

# Mis-seeded and Mistreated

from B1

Coppin State and Howard (the Women's MEAC representative) were victims of biased seeding, a enormous obstacle to advancing out of the first and second rounds.

Although Coppin State Eagles sported a 22-8 record entering selection Sunday (March 9), won the MEAC regular season championship in convincing fashion, then captured the league's post-season championship, no one expected the team to make any noise in the tournament.

Was that any type of way to treat a team which held the nation's longest home winning streak (42 games) in Division I basketball before having it snapped midway through the season?

Yet when the pairings were announced Coppin could do no better than the No. 15 seed and was matched against No. 2 in the East Region, South Carolina. The Eagles took the seeding as a challenge to show the Selection Committee the error of their ways.

Coppin came out with a chip on its shoulder and throttled the Gamecocks, taking the victory going away 78-65.

"We believed, we always believed," said Danny Singletary, who scored 22 points to lead the Eagles. "It was no miracle. We said at the half that we could do it."

When the game ended, Reggie Welch took the ball and heaved it far as he could. That symbolically was his way of telling the world that the MEAC and black college teams had finally gotten the monkey off their back.

"I threw the ball to throw away all the doubts surrounding this program," Welch said. "I wanted to throw it out of the arena if I could."

In the process the Eagles became only the third No. 15 to upset a No. 2 seed in tournament

history, and became the first MEAC team to advance past the tournament's first round.

The latter stat is misleading, MEAC teams are traditionally relegated to a No. 16 seed in one of the four regions and occasionally the No. 15 spot. This forces teams to play the nations elite teams year in and year out. And

convinced Texas coach Tom Penders that the Eagles had been seeded wrong.

"I'm going to say it like Bobby Knight, 'There's no way in hell they're [Coppin State] a No. 15 seed,'" he said at the post game press conference.

The selection committee, unlike coach Penders, gives little

have trouble scheduling away games. Our neighbor, Maryland won't play us. They'll play everybody except us. Georgetown won't play us."

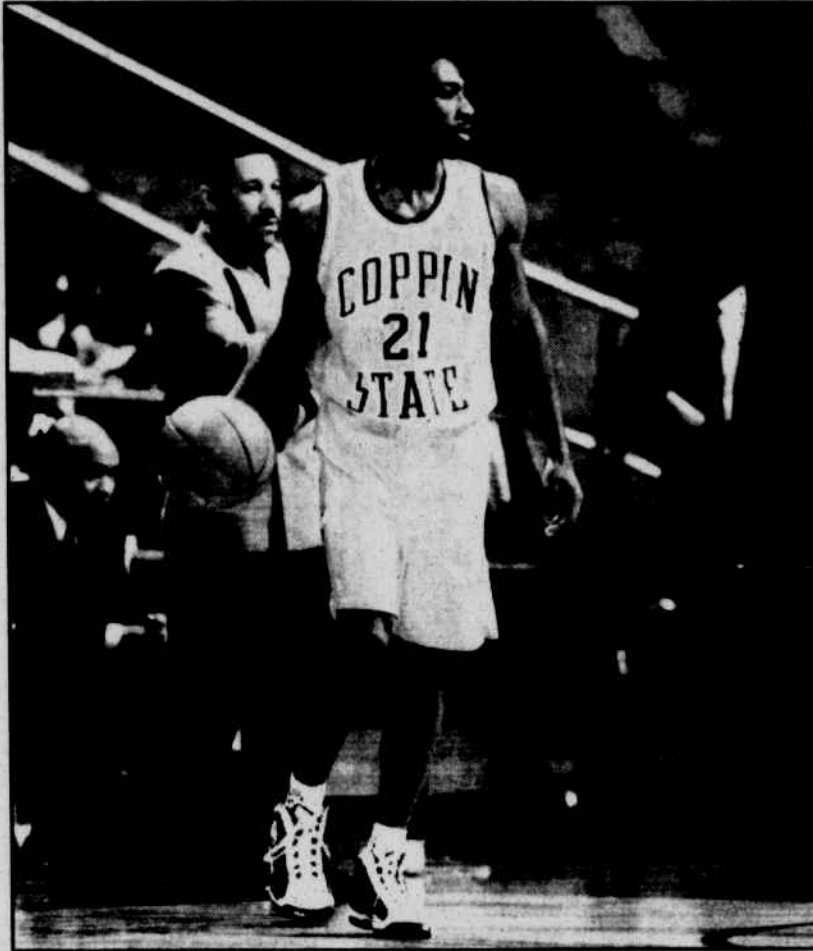
A.D.'s and coaches are understandably reluctant to play a talented team that is at the same time unknown and unclaimed. A win benefits these programs little and a loss is extremely damaging, because of the perception that these small Black institutions should be easy victories.

Duquesne, the only Division-I team outside the conference to play the Eagles on their home court, got hammered when it traveled to Coppin State (91-57).

And while understandable that hesitance on the part of major programs to create games is a key in Black schools inability to compile a schedule that has a favorable RPI rating, the method in which the NCAA measures strength of schedule. Without that favorable RPI rating these institutions are doomed to the prisons of low seeding and continually forced to compete against the top 10 teams in college basketball.

The story of the MEAC Women's Champion, Howard University, is even more disturbing. For one the Lady Bisons were not able to avenge the folly of their No.16 seed with a win over No.1 ranked Stanford. But the real injustice is that Howard was ranked in a No. 16 spot at all. The young women of Howard were on a 23-game winning streak entering the tournament, fifth longest in the nation, including going undefeated through the conference and blitzing their competition in the conference tournament.

Howard is only the second team in history to complete complete conference play without a loss. Their RPI rating was the highest among historically black schools and their roster includes three players who rank nationally in offensive and defensive categories.



Antoine Brockington of Coppin State led the team in scoring during the season and also played a pivotal role in the Eagles' win over South Carolina.

even with this obstacle many of the conference's teams have given top-ranked teams problems and scared more than a few programs.

Coppin State was one point and one errant pass away from becoming the first No. 15 to ever advance to the "Sweet 16". Those plans were foiled by Texas, which barely escaped the contest with the Eagles, with an 82-81 win.

The play of Coppin State

credit to the strength of historically Black college conferences like the MEAC and the SWAC, however, coaches and athletic directors in the nations premiere conferences know well to fear the bite of Black schools.

Coppin State head coach Ron "Fang" Mitchell says that it is nearly impossible to get schools to schedule games with them.

"We have trouble scheduling home games," said Mitchell. "We

Before the selections were announced head coach Sanya Tyler spoke of her teams accomplishments and believed that they were more than enough to help Howard escape a No. 16 seeding.

"If that's not enough to get us out of a 16th slot, then we need to reevaluate the way in which the tournament is seeded," she said.

A week later the selection committee, unmoved by the superb season Howard had slotted them 16th for the second year in a row. Stanford beat Howard handily, as had the University of Connecticut the year before. The team deserved better than their seeding and better than a first round exit from the Big Dance. But more than both of those facts is that the country deserved a chance to see two of the nations most exciting players, Denique Graves and Amanda Hayes play out their senior seasons, and

Black institutions need to know that their hard work counts for something come selection time.

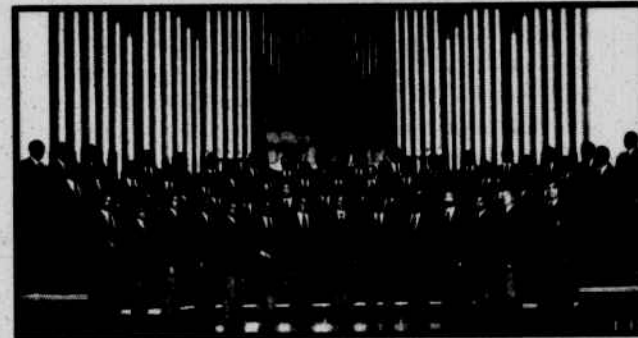
Tyler is now understandably wondering what she could have possibly done differently, and what is sad is that there she will not be able to come up with anything.

The Lady Bisons exceeded the the criteria, and like this country, outside of sport, often the exceptional work of African-Americans is often still not enough. The world of sport and the NCAA in particular stands at the same cross-road that this country finds itself. And all of us will either move forward with fair and just decisions or move backwards with prejudice and bias. Coppin State and Howard University were this year's litmus test and the Selection committee failed both miserably. Luckily for all of us they have the chance to take the test again next year.

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