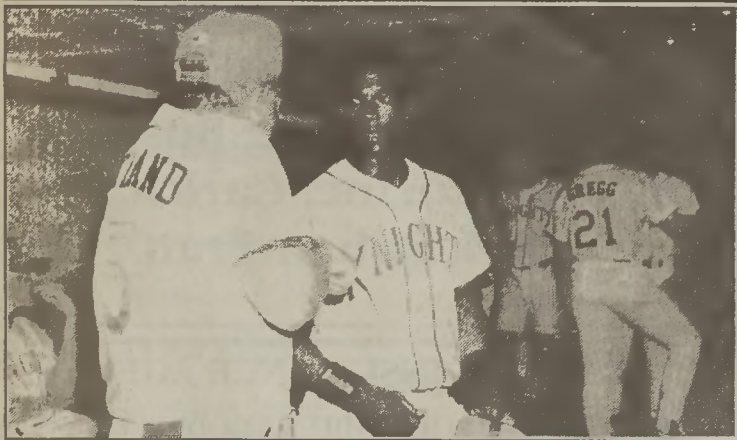


SPORTS



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Second baseman Ralph Milliard (center) is a defensive asset for the Charlotte Knights.

Milliard spells defense for Knights

By Karl Petraroja
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

For a 22-year old rookie in the International League, Charlotte Knights second baseman Ralph Milliard has his feet firmly planted on the ground.

Actually, not all the time. Milliard's dazzling defense takes him off his feet from time to time, but he knows exactly where to go. It helps to

have a double-play partner like shortstop Edgar Renteria, whom Milliard played with last year at AA Portland.

"Defense is my No. 1 priority, of course," Milliard said. "Just playing with him, we got used to each other, so things really get smooth. There's nothing we have to worry about. We know each other and that makes it easier."

Charlotte manager Sal Rende is getting to know

Milliard, and what he sees is something he'll never tire of.

"It's super. I mean just watching those guys go out and play defense," Rende said. "They're fun to watch. They make so many good plays, every night I'm saying something on the game report."

"It's got to be a great feeling as a pitcher knowing that if you get a ground ball, you got a pretty good chance of getting an out."

It's a pretty good feeling for the whole team. Charlotte's defense is much improved over last season, when weak pitching combined with spotty defense doomed the Knights to a 59-81 record. Charlotte is also hitting better, which has helped boost the Knights to a first place record through the opening month of the season.

Milliard has also been a pleasant surprise at the plate. See MILLIARD Page 10B

Magic act, part 3

Orlando looks forward to Chicago Bulls

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shaquille O'Neal is always looking for a bright spot, even after a bad outing.

"Winning at home makes it sweeter," he said, looking ahead to Orlando's chance to wrap up the Eastern Conference semifinals against Atlanta with a victory Wednesday.

Of course, if O'Neal could make a free throw every now and then, the series would have ended Monday and the Magic could be resting up for a meeting with the Chicago Bulls in the conference finals.

Orlando is poised for a rematch with the Bulls, who eliminated New York Tuesday in the Eastern Conference final. In the West, Seattle, fresh off a four-game sweep of two-time champion Houston, will take on the winner of the San Antonio-Utah series.

After losing the first three games, Atlanta managed to avoid a sweep with a 104-99 win in large part because O'Neal's old bugaboo - foul shooting - reared up again at critical moments.

One after another, his shots clanked off the rim, most with not even a glimmer of hope of touching the bottom of the net. By the end of the night, he was 5-for-17, missing all seven in the second half when the game was on the line.

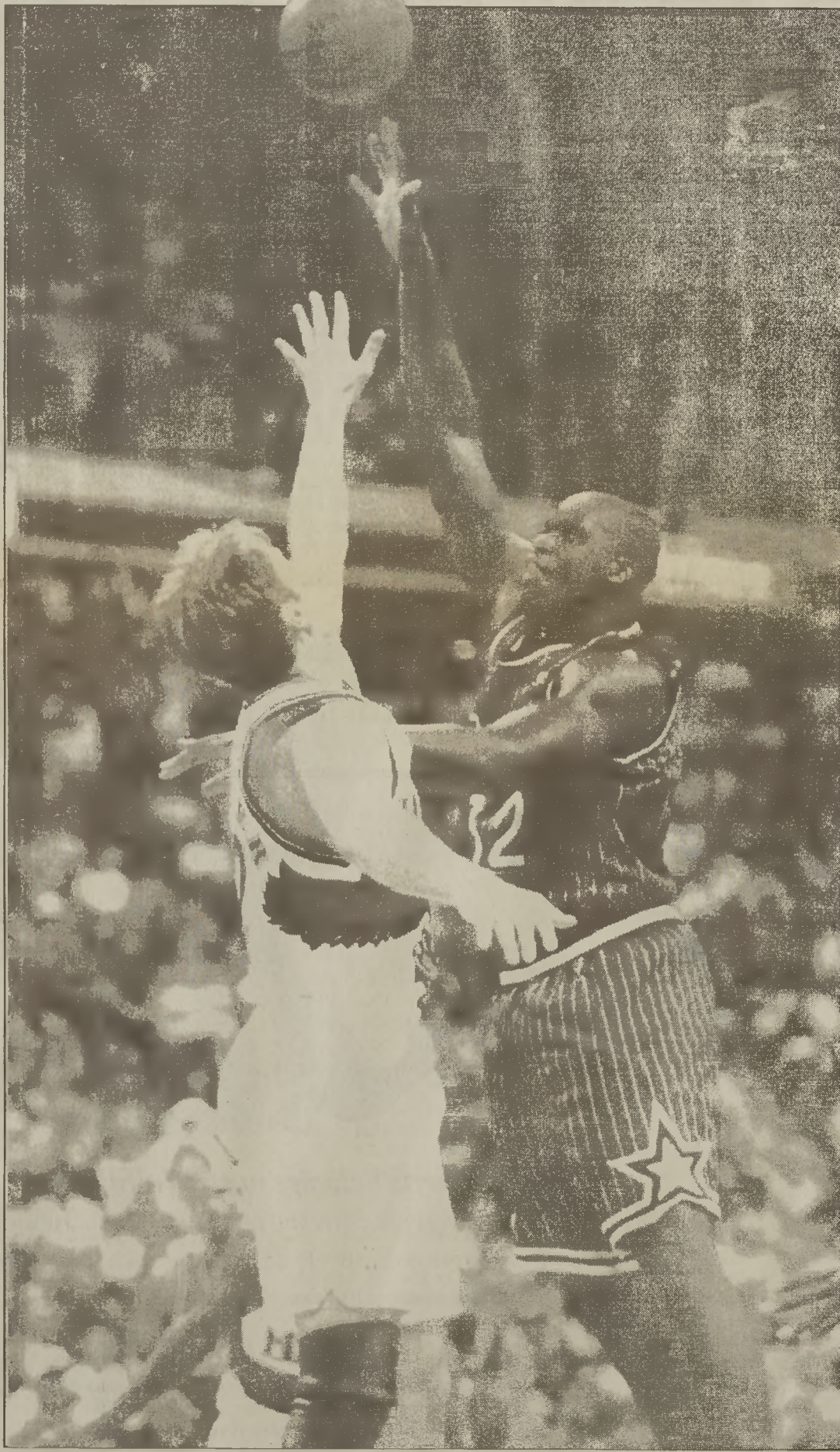
"I've won more games than I've lost at the line," said O'Neal, who isn't going to win many with his 42 percent free-throw shooting in the playoffs. "(Monday) was my fault. I don't make excuses for my play."

Houston still has heart. They just don't have a third straight NBA crown.

Their two-year title reign ended Sunday with a 4-0 sweep by SuperSonics, who had more than an answer for every escape trick the Rockets tried.

Now the challenge is getting the title back.

See PLAYOFFS Page 10B



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Orlando's Shaquille O'Neal fires a hook shot over Atlanta's Christian Laettner during Game 5 of the Eastern Conference semifinal in Atlanta.

This Belle takes toll on Angels

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM, Calif. - Albert Belle got the best of Troy Percival's fastball - and the California Angels reliever's hairdo as well.

Soon after announcing he would let his hair grow until he gave up a run, Percival was rocked by three solo homers in the ninth inning as the Indians beat the Angels 4-1.

"I haven't seen as hard a heater as his in a long time," Cleveland manager Mike Hargrove said. "But we've got guys who can get the bat out in front."

Belle, after being seemingly overmatched by a fastball that put the count at 0-and-2, hit a towering shot to dead-center to break a 1-1 tie.

The homer, Belle's major league-high 200th in the last five years, ended Percival's string of 24 straight outs, 11 of them strikeouts. And two outs later, Sandy Alomar and Jim Thome also homered.

"Albert got a pretty good pitch to hit, and seeing him homer pumped me up to face a guy who throws 98-mile fastballs," Thome said. "Albert fired everyone up."

Belle's 14th homer also humbled Percival.

"I let my confidence get too high. I tried to throw the ball by him, and I should know better than that," Percival said. "The guy's got

See BELLE Page 10B

Stewart wants chance to start as Steelers' QB

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - Kordell Stewart wants to be a quarterback. John Elway wants to be the winning quarterback in a Super Bowl.

Last season Stewart was all over the field, playing running back, receiver and quarterback for the AFC champion Pittsburgh Steelers.

Now he wants more.

"The chance of me being the starting quarterback is there," Stewart said Monday at a promotional appearance for the NFL in Central Park. "That's what I want to be this year."

Elway also has a feeling of urgency. The 35-year-old quarterback will begin his 14th season at Denver still searching for his first Super Bowl championship.

"There are only so many things that you can do to try to win a Super Bowl," Elway said of the Broncos' three losses in 1986, '87 and '89. "Frustration wise, sure I would love to win one, but I'm not going to become a manic depressant when I get done if I haven't."

See STEWART Page 11B

All-Star game shows off HBCU talent

By Wade Nash
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

ATLANTA - Coata Malone wasn't going to let anyone stop him in the Black College All-Star basketball game.

Malone, Alabama A&M's center, stormed in at the pre-game breakfast and yelled, "I'm mad, I'm going off today. I'm going to show you how bad I am." His South teammates laughed, while Virginia Union's Ben Wallace looked at Malone. Later that morning, Wallace finally spoke. "I don't do a lot of talking," the North

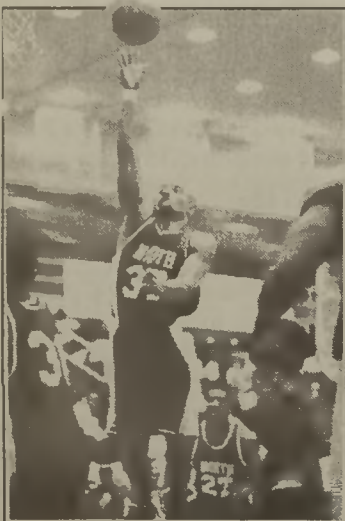
center said. "I just let my play on the court speak for me."

The game, matching the North team from the CIAA and MEAC against the South made up of players from the SWAC and SIAC, allowed six fouls, a 30-second shot clock, and no zone defenses. The emphasis was on playing to NBA rules to give scouts a first-hand look at players' skills.

"I want the scouts to really see the kids in an NBA game situation," tournament coordinator Mark Gray said. "I hope the score will be 125-123,

which should thrill the crowd, especially with the players we have. The slams are really going to be funky." Wallace and Malone glared at each other prior to the opening toss, Malone smiled, Wallace gave him a piercing look, indicating the goofing was over. The South players still talked a good game, but now it was time to play. The North played a tight man-to-man defense challenging every shot, denying open passes. The run-and-gun offense normally present in all star games never showed

See ALL-STAR Page 10B



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Hampton's JaFonde Williams scores two of his 24 points.

Run to daylight



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Connecticut Coyote Les Barley picks up yardage against the Charlotte Rage in Arena Football League action last week.