

ALUMNI

English gets feet wet as first-year pro

A.J. English didn't set any unrealistic goals during his first season in the NBA. English, the Washington Bullets' second round draft pick in '90, just wanted to get his

feet wet in professional basketball.

The former Virginia Union star did turn in some impressive performances during his rookie season. But there were also times

when he struggled with his shooting and ball-handling. Nevertheless, English averaged 9.2 points and 2.1 rebounds a game while shooting 44.4 percent from the field and 70.9 per-

cent from the free throw line. English calls his initiation into the NBA court wars a learning experience.

"Every night I was playing against a great player," said English, a 6-3, 180 lbs. guard. "The talent level in this league is incredible. I mean, players like Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley are unbelievable. You have to be ready to play all the time.

"I was pleased with the way things shaped up for me. I could have played better in certain games. But I think that overall, things turned out really well for me. It's a big jump from college to the pros. I found that out right away."

Wes Unseld, Bullets head coach, feels that English has the potential to be a fine NBA player. Unseld believes that English did a lot to demonstrate his versatility in the backcourt.

"A.J. played two positions for us," Unseld said. "He's a terrific shooting guard. He has tremendous leaping ability too. But A.J. showed some pretty good ballhandling skills. He had to play point guard on a few occasions and didn't embarrass himself. I've really liked A.J. ever since his college days."

English, a three-time, All-CIAA selection, led the NCAA Division II in scoring at 33.4 ppg as a senior. He joins Charles Oakley (New York Knicks) and Terry Davis (Miami Heat) as the third player from Virginia Union to reach the NBA in the last six years.

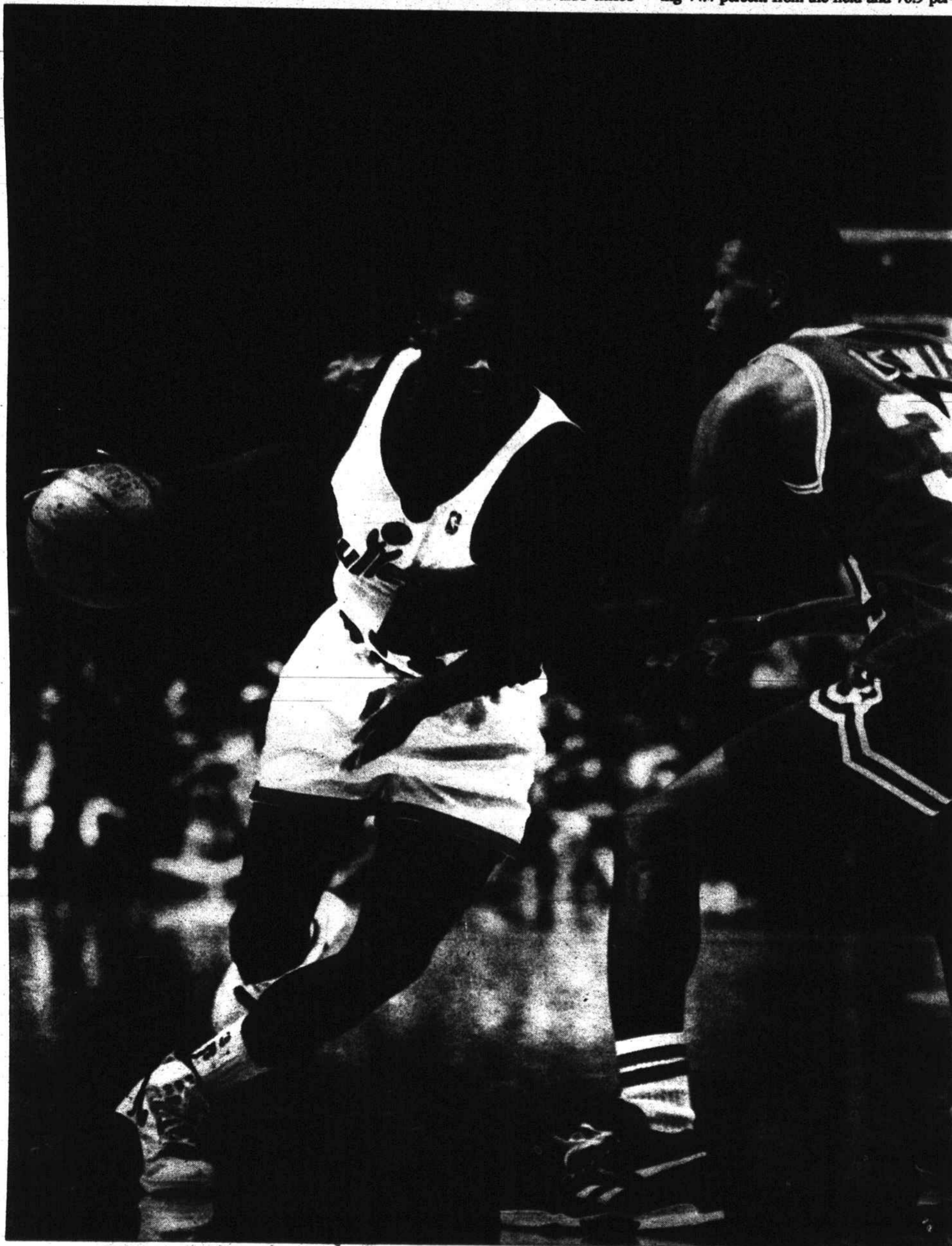
"Virginia Union has one of the best Division II basketball programs in the country," English said. "I have to give a lot of credit to Coach (Dave) Robbins. He does an excellent job of recruiting, coaching and just getting a maximum effort out of everybody. You know, he's got Charles, Terry and myself in the NBA. But coach Robbins really impressed me by getting this year's team to the Final Four. I was sorry to see them lose. I was hoping they would go all the way."

English, a native of Wilmington, Del., and an all-state performer at Howard High School, plans to play a lot of summer league basketball during the off-season.

English will take part in the Bullets' rookie/free agent summer camp along with the Baker League, a summer basketball league in Philadelphia. "I want to play as much as I can," he said. "I definitely want to get more playing time next year. I want to raise my game to the next level."

In addition to bolstering his own game, English wants to see an improved Bullets team next season. He feels they have enough talent to become one of the better teams in the NBA's Eastern Conference.

"We have some great players like Bernard King, Harvey Grant and Pervis Ellison," he said. "If we can stay away from injuries, we'll be in good shape. Plus, we're going to have a high pick in the NBA draft. So that should really help us. My goal is to become a better player. But I want the Bullets to get better too. Hopefully, we'll see some good things in the future."



English is looking to elevate his game to a higher level next season.

Photo by Mitchell Layton

— Donald Hunt