

Johnson

From Page A5

Almost make ends meet. As for Winston-Salem's prospects for the tournament, 1991 seems the soonest the Twin City would be able to host the world's largest combination fashion show-party-reunion-athletic event.

But that's only five years away, and now is the best time to organize a campaign of city, business and community leaders to make an impressive pitch.

Unfortunately, despite the potential economic benefits, the city's business establishment seems uninterested. Winston-Salem State University Athletic Director Clarence "Big House" Gaines said last Thursday that he is unaware of any local efforts to lure the CIAA here.

"The coliseum people here have shown no interest," he said.

"The Chamber of Commerce people here have shown no interest. With a 14,000-seat coliseum, why not?"

Bucky Dame, the operations manager for Memorial Coliseum, said the city is interested in the tournament.

"It's been discussed," he said, "but until we find a completion date (for the new coliseum's construction), it will be hard to go after anything."

Ground is supposed to be broken for the new arena "late this fall," Dame said, but no construction bids have been taken yet. It will take roughly 26 months for the new coliseum to be completed, he said.

Which would be well before 1991, even if there were construction delays.

Winston-Salem has so much to offer, though it seems reluctant to sell itself.

For one thing, it's the home of Winston-Salem State and its proud athletic tradition.

For another, it's also the home of Gaines, the nation's winningest active basketball coach.

If the plans are any indication, the coliseum promises to be the centerpiece of the pitch.

Its 14,000 seats will surpass Richmond, Hampton and Norfolk, and it will be large enough to seat a big crowd but intimate enough for basketball.

Twenty-thousand-seat arenas tend to be cavernous, sterile and quiet, and they often give fans the impression that they're Bob Wecker in the upper deck. Witness the profitable but characterless Dean Smith Student Activities Center in Chapel Hill or the money-grubbing NCAA's decision to hold its finals in domed football arenas where Kareem Abdul-Jabbar might look like Tyrone Bogues, depending on where you sit.

Also, Winston-Salem will support the tournament, as will nearby Charlotte, where CIAA member Johnson C. Smith is located, and Greensboro, whose CIAA ties are still strong, thanks to North Carolina A&T's former membership in the conference.

CIAA Commissioner Bob Moorman said last week that the Twin City would be a strong candidate. "They have a (CIAA) school - they have everything," he said. "Winston-Salem State has good attendance. The people of Winston-Salem are very supportive of the program."

Granted, the MEAC Tournament bombed here in Memorial Coliseum, but it bombs nearly everywhere, and no MEAC school is located in the Twin City.

In short, the CIAA Tournament would be a boon both to the city's economy and its new coliseum's prestige. It also would be one of the largest, most lucrative sports events the city can hope to attract, since the arena will be too small to accommodate the ACC Tournament.

How about some initiative from the black community, perhaps involving businesses, WSSU alumni, booster clubs and Greek-letter organizations?

We can have the CIAA Tournament here within five years - if, like Smith-Barney, we're willing to earn it.

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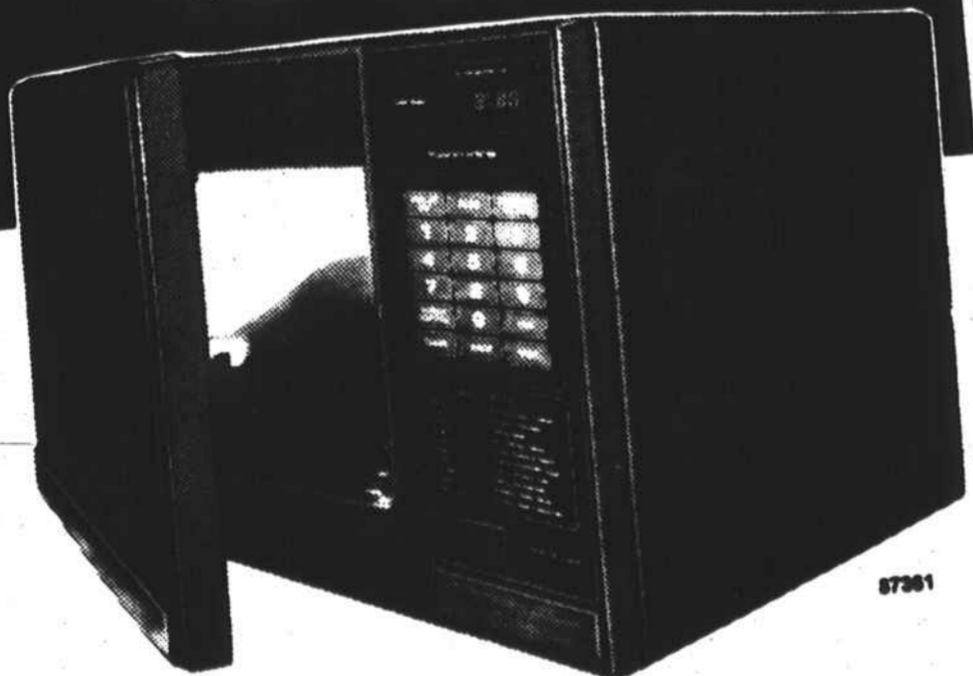
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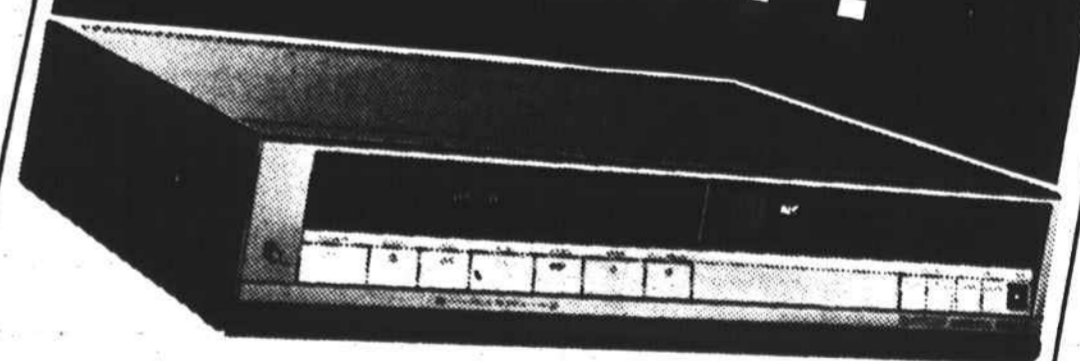
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