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Alcorn Coach Marino "Godfather" Casem, victor in the Game of the Century against former assistant Archie Cooley and Mississippi Valley State (photo by Mark Gail).

Playing big names, The Game, etc.

By ALLEN JOHNSON
Review Editor

When North Carolina A&T prepares to play Georgetown in basketball Dec. 28, jests one court-side comedian, it ought to hold two-a-day prayer sessions instead of practices.

Hah hah.

While the defending MEAC champion Aggies stand a snowball's chance you know where when they take on the defending national champion Hoyas, the folks who make A&T's schedule are neither mad nor masochistic.

Black Division I schools have to play top-notch competition during the regular season if they expect to play well in the NCAA Tournament, the Valhalla of college basketball where big money and big exposure await.

Black schools rarely play before the types of crowds involved in NCAA competition; they do when they schedule people like

Georgetown.

Further, an hour and a half of Pat Ewing may appear nightmarish on the surface, but it may be to your advantage to face him for the first time in November, rather than in March -- and it'll make your team better in the long run. The stronger your schedule, the stronger you're likely to be, if you have any aspirations at all.

Third, a schedule that includes Division I heavyweights can help a team's chances of qualifying for NCAA postseason play or the NIT. Glistening records mean nothing these days if you haven't played anyone.

Fourth, a glamorous name or two on your schedule will impress recruits. "You don't have to go to Georgetown to play," a coach who schedules wisely might say to a skinny, long-legged intern of dunk. "Come play for us and beat Georgetown."

Finally, it's not inconceivable that

a black college team -- most likely Alcorn State this season -- will make a breakthrough and beat a big-name opponent. Remember how Division II Chaminade, which plays its games in a high school gym -- beat Virginia in 1982 and Louisville last year?

But you can't beat 'em if you don't play 'em.

Other black college teams with name opponents on their schedules this season:

- Dec. 3: Howard at North Carolina.
- Dec. 4: South Carolina State at Virginia Tech.
- Dec. 6: North Carolina A&T at N.C. State.
- Dec. 10: South Carolina State at Kansas.
- Dec. 13: Maryland-Eastern Shore at Maryland.
- Dec. 15: South Carolina State at Illinois.

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