

SPORTS REVIEW

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WINSTON-SALEM DID A NICE JOB WITH CIAA TOURNAMENT

Ok, so the CIAA final was a bit anticlimactic. So Virginia Union kind of rolled past Norfolk State and won the title for a third year.

This 49th CIAA Tournament came off better than any one in recent memory.

The city of Winston-Salem opened its arms and welcomed the league like Richmond and Norfolk didn't do. There were people milling around the Lawrence Joel Coliseum wearing pins that identified them as tournament helpers and these good people were willing to answer any question you had, from where's the nearest cafeteria to "Where's The Party?"

And there was parking.

Anyone remember how nasty a situation that was in Richmond? It was worse in Norfolk.

There were bigger crowds than in recent years.

"It really does seem that, especially for the early games, that the crowds are bigger," said J.C. Smith women's coach Hythia Evans. "That's nice."

And OK, so Evans is from Winston-Salem. And Ok, so this paper is published in Winston-Salem.

We're not being prejudiced. Just truthful.

Many of the fans sitting close enough to press row for the media to hear them talked about how much better they liked the tournament in Winston.

Many of the coaches said so as well.

And this year, the television broadcast got started on time and allowed the media to get their stories to their respective newspapers and T.V. stations and radio stations on time.

There were no glitches.

So congratulations to conference president Leon Kerry and the CIAA board for making this move.

And congratulations to Winston-Salem for helping to make this tournament a huge success.

But one question:

How do you top this next year?

It is the big 50th anniversary you know.

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BARAKA HAS PROVEN THAT "TALL AIN'T ALL"

What Shani Baraka has proven in four years is really kind of simple.

Tall ain't all.

They say you have to be tall to succeed in basketball, that you've got to be long and strong. Shani Baraka, Johnson C. Smith's senior point guard and the Black College Sports Review's CIAA player of the Year, is 5-1 with her Reeboks on. Maybe.

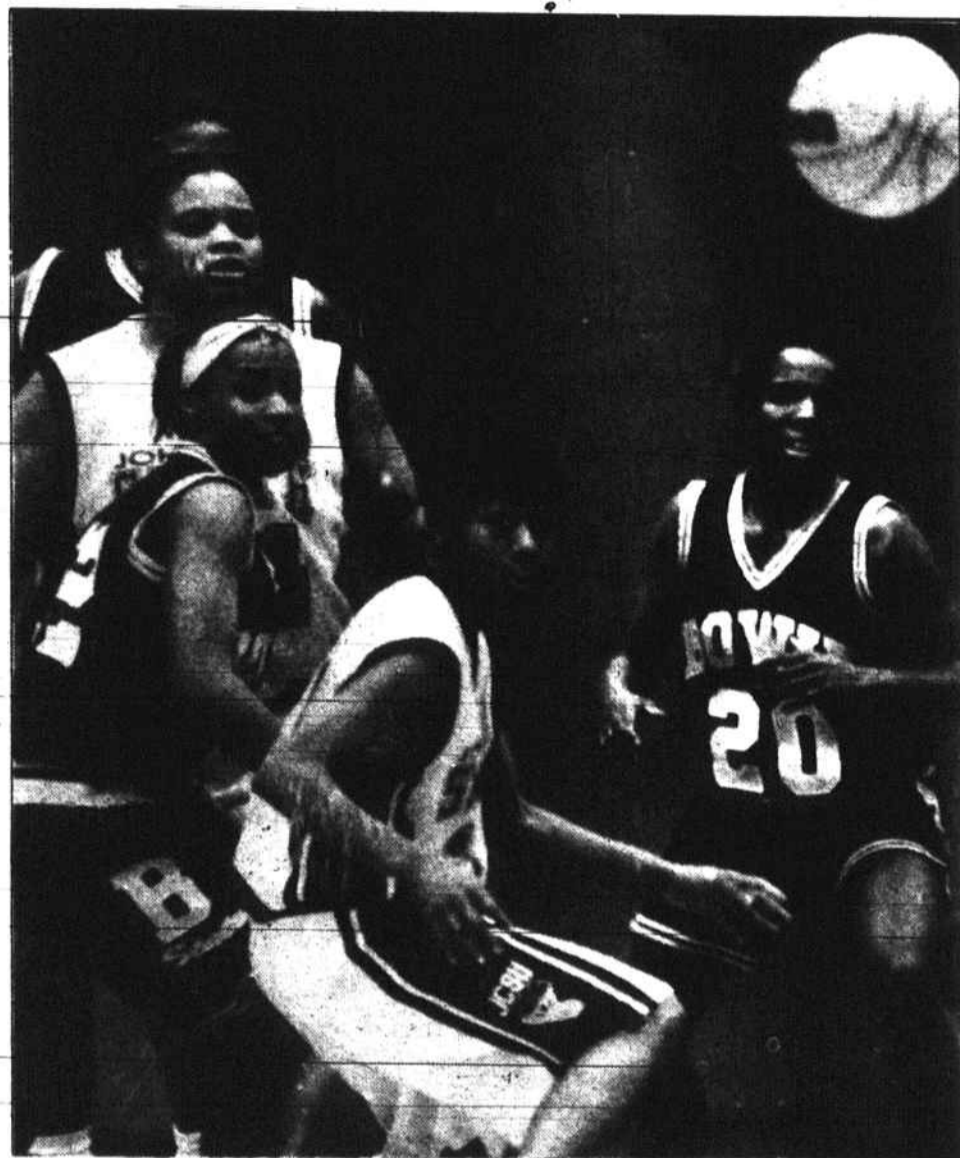
But height didn't stop her. She couldn't always drive down the lane and get her shot off, and her shooting percentage (36%) wasn't the kind of thing you write home to Mom about, but other than that, Baraka was a one-woman gang for the Bulls.

Maybe there are better players in the CIAA, maybe, but there was no player who was more important to her team this year than Baraka, no player more valuable.

That part was not even close.

"I've been particularly impressed with her quickness," N.C. Central coach Jackie Pinnix said after Baraka hit her team with a 23-point, five-rebound and eight-assist performance in Smith's 75-62 win in January. "Her aggressiveness is a strength and she plays a full 40 minutes all the way to the end."

Baraka, who turned 22 on Oct. 23, plays nearly every minute of every game, and since



Despite being 5-1, JSU guard Shani Baraka stands tall in the CIAA.

she came to play for Hythia Evans at Smith, the Bulls have won 77 percent of their games.

"She is," Evans says rather bluntly, "the best point guard in the CIAA."

Baraka owns six school records and is ranked high in CIAA history in nearly every category. At 5-1. Maybe.

But what's odd is that she never really wanted to come to play for Smith. Baraka learned the game from her brother, Obalaji ("He played against me really hard," she said. "And he never, ever, let me win.") and made the Newark, (N.J.) University girls junior varsity as a seventh-grader. By the eighth grade, she was still the youngest player.

She was also the best.

Baraka was recruited by Florida A&M, Seton Hall, Syracuse, Bethune-Cookman, N.C. A&T and Howard. She was all set to attend Howard, where her four brothers and famous father, noted poet Amiri Baraka (the former Leroi Jones), had gone.

But...

"They had a scholarship ready for me and everything (at Howard)," she says. "But I didn't like their program."

Sandy Hewitt, Baraka High School assistant coach, attended Winston-Salem State with coach Evans. Hewitt called Evans, told her about the point guard and Baraka paid a visit to Charlotte, to see Smith.

"I really didn't want to come this far from

All-Time Record

Points, 1,577 for career; places her at No. 3 on the school's all-time chart behind Angela Hamilton (1,852) and Kim Brewington (1,724).

Baraka is No. 9 all-time in the CIAA. Assists: No. 6 in NCAA Division II history, No. 1 in school history with 668. Baraka is No. 3 all-time in CIAA history.

■ Steals: 305 steals, school record.

■ Free Throws: 397 career free throws, school record.

■ Three-Pointers: 192 career threes, school record.

■ Most Field Goals Attempted: 1,559, school record.

■ Most Three-Pointers Attempted: 519, school record.