

Fourteen Reach For A Title

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the winner of the title.

Warren Reynolds used the help of former UNC all-American and pro player Bill Chamberlain and two-a-day practices during the Christmas break to surprise Virginia Union and WSSU early in January. But lately other teams have caught up with the Bears. Still, in Andre Sheppard, Dave Lacy and Inoch Arnette, the Bears have fine players at the guard spots.

They also have size up front, but quickness and scoring are a problem. Still, if the up-and-down Bears are up, they could spell trouble.

Virginia State lost big scorers "Doc" Norman and Darryl Stith from last year's team but pint-sized guards Dwayne Wood and Kevin Bush have taken up the scoring slack. Although only 6-6, Cliff Straughn was leading the league in rebounding at this writing. But the Trojans lack depth and help for Straughn on the front line. Don't count them out, however. Didn't N.C. State prove last year that a talented backcourt can still lead a team to great heights?

Bob Moore is the coach with possibly the most to prove this time around. His Johnson C. Smith squad was picked to finish third in the South this season, but currently stands fifth. Before the start of the season, Moore predicted that his team would be a contender come February, and after so many bitter disappointments in tourney play, the Bulls' coach would like nothing better than to pull an upset after losing almost every time he was favored in the past.

As for the tourney hero, pull a name from the roster of almost any team that might reach the finals and you have as good a shot at picking the guy who will make the dramatic shot as anyone else.

One of the more likely heroes was Norfolk State's Gene Cunningham, who in both '75 and '76 helped the Spartans beat Winston-Salem State with buzzer and overtime baskets.

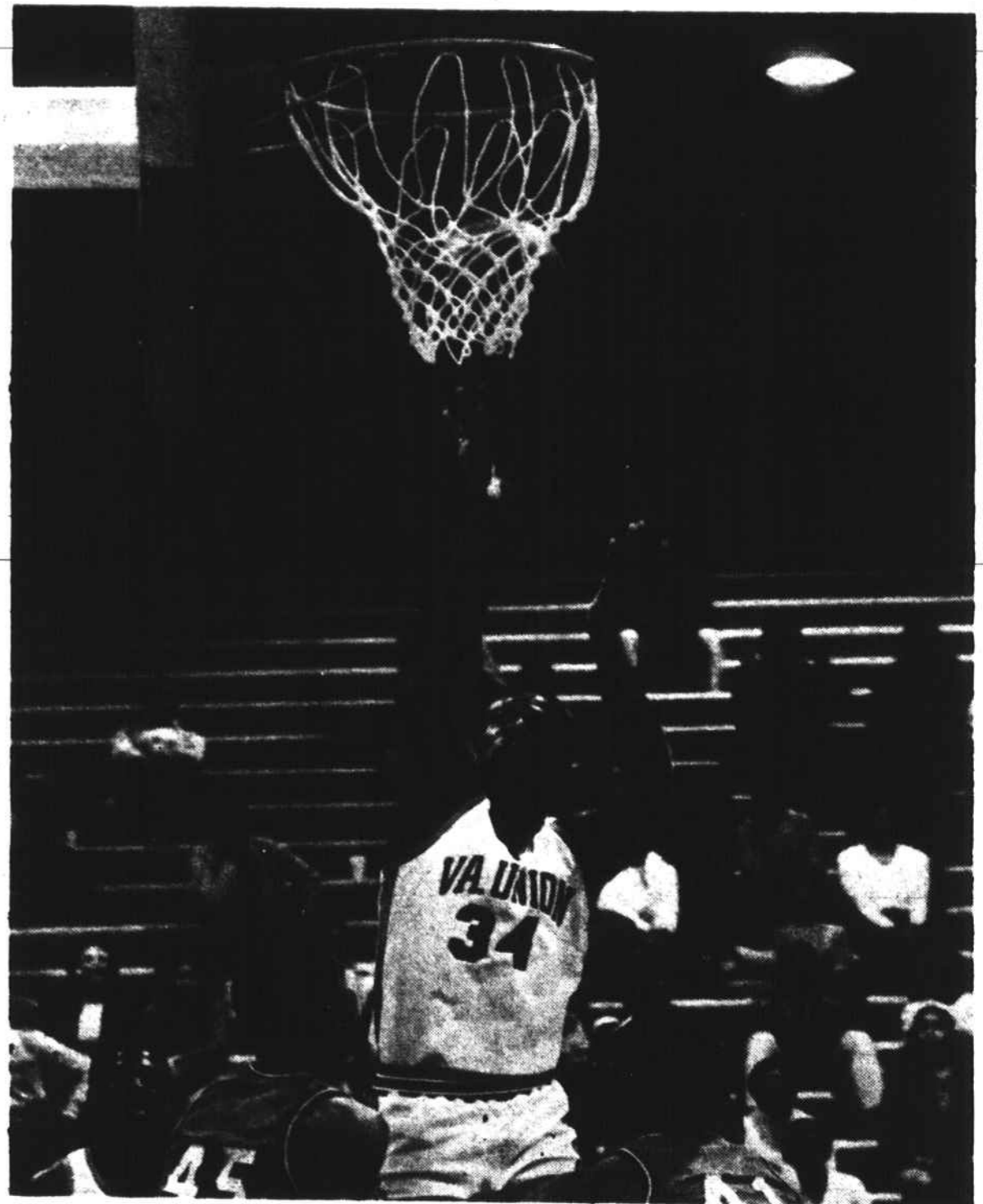
Recently, though, the heroes have been more unlikely candidates. 1981 saw Elizabeth City's Donnie Carter sink a 30-footer to set up his team's tourney title. 1982 saw Hampton's Hank Hankerson drop in a running 35-foot, three-pointer to give his team a one-point win over St. Augustine's in the championship game.

And few can forget Tim Allen's dunk as time expired last year that put Norfolk in the finals.

The winner of this year's title? The natural pick would be Virginia Union. The Panthers are tall, talented and deep. And they have the league's most dominant player in Oakley. But I'll have to take St. Augustine's. Harvey Heartley is due to get a break, and it's only fitting that he be able to quote the adage, "What goes around comes around."

As for this year's tourney being as exciting, fast-paced and unpredictable as in the past, I can't guarantee it. But if I were you, I wouldn't leave my nerve medication at home, or my Alka-Seltzer.

After all, those items are a bit easier to find at the corner store than what the league's coaches and players have on their shopping lists.



Charles Oakley will have to rise to the occasion for Union to snap its tourney skid (photo by Marcus Wilson).



Fast and potent: Virginia State's Dwayne Wood (photo by Marcus Wilson).

Trojans' Little Big Man

By DOUGLAS MASSENBURG
Contributor

At Virginia State, first impressions can be very deceiving.

"When I first saw Dwayne Wood, I said to myself, 'He's too small to play college basketball.' Then I watched him do his thing and ended up signing him," says Trojan Assistant Coach Anthony Rinaldi.

That was nearly four years ago. Since then, Wood has grown one inch taller and gained 200 pounds. To many, that makes him still too small to compete in the big leagues, but not to his fans and teammates in the "Land of Troy."

At 5-7 and 150 pounds, "Tiny" has made believers out of CIAA skeptics, particularly in the Northern Division.

Last year, while playing in the shadows of all-Americans Darrell Stith and Julius Norman, Wood averaged 12.4 points per game, dished out more than 200 assists to lead the league and came up with 73 steals. His timely passes were bread

and butter to Stith and Norman, who scored more than 2,000 career points.

The Trojans finished the 1982-83 season with a 19-10 record and Wood played his part in that success. "Wood made things happen and emerged as a team leader," says Head Coach Floyd Laisure.

The same is expected of Wood this year. "It is a routine thing and nothing has changed from last year," he says. "I am expected to come up with the big plays, force turnovers, dish out assists, score points and to lead the team by using myself as an example."

Those are lofty expectations. So, during the off-season, Dwayne worked vigorously to improve his play. "I ran three to five miles a day, lifted weights, worked on shooting from the outside and the foul line, and played against taller players to improve defensively," he says.

The fleet-footed Trojan floor general is a native of Baltimore.

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