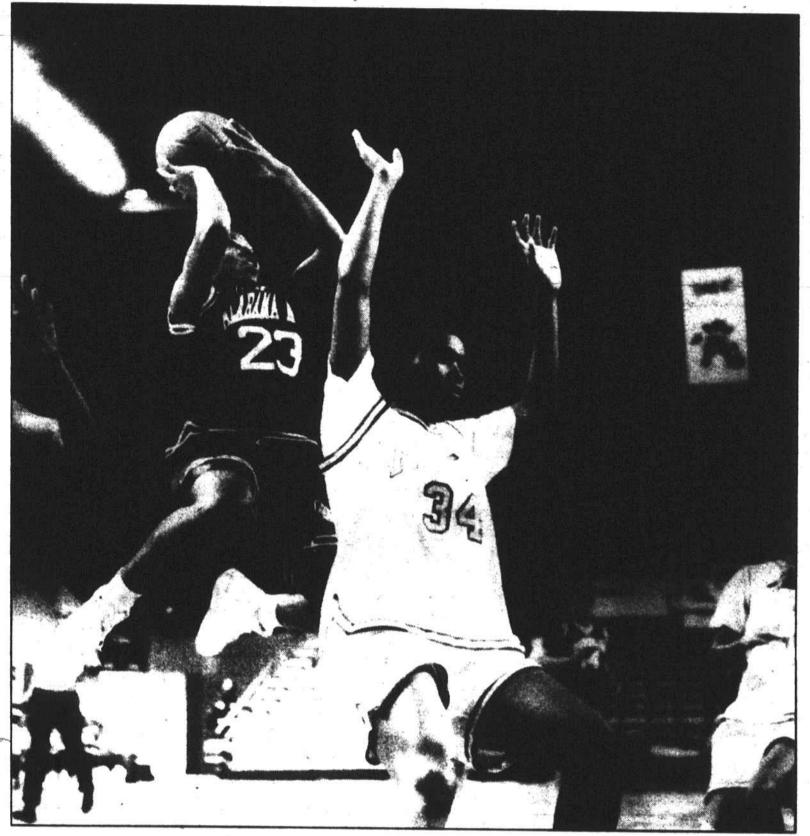
Fort Valley's defense, board work keys victory



A&M's Carmelia Bloodsaw (shooting) and Valley's Debbie Ray (34 in white) showed why they are considered the marquee players in SIAC women's roundball.

The SIAC women's finals held true to form with both of the tournament's top seeds facing off for the championship trophy. But when it was all over, Fort Valley State enginneered a surprising 84-81 win over Alabama A&M and earned the league's automatic berth to the NCAA Division II playoffs.

Coach Lonnie Bartley's Lady Wildcats fashioned their triumph with defense and rebounding. For the game, Valley had 16 steals and forced 29 A&M turnovers. On the boards, the two teams battled on even terms, with Valley holding a slim 52-51 edge. The difference, though, came on the offensive glass, where the Lady Wildcats grabbed 28 rebounds to the Lady Bulldogs' 21.

Valley was fortunate that they were able to get more shot attempts than A&M (94-55), because they didn't shoot many free throws. For the game, the Lady Wildcats went to the line just six times, hitting three of those. A&M, on the other hand, didn't take advantage when they got to the foul line. By game's end, A&M had shot 31 free throws, but connected only 56.3 percent of those, going 16 for 31.

Tournament MVP Debbie Ray was the guiding force for Valley State's offense. Ray fired away for 30 points (on 57.7 percent shooting), while snatching a dozen rebounds. Alicia McElroy, however, was equally as impressive, coming through with a solid overall performance — eight points, seven rebounds, 11 assists and four steals. Seleria Newton contributed 16 points, six assists and five boards, while Dionka Davis and Cynthia Bridges (eight rebounds) chipped in with nine points apiece. Lisa Draper finished with eight points and four steals.

Coach Press Parham's Lady Bulldogs, who finished the year with a 23-8 record, were never able to get over the hump in the finals. Valley took a seven point lead at the half, 49-42, then held A&M off for the rest of the way.

Carmelia Bloodsaw, the league's leading scorer, put on an offensive clinic, tallying 27 points for A&M. Pamela Tucker was also very productive with 19 points, 12 rebounds and five steals. Kimberly Hall added 12 points and nine boards and Kimberly Seward chipped in with nine points and seven rebounds. Aquanetta Washington was the team's assist leader with six.

- Kelly Harper

Results

First round

Alabama A&M 89 Paine College 63
Albany State 83 Miles College 65
Savannah State 68 Tuskegee University 57
Fort Valley State had a first round bye

Semi-finals

Alabama A&M 84 Albany State 82 Fort Valley State 75 Savannah State 74

Championship finals
Fort Valley State 84 Alabama A&M 81

All-tournament team

PLAYER/SCHOOL

Debbie Ray/Fort Valley State
Mabel Sanders/Savannah State
Cermelia Bloodsaw/Alabama A&M
Latrice Harris/Albany State
Dee Dee Davis/Fort Valley State

Seleria Newton/Fort Valley State Pamela Tucker/Alabama A&M Alicia McElroy/Fort Valley State Jonetta Reed/Albany State Stephanie Johnson/Savannah State

Most Valuable Player Debbie Ray/Fort Valley State

Hustle Award
Kim Seward/Alabama A&M

Sportsmanship Award Kim Hall/Alabama A&M

Outstanding Coach
Lonnie Bartley/Fort Valley State