

# Cinderella Central Goes To The NCAA's Ball

By ROBERT ELLER  
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Upstart North Carolina Central, a team that finished dead last in the CIAA Southern Division, completed its Cinderella story in the CIAA tournament, proving that the glass slipper did indeed fit in a 92-87 upset of Virginia State for the school's first-ever women's tournament title.

NCCU, which entered the event with a 9-17 regular-season record, knocked off Hampton, the second-seeded team, in the first round, 80-76, followed by a 94-89 win over Winston-Salem State, the South's third seed and a victory over Shaw, the South's top seed, 74-61, in the semifinals.

Virginia State was the third-seeded team in the North.

Even jubilant Coach Yvonne Edwards, in her second season at Central after leaving Fayetteville State, admitted she was surprised by her team's performance.

"When we entered the tournament, realistically, I didn't think we had a chance to go all the way," she said, "but after we beat Hampton, I was confident we would reach the finals. Tonight I just told the girls that I felt that, if we played as hard as we could for 40 minutes, we would win, and that is just what they did."

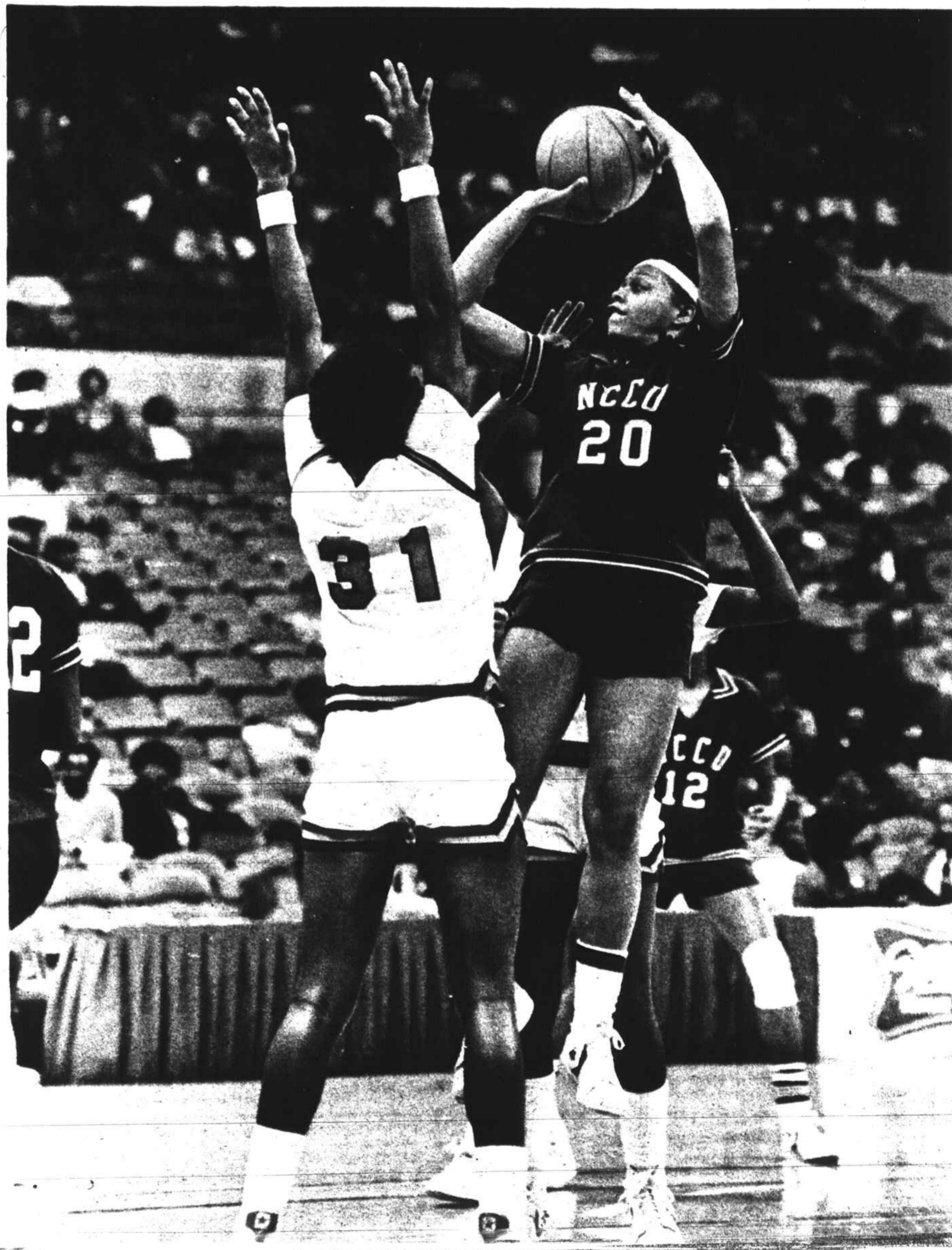
With defending national champion Virginia Union bumped off in the semifinals by Virginia State, 65-63, the Trojans were heavy favorites to claim the title for the first time since 1980, when Leon Bay was at the helm.

The Lady Eagles jumped to an early 15-9 lead, but Virginia State countered with six unanswered points to go up by one. The lead then changed hands five times and the teams were tied on six other occasions before the Lady Trojans scored the first half's last seven points to take a 44-37 lead at intermission.

Virginia State held a slim lead until a three-point play by Central's Jackie Pinnix tied the score at 68 with 7:36 remaining, then took the lead for good, 74-72, at the 4:47 mark on a basket by Priscilla Herring. Central went on to win 92-87.

"I feel super," said Edwards in a post-game interview. "This is my first tourney title. With Fayetteville State, we won two Southern Division titles but never made the finals. When we came on the floor for tonight's game and I realized I'd never been here before, it made me extremely nervous and that usually doesn't happen to me before a game."

The Lady Eagles, 13-17 after the win, earned an automatic berth to the NCAA Division II playoffs with the title and were scheduled to take on Radford College in regional action in West



Central's Deidra Solomon fires a jumper over Virginia State (photo by Joe Daniels).

Virginia.

Edwards said her team would be ready to play despite being decided underdogs again.

"This team didn't have any tourney experience coming into this and we won't let the fact that we don't have NCAA experience bother us going into that tournament," she said. "The key to our success in the tournament has

been defense and execution of our offense."

Edwards also defended her team against those who would call it lucky. "We have average players who worked extra hard," she said. "We would have been ready to play any team in the league, and we weren't lucky. We just played good basketball and jelled at the end."

Virginia Union Coach Lou Hearn said he hoped his team would receive an at-large berth to the NCAA tourney. "I don't see how they can keep us out," he said. "We're the defending champs, won our division and only lost three games this season. It's not our fault that we didn't play a large number of games. Other teams were just afraid to schedule us."