COVER STORY

CONTINUED

shooting hand in practice.

Since then, he's been breaking opponents' hearts.

As a freshman, he broke into the Union upset the then-No.1-ranked tracks.

He was also named MVP at the NCAA quarterfinal, a game Union lost to Kentucky Wesleyan in Owensboro.

As good as he is, organized basketball almost passed him by.

"Mostly, I just went straight home from school and messed around with a guy named Billy," he recalls of his younger days.

He didn't go out for the Comets' varsity until 11th grade. Then it was only because a former assistant coach at the high school, Evan Dyer, kept nagging him to do so.

"Some of the guys didn't want me to come out," he says. "Maybe they thought I might take their position or something."

Waller made all-Northwest Region as a senior, but few college recruiters came calling. Some felt him too short to play inside. Others felt he wasn't enough of a ballhandler to play on the perimeter.

Robbins felt he was just right.

Waller primed for this season with daily workouts that began with crackof-the-morning, one-on-one drills with Union Assistant Coach Monty Knight. He worked a summer job at V.F. Lanasa Inc., a produce company, where he lifted heavy crates all day.

"That was my weight-lifting," he

In the evenings, he went to Virginia Commonwealth University, about a mile from Union in downtown Richmond, for pickup games with some of the top players for VCU and the University of Richmond, past and pre-

He concedes, however, that the trips to VCU weren't all for honing his jump

"During the summer, there are no girls on the Union campus," he says. "They're all over at VCU."

Waller's top game this season came against Gaines' Rams.

Afterward, Union Coach Robbins talked about banning the CIAA's three-point field goal arc, just 19 feet, 9 inches from the hoop. Gaines said he'd prefer banning Waller.

The Panthers' human elevator burned Winston-Salem for 34 points that night, including six three-point plays. Waller's three-pointers were all the old-fashioned kind, earned in Elbow

after arriving at VUU was to break his Alley beneath the hoop. He hit 14 of 17 foul shots overall.

Waller has steadily improved his jump shot in his three seasons at VUU. If defenders slack off, he won't line-up late in the year and won MVP hesitate to take the mid-range jumper. honors at the South Atlantic NCAA But if they get too close, Waller has the Regional at Norfolk State, where explosive takeoff to leave them in his

No defensive player seems just right he says. to defend Waller. They're either too

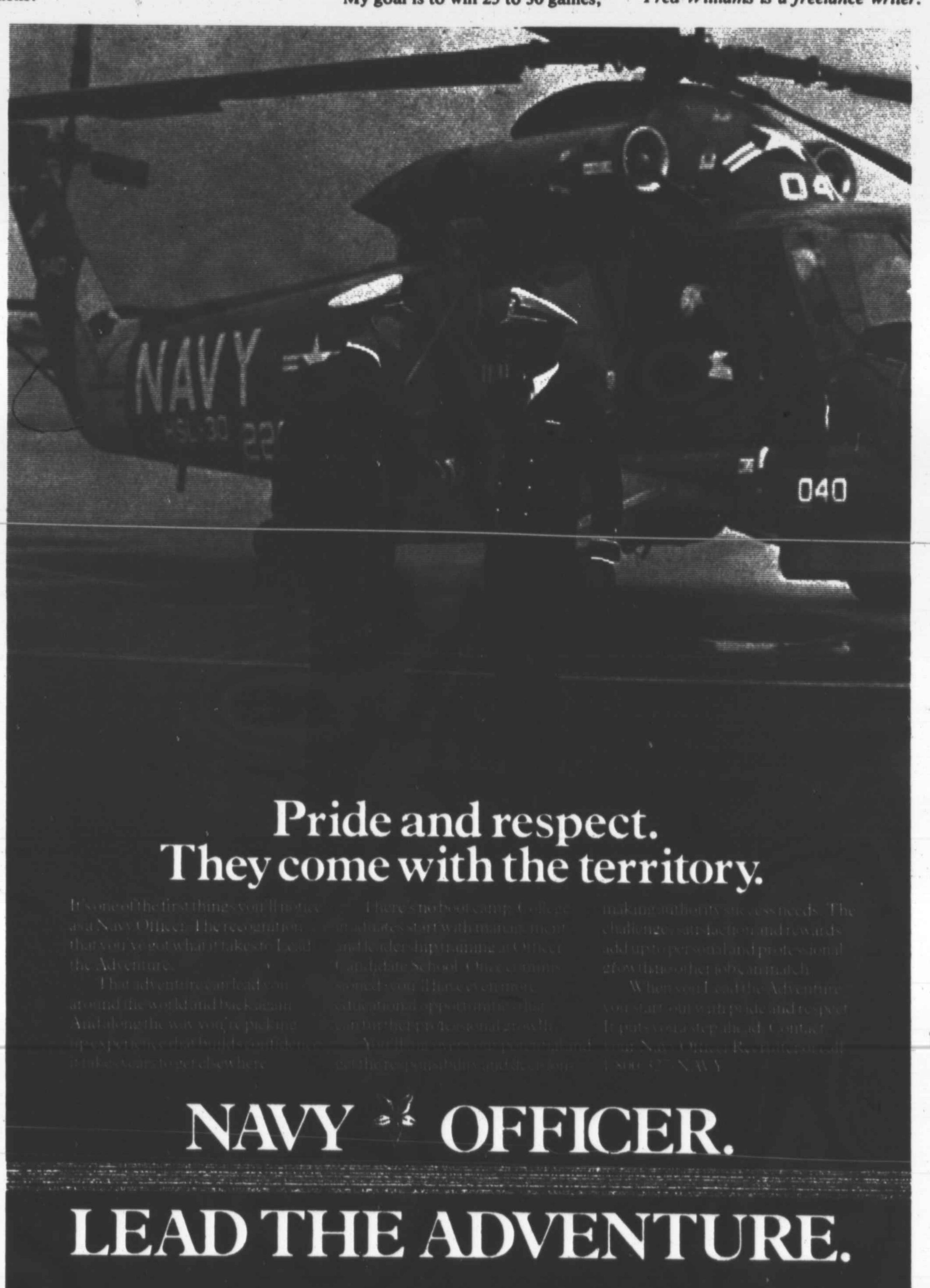
short, too slow, too this, too that . Many feel the CIAA Player of the Year award will come down to a duel between Waller and Tally.

Regardless, Waller's goals remain more team-oriented.

"My goal is to win 25 to 30 games,"

That's a pretty lofty hurdle to set for a Union team that's just lost one of the top players in CIAA history. But then, jumping over high barriers has never been a problem for the son of South Boston's dunking daddy.

Fred Williams is a freelance writer.



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AIRBORNE PANTHER

By FRED WILLIAMS

Virginia Union's Jamie Waller has graduated from right-hand man to main man this year for the Panthers, who remain a CIAA power.

WHERE THERE'S A WIL ...

By JIM TROTTER

With Georgetown transfer Michael Graham ineligible to play this season, some UDC fans have pointed wistfully to next year. But for Coach Wil Jones and his players, the future is now.

WHISTLING 'SWEET GEORGIA BROWN'

By CRAIG GREENLEE

Former Savannah State Coach Russell Ellington reflects on his new job as coach of Harlem's newlook Globetrotters, including Lynette Woodard.

BAD BLOOD

By JIM TROTTER

A&T and Howard dislike each other plenty enough during the regular season. But the bad blood really boils come MEAC Tournament time.

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PUBLISHER Ernest H. Pitt

OFFICE MANAGER Elaine L. Pitt

CIRCULATION MANAGER Michael A. Pitt

SPORTS REVIEW EDITOR Allen Johnson

STAFF WRITERS

David Bulla Gregory Clay Robert Eller Craig T. Greenlee **PHOTOGRAPHERS** Joe Daniels Mark Gail

James Parker

Tim Butner

PRODUCTION MANAGER Vinson Dewberry

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS Yvonne Truhon

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ON THE COVER: Virginia Union forward Jamie Waller fires a jumper during last year's CIAA Tournament (photo by Joe

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