



If the MEAC's basketball deal with the All College Sports Group reaps dividends, the league's football teams, featuring such talent as Howard's Maurice Haynes, might be next on the tube (photo courtesy of Howard University).

# MEAC Snares A Promising Television Package

## A Recently-Signed Contract Calls for 13 Live Basketball Telecasts

By GREG BROWN  
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A Durham, N.C.-based production company which purchased the broadcast and cable rights to the MEAC's 1985 basketball games says it has a potential viewership of 30 million households after striking a deal with a cable TV network.

"At this point, the project looks excellent," said Robert Drakeford, general manager of the fledgling All College Sports Group, formed last year. "This will be the largest black sports network in the history of the country."

And, for the first time, the games will be aired live -- not six to seven days later as were most of the black college games this year. Operating with a staff of about 30 persons, the production company plans to relay the television signal to a satellite, which will beam the live action to non-cable stations across the country, including many independents. The Satellite Programm-

ing Network will carry the games via cable TV systems.

The All College Sports Group bought rights to the next three years of MEAC games. MEAC Commissioner Ken Free said the conference will receive "between \$30,000 and \$40,000 annually for rights to the regular-season coverage." "It's not a lucrative contract," Free said. "It's a trade-off for more exposure." Negotiations for the tournament rights still were under way when the *Review* went to press.

"Basically, we have the TV and cable rights for the MEAC and we are currently in the process of stitching a network together," Drakeford said. "Our understanding is that, of the top 25 markets, we should get at least half of them."

That would represent a giant leap for MEAC coverage and progress for black college basketball as a whole.

Last season, only 10 black college basketball games were aired, all of them tape-delayed broadcasts on the

Black Entertainment Television cable network. Even those games weren't the best pairings, since their selection was more dependent on available production facilities than anything else.

Drakeford said the new black sports network will be three times larger than the Black Entertainment Television network.

*"We're going to be doing a lot of women's basketball. We're interviewing a lot of female announcers for the women's games."*

*Robert Drakeford*

ESPN, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, carried more than 150 college basketball games last season, but not one of them between two predominantly black schools. The USA Network, NBC and CBS also have refrained from broadcasting black college games.

Such a lack of exposure affects not only TV revenue for the schools, but, more importantly, their ability to recruit blue chip athletes who tend to

go to the wealthier white schools whose teams appear regularly on regional and network telecasts.

The lack of television exposure also can affect a team's ranking.

"We feel there are two or possibly three (MEAC) teams which should be ranked in the Top 25, and we will cover those teams," Drakeford said, adding

that one or two of the teams would have ranked in the nation's Top 10 with better TV exposure.

The sports group's coverage will begin in December, when MEAC teams face nonconference foes like Georgetown, Maryland and Georgia Tech. Conference coverage will kick

off Saturday, Jan. 12, when N.C. A&T faces Howard in Greensboro, where it will resume two days later when A&T