

In only a handful of those games has he not been the game-high rebounder.

Ranked No. 6 in the preseason Division II poll, Union is coming off a 20-8 season in which it lost in the first round of the CIAA tournament.

This season's Panthers are vastly superior in two areas: depth, and at point guard.

Last year Robbins went with a nine-man roster, including one walk-on. This year he's loaded with 14 players, most of whom could be starting elsewhere.

"I'd just be glad to have Dave's second string," said Longwood Coach Cal Luther, one of Union's early-season victims.

Luther, a long-time head coach at Murray State of the Ohio Valley Conference, says Union is a Division II team with Division I talent.

"I've coached a lot of years, most of it in Division I," says Luther. "And there weren't many teams I faced with better material than Union's."

The Panthers were bolstered by a spectacular recruiting year that saw Robbins sign a pair of two-time all-Metro players from Richmond, Jerry Hargrove and Greg Williams.

Both Hargrove and Williams, at 6-5, are starting in the frontcourt with Oakley. A third freshman, 6-foot Ray Neblett, also from Richmond, is the off-guard.

Orchestrating the offense from the point is 6-3 Steve Silva, a native New Yorker who transferred to VUU from crosstown Virginia Commonwealth.

"At 6-3, Steve can just do things our smaller point guards in the past couldn't," says Robbins.

Coming off the bench, Robbins has three former first-stringers in willowy 6-9 Tony Singleton, 6-4 leaper Gary Dalton and 6-6, 254-pound Darnell Wall, who joined the team late after playing defensive end for Union's CIAA championship football team.

"I don't need to score," says Silva. "My job's to get the ball in the hands of all those big guys, especially Charles."

Robbins starts the newcomers, then comes off the bench with the more experienced upperclassmen.

"The freshmen have more sheer talent," says Robbins. "Eventually, the older guys may be starting, but then, when I come in with the freshmen off the bench, they'll be ready."

Last year, Union's men were upstaged by the Union women.

It was VUU's Pantherettes that Oakley went to see play last year in Springfield, where the men's and women's finals are held in conjunction.

"This year," says Oakley, "Union should win both titles. We definitely got the potential."

Another winner on the Union



Union's Dave Robbins: A blend of talented youth and seasoned veterans may equal a title (UPI).

campus in Coach Willard Bailey's football team. The Panther gridgers have won three straight CIAA titles, and have been to the NCAA playoffs a record five straight times.

But it's hoops-watching that keeps the Union fans warm during the cold winter months.

The VUU women, coached by Lou Hearn, went 27-2 a year ago and defeated defending champion California-San Luis Obispo in the NCAA finals. This season, the Pantherettes are undefeated and appear well-equipped to defend their title (see next issue's story). Never have the men's and women's teams from the same school collected national titles in the same season.

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

NCAA.

"We should definitely be better than last year. But whether that improvement will be to 21-7 or to 28-2, I can't say at this point."

Oakley is the latest in a rich tradition of Union hoop stars.

Probably the greatest Panther, to date, was guard Mike Davis. Between 1966 and 1969, Davis scored 2,758 points, the fifth highest total in small-college history.

In '68, Davis led the nation with 36.3 average. Following graduation, he was drafted by the NBA's Baltimore Bullets and was second in voting for Rookie of the Year in 1970.

Another ex-Union star was

the spring-legged Jackie Jackson, one of the premier leapers to ever lace up a pair of sneakers. For some 20 years, Jackson played with the Harlem Globetrotters.

He was the one taking those fancy passes from Meadowlark Lemon and converting them into windmill dunks.

But Oakley isn't in the mold of a Davis or Jackson. His game has little flash and glitter.

He's a meat 'n' potatoes, blue-collar battler who is at his best in the bump-and-grind territory under the rack.

"We want Charles under the basket," says Robbins. "He likes to move out and take a jumper now

and then. But that's a shot he'd be better off leaving back on the playground."

For years Union played all of its games in the cramped, dimly-lit Barco-Stevens Hall on campus. During the last two seasons, however, the better games have been moved to the sparkling new Arthur Ashe Center.

The Ashe Center, located about a mile from Union on Richmond's North Side, seats 5,000 fans and Union has come close to filling it on several occasions. "Eventually, we'd like to play 'em all there," says Robbins, "even though it takes away from our home-floor advantage."

Union went almost the entire 1970s without losing a home game at Barco-Stevens, where foes complained that they couldn't even see the basket, much less throw a basketball into it.

Barco-Stevens has been refurbished in recent years, but the image of the program takes a big step upward whenever the Panthers play at Ashe.

To get to Springfield, the Panthers may well have to go through Washington, D.C., which won't be easy.

UDC won the NCAA crown in 1982 and placed second to Wright State a year ago. The Firebirds, off to a slow start this season, figure to become a contender again once Jones returns to the lineup. The 7-foot senior was sidelined just before this season when he underwent hernia surgery.

In '82, UDC's toughest game en

Please see page 15