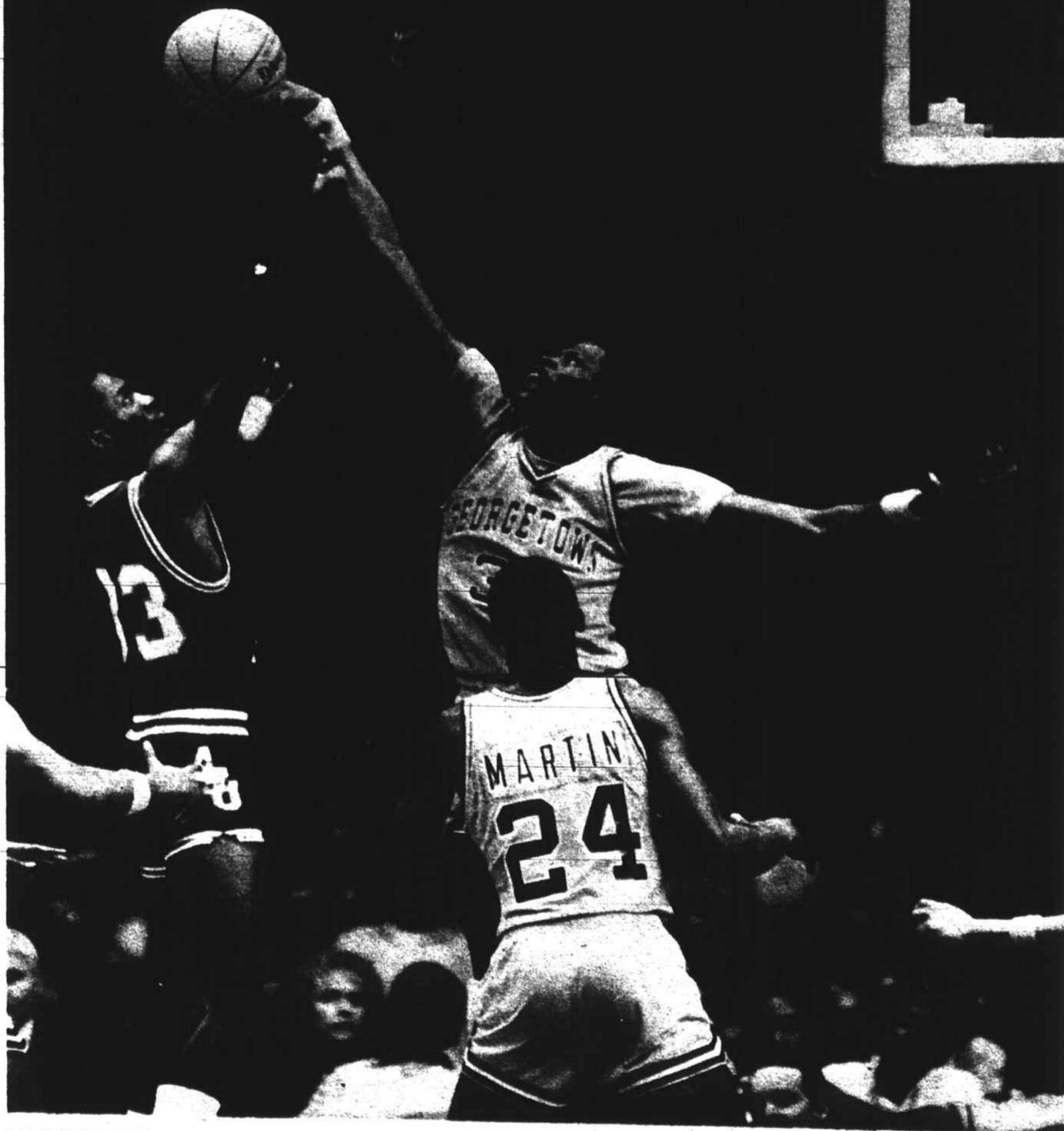


BASKETBALL PREVIEW '83-84



Though Pat Ewing blocked this shot by Alcorn State's David Claybon, heavily-favored Georgetown barely beat the Braves 68-63 in last year's Midwest Regional (photo by Jay Mather, copyright ©1983, *The Louisville Times*).

Up And Coming... ...Or Down And Out?

The road to The Big Time is filled with potholes, slick spots and tricky curves, as Division I black schools have discovered in their quest for the prestige and big bucks at the end of the NCAA rainbow.

By **BARRY COOPER**

Twenty years ago, Winston-Salem State's Earl "The Earl Pearl" Monroe would dribble a basketball between his legs and around amazed defenders before routinely sinking 30-foot jump shots.

Willis Reed was a punishing center for Grambling State University.

And North Carolina Central's Sam Jones was a poised guard who was equally at ease playing the role of a rebounder, scorer or assist man.

Twenty years ago, Three dominant players. Times have changed.

Now players similar in talents to Monroe, Reed and Jones seldom choose black colleges, though there are some exceptions.

The University of District of Columbia has 6-11 center Earl Jones, who the pro scouts say is a potential first-round draft choice.

And North Carolina A&T's Joe Bion is considered one of the country's best small forwards.

Those are just a couple of names, though. The very best basketball players -- the kind who are bonafide superstars -- now turn their noses up at schools such as Grambling and Winston-Salem State.

All this after schools such as the University of Kentucky, which was built into a powerhouse by the late Adolph Rupp, resisted recruiting black athletes until the 1960s.

The Wildcats had to change their way of thinking, however, because coaches such as Joe Williams of Jacksonville and Al McGuire of Marquette had proven that the way to win championships was not with slow, hustling white kids, but with blacks who could run with the wind and, most importantly, 7-foot centers such as Artis Gilmore, who reportedly turned down predominantly black Florida A&M to attend Jacksonville.

All Gilmore did was lead a relatively mediocre team to the NCAA Final Four.

Florida A&M wonders what might have happened if Gilmore had signed with the Rattlers instead.

Other black colleges ponder similar questions: What if Howard University could sign a Patrick Ewing? What if Akeem Olajuwon had dreamed his way to Texas Southern?

What if Keith Lee had joined the Tigers of Tennessee State rather than the Tigers of Memphis State?

We'll never know the answers to those questions. Gilmore, Ewing, Olajuwon and Lee took different routes, accepting what they considered the best situations for them.

Barry Cooper writes a nationally-syndicated column on black- and small-college sports.