

# Cy's guys did better than most people predicted

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE  
Chronicle Sports Editor

For a coach who lost six of his top seven players from a championship team last season, Cy

Alexander didn't fare that badly this time around.

His South Carolina State Bulldogs raised some eyebrows at the MEAC Basketball Tournament when they made the Final Four. The

Dogs lost to eventual tourney champ Coppin State, 48-37 in the semifinal round. SC State finished the year at 13-16.

Alexander, a Winston native, was very aware that this would be a year of transition for his new crew.

mark and made the NCAA Division I playoffs. But most of the major cogs on the '89 team that captured the MEAC regular season and tournament titles completed their college careers last spring.

### Lumps and bumps

Cy's team has taken its share of lumps and bumps this season. But that hasn't caused him to go running to the medicine chest searching for something to relieve upset stomach and heartburn.

"I feel good about this team," Alexander said. "They work hard and it shows. We lost 15 games, but 11 of those were by six points or less. So we've been in every game. We just haven't had the poise we needed to win consistently all year. It's really more a matter of mental development and maturing. That's going to be an on-going process and it's going to take some time."

The fact that the Dogs even finished at .500 in the league this season was somewhat of a surprise. Without a lot of experience coming back, many league observers felt that SC State would find itself lodged at the lower end of the standings.

### Better boardwork

In order for SC State to continue its rise back to the league's upper echelon, Alexander feels that his team will have to work the boards better and shoot better from outside.

"Our inside game did well," the coach said. "But our perimeter people have to improve. What it comes down to having them gain more confidence in hitting that shot from the perimeter."

Inside the paint, SC State was

able to hold its own thanks to two key people.

Travis Williams was one of those factors. The 6-6 junior forward scored 20.9 points and pulled down 10.1 rebounds a game. He also got more than

who tallied 14 points and 6.7 boards a game.

The outside game was null and void for the tournament because of an altercation between guard Ricky Byrd and forward Chris Felix (13.4 ppg). After a game against North Carolina A&T late in the regular season, Byrd and Felix exchanged words in the Dogs' dressing. Byrd pushed Felix, who fell and hit his head, suffering a concussion in the process.

Byrd was suspended from the team for the rest of the season and Felix didn't play in the tournament because of the injury. He is recovering nicely from the injury according to reports.

### Can be good in transition

The Dogs haven't been noted for running the break with any great frequency. But that could change next season if Alexander can get additional rebounding help.

"When we can rebound, we can have a good transition game," the coach explained. "We're not as big as we need to be, but that's going to change next season."

"Still, we have to be sound fundamentally. We have to block out, seal off and attack the boards. We have the guards who can push the ball up the floor and the people who can run. But if you don't get rebounds, you can't run."

### Fleet guards

The Dogs have a pair of fleet of feet guards who are superb at triggering the break. Curtis Faulkner, 7, is more of a pure point guard than Anthony Higginbotham, who plays both guard positions and is more of a scorer. Both are often on the floor at the same time, which will give the Dogs that fast break potential everytime they get a rebound and make a good outlet pass to either one of their ballhandlers.



Photo by T-Lee

Alexander's team has seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

## Coppin State vs. Syracuse

Stewart, a junior, led the MEAC in rebounding (11.1 a game), field goal percentage (.655), was fifth in scoring (18.7 ppg) and fourth in blocked shots (4.3 in 32 games).

Issac, a sharpshooting junior, was second in the league in scoring (17.7 ppg) and three-point field goals made (7.3). He also converted over 85 percent of his free throws (18.6 of 18.8) to also rank No. 2 in that category among MEAC leaders.

Booth averages 11.6 points and 5.5 rebounds a game. Stewart, Issac and Booth are all from Philadelphia.

The Eagles' trigger man is 6-0 point guard Larry Yarbray (9.0 ppg). The Chester, Pa. sophomore led the conference in assists (7.4 a game) and recorded 57 steals (the league's second highest total).

The other Coppin starter is 6-8 junior center Larry McCollum, who averages five points and five rebounds a night. At 270 lbs., McCollum takes up a lot of space around the basket area.

The above mentioned five are on the floor for all Eagles' games. But they do get ample support from the bench with 6-6 guard Derreck Orr, a dangerous long range shooter, plus 6-8 center Joe Hammond and 6-6 sophomore forward Darren Woods.

As a team, Coppin led the MEAC in scoring defense (allowed 66.6 ppg), field goal percentage (.489), field goal defense percentage (.406), rebound margin (+ 5.3), and scoring margin (+ 10.2).

Syracuse is a big team, physically and they rely on their inside game a great deal. The team's

Derreck Coleman, the Big East Player Of The Year. For the season, Coleman tallied 18.2 points and 12 rebounds a game. Billy Owens, a 6-9 forward, led the team in scoring at 19.3 ppg, and 6-4 senior guard Stephen Thompson added 18 ppg.

The other starters are 6-10 center LeRon Ellis and freshman point guard Michael Edwards, who averages 5.5 assists per game.

This is Coppin State's first crack at the NCAA title. But the Eagles do own a national basketball championship, having won the NAIA crown in 1976.

The MEAC's previous results in NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship competition is as follows:

- 1981 — Wyoming 78 Howard U. 43
- 1982 — West Virginia 101 North Carolina A&T 72
- 1983 — Princeton 53 North Carolina A&T 41
- 1984 — Morehead State 70

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- North Carolina A&T 69
- 1985 — Oklahoma 96 North Carolina A&T 83
- 1986 — Kansas 71 North Carolina A&T 46
- 1987 — Alabama 88 North Carolina A&T 71
- 1988 — Syracuse 69 North Carolina A&T 55
- 1989 — Duke 90 South Carolina State 69

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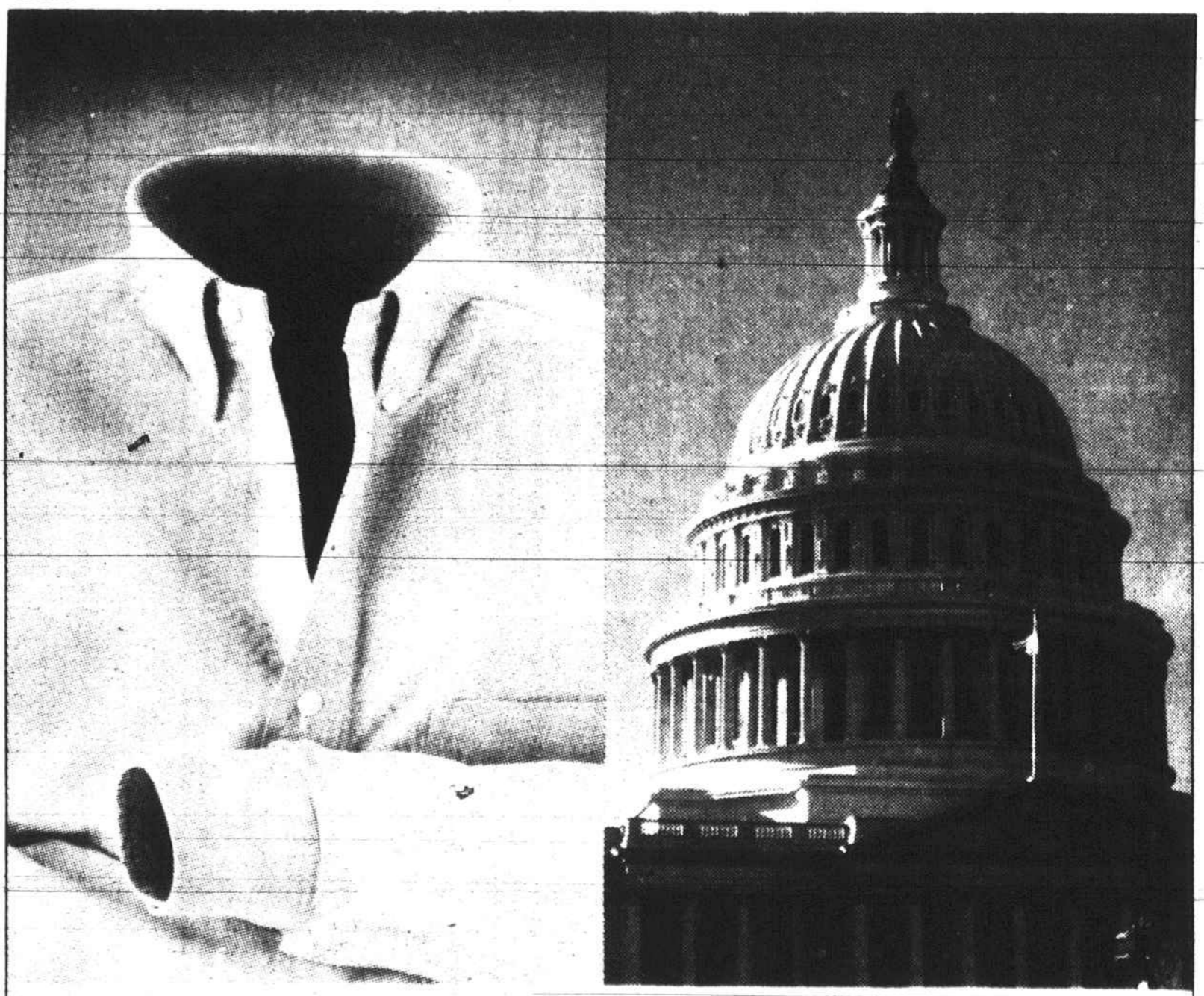
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