

Another Strong Showing By 'America's Team'

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If the Atlanta Braves are "America's baseball team" and the Dallas Cowboys "America's football team," then the Alcorn State Braves deserve to be "America's college basketball team."

Nobody on the collegiate circuit can boast more of doing so much, for so long, with so little as the Braves. The team's performance in the 1984 NCAA championship playoffs only lent only credence to that fact.

After earning the right to represent the Southwestern Athletic Conference in the NCAA playoffs by virtue of winning the league's postseason tournament, Alcorn set out to do what no team from a predominantly black school had ever done on the Division I level -- win more than one NCAA Tournament game in a season. And that record the Braves held themselves, winning one of two NCAA tourney appearances in 1980 and one of two games in 1983.

But in order to break NCAA Tournament records, Alcorn had to get to the NCAA Tournament, which seemed very distant earlier in the year.

"We were very happy to make it to the tournament because we had so much bad luck this year," Alcorn Coach Davey L. Whitney reflected. "Considering our 5-6 record after Jan. 7, I thought we made a tremendous surge at the end of the year. We went 16-4 over the last three months of the season."

Scene One of Alcorn State's quest to make history was in Dayton, Ohio, the site of the team's preliminary-round game against Houston Baptist University. It was the first meeting ever between the two schools and an introduction the HBU-Huskies would probably much rather forget.

Houston Baptist, sporting a 6-foot-8 African center named Anicet Lavodrama, and noted for being smaller but sometimes just as tough as Houston's Akeem Olajuwon, won the battle over the much quicker Braves for much of the opening half, scoring the game's first basket on a layup. The Huskies went on to lead by as many as four points before Alcorn battled back to take a 29-27 margin into the locker room at halftime.

The second half, however, was a tale of the tape as the slower Huskies simply found themselves chasing the Braves up and down the court.

The precarious two-point Alcorn halftime lead had quickly swollen to four points on a jumper by all-SWAC forward Aaron Brandon, to 11 points on a layup by Terry Parker, and eventually to 21 points on a free throw by Eddie Archie.

When the footrace was over, Alcorn had won easily, 79-60.

"I think the thing that turned things



Soaring

Alcorn's David Claybon soars for a layup against out-quickened Houston Baptist (photo by Joe Daniels).

around in the second half is that we played real aggressive defense," Whitney said. "We forced them into things they didn't want to do."

"We told our kids before the game that we didn't believe they (Houston Baptist) could blow us out, but that we did believe that we could blow them

out. They don't play the type of ball to blow people out."

Houston Baptist Coach Gene Iba, whose team ended its season at 24-7, agreed that the Braves' quickness, both defensively and offensively, was the determining factor, adding that Alcorn's tournament experience also

showed.

"I believe that Alcorn's tournament experience was a major factor," Iba said. "We didn't play our game, plus the pressure of the tournament and our lack of tournament experience did play a role. But Dave Whitney does as good a job of coaching as anyone in the na-