SWAC UPDATE

Texas Southern streaking toward championship

By ROSCOE NANCE
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Surprise! Texas Southern, picked as an also ran in the Southwestern Athletic Conference, is making big noises.

After a 1-3 start, the Tigers reeled off 10 consecutive victories and, along with Southern University, is a favorite to capture the conference championship.

It's a turn of events that no one expected.

"If they had called and asked I would have told them we'd be all right," said coach Bob Moreland. "I'm not responsible for their surprise."

Quiet as it's kept, Moreland might not be surprised by the quality of his team's play, but it's record after 14 games (11-3) did catch him off guard.

"I never thought about a streak," said Moreland. "I just wanted to win one game at a time. I didn't think we'd be off to this good a start this early. I thought we'd be maybe a game above 500."

Texas Southern was 11-18 last season with virtually the same team returning. With just two seniors on the squad, the Tigers' chances for contending in the conference were remote at best. Moreland was pointing toward next season when the Tigers moved into their new facility.

"Whatever we accomplish this year is icing before the cake," said Moreland.

But a strange thing happened to the Tigers' in their 64-61 road loss to New Mexico at the Pit - one of the toughest places to win in college basketball. The Tigers realized they could play with some people.

"New Mexico was lucky to get out of that game," said Moreland. "Things started falling in place. The kids understand what we expect, and we understand what they're capable of doing."

What the Tigers are capable of doing is scoring. They average 82 points a game. And what Moreland expects is everyone to play and contribute.

There is no star system as in the days when Machine Gun Harry Kelly was gunning from downtown. People are beginning to compare this version of the Tigers to the 1977 squad that won the NAIA national championship.

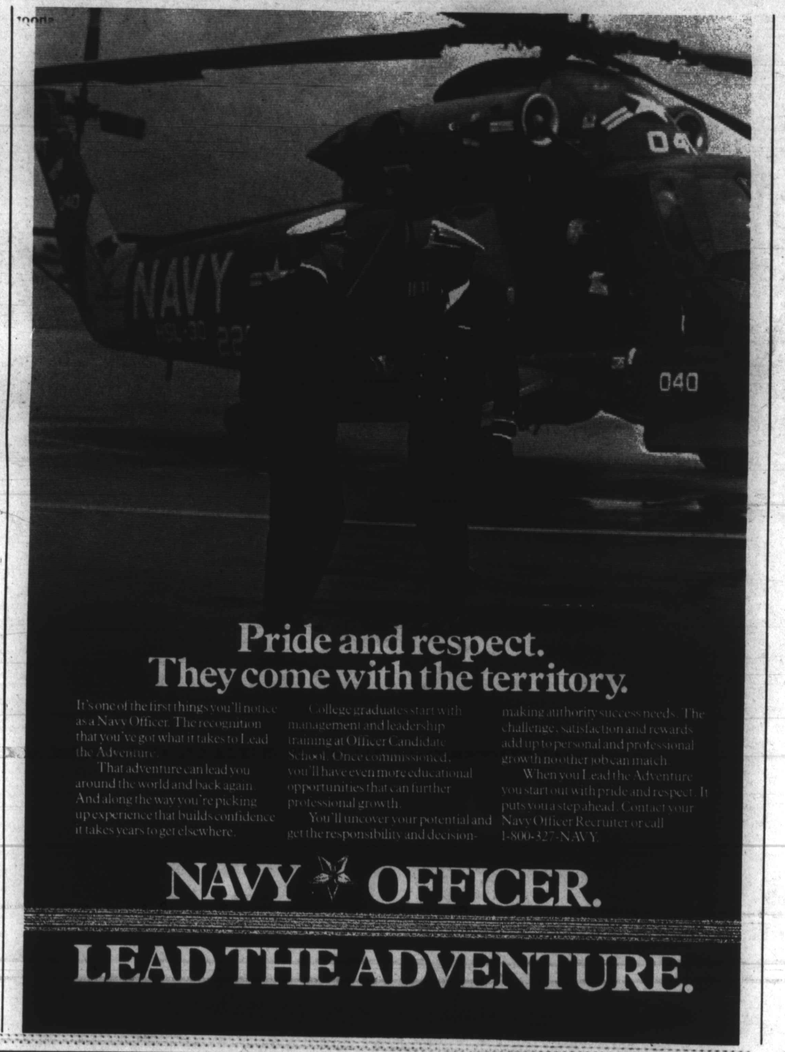
"We play 10 or 12 people and all of them are capable of contributing," said Moreland. "The difference (in the 1977 team) is we don't have an Alonzo Bradley or Marcellus Singleton. But we do have a Fred West."

West, a 6-9 third-year sophomore, is the closest thing to a franchise in the SWAC this season.

He was SWAC Freshman of the Year last season. This season, he averages points and rebounds a game. He is already No.2 on Texas Southern all-time list for blocked shots.

"Fred is a true 6-9," not a 6-7 who is listed as 6-9," said Moreland. "He has one of the sweetest touches you'll see on a person his size.

"He has tremendous potential. With work, there's no telling how good he can be. When we put the ballclub together, we put it together with him in mind."



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The beauty in the Tigers is the opposition can't gang up on West. Two other starters average double figures scoring.

Angelo Garrett, a 6-1 guard with a 42-inch vertical jump, averages 11 points and almost eight rebounds a game; 6-9 center Bryant Mason averages 9.6 points a game, and point guard Andre Young averages 10.6.

Forward Brian Brooks had a four-game stretch in which he shot 68 percent from the floor and averaged 20 points a game.

"People have to realize we have four other good players and they can't key on Fred," said Moreland.

Alcorn State snapped Texas Southern's 10-game winning streak with an 85-84 home victory. But Braves coach Davey Whitney came away thoroughly impressed with the Tigers who shot 52 percent from three-point range.

"They've got three people who can really shoot the three pointer," said Whitney. "West is tremendous. Brooks has come into his own and Garret shoots the daylights out. When you shoot two, they shoot three. They're patient with their offense, but they look to shoot the three-pointer. They have a good looking club and they're so big. They're the biggest starting team in the conference, and they're talented."

Moreland is prepared for a duel to the wire with Southern for the regular season title. He also expects Southern to be one of the teams in the tournament championship game.

"We still have a long way to go and a lot to learn," he said.

"Southern is a tough, experienced ballclub. I would say the regular season is up for grabs. The conference tournament is in Baton Rouge, but we're working to win it all."

Considering the Tigers scintillating start, no one should be surprised if the Tigers do.

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>
> -- TSU Coach Bob Moreland

Alabama A&M outlasts Albany State 80-78

NORMAL, Ala. -- Alabama A&M (9-1 overall and 5-0 in Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference action) erased a 15-point deficit en route to defeating Albany State College at Sanford Hall in Albany, Ga.

The Bulldogs fell behind 17-2 with 13:33 left in the first half, but rallied to the game at intermission -- compliments of guard Ondray Wagner. A&M's senior guard connected on six consecutive three-pointers as the Bulldogs tied the game at 44.

A&M went ahead 80-78 on a jumper by guard Willie Hayes, but the contest wasn't secure until Wagner blocked and rebounded a Ram shot as time expired.

In addition to a 28-point performance, Wagner had s3even rebounds and seven steals.

All-America forward Frank Sillmon added 12 points and 10 rebound for the Bulldogs while Hayes scored 18 points and dished out six assists. Mark Dukes added 12 points.

Albany State was led by Byron Martin's 28 points and 14 rebounds.

The Lady Bulldogs are doing just as well as the men, with Alabama A&M breaking open a close contest midway through the final period to Defeat Albany State 82-68. Jennelle Wilson led the Lady Bulldogs with 15 points, followed by Mary Johnson with 14, Sonya Perry, also with 14, Shaunda Hill with 13 and Sharon Hunter with 13.

Tawauna Dixon, 22 points, and Lois Harty, 19 points, led Albany State.

The win broke A&M's three-game losing streak to Albany State.

The Bulldogs didn't fare so well, however, against Jacksonville State. Alabama A&M, which led by eight points with 1:27 left in the game, lost to Jacksonville 106-92 in overtime on the winners' homecourt.

Jacksonville State capitalized on a five-point play at the 1:27 mark en route to sending the game into overtime. In the overtime period, the Gamecocks outscored the Bulldogs 23-9 for the win.

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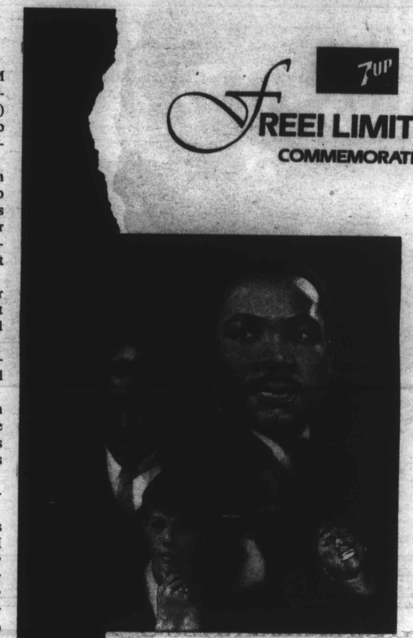

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