

Vikings primed for a winning season

By Jody Riddick

"Enter to Prepare...Exit to Succeed" is this year's theme for the ECSU 1992-93 basketball team, according to ECSU's head coach Claudie Mackey.

"Enter to prepare simply means once you put on that blue and white you will prepare mentally to go on the basketball court to do the kinds of things that will be asked of you to perform," said Mackey.

Coach Mackey, now in his seventh year at the helm of the men's basketball program, said he's as excited about this year's team as he has ever been in his tenure. With three returning starters from last year's team, a few valuable reserves and four newcomers, the 1992-93 Vikings are truly a team on the rise.

Leading the way for the Vikings is 6'7 forward, Nate Higgs, an All-CIAA performer and Smith Pre-Season All-American. Coach Mackey is also relying on returning guards 6'7 Martin Lacewell and 6'0 Shawn Walker, along with key reserves like Lamar Barrett, John Richardson, and Derrick White.

Among the newcomers, 7'1 center Jo-ve' Ford and 6'6 forward Ron Nowlin will join Higgs, Walker, and Lacewell in the starting lineup. With hard work this unit could compete with any starting five in the CIAA, Mackey believes.

"Once this group of guys learn how to play together, they will be very exciting to watch," he said. Other newcomers expected to contribute are Sharano Woodley and Stephawn Kee.

Assistant Coach Alfred Johnson feels that this year's team is better than last year's because of the returning players. "The returning guys are a year older than the new guys," Johnson said. "Also the new guys have extended roles and they have done a good job of listening to Coach Mackey as well as following the lead of the returning players."

The coaches and the players of the 1992-93 squad have high expectations about making a strong impact in the CIAA this year.

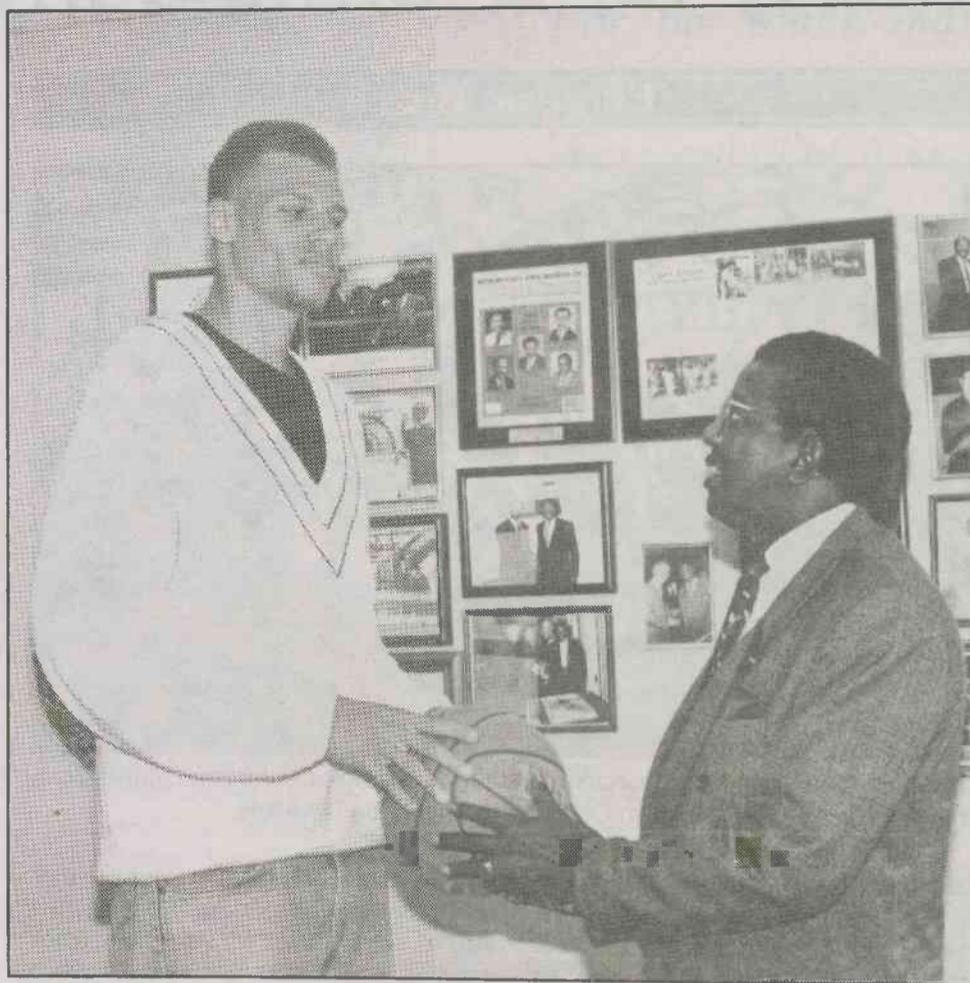
"Our main objective is to win the CIAA championship," said sophomore guard John Richardson. "Everyone is working hard in practice, unlike last year when we didn't work as hard as we should have. But this year Coach Mackey is pushing us hard to strive and to be the best we can be."

Coach Mackey is looking forward to a winning season.

"Too many times we equate winning and losing by numbers rather than looking where a team starts and then finishes," Mackey said.

Assistant Coach Johnson is also feeling positive about this year's team.

"I think that it is important that we take each game as a separate event and play each game individually and use each game as a stepping stone to improve by doing these things we will be successful," Johnson said.



Pictured with Chancellor Jenkins is Jo-ve' Ford. Ford, the starting center for the Vikings this year, is the first seven footer to play basketball at ECSU.

The Vikings have been impressive so far in the early part of the season. The Vikings captured two wins by winning the University of North Alabama Tipoff Tournament Nov. 20-21 in Florence, Al on the campus of the University of North Alabama. The Vikings defeated Paine College 80-75 in the opening game of the tournament. Eleven players scored for the Vikings and nine players played for at least ten minutes. Nate Higgs, an All-American candidate led the Vikings with 17 points. Jo-ve' Ford, 7'0 sophomore, had 14 points and eight rebounds in his first game at the Division II level. Shawn Walker added 11 points for the Vikings and Nate Higgs led the Vikings in rebounds with 10.

Junior guard Shawn Walker scored 33 points and junior forward Nate Higgs added 22 to lead the Vikings to a 95-90 victory over the University of North Alabama in the championship game of the University of North Alabama Tipoff Tournament.

Walker was named Most Valuable Player of the tournament and Higgs, and All-CIAA pre-season pick, was named to the all-tournament team.

ECSU is the only CIAA team ever to defeat North Alabama at home.

After the North Alabama Tournament, the Vikings traveled to play Jacksonville State University Nov. 23 and won a 109-108 victory. Jacksonville State was ranked 18th nationally by a leading pre-season poll amongst Division II schools. Ron Nowlin, a 6'6 forward led the Vikings

offense pouring in 32 points, including eight three-pointers, and grabbing eight rebounds. Nate Higgs scored 18 points and grabbed 13 rebounds.

Jo-ve' Ford added 17 points and grabbed nine rebounds, and Shawn Walker chipped in 14 points for the Vikings.

The Vikings traveled to Fayetteville State Dec. 2 and played a hard fought game, but lost 87-83. Jo-ve' Ford led the Vikings with 26 points, 12 rebounds, and two blocked shots. Nate Higgs, had 16 points and 15 rebounds, Ron Nowlin added 21 points, and Shawn Walker added 10 points.

The Vikings played their first home game Dec. 4 in the first round of the ECSU Invitational Tournament, defeating St. Paul's College 76-73 in the men's championship game. Nate Higgs was named the most valuable player and Shawn Walker was named to the All-Tournament Team.

The Vikings entered the second half with a twelve point lead shooting 68 percent from the floor; their aggressive defense forced the Tigers into shooting only 31 percent.

The Vikings will continue to use their "shuttle" offense to help spread the offense, said Mackey.

On defense, the Vikings will play lots of man to man defenses, combination defenses, and match up zones. Also defensively, a group to watch for the Vikings this year is called the "posse."

The "posse" consists of five players about 6'0 tall, but they are great on de-

fense and have been a great help in the Vikings three victories according to Coach Mackey. Members of the "posse" are guard Lamar Barrett, guard John Richardson, forward John Bullock, forward Sharano Woodley, and center Derrick White.

"These guys aren't all that tall, but they play tenacious defense while they're on the floor and also they are fun to watch," Mackey said.

The co-captains for the 1992-93 Viking squad are forward Nate Higgs, and guard Lamarr Barrett. "In terms of leadership, there isn't one specific leader for us this year," Mackey said. "All the guys are leaders for us this year. "Each player has so much to offer to this team so they are all leaders to me."

Running the point guard position for the Vikings this year is Martin "Twiggy" Lacewell.

"This is a new position for Martin, but I think he'll feel comfortable with it once he gets the hang of it," Mackey said. Lacewell averaged 14 points per game and 5 rebounds per game last season. Shawn Walker is playing the shooting guard position this year while last year he played the point guard position.

"The shooting guard position is new to Shawn because he is used to playing the point, but I feel that he will adjust to this position just as Martin will to the point guard position," Mackey added. "The transition of these two players may be a little rough at first, but I feel that the change will work for us."

Walker averaged 13 points per game and 2 rebounds per game last season.

"Walker is a very good outside shooter and he can stick the jumper when we need it in the stretch," Mackey said.

Nate Higgs, is back at the power forward position again this season. Higgs led the team in scoring and rebounding last season averaging 20 points and 10 rebounds per game. Higgs is a pre-season All-CIAA pick, a pre-season CIAA Player of the Year Candidate, and a pre-season Street and Smith Small College All-American Candidate.

"Nate is a very good, solid player and he works hard in practice and his hard work carries over when he's on the court in the game," Mackey said. "Nate is a very exciting player to watch, and he is a very well-rounded player."

Overall Mackey and Johnson are looking forward to seeing a great season.

"I think that we have a group of guys who are going to try their best to bring winning back to this basketball program and to the campus of ECSU," Mackey said. "We want to keep the fans happy and excited about the basketball team this year, but at the same time we need the support from the university as a whole—the students and the faculty and the community as well."

We need the university's support through the good times and the rough times as well," Mackey said.