

If Aggies Won't, Bison Certainly Will

By ALLEN JOHNSON
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The MEAC is still somewhere in the wilderness between The Big Time and perennial obscurity.

Two members of its lost colony -- North Carolina A&T and Howard -- are on the verge of finding their way out. They've upgraded their schedules and between them have made three NCAA tournaments.

The other five league members appear, at least for the time being, to be going in circles. While A&T and Howard battle it out for the top spot -- and try to figure out how not to get blown away in the NCAA tourney, the rest of the conference ranges from mediocre to weak.

A&T figured to have all the ingredients to dominate the league -- until 6-9 center Juan Lanauze left school last spring for his home in Puerto Rico. That puts more pressure on Joe Binion, a 6-8 senior forward who averaged 19.9 points and 11.1 rebounds last season and is the best player in the league.

But Binion will get help from 6-4 Eric Boyd, a fine guard who contributed 15 points and three assists per game, and Jim Brown, another guard who averaged 10 points, but may be best-known as the son of a certain pro football immortal who's considering a comeback.

Aggie Coach Don Corbett is an intense man whose bark during games may be more ferocious than A&T's bulldog mascot's. He'd like nothing better this year than to win the MEAC once more and show those NCAA snobs that his team and his conference are not sacrificial lambs.

The Aggies will get a chance at the latter early in a Dec. 17 game at defending national champion North Carolina State.

And if A&T falters in its quest for the former, Howard will be waiting in the wings.

The Aggies and Bison don't like each other a whole lot. Never have. Never will.

"Why do we hate A&T?" said a Howard fan at last year's tournament, "Why is the sky blue? Why is the earth round? It's nature."

Mother Nature always seems to make her presence known at Howard-A&T games. In 1981, for instance, the Bison squeezed the favored Aggies out of the MEAC's first NCAA tournament berth with a 66-63 win in the MEAC tourney.

In 1982, A&T returned the favor, 79-67, but not before a second-half brawl erupted. In 1983, A&T beat 'em again in the finals, 71-64, even though Howard had won the regular-season title with an 11-1 league record.

Howard's one loss, incidentally, came at A&T. And one of A&T's three

league losses came at Howard.

Which wasn't supposed to happen last year, since A&T was loaded with talent and generally expected to use the MEAC for scrimmages until the NCAAs. But the Bison and Coach A.B. Williamson had other ideas, going 19-9 overall and winning the regular-season title.

Although he loses one of the keys to last year's success story, guard Bernard Perry, Williamson returns three starters from last year's team.

Kevin Scott, a 6-5 forward who scored 12 points per game in '83, is one of them. Williamson expects the all-conference senior to be the glue that holds his '84 team together and leads another Bison assault on the Aggies' dominion.

Williamson also has beefed up the Bison's nonconference schedule, which includes December dates with Hawaii and UCLA.

"Those games will be tough," he says, "but they should help our recruiting and will help prepare us for the conference schedule."

Meanwhile, there have been more than rumbles of discontent among some of the other league members as three heads have rolled.

At Delaware State, where the MEAC's best-looking cheering squad was the major bright spot in an otherwise forgettable 8-19 year, Coach Ajac Triplett got his pink slip.

While Triplett now coaches high school ball in Texas, his replacement, Joe Dean Davidson, formerly of Washington, D.C.'s legendary Dunbar High School, will try to squeeze a few more wins out of a lineup that's solid in the backcourt and soft up front.

DelState's fine backcourt trio includes junior point guard Danny Sapp, who averaged 17.1 points in '83, and seniors Albert Anderson and Robert Fields.

Six-foot-seven Eric Seymour, the lone veteran forward, averaged only 2.3 points and 3.3 rebounds last year.

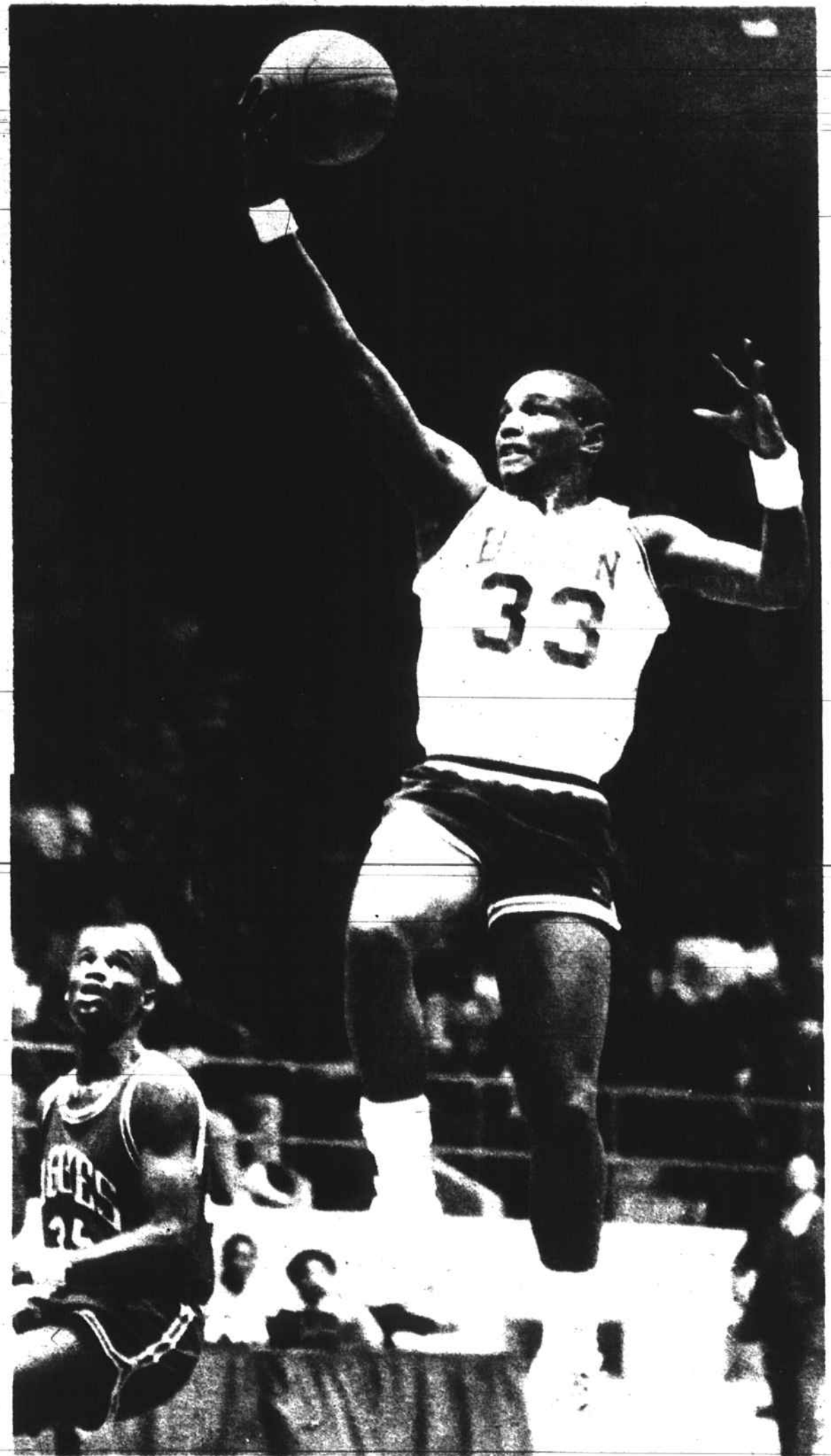
While Joe Davidson attempts to build a tradition, Maryland-Eastern Shore Coach Kirkland Hall would like to restore one.

The 1974 Hawks won the conference title and went on to a strong showing in the NIT. The 1983-84 Hawks would be happy to pass the .500 mark.

One of the prime determiners as to whether UMES will reach that modest goal is swingman Robert Boney, the only returning starter.

Robert's cousin, Donnell Boney, proved that hoops run in the family by turning in a strong freshman season, scoring 10.6 points per game.

South Carolina State and Florida A&M have a common problem: reputations as football schools -- which is okay if you're a football coach but not so wonderful if you're trying to build interest and credibility in a



Howard's Kevin Scott leads Coach A.B. Williamson's upstarts this year (photo by Brian Branch-Price).

basketball program.

Basketball has been the one sport in which proud S.C. State has not kicked butt in the MEAC. Matter of fact, the Bulldogs have more often than not been the kickees on the hardwood, as was Coach Johnny Jones, who was booted right out of his job last year.

Percy "Chico" Caldwell takes over for Jones, and inherits a team that looks solid on paper but only finished 13-15 in '83.

The Bulldogs are strong in the middle with 6-8 veteran center Franklin Giles, who scored 15.9 points a game

and grabbed 12.8 rebounds (second in the nation). Another notable returnee is 6-3 guard Marvin Haynes, who averaged just under 20 points.

A&T Coach Dan Corbett says S.C. State "may have the best material in the conference." But it only has the fifth-best team.

As for Florida A&M, the Rattlers haven't rattled very much lately, and will rattle even less this year since they'll be ineligible for the league title.

They did make some noise off the court, however, as Coach Josh Giles

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