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Coppin State takes MEAC

From Centerfold

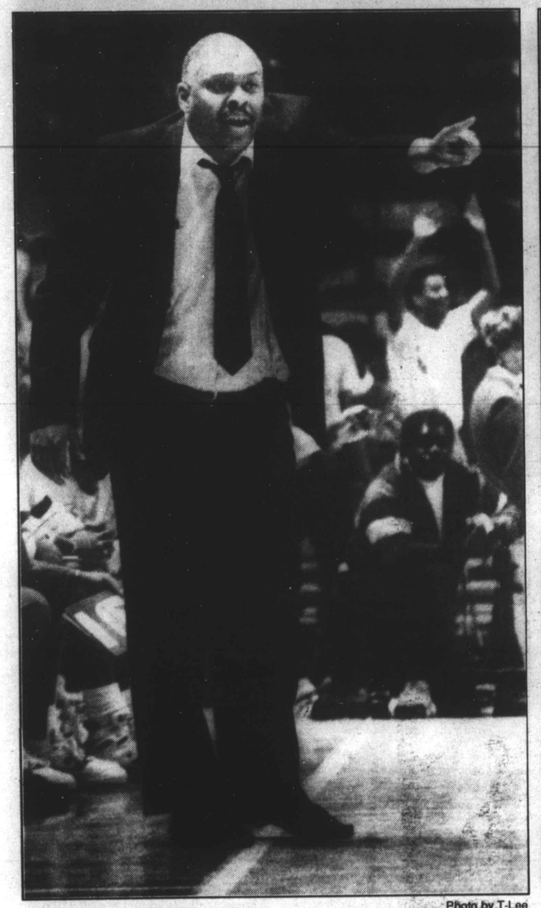

Photo by T-Lee

Corbett's Aggies were seeded No. 6 going into the tournament. But the veteran coach had his troops primed to the max as they upset Delaware State and Florida A&M to reach the championship finals.

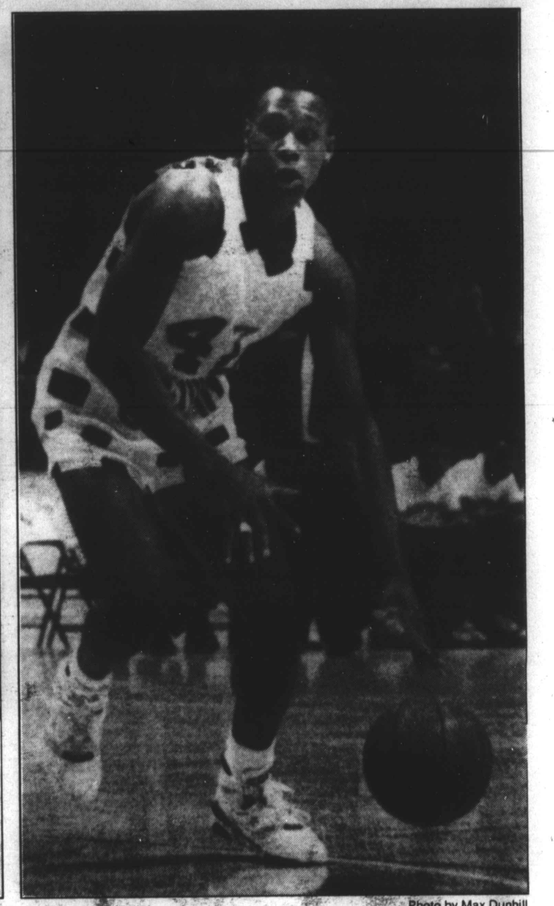

Photo by Max Dunhill

MEAC Player of the Year Larry Stewart and his Coppin State mates may have let down a bit when Florida A&M (the No. 2 seed) didn't make it to the finals.

from getting offensive rebounds.

With that strategy working well, A&T (13-16) was able to control the pace of the game and keep the score down, which gave them more of an opportunity to pull off the upset. They appeared to be in good position as they took a 24-18 lead at the half.

Offensively, Corbett's guards made some statements of their own. Taggart and Bobby Moore stretched Coppin's zone with deadly three-point shooting, while Jimmy Humphries added six points and five rebounds. The slow place along with the inside-outside play of A&T, gave Coppin all they could handle and then some.

Taggart proved to be a troublesome individual for Coppin to deal with. For 35 or so minutes at least. He wound up with 14 points to lead A&T. Dana Elliot provided added support with 12 points and eight boards.

However, Taggart's reign of terror came to a halt after he hit two straight jumpers, the last one giving the Aggies a 43-40 lead. Over the final 4:39, Taggart didn't score.

Moore who had hit two of three, tres in the first half, sank only one after being saddled with foul problems for a major portion of the second half.

Winning this tournament title was an exercise in hard core labor for the Eagles. But they never lost their cool. At times, they appeared so relaxed, that it seemed as if they lacked intensity -- even when A&T led by as many as eight points in the second half with 10:16 remaining (37-29).

Being able to win under pressure and under unfavorable conditions is nothing new for these Eagles. Of their 23 regular season games, only 10 were played at home. Coppin State has shown themselves to be a team of road warriors in the truest sense.

Coppin's wins over Creighton, Morehead State, Toledo, Cornell and Maryland were all road wins. They also dropped a 71-66 squeaker to Ball State in the Cardinal Classic last December.

"We got used to playing in places where the crowds would be against us," said Issac, "and we've been doing that since the start of the season. Those circumstances have showed us that when things aren't going right, you just have to dig a little deeper. As a team, we feel that we're always bound to make a run at some point."

Added Booth: "We've learned that you can't afford to get too high or too low emotionally. It's best to always be somewhere in the middle. What this game came down to was us finally adapting to what they were doing."

-Craig T. Greenlee