COVER STORY

Texas Southern triumphs

Tigers dump Jags in SWAC finals

Texas Southern finally transformed pre-season predictions into post-season reality by topping Southern University, 94-89 to win the SWAC men's tournament in Houston.

Coach Robert Moreland's Tigers (19-11) overcame early ball handling jitters and took advantage of Southern's foul problems to earn their first ever berth in the NCAA Division I playoffs. The Jaguars (25-5), who had won four straight SWAC tourney titles under coach Ben Jobe, suffered their first ever conference tournament defeat. But even in defeat, SU earned a bid to the National Invitation Tournament.

Photo by Mark Gail

Southern's Jaguars knew it was going to be a bad night for them when Joe Faulkner (31) fouled out early in the second half after scoring only four points. Faulkner was the SWAC Player of the Year, averaging 21.7 points and 9.2 rebounds per game.

All season long, these two teams clearly demonstrated that they were indeed the elite duo of the league that calls itself "The Super Eight."

Texas Southern's front line proved to be the difference in the championship finals. Senior forwards Charles Price and Fred West combined for 53 points and 30 rebounds (15 at the offensive end) to lead the Tigers to SWAC's promised land.

Darrion Applewhite added 19 points and Ray Younger contributed 12 points to the winning cause.

Price and West split halves as they took their individual turns in dominating play. Price carried TSU early, scoring 17 of his 28 points in the first half.

West, on the other hand, started slowly, tallying just six points in the first half. In the second half, however, he ignited for 19 points, giving him a total of 25. West also grabbed 20 rebounds.

Southern, the regular season league champion, jumped on TSU in the early stages by effectively applying full court defensive pressure. Their baseline-to-baseline defense caused numerous Tigers' turnovers which the Jags converted into points.

But SU paid a price for their all-out defensive efforts. Four players had at least two fouls apiece in the first half, with two key people in serious trouble. After only six minutes of play in the first half, they had accumulated seven team fouls which put Texas Southern in the bonus free throw situation for the remainder of the half.

SWAC Player Of The Year Joe Faulkner had four fouls in the first half and didn't score. Forward Derrick Stewart, one of Southern's premier front-liners, found himself sitting on the bench after committing his third foul with 15 minutes left to play in the first half.

Because Southern usually plays just six to seven people, they were hurting depth-wise. That same lack of bench strength and poor shooting in the second half, eventually caused their demise.

The Jaguars hit just 34.7 percent of their field goals in the second half after shooting 42.9 percent during the first 20 minutes. An even better indication of SU's woes was their inability to bury the three-point shot, an area they usually excel in. Southern's bombers hit on 18.8 percent of their tres in the second half after converting 36.4 percent in the first half.

Still, point guard Carlos Sample (game's leading scorer with 31 points) did what he could to keep his mates in contention. Sample came out firing the three-pointer with Gatlin gun like frequency. He finished the half with 25 points (seven of 12 from three-point range, including one stretch where he canned four straight from long distance).

During that run, Sample helped Southern build an 18-10 margin at the 15:34 mark. But TSU retaliated thanks to Younger and Price. The Tigers seemed to get a firm grip on the game's pace on Price's tip-in that gave them a 38-33 lead with 6:24 left in the half.

Yet Sample & Co. wouldn't let the Tigers pull away, even though the Jags' had given up a lot of size inside with their top rebounders on the bench in foul trouble. With three minutes left in the half, Southern didn't have anyone in the game who was over 6-4 to deal with TSU's front line of 6-9 West, 6-8 Price and 6-8 Michael Brooks.

Still, Sample had the last word.

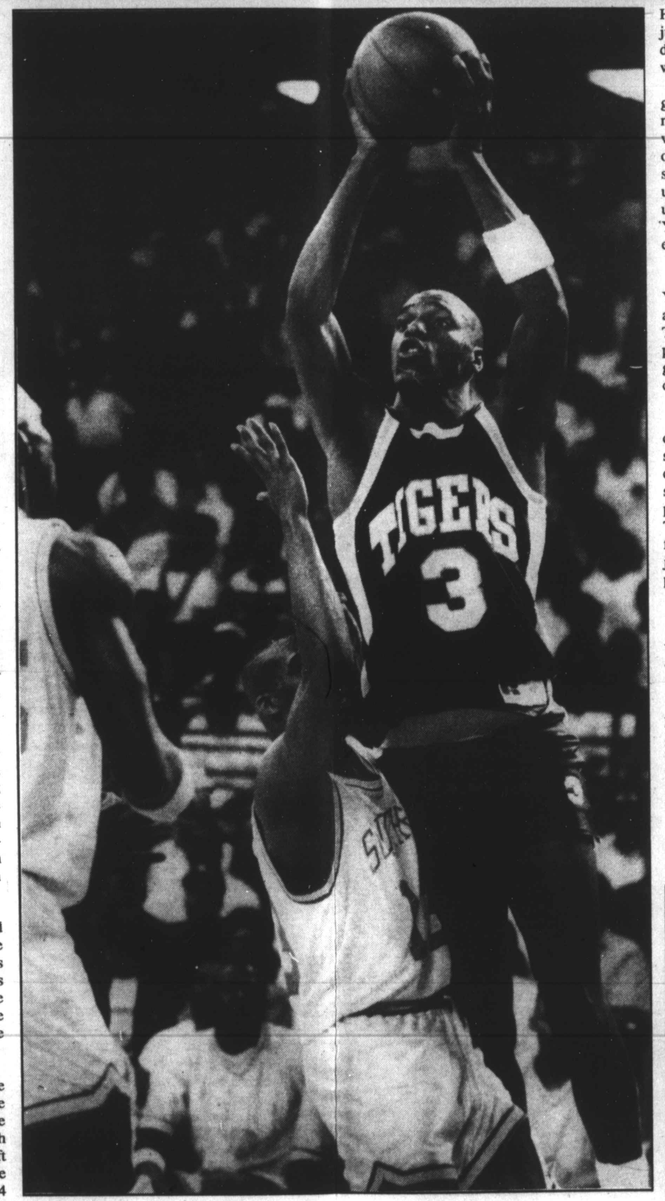

Photo by Mark Gail

Darrion Applewhite's shooting prevented the Jags' defense from totally focusing on TSU's forward tandem of Fred West and Charles Price.

He fired an in-your-face, three point jumper with the shot clock running down to knife into the Tigers' lead, which was 49-48 at the half.

Second half action saw Southern get the best and worst of it. On the negative side, Faulkner fouled out with 17 minutes left after scoring only four points -- 18 under his season's average. Minutes later, back-up forward Derrick Anderson picked up his fourth foul and Robert Youngblood, an inside force at both ends was also whistled for foul No. 4.

However, Dwayne Tanks and Youngblood, along with Bobby Phills and Sample pulled together to give the Tigers all they could handle. Tanks, in particular, was very helpful on the glass with nine rebounds -- eight coming off the offensive end.

But Tanks, who hadn't seen a lot of playing time previously, showed some nervousness. On several offensive rebounds, he missed easy shots, which if converted, may have pushed Southern over the hump. Tanks eventually fouled out and had four points. Those four points could just as easily have been 12 or 14 points.

Outside of Sample, the Jags' got 15 points from Bobby Phills, 13 from Youngblood, 12 out of Anderson, while Stewart added 10 points.

With Southern's make-do lineup producing as much as it could, the Jags' put together a 10-2 run that gave them a 64-58 lead with 13:30 left in the contest. Sample's sweet scoop shot lay-up gave the Jags' a seven point bulge a 69-62.

From that point on, however, the pendulum started to swing to the side of the striped cats.

Photo Courtesy of Anheuser-Busch

Charles Price walked off with the tournament MVP award for the second straight year.

Price answered Sample's lay-up with a three-point goal. He followed that up with two steals that resulted in break-away slam dunks to give TSU a 74-71 lead with 7:54 left to play.

At this point, West began to take over for TSU. He scored on a put-back of Younger's miss, then hit a fade away jumper from the right corner and the Tigers led 80-75.

But the key sequence in this game may have occurred when Texas Southern produced a major defensive gem that set the stage for victory. SU's Youngblood grabbed a rebound and made the outlet pass only to have Applewhite step in for the steal and drive to the hoop for a lay-up, making the count 82-75 TSU with five minutes remaining.

The Tigers went to a spread offense to take time off the clock, but Southern refused to die. Tanks scored off of an offensive rebound to cut TSU's lead to 84-81. But the Tigers responded with more points off the offensive glass as Younger and West were able to get in position to get second and third shots at the basket.

As the Jaguars continued to scratch and claw their way back in an effort to take the tourney crown, the Tigers were equally as determined to claim the trophy for themselves and bask in the limelight before a fired up home town crowd.

Texas Southern put the game away for good with 1:12 to go after breaking the Jags' press with a dunk by Price, giving the home town guys a comfortable 92-87 lead.

Anderson hit two free throws to bring Southern within four at 92-89 with 59 seconds left. But Texas Southern went into their spread, kept the ball away from the Jags' defenders and watched the clock wind down as they added two more free throws to solidify their triumph.

- Bruce Winters

SWAC Men's All-Tournament Team

Player	Height/Position	School
Charles Price	6-8 Forward	Texas Southern
Carlos Sample	6-0 Guard	Southern University
Fred West	6-9 Forward	Texas Southern
Alphonso Ford	6-3 Guard	Miss.Valley State
Joe Faulkner	6-4 Guard/Forward	Southern University

Tournament MVP
Charles Price

Staff Photo

TSU headmaster Robert Moreland had the Tigers primed for the finals.