

Lester Fonville's no laughingstock anymore

By ROSCOE NANCE

They're not laughing at Lester Fonville, Jackson State's 7-foot junior center, anymore.

When Fonville came to Jackson State two years ago, he had difficulty walking and chewing gum at the same time. His every move on the basketball floor was pure comedy.

From those meager beginnings, Fonville has developed into the most dominant player in the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

Fonville's dominance begins with his size. He's the only legitimate big man in the SWAC. Initially, that alone was his calling card. But through hard work and dedication his game has improved by leaps and bounds.

"His development was more than I expected," said Jackson State Coach Paul Covington. "He caught on and understood and started doing it."

There was much for Fonville to

He didn't start playing basketball until his junior year at Mound Bayou (Miss.) High. He was self-conscious about his height and everyone made fun of him. The best way for him to

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escape the jokes was by staying to

When he finally started playing, he relied strictly on his height and never learned the nuances of the game.

That showed after he got to Jackson State. Things that most basketball players pick up in junior high school were foreign to him.

"I wish I had started playing when I was in the seventh grade or earlier," said Fonville. "At that time I was shy. Kids would tease me about my height. I would let them get me down. When I got older, I was saying what I should have done. But I didn't look back."

discouraged after launching his basket- the NBA before jumping to Italy. credits to graduate with his high school Norris will make Fonville more final preseason scrimmage. class in 1982. Then he failed to gain ad- physical and intimidating. mission to the University of the District "He won't get pushed around as of Columbia. He then enrolled at Lake much," Covington said. played there for a year.

State in 1983, he had to sit out a year. consistently and wasn't afraid to shoot Covington had Fonville play catch- it.

up. He spent hours talking basketball with Fonville and giving him individual instructions.

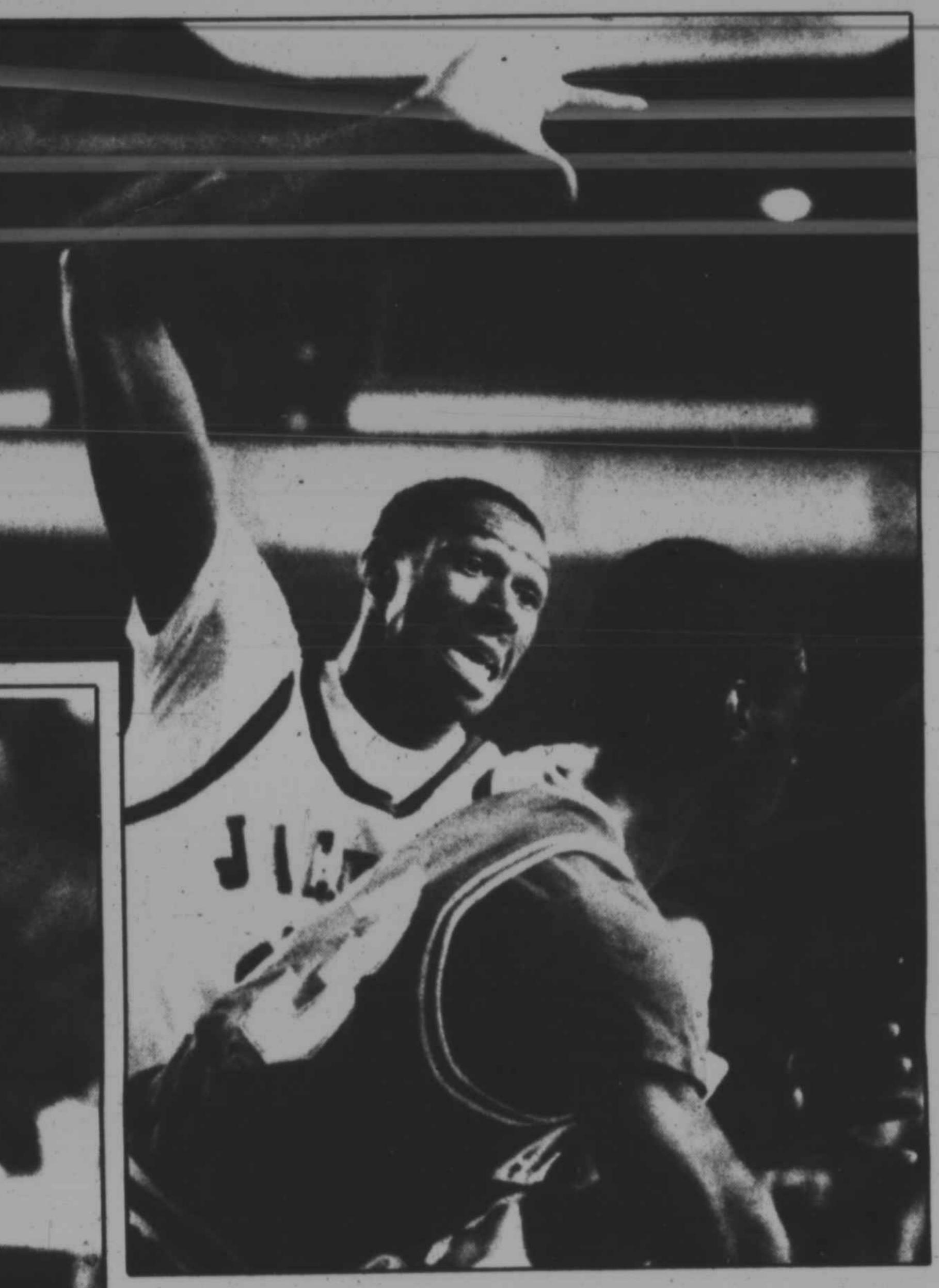
The work paid off.

Fonville was the driving force behind a late-season surge that saw Jackson

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Fonville spent the summer working out with Audrie Norris, the Jackson State product who spent three years in



Steady Growth

Fonville's progress on the court, above, has brought smiles on the sideline to JSU Coach Paul Covington (photos by Mark Gail).

his wish. Fonville scored 19 points and more concentration, he could be

But Fonville still thinks defense first. "My main thing is playing defense," he said. "It's all about winning and until the final month of last season. He and not score. But I can block shots coming along." developed a hook shot that he made and rebound and throw outlet passes.

That's all that counts."

Still, Covington But he is so much better than he was that Covington often shakes his head in amazement. Even better for Jackson State is that the best is yet to come for

> "When he plays more and gains Coach Bob Hopkins. "It's just a matter of time. He's the only legitimate center in the league.

"I had heard so many negative

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Fonville is still not a polished player.

