SWAC HOOPS

Texas Southern has the guns to win it all

TEXAS SOUTHERN basketball coach Bob Moreland is treading on dangerous ground and he knows it.

Moreland is telling anyone who will listen that his Tigers are going to win the Southwestern Athletic Conference championship. That's a definite no-no among coaches, who are notorious for crying the blues no matter how talented their squad may be.

"Somebody has to break away from the norm," said Moreland, the winningest coach in Texas Southern history with 213 victories in 13 seasons. "We feel real good about things."

Moreland has reason for feeling good after last season's 21-8 record. The Tigers move into a new arena this season, and with five starters and 10 lettermen returning they could become the first predominantly black school to advance beyond the first round of the NCAA tournament since Alcorn State did it in 1984.

Texas Southern will have size to go with its experience. If Moreland chooses, he could start a lineup that averages 6-10 in the frontcourt and 6-6 in the backcourt.

"We'll get a feel for what our best group will be early," said Moreland.

No matter what combination Moreland settles on, 6-9 junior forward Fred West will be the main man. West was No. 8 in the nation in rebounding last season (10.7 a game) and averaged 19.8 points a game. Guards Brian Brooks (10.6) and Ron Johnson (10.5) and center Mason Bryant (10.0) all averaged double figures scoring.

What gives the Tigers an edge is a trio of transfers. Charles Price, a 6-8 forward comes from Grambling State; Eric Bethea, is a 7-1 center from Texas A&M; and Darron Applewhite, a 6-5 guard formerly of Indiana State.

"We can put some talented people out there," said Moreland. "With no bad luck, we'll be good. With a little good luck, we can be outstanding."

The Tigers' November-December schedule should be a good indicator of how the season will go. They are on the road against New Mexico State, Texas-El Paso, Wyoming, Arkansas-Little Rock, Auburn and Arkansas.

After two rebuilding years, **ALABAMA STATE** could be ready to return to its glory days. The Hornets, 8-20 last season, return four starters. In addition, 6-9 Eric Thomas and 6-0 Lemone Shaw, Proposition 48 casualties a year ago, are eligible. Martin Hogan, 6-9, and Guy Bowen, a pair of junior college transfers will also add depth.

Guard Terry Brooks, the SWAC's leading scorer last season, will again be counted on to shoulder the offensive load. But coach James Oliver needs to find a solid point guard. Shon Cooks and Gerald Dortch are the top returnees. Darrin Mayo, 16.3 points and 7.9 rebounds a game, is solid in the front court.

JACKSON STATE is another experienced squad that could be a contender. The Tigers return 10 lettermen from last season's 13-15 squad. The key performers are 6-7 forward Demetrius Abram, SWAC newcomer of the year last season when he averaged 19.6 points and 8.5 rebounds a game, and guard Tyrone Kidd (14 points a game and 44 percent from three point range).

The Tigers' success in coach John Prince's third season will be determined by the quality of play they get from the center and power forward positions.

Defending champion **SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY** will be rebuilding after back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances. The Jaguars lost four starters from last year's 24-7 team. The only returning starter is 6-6 forward Daryl Battles (15 points and 8.5 rebounds a game),

Coach Ben Jobe will be looking for immediate help from a trio of junior college transfers, 6-7 Johnny Steptoe, 6-6 Paul Jones and 6-4 Demetrius Franklin.

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE needs to find help for guard Tim Pollard, who averaged 19 points a game last season. Pollard is one of two starters returning from an 8-20 squad.

If the Delta Devils are to improve, 6-9 center Rod Coleman, the other returning starter, will have to be much more productive.

Well-traveled guard Joe Coleman, who signed with Ole Miss and transferred to Jackson State before landing at Mississippi Valley, could be a big help if he plays up to his all-state high school form.

PRAIRIE VIEW, 5-22 last season. figures to be a dangerous club. The Panthers are a young but experienced squad with only two seniors on the roster.

The key performer is sophomore guard Michael Ervin, SWAC freshman of the year. He averaged 15 points a game. Steve Stevenson, a 6-10 sophomore, gives the Panthers a shot blocker in the middle. He was among the national leaders last year with 70. Senior guard Lamar Holt returns after redshirting last year with a foot injury and should provide stability in the backcourt.

ALCORN STATE, 8-21 and last in the SWAC, is coming off consecutive losing seasons. Even though the Braves return three starters - Darren Davenport, Mark White, and guard Larry Smith. Look for wholesale changes.

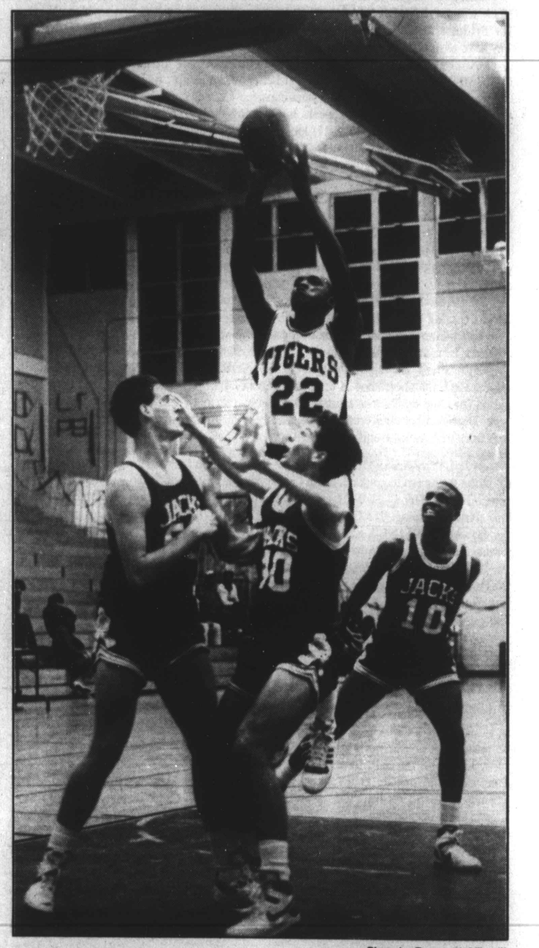
Coach Davey Whitney has brought in eight freshmen, mainly forwards and guards who can score. The best of the group is 6-5 Rossie Kearson from Irvington, N.J., who averaged 21 points a game.

GRAMBLING STATE, 13-17, will be another team with several new faces. All-SWAC forward Terrell Wesley is the only returning starter.

Help will have to come from 6-5 forward Antwahn Nance, the No. 2 scorer in the California Junior College Conference last season with 15 points a game. He also averaged 10 rebounds a game. Jesse Spinner, a 6-10, 250-pound senior transfer from Mississippi College, should give coach Bob Hopkins frontcourt depth.

Lonnie Smith, Andre Blackett and Cedric Quinn are the top candidates in the back court.

-Roscoe Nance



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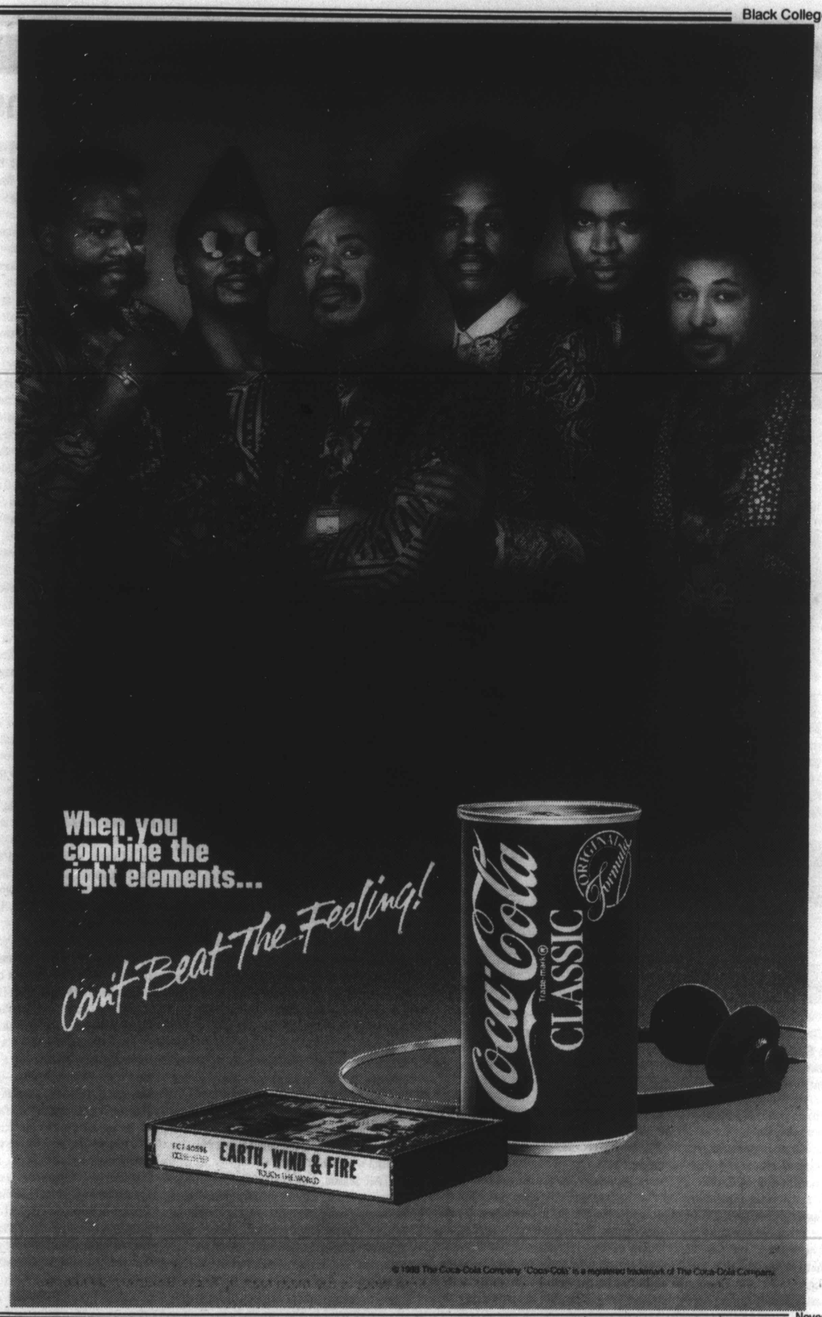
Fred West is the main man in Texas Southern's scheme.