

Nowhere to go, No one to play

It used to be that we picked the cotton and the white people got the money. Now we shoot the basketballs and the white schools get the money.

—Reverend Jesse Jackson

The North Carolina A and T State University Aggies subdued powerful Morgan State 70-65 in the finals of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Tournament to capture their third title in four years.

The Aggies' season closed at that point.

Despite an 18-7 record, a talented cast of players, and a huge following of students and alumni, coupled with the NCAA Tournament's Invitational Tournament, the Aggies saw post-season action only on their television sets.

The irony is compounded when the fact is considered that the

National Invitational Tournament once again bypassed A and T in favor of such "powerhouses" as Manhattan, 13-11; Pittsburgh, 17-10; Connecticut, 18-9; and St. Peter's, 15-11.

Aggie players remained in Greensboro during the first portion of spring break hoping that, by some chance, a late invitation would arrive. No word was received and the players departed for home.

Last season the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore became the first all-black school in history to be invited to the 16-team NIT. And UMES performed well, tripping an embarrassed Manhattan squad in the first round and later dropping a heartbreaker in the quarter-finals. UMES, in fact, was probably one of the most exciting teams in the tournament.

Yet, the NIT selection

committee which, incidentally, is all white, appears reluctant to invite another all-black school. This is precisely the reason that Jesse Jackson, Director of Operation PUSH, urged all blacks to boycott the NIT, a basketball event with "93 percent black players" and no black schools represented.

"The truth of the matter," writes black Greensboro journalist Ralph Vaughn, "is that all the best ball players like D.T. (David Thompson) are co-opted by the larger universities and almost made amateur immortals with the occasional visits on the ACC Game of the Week."

In the meantime, players who elect to attend black schools are faced with little television exposure and are further frustrated by larger white universities who refuse to play their teams.

"I think we could match up well with Carolina"

"I think we could match up with Carolina, State, or any of those teams," says A and T Head Coach Warren Reynolds, "but they don't want to play us."

White sports columnist Larry Keech of the GREENSBORO RECORD attempts to refute Reynold's statement by contending that State and Carolina will not play A and T because the Aggies do not offer legitimate competition.

"Reynolds hurt his own credibility when he said his team could match up with Carolina or State," Keech

argues. "Carolina and A and T shared one common opponent this year—MEAC member Howard. The Tar Heels beat Howard by 42 points, 109-67 at Chapel Hill. The Aggies struggled to beat Howard by four points on three different occasions."

Keech's argument holds very little credibility. He, first of all, fails to mention that Howard matched Carolina basket for basket until star player Vadnay Cotton became saddled with foul trouble. He also fails to mention that Carolina Coach Dean Smith played his starting lineup

for virtually the entire game.

He fails to mention that Howard had no player on its roster over 6-6 and that Smith exploited this weakness by inserting 6-9 Mitch Kupchak, 6-10 Ed Stahl, and 6-10 Tommy LaGarde in the lineup at the same time. And he fails to mention that comparing scores with common opponents is a pitifully unreliable means of rating teams.

If, in fact, such a system works, then Carolina had absolutely no business winning the ACC Tournament. After all, the Tarheels struggled to beat Duke on two occasions and were beaten by the Blue Devils on a third occasion. N. C. State thrashed Duke twice.

How in the world, then, could the Tarheels manage to beat State once, let alone twice in one season?

The only truly reliable means of determining how two teams stack up against one another is to watch them play, head-to-head. If Carolina is so much better than A and T, why won't they prove it on the playing court?

Beneath The Surface

Why are ACC schools so reluctant to schedule black competition? The answer is simple: white universities know that playing black schools will threaten their monopoly on black high school talent.

Black recruits go to white institutions for exposure. They know that they'll have a chance to be seen on national television, the ACC Game of the Week, the Norm Sloan Show or the Dean Smith Show. They know who gets top priority on those big, fat Sunday sports sections.

If, however, black schools were able to schedule ACC competition, they would be provided with an extra recruiting pitch.

"Come to A and T, son," a recruiter could say. "We got strong tradition and good, solid team. AND you can help us beat State and Carolina."

Black players would no longer HAVE to go to ACC schools to receive due recognition. All they'd have to do is go to Central, Howard, or A and T, beat N.C. State or Carolina, and the recognition would be guaranteed.

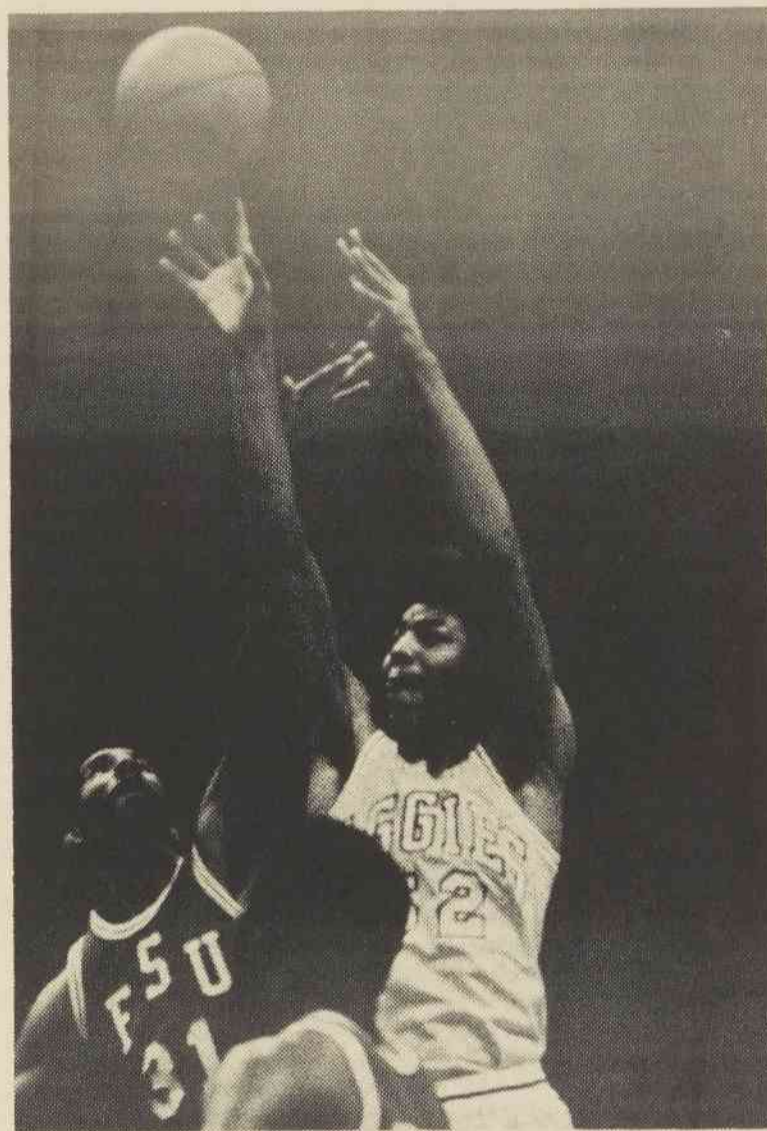


Photo Courtesy A&T Register

A and T's Sinclair Colbert launches a jumper against a Fayetteville State defender.

The ACC could help black schools

Take black players away from the ACC and what do you have? Take David Thompson, Kenny Carr, and Moe Rivers from State and what have you got? Take John Lucas, Moe Howard and Owen Brown from Maryland and try to win a national championship. Take Phil Ford and Walter Davis from Carolina and see if you can beat N.C. State.

ACC officials realize that the success of their schools relies on a black foundation. And they know that playing black schools would give these teams an equal chance at black talent and, in turn, jeopardize that crucial foundation.

The answer is painfully obvious.

Hurts the Players

Thus, the A and T basketball team has only its MEAC title to cherish and a myriad of unfulfilled "what if's" to bitterly remember.

"Somehow it just isn't right," said Coach Reynolds in a GREENSBORO DAILY NEWS interview. "I don't think

the NIT field is all that impressive. I feel we would have represented ourselves well.

"We are the only MEAC champions who have yet to be invited to one of the prestigious tournaments.

"It's absolutely ridiculous. I'm not personally hurt, but it's the players that I'm mostly concerned about. They looked forward to playing in one of the tournaments.

Concurrently, the MEAC remains in limbo, stuck in its transition from small college to major college status. Although five of its members—A and T, South Carolina State, Delaware State, Howard, and Maryland Eastern Shore—have attained major college status, North Carolina Central and Morgan State have yet to do so.

The road to major college status has been a rocky one and the ACC could make that path smoother.

If it wanted to.

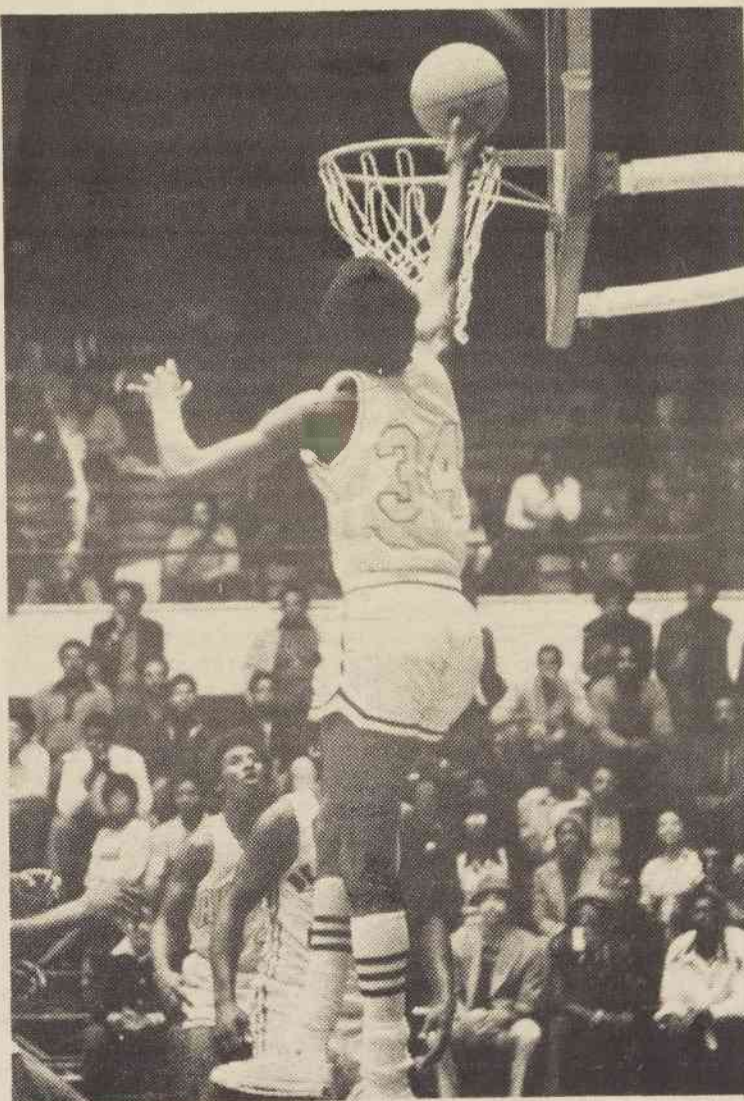


Photo Courtesy of A & T Register

Aggie Allen Sprueill scores on a lay-up in a contest against Delaware State.

For a closer look . . .

For a closer look at the issue of white schools shunning basketball competition with Black counterparts, read the upcoming premiere issue of the "New Carolinian" magazine, a publication to be distributed soon under the auspices of "The Daily Tar Heel."

The "Carolinian" article will examine the subject from a dual perspective, investigating the point of views expressed by Carolina and A & T players and coaches.

Readers are urged to voice their opinions on the concept and content of "Sports Analysis" and other articles in the "Black Ink."