

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Clark's Yvonne Owens: Just call her 'Moses'

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE
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Yvonne Owens, the all-America basketball player, is busy working up a sweat. She sprints back and forth across the free throw line, picking up loose balls and putting up shots repeatedly as if she's in an NBA Hot Shot Contest.

The scene is very similar to the Nike television commercial that features Moses Malone of the Philadelphia 76ers. Watching Owens go through the drills in the Clark College gym and looking at the Malone commercial remind us that both have a lot in common. Both play center for their teams. Both are very physical. Both are wide bodies. In most cases, their respective teams' success depends on how well they perform. Owens used her quickness and physical style to lead the nation in scoring and rebounding in the NCAA's Division II. She averaged 25.6 points and 16.2 rebounds a game last season.

Where the two differ, however, is

At her height, Owens faces taller people in the pivot every time she takes the court. Yet, she always gets her points and rebounds. One reason for that, she says, is that opponents think she's slow because of her height and build. "But I'm three times quicker than I look," she adds.

Mike Mosley, the Clark women's coach, agrees. "You won't believe her first step," he says. "It's better than most men I've seen. She's an unusual ball player. We're lucky to have her."

Owens' sturdiness is evident when you look at her. She won't tell how much she weighs. "I'll let you guess," she says with a smile and a wink.

When Clark gets the ball in the paint to Owens, her quickness and tenacity are all too apparent. "My game is inside," she says. "Once I get the ball down low, I can do what I want and a lot of opponents get upset. They know they can't contain me because I can score when I get ready."

Lady Moses failed to make a basketball team on her first try-out as a sixth-grader. Determined that she would

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that Owens is only 5-7½. But she uses her body to her advantage and wears opponents down during the course of a game. Just like Moses.

The 21-year old senior led Clark to an SIAC title last year and was a major reason the Pantherettes were the only all-black team to make it to the Final 16 in the Division II playoffs.

Ironically, Owens was nicknamed "Moses" last season during a game in which she had an awful night offensively. "I kept missing shots, kept getting the ball back and putting it up until I made the shot," she says. "That's when they started calling me Moses Malone."

The Clark all-America learned to use her body on a basketball court by playing with her older brothers as a 10-year-old in Concord, Ga. They played ball in the backyard using an old bicycle rim for a basket that was nailed to a tree. "My brothers gave me a hard time when I was little," Owens explains. "They made me pay when I wanted to play."

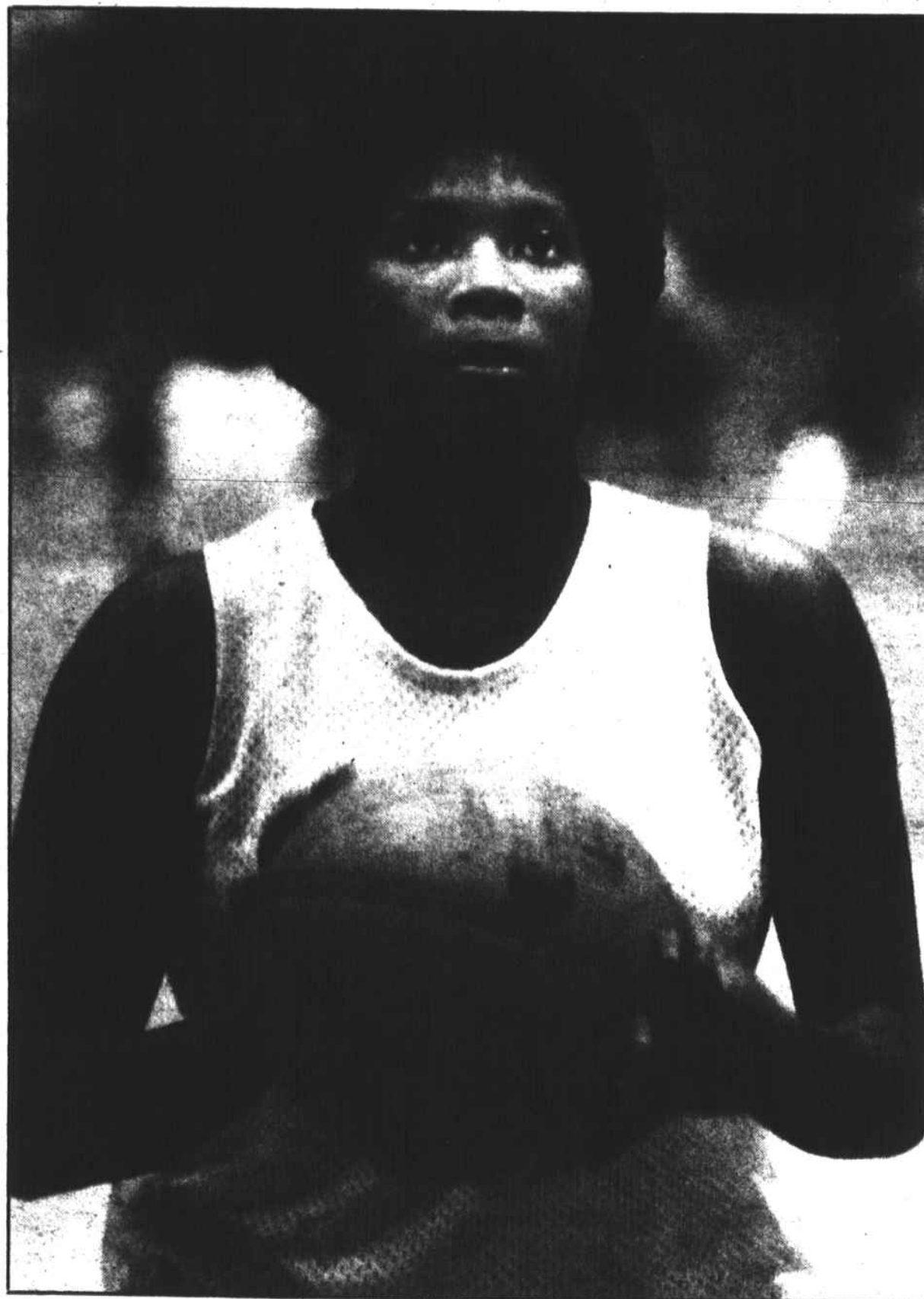
play the next year, Owens returned to the back yard and the old bicycle rim that summer, working on fundamentals from sunrise to sunset.

Owens credits Kathy Williams (her middle-school coach) with tutoring her on the fine points of rebounding. "She worked me constantly," Owens says. "I did a lot of work on learning how to box people out."

Surprisingly, few people on the Clark campus know of Owens' exploits. But opponents do, and they've employed a variety of tactics in attempts to nullify her game. A usual outing for Owens consists of being "bowed" in the head, stomach and other bodily parts. Some opponents have even resorted to stepping on her feet to curtail her effectiveness.

"I do take a lot of punishment, even though I don't play dirty ball," Owens says.

Women's professional basketball on the European circuit is a definite possibility for Owens. Several agents have made inquiries, according to Mosley. With her speed and roughhouse style, she has a solid opportunity to earn considerable cash.



Yvonne Owens: "I've been Moses all my life" (photo by Craig T. Greenlee).

Owens also is aware that, if she makes it in Europe, she won't be a center. The forward position is fine with her. That was her position in high school and in community college before she came to Clark. Being an off guard wouldn't take her out of her game, either, she feels. "I've played the big guard position before, so I can shoot the long jumper, too," she says.

As for her college career, there's no reason why this season shouldn't be better than the last, says Owens. She envisions averaging 30 points and 20 rebounds a game, barring injury. "All it means is that I have to have four more points and four more rebounds a game," she says. "It's just a little more work. If I improve at the free throw line (74 percent last year), I shouldn't have a problem doing it."

Yvonne Owens found out a lot about herself as a basketball player last season.

"I knew I could accomplish a lot if I didn't come down with an injury," she says. "Last season made me realize that I was capable of playing with some of the best in the country. It just goes to show that you can do anything you set your mind to do."

Look for Owens to continue her reign in scoring and rebounding this season. She has a first step to the hoop that gives taller centers fits. She also has the body that makes it difficult for opponents to get around her.

Perhaps they should realize, if they don't already, that they're up against a womanly version of Malone. Owens confirms: "I've been Moses all my life."

Craig T. Greenlee is executive editor of American Illustrated Magazine in Atlanta.