Norfolk State's Christian: More than a winner

By SAM DAVIS Review Staff Writer

True to his name, Charles Christian is a good man.

Granted, the bespectacled little wizard has compiled an impressive won-loss record as a basketball coach. But wins and losses aren't all that matter to him.

"The real reward in coaching is not the championships or the trophies," says Christian. "It's seeing your former players later in life and seeing them doing something positive and being winners in life.

"It's a great feeling for them to come back 10 or 20 years later and say prove enough so that we can be at our they learned something and that playing basketball has contributed ment." something positive to their lives."

ner of his mouth, is as competitive a CIAA tourney, is ready to step in as coach as you'll find in collegiate the Spartans' scoring machine. sports. He drives his players to be suc- "We were very lucky to get a player

CIAA regular season titles and seven talents in the conference." high school crowns (with a combined high school record of 355-60), he says upon heavily this season. none of those experiences was as gratifying as working with the team he had freshman mistakes," says Christian. the CIAA basketball tournament for of him, we're looking more to our and advanced to the NCAA playoffs, finishing the season at 29-2.

year was a very rewarding experience," team will be quicker than he's ever says Christian. "We had players that coached. were team-oriented and there was a family-type atmosphere on the team.

"We were fortunate enough to finally go to the mountaintop," Christian says of his team's accomplishment. "It was a thrill for us to get there with such a young team."

Christian also had the privilege of folk's green and gold -- and one of going to live or die by the run. Christian's favorite people on and off the court.

never know that he was an all- our offense. It's not a very complicated American basketball player," says system, but we do think in terms of be-Christian. "He would do anything ing sound fundamentally. you'd ask him.

the team's laundry, he'd do it," Christian says. "He was very unselfish and ting lineup will be Barry Mitchell and dedicated to the team. He exemplifies what I try to teach my players."

Now that Pope's no longer with the

Christian says, despite the fact that Pope is the only starter missing from last year's starting lineup. "Pope gave us so much, not only as a player, but also because of his strong leadership.

"I feel like we've lost three-fourths of our ball club. Without Pope, we have to try to look at trying to get more people to help in the areas that he provided for us."

"We're a very young team," says Christian, who seems to be the only one in the Western hemisphere who thinks Norfolk won't be tough this season. "We're working at being a cohesive team. Hopefully we can imbest come time for the CIAA tourna-

Fortunately for Norfolk, sophomore Yet, Christian, 57, whose trademark guard Ralph Tally, another rising is the ever-present toothpick in the cor- superstar and a hero in last year's

cessful year after year -- and they are. like Tally," says Christian. "By sign-Though Christian has had enormous ing him, we were able to come up with success as a coach, including two a real gem. He's one of the exceptional

Christian says Tally will be counted

"Last year, he made a lot of a year ago. Last year, the Spartans won "Now he's a lot more mature. Because the first time under Christian's tutelage guards. We're more of a guardoriented team this year."

A strong believer in sound, fun-"Working with the guys we had last damental basketball, Christian says his

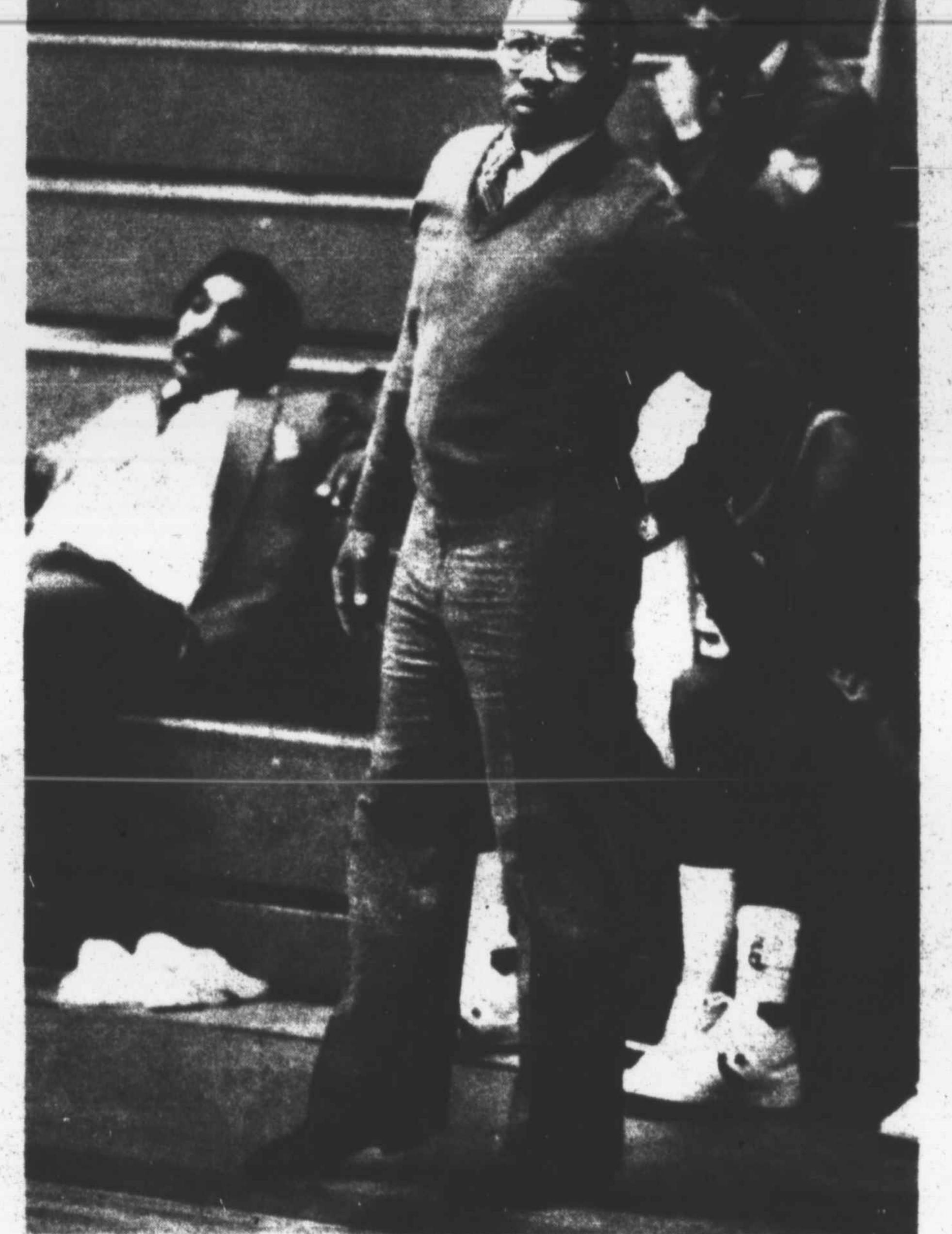
> "We have a lot of quickness, but we don't have size," he says. "We've never been a running team and we don't expect to be a running team this year. We don't have a lot of people that we're going to play, so we have to conserve our energy.

"We have to be great opportunists," working with all-America David Pope, Christian says. "If the break is there one of the best players to ever don Nor- we're going to take it. But, we're not

"Once we get past half-court, we'll attack as fast as anybody," says Chris-"If you didn't know David, you'd tian. "We're looking for continuity in

In addition to Tally, Barry Mullen "If you told him to go down and get will likely start at guard for the Spartans. Rounding out the rest of the star-Alexander Gatling at the forwards and Darnell Brown in the middle.

"Since we don't have overwhelming Spartans, Christian says, his team will size, we'll need more of a collective efbe hard-pressed to match its recent suc- fort from our starters," says Christian. The second of th



Christian: Directing his team from the sidelines against Winston-Salem State (photo by James Parker).

we'll be great hustlers and apply good

"We have got to get our tails up and down the court. But, more than anything, the team concept has to be there. Execution will be the key to our

The team concept comes up often when Christian talks about his young squad. He says "good chemistry" i what makes a basketball team win

says. "We have to play both ends of start for us. We were fortunate that he the court and help each other out."

Like many of his counterparts in the CIAA and black college sports, Christian relies on Norfolk State alumni and supporters to help him recruit. That

"We don't have a big budget or staff to do that (recruit)," Christian says, "so most of our players come to us through recommendations."

Christian cites Tally, who was first noticed by a former Norfolk player.

"Jim Brantley, who played here in the 60s, saw us play in the CIAA Tournament a couple of years ago and we lost because our guards weren't that good," says Christian. "After the tournament, he called me and told me "We have to be together," Christian he had a guy that could come in and did that for us."

The grassroots support helps build a winner, Christian says, and the winner helps build the grassroots support.

"Traditionally, the school is just a grassroots approach has worked well winner," he says. "Not just in basketfor Christian, who had posted a 167-62 ball, but all sports. The fans' support record at Norfolk going into this and involvement of everyone helps

