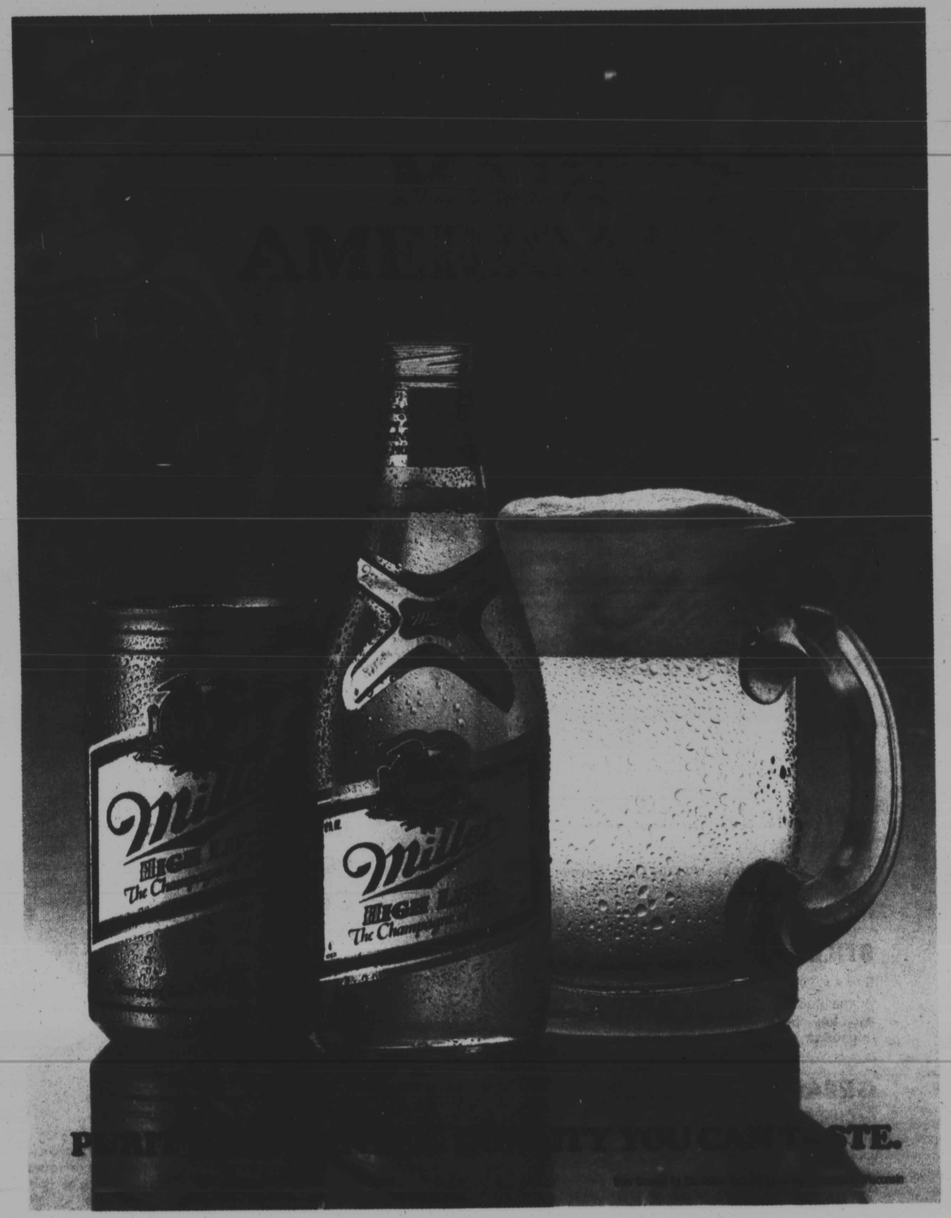


MILLER PRESENTS BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PROFILE

The enigma who put the clamps on Oakley

By SAM DAVIS
Review Staff Writer

Six-foot-six Winston-Salem State University senior center Kevin "Cadillac" Vaughan, who grew up in a mostly-Italian section of South Philadelphia, seems to be a walking contradiction.

In some situations, he's a boisterous free spirit, but get him away from the crowd and he's a down-to-earth, street-smart, caring young man.

A standout prepster at Martin Luther King High School, Vaughan went to work in the shipyards of Philadelphia after graduation in 1979, rather than going off to college.

When you look at his physical stature, Vaughan seems perfectly suited for a job as a dockworker, but he worked instead as, of all things, a clerk-typist.

"It was better than anything else I could get," he says. "I had typing classes for four years in high school and, by the time I graduated, I could type a hundred words a minute," he says.

"I can still type about that fast," he says. "But, I'd probably make about 25 mistakes because I haven't practiced in a long time."

Vaughan continued playing basketball during the two years he worked in the shipyards. His reputation as a street player continued to grow. During his days in the city he was known as "Seville" to basketball afficionadoes.

"In Philadelphia, people give you a nickname by the way you play," Vaughan says. "Everybody thought I was too smooth or cool when I played. So they started calling me Seville, like the car. It's a smooth ride."

While playing in a city recreation league, Vaughan was noticed by one of C.E. "Bighouse" Gaines' former players at Winston-Salem State, Leon Whitley. Whitley, who played for Gaines during the mid-50s, called Gaines and recommended Vaughan for a scholarship.

"He's the same guy that recruited Earl Monroe, Teddy Blount and Kevin McRay," Gaines says of Whitley. "He's an official in the recreation basketball league in Philadelphia. We've always been very close."

On Whitley's advice, Gaines offered Vaughan a chance to play for the Rams. But Vaughan wasn't so sure he wanted to come South and go to college.

"I had to think about it," says Vaughan. "I still had the spirit of wanting to play college basketball. But I wasn't that eager to leave my job. After I thought about it, I decided I could make more money if I went to college and got a degree. So I said I'd take a year off from my job to see if I liked it."

That first year in North Carolina was rocky for Vaughan.

"When I first came here, I would pack up and leave on any given day," he says. "It was hard getting adjusted to the place. Every time I felt that way, I would talk to Chief (Gaines) and I'd stay here."

And though Vaughan has been the Rams' starting pivotman for the past four years, it has been an up-and-down career. On occasions, he's shown flashes of brilliance. At other times, Vaughan has drawn the ire of Gaines, college basketball's winningest active coach.

"I've had writers describe him as flamboyant and others to say he's colorful," Gaines says when asked to comment on Vaughan. "I'll just say that he's an excellent defensive player with quick feet and a lot of energy.

"If you could ever harness it and put it in one direction, we'd be all right," says Gaines. "But you don't ever have to worry about who he's playing for. Sometimes his choices aren't what you'd like to be, but he's going to give 100 percent."

Throughout his career, Vaughan has been a showman, both on and off the court. Often that has gotten him in trouble with Gaines, opposing players and, at times, his own teammates.

"He really likes attention," says Gaines. "Kevin has a hidden desire to really excel."

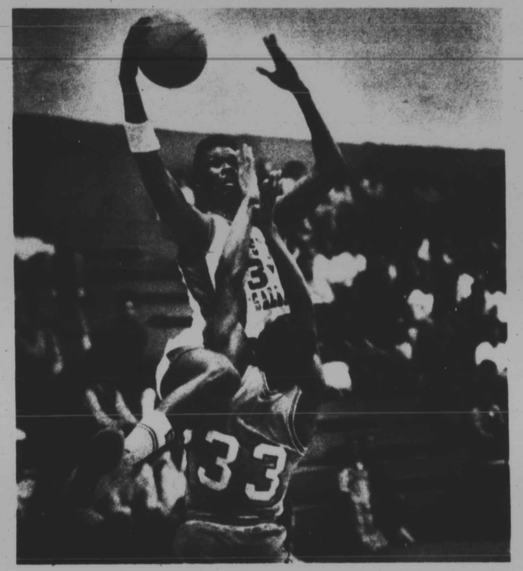
Vaughan agrees.

"Everybody wants to stay in the limelight now and then," he says. "I have to be a little different on the court than everybody else. I don't look at basketball the way a lot of people do."

For Vaughan, that means running his mouth a mile-a-minute on the court, trying to psyche out his opponent. And though he's known throughout the CIAA for doing so, it's been effective for him.

"Straight-up physically, I'm usually no match for other centers," says Vaughan, who at only 6-6 is usually two or three inches shorter than his counterparts. "Talking junk to them usually takes them out of their games. It's part of my game and thus far it's gotten the job done."

Perhaps the finest game of Vaughan's career came in the recent NCAA Division II playoffs, when he held Virginia Union's mammoth 6-9, 240-pound Charles Oakley, who averaged 24 points and 18 rebounds a game, to only 11 points and six rebounds in the Rams' 44-42 win. Not only did Vaughan's team shut down Oakley, but WSSU also knocked the Panthers from the unbeaten ranks after 30 straight wins.



WSSU's Vaughan: Using his talent -- and mouth -- to beat the odds (photo by James Parker).

While Vaughan plays the tough-guy act on the court, he's really a down-to-earth, sensitive, caring young man.

"He's like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," says Gaines. "My wife thinks he's an angel."

Another role he plays for the Rams, sometimes to the chagrin of Gaines and fellow players, is resident comic for the team in the locker room.

"I try to keep everyone loose," he says. "If someone makes a mistake, I try to bring out the humor in it."

Away from the court, he says he tries to maintain that same type of playfulness in his chosen field, special education.

"It's something I plan to use when I graduate," he says. "For the last couple of years, I've had an opportunity to work at day care centers during the summer. I really love working with kids. It's always been a special thing for me to help kids."

Still, Vaughan says his fondest memories of college will always be of Gaines, a man who has helped mold so many young athletes into men.

"You're not going to find too many coaches like him," Vaughan says. "The relationship I've had with him the past four years is really indescribable. The man has been so good to me."

Vaughan admits the two have had their tiffs, but more often than he'd like to admit, Gaines was only trying to help him grow up.

"We can sit down and talk and he'll say something bad about me," says Vaughan. "But then, the next minute he'll say something to pick me back up.

"He lets you know that in life, everybody makes mistakes," he says. "Chief is like a pencil with an eraser on it. In four years he's taught me a lot. He's made me feel a lot differently about myself. He lets you know we're all here for something.

"As long as I'm around him, I'm going to continue to learn," says Vaughan. "I'm going to stick around him because he's been here so long and has so many experiences. Everything he says to me, I'm going to lock it up in here," Vaughan says, pointing to his head, "so I can use it on him later."