

A Bumpy Road

Joe Binion and A&T, like many black schools, have found the going against Division I opposition tough. The Aggies dropped a 100-70 game at North Carolina State in December, and have suffered equally lopsided defeats against the Wolfpack in previous years. But most black coaches maintain that playing the bigger schools is a wise move. Says Josh Giles at Florida A&M: "Sure, we may lose by a large margin, but it gives our kids a chance to play against players they've seen or heard about. It also gets us ready for conference play and the NCAAs" (photo by Joe Daniels).



Charles Bell Kept Trying

LAWRENCEVILLE, Va. — Charles Bell tried out for the Saint Paul's College basketball team his freshman and sophomore years. Both times he was cut.

Other players might have given up in discouragement, but Bell went out for the squad a third time — and made it.

Now a senior, the Jackson, N.C., native is a starter and the teams' third leading scorer, averaging 13 points a game. Bell has been the top scorer in the past two contests with 18 points against Elizabeth City and 25 points against Fayetteville. For his effort, he was named to the TABCA Holiday all-tournament team in Norfolk, Va., and was Saint Paul's Player of the Week.

The six-foot guard was a standout player at Gumberry High School in Gumberry, N.C., and was named to the Albermarle all-conference team as well as being tabbed its player of the year. He was also honorable mention all-East.

Bell said he had to work hard to make the Saint Paul's team and got his chance last year after a number of starters graduated. Bell averaged nine points and shot nearly 75 percent from the floor (102-137) last season.

But it was still hard for Bell to get used to a disciplined team game after not playing for two years.

"I love street ball — a run-and-gun type game," Bell said. "The hardest thing for me to learn was to run plays."

The Tigers belong to the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Conference and have been experimenting this year with a three-point shot and 30-second shot clock.

Bell said the clock has not bothered the Tigers since the team generally takes good shots quickly. But he feels the 23.9 foot three-point line is too far away.

"It takes all your energy to put it in," Bell said. "You almost have to throw it up there."

He has made one three-point bucket this season.

For the first time, all CIAA teams will participate in the post-season tournament. Bell is happy to have this opportunity at the end of his playing career.

"I wish I had more years to do that," Bell said. "We play better in tournaments: If everyone pulls together, we can win it."

The Tigers are currently 5-8, but Bell feels this is one of the best Saint Paul's teams within the past two years. What's needed, he said, is for the team's inside game to improve to open up the outside for more shots.

Besides winning the CIAA tournament, Bell's other goal was to lead the CIAA in steals. But because of badly calloused feet, Bell has only averaged one steal a game.

Pat And Ralph

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future -- unless one comes along that I just can't refuse."

Laisure said that winning a national title can be accomplished without the big man, but that it will take a team such as Robbins had at Union when he won the title to do it.

"Dave had a unique situation," Laisure said. "The kids he had played four years together and, for that to happen again, a coach would have to have the same combination: five kids who could play four years together and complement each other perfectly."

Robbins, who presently has the league's premier big man in 6-8 Charles Oakley, plus 6-9 Tony Singleton, may be a step up on the rest of the league. Seven-two Chris Cox transferred to the school this season, and with him Robbins will have a front line as big as any major college's.

How does Robbins get the big kids? "I don't go after Division II players," he said. "I only want kids who can play major college basketball, but I know that I have to develop the kids I get since the kids who are ready to star right out of high school are going to the big schools."

There are coaches, however, who feel that the way to win is to take the more skilled smaller players. Warren

Reynolds had great success at North Carolina A&T and always had major college size. But he changed his mind after two fruitless years at Shaw where he boasted the league's biggest team.

Reynolds had seven-foot Al Tyson, a pair of 6-9 twins and three other players above 6-8 and failed to win a league game in 1980.

Reynolds has made a drastic change since then. During the first semester this season, he started a team with the tallest player 6-5.

"When I came into the CIAA, I tried to win using the size player that I won with in Division I and it was a disaster," Reynolds said. "In this league, the emphasis is on guard play and speed. So now I like the smaller, quicker kids who can run and shoot."

Still, Reynolds, known as an outstanding recruiter, has 6-10 Kent State transfer Andre Bryant waiting in the wings for the league to decide if transfers must sit out a full year or not (as Robbins must do at Union with Cox) and it is hard to believe that Reynolds will not again soon be stocked with taller players.

On the other hand, there is "Bighouse" Gaines. His last legitimate big man was 6-8 Earl Williams, who he recruited nearly a decade ago. Yet,

Gaines has gone on winning, building his team around good defense, fine shooters and, of course, coaching.

Gaines says he would like to have a big man, but he only wants one "who can play."

"A lot of schools list kids 6-10 and 6-11 on their rosters," he said. "They start the game and end up sitting on bench while smaller, more talented kids do the playing. I won't take a kid just because he is big. I always go after the kid who can play regardless of his size. If a kid can't get up and down the floor, the other players lose respect for him. It is also hard on the kid. Pressure is applied on him by the public and fans and the pressure is on the coach to play him whether he can produce or not."

Gaines, however, does not go after the players that he knows the big schools will get; he elects to go with smaller players.

The tall and short of small college recruiting: it's a dilemma that not only the coaches of the smaller schools must face, but many of the major colleges, too.

The difference is that coaches like those in the CIAA have much less to choose from.