All he wanted was to add 4 points to his average

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE
Review Staff Writer

Entering this basketball season, all Ernest Lee of Clark College wanted was to improve his scoring average by four points a game. What he didn't plan on was leading the nation in scoring for all divisions of college basketball.

Lee, a sophomore, admits his 34.1 average is somewhat surprising. He averaged 21.4 points as a freshman. "I shot a little more this year," he says with a devilish grin in explaining his point production increase. One reason for that increase was that Clark had seven freshmen on its roster this year. With a young team, Lee said, "Many times we'd get into foul trouble and I was one of the few people we had to go to."

Clark's Panthers went to Lee quite often this year. He totaled 927 points in 27 games and shot 55.6 percent from the field.

The 6'3", 205-pound guard is exceptionally strong. He looks more like an NFL running back and loves to drive the lane, which he says is the essence of his game.

Lee learned to play the game that way on the playgrounds of Sacramento, Calif., where "you had to be able to handle the ball to play." His aggressive style put him on the free throw line a lot. He went to the line 299 times this year, converting 215 of those for a 71.9 percentage. Lee is quick to add that his average would've been higher with more concentration on free throw shooting. He feels he can consistently sink 80 percent of his free throws.

Most scoring leaders are notorious for not passing, but Lee doesn't fit that mold. He was a point guard at John Kennedy High School in Sacramento and came up with a game-winning assist when Clark defeated Norfolk State, then rated number two among NCAA Division II schools at the time.

"We called time out in the closing seconds of that game," recalls Robert Pritchett, Clark's head basketball coach. "We designed a play especially for Lee. He got the ball, was covered and made an excellent pass to an open teammate under the basket to win the game."

"Had he been egotistical," Pritchett said, "he would've tried to win the game with a shot. But, being unselfish, he opted to pass off to a teammate for a higher percentage shot. That showed

"The way things have happened, that's how I would want them to happen again. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

class because I doubt if seven out of 10 national scoring leaders would've made that pass."

Lee was a highly sought-after high school All-American in 1982 and was courted by many prominent basketball powers, particularly on the West Coast. But because of a 1.9 grade point average, nobody offered him a scholarship.

Disappointed, Lee was out of organized basketball for one year and came to Atlanta to visit his mother two summers ago. "I liked the city, so I stayed," he said. Still, his desire to play basketball remained strong.

That's when he came in contact with Pritchett. Lee wanted to play in a summer basketball league hosted by Clark. A friend of his mother's recommended that he talk to Pritchett about getting on one of the teams.

Pritchett asked one of the league's team coaches to let Lee play some as a personal favor. Lee remembers not getting to play too much. "I was sitting on the bench and after watching, I knew I could play with those guys."

Lee finally got his chance to play a few minutes and Pritchett watched "for about a minute." At that point, the Clark coach told the summer league coach to take Lee out so he could talk to him.

The two talked about Lee's high school grades, the Clark basketball program and the close-knit environment at the school. Lee decided to sign with Clark that same day.

And since then, Lee has had no regrets about attending Clark. "The way things have happened, that's how I would want it to happen again. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

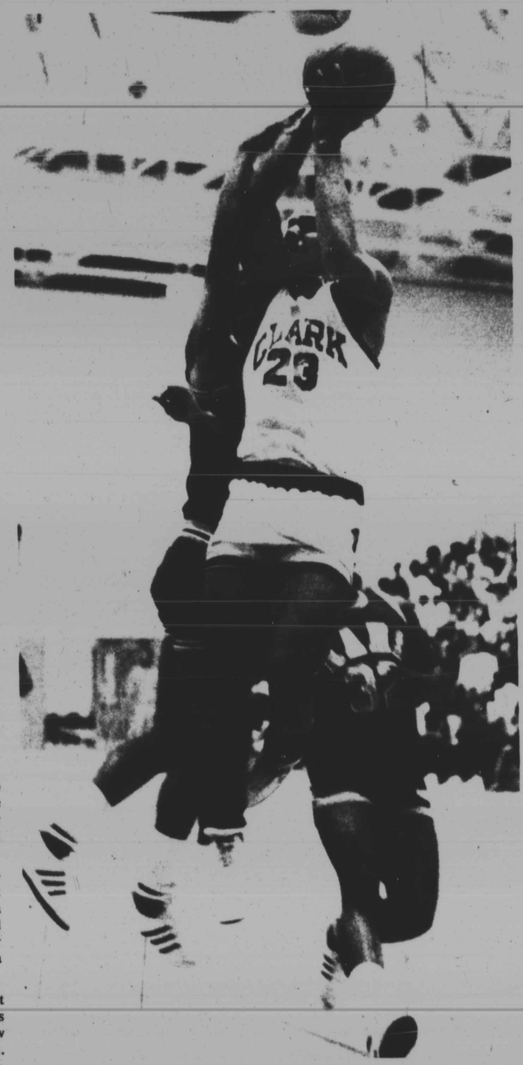
Lee says the family-type environment is one reason he chose Clark because people see him as more than a basketball player. He's also improved his grade point average each semester at Clark. He now has a 2.3 GPA as a mass communications major.

The nation's top gunner closed out the regular season by scoring 60 points against Benedict College to set a new school single game scoring record. That game showed how well Lee is accepted by his teammates. They all went out of their way to give him the ball so he could break the record.

Lee, the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's Player of the Year this season, says he doesn't miss the media attention he would have received had he gone to a major school. "I don't miss it," he explains, "because I'm not a glory hound."

But regardless of whether Lee seeks glory or not, glory has a way of finding him.

Craig T. Greenlee is the editor of Sports Express *in Atlanta.*



Lee's explosiveness and quick release make him a difficult man to defend (photo by Craig T. Greenlee).

SIAC REPORT

Albany State weathers a storm to take title

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE
Review Staff Writer

There were times during the men's finals of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Basketball Tournament that Albany State appeared destined to finish as bridesmaids.

But like the Ram truck of TV commercial fame, the Albany roundballers performed their best under the most difficult of circumstances, prevailing 79-76 over Savannah State in Atlanta.

The victory was not an easy one for Coach Oliver Jones' team. They were in danger of being blown out near the end of the first half, trailing the Tigers 48-38.

The Rams refused to fold, though. "We didn't fall apart when we were down by 10," Jones said. "We made some corrections (at the half), changed our defense and went to the press."

Full court defensive pressure was the difference for Albany, Jones said. Defensive harassment by Patrick Walker, Leonard Wright and Macklin Bradford set the tone for the Rams' second-half comeback.

"I thought they (the Tigers) were shooting jump shots because we weren't making them get tired," Jones explained about the defensive adjustment. "When a team gets tired, they don't shoot that well. We closed down the inside, made them speed up their game and when we got the ball, we ran our own tempo."

Running at their own pace, the Rams outscored the Tigers 41-28 in the second half. Albany's inside game finally got untracked as they were nullified by Savannah's swarming inside defense in the first half.

Chamberlain Campbell and Jerome Reeves powered the inside for the Rams, who enjoyed a big size advantage over the smaller Savannah club. Campbell ignited the second-half comeback with 16 points. He finished the game with 22 points, 10 rebounds, and was voted the tournament's MVP.

For most of the contest, Savannah State seemed poised to take the tournament title. Albert Miller held their fast break that operated in overdrive. Gregory Hillman and Charlie Askew lit up the scoreboard from the outside, combining for 33 of the Tigers' 48 first-half points.

But with less than four minutes left to play in the game, Albany began to surge. Askew had only six points in the last half, and Hillman, who was scoreless in that stanza, fouled out.

With 1:57 to go, the Rams led 77-75 as Miller drove the lane and dished off to Calvin Laing, who was fouled. Laing made the first shot and Jones called time. The ploy worked as Laing missed the second free throw. The Rams got the rebound; Campbell was fouled. He converted the one-and-one to give Albany the title.

Russell Ellington, Savannah State's head coach, was philosophical about the loss. "We just had a few bad breaks. We fouled at the wrong times and turned the ball over," he said. "We just didn't play with the same intensity and they were able to get the ball inside. Their big men did a good job. That's just the breaks of the game."

Campbell was the leading scorer for Albany followed by Wright with 17. Bradford and Reeves added 14 and 12 points, respectively.

For Savannah, Askew was tops with 24 points, with Laing scoring 21. Hillman finished with 15 and Willie Jones had 10.

Craig T. Greenlee is the editor of Sports Express *in Atlanta.*

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