

## MEAC REPORT

# Coppin State Is Definitely Back!

The small Baltimore college has reached again into the upper echelons of Midwestern Athletic Conference play by posting, as of BCSR press time, an 8-0 record.

Because of last year's barely winning season (15-13), many college basketball publications put the Eagles in the middle of the MEAC standings. Street & Smith considered the "Bible" of college basketball, has Coppin ranked fifth, behind North Carolina A&T, Florida A&M, South Carolina State and Howard. The Sporting News College Basketball yearbook also have the Eagles ranked fifth, however the order is South Carolina State, Howard, North Carolina A&T, and Florida A&M.

"We don't pay any attention to those publications," says Head Coach Ron "Fang" Mitchell, who is in his eighth season at Coppin. "The key to our success is to think positive, discipline and putting together a great coaching staff."

Mitchell's assistants are Derek Brown and Nate Blackwell. Brown has been Mitchell's right hand for 14 years. He has been credited with a significant part of Mitchell's success at Gloucester County College and at Coppin.

In 1991, Brown coached the Eagles for two games while Mitchell recovered from surgery. The team was 1-1, including a victory over South Carolina State, which clinched the Eagles' second consecutive MEAC regular-season title.

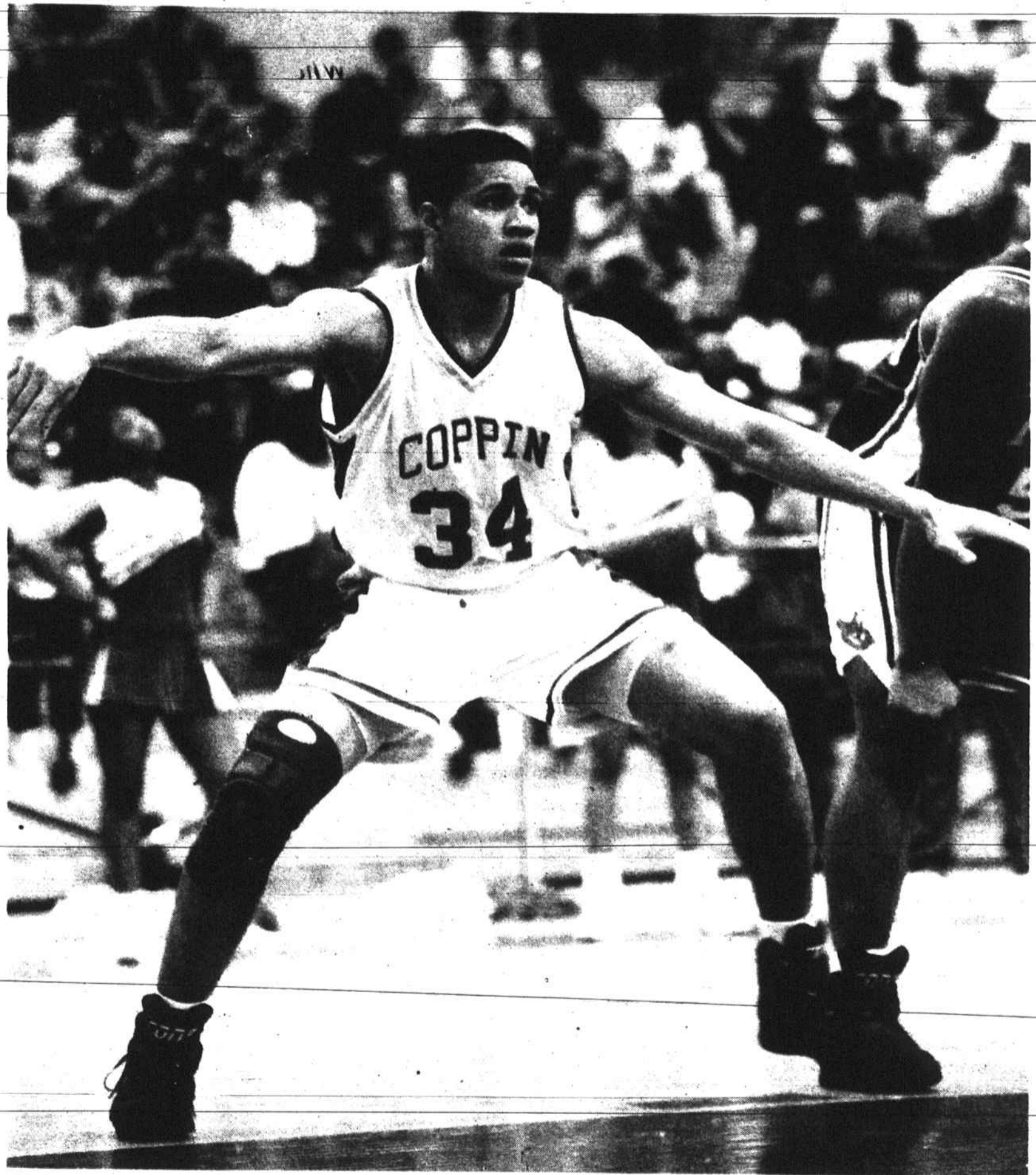
Blackwell played for John Chaney's Temple Owls. He was an Atlantic 10 Player of the year and MVP of the Atlantic 10 Tournament. He graduated from Temple in 1987.

One reason for Coppin's success is the toughness of its schedule. This season, Coppin has Kansas State, James Madison, Boston College, American University and California—Santa Barbara - on the road. Mitchell believes a demanding schedule prepares his team for conference play.

"You cannot get better playing teams on your skill level," says Mitchell. "This is why we like to play tough teams on their turf. It matures us as a team."

James Madison coach Lefty Driesell has the highest regard for Mitchell and his program. The former Maryland coach tells his players to take Coppin seriously.

"I know when they come here to Harrisburg to play, we have to put up a full 40 minute effort. They are tough, scrappy and well-coached," says Driesell.



*Tariq Saunders should help Coppin win the MEAC title this year.*

*Photo by Teresa Burnell*

Driesell also schedules Coppin to help the school with financing its program and to give his team a variety of opponents.

American University coach Chris Knoche has nothing but the utmost respect for Coppin, considering that Coppin leads the series 2-1. He thinks that Coppin debunks the myth of poor basketball play and coaching at Black colleges.

"One of the myths that's perpetuated in college basketball is that Black colleges don't have good players or good coaches. That's baloney! This team has beaten Maryland, Creighton, and Southern Connecticut among others. They know what they are doing."

While the coach and his staff are excellent, it is the players who bring in the victories. One such player is Tariq Saunders, a preseason All-MEAC can-

didate, selected Coppin over Miami, Northeastern and Boston University. Saunders is a junior, who knows he made the right decision.

"This is a small school. I'll get more attention in the classroom and on the court as opposed to a bigger school," says Saunders. "As league play progresses, our confidence grows as a team and we are able to win."

Saunders leads the team in min-