

BLACK COLLEGE

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THE MEAC GENTLEMEN

The first two MEAC Basketball Tournaments were held at Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium in Durham, North Carolina in 1972 and 1973. Durham was home-base for the conference office from 1970 through March 1982. The conference office then moved to Greensboro, the city that has hosted the most MEAC Tournaments, with ten. After an initial two-year stint in Baltimore (1974, 1975), the Greensboro Coliseum housed the event from 1976 to 1979, again in 1983 and 1984, and finally from 1987 to 1990. The other sites were Winston-Salem, NC (1980-1982), Philadelphia, PA (1985 and 1986), Norfolk, VA (1991-1993), and Baltimore again (1994, 1995).

North Carolina A&T's men, two-year defending champions who have won 15 of 24 MEAC Tournament title games, also received a MEAC record seven straight trips to the NCAA Division I Basketball Championship from 1982 to 1988. However, Howard secured the first ever MEAC automatic entry in 1981 after winning its second straight league title. Howard lost to Wyoming in the opening round. The MEAC has enjoyed NCAA post-season play since that season, but is yet to post a first round victory. Howard, which has appeared in 13 title games, including nine straight (1979 to 1987), came back to win it all again in 1992 but dropped a first round contest to Kansas. NC A&T's first round opponents were: West Virginia, Princeton, Morehead State, Oklahoma, Kansas, Alabama, Syracuse, and Arkansas. South Carolina State broke NC A&T's streak in 1989 with its only MEAC title run and lost to Duke in the opener. Coppin State took the crowns in 1990 and 1993, and faced Syracuse and Cincinnati. Florida A&M grabbed its lone title in 1991, coming out of the fifth seed position and lost to NE Louisiana. The other two MEAC Tournament championships went to Maryland Eastern Shore in 1974 and Morgan State in 1977.

Morgan made a big splash by winning the 1974 NCAA Division II National Title (beat SW Missouri in final) and its star, Marvin Webster, became the first player selected during the professional leagues' drafting process.

Besides the NCAA appearances, MEAC teams have also been invited to the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) five times, including last season. UMES's 1974 team also gained national notoriety by entering the NIT from the Division II level and defeating Manhattan before losing to Jacksonville. NC A&T played in two, losing to Providence in 1976 and Duke in 1981. Coppin was invited in 1991 and lost to SW Missouri, but returned last season to beat St. Joseph's before losing at South Florida.

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FORT HAYS STATE OBSTACLE FOR VA. UNION IN TOURNEY

Virginia Union may have lost the CIAA title, but the Panthers are now concentrating on an even bigger fish: the NCAA Division II national title.

And they have a great shot. Dave Robbins' Union team was ranked No. 1 for much of the season. But their biggest obstacle to gold this season may be a little team from Kansas.

Fort Hays State is 29-0 this season, ranked No. 1 in NCAA Division II and the nation's only unbeaten men's team in college basketball.

"The fun's going to come when the season's over," said coach Gary Garner, who coached Drake from 1981-88. "We really don't have time to enjoy it right now. "Our students and community have been great. Our colors are black and gold and they seem to be everywhere. There are tiger paws everywhere, in merchants' windows, on doors. It's great to see the people respond this way."

Behind Alonzo Goldston's 32 points, 16 rebounds and four blocks Saturday night, Fort Hays overcame Nebraska Kearney's seven-point halftime lead and won a 85-79 victory in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference tournament championship game.

Next up is the NCAA Division II tournament beginning this weekend. If Fort Hayes, as expected, gets to host the early-round games, things are certain to be rocking at Gross Memorial Coliseum,

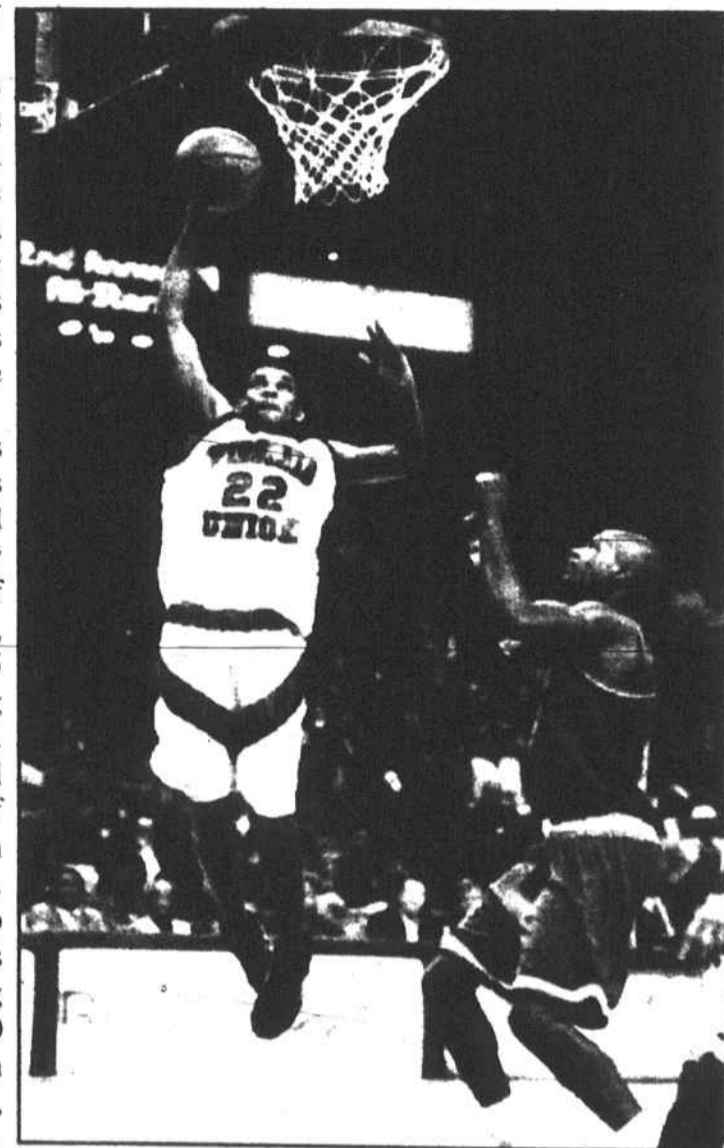
Gary Garner masks.

Although Garner insists his team caught some breaks in a few early wins, statistics indicate his team is more that lucky.

Fort Hays State has outscored opponents by an average of 24.1 points, scoring 94.5 while giving up just 70.4. Its field goal percentage of 55.1 is tops in Division II. Six of its top seven players are shooting better than 50 percent. From 3-point range, the team is hitting 43 percent.

Garner's caution at the beginning of the year was understandable. Although the team was coming off a second straight 20-win season, the Tigers had lost both starting guards and a starting forward, including Dennis Edwards, the two-time MVP of the conference.

Goldston, a 6-foot-9 center, and guard Geoff Eck were the



Union & Co. hope to soar during the tournament.

point guard Chad Creamer had started about half the time in college transfer. Going into the NCAA tournament, their last loss was to Morningside College, 85-82, in the regional championship game a year ago.

After leaving Drake, Garner was out of coaching for two years before taking the job at Fort Hays.

"I just really missed coaching," he said. "I guess I'm just a dumb coach."

He caught the coaching bug while serving as an assistant under Norm Stewart for several years at Missouri.

Stewart has been calling his former assistant after every game. Some of us associated with different programs don't always recognize what the other person is doing," said Stewart, the dean of Big Eight coaches. "I can remember coaching at Division II."

The 14-hour bus rides can be a little long. But Gary's team is the only team in the country to go through the regular season undefeated. I'm very happy for him."



Virginia Union Coach Dave Robbins has his team set for a run at the national title.

where fans have begun wearing only returning starters, although