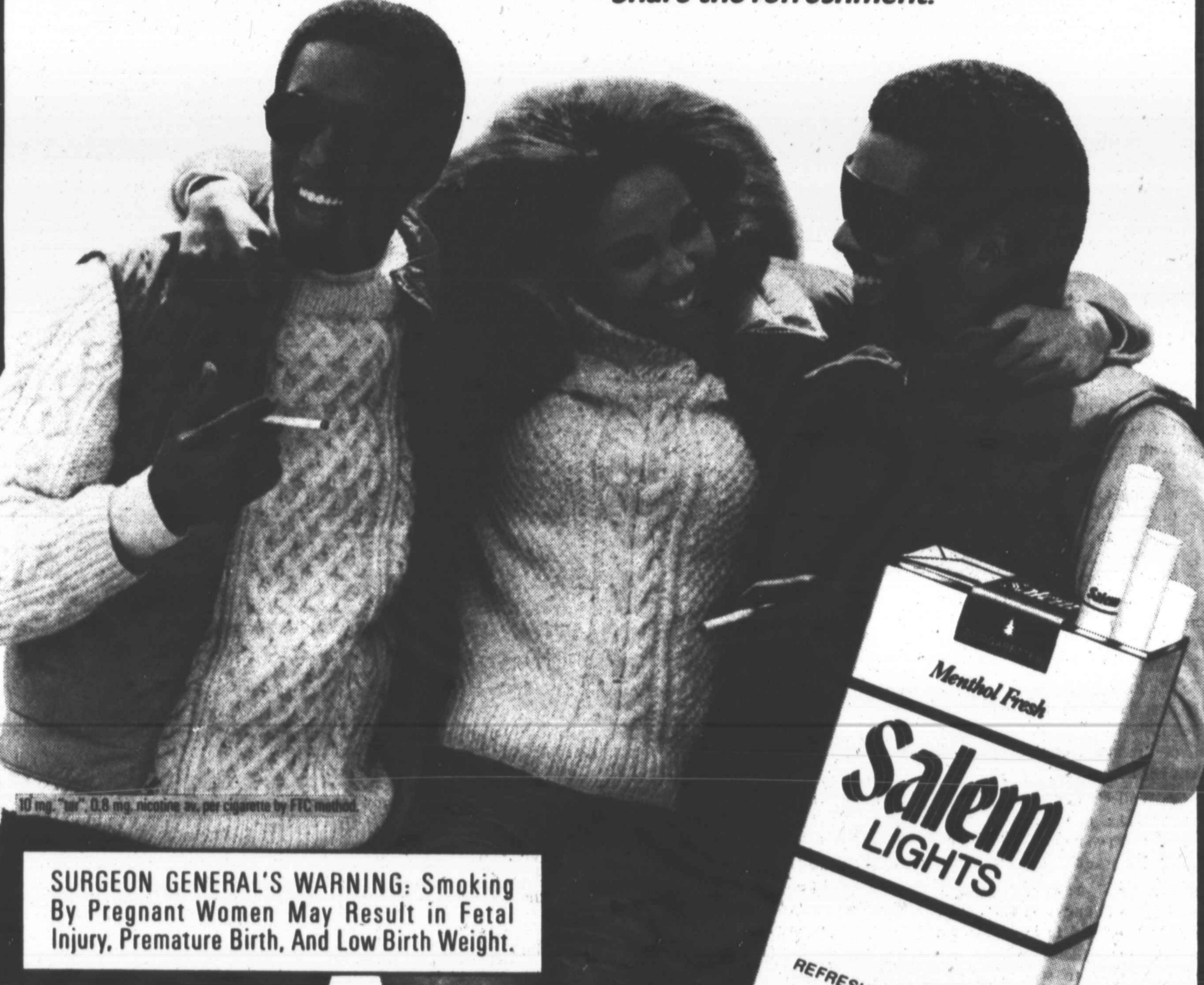
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Like his dad, Union's Waller likes to walk on air

By FRED WILLIAMS Special To The Review

Virginia Union's Jamie Waller is a high-wire artist -- minus the wire.

He dances on air, or so it seems. Last year Waller served as righthand man for the CIAA Player of the Year, VUU center Charles Oakley.

This season, with Oakley in uniform for the NBA Chicago Bulls, Waller has graduated from right-hand man to main man for the Panthers.

If VUU is to reach in Springfield, Mass. -- site of NCAA Division II Final Four - it'll arrive via the wings of its 6-4, 205-pound junior from South Boston, Va.

"Unless he's injured, or we have a horrible year, Jamie should be firstteam all-America this season," says Robbins. "We count on him for so much -- scoring, rebounding and leadership, too."

Last season Waller, playing in Oakley's long, broad shadow, made first-team all-CIAA, plus second-team Division II all-America, as selected by the National Association of Basketball

"Waller and the kid down at Norfolk (Ralph Tally) are the two best players in the league," says Winston-Salem Coach Clarence Gaines. "They could play for anyone in the country.

"I was at the Olympic development camp, and I've seen about every bigtime player in the country. They just don't come any better than Waller and

As a sophomore, Waller averaged 21 points for the 31-1 Panthers. The only setback was to Gaines' Rams in Round One of the NCAA Division II playoffs, at the Arthur Ashe Center in Rich-

In the 32 games, Waller went airborne for 70 dunks.

"I'd be hesitant to say he's the best jumper I've ever coached," says Robbins. "I've had some good ones -- like Mike Perry in high school, and Keith Valentine in high school and here at

"But what sets Jamie apart is that he attacks the basket so hard. He attacks the basket harder than anyone I've coached. It's like he's going to take down the rim and everything else ... J call 'em gorilla dunks.''

During Waller's junior year, Union foes have loaded their defenses to try and corral the Union superman. Nothing has worked.

Through Jan. 7, he was averaging 23 points and 11 rebounds. He also had 18 the day his dad took him to a South assists, 15 steals and 15 blocks on his statistical resume.

Waller's ability to rise above the

at the time," recalls Waller. "But he says. "If that's what it takes, then crowd is something he calls "a gift of could still dunk. He showed me a few OK." More realistically, it's a quality he ... never forget that.

"And, you know, I think he can still dunk today. And he's over 50."

Waller says he has no great affection for the dunk shot. He does it, he says, for the sake of the team.

Boston playground to shoot some "I've noticed that when I get a real good dunk, it picks up the crowd and, "Dad wasn't that tall, and he was 40 in turn, that picks up the team," he

And how high can he go? "I don't really know ... just high enough, I guess," he says.

Waller does not participate in track at Union. But he did long jump 22-8 to win the Western District title as a Halifax High senior, and he standing broad jumped more than 10 feet once in physical education class.

One of the first things Waller did



Waller rises to the occasion against Hampton in last year's CIAA Tournament (photo by Joe Daniels).

inherited from his father, James

Squire, a former teammate of Sam

Jones at North Carolina College (now

Waller likes to tell the story about

N.C. Central).