

The Central Saga

6-4, 270-pound forward Scott Stewart, who believes he's a point guard in a line-backer's body, not to alma mater, but to Durham - and to coach Jackson.

"Picking up those guys, and Andre Jordan," Jackson said, "Man, it makes it easy for you."

So Jackson worked in his new talent with the old, mixing in guards Larry Crowder and Clifton Daye. What Dr. Frankenstein, Coach Jackson, came up with was an anything mechanical, but wierd-looking yet effective team. Steel rods protruding from players' necks were optional.

The Eagles would play basically with five guards Jordan, Daye, Crowder, Walker, and Stewart. Central would outshoot you, out quick you, out hustle you, and ultimately, Central would outdo you.

For 17 games, fans and coaches and media said all this running would stop, Central would run out of gas, and all these outside shots would miss one day, something about the old cliché, "you live by the jump shot, you die by the jump shot."

J.C. Smith assistant Andrew Mitchell said as much in the days leading up to Central's 18th game of the season against

the Bulls. "They live by the jumper," he said. "They . . ." Aw, you know the rest. To that point, though, the shots hadn't stopped falling. Central was ranked No. 5 in the nation and was undefeated.

But for a game, at least, Mitchell was right. Smith whipped Central 105-81 as Chris Parker and Tyrone Satterfield and Robert Boykins all had big games for the Bulls.

But no other team would stop Central the rest of the way, except Virginia Union, which won a showdown in Durham towards the end of the regular season and again defeated the Eagles in the CIAA championship game.

"I just hope," Jackson said after the tournament loss, "that we get another chance to play them down the road."

Jackson's wish came true in the South Atlantic Regionals in Fayetteville. Having learned from his first two losses, BCSR's coach of the year ordered his team to run with Union, something most coaches felt was self-prescribed suicide.

But running was Central - remember the outrun, outplay, outdo stuff? - and Central was going to run. So Jackson played his game instead of slowing the

ball down as he'd instructed his team to do in the earlier meetings with Union, the defending national champions.

And Union couldn't run with the quick, determined Eagles. It was, in the words of Dick Vitale, an "NCer." No contest.

Baby.

So Central was going back to Springfield, Mass., to the Elite Eight, to The Big Dance.

"Greg has done a fantastic job," said J.C. Smith coach Steve Joyner. "Being able to get his first head job and then taking them as quickly as he did to that next level, it says a lot about his ability. But to be honest, I'm not surprised."

Joyner said he felt that in order for Central to be good again, the school needed a change. The Eagles had won the national title in 1989 under then-coach Mike Bernard. But, in the years following, Bernard had gotten increasingly frustrated with the program.

"I think sometimes it just comes down to the frustrations of the worker," Joyner said. "It can lead to low productivi-

ty. Mike was a guy who'd become dissatisfied and did want to get out. Because of that, he didn't function at the level he wanted to or his team wanted to. That's not being critical about him or his team, it's just being factual. And that's saying a lot of good things about Mike, because he knew it was time for a change."

So Bernard went to Norfolk State two years ago to face new challenges and Jackson, Bernard's assistant in Durham, stepped up and stepped out.

So Central lost a close game to Cal-State Bakersfield in the national quarter-finals. But guess what? Most of the Eagles are back next season.

"God had had a lot to do with all this," Jackson said. "Some coaches in this league in a long time and have never had the opportunity (to go to the Elite Eight). I realize that as a second-year coach, I've been fortunate."

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