaged 21 points and 14 rebounds.

Twice he's been selected to the all-Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association team. And last year he was named CIAA Co-Player of the

Year along with Norfolk State's David Pope.

Much of Oakley's talent is God-given.

Which is fortunate, since, according to Union's sixth-year coach, Dave Robbins, Oakley's only shortcoming is motivation.

"I'm from the old school, I guess," says Robbins. "I like the stories about the guys who shovel off the driveway so they can shoot. Charles would never do that."

"If he'd just work a little harder, there would be no finer player anywhere."

Although he enjoys taking an occasional jumper from the perimeter, Oakley's game is brute strength underneath. Most of his scoring comes on power moves inside, and offensive rebounds.

One wonders what he'd accomplish if he ever began lifting weights.

"Charles has worked on his legs some in the weight room," said

Robbins, "but he's never gotten interested in any upper-body work."

Even without the use of barbells, the 21-year-old center could give even Lou Ferrigno a challenge for Fold-Out of the Month honors.

"Charles is very physical," says Robbins. "Sometimes in practice I have to tell him to lighten up. I'm afraid he's gonna hurt our own people."

Oakley was all-everything at Hayes High in Cleveland, and drew the recruiting attention of virtually all the Big Ten schools. However, when his final grades came out, his average was a tad below the 2.0 minimum requirement for NCAA Division I.

"We have some alumni in Cleveland, and they put in a good word for us," says Robbins.

As durable as he is talented, Oakley, at the beginning of the year, had started every game Union has played during his three seasons.