

Black Entertainment TV Helps Fill The Void

By ROBIN ADAMS
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It's not the top networks' Saturday afternoon broadcasts of ACC or Big 10 games, but it is black college basketball at its best.

Black Entertainment Television's taped broadcasts of 10 black college basketball games for the 1983-84 season fill a void created by the lack of black college games on other media.

James Felton, who serves as sports producer for the programs, says BET started the project four years ago and that overwhelming support from the participating schools and audiences have kept the project going and growing.

"The audience is demanding more coverage," Felton says, "and the schools are very positive. We have got a lot of cooperation from the coaches and their staffs, the athletic departments and the students."

sideration is given to rivalries, games that attract audiences and games that are expected to be exciting.

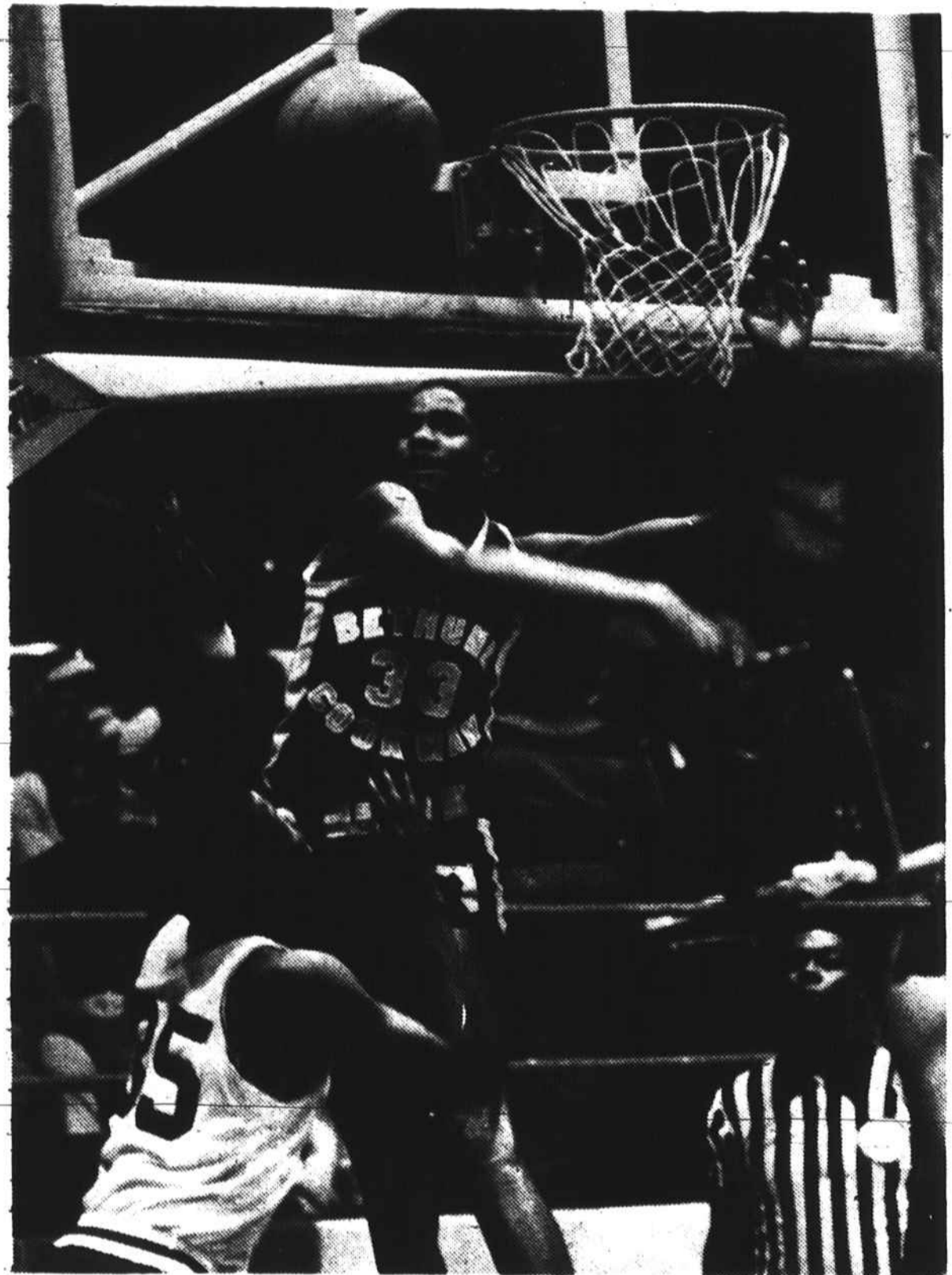
BET wishes it could broadcast black college sports 24 hours a day on Saturdays, Felton says, but, for now, it's not feasible.

"BET only broadcasts seven nights a week for six hours," he says. "If we expand our broadcast time, then maybe we could expand the sports coverage."

The one immediate area BET expects to enter before the end of this basketball season is the broadcast of a women's game.

"The women's games," Felton says, "are usually played prior to the men's games and sometimes there is more excitement or more attention on their games than there is on the men's games."

The wild card game or one of the tournament games may feature women's teams, Felton adds.



Bethune-Cookman's Greg Ross blocks a Howard shot -- and a lack of TV exposure blocks the progress of black college sports. But Black Entertainment Television offers an alternative on cable (photo by Brian Branch-Price).

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-- James Felton

In fact, the response from the students was so positive that BET began using student interns from the schools with broadcast majors to help with the shooting and production of the programs.

This year, BET will broadcast seven individual basketball games on Saturday nights at 8:00 in addition to tournament action from the CIAA, MEAC and SWAC. The telecasts will feature Charlie Neal, a noted pro-sports announcer, on play-by-play with Washington, D.C., sportscaster James Brown providing the color.

Felton says no particular criteria are used to determine which games will be broadcast; the choices are based principally on available technical facilities.

"Basically," says Felton, "the choice is made based on the facilities that are available. Some schools have facilities that are too small for us to use and others don't have the proper lighting. Technical abilities are the top priority."

In addition, Felton says, some con-

Also on BET's list of things to do in the future is live broadcasts. But, as Felton says, that's a long time coming. Now, most of the games are shown on BET six or seven days after they were played.

Since the audience response has been so positive, Felton says, it's obvious that the need for BET's broadcasts and other black college sports broadcasts is there.

"It's all about exposure," he says. "We are doing a service for our audience and for black college sports. Where I'm from, there were very few black colleges that I knew of. I only knew of Central State of Ohio and Grambling. But when I moved to D.C., I found out there were many others. I never had any idea that there were that many black schools and I'm sure there were other youngsters who thought the same way as I did. Because you don't see Grambling or some of the other black colleges on TV, their existence just normally escapes you."

Barry Cooper, a syndicated colum-

nist who writes about black college sports, says that, because the audience demand for broadcasts of black college sporting events is so great, plans are being made to give the fans what they want: live broadcasts.

"Grambling University is spearheading a plan where a representative of the SWAC will go to the individual stations and ask for broadcast time," Cooper says.

"Now the big schools are forcing all the small colleges off TV."

Cooper says the plans are in the very early stages, and nothing yet is concrete, but he speculates that, "although the major networks may turn away from the small schools, the opportunity to get some exposure and to make a few dollars is present."

In the meantime, Felton says, BET will continue to improve and expand its broadcasts.

S.C. State's Williams Suspended For Season

Dennis Williams, the leading rebounder and number two scorer on South Carolina State's 4-3 basketball team, has been suspended for the remainder of the season by first-year Head Coach Chico Caldwell.

Caldwell said the action was taken after a review of class attendance records indicated the 6-8

Williams had amassed a high number of unexcused absences.

Although semester grades have not been released by the Office of Admissions and Records at the college, Caldwell said Williams would not play anymore this season regardless of how he came out in his studies.

Caldwell, who succeeded Johnny Jones as the Bulldogs' head coach this season, said that class attendance is mandatory for team members.

He added that he made it clear to the players from the beginning that failure to attend class would result in immediate suspension from the

team.

Caldwell said that Williams, who was averaging 8.6 rebounds and 12.7 points for the Bulldogs, had been warned at mid-semester when attendance records showed he had a number of unexcused absences.

The Bulldogs took a holiday break before resuming their schedule Jan. 6 at Grambling.