

NBA BASKETBALL

Davis finds his niche with the Dallas Mavs

After finding out that he would not be re-signed by the Miami Heat last summer, Terry Davis found a way to rebound from that set of circumstances. In fact, rebounding has been the key to his success.

The 6-10 power forward from Virginia Union, who averaged 5.1 ppg, 4.2 rpg with the Heat during his first two NBA seasons, hooked up with the Dallas Mavericks in pre-season and is now contributing 9.8 points and 10.1 rebounds per game.

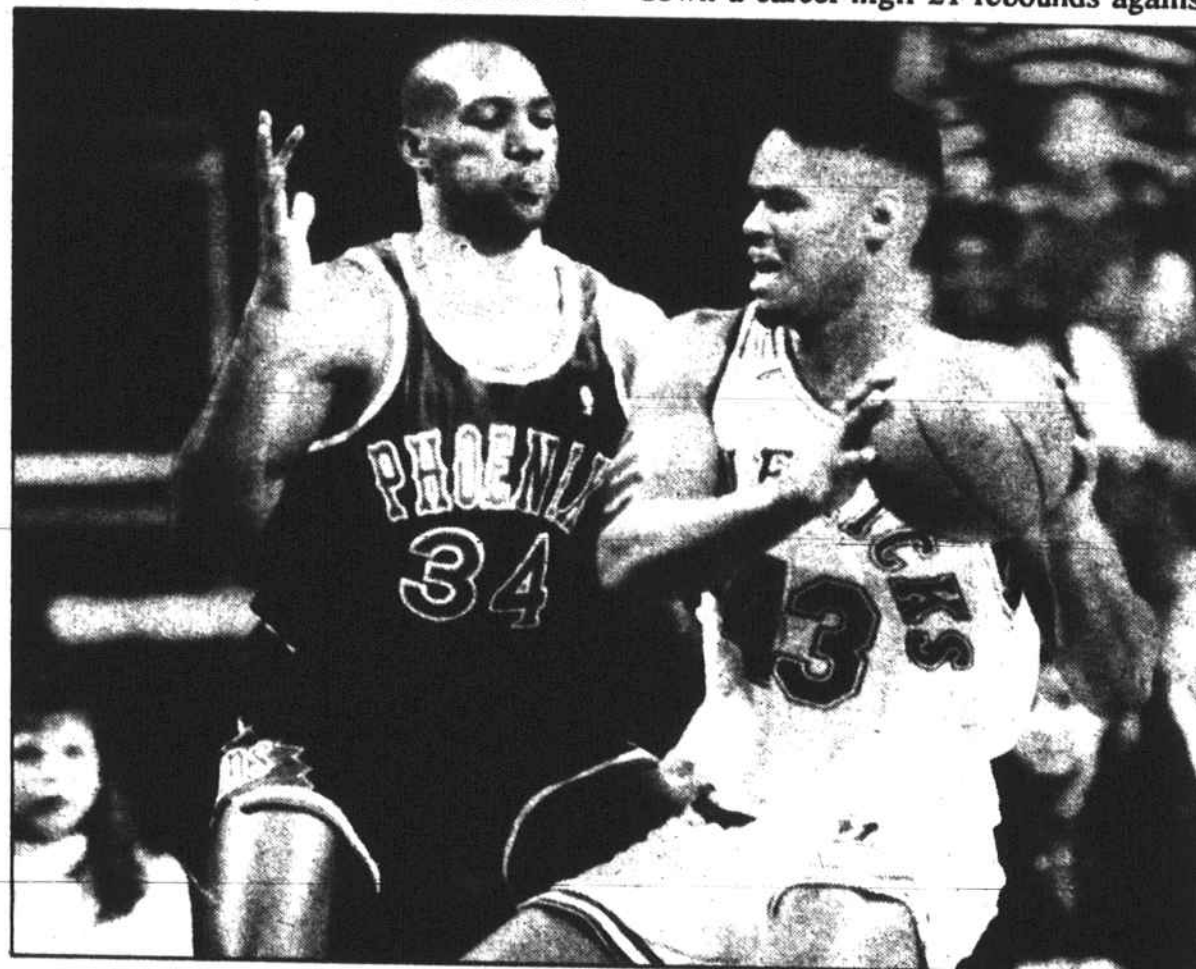
Pro basketball rosters are filled primarily with guys who played major college ball. Those who played at lower levels, don't make NBA teams with as much regularity. But even though Union is a Division II school, that fact didn't hamper Davis' desire to make it in the big time. He credits Union coach Dave Robbins with helping him further develop his skills.

Says Davis: "He's one of the best coaches in the country. There aren't too many coaches who know more about the game than Dave Robbins. He's developed Virginia Union's basketball program into one of the best in college basketball. I know I've learned quite a bit from him."

Davis, who has started in every game this season for the Mavs, has surpassed his total number of rebounds (495) and points (598) from his first two seasons in the league.

"I'll tell anybody that there will be down periods in life, but I'm not going to

let them get me down," said Davis, referring to his unwanted status as a free agent last summer. "You can't dwell on your past. If you do, you'll never succeed in



Davis (43) makes every minute count for the Mavs as a relentless performer who never stops going after every rebound and loose ball.

life. As far as basketball goes, there's always somewhere else I can play."

That's an accurate statement, especially when you consider his rebounding

proficiency as a Maverick.

"He's a real find," said Detroit coach Chuck Daly, who watched Davis pull down a career-high 21 rebounds against

the Pistons. "I love him and I'd love to have him. Those guys are hard to come by."

When it comes to rebounding, Davis

has a no frills approach. "I always went for the ball, no matter who I played for," said Davis, who is a product of the same school that produced A.J. English (Washington Bullets) and Charles Oakley (New York Knicks). "What makes a good rebounder? Someone who goes out and gets the rebound. Don't let the ball come to you. You've got to box out, get good position and go for the ball.

"My job is to do the dirty work. I'm a hard-nosed player, a role player. I'm here to rebound and play tough defense. My game has always been just like it is now — rugged. I get the ball any way I can."

Mavericks coach Richie Abdubato is most appreciative of what Davis does for his team. In the coach's mind, the bruising power forward will only get better. "Terry has been a real force inside," said Abdubato. "He has scored and rebounded very well all season. He's one of the most improved players in the league."

Dallas teammate Herb Williams acknowledges that Davis' board work has made the Mavs a better rebounding team. This year, as a team, Dallas averages 45 rebounds a game, compared to 40.7 from last season.

"One guy can do that for you," said Williams. "We've been doing a much better job this year than in past years. I think a large part of that is due to him. He makes everyone else a lot more conscious about going out and getting the ball."

— Donald Hunt

COMMENTARY

Creative marketing is the key for MEAC tourney

In terms of competitiveness, the MEAC tournament provided enough thrills and excitement to satisfy the most ardent round-ball follower. Too bad that there weren't very many spectators.

At best — the tournament, now in its second year at Norfolk, Va., got minimal fan support. In the women's finals, only 2,000 folk witnessed South Carolina State dismantle Bethune-Cookman. The men's final attracted more people, but not that much more — a disappointing crowd of 4,011 showed up to witness Howard University's incredible comeback.

From the first round of play until the final buzzer in the championship finals, the MEAC tournament, for the most part, featured down to the wire action.

Tournament officials express concern about the sparse attendance. But they remain cautiously optimistic about the future.

"I thought it was a well-played tournament," said Brenda McCoy, assistant to (MEAC) Commissioner Ken Free. "I really wish that more people could've attended. But

as far as I'm concerned, things are looking up. We're very hopeful that we will do a little better next year."

Added Larry Barber, the league's Service Bureau director: "I think a lot of people are pleased with what they saw this year. What they saw was good competition among very good college teams. Norfolk is a great city and a good host for this tournament. We look forward to coming back here next season."

Next year will mark the final year of a three-year contract between Norfolk and the MEAC. Whether or not the tournament will stay in Norfolk after '93 is an open question. Conference observers are not very certain about where the tournament should be played.

"I think Norfolk is a great place and all, but it's definitely not the city for this tournament," said one conference backer who requested anonymity. "Heck, this is CIAA territory. We can't make it here. Last year, during the first year it was held in Norfolk, I wasn't sure about it. But now I'm convinced that this tournament needs to move elsewhere. Where? That's a good question."

Offered another conference supporter: "We're heading into only our third year in Norfolk. Maybe we need to give things a little more time. But still, I'm not sure that even with more time that the tournament will be a big hit. Maybe I'm for moving it after all."

Some coaches around the league are encouraged about the '92 tournament and about the future success of this event. But none of the coaches ever said specifically whether a site change is necessary since the league's contract with Norfolk to host the event will expire next year.

One of the hurdles that the MEAC hasn't completely crossed is the geographic make-up of the schools in the league. The league stretches as far north as Delaware and as far south as Florida. In too many instances, the schools are located at great distances from one another.

If this tournament is to compete and survive, more people have to attend the games.

Prior to coming to Norfolk, the tournament was last played in Greensboro, NC in '91. And keep in mind that Greensboro is the

home of North Carolina A&T, one of the conference's strongest basketball members. Even so, the tournament suffered from acute attendance.

After considering the low attendance over recent years, one conference observer responds that MEAC schools have to do a better job of getting people to support the tournament. "Schools in the conference just aren't doing a good enough job of selling the tournament," said one unidentified fan. "If member schools would pull each one's load a little better, this tournament could have better attendance. We play great basketball in this conference. We have a great product to sell."

Judging from past history, the MEAC does have a good product to sell. But realistically, we all know that a huge increase in fan attendance won't happen overnight. As a result, emphasis has to be placed on more creative ways to market this event. For sure, there is much work yet to be done by MEAC officials and those who claim to be supporters of this conference.

— Levi Johnson