

## Press Box

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teams, Norfolk State and Hampton Univ. It has also seen changes in the tournament's operation. The once passionate crowds of the tournament had become more of a "wine and cheese" audience during the games. But an infusion of fresh ideas has once again made the tournament one of the nation's major attractions, when it comes to African Americans and their leisure time.

Give the conference office credit. After last season's tournament produced one of the smallest championship game crowds since it came to Winston-Salem, Commissioner Leon Kerry and his staff stepped up to the plate. They put their heads together and utilized the involvement of corporate

funding to bring more excitement to the tournament this season.

Although the league's plan to include the students more in the tournament this season didn't come off as planned, they were able to devise a program for the tournament at the conclusion of the 2000 season. By exposing the students to the tournament's festivities, the future of the tournament will again become bright.

As far as the on-the-court occurrences, this season has been one of the most competitive in the league. The talent level continues to improve and the league's coaches have done well with the resources and talent available to them.

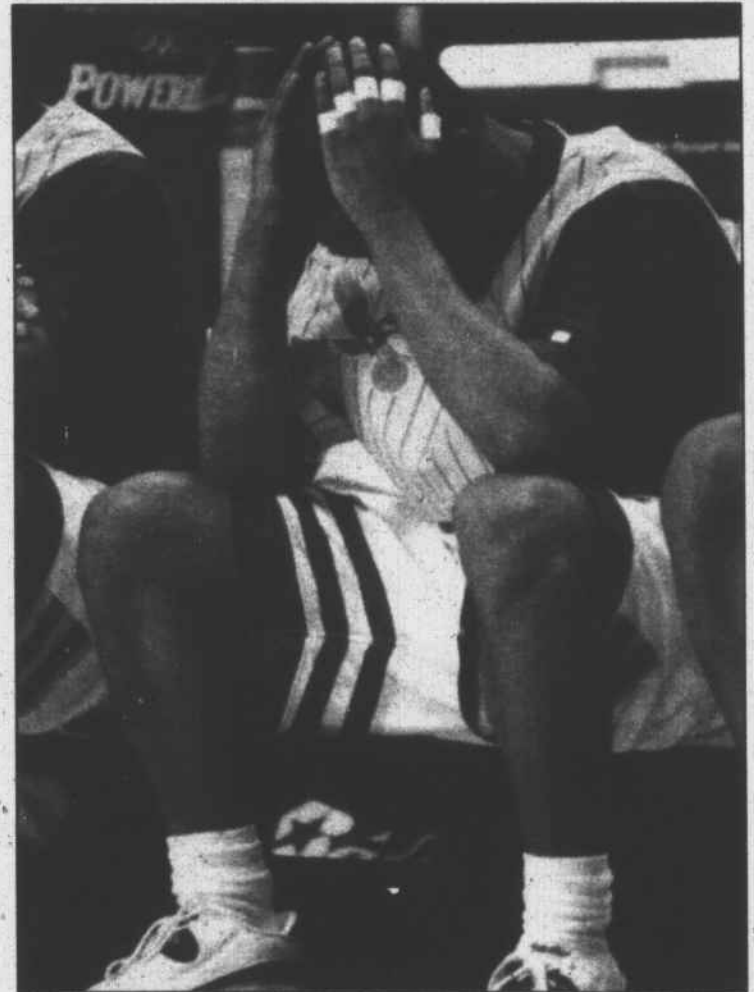
That fact is illustrated plainly in the fact that both the divisional races on the

men's side went down to the final week of play before Virginia Union captured the Eastern Division and North Carolina Central was crowned the Western Division champion.

The only divisional race that wasn't close was in the Eastern Division of the women's standings. Bowie State rolled to the divisional crown and is the prohibitive favorite to capture the Women's Tournament title.

In the west, North Carolina Central surprised the field and held off Livingstone for its first divisional title in many years. Livingstone pushed the Lady Eagles to the wire before finishing second.

But if last season is an indication of things to come, this year's tournament might once again be up for grabs.



NCCU's men are hoping their experience in the tournament is better than last year's when they were knocked off by Livingstone.

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The National Black Theatre Festival is an international outreach program of the North Carolina Black Repository Company, NC BRC, celebrating 20 years. Since its inception in 1979, the festival has been a leading member of the Arts Council of Winston-Salem & Forsyth County and receives funds through a grant from the North Carolina State Council of Cultural Resources.