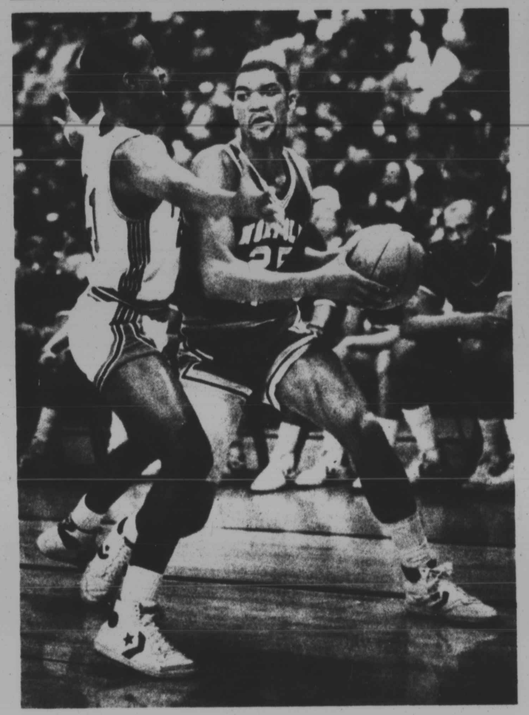
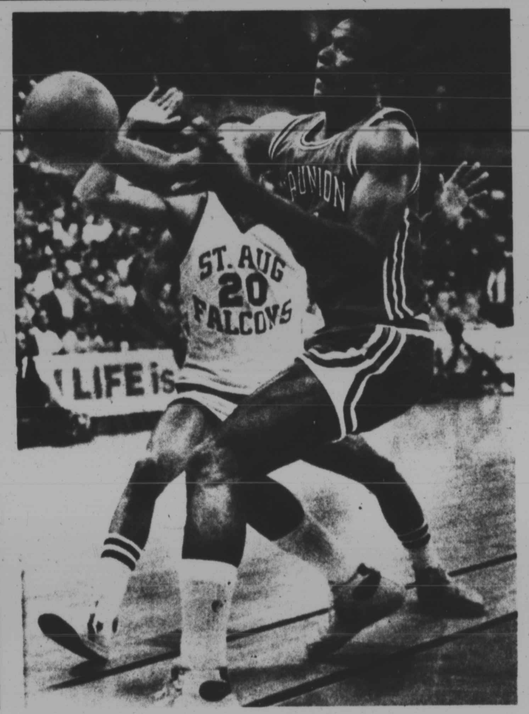
CIAA REPORT



Norfolk State's Barry Mitchell is hounded by Union's Steve Silva in the CIAA finals (photo by James Parker).



Virginia Union's mighty Oakley played some mightly fine basketball in a mightly tight title game against Norfolk (photo by James Parker).

Norfolk: Lamenting the title that got away

By ROBERT ELLER
Review Staff Writer

They will move to Richmond next year, taking their flashy cars, stylish clothes, lavish parties and $3 million-plus out of the Norfolk economy. And, while Norfolk city officials will more than likely spend quite a few hours talking about the tournament that got away, they won't match the amount of time Norfolk State fans will spend mourning the title that got away in the 40th annual CIAA Tournament.

The underdog Spartans, with guard Ralph Tally playing like a man possessed, came within an eyelash of spoiling powerful Virginia Union's unbeaten roll through the rough-and-tumble CIAA.

But a blocked shot by the smallest player on the floor, a deft pass by "Mr. Clutch" Jamie Waller and a layup by freshman standout Tony Dallas, kept the Panthers the only unbeaten team in college basketball as they prepared to enter NCAA Division II championship play.

The dramatic ending was a fitting one for what has become possibly the biggest black sporting event in the nation.

For the first time in four decades, the tournament sold out for its entire four days with some 3,000 additional fans buying tickets to see the finals on closed-circuit TV.

The event began with little fanfare on Wednesday morning, Feb. 27, with Shaw University, the Southern Division's second seed, squeaking past Northern Division cellar-dweller Bowie State.

That was as close as any team got to an upset in first-round action as the higher-seeded team uncharacteristically captured each game.

The same held true, for the most part, in the quarterfinal action, although Hampton, seeded third in the North, did beat Shaw to advance to the semifinals against Union, a winner over St. Augustine's.

"Yes, they're (Union) the best team in Virginia. They are also the best team in South America and Africa."
-- Hampton's Hank Ford

The South's top seed, Winston-Salem State, beat Elizabeth City after receiving a first-round bye, as did Union, while Norfolk topped Johnson C. Smith to gain a berth in the semis opposite WSSU.

The semifinal results left the two losing coaches singing two totally different songs.

WSSU's Bighouse Gaines, who had guided his upstart Rams, picked to finish no higher than fourth in the South, to the regular-season title with a 9-3 division record, was ready to call it quits after his team's second-half showing against Norfolk State.

Gaines' Rams were assured an NCAA berth by winning their division title. But the 81-61 drubbing by the Spartans, a team WSSU had taken to overtime before losing in early December, left Gaines wondering what was the point of continuing.

"You can reject a bid to the NCAA playoffs," he reminded reporters in his post-game interview. "When you get into post-season play, it should be a tremendous honor to be there and kids

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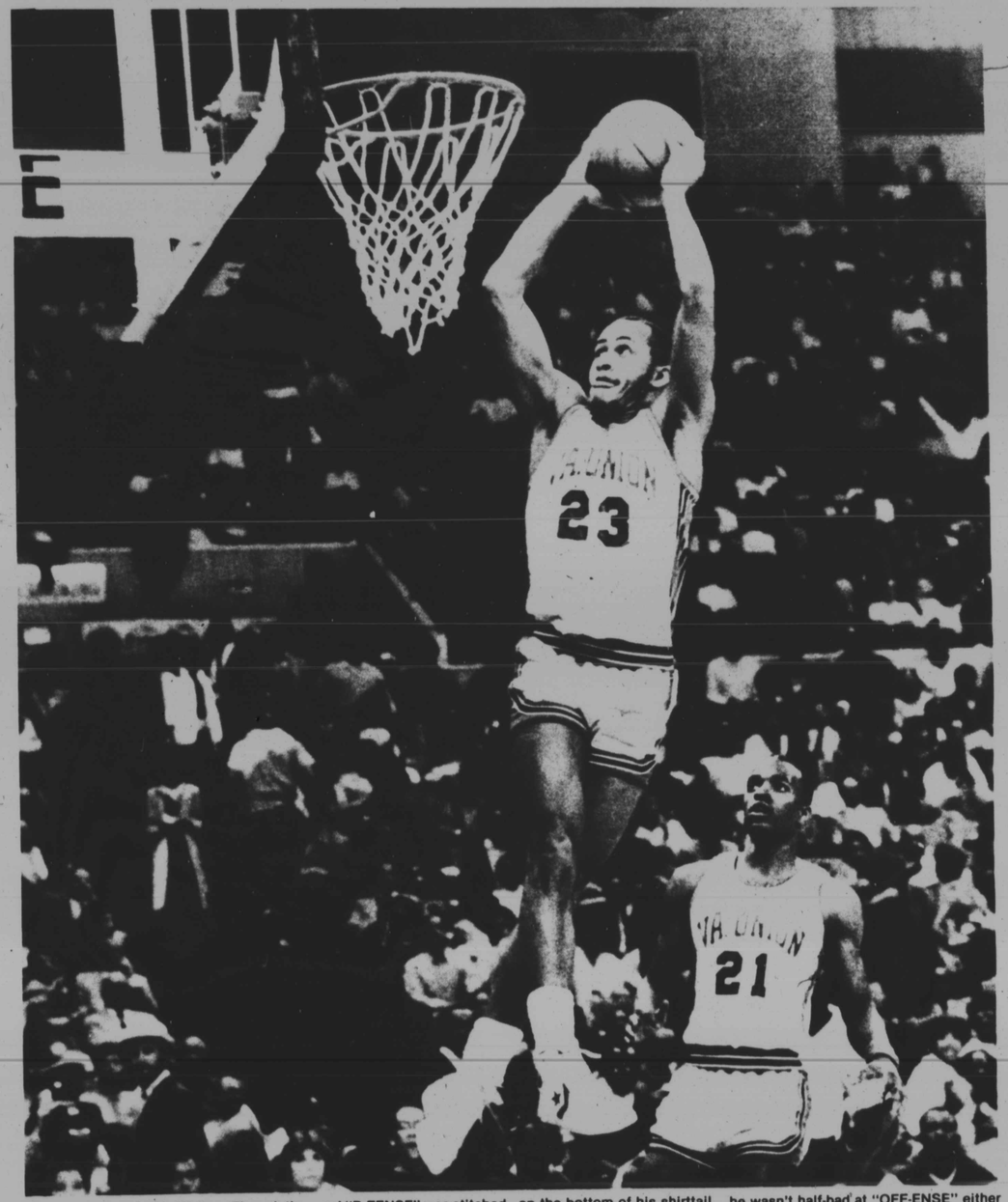

Virginia Union's Jamie Waller: Though the word "D-FENSE" was stitched on the bottom of his shirttail, he wasn't half-bad at "OFF-ENSE" either (photo by Joe Daniels).