

SHOWTIME!

CIAA Tourney promises thrills aplenty

Parity is more than just a word or part of a catch phrase used to describe what's been happening in CIAA roundball this season. It's a fact of life. For that reason, the '91 CIAA Basketball Tournament should give hoops connoisseurs a full taste of slam-jammin', high fivin', thrill by the heartbeat action they so desperately crave.

Virginia Union, which had lost only one of 15 conference games at presstime, rates as a slight favorite. However, the Panthers are not a sure pick to reign supreme. Hampton's Pirates will be an obstacle, primarily because of their defense and because they were the only league team to hang a loss on Union

NORTHERN DIVISION

Virginia Union - Union has an edge because of offensive balance and depth. The Panthers are one of the top scoring teams in the league at 91.7 ppg. But they are also true marksmen. They lead the loop in team field goal percentage (.519) and are second in three-point percentage (.448).

Walter Hurd, who was No. 2 in Division II scoring two years ago at Johnson C. Smith, isn't as prolific at 15.7 ppg, but he makes every shot count — 46.9 shooting percentage from three-point range, 84.6 percent from the foul line, which is best in the league.

Reggie Jones (15 ppg) and Derek Johnson are

option for Hampton.

Norfolk State — The Spartans haven't forgotten what it was like to stand in the winner's circle as last year's tourney victors. However, the Spartans could find it very difficult to repeat this time around.

Jerome Coles (22.5 ppg, 12 rpg) is the pillar of this team. But without enough help coming from his backcourt mates, Coles' effectiveness has been reduced. Spartans opponents have opted to double and triple team Coles and dare someone else to beat them. In the meantime, NSU hasn't been able to adjust and make foes pay for that kind of strategy.

But if Norfolk is able to consistently assert itself

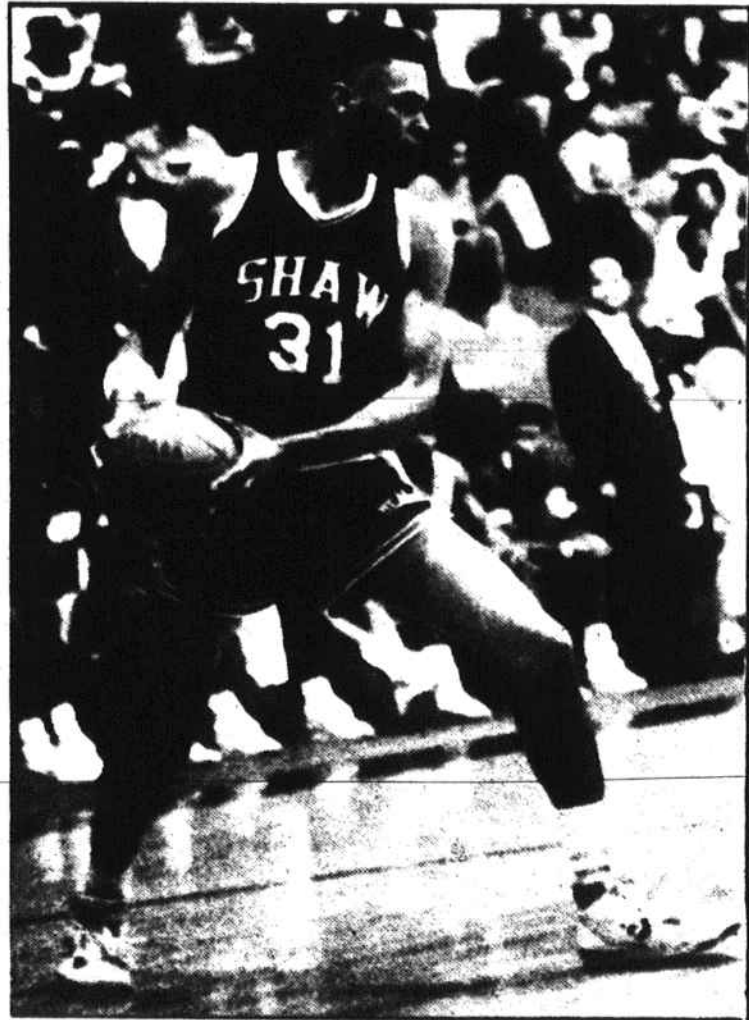


Photo by Max Dunhill

Sheldon Owens of Shaw University is one of the league's top all-purpose players.

Tourney Notes

This year's CIAA basketball festival promises to produce more than a thrill a minute for die-hard conference fanatics. The parity of the league makes picking a sure-fire winner a difficult task at best.

The action for the men takes place at the Richmond Coliseum in Richmond, Va., Feb. 20 - Feb. 23 with the winner getting an automatic bid to the NCAA Division II playoffs.

It's reasonable to predict that Virginia Union, Norfolk State, Shaw University and Johnson C. Smith will be the teams that will comprise the final four. Who will win it? The edge goes to Union. Picking a darkhorse is even more arduous. There are several teams very capable of stealing the show — Hampton University, St. Augustine's or Fayetteville State all have the tools to pull it off.

This year's event has been sold out since last July. Because of the overflow demand, the league has set up a big screen TV party at the Richmond Center (across the street from the tournament site), which will show the action on closed circuit television on Feb. 22 and 23 — the night of the semi-finals and championship finals.

Black Entertainment Television will air the the championship game live on Feb. 23 at 8 p.m. There's no need to call the CIAA office for tickets, they haven't had any for quite a few months.

(65-62).

But while conference observers have become accustomed to seeing the Northern Division walk off with the CIAA prize, there are rumblings coming from the Southern Division.

This time it's no smokescreen.

Johnson C. Smith, Shaw University, and St. Augustine's are legitimate contenders. All three teams have a better than average chance of claiming the tournament championship. And if Fayetteville State can return to the winning form it had in January before injuries set in, the Broncos will stampede a few folks and become the Cinderella of this year's conference party.

Now let's get down to basics concerning the tournament field.

horses around the basket. Johnson is tops in field goal accuracy (72.7 percent) as well as a terrorizing shot blocker. Jones scores 15 ppg and hits 53.6 percent of his shots.

Hampton — This group isn't as free-wheeling at the offensive end as Union. But what they do best is defend and rebound.

As a superior shot blocker, Marvin Childs smacks most shots that come his way into the rafters. Childs, 11.5 rpg, is a major reason why the Pirates limit teams to 68.6 ppg and why they outrebound opponents by a +8.

Offensively, point man Kenny Brown is the headliner at 16.6 ppg. Brown also makes 5.9 assists a night, hits 2.4 threes a game and shoots 84.2 percent from the foul line. Keith Hunter (52.4 percent shooting from the floor) is another dependable scoring

in the paint, they are as dangerous as anyone. Coles grabs the lion's share of rebounds, but Clint Wright (8.6 rpg) is also highly skilled in that phase of the game.

Virginia State — The Trojans will come in and play with a lot of grit. But they have to be hurting from the loss of top scorer Torraire Sears, whose season ended last month because of eye surgery. Everett Watkins has carried on in Sears' absence. Watkins (14.9 ppg, .545 FG percentage) surpassed the 1,000 points in a career milestone vs. Elizabeth City State in late January.

St. Paul's — Good fortune hasn't been a constant companion in the Tigers camp. But they've had some good moments, one of those being an 82-81 victory over Johnson C. Smith. Tim King's jumper with one second left to play put the Golden Bulls away.