BLACK COLLEGE REPORT

Hornets: Growing pains and naive expectations

By SAM DAVIS
Review Staff Writer

To paraphrase Mark Twain, rumors concerning the demise of Delaware State's basketball program are greatly exaggerated, says Coach Joe Dean Davidson, whose Hornets had, at this writing, finally begun to make headway in the MEAC regular-season race.

DelState, which rallied to post a 12-16 record in Dean's first season last year, was picked by the MEAC's coaches to win the conference crown this season. But the young Hornets sputtered through their first 15 games, posting a lowly 3-12 record.

Davidson, who compiled a 224-40 record in 10 years at powerful Dunbar High in Washington, D.C., and who obviously isn't used to 7-12 records, remains undaunted.

"I'm not apologizing or making excuses," Davidson says emphatically. "I have nothing to make excuses about. We feel that the program is improving. All I can do is come in here and work as hard as I can.

"The Delaware State basketball team is alive and well," says Davidson. "We've played very well at times and gotten progressively better as the season has gone along. We can play better, but we haven't embarrassed ourselves."

Based on the Hornets' showing in recent wins over Bethune-Cookman, South Carolina State and North Carolina A&T, which upped Delstate's conference record to 4-3 and a tie for third place in the MEAC standings, Davidson may have a point.

Davidson also says his fellow coaches in the MEAC were perhaps a bit hasty in predicting his team to do so well.

"I'm only in my second year," he says. "Why should I be picked to win the conference? This is not the second year the conference has been playing.

"Most of the other coaches have been at their schools seven or eight years and had a chance to build their programs," he says. "After I've been here for that long, then maybe someone could make a prediction like that for us. That would be be a very good reason for making those type of predictions."

While Davidson says he feels the MEAC's coaches did his team an injustice by predicting it to head the pack at the end of the season, he isn't bitter.

"A couple of coaches said Delaware State is going to be good and things just snowballed from there," he says. "Wouldn't you predict the other guys would be better than you? It takes the pressure off of you."

Since Davidson accepted the Delaware State job only two days before the end of the '83-84 recruiting campaign, he says, he wasn't able to bring in many players during his first season. Compounding his woes this year is the fact that his team only returned two players from a year ago and lost guard Danny Sapp, the team's leading scorer last year, when Sapp was declared ineligible for NCAA competition.

"Technically, I never had Danny Sapp this year," says Davidson. "Unbeknown to me, it had been five years since the time he first enrolled in college.

"We would have been a better ball club if we had him on the team," says Davidson. "There were expectations on the part of the team. Nonetheless, life must go on. Danny Sapp will no longer play for Delaware State and we have to live with that reality."

Another reason coaches and sportswiters chose Delaware State as the MEAC favorite was the strong recruiting season the Hornets enjoyed last spring. But Davidson says freshmen shouldn't be asked to come in and make a major impact right away.

"I feel good about our freshmen in the sense that they will become sophomores next year," Davidson says. "You need experience to win on this level of competition."

Look around the MEAC, Davidson says, and it's obvious that the top teams have more experienced personnel.

"Look at North Carolina A&T," he says. "They returned their entire backcourt, including the three-time tournament MVP, Eric Boyd.

"In all, A&T returned seven or eight players that saw action last year. Yet, people expected us to win the conference over them."

Despite the growing pains, Davidson says, he feels his team is on target for his long-range plans.

"The team is very positive and optimistic," says Davidson. "With each disappointment, they seem to work harder and come together. There are highs and lows, but every time we're low something comes along to renew our spirit. We know we're not as good as people said we would be. But we know we're not as bad as our record indicates."

Senior center Dominic Snowden (without the ball): One of the keys to DelState's recent success (photo courtesy Delaware State College).

Davidson says his team has been able to put together some strong stretches of basketball on occasion. But, because people's expectations were so high, he says, they might not see it that way.

"It causes people that don't know the situation to think we're not doing a good job," he says. "As far as the effort going into putting together the program, I know we are making progress."

While there haven't been a lot of ups for the Hornets, Davidson has been pleased with the play of senior center Dominic Snowden. Snowden has averaged a league-leading 19.5 points through 20 games and is fourth in the MEAC in rebounding with 7.5 a game.

"Dominic's played well for us," says Davidson. "He's been consistent in every game. He's the only senior on the team so we look to him for leadership."

Another plus for the Hornets in recent games has been the play of junior transfer Roy Johnson. Johnson, who joined the team after the Christmas break, has solidified the DelState backcourt.

Further, Davidson says he feels his program is still in its infant stages and can only get better with time.

"If we're given the minimal amount of time that is normally given to a

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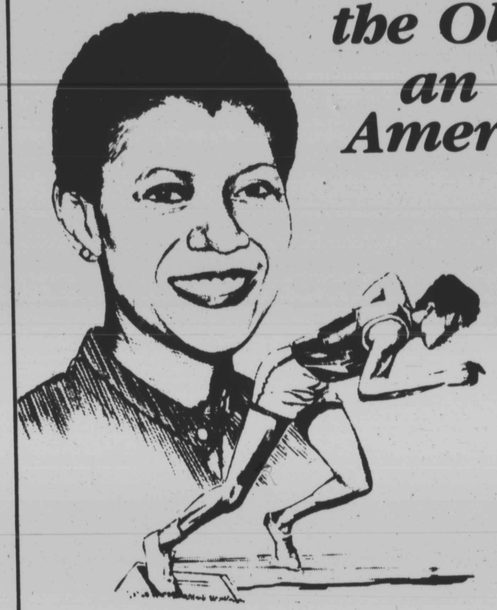
Wonder Bread and the Olympics . . . an American tradition



Wilma Rudolph

Olympic Record:

1956 Bronz Medal	400 meter relays
1961 Gold Medal	100 meters
1961 Gold Medal	200 meters
1961 Gold Medal	400 meter relays

The only American woman ever to win 3 gold Olympic medals was born in St. Bethlehem, Tennessee, the 20th of 22 children. An early childhood illness required her to wear a leg brace but this setback only served to increase her determination to excel. In 1957, as a student at Tennessee State University, she began preparing for her Olympic track career.

Today, she is president of the Wilma Rudolph Foundation and lives in Indianapolis. Her organization promotes the physical, mental and moral development of youth and athlectic aspirations. Her autobiography, "Wilma", was aired on NBC—TV as a two hour movie. The world record holder was voted "Female Athlete of the Year" by the Associated Press in 1960 and 1961.

This year, Ms. Rudolph is spokesperson for Continental Baking Company's 1984

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