

## CIAA SPECIAL REPORT

## Va. Union Beats NCCU, But Best May Be Yet To Come

Heading into a Feb. 11 show down with Va. Union, N.C. Central was 18-1 and indeed Eagles fans were reminded of the 1989 season when the Eagles started 17-0, lost, and won the national championship.

This season, the Eagles started 17-0, lost to Johnson C. Smith - in a 106-81 blowout - and are now moving on. And this team has surprised everyone. Central coach Greg Jackson is BCSR's choice for CIAA coach of the year with good reason.

The conference coaches picked him to finish fourth in the Southern Division and he's all but won it now. He has a young team of mostly guards to try to win with, then he lost his best big player, Stephen Birchette, a sophomore from Warfield, Va., in preseason to a vicious asthma attack. The team banded together and dedicated their season to Birchette.

It's working. "When Stephen died early in the preseason, it affected the team," Jackson said. "They began to play hard. That was a good signal that we'd be pretty good."

That and the play of junior college transfer Jimmie Walker.

Walker has come on and led the team in scoring (15.6 points per game) and has joined Clifton Daye to form one of the most exciting backcourts in the league. Daye gets it done in Jordanesque fashion, leaping over taller opponents for crowd-pleasing slam-dunks.

Walker stays mainly on the perimeter, as he possesses one of the best jump shots in the league.

And Central, if you haven't seen them lately doesn't look much like Central.

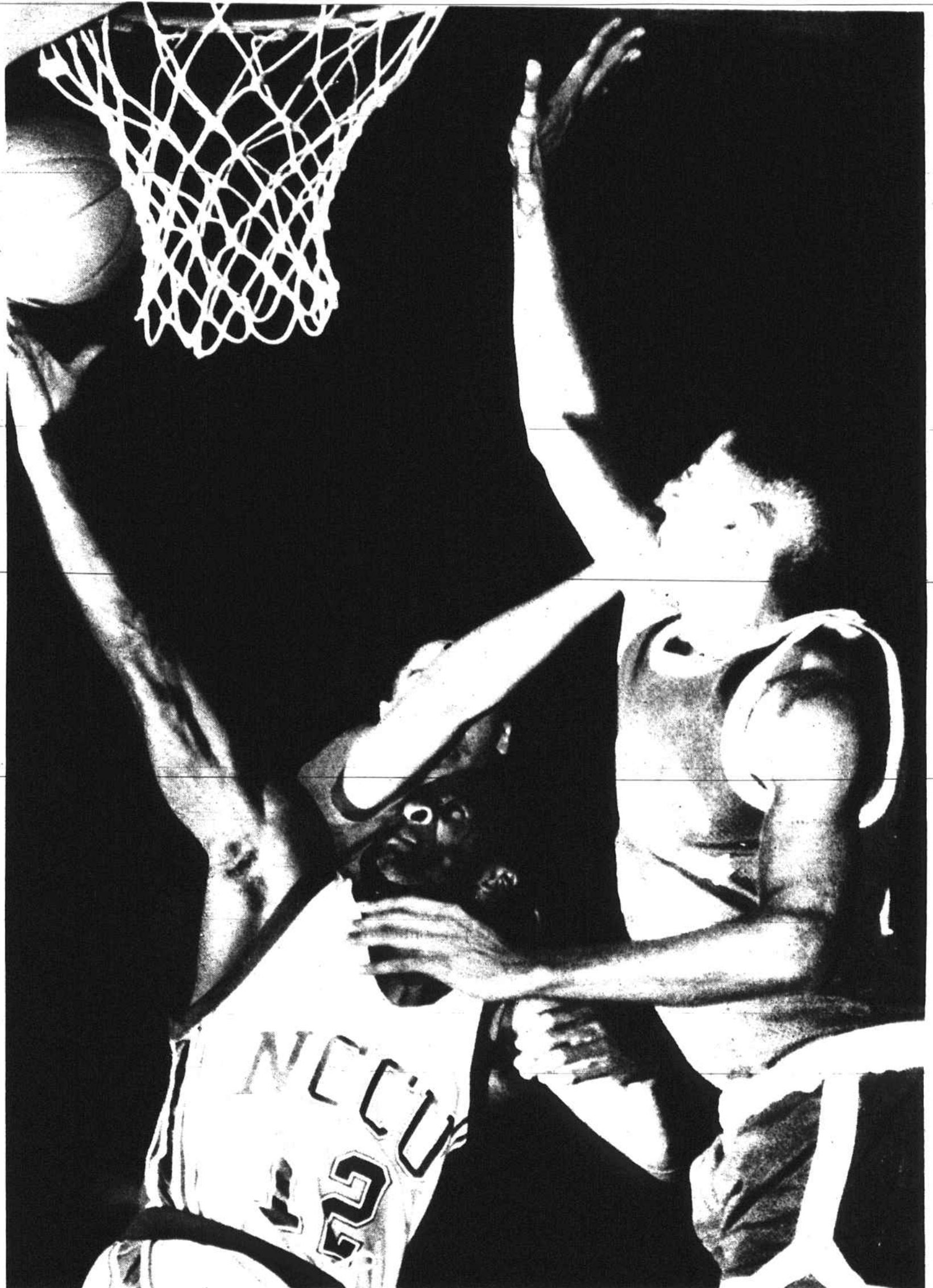
The Eagles used to slow the ball down, score in the 50's, put you to sleep. Now, they look more like Loyola Marymount during the good-ole days, running and shooting and making teams shoot quickly. They lure you into playing their style, they kill you.

"We want to try to move the ball upcourt to get easy baskets," Jackson said. "And I don't know how far we can go. We just want to play basketball and have fun."

So far the fans are having fun too.

"Oh man, our fans support has been tremendous," Jackson said. "We have the best student body and the best community around. We're turning away fans."

Now, can they win a CIAA championship?



N.C. Central's point man is Jimmie Walker. He is expected to help take the Eagles all the way.