Moments after Alcorn State's 57-56 loss to Kansas in the NCAA Midwest Regionals last year, the Braves' locker room looked more like a church during a wake than a dressing room. But, though the men from Mississippi wept at the loss of a major battle, they seem to be well on their way to winning the

Alcorn State basketball, to Mississippi, to the Southwestern Athletic Conference, and to a growing number of fans across the nation, has become synonymous with winning. That winning tradition, however, did not begin just last year nor did it begin the decade before. It's part of a legacy that began as far back as the late 1940s and early 1950s when Jim Crowism prevented most predominantly black programs from receiving the recognition they deserved.

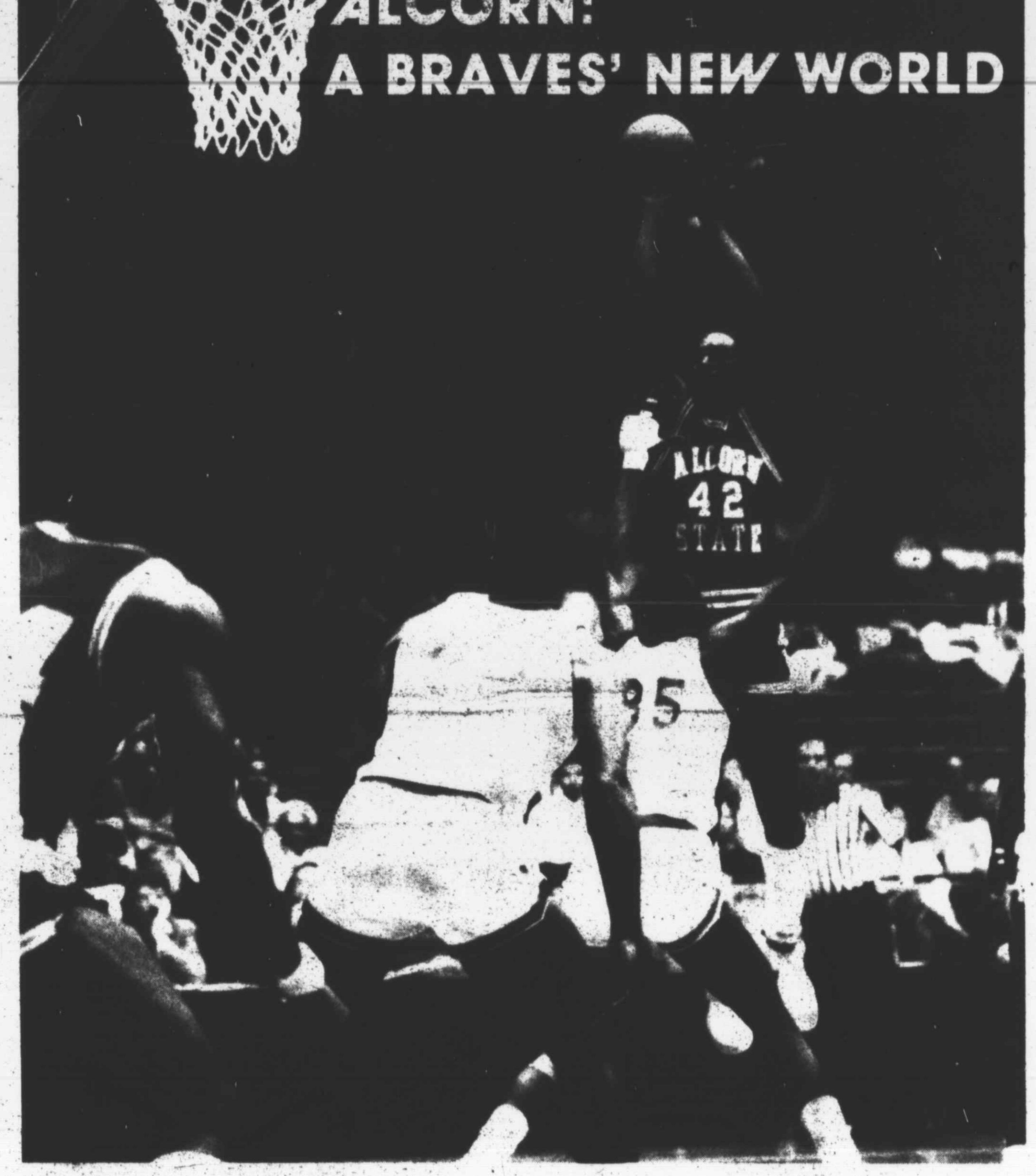
"I suppose we had the players that just developed into good players," said ... former Brave Dwight Fisher, a retired Dallas school official. "We just competed against all of the teams that would play us -- Florida A&M, Kentucky State, Central State, etc. - and we usually beat them."

Like the great Alcorn teams of today, it was the norm for the Braves to win 20 or more games each year.

The seeds were planted and many a good harvest would await ASU, a tiny Southwest Mississippi school with an enrollment of just 2,500.

Under Coach Bob Hopkins, who came to Alcorn in 1966, the Braves' program moved into high gear in the post-integration era, planting itself firmly on the map of the college elite. The team went 20-8 in Hopkins' rookie year and went on to compile records of 24-3 in 1967-68 and 26-1 the following year. Each of those years the team won the SWAC championship (the Braves went 14-0 in league play in 1968-69) and advanced to the second and third rounds of the NAIA national tournament Hopkins' last two years at ASU.

When present-day Coach Davey Whitney arrived on the Lorman cam tournaments were fantasies for black Division I and playing such "bigname" schools as Indiana, LSU and Georgetown foolhardy even to think about.



Alcorn State has its sights aimed squarely on another SWAC title and NCAA Tournament bid this season (photo by Joe Daniels).

But Alcorn did all those things, and not as a sacrificial lamb. Alcorn played than ever before. For the SWAC's the big names on even terms, losing lower echelon, perhaps so. But at the two years ago to Georgetown by seven top, it'll be business as usual. in the NCAA tourney and remaining team to win an NCAA tournament

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Whitney, who obviously knows his basketball, says the SWAC will be

more balanced in basketball this year

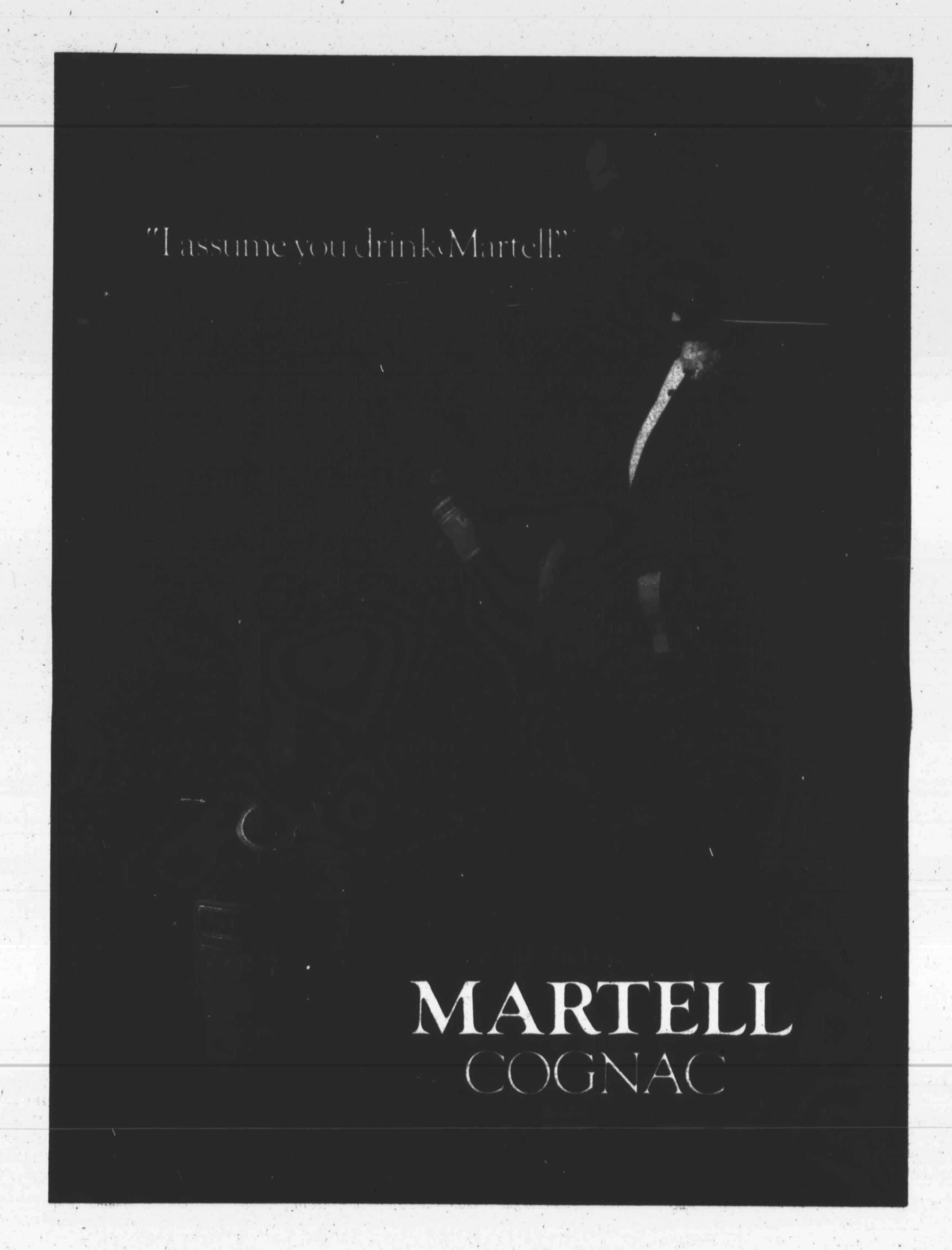
that means Alcorn State should again capture the crown which seems to have become a permanent fixture in its and winners of the regular-season league title five of the last six years. This season should be no different.

The Braves return all but two non-

starters from last year's team, which went 21-10 overall, 11-3 in league play, and went on to defeat Houston Baptist 79-60 in the opening round of the NCAA tournament before falling to Kansas. The team's line-up is its most experienced in years, including five starters who have won the SWAC postseason tournment each of their collegiate years and earned the right to compete for the NCAA championship

"We have a senior ball club and some of the coaches in our league say

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