SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC

Southern's not eager to surrender its perch







Davey Whitney must rebuild Alcorn from the ground up, and an improved

Clockwise from the right, David Ponton and Southern rushed to the SWAC title last season and may repeat this year. Meanwhile, Alcorn's Jackson State (photos by Mark Gail).

BEFORE THE MASTERPIECE there is a side of a great sculptor few people see. It's those long, time-consuming hours that go into crafting each and every feature until it pleases his toughest critic...himself.

This is also the spirit which thrives at Jack Daniel's. Before we can hope to please you, we first must please ourselves. That's why we take the extra time to charcoal mellow our whiskey the slow, old Tennessee way, drop-by-drop.

So when you try our Jack Daniel's whiskey, you'll find that like a great sculptor's finished piece, our rare, sippin's smooth whiskey is the best.

By LONZA HARDY JR. Special To The Review

THERE'S A NEW DAY dawning in the Southwestern Athletic Conference, where Southern and Jackson State, not traditional top dog Alcorn State, are the pre-season favorites to capture the SWAC crown in '85-86.

Southern, an upset winner over Alcorn in last year's SWAC Tournament, finished at 19-11 a year ago, while Jackson State, which didn't make the conference playoff field, stood at 10-16. Both teams return the most experienced lineups in the league this year.

"It'll be a balanced league this year," said SOUTHERN Coach Bob Hopkins. "Everybody has a

shot at the title."

First, there are Hopkins' own Jaguars. The second-winningest team in the conference last year, the Jags also were the only team to beat regular-season champion Alcorn in SWAC competition. Returning three of five starters along with a crew of talented reserves and an impressive slate of newcomers, the men from Bayou Country should show that their win over Alcorn State in the SWAC Tournament finals was no fluke.

Spearheading the Jaguars, who are the only team in the last five years besides Alcorn to win a SWAC regular-season title, are 6-1 senior guard Byron Gabriel (13.8 ppg., 3.7 assists), 6-7 senior center James Lee (10.4 ppg., 6.4 rebounds)

and 6-5 senior forward John Staves (13.1 ppg., 4.5 rebounds, 63.8 field-goal percentage).

Whatever havoc Southern initiates in the SWAC this year, the JACKSON STATE Tigers should be able to finish. Perhaps a toss-up favorite with Southern for the SWAC crown, Paul Covington's crew includes the return of all but one starter, the coach's son, guard Paul Covington Jr. (5.8 ppg.).

The Tigers, who went 6-8 in league play in 1984-85 (fifth), will be led by the conference's lone 7-footer – senior Lester Fonville.

The 7-1 pivotman netted just 7.1 points and 5.7 rebounds per game last year, but those figures are far beyond what folks around the conference ever anticipated.

"His development was more than I expected," confessed Covington. "He caught on and understood and started doing it. There's no limit to how good he can be."

Fonville should get plenty of assistance from his teammates this year. Jeff Hart, a 6-6 junior forward, led the Tigers in scoring last year with a 16.6-point average as well as a 7.2 rebound average. Jackie Walker, a 6-5 junior forward who's also an all-America linebacker, is back to better his 10.5 scoring and 6.0 rebounding averages.

Perrenial favorite ALCORN
STATE will be down this year but
perhaps not completely out of the

Davey Whitney's team lost its en-