

VCU basketball ... in your face

A photograph of a basketball game in progress. Several players are jumping towards the basket. In the foreground, a player in a white jersey with the number 54 and the name 'PARO' is visible. Another player in a white jersey with the number 23 and the name 'LANG' is also visible. A player in a dark jersey with the number 22 and the name 'MCCOY' is in the lower right. The basketball hoop and backboard are visible in the upper center of the image.

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Sonny Smith, page 3

■ Meet the players, pages
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page 10

Yeager discusses CAA's plans for future

Brian J. French
CT STAFF WRITER

With the addition of VCU this past July, the Colonial Athletic Association took another step to distinguish itself among the mid-major athletic conferences.

The CAA counts as its members American, East Carolina, George Mason, James Madison, Old Dominion, Richmond, UNC-Wilmington, VCU and William and Mary.

After the fall athletic season, which featured two teams in both the field hockey and women's soccer NCAA tournaments, the CAA made another step toward that end.

"This is actually par for the course for us," said CAA Commissioner Thomas Yeager. "One of the things I've been most proud of is the CAA's non-revenue suc-



Yeager

cess."

Yeager came to the CAA immediately after its inception in 1985.

Since the league began play as the CAA (the conference was known as the ECAC South since 1982), it has housed several field-hockey champions (including James Madison last year) and playoff performers in soccer and baseball, where they advanced three teams last season.

But the glamour sport in most conferences is men's basketball, and such it is with the CAA. And it's been nine years since the CAA last sent more than one team to the NCAA tournament (David Robinson-led Navy and Richmond).

Yeager hopes the addition of VCU will be what's needed to get the CAA an at-large bid in the NCAAs.

"We certainly hope that VCU is the impetus for us getting there (to the point where a CAA at-large team is a possibility)," Yeager said. "But people have to win games outside of the conference (where the CAA finished under .500 last year) for us to contend for a second team to go to the NCAAs. And the addition of VCU is a foundation for that."

Yeager also said he hopes the addition of VCU will increase fan and media interest.

"This will create heightened fan interest, and that will pay dividends across the

board."

Yeager emphasized the CAA-VCU marriage is more than a one-way street.

"We feel that the CAA is good for VCU because the students can relate to the other schools better than they could in the Metro (VCU's conference from 1991 to 1995)," Yeager said. "It increases the emotional stakes of their games. The players know each other."

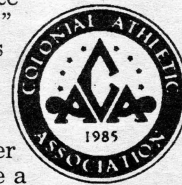
"Just look at the soccer tournament. There were a number of VCU parents and fans there, and they couldn't have done that before because the tournaments would be so far away. That's a nice benefit."

So everything's all rosy? Not quite.

While VCU, Old Dominion and James Madison look to finish in the upper echelon of the CAA, the disparity in talent between the breadwinners and the bottom feeders (American, William and Mary, George Mason) is great, dragging down the pivotal power ratings that determine who gets the at-large bids.

Yeager denied, though, that the disparity between top and bottom is that large, nor is it particularly unique to the CAA.

"In any conference, there will be a gap between the first division, the middle teams and the bottom teams," Yeager said. "But



that doesn't point to a guaranteed domination. That's why you have to play those games. You never know.

"But our challenge is to make the weaker teams stronger," conceded Yeager. "Our top teams are competitive, but the difference in rating between the top and bottom teams drags down our computer ratings. That's what needs help."

The recent rush of expansion has now ended, and Yeager said that, barring a deal too good to be true, the CAA won't expand.

"We've never taken the approach to expand for expansion's sake," Yeager said. "Last year at this time we did recruit heavily, because we knew that the Metro was breaking up and we had that opportunity."

"There are several schools that we could call up and make CAA members by the end of the day, but the timing wouldn't be right, and may never be right," Yeager said, noting that UNC-Greensboro and the College of Charleston, rumored to be potential CAA members, have been extended invitations to join the Southern Conference.

And for what it's worth, the CAA will not lose Richmond, JMU and W&M to the Southern for all sports.

"The only interest is for football," said Yeager. "All three schools have agreed that the CAA outweighs the Southern for their other sports."

VCU men's basketball transportation schedule

Date	Team	Pick-up before game		
Thu., Nov. 30	Xavier	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Mon., Dec. 4	Florida International	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Thu., Dec. 7	UNC-Charlotte	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Sat., Dec. 9	Pittsburgh	12:30 p.m.	12:45 p.m.	2 p.m.
		1 p.m.	1:15 p.m.	
		1:30 p.m.	1:45 p.m.	
Wed., Jan. 17	James Madison	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Sat., Jan. 20	Richmond	3 p.m.	3:15 p.m.	4:30 p.m.
		3:30 p.m.	3:45 p.m.	
		4 p.m.	4:15 p.m.	
Wed., Jan. 24	American	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Sat., Feb. 3	Old Dominion	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Wed., Feb. 7	William and Mary	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Sat., Feb. 10	East Carolina	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	
Wed., Feb. 21	UNC-Wilmington	5:30 p.m.	5:45 p.m.	7 p.m.
		6 p.m.	6:15 p.m.	
		6:30 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	

Before game: Pick-up at Johnson Hall. Drop-off at Fifth Street at the Richmond Coliseum.

After game: Pick-up at Fifth Street immediately following the game. Drop-off at Johnson Hall.

Commonwealth TIMES

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SPECIAL THANKS TO VCU'S SPORTS
INFORMATION DEPARTMENT.

Smith poised to open first season in CAA

Coveh Solaimani
CT SPORTS EDITOR

Growing up he wanted to either be an actor, a coach or a minister.

At VCU, men's basketball head coach Sonny Smith has accomplished all three.

Now in his 26th year of coaching, Smith has experienced the ups and downs of big-time college basketball.

He began his coaching career as an assistant at William and Mary in 1969. He stayed there one year before moving on to Pepperdine and then Virginia Tech as an assistant. In 1976, Smith landed his first head coaching job at East Tennessee State University, near his hometown of Roan Mountain, Tenn.

"I took over a team that only won four games in two years," he said. "The only tough thing about going to East Tennessee State was going back to my hometown."

In his second year at ETSU, Smith led his team to a tie for the Ohio Valley Conference title and was named OVC Coach of the Year. Following his second season, Smith left ETSU and went to the Southeastern Conference to coach the University of Auburn squad.

He coached the Tigers for 11 years, taking the team to the NCAA Tournament five times and, in doing so, was named SEC Coach of the Year twice.

From 1984 to 1986, Smith's teams won 20 games each year as he developed a reputation as one of top coaches in the country.

While at Auburn, he coached future NBA stars Chuck Person, Chris Morris and Charles Barkley. Although he and Barkley didn't have the best relationship in college, during the summer Barkley said he now better understands Smith and his way of coaching.

"I really didn't understand Sonny until I left Auburn and got into the NBA," Barkley said. "Once I got into the NBA, I realized he was just trying to make me a better player."

Following the 1988-89 season, Smith left the Tigers to come to Richmond and take over the VCU basketball program.

"I had been in Virginia before," Smith said. "I coached high-school basketball here and I coached at William and Mary and Virginia Tech so I thought I knew the state and it would be a perfect match although it didn't work out that way totally."

In his seven years at VCU, Smith has been criticized by the media for not taking the Rams to the NCAA Tournament and for not being more successful during former Rams forward Kendrick Warren's four years at VCU.

But in 1993 he took a Rams team without its best player — Warren — and helped mold them into a squad that he said should have been to the Big Dance.

"I think that was one of the biggest hose jobs by the NCAA (selection committee)," he said.

At VCU, Smith has continued to show the ability he displayed at Auburn to develop talent so they can play professionally. Former players Warren, Sherron Mills and Kenny Harris currently are playing pro ball.

"I chose VCU because I liked coach Smith, and I thought he could help me get to the next level," said VCU senior Bernard Hopkins.

Smith said he is excited about the prospects of this year's team and VCU's entrance into the Colonial Athletic Association.

"From a competitive standpoint and an athletic ability standpoint this team is as good as any team I've had here," Smith said.

He said playing in the CAA will be good for the school and should help heighten interest among the students.

"We have more natural rivals," he said. "The crowds are going to get better, and I think it's going to be a more competitive league. I think that bragging rights are going to be a real factor now."

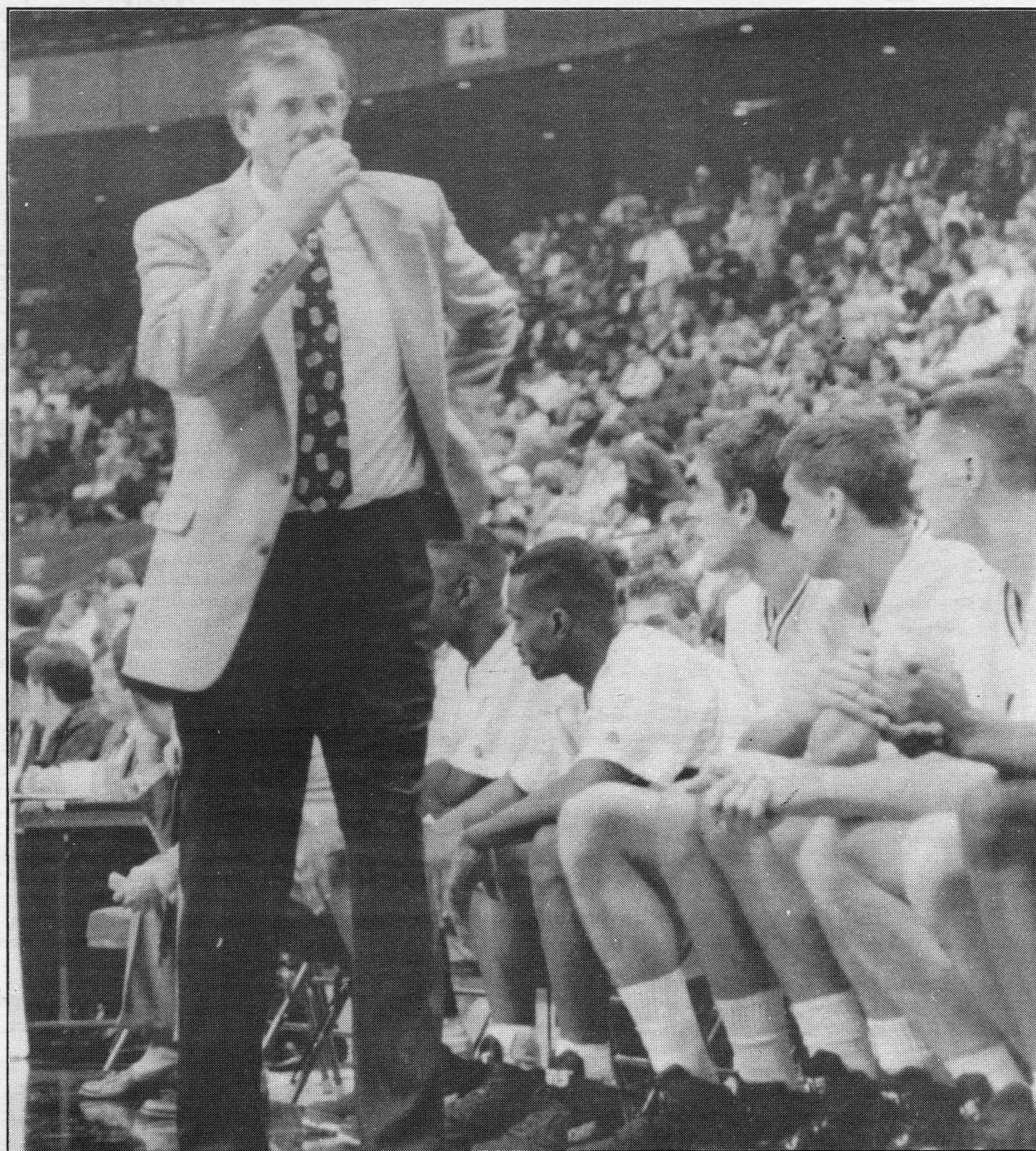
When he isn't coaching, Smith said his passions are NASCAR racing and country music. At ETSU, he sang at the Grand Old Opry, and while at Auburn he worked as a member of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt's pit crew.

Although he's 59, and some might think the end of Smith's career may be just around the corner, the VCU coach said he isn't ready to give it up.

"I don't feel 59 and that's because of the players," he said. "I haven't lost the enthusiasm for (coaching)."



Smith



File photo

AS TIME GOES BY — VCU coach Sonny Smith hopes this year — his seventh — will be a lucky one. The one he takes his Rams to the NCAA Tournament.

SONNY'S TIME ON THE PINE

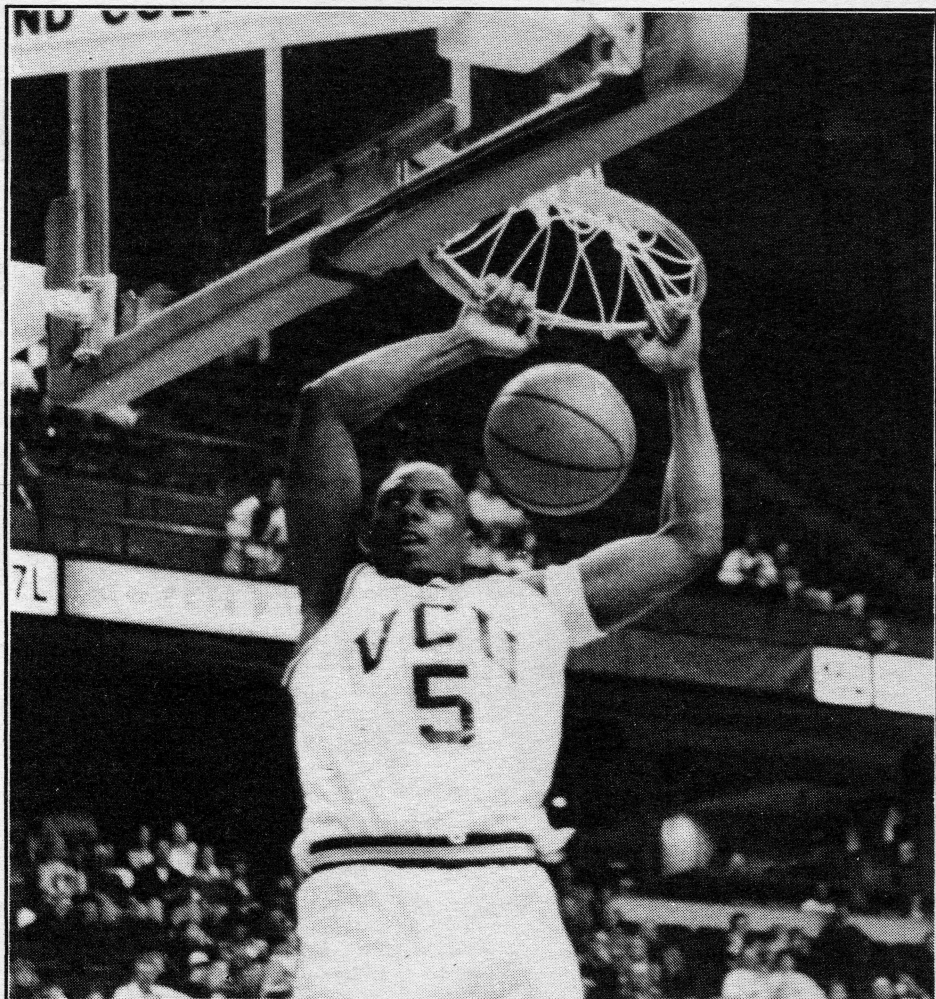
□ 1969-70	Assistant William and Mary	11-16	.407
□ 1970-71	Assistant Pepperdine	12-13	.480
□ 1971-72	Assistant Virginia Tech	16-10	.615
□ 1972-73	Assistant Virginia Tech	22-5	.815 NIT Champions
□ 1973-74	Assistant Virginia Tech	13-13	.500
□ 1974-75	Assistant Virginia Tech	16-10	.615
□ 1975-76	Assistant Virginia Tech	21-7	.750 NCAA Tournament
□ 1976-77	Head coach East Tennessee State	12-14	.462
□ 1977-78	Head coach East Tennessee State	18-9	.667 OVC Co-champs, OVC Coach of the Year
□ 1978-79	Head coach Auburn	13-16	.448
□ 1979-80	Head coach Auburn	10-18	.357
□ 1980-81	Head coach Auburn	11-16	.407
□ 1981-82	Head coach Auburn	14-14	.500
□ 1982-83	Head coach Auburn	15-13	.536
□ 1983-84	Head coach Auburn	20-11	.645 NCAA Tournament, SEC Coach of the Year
□ 1984-85	Head coach Auburn	22-12	.647 NCAA Tournament, SEC Coach of the Year
□ 1985-86	Head coach Auburn	22-11	.667 NCAA Tournament
□ 1986-87	Head coach Auburn	18-13	.581 NCAA Tournament
□ 1987-88	Head coach Auburn	19-11	.633 NCAA Tournament, SEC Coach of the Year
□ 1988-89	Head coach Auburn	9-19	.321
□ 1989-90	Head coach VCU	11-17	.393
□ 1990-91	Head coach VCU	14-17	.448
□ 1991-92	Head coach VCU	14-15	.483
□ 1992-93	Head coach VCU	20-10	.667 NIT, Metro Conference Coach of the Year
□ 1993-94	Head coach VCU	14-13	.519
□ 1994-95	Head coach VCU	16-14	.533

□ Overall record 292-263 .526

Hopkins has NCAA Tournament dreams

VCU senior named preseason All-CAA

Coveh Solaimani
CT SPORTS EDITOR



Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

JAMMIN' — Rams forward Bernard Hopkins hopes to live up to his preseason All-CAA selection.

The 1996 Colonial Athletic Association Player of the Year is VCU senior Bernard Hopkins.

Could this happen? Hopkins hopes so. The preseason All-CAA selection said the goal he set for himself this year is to play at a Player-of-the-Year level. He knows that to attain that level of performance, he will have to work hard.

PROFILE

"The preseason stuff doesn't mean anything," he said. "They could have picked any five guys. I'm happy about it, but now I have to go prove it."

While the award would be nice, Hopkins said it would be more important for the team to make it to the NCAA Tournament.

"No matter where you play, your goal is to make it to the Big Dance," he said.

If the Rams are going to do so, Hopkins must have a big year. Last season, Hopkins led the team in rebounding (8.5) and was second in scoring with 13.7 points per game.

"Bernard is a big part of our team," said point guard Sherman Hamilton. "We need him to have a big year for us."

Hopkins is the central part of a VCU frontcourt that is expected to overpower many of its conference counterparts.

"I think with our big men we can dominate the CAA," said teammate John Smith. And if they do, Hopkins will be a major part of that domination.

Coming out of high school, however, Hopkins was expected to dominate in another sport ... football.

He signed a letter of intent to go to Boston College as a tight end, but he didn't

meet NCAA requirements so he transferred to Hagerstown Junior College.

In his second year at Hagerstown, Hopkins was named second-team JUCO All-American. He set school records averaging 23.3 points and 12.3 rebounds. He shot 65.8 percent from the field.

He was recruited by several big-time universities but said he chose VCU because he wanted to play in the Metro Conference and because he thought Rams coach Sonny Smith could make him a better player.

"Sonny coached (Charles) Barkley, (Chuck) Person and (Chris) Morris, and they are in the NBA," Hopkins said. "Sonny told me he thought I could play professionally and I thought he could help me get to the next level."

Although the Rams aren't in the Metro anymore, Hopkins said it doesn't bother him and that he's excited about playing in the CAA.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "I just want to play basketball and I just want to win."

Last season, Hopkins struggled at the beginning of the year. He said it was difficult getting used to the Division I game.

"It was hard making the adjustment from JUCO to Division I," he said. "It was just like coming out of high school again."

To prepare himself for the upcoming season, Hopkins worked hard during the offseason on his perimeter game.

"I worked on shooting the 15 footer," he said, adding that he also trimmed down a bit.

As a senior Hopkins said he plans on taking more of a leadership role.

"I plan on stepping up when things are going bad on or off the court," he said. "I'm going to do the little things."

Byrd anchors Rams' powerful frontcourt

James McMahon
CT NEWS EDITOR

Playing tackle for the high-powered offense of the Florida Gators football team during a national championship race: Could there be anything better? How about playing center for a preseason Colonial Athletic Association basketball favorite?

PROFILE

Junior George Byrd had his pick of the two, and VCU coach Sonny Smith is happy he chose the latter.

Expectations are high for Byrd, the 6-8, 270-pound center who is part of one of the best frontcourts in the CAA. Byrd, however, just as easily could have been spending his college career in the state of Florida.

Although he was recruited by Miami, Florida State, Florida and Notre Dame to play offensive tackle, Byrd chose to play basketball.

"If circumstances would have been different I would have been at the University of Florida playing football," Byrd said. "I just didn't want all the weight on me that football required."

Byrd brings experience to a solid frontcourt that features preseason All-CAA forward Bernard Hopkins and swingman forward Ivan Chapell. John Smith and Marlow Talley also are expected to receive a lot of playing time in the frontcourt.

Byrd averaged 29 minutes per game last year and appeared in all 30 games. He doubled his point production from his fresh-

man year, averaging 10.6 points per game. Byrd also was second on the team in rebounding, averaging 7.3 per game, and was tied for sixth in the Metro Conference in blocks with 27.

"My freshman year gave me the chance to come on and show how I can play," he said. "My sophomore year I knew I had to play and just kept pushing and pushing and working hard."

Despite the improved numbers Byrd said he believes he could have done more last year.

"I kind of slacked off last year, I didn't go all the way," he said.

Byrd has lost 10 pounds during the offseason and feels that will help him get back to his aggressive style of play.

"I lost my freshman form—I used to run the court a lot and I got away from that," he said. "Last year sometimes I got tired when John (Smith) wasn't there, playing 30 to 35 minutes a game, and I wasn't used to playing that long."

Playing strong team defense in addition to better shooting, Byrd said, should be one of the goals of this year's team.

"We, as a team, need to shoot better free throws," he said. "We brought in some shooters this year, which is going to make the team much better."

CAA teams, Byrd said, should all be playing on an even level, but the Rams' experience against tough opponents could give them an advantage.

"We've played against higher competition and so has ODU, but we played against it all season long, and I think that will



GET IT OUT —
The Rams are expecting George Byrd to anchor the middle of VCU's defense and provide scoring punch on the inside.

really help us," he said.

The Rams' frontcourt, he said, compares with any in the conference, adding that this year's depth gives the team an upperhand.

The positions, Byrd said, are interchangeable.

It also helps to have a back-up center that can come in without the team losing anything.

"I don't see any weaknesses," he said. "John has completely rehabilitated his

knee, Bernard can go off the dribble, Marlow can go off the dribble, both of them can shoot the outside shot and John and I have both worked on our outside shots," he said.

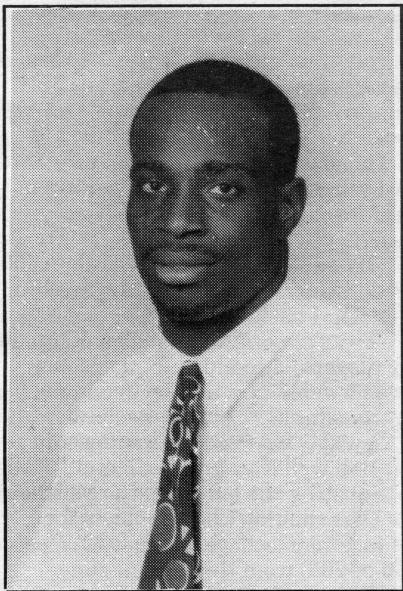
But whoever they're facing, Byrd said, that team will see the best the team has to offer.

"When we come to play we are going to come to play," Byrd said.

"They might get the best of us one night, but we're not going to take that as a let-down and we'll come back the next night."



MEET THE 1995-96 VCU RAMS



Brian J. French
CT STAFF WRITER

Call him Mr. Versatility.

Ivan Chappell, VCU senior forward, was brought to Richmond last year by Sonny Smith to be a pure shooter, especially from the outer fringes.

But with the transfer of freshman Todd Cox, the Rams are left with only four traditional forwards.

With that in mind, Smith taught Chappell a number of inside moves. While keeping his outside skills, Chappell can start playing the power game in a pinch.

"It's not a big change, really," Chappell said. "I already knew the three spot and the four spot. I'm the fifth biggest player on the team."

Chappell was the starting small forward for the first 10 games of the season

IVAN CHAPPELL Forward, 6-6, Senior Chesapeake

before moving to the bench. His numbers from last year: 7.8 points and 3.2 rebounds per game.

Asked if his game had changed, outside of learning the post moves, Chappell replied: "It's nothing different. I'm just going out there trying to give my all to help the team have a winning season."

After transferring from Otero (Colo.) Junior College, Chappell came to VCU with the goal of being an outside shooter. He shot 27-for-80 from behind the arc, 33.8 percent.

He does this with an indescribable overhead jump shot unique to him.

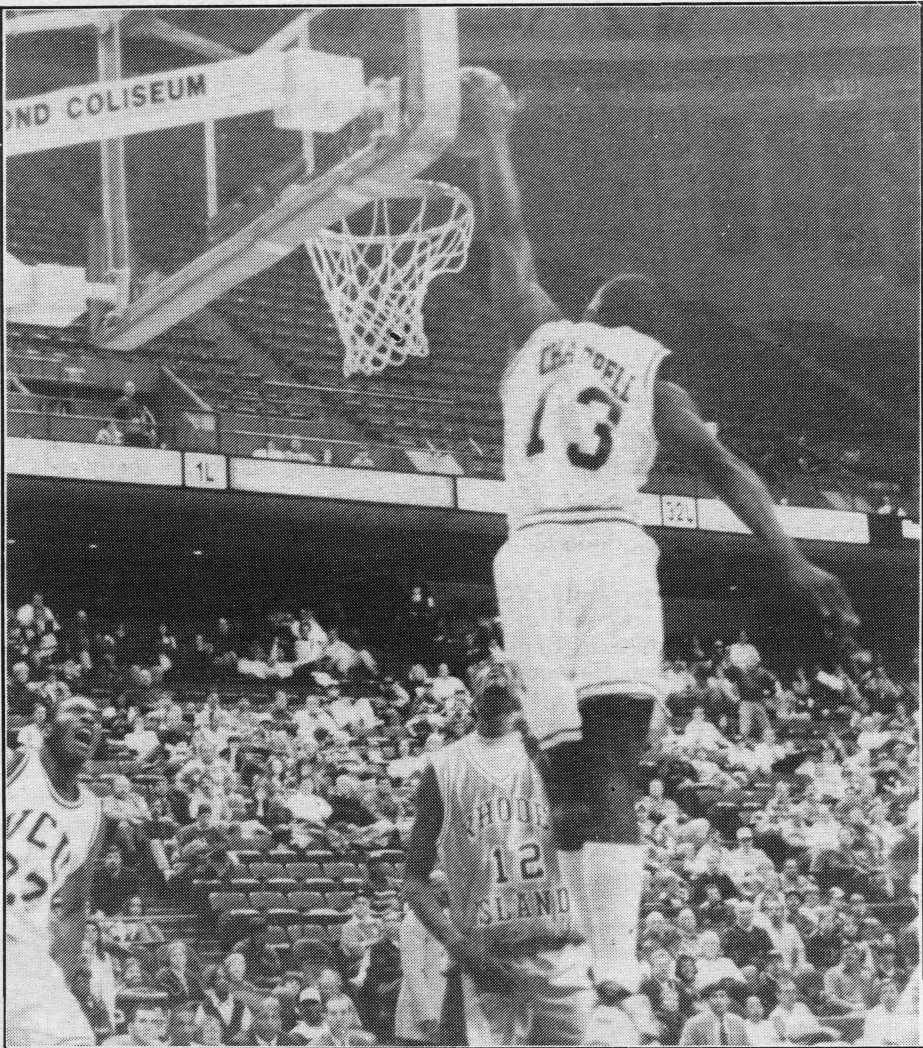
"During the summer, after I graduated from Otero ... I don't know what happened," said Chappell about developing his shot. "I just got it during the summer (before coming to VCU)."

Chappell also has an unusual delivery on his free-throw shot, but that has been considerably less successful (44.8 percent). He said, however, he has made progress on that aspect of his game.

"I've changed free-throw styles," said Chappell. "Coach Cheeks got a new style for me, so I'm going to stick with that style instead of my first one. That didn't go anywhere."

Chappell, a native of Chesapeake, benefits from the Rams' move to the CAA more than most players. He'll get a chance to play in front of his friends and family Jan. 6 at Old Dominion.

"It's 20 minutes from home, and all my friends and family will be there, so I'll hope to do good there," Chappell said.



Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

OLD NUMBER, NEW GAME — VCU forward Ivan Chappell will be looking to score as much from the inside as the outside this year.

JOHN SMITH Center, 6-8, senior Columbia, S.C.

starting one. He averaged 3.4 points and 2.3 rebounds in 11.1 minutes of action.

During the offseason, Smith had surgery to remove bone chips in his left knee to try to gain back some of his mobility.

And it worked.

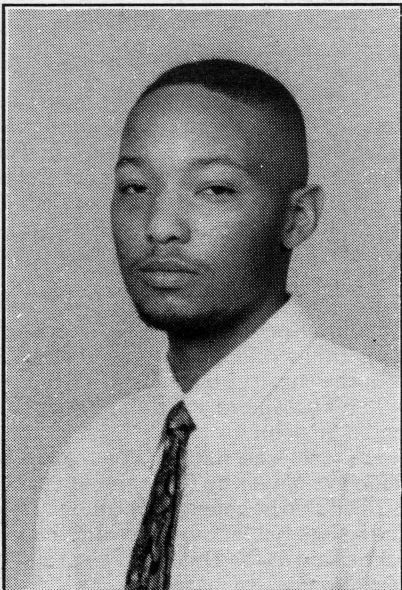
In VCU's first exhibition, the annual Black and Gold game, Smith showed the fans, his teammates and Rams coach Sonny Smith the potential he displayed at Wichita State University, where he played his first two years of college basketball before leaving because of differences with the program.

Smith scored 23 points, grabbed 13 boards, had three blocks and two steals in the game.

"John looked like a whole different player," said teammate Marlow Talley. "He was taking stuff of the rim and dunking it back in."

Along with Bernard Hopkins, Talley and George Byrd, John Smith is part of a frontcourt that may overpower the rest of the Colonial Athletic Association.

"I think we are going to dominate, we have power," Smith said. "Our forwards can handle the rock, me and George can rebound and block shots. Basically, we have a lot of power down low."



Brian J. French
CT STAFF WRITER

Three-hundred sixty-five days and a 180-degree turn for Ben Peabody.

This time last year, the senior guard was in a state of flux, unsure about his decision to transfer to VCU. With his family back home in Oklahoma, Peabody decided to leave the Rams program last Nov. 13.

On Dec. 1, he returned and moved into a starting shooting guard position, which he currently holds as the 1995-96 season begins.

So, Ben, did you think you'd still be

BEN PEABODY Guard, 6-4, Senior Oklahoma City

here?

"Not really," admitted Peabody, "but after some head scratching, I met with coach (Sonny) Smith and decided to come back."

Peabody's decision to return would somewhat quell a problem the Rams would develop after Keith Davis abruptly left — lack of a backcourt. After Peabody and point guard Sherman Hamilton, there were no major reserves.

This year, the Rams are much deeper in shooters, which makes Peabody a marked man.

"Our team is a lot deeper this season," said Peabody on the question of how this team differs from last year's, his first with the Rams. "We can go all out on defense now."

"Last year we played tentatively because we were worried Sherm would foul out, and I'm not comfortable running the point."

With his role more cemented, Peabody went to work on the part of his game that lagged the most: field-goal percentage.

Peabody shot 43.3 percent from the field, which he knew could put his job in jeopardy for the new season. So he worked on his jumper during the offseason.

The result?

"I feel like I'm hitting my shots more accurately now," Peabody said.



Coveh Solaimani
CT SPORTS EDITOR

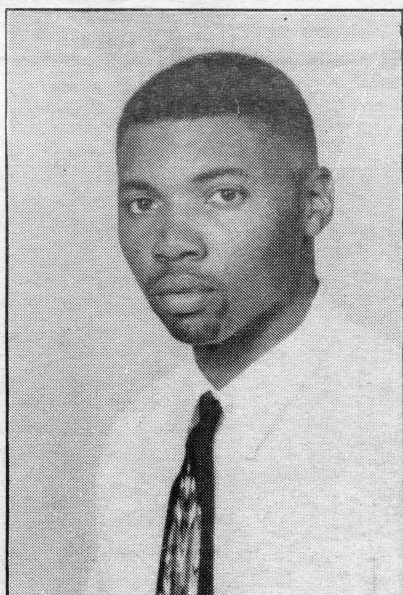
When healthy, he can control a game. He can score, rebound and be the shot-blocker VCU has lacked for some time.

For Rams senior John Smith, the key words are "when healthy."

Smith spent much of last season hobbled by an ailing knee, but he said right now it feels all right.

"The knee feels good," Smith said, "and I'm going to be ready to go."

He played in 15 games last season,



Brian J. French
CT STAFF WRITER

Can Marlow Talley continue his November successes?

Talley, a reserve power forward for VCU, started last year doing very well in the preseason games, giving Bernard Hopkins a tussle for the starting job. He scored 19 points against Liberty in the first game of the season before tailing off as the season progressed.

This year, the start is familiar.

Talley scored 27 points and had 13 rebounds in the Black and Gold game, and VCU coach Sonny Smith recently said Talley was playing well enough to possibly

MARLOW TALLEY

Forward, 6-7, Senior Sterling

get a starting job.

But can he do it in December?

On whether he can become a more consistent player, Talley said, "It just really happens. I couldn't really work on it. You've just got to concentrate during the game."

Talley averaged 4.2 points and 2.4 rebounds per game last season, his first with the team.

Talley is expected to continue to contribute as the primary power forward reserve and, along with John Smith, is a part of the second-line frontcourt tandem, backing up Bernard Hopkins and George Byrd.

"I feel comfortable playing the four (power forward) spot," the senior said. "It's the best thing I have. It's really good for me."

With the move to the Colonial Athletic Association, Talley said that the four-man rotation of post players should be more than enough to handle conference opponents.

"We're strong. John's getting healthy, and I think overall we're getting better," Talley said.

Talley also said he worked on the mental aspects of the game most since last year.

"I'm trying to keep my mind focused, both during games and in practice and knowing the plays better," Talley said.

MARCUS REED

Guard, 6-4, Junior Staunton

you want to talk to the coaches, the door is always open.

"At many of the 'big-time' schools you have to make appointments with the coaches."

The reason Reed's family hasn't seen him play for quite some time is because the guard spent the past two years in Texas playing for Trinity Valley Junior College.

At Trinity Valley, Reed averaged 16.8 points, 4.5 rebounds, 3.5 assists and 2.9 assists a game in helping the team post a 30-8 record.

He shot 50 percent (214-of-428) from the field, 38 percent (59-of-157) from three-point range and 86 percent (117-of-136) from the charity stripe.

In his best game at Trinity Valley, Reed scored 39 points.

He also was named the team's best defensive player by his teammates.

Reed said he believes his time at Trinity Valley has helped prepare him for VCU, but he said at the Division I level a player has a lot more to learn.

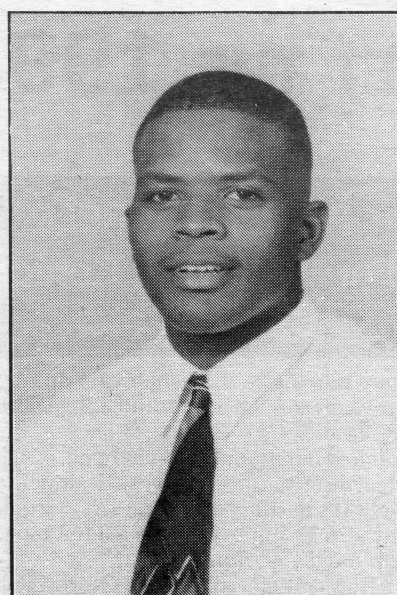
"The coaching is a lot more efficient," he said. "I've learned more in the last two weeks than I did through most of my career."

He must be learning well, too.

In the Rams annual Black and Gold game, Reed scored 17 points and grabbed six rebounds while playing relentless defense. After the game, Smith said Reed was the player that impressed him the most.

"The guy who stood out as much as anybody for me was Marcus Reed," Smith said.

"There's a possibility before the year is over that he could be our starting point guard."



Coveh Solaimani
CT SPORTS EDITOR

When it came time to choose a college, VCU was the obvious choice for Rams guard Patrick Lee.

"It seemed as if this was a family-type environment," Lee said. "They made me feel at home here, and this place is close to home."

There is another reason Lee chose to come to VCU, and that's Rams senior Bernard Hopkins.

Lee and Hopkins were teammates at Hagerstown Junior College two years ago where they became friends.

"I had played with Bernard and we had become good friends," Lee said, adding that Hopkins being here was a factor in his decision.

At Hagerstown the Rams junior guard was dominant. He averaged 18.5 points, 6.5 rebounds, 4.5 assists and 3.3 steals in

PATRICK LEE

Guard, 6-1, Junior, Monroe, N.C.

24.5 minutes of game time. Lee shot 50.2 percent from the field including 71.1 percent (69-of-87) from behind the free-throw line.

Hagerstown posted a 56-10 record in his two years there, and he helped them to a ranking as high as 14th nationally last year.

His experience at the junior college level, Lee said, will help prepare him for Division I basketball VCU.

"I was playing against a lot of top-quality players," he said.

The goals Lee has set for himself are pretty simple.

"I just want to get into shape and shoot the ball well from the perimeter," he said.

Shooting the ball from the perimeter? That shouldn't be a problem for Lee.

In junior college he shot 41.7 percent (86-of-206) from three-point range.

With a logjam of players at his position, playing time could be a problem this year for Lee, but he said he isn't concerned about it.

He added that he hopes to help the team anyway he can.

"I can help with my outside shooting, rebounding and defense," he said.

And in the past few weeks he has shown VCU coach Sonny Smith exactly what he is capable of doing.

Just recently Smith said Lee has come as far, if not further, than any other player since the start of practice.

"Lee is coming on fast right now," he said. "He's really come on in the last week. He was an outstanding junior college player."

SHERMAN HAMILTON

Guard, 6-2, Junior Malton, Canada

ment."

If the Rams are going to do so, they will need a stellar season from their point guard. Last season, his first at VCU after transferring from Florida Tech, Hamilton led the team in assists with 4.9 per game and averaged 8.7 points and 3.2 rebounds per contest.

The Rams need him to improve those numbers and Hamilton said he is ready, adding that last year helped him a lot.

"I played last year and played in a tough league and had a good experience," he said. "I had my good days and my off days, but I learned a lot and I think that should carry over to this year."

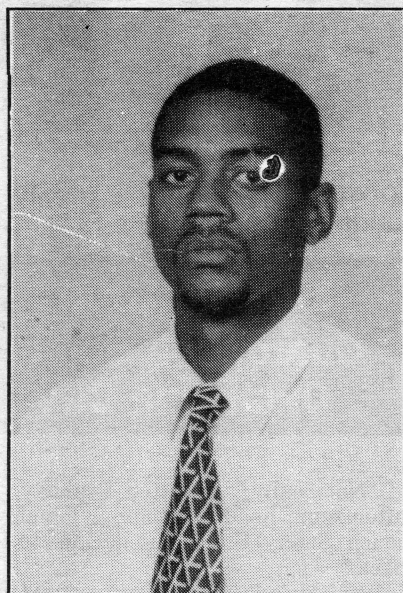
Added VCU senior Bernard Hopkins: "Being the point guard, he is very important to the success of the team."

One of Hamilton's strengths is his unlimited range from three-point territory. He had 50 three-pointers a year ago. Although shooting the outside shot is a feature of his game, Hamilton said this year he would like to concentrate on being a true point guard.

"I want to keep my turnovers down and find the right people at the right time," he said. "I want to be a true point guard and distribute the ball."

As much of the talk around this year's VCU squad centers on the frontcourt, Hamilton said the backcourt will be strong as well, creating a well-balanced team.

"We got the size up front and some skill players up front and we got some size and a lot of skill in the backcourt," he said.



Coveh Solaimani
CT SPORTS EDITOR

It's been said many times that nothing is more important than family

For VCU guard Marcus Reed, this apparently holds true.

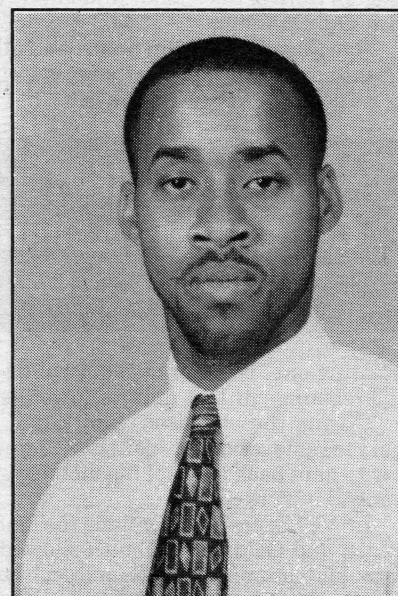
Reed could be playing basketball for Bobby Knight and the University of Indiana or any number of prominent schools across the country.

Instead he decided on VCU and his family.

"I could have went to any school basically. Indiana, Minnesota, Tulane, anywhere," he said. "I chose here because it's closer to home, and I want my friends and family to see me play. They haven't seen me play in a while, and I'm going to put on a show for them."

Reed said another element that played a role in his choice of VCU was the friendliness of the staff and the accessibility of coach Sonny Smith.

"I love the staff here," he said. "Anytime



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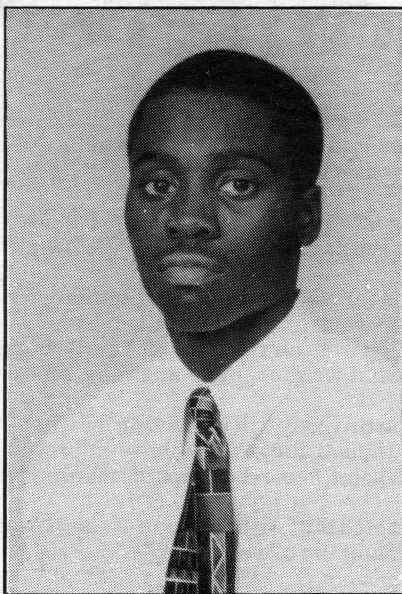
While many players spent the summer playing pickup games VCU junior Sherman Hamilton used the time to try to help his native country Canada qualify for the Olympics.

Hamilton played in the Olympic Qualifying round for the Canadian National team in Argentina this summer.

His team went 5-5 and finished in fourth place, just missing a spot in the 1996 Olympics.

Although the team failed to garner a spot in the Olympics, the Rams point guard said he doesn't expect the same results from this year's VCU squad.

"My goals for the team this year is to win the CAA and to go to the NCAA Tournament."

**Terry Scanlon**

CT ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

Like most freshman, Tryrian Ridges has gone from being a big fish in a little pond to being a little fish in a big pond.

"It makes you want to work harder so you can contribute to the team," said the Springbrook High School alumnus.

During both his junior and senior seasons, Ridges led his team to the Maryland State Championship game on his way to breaking the schools all-time scoring record with more than 1,300 points, which is nothing to sneeze at considering some of Springbrook's alumni: Darren McLinton, James Madison; Chris McGuthrie, Mount St. Mary's; and Kevin McLinton, Maryland.

As a senior in high school his 23 points and 7 assists per game were enough to earn him First team All-Metropolitan and

TRYRIAN RIDGES

Guard, 6-1, Freshman
Silver Spring, Md.

All-State honors.

During his three seasons at Springbrook his teams were 64-12 over four seasons, winning 54 straight AAAA games at one point, including posting a 22-4 record last season. He helped Springbrook to three straight regional and county titles.

His junior year he averaged 19 points per contest and was named as the Montgomery County Player of the Year.

VCU head coach Sonny Smith said those were serious factors in recruiting him.

"He was a flat-out winner," Smith said.

This year Ridges is behind junior point guard Sherman Hamilton on the depth chart, but Smith said he'll see some playing time especially since he possess a much-needed skill.

"Right now he's in the hunt for a point-guard position," Smith said. "He can make the free throw."

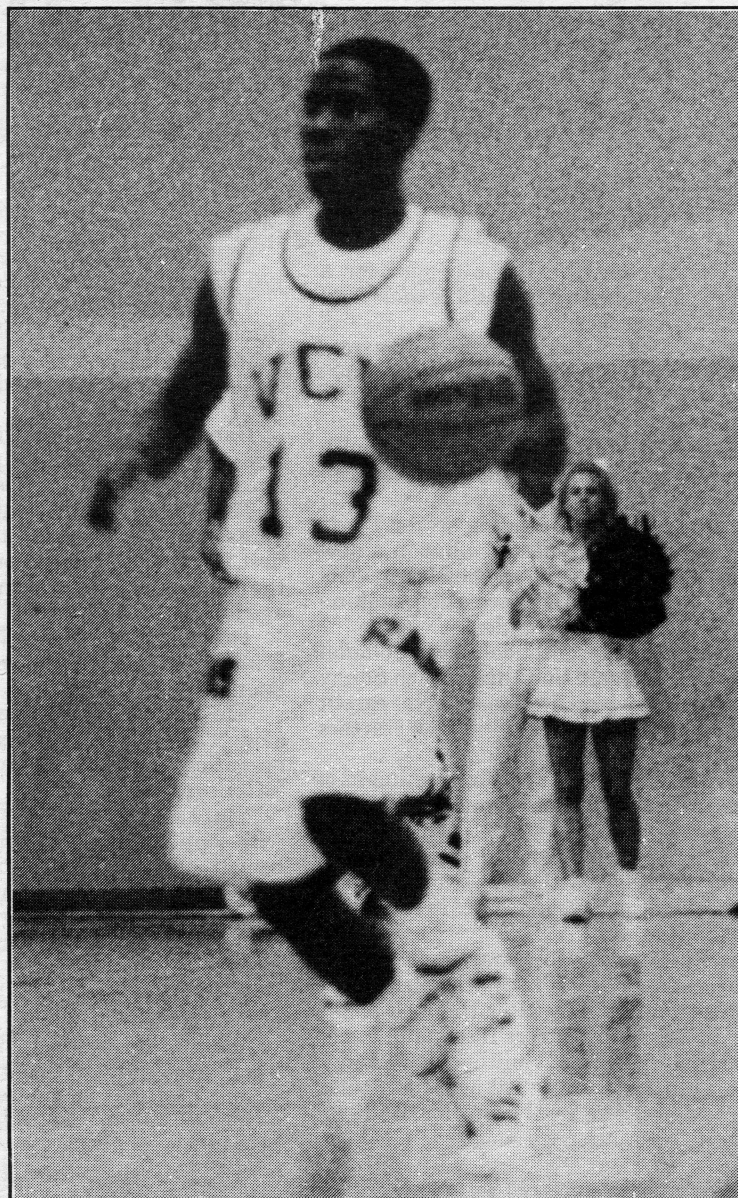
Smith also points to Ridges ball handling, shooting range, and ability to penetrate to find the open man on the break as the strengths of Ridges' game.

Ridges said he respects the more experienced players on the squad and is beginning to feel a part of the team.

"It's more like your family," he said, "instead of just friends."

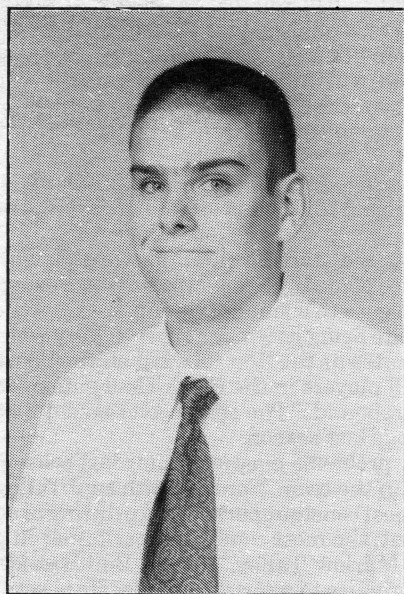
Ridges said when choosing a school he took into consideration the level of basketball, the distance from his home and what he could contribute to the team. Only a few months into his college career he said he is not disappointed with any aspect of VCU.

"I have no regrets," he said. "I'm happy so far."



Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

FUTURE —
Freshman
Tryrian
Ridges could
be VCU's
point guard
of the future.

**Brian J. French**

CT STAFF WRITER

With the departure of Tyron McCoy following last season, VCU coach Sonny Smith began the search for a replacement long-ball shooter.

Expect Scott Marston to be among the contenders.

Marston, the Cincinnati Player of the Year, begins his first season at VCU by attempting to work his way through the guards and small forwards and into the rotation.

"The main thing for me here is to shoot," Marston said. "I'm just looking to play."

And shoot he does. Marston averaged 23.5 points per game his final year at Oak

SCOTT MARSTON

Forward, 6-7, Freshman
Cincinnati, Ohio

Hills High School on 55 percent shooting from the field. Marston also shot 41 percent from beyond the three-point arc. His 81 percent shooting from the foul line would be among the VCU leaders last season.

The natural inclination for veteran VCU basketball observers is to juxtapose Marston with former Rams shooting guard Chris Brower, among the school career leaders in three-pointer proficiency.

Before any such comparisons can be validated, Marston first must establish himself in the coming weeks. A difficult task when adjusting to a new part of the world, as Marston is, though he isn't having problems now.

"I (chose VCU because I) like the coaching staff here and the city," Marston said.

How is being a freshman on a college team differ from being a senior on a high-school squad?

"It's a little rough," Marston said. "The size of the players is different. They're quicker and more athletic."

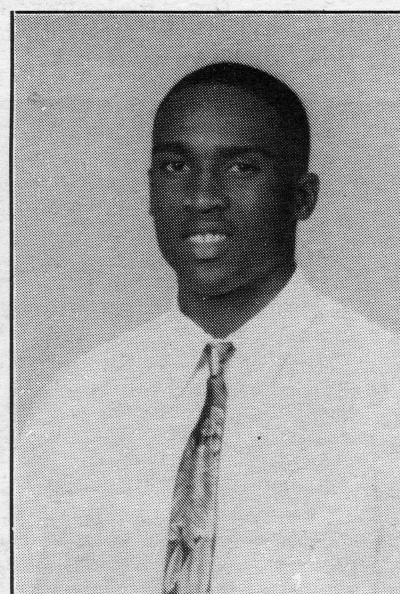
Marston also had no problem adjusting to playing in the Colonial Athletic Association.

VCU was a member of the Metro Conference when Marston signed with the Rams.

"I don't think it changed my mind at all," the freshman said.

The expectations for the Rams are apparent to Marston.

"We should win the conference tournament," he said.

**Terry Scanlon**

CT ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

Entering his second season with the Rams, Joe Martin is trying to play his way into some time on the court.

"It all depends on what I'm doing in practice," Martin said.

Head coach Sonny Smith said increased playing time for Martin depends on two factors: ball handling and passing.

"If he doesn't improve those things, it's a whole different ballgame," Smith said.

The different ballgame probably means a repeat of last season's 33 total minutes in only 12 appearances.

He scored 22 points, had seven rebounds, dished out five assists and made two steals.

JOE MARTIN

Guard, 6-3, Sophomore
Hamilton, Ontario

He connected on 6-of-17 (35.3 percent) of his shots, including 2-of-3 from behind the arc.

His top performance last season came against Alabama when Martin drained two of three treys for a career-high six points.

Martin is optimistic, however, that he'll get to see some more playing time this season.

"It's not about who starts," he said. "I want to get in and contribute to the team."

As a freshman arriving in Richmond from Hamilton, Ontario, Martin said everything from the coaching staff to the crowds at games to the practices were different from what he had grown accustomed to in Canada.

Now in his second season with the Rams, Martin said he feels more at home.

"Now I have my feet wet," the Hamilton Tigercats fan said. "I still have a lot to learn. But I feel better going into a second year."

Martin's athleticism, Smith said, is his biggest asset.

The coach added that when Martin does play, he will be used at the two or three spot in a three-guard offense.

Martin emphasizes his focus is on the team and not on how much he plays.

"This year I think we have a good chance of getting to the NCAA Tournament," he said.

"Now that we're in a new league, we have to come up to par."

VCU Rams 1995-96: A new conference

NCAA Tournament in sight

Brian J. French
CT STAFF WRITER

Last year the pundits had the Rams pegged for a seventh- (and last) place finish in what would be their final season in the Metro Conference.

They said the lack of depth would keep the Rams from contending, and VCU would finish roughly with a .500 record.

They were right.

Last year's edition of the VCU Rams, besieged with defections, ended up seventh in the Metro, with an overall record of 16-14.

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This season, the Rams return four starters from that team and add depth — especially at the backcourt, where the emergence of newcomers may alter the look of the guard tandem, even with both starters returning.

If practice trends emerge, Sonny Smith will be using a nine-man rotation, with a little time left over for a 10th.

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Will likely start on bench: Tryrian Ridges, Fr., 6-1, 170 pounds; Joe Martin, Soph., 6-3, 190 pounds

The Rundown: Of the aforementioned guards, Hamilton has the most job security. The starting point guard from last year, Hamilton will start there this year, though Sonny Smith noted that he was likely to see time at shooting guard.

Hamilton led the team in assists with 4.9 per game. He also averaged 8.7 points per game, though his performance improved as the season progressed.

The Malton, Canada, native posted averages of 4 points, 4.8 assists and 27.6 percent field goal shooting through the first 10 games of the season. During the past 20 games of the season, his averages in points and field-goal percentage jumped to 11.1 and 41.2 percent, respectively.

The only question with Hamilton is whether the effects from the back surgery he underwent two years ago still are being felt.

"He doesn't jump the way he used to," Sonny Smith said. "I'm not sure if it's because he's being safe, or if that operation has taken something away from his legs that he'll never get back."

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Peabody's job that is in the most tenuous of the returning starters.

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"He should be in the fight, but his job is in jeopardy. It's nothing about him, but it's just the injury and that we have more depth."

One of the leading contenders for good playing time is Reed, who apparently has impressed the coaching staff with his adaptability.

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He was particularly reliable in field-goal accuracy, hitting 58.5 percent of his shots. That figure placed him 25th in the nation last season and second all time at VCU.

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Talley, despite being listed as a reserve, very well may log starter minutes as the first forward off the bench.

Talley led all players in the Black-Gold game with 27 points and 13 rebounds. The senior averaged 4.2 points and 2.4 rebounds last season.

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Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

BOMBS AWAY —
Point guard Sherman Hamilton may be the Rams' best three-point shooter. Last season, Hamilton connected on 35 percent of his three-point attempts.

VCU Rams 1995-96: A new conference, an older team, a new destination?

NCAA Tournament in sight

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The rundown: Not since 1992-93, when Sherron Mills and Eugene Kissourine were the tandem centers, has the

center spot been this solid for the Rams.

Byrd returns for his junior season and second as starting center. Averaging 10.9 points, 7.3 rebounds and nearly a blocked shot per game, the Gainesville, Fla., native will be expected to maintain that level of play while anchoring the defense.

He also will be expected to improve his free-throw shooting. Byrd averaged a miserable 44.4 percent from the ironically titled charity stripe.

"If George Byrd hadn't broken his foot (during his freshman season against Tulane), he would be light years ahead," Sonny Smith said. "He had a more inadequate year last year, but his broken foot hindered his progress."

"Now, he is more mature, both physically and emotionally."

The year's big surprise — so far, anyway — has been the turn around of John Smith.

The Wichita State transfer, after sitting out the first semester of last season, played only 15 games during the season because of a variety of knee ailments, and when he played, he wasn't overly impressive (3.4 ppg, 2.3 rpg).

This season, on the other hand...

"John Smith has been an unexpected and pleasant surprise," Sonny Smith said.

The surprise being?

After knee surgery, John Smith has regained the mobility he had at Wichita State.

Whereas last year Smith basically was immobile, this year he's able to jump much better and should make him more of a factor.

How this translates to the regular season possibly will be the key to the VCU season.

With him, Byrd doesn't have to average 30 minutes a night (which would have been more were it not for 90 personal fouls he accrued). Without him, the Rams have to go to the small lineup more often (moving Reed or Marston to SF, Chappell or Talley to PF and Hopkins at center).

□ THE BOTTOM LINE

According to Sonny Smith, this is a team with legitimate postseason aspirations.

"Barring injury, illness or attitude problems, which I don't foresee, this team could be a challenger for a spot (in the NCAAAs)," Sonny Smith said.

To compensate for the weaker conference slate, VCU schedule, among other teams, Top 25-perennial Virginia, Western Kentucky, and Pittsburgh.

Mark these dates on the calendar: Jan. 4 and Feb. 3. That's when VCU plays Old Dominion, and the top seed in the CAA tournament almost certainly will be at stake.

Said Sonny Smith: "If Odell Hodge is all the way back from his knee injury (a torn anterior cruciate ligament suffered last year at Southern Illinois), then I would have to give the nod to ODU. If he's not healthy, then it should be pretty close."



Bill Buckner/Commonwealth Times

THROWING IT DOWN —
If Ben Peabody can hit the outside shot this year with as much efficiency as this dunk, VCU will be in store for a strong season.

BOMBS AWAY —
Point guard Sherman Hamilton may be the Rams' best three-point shooter. Last season, Hamilton connected on 35 percent of his three-point attempts.



Bill Buckner/Commonwealth Times

VCU men's basketball schedule 1995-96

#-San Juan, Puerto Rico
*-New Orleans, La.
%-Richmond

November					
24	vs. Western Kentucky#	3 p.m.	10	George Mason	7 p.m.
25	at San Juan Shootout#	TBA	13	at East Carolina (HTS)	7 p.m.
26	at San Juan Shootout#	TBA	17	James Madison	7 p.m.
30	Xavier	7 p.m.	20	Richmond (HTS)	4:30 p.m.
December			24	American	7 p.m.
2	at Liberty	7:30 p.m.	29	at UNC-Wilmington	7:30 p.m.
4	Florida International	7 p.m.	31	at George Mason	7:30 p.m.
7	UNC Charlotte	7 p.m.	February		
9	Pittsburgh (HTS)	2 p.m.	3	Old Dominion	7 p.m.
16	at Rhode Island	2 p.m.	7	William and Mary	7 p.m.
21	at Virginia (HTS)	7 p.m.	10	East Carolina	7 p.m.
23	Illinois State	1 p.m.	14	at American	7:30 p.m.
27	vs. Jackson State*	7 p.m.	17	at James Madison (HTS)	4:30 p.m.
28	at New Orleans Classic*	TBA	21	UNC-Wilmington	7 p.m.
January			24	at Richmond (HTS)	4:30 p.m.
4	at William & Mary	7:30 p.m.	March		
6	at Old Dominion (HTS)	7:35 p.m.	1-4	at CAA Championships% (HTS)	TBA

an older team, a new destination?

center spot been this solid for the Rams.

Byrd returns for his junior season and second as starting center. Averaging 10.9 points, 7.3 rebounds and nearly a blocked shot per game, the Gainesville, Fla., native will be expected to maintain that level of play while anchoring the defense.

He also will be expected to improve his free-throw shooting. Byrd averaged a miserable 44.4 percent from the ironically titled charity stripe.

"If George Byrd hadn't broken his foot (during his freshman season against Tulane), he would be light years ahead," Sonny Smith said. "He had a more inadequate year last year, but his broken foot hindered his progress.

"Now, he is more mature, both physically and emotionally."

The year's big surprise—so far, anyway—has been the turn around of John Smith.

The Wichita State transfer, after sitting out the first semester of last season, played only 15 games during the season because of a variety of knee ailments, and when he played, he wasn't overly impressive (3.4 ppg, 2.3 rpg).

This season, on the other hand...

"John Smith has been an unexpected and pleasant surprise," Sonny Smith said.

The surprise being?

After knee surgery, John Smith has regained the mobility he had at Wichita State.

Whereas last year Smith basically was immobile, this year he's able to jump much better and should make him more of a factor.

How this translates to the regular season possibly will be the key to the VCU season.

With him, Byrd doesn't have to average 30 minutes a night (which would have been more were it not for 90 personal fouls he accrued). Without him, the Rams have to go to the small lineup more often (moving Reed or Marston to SF, Chappell or Talley to PF and Hopkins at center).

□ THE BOTTOM LINE

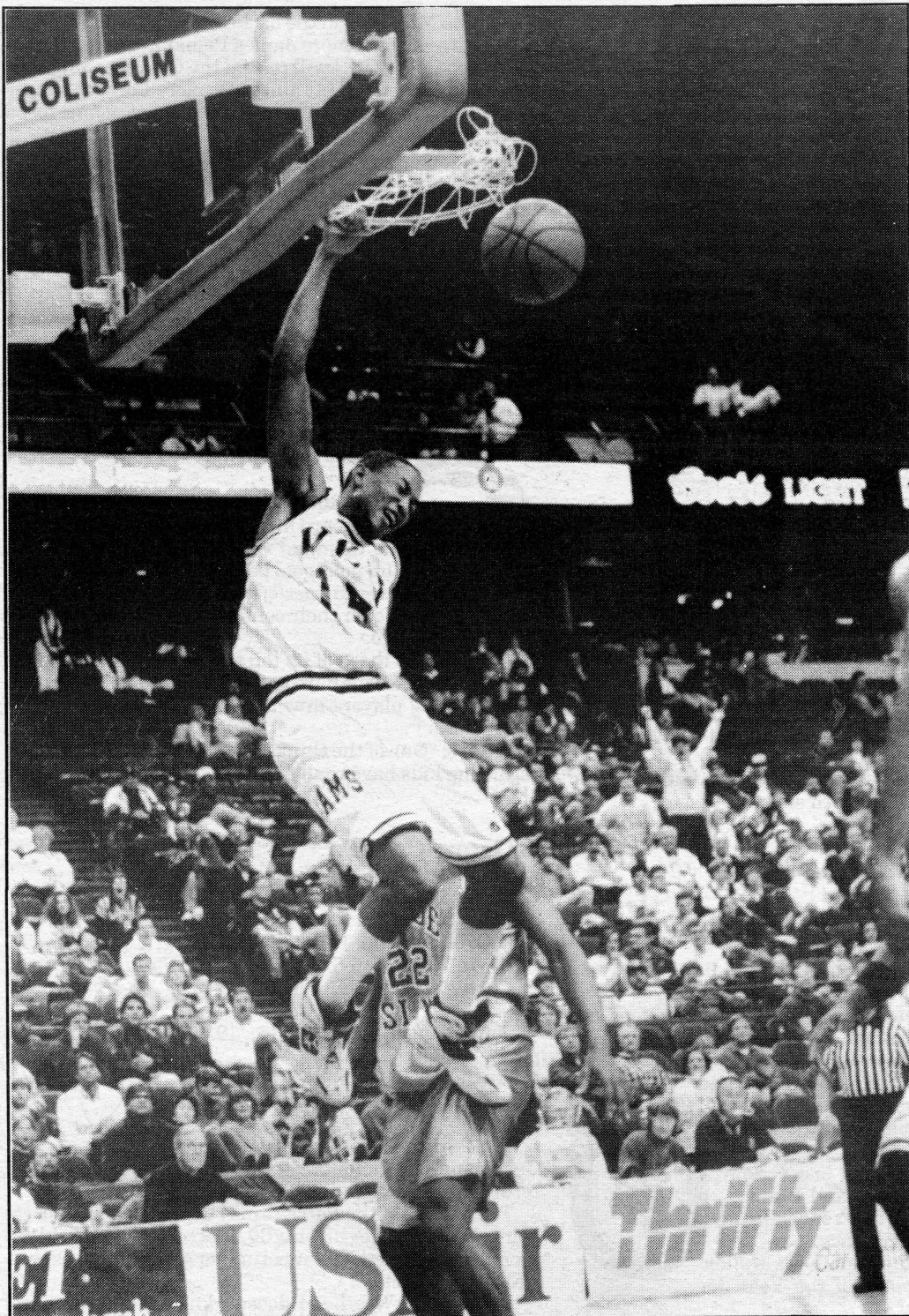
According to Sonny Smith, this is a team with legitimate postseason aspirations.

"Barring injury, illness or attitude problems, which I don't foresee, this team could be a challenger for a spot (in the NAAs)," Sonny Smith said.

To compensate for the weaker conference slate, VCU schedule, among other teams, Top 25-perennial Virginia, Western Kentucky, and Pittsburgh.

Mark these dates on the calendar: Jan. 4 and Feb. 3. That's when VCU plays Old Dominion, and the top seed in the CAA tournament almost certainly will be at stake.

Said Sonny Smith: "If Odell Hodge is all the way back from his knee injury (a torn anterior cruciate ligament suffered last year at Southern Illinois), then I would have to give the nod to ODU. If he's not healthy, then it should be pretty close."



Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

THROWING IT DOWN —
If Ben Peabody can hit the outside shot this year with as much efficiency as this dunk, VCU will be in store for a strong season.

VCU men's basketball schedule 1995-96

#San Juan, Puerto Rico
*New Orleans, La.
%Richmond

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17	at James Madison (HTS)	4:30 p.m.
21	UNC-Wilmington	7 p.m.
24	at Richmond (HTS)	4:30 p.m.
March		
1-4	at CAA Championships% (HTS)	TBA

VCU, ODU are frontrunners for CAA crown

Coveh Solaimani
CT SPORTS EDITOR

Giant killer!

That's the name given to Colonial Athletic Association teams once they reach the NCAA Tournament.

The University of Richmond set the precedent and other teams have followed.

Last March, Old Dominion University added to the conference's reputation by knocking off the Villanova Wildcats.

This year the CAA has two teams that could get the opportunity to play in the NCAA Tournament. VCU, a newcomer to the CAA, and ODU, the defending champion, are the conference's elite teams. And with their talent if they beat someone in the Big Dance it may not be considered an upset.

Predicted order of finish:

□ VCU

Head coach: Sonny Smith

1994-95 record (Overall/Conference): 16-14, 3-9 (in the Metro Conference)

Returning starters:

Bernard Hopkins, F, 6-7, Sr., 13.7 points per game, 8.5 rebounds per game.

George Byrd, C, 6-8, Jr., 10.9 ppg, 7.3 rpg.

Sherman Hamilton, G, 6-2, Jr., 8.7 ppg, 4.9 assists per game.

Ben Peabody, G, 6-4, Sr., 6.2 ppg, 2.8 rpg.

Outlook: See pages 8 and 9

Quote: "This team is as athletic as any team I've had since I've been at VCU," Smith said.

□ Old Dominion University

Head coach: Jeff Capel

1994-95 record: 20-12, 12-2

Returning starters:

Brion Dunlap, G, 5-11, So., 4.1 ppg, 1.9 rpg

Mario Mullen, F, 6-6, Sr., 12.9 ppg, 5.7 rpg

Outlook: The defending conference champions are minus three starters from a season ago but their best player is back.

Odell Hodge will return to the lineup and looks better than ever, according to ODU coach Jeff Capel. That's a scary thought for the rest of the CAA.

Hodge, a junior, missed last season because of a knee injury, and the pre-season CAA Player of the Year is being counted on heavily to produce.

Joining Hodge on the front line is Mullen and 1994 MEAC Rookie of the Year Joe Bunn.

Bunn, a transfer from North Carolina A&T, where he averaged 13.4 points a game and 8.4 rebounds, should take some of the load off Hodge in the middle.

In the backcourt, the Monarchs will be led by junior E. J. Sherod and Dunlap, a 1995 All-CAA Rookie Team selection. If Hodge stays healthy ODU could be the champions in the CAA once again.

Quote: "My goal is to have the team playing at its best at the end of the season," Capel said. "I'd rather be 5-8 playing a tough schedule than be 13-0 against a schedule of teams we know we should beat."

□ James Madison University

Head coach: Lefty Driesell

1994-95 record: 16-13, 9-5

Returning starters:

James Coleman, C, 6-9, Sr., 5.6 ppg, 5.0 rpg

Charles Lott, F, 6-9, Jr., 8.7 ppg, 6.2 rpg

Darren McLinton, G, 5-11, Sr., 14 ppg, 3.0 rpg

Outlook: JMU has reached the championship game of the CAA Tournament four straight seasons, capturing the conference crown only once. This year Driesell's Dukes will be hard pressed to make another run at the title. Point guard Darren McLinton is the key to the team. He is the top returning scorer and led the team in steals and assists a year ago.

Joining McLinton in the backcourt will be junior Ryan Culicerto and sophomore James Pelham.

In the middle JMU will rely on the CAA's leading shot blocker in Coleman. Lott and sophomore Lamont Boozer also will have to play well if the team is going to be successful.

Boozer averaged 4.6 points and 3.8 rebounds per game as a backup last season but will be counted on for more this year.

Quote: Driesell on who is going to replace leading scorers Louis Rowe and Kent Culuko: "It's hard to tell. You just can't say who is going to do that."

□ UNC-Wilmington

Head coach: Jerry Wainwright

1994-95 record: 16-11, 10-4

Returning starters:

Darren Moore, F, 6-9, Sr., 7.4 ppg, 6.5 rpg

Preston McGriff, C, 6-11, Sr., 11.6 ppg, 7.3 rpg



Outlook: Defense! Defense! That's the cries heard from Seahawk fans last year as the team led the CAA in scoring defense and field-goal percentage. They must have a repeat performance if they are going to match their conference record of a season ago.

UNC-W lost three of its top four scorers and its sixth man, and they will be hard to replace. The onus will fall on the returning players in whom Wainwright has a lot of confidence.

Quote: "One of the things that will help us is that our returning kids have really improved," Wainwright said.

□ George Mason

Head coach: Paul Westhead

1994-95 record: 7-20, 2-12

Returning starters:

G.C. Marcaccini, F, 6-5, Sr., 11.8 ppg, 4.6 rpg

Kevin Ward, F, 6-8, Jr., 12.7 ppg, 6.7 rpg

Curtis McCants, G, 6-0, Jr., 15.2 ppg, 9.3 apg

Nate Langley, G, 6-3, Jr., 19.5 ppg, 3.3 saves per game

Outlook: Westhead finally may have the horses to run the offense he wants.

The Patriots have the best backcourt in the CAA in McCants and Langley and in the frontcourt GMU returns three double-figure scorers.

The success of the Patriots may depend on their three-point shooting. They hit only 30.6 percent from behind the arc last season, and if their perimeter game improves then GMU will be better.

Remember, Westhead doesn't know the meaning of defense.

Quote: "At this stage, I have a better mix of players than I've ever had since I arrived," Westhead said.

□ University of Richmond

Head coach: Bill Dooley

1994-95 record: 8-20, 3-11

Returning starters:

Rick Edwards, C, 6-9, Jr., 7.0 ppg, 4.6 rpg

Jarod Stevenson, F, 6-7, So., 8.4 ppg, 4.8 rpg

Eric Poole, F, 6-8, So., 9.0 ppg, 6.9 rpg

Carlos Cueto, G, 6-0, So., 6.1 ppg, 3.7 apg



Outlook: Learning how to win the close ones. It's a problem every young team has and UR is no different.

The Spiders lost 10 games by less than 10 points last year, and it is a trend they will have to reverse this year.

Dooley's squad lost only one starter and returns five players who started at least 11 games last season.

UR's main man in the paint will be Poole, a 1995 CAA All-Rookie pick. In the backcourt, the talented Cueto will be joined by sophomores Adam Mobley and Daryl Oliver. The duo ranked one and two in the CAA in three-point shooting.

Quote: "I've certainly liked what I've seen so far. We are stronger physically, and we are working on being stronger mentally," Dooley said.

□ American University

Head coach: Chris Knoche

1994-95 record: 9-19, 7-7

Returning starters:

Matt Brown, F, 6-6, So., 9.0 ppg, 4.4 rpg

Duane Gilliam, G, 6-4, Sr., 9.7 ppg, 4.2 rpg

Darryl Franklin G, 6-0, Sr., 13.6 ppg, 5.2 apg



Outlook: After missing last season with a knee injury, Tim Fudd, the CAA's second-leading scorer in 1994, will return to action and should help the Eagles tremendously. Joining Fudd in the frontcourt will be Brown and a junior college transfer, Chris Ganz.

Even with Fudd back, the strength of AU's team lies in the backcourt. The Eagles may be the deepest and most experienced in the CAA at that position.

Both Gilliam and Franklin have had plenty of time to get to know each other during the past three years.

The development of the big men will determine the team's success.

Quote: "Tim Fudd is back and that's the good news, but I'm not sure if he'll ever play the way he did before because of the nature of the injury," Knoche said.

□ East Carolina University

Head coach: Joe Dooley

1994-95 record: 18-11, 7-7

Returning starters:

Tim Basham, F, 6-6, Jr., 10.6 ppg, 5.6 rpg

Tony Parham G, 6-1, So., 9.1 ppg, 2.7 rpg

Outlook: This season could be a rebuilding year for the Pirates. Their new head coach is the youngest man at his position in Division 1.

They are going into the season without their three top scorers from a year ago, and they really have only two players with a lot of game experience.

The success of this team fall into the hands of the young players like Parham and sophomore Damon Van Weedhuizen. ECU's bench accounted for only 10.9 points a game in 1994-95.

Quote: "Our point of emphasis this year is that we don't wait for someone else to do it, but we want to do it ourselves," Dooley said.

□ College of William and Mary

Head coach: Charlie Woollum

1994-95 record: 8-19, 6-8

Returning starters:

Carl Parker, F, 6-6, Sr., 14.9 ppg, 7.2 rpg

David Cully, F, 6-9, Sr., 7.7 ppg, 10.6 rpg

Matt Verkey, G, 6-4, Sr., 11.1 ppg, 2.3 rpg

Outlook: Things just don't ever seem to fall into place for W&M basketball. The Tribe return 10 players from last year's team, but two of the players missing made up the starting backcourt.

While Woollum's frontcourt is formidable with Cully and Parker, the guard rotation is full of unproven players.

Verkey did have some success last year, but the man being counted on to run the point, junior Shaka Arnold, is relatively untested.

Quote: "I definitely believe we are better. The only thing I can say is that after being in this league for one year, is that this is a fine basketball league," Woollum said.

Key CAA Games

Jan. 6	VCU at ODU (HTS)
Jan. 17	JMU at VCU
Jan. 20	UR at VCU (HTS)
Jan. 24	ODU at JMU (HTS)
Feb. 3	ODU at VCU
Feb. 17	VCU AT JMU (HTS)
Feb. 24	VCU at UR (HTS)
March 1-4	Richford CAA Championship

Non-CAA slate may be key for VCU's NCAA hopes

U.Va., Pittsburgh highlight nonconference schedule

Brian J. French
CT STAFF WRITER

San Juan Shootout Western Kentucky

Date: Nov. 24

Site: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Series record: WKU leads 13-12

Last year: 27-4, 17-1 (1st) Sun Belt, second round of NCAAs

Returning starters: 2

Outlook: The Hilltoppers wreaked havoc last year in the Sun Belt, where VCU once played. They're projected to do more of the same this year, with a likely return to the NCAAs as Sun Belt champions.

The go-to guy here is swingman Chris Robinson, an Athlon's Magazine fourth team All-American.

Robinson averaged 17 points and 6.7 rebounds per game last year and will have to duplicate that for the Toppers to do well.

Point guard Michael Fralix is the other returning starter.

They'll need production from former bench players to do what they did last year, but the Sun Belt is weak enough to allow them to win without much of a fight.

Other San Juan games: Louisville vs. American-Puerto Rico, Auburn vs. LaSalle, Illinois State vs. James Madison. VCU-WKU and UL-AUPR winners/losers meet, as do ISU-JMU and Auburn-La Salle winners/losers Nov. 25.

Teams with no losses to that point meet for first place Nov. 26, with third-, fifth- and seventh-place games the same day.

Xavier

Date: Nov. 30

Site: Richmond

Series record: VCU leads 1-0.

Last year: 23-5, 14-0 (first) Midwest-ern Collegiate Conference, first round of NCAAs.

Returning starters: 1

Outlook: The Musketeers couldn't have made the switch to the Atlantic 10 at a worse time, losing four of their five starters while taking a major step up in conference affiliation.

Their lone returnee, forward T.J. Johnson, averaged 12 points and five rebounds per game while winning MCC Rookie of the Year.

The squad is peppered with sophs and juniors, and the one returning senior averaged only 0.3 points per game. Even in the weaker A-10 West division, Xavier is a likely bottom feeder. They certainly won't go 14-0 in conference play.

Brian Grant, we hardly knew ye.

Liberty

Date: Dec. 2

Site: Lynchburg

Series record: VCU leads 4-0

Last year: 12-16, 7-9 (tied fifth) Big South

Returning starters: 3

Outlook: Should rebound from a disappointing season to contend in the Big South. Junior center Peter Aluma leads returnees with a 15.7 point and 5.8 rebound average.

The Flames strengths lie in their size, with 6-10 Auburn transfer Adam Hopkins, 6-9 Stephen Bamigbola and 6-8 Ekpenyong Effiong, unusual size for the Big South. But to return to the NCAAs, where they gave North Carolina a half of a game in 1993, they need better ball-handling skills (516 turnovers).

Florida International

Date: Dec. 4

Site: Richmond

Series record: VCU leads 1-0

Last year: 11-19, 4-12 (eighth) in Trans America, first round NCAAs

Returning starters: 1

Outlook: Bleak. The Golden Panthers pulled a shocker by winning the TAAC conference tournament to get their 15 minutes of fame, but with only one veteran starter they aren't likely to repeat that NCAA journey, though the overall record sounds right.

Bottom of the pack finish in the TAAC East.

UNC Charlotte

Date: Dec. 7

Site: Richmond

Series record: VCU leads 25-15

Last year: 19-9, 8-4 (first) Metro, first-round NCAAs

Returning starters: 1

Outlook: A familiar foe from VCU's Sun Belt and Metro days, the 49ers could be a sleeper in the White division of Conference USA.

They lose Metro Player of the Year Jarvis Lang but return the services of point guard Andre Davis, who took a year off from school.

They are good outside but weak inside. Interesting prospect: 7-2 German center Alex Kuehl, from Palm Beach Community College.

If he develops, and Davis shakes off the rust, they could contend, but will almost certainly be behind both Louisville and Memphis in the three-team White.

Pittsburgh

Date: Dec. 9

Site: Richmond

Series record: First meeting

Last year: 10-18, 5-13 (seventh) Big East

Returning starters: 2

Outlook: In a couple of years, this team could be a contender. Right now, their lack of experience probably will send them to the bottom of the Big East 7.

They're deep but not overly big, and their big men are all freshmen (tallest upperclassman: 6-6 Chad Varga with 9.6 ppg in 10 games).

The Panthers' greatest asset is coach Ralph Willard, who milked a Sweet 16 bid out of an underrated Western Kentucky team in 1993.

Guard Andre Alridge leads the incumbent starters with 13 points and 5.8 assists a game.

If the young guys jell with the returners and produce early, the Panthers could be very good, very fast. Otherwise, they're not likely to finish above 500.

Rhode Island

Date: Dec. 16

Site: Kingston, R.I.

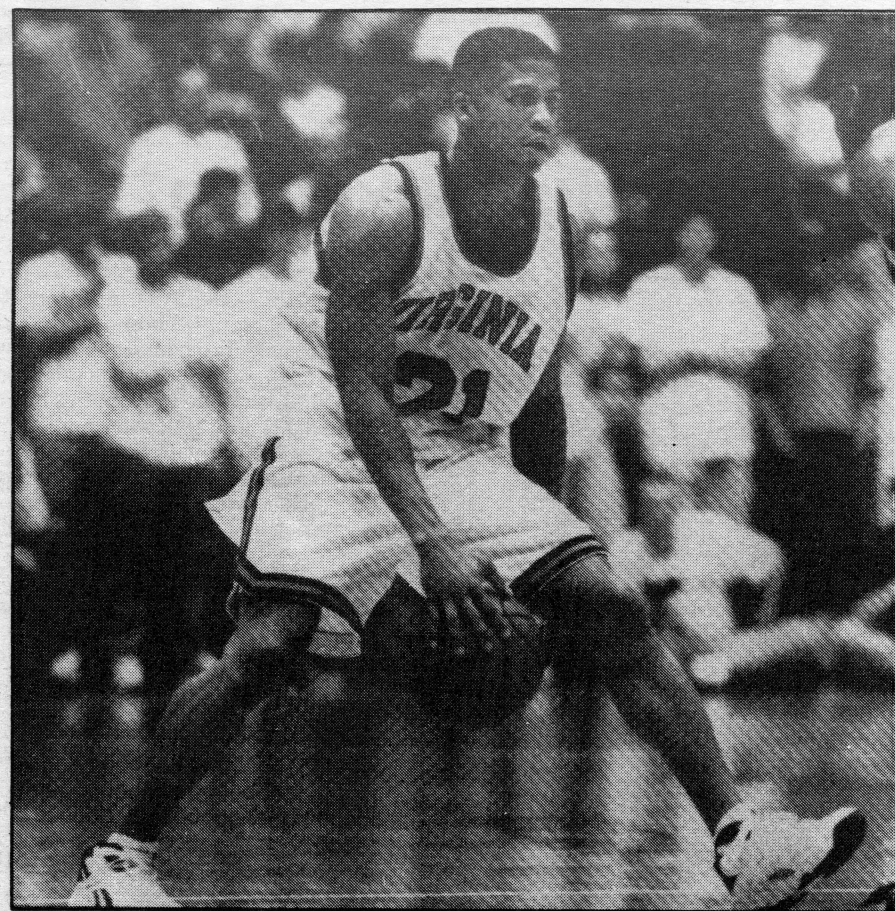
Series record: VCU leads 1-0

Last year: 7-20, 2-14 (ninth) Atlantic 10

Returning starters: 4

Outlook: They can't be much worse this year than they were last season. With four returning starters and being in a division with weak Fordham, these Rams should be better, and it'll show in the record books.

The Rams are led by 5-10 point guard



Pete Emerson/U.Va. Media Guide

DEANE OF VIRGINIA BASKETBALL — On Dec. 21 VCU travels to University Hall to resume its rivalry with the University of Virginia. The teams' last meeting was Dec. 20, 1989, with U.Va. defeating the Rams 63-46. The Cavaliers lead the all-time series 7-1.

Tyson Wheeler, who scored 13.2 points per game. Rhode Island has good outside shooting but is weak in center depth, though 7-0 Michael Andersen could be decent.

It'll be 1996-97, though, before the Rams can contend for postseason play.

Virginia

Date: Dec. 21

Site: Charlottesville

Series record: Virginia leads 7-1

Last year: 25-9, 12-4 (tie first) Atlantic Coast Conference, Final Eight NCAAs

Returning starters: 2

Outlook: The glamour team on the schedule. Last year the Wahoos made an unexpected run in the NCAAs, and that success has been parlayed into high expectations, as seen in preseason publications.

The Cavaliers are a near-unanimous Top 25 squad and are considered contenders for the ACC title and a high seed in the NCAAs.

Returning to Charlottesville is one of the best backcourts in the nation: junior point man Harold Deane (16 points, 4.3 assists per game) and sophomore shooting guard Curtis Staples (11.9 points per game), who was thrust into the starting lineup after Cory Alexander reinjured his ankle.

Alexander has since left for the greener pastures of the NBA, but the Cavaliers won't miss a beat in the backcourt.

The question for this team becomes "How can they make up for Junior Burroughs and Yuri Barnes leaving?"

Chris Alexander and Norman Nolan are the designated post players this year, and if they don't do the job, it isn't certain as to who can.

Depth at the post position will be thin. That notwithstanding, expect the Cavaliers to again be a NCAA team and again make a run toward rarer air.

Illinois State

Date: Dec. 23

Site: Richmond

Series record: VCU leads 2-1

Last year: 20-13, 13-5 (tie second) Missouri Valley Conference, 2nd round NIT's

Returning starters: 3

Outlook: The Redbirds could make the move from NIT to NCAAs this season, either by winning their conference (which is certainly possible) or possibly an at-large bid. The two major returning players, sophomore forward Dan Muller (10.2 points per game) and senior guard Maurice Trotter (11.4 points per game) were new to the team last season.

Tulsa may be the only thing that keeps the Redbirds from going to the Dance.

UNO Classic

Jackson State

Date: Dec. 27

Site: New Orleans

Series record: First meeting

Last year: 12-19, 7-7 (fourth) Southwestern Athletic

Returning starters: 3

Outlook: The Tigers normally are the creme of the SWAC crop, but last year they fell and fell hard. Even with three returning starters, Jackson State may not get out of the second division.

About the only positive for the Tigers is their ball-handling abilities, where they have two guards with averages of roughly five assists per game last year (Titus Hooten and Roderick Taylor, both seniors).

A lack of formidable inside talent keeps the Tigers from doing well this year. The presence of Prairie View A&M in the SWAC keeps the Tigers from finishing dead last.

Other UNO Classic games: New Orleans vs. San Francisco. Winners, losers meet Dec. 28

On occasion two writers will use the CT to voice their opposing opinions on a particular sports topic.

SPORTS FORUM

Today's topic concerns college basketball and which teams are among the top 25 in the country.

Jayhawks ranked No. 1

James McMahon
CT NEWS EDITOR

The last time we saw Kansas coach Roy Williams, his highly ranked Jayhawks were bowing out of the NCAA Tournament courtesy of a third-round loss to the University of Virginia. This year's edition, however, promises bigger and better things.

With one of the best backcourts in the nation and a strong front line, Kansas is poised to give Williams his first national title. Junior point man Jacque Vaughn may be the best in the country, and shooting guard Jerod Haase is a coach's dream. The graduation of Greg Ostertag hardly will be noticed on a front line that includes Raef LaFrentz, Scott Pollard and soon-to-be sensation, freshman Paul Pierce.

The only question about this year's team is its tendency to stumble down the stretch, and should they falter this year there's plenty of talented squads poised to cut down the nets come March.

Here is my own little edition of the NCAA pecking order. Like it won't change in a week.

1. Kansas — 'Nuff said.

2. Kentucky — The deepest team in the country just may have too much talent to win it all. The trick for coach Rick Pitino will be finding enough minutes for all the superstars on this basketball team. Should the flamboyant coach find a way to jell this incredible talent, my first three paragraphs just went bye-bye.

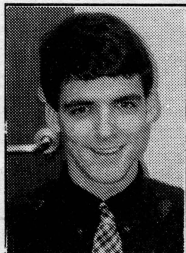
3. UCLA — Ed O'Bannon has a New Jersey address now (lucky him) and George Zidek has his own zip code in Charlotte, but this team still is a good bet to return to the final four. Charles O'Bannon, Toby Bailey and J.R. Henderson will be the go-to guys now for coach Harrick.

4. Georgetown — Georgetown is helping to lead a Big East resurgence that has three teams in the Top 10. Allen Iverson may be the most exciting player in the country, and Othella Harrington the most underrated. Defense usually is the cornerstone of any John Thompson-coached team, and this year will be no different.

5. Villanova — The Jekyll-and-Hyde team of the Big East. The Wildcats beat Connecticut twice last season on their way to the conference title only to lose in the first round of the NAAs to "powerhouse" Old Dominion (Hello, CAA). Kerry Kittles returns to lead the Cats, and his explosive scoring power is matched only by his smothering defense.

6. Massachusetts — The Atlantic-10 actually gets respectable this year with the addition of Virginia Tech and Xavier, but UMass still is the cream of the crop. Marcus Camby is not the leader Lou Rowe was, but he is every bit the player. The key may be how well Edgar Padilla protects the ball this year.

7. Connecticut — The backcourt is the heart of this team, with Doron Sheffer and Ray Allen constituting the best backcourt this side of the Mississippi. Allen's slashes to the basket and crisp jumpers should open things up for Travis Knight in the



McMahon

middle.

8. Louisville — Denny Crumb reportedly was seen sobbing when he found out VCU was not asked to be part of the new Conference USA, but this team is talented enough to find some new whipping boys. The team's depth and shooting should net them the new conference's first title.

9. Cincinnati — Good news for Ohio: This is the most-talented team in the state, and they're not allowed to move to Baltimore.

10. Wake Forest — Sure, Randolph Childress is gone, but the best player in college basketball — Tim Duncan — remains. A down year in the ACC should make it easier for the Deacons to stay in the upper half of the rankings.

11. Memphis — If there is a sleeper team outside of my can't-miss Top 10, it's this team.

12. Maryland — Life without Joe Smith will be tough for the Terps, but they still have enough talent and experience to challenge for the ACC title.

13. Missouri — Does it really matter? You know they can't win in March.

14. Michigan — If you're going to Michigan, you'd better bring a big trash can, because these youngsters will talk it up.

15. Arkansas — Seventy-six points are gone from last year's team. That's more than most teams score a game.

16. Mississippi State — It's been a while since Starkville has had anything to cheer about, but last year's 22-8 record changed all that.

17. Virginia — Harold Deane may be the most underrated guard in the country. If Chris Alexander can find some offense, and Norman Nolan can find a diet, this team will find itself back in the final eight.

18. Utah — Did anyone tell Keith Van Horn that big guys aren't supposed to shoot like he does?

19. North Carolina — Not the normal Dean Smith product. You try losing Stackhouse and Wallace and return to the Final Four.

20. California — If UCLA stumbles, California could be the team to beat in the Pac-10.

21. Tulane — Not on probation. That's good news.

22. Stanford — I don't care. It's still Stanford.

23. Indiana — The players are too afraid of Bobby Knight to be that bad.

24. Iowa — A weak Big 10 could help move Iowa farther up the rankings.

25. Virginia Tech — No. 7? Terry, man, what are you thinking?

Virginia Tech a Top 10 team

Terry Scanlon
CT ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

Only 121 days until the NCAA selection committee announces the field of 64, causing countless numbers of office pools involving everyone from the fanatics that write crap like this to the casual observer who uses crap like this to line their bird cage.

But for you die-hards who can't wait here's a look at the early favorites.

1. Kentucky — Rick Pitino has averaged 25 wins per season since taking the reigns in Lexington, and with the depth and level of talent he has this season, 25 is a given — even in the SEC. The expectations Wildcat alumni create, puts pressure on Pitino to follow in the footsteps of Adolph Rupp.



Scanlon

2. Kansas — The Jayhawks return four starters from last year's Sweet 16 team and likely will make the trek to Northern Jersey at the end of March with Jacque Vaughn and Raef LaFrentz leading the way.

3. Iowa — This is not a typo. Look for the Hawkeyes to dominate the Big 10. By season's end Jess Settles and Greg Kingsbury will be household names.

4. Villanova — The second-best Wildcats. Old Dominion was a blessing in disguise for Kerry Kittles & Co. Count on them being focused on settling for nothing less than a Final Four appearance.

5. Louisville — Thank God the Rams don't face the Cardinals twice this season. Denny Crum didn't lose anybody to graduation, and there are only two seniors on this year's squad. The early favorite for the 1997 Final Four in Indianapolis.

6. Maryland — The Terrapins definitely can empathize with the 1919 Black Sox after Joe decided to go pro. The Terps will survive a weakened Atlantic Coast Conference behind the leadership of Exree Hipp and Johnny Rhodes.

7. Virginia Tech — This is not a homer's pick. The Hokies are for real. Look for the dirt-road school to build on last year's success. With everybody returning, the only weakness in Bill Foster's lineup (besides himself) is the lack of a dominant Fighting Gobbler in the middle.

8. Connecticut — Two words — Ray Allen. One of the best all-around players in the nation. The success of this team may

rest with 7-foot senior Travis Knight.

9. UCLA — The defending champs minus an O'Bannon brother and Tyus Edny. They're still tough.

10. Georgetown — Allen Iverson will make Wilder proud. Expect John Thompson to have a traditionally tough "D" team. A disciplined Iverson combined with Harrington and Williams could spell Me-a-d-o-w-l-a-n-d-s for the Hoyas.

11. Mississippi State — A Dampier-Dandy, baby! The newfound success in Starkville should be credited solely to head coach Richard Williams. Look for the best center in the land, to at the very least, lead the Bulldogs back to the Sweet 16.

12. Massachusetts — Without doubt, Marcus Camby is big time. But Donta Bright is going to have to step up if John Calipari is to see his first Final Four.

13. Utah — The Utes 20-game home winning streak will be on the line when they face perennial powerhouses Montana Tech and St. Martin. Should they survive those, Keith Van Horn should have little trouble showing his bad-assness in dominating the WAC.

14. Memphis — It's just not the same without the "State." Rip Sherer's mere presence on campus will help the Tigers to 20 wins.

15. Arkansas — Who are these guys? Fans in Fayetteville will want to hold onto their basketball supplement to learn the names of the 11 new Razorbacks. Nolan Richardson's squad is the biggest unknown of the new season.

16. North Carolina — The Tar Heels lack the big-name players. But it's still a Dean Smith-coached team and that equates to Sweet 16.

17. Missouri — With the 7-foot Haley twins the Tigers can't help but win 20 games. But don't be surprised to see them keep alive the Norm Stewart tribute to the NCAA-noose.

18. Michigan — The round-mound style of player has invaded Ann Arbor. Wolverine fans will open their hearts and their refrigerators to 290-pound Robert "Tractor" Taylor. They may be inexperienced, but Steve Fisher just doesn't know how to lose.

19. Virginia — Harold Deane and Curtis Staples can light it up from three-point land. As usual the Wahos lack the necessary big man.

20. Western Kentucky — Look for the Hilltoppers, led by senior forward Chris Robinson, to build on last year's 27 wins and NCAA triumph over Michigan.

21. Wake Forest — With Joe Smith and Rasheed Wallace going pro, Tim Duncan is the dominant big man in the ACC. But that probably won't be enough for the Deamon Deacons.

22. Duke — Why is everybody counting the Blue Devils out? Coach K. is back and all is well in Durham. There will be no repeat of last season.

23. Cincinnati — Bob Huggins' Bearcats can hit the boards. But a lack of size and perimeter shooting may be their downfalls.

24. Indiana — The Hoosiers feature Brian Evans, the leading returning scorer in the Big 10.

25. Oklahoma — Ryan Minor very well may be the finest shooting guard in college basketball today.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

COMMONWEALTH TIMES POLL

(Through Nov. 17)

The top 25 teams in the Commonwealth Times Division I writers' poll, with first-place votes in parentheses (points tabulated on a 25-24-23-22-21-20-19-18-17-16-15-14-13-12-11-10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 basis):

SCHOOL	W-L	PTS.	LW
1. Kansas (4)	0-0	244	—
2. Kentucky (5)	0-0	243	—
3. UCLA (1)	0-0	217	—
4. Villanova	0-0	212	—
5. Georgetown	0-0	192	—
6. Connecticut	0-0	187	—
7. Massachusetts	0-0	180	—
8. Louisville	0-0	177	—
9. Wake Forest	0-0	140	—
10. Mississippi State	0-0	126	—
11. Memphis	0-0	125	—
12. Arkansas	0-0	121	—
13. Utah	0-0	121	—
14. Iowa	0-0	112	—
15. Virginia	0-0	103	—
16. North Carolina	0-0	102	—
17. Cincinnati	0-0	89	—
18. Maryland	0-0	86	—
19. Missouri	0-0	84	—
20. Michigan	0-0	73	—
21. Virginia Tech	0-0	73	—
22. Purdue	0-0	46	—
23. Stanford	0-0	40	—
24. Tulane	0-0	30	—
25. Indiana	0-0	22	—

Others receiving votes: Western Kentucky, 20; Duke, 18; Oklahoma, 12; California, 12; Arizona, 4; Old Dominion, 2.

KRISTA MILLER

Go figure. She had an opportunity to attend the University of Connecticut.

That's right. The defending national champion, the UConn Huskies.

Instead Krista Miller decided to attend VCU despite the appeals of those around her to stay at home.

"I had to do it for me," she said.

The logic is clear but not that simple: at UConn, she said, she would've had to sit behind too many players before getting a chance to start. This way she figures she'll get a chance to play.

Named High School Player of the Year in Connecticut by Gatorade and USA Today, Miller, who's most comfortable at the small forward and shooting guard spots, is an outstanding three-point shooter and likely will play shooting guard.

In high school she said her team would play before crowds of 2,000 and 3,000.

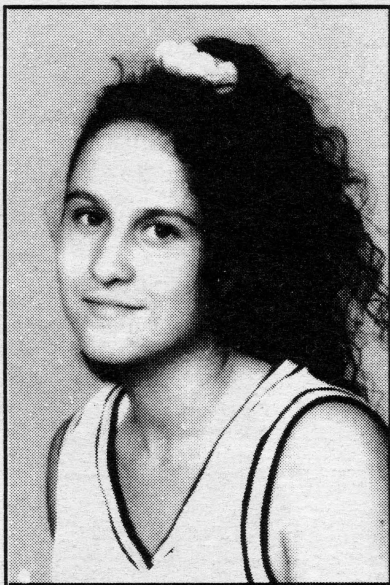
So, why VCU?

"When I came down here I was comfortable with the players," she said. "I wanted to get away from the Big East."

In a preseason exhibition game against Latvia she was 5-of-10 from behind the three-point arc.

Head coach Peggy Sells said Miller has shown considerable improvement since arriving on campus.

"I've been pleasantly surprised with what she's accomplished this season," she said.



Miller

CAA

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East Carolina

Head coach: Anne Donovan

1994-95 record: 8-19, 3-11

Returning starters:

Tomekia Blackmon, F, 5-11, Sr., 16.1 ppg, 6.7 rpg

Danielle Charlesworth, G, 5-3, Sr., 10.5 ppg, 3.4 apg, 2.4 spg

Tracey Kelley, F, 6-0, Jr., 8.9 ppg, 6.4 rpg

Outlook:

The Lady Pirates are returning their top three scorers from last season. Ironically, the weakest spot on this Donovan-led team is the frontcourt.

Donovan, a first-year head coach and a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame, is a 1983 alumnus of ODU and still holds the NCAA career record for blocked shots with 801.

Conventional wisdom is that her experience will have an immediate impact and help to turn this program around.

Quote: "We're not a very big team. That's no secret. So we're going to concentrate on some good, solid defense," Donovan said.

American University

Head coach: Jeff Thatcher

1994-95 record: 13-14, 7-8

Returning starters:

Jeri Dorezas, G, 5-4, Sr., 3.7 ppg, 3.2 apg, 1.2 spg

Ally Baker, F, 6-0, Sr., 9.6 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 1.9 spg

Becky Greenfield, F, 6-0, Sr., 9.8 pg, 6.8 rpg

Outlook:

The Lady Eagles' success will depend on two things: the impact of newcomers, and the condition of Jeri Dorezas.

Dorezas underwent her third surgery on the same knee during the offseason. Her return to form is key for AU. In 1995, she led the team in assists (3.2 apg) and minutes played (26.2 mpg).

Transfer Lena Patterson tops the list of new faces joining the Lady Eagles' program this season. The 5-5 guard is a two-time transfer, arriving in Washington from the University of Maryland via Frostburg State.

Quote: "Lena is going to give us something at the point that we quite frankly have not had the past four or five years," Thatcher said.

University of Richmond

1994-95 record: 12-16, 7-7

Head coach: Tammy Holder

Returning starters:

Carole Detollenaere, 5-9, So., 5.9 ppg, 2.6 apg, 2.1 spg

Patience Jones, 5-9, Sr., 8.9 ppg, 2.6 apg, 2.2 spg

Denise Winn, 5-7, Sr., 10.9 ppg, 1.7 spg, 2.3 apg

Melanie Noise, 6-0, Sr., 7.9 ppg, 3.4 rpg

Outlook:

The challenge facing Holder is finding a way to fill the void created by the departure of Ina Nicosia. Nicosia led

UR in scoring and rebounding in 1995.

Detollenaere is expected to be the quarterback on the court for the Spiders, and Holder is hoping the five seniors, Jones, Winn, Noise, Lee Wallace and Mollie McClure, will accept leadership roles.

Keys for success are improved three-point shooting and the development of roles to fill Nicosia's big shoes.

Quote: "I expect to be able to compete with the upper echelon," Holder said.

William and Mary

Head coach: Trina Thomas Patterson

1994-95 record: 8-21, 4-12

Returning starters:

Yolanda Settles, G, 5-8, Sr., 8.3 ppg, 4.1 rpg

Bridget Wagner, F, 6-2, Jr., 6.4 ppg, 5.5 rpg

Julie Hamiel, F, 6-1, Jr., 6.4 ppg, 2.5 apg

Outlook:

The Tribe is above average in the conference in terms of size but well below average in terms of experience. With five freshmen on the roster and the loss of the team's top players from last year's squad, guards Aquedine Khasidis and Tara Roberson, Patterson, the 1994 CAA Coach of the Year, has her work cut out for her.

She said much more emphasis will be placed on scoring than in years past.

Patterson is looking for the bulk of the Tribe's offensive production to come from the frontcourt tandem of Wagner and 6-4 Nina McIntyre.

Quote: "The teams that have been most successful in every conference are the teams that can score. Of course we're going to have to stop people, but our goal is to put the ball in the basket," Patterson said.

UNC-Wilmington

Head coach: Susan Yow

1994-95 record: 4-23, 3-11

Returning starters:

Toni Esposito, G, 5-10, So., 7.3 ppg, 3.0 apg, 5.1 rpg

Denise Marsh, G, 5-7, Sr., 8.9 ppg, 2.5 apg

Tara Spencer, F, 5-10, So., 8.5 ppg, 2.0 spg

Tiffany Stacey, C, 6-2, Sr., 7.3 ppg, 5.7 rpg

Outlook:

The Seahawk women are in trouble this year — again. In her first two years at UNC-W, Yow has managed only nine victories. The bright side is her top scorer and best all-around athlete — Marsh — is returning for her senior season.

For the Lady Seahawks to be successful this season, one or two of their six freshman need to step forward and do something — anything — well.

Quote: "It just seems there's a cloud hanging over this program," Yow said.

PREVIEW

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"Gabby's getting very good at putting the ball on the floor and beating people," she said.

Newcomer Krista Miller will see some quality playing time this season at both the off-guard and the small positions.

The strongest aspect of her game is her three-point shooting ability.

Millsaps, who had surgery on her knee during the offseason, enters her second season fighting for playing time on a team that has depth at the perimeter.

Small forward

Maria Albertsson, 6-0, So.

Kenoris Blackmon, 6-0, Jr.

Maria Albertsson very well may be the best-kept secret on this team. She'll likely start at small forward but could also play either guard spot or power forward.

"I'm just looking to play whatever role they want me to, Albertsson said.

"If I'm scoring that's fine. If someone else is scoring that's also fine."

Sells describes her as being the most complete player on the team. She can handle the ball, penetrate, shoot the three and crash the boards. But most of all she can play defense.

"She has good foot speed," Sells said. "She really pressures the basketball very well."

Blackmon, a transfer from Central Arizona Junior College, will be the sixth player for the Lady Rams this season, Sells said.

Her size and athletic ability lend her to being a versatile player.

Power forward

Adrienne Beard, 6-0, So.

Monifa Coleman, 5-11, So.

Beard is the likely starter and may see some playing time at small forward and center.

Coleman will be used as both a center and power forward.

Sells said Beard has what it takes to be All-Conference. She's quick, has speed, good leaping ability and can take the ball to the hole.

Coleman, who saw limited playing time last season, has impressed Sells thus far with her work ethic. Sells repeatedly has said she likes tough players, especially in the post.

At CAA media day she used humor to stress the fact that, to her, work ethic and hustle are more important than size.

"The rest of America is going to think I'm the stupidest person in the world," she said jokingly, "having three 6-5s on the bench and starting a 5-10."

Coleman is the "5-10" Sells referred to.

"She probably gets better position than any of our post players," Sells said.

Center

Mona Karlsson, 6-6, So.

Allyn Lewis, 6-4, Jr.

Julie Tarrance, 6-5, Fr.

Karlsson likely will be the starter, with Lewis seeing a lot of minutes. Either player could also spend some time at the small forward position. The reality is that, just like any other spot on the team, the player that works the hardest in practice and in games will see the most playing time.

Sells said both have their strengths.

"Ally seems to be more physical than Mona," she said. "Where Mona seems to be a little better scorer than Allyn. If we could blend the two together it would be great."

Julie Tarrance most likely will see very limited playing time this season, because of the number of post players ahead of her and simply the level of her game.

Tarrance is going through period of transition. Sells said she has some things to learn about college-level basketball.

Outlook

James Madison head coach Sheila Moorman a few weeks ago said for the CAA to send more than one team to the NCAA Tournament that they will need to knock off some top-ranked teams.

This season the Lady Rams are in position to do just that.

Their nonconference schedule includes games with Duke, Western Kentucky, Texas and either Alabama or Oklahoma.

Duke is ranked as high as 10th in preseason polls. Western Kentucky and Alabama also are ranked opponents. Last year was the first time Texas did not finish the season in the AP poll.

Beard is excited about the quality of the schedule.

"This is the level I want to play," she said.

The Lady Rams collectively speak of making the NCAA. Old Dominion is the obvious hurdle. Coleman said she's not convinced ODU is the best team in the conference.

"I think we're going to give some people in this conference a little more than they bargained for," she said. "I don't think we'll just make an appearance (in the NCAA Tournament). I think we'll advance."

Lady Rams have singular goal: NCAA

Terry Scanlon

CT ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

At this time last year the Lady Rams were hoping to win a few games. Now they're talking NCAA Tournament.

A team that lost their top three scorers to graduation and has seven new faces is talking about going to the NCAA Tournament.

Sophomore Monifa Coleman has witnessed the attitude adjustment.

"Last year 'we just need to win,'" she said. "This year we have a special goal in mind, which is Tourny Time."

A major reason for the confidence is new head coach Peggy Sells. In her eight seasons of being involved with women's college basketball, every team she has been associated with gained at least 20 wins and an NCAA Tournament birth.

Last season's shocking 20-10 record and National Women's Invitational Tournament appearance are another source of confidence for this young and largely inexperienced squad.

An influx of unknown talent from Sweden also has played into the mix.

Still only two starters return from last season and all the returning players combined averaged less than 30 points per game.

Sophomore Adrienne Beard, who averaged 8.0 ppg and looks to start this year, said there's a lot riding on this season.

"A lot more is at stake now," she said. "We have to defend our season last year."

Sells is aiming high. She doesn't want any transition period. She wants to win now.

"As a coach I always place high expectations on my team," Sells said. "We want to win 20 or more games and we want to win the Colonial."

The cornerstone of the Sells' approach will be her "60 points or less" philosophy.

"If we can hold an opponent to 60 points or less every night," she said, "chances are we're going to win a lot of games."

The theory being that with pressure in-your-face defense will force turnovers and bad shots. From there the Lady Rams can push the ball down court and either drive the lane or pull up and take the three.

"We want to be a fundamentally sound, scrappy, hard-nosed defensive team," Sells said. "I think that playing pressure defense it will allow us to get some transition baskets and some high percentage shots."

Sells has said repeatedly that no one's starting spot is secure. She wants to play to the people who work the hardest. She insists the starting lineups will change throughout the season.

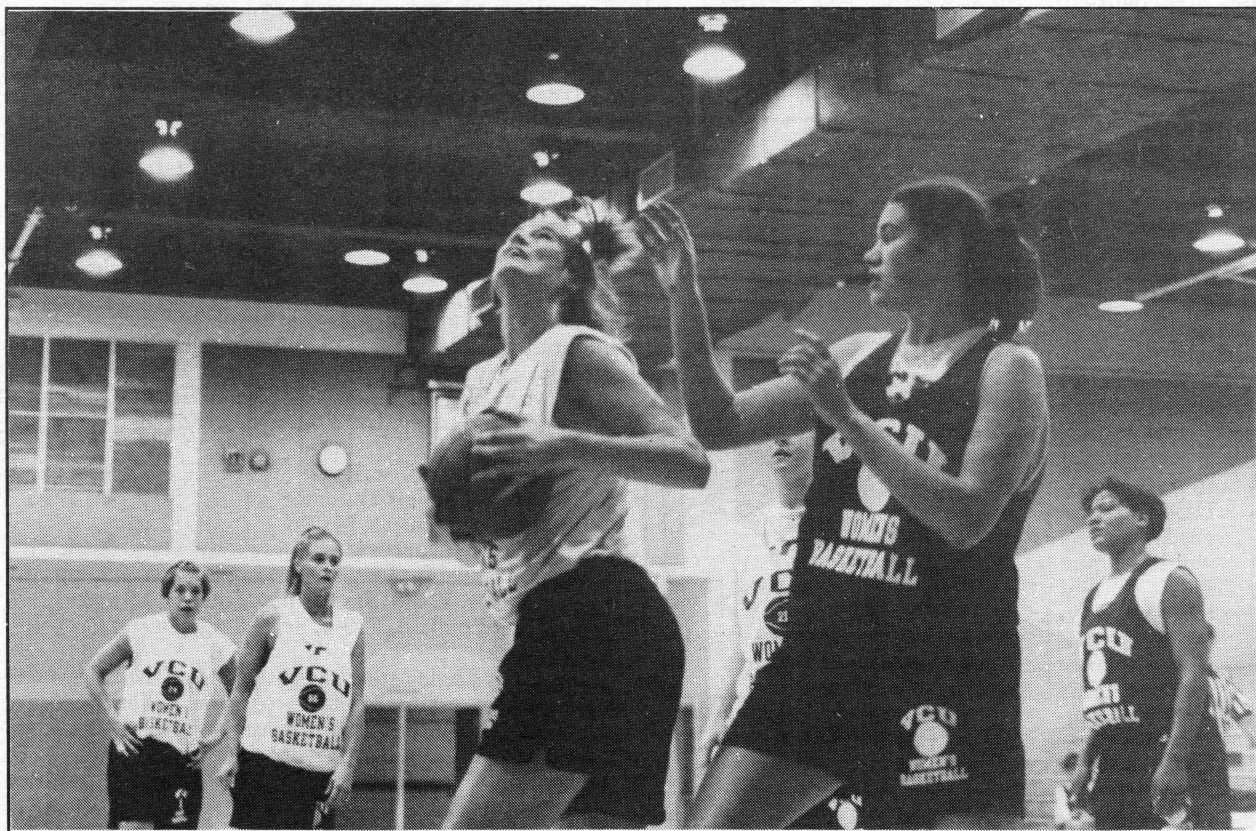
Here's a look at each position:

Point guard

Vendela Thelander, 5-9, So.

Sarah Trayers, 5-6, Fr.

Thelander started all 30 games last season and only sat out for a total 102 minutes. With Trayers and Maria Albertsson able to run the point, Thelander won't play as much this year.



Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

GETTIN' READY — The Lady Rams prepare for the WNIT, which started Wednesday. VCU played Duke University in the first round of the tournament.

Thelander, a native of Stockholm, Sweden, is a tireless, disciplined ball-handler. Last season she averaged more than three assists and six points per game. Sells said she has stepped into a leadership role.

"Not only being the point guard but being the person that she is," the former point guard said, "she really leads by example."

Thelander's aggressive defensive play wore out many opposing guards a year ago, and she is expected to be one of the top point guards in the CAA.

Shooting guard

Gabrielle Kyhlstedt, 5-11, So.

Tammy Millsaps, 5-9, So.

Krista Miller, 5-10, Fr.

Kyhlstedt, also from Stockholm, is the team's leading returning scorer averaging 10.8 ppg last year. Kyhlstedt led the team in three pointers and assists. Her ability to score from 20 feet enables her to dish the ball into the low post.

Kyhlstedt looks to play a big part in Sells' offense and surely will be near the top of the CAA three-point leaders. Sells said she's getting better at moving with the ball.

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ADRIENNE BEARD

This is her year to shine.

In her first season she went down four games into the season and took a medical redshirt.

Last season she started on and off and suffered from nagging injuries.

This year, with the departure of the top three scorers, sophomore Adrienne Beard has a chance to step into the spotlight and carry the torch for the Lady Rams.

Beard is ready for the challenge.

"I'm expecting a lot from myself this year," she said. "I'm expecting to be a leader on the floor."

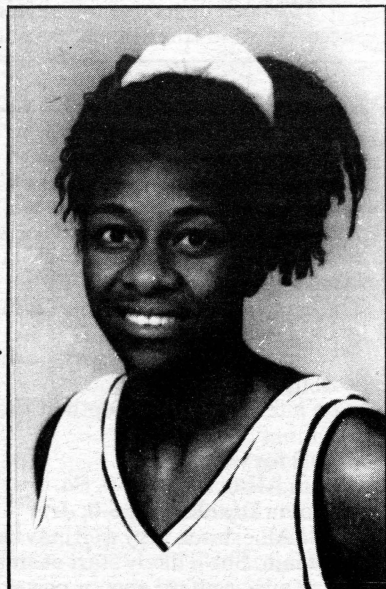
Head coach Peggy Sells said Beard will be asked to provide some offense this season. Beard's height is enough to allow her to start at the power forward spot while still having the ability to move like a swing forward. Sells said her speed will make her an invaluable post player.

"We want to get her on the break in a hurry and post her up and get her the basketball quick," Sells said. "And we want to pull her out from the basket offensively and let her drive by the defender."

Beard posted an average of eight points and six rebounds per game last season.

Beard's ability to keep her emotions in check are key to her success, said teammate Allyn Lewis.

"If AJ keeps her head in the game," she said, "nobody can stop her."



Beard

VCU's women's basketball 1995-96 schedule

#women's NIT
*Colonial Athletic Association game
£ game broadcast on AM910

November			
15-21	at Duke#	7 £	
29	Morgan State	7	
December			
2	Hampton	7 p.m.	
5	at Liberty	7 p.m.	
16	George Mason*	7 p.m.	
19	North Texas	7 p.m.	
22	UNC Charlotte	7 £	
28	at Junkanoo Shootout (Nassau, Bahamas)		
	Alabama vs. Oklahoma	7 p.m.	
	VCU vs. W. Kentucky	9 p.m.	
29	at Junkanoo Shootout consolation	7 p.m.	
	championship	9 p.m.	
January			
3	Texas	7 £	
7	at East Carolina*	2 p.m.	
12	William and Mary*	7 p.m.	

14	Old Dominion*	2 p.m.	
17	at Maryland-Eastern Shore	7 p.m.	
21	American*	2 £	
24	at Richmond*	7 p.m.	
28	at UNC-Wilmington*	2 £	
February			
2	James Madison*	7 p.m.	
9	East Carolina*	7 £	
13	Richmond*	7 £	
16	at William and Mary*	7:30£	
18	at Old Dominion*	2 p.m.	
23	at American*	7 p.m.	
25	UNC-Wilmington*	2 p.m.	
28	at George Mason*	7 £	
March			
3	at James Madison*	2 p.m.	
6-9	at CAA Tournament (Norfolk)		

Sells brings winning attitude to Franklin St.

Terry Scanlon
CT ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

Refuse to lose.

That's the self-described attitude of first-year women's basketball coach Peggy Sells.

In each of the past eight seasons, the team Sells has been associated with has won at least 20 games and appeared in the NCAA Tournament.

"I can't say it's one thing that has contributed to that," she said, adding that she was surrounded by talent in each instance.

A point guard at Clemson University for four seasons, Sells served as an assistant for the Lady Tigers the following year before assuming the top spot at the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg.

During her three seasons at USCS, she amassed an 80-13 record.

Her coach at Clemson, Jim Davis, said he is not surprised Sells is rising through the coaching ranks so quickly. She was a natural point guard, Davis said, not only because of her leadership abilities but also because she fit his point-guard theory.

"When you're born and the doctor slaps you on the butt," he said, "the ones that kick the hardest make the best point guards."

In the 1991 NCAA Tournament, Sells hit the game-winning shot to lift the Lady Tigers over James Madison and into the Elite Eight in what Davis said was one of the biggest wins in Clemson history.

Sells said she pushed the ball down court with the intention of passing, but with the clock winding down and nobody open she decided to shoot.

"Luckily for me it went in," she said.

Her winning ways played a factor in the decision to hire



Sells

The Sells Record

1987-1988 *	21-9	.700
1988-1989 *	20-11	.645
1989-1990 *	22-10	.688
1990-1991 *	22-11	.667
1991-1992 **	21-10	.677
1992-1993 ***	28-3	.903
1993-1994 ***	27-4	.871
1994-1995 ***	25-6	.806

*as a player at Clemson

**as an assistant coach at Clemson

***as head coach at the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg

Sells, according to Jeff Cupps, the associate athletic director for business affairs.

"She's a proven winner," he said. "I felt strongly that if she got the job she'd be successful."

Meredith Sisson, a junior transfer from USCS, described Sells as an intense competitor who likes to win.

"If we do what she asks us to do we're going to win," Sisson said.

Former Clemson teammate Shandy Bryan said

Sells is vocal in displaying her intensity.

"They're going to get a kick out of Peggy," Bryan said, jokingly. "She's going to yell and get stuff done."

Sells admits she is quick to point out when a player errs, but she says she also is just as quick to give them a hug when they get the job done.

"Deep down I think people know discipline is good for them," she said.

At 26, Sells is the youngest Division I head coach in women's basketball. Her age, she said, is an advantage because she's able to relate to her players on and off the court.

"It's not like I'm an old fogey or out of style or out of date," Sells said, adding that she listens to the same music and wears the same clothes as her players.

In her three seasons with Sells, Sisson said she has not seen Sells have any difficulty commanding respect from her athletes, and that's the way Sells likes it.

"I don't think you demand respect," Sells said. "I think you earn respect."

Davis, who's in his ninth season at the helm of the Lady Tigers' program, offered his protégé some advice.

"Stay humble," he said. "She has had three or four outstanding years, and they're not all like that."

New season, same story: ODU the strong favorite

Terry Scanlon
CT ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

Parity is not the best word to describe women's basketball in the Colonial Athletic Association.

James Madison University won the first four conference titles, and ODU has won the past four. Between the two streaks, the University of Richmond twice captured the CAA crown.

In all, JMU has experienced the most success, reaching the Sweet 16 five times, including a victory as the only CAA at-large team ever against Penn State (ranked No. 1 nationally at the time) before losing to the Clemson Lady Tigers, which was led by point guard Peggy Sells.

Old Dominion University

1994-95 record: (overall/conference) 27-6, 16-1

Head coach: Wendy Larry

Returning starters:

Shonda Deberry, G, 5-8, Sr., 9.8 points per game, 2.0 steals per game, 3.9 rebounds per game

Patricia Penicheiro, G, 5-11, Jr., 8.6 ppg, 4.0 spg, 6.2 apg

Clarisse Machanguana, F, 6-5, Jr., 16.7 ppg, 8.8 rpg

Sarah Willyerd, F, 8.8 ppg, 3.7 rpg

Esther Benjamin, F, 6-3, Sr., 8.2 ppg, 5.7 rpg

Outlook:

The Lady Monarchs have adopted the motto of the 1981 Pittsburgh Steelers: "One for the Thumb."

Entering its fifth season as a member of the CAA, ODU is seeking its fifth conference crown.

Lady Monarch head coach Wendy Larry, who is entering her ninth year at the helm of her alma mater, is placing emphasis on putting points on the board.

The logic of this less-popular approach to the game is simple. They already have the top defensive unit in the CAA, which is led by Penicheiro, the 1995 CAA Rookie of the Year. Her long arms produce a wing span too difficult for most ball handlers to evade.

Last season Penicheiro tied for ninth in the nation in steals, averaging four takeaways a contest.

The frontcourt is anchored by 6-5 Machanguana, the 1995 CAA Player of the Year. She also was chosen by conference coaches and media to repeat as the top player in the CAA. Machanguana is joined up front by Benjamin, who posted a team high 47 blocked shots in 1994-95.

As usual, the Lady Monarchs face a tough nonconference schedule that includes three 1995 Final Four Teams: Stanford, Tennessee and Georgia.

Quote: "This is the best basketball team I've been affiliated with at ODU since 1985," Larry said, referring to the last year the Lady Monarchs won the NCAA Championship.

VCU — see page 14.

James Madison University

1994-95 record: 22-7, 13-1

Head coach: Sheila Moorman

Returning starters:

Holly Rilinger, G, 5-4, Jr., 13.4 ppg, 2.1 spg, 3.8 apg

Krissy Heinbaugh, G, 5-9, Sr., 11.3 ppg, 3.6 apg

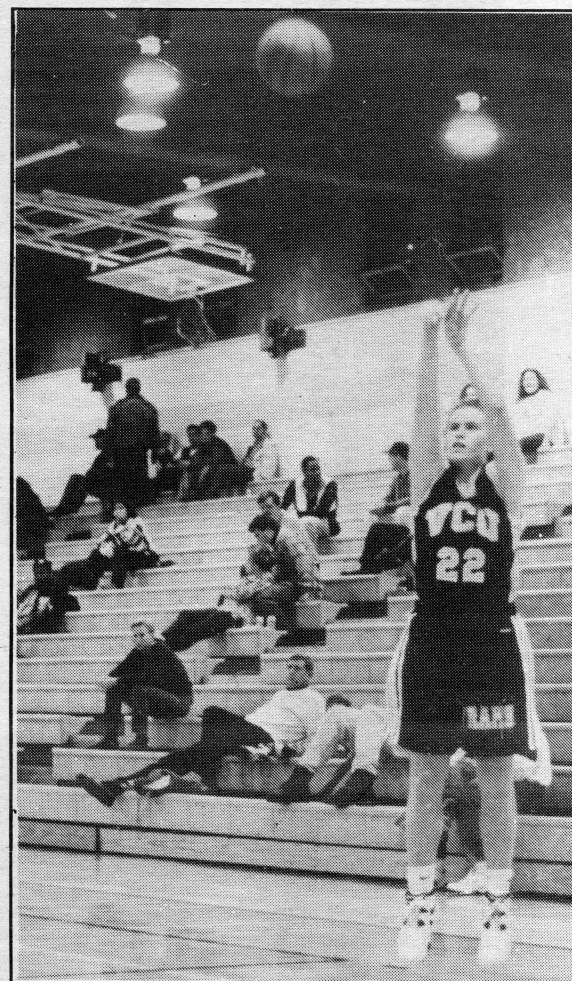
Sarah Schreib, F, 5-11, Jr., 12.8 ppg, 7.5 rpg,

Outlook:

In a six-year span up to 1991, the Dukes made five NCAA appearances. Since that time, ODU has joined the conference, and JMU has been relegated to second-class citizenship.

Sheila Moorman, who is entering her 14th season as head coach of the Lady Dukes, said her three returning starters will be the nucleus of the team.

Rilinger will run the point, Heinbaugh looks to be



Bill Buckman/Commonwealth Times

FROM WAY DOWNTOWN — The Lady Rams are relying on sophomore Gabrielle Kyhlstedt to lead the way in conference play.

the team's three-point threat and Schreib possibly could lead the team in both scoring and rebounding while playing small forward.

The Lady Dukes' out-of-conference schedule is highlighted by a Dec. 6 contest at the Convocation Center against Vanderbilt.

Quote: "Those three (Schreib, Rilinger and Heinbaugh) will be our heart and soul," Moorman said.

George Mason

Head coach: Jim Lewis

1994-95 record: 9-18, 7-8

Returning starters:

Krista Jay, G, 5-10, So., 12.4 ppg, 4.6 rpg,

Keri Chaconas, G, 5-9, Sr., 18.9 ppg, 4.9 rpg, 3.9 apg

Cricket Pearson, F, 5-11, Jr., 6.0 ppg, 7.1 rpg

Glenna Lewis, F, 5-11, So., 2.0 ppg, 3.0 rpg

Outlook:

Chaconas not only led the CAA in scoring in 1995, but she also had the three highest single-game scoring marks, including tallying 51 points against East Carolina University.

Sophomore Krista Jay also is expected to contribute points from the perimeter and gives the Patriots one of the strongest backcourts in the CAA.

The Lady Patriots' biggest weak spot heading into the season is the low post. Pearson is the team's leading returning rebounder but is neither big enough nor strong enough to carry the load by herself.

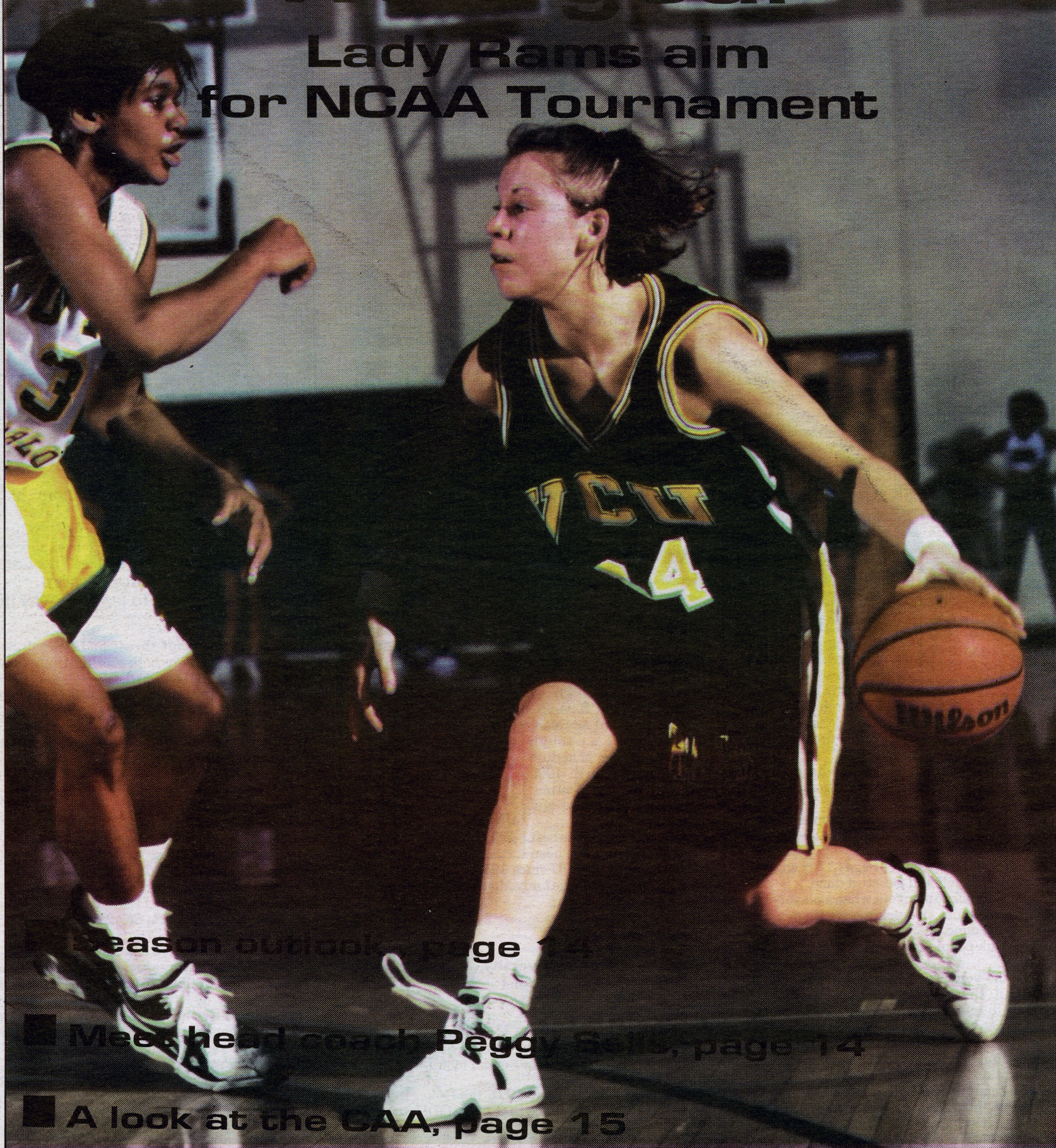
Twelfth-year head coach Jim Lewis will look to a couple of freshmen, Taisha Thomas and Christina Todd, to help alleviate some of the pressure from Pearson.

Quote: "She'll be the go-to person for sure," Lewis said of Chaconas.

CAA continued to page 13 ►

New England Jew League New York

Lady Rams aim for NCAA Tournament



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