

Stories by Fred Jeter

Black referee to lead Super Bowl

African-American Ronald "Ron" Torbert will be the lead referee — wearing the white cap — for the Feb. 13 Super Bowl in Inglewood, Calif.

A graduate of Michigan State University and Harvard Law School, he is an attorney by trade and became a part-time NFL official in 2010.

Torbert, who wears striped shirt jersey No. 62, has worked six previous NFL playoff games, most recently the San Francisco 49ers' win over Green Bay in the NFC Divisional round.

He is one of the NFL's seven African-American referees.

Super Bowl officials are selected on merit. During the regular season, Torbert's crew threw just 12.3 penalty flags per game, fourth lowest in league.

In 1980, Burl Toler became the first African-American Super Bowl official.



Ronald "Ron" Torbert will referee Super Bowl LVI between the Cincinnati Bengals and Los Angeles Rams on Feb. 13 at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, Calif.

Then and Now: Richmond area's Super Bowl heroes

By Fred Jeter

Super Bowl LVI

Cincinnati Bengals vs. Los Angeles Rams

When:
Sunday, Feb. 13, 2022
Television: NBC
Where: SoFi Stadium, Inglewood, Cal. (about 23 miles south of Hollywood)

Kickoff:
6:30 p.m., Eastern Time
Booth announcers:
Al Michaels, Cris Collinsworth

Halftime:
Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Eminem, Kendrick Lamar

Cincinnati Bengals offensive right guard Quinton Spain - No. 67 - will become the latest local athlete to perform on football's grandest stage.

From Petersburg High, the 340-pound Spain provides much of the heavy lifting required to give quarterback Joe Burrow time to pass and running back Joe Mixon room to gallop.

Now let's take a stroll through pigskin history and revisit some other local luminaries to strut their stuff in the Super Bowl.

Willie Lanier (Maggie L. Walker High): The bruising middle linebacker was among the defensive heroes as Kansas City defeated Minnesota, 23-7, in Super Bowl IV.

Russell Wilson (Collegiate): The Seattle Seahawks quarterback is 1-and-1 in Super Bowl, defeating

Denver, 43-8, in XLVIII, and losing to New England, 28-24, in Super Bowl XLIX.

William Henderson (Thomas Dale): The Green Bay Packers' powerful fullback was a primary body-guard for QB Brett Favre in Super Bowl XXXI, a 35-21 win over New England.

Damien Woody (Patrick Henry): As a teammate of QB Tom Brady, the center/offensive guard helped New England to victories in Super Bowls XXXVI and XXXVIII.

Larry Brooks (Prince George High, Virginia State): The Los Angeles Rams' defensive tackle never played in a Super Bowl for L.A., but was defensive line coach for Green Bay's XXXI Super Bowl win.

Herb Scott (Virginia Union): The long-time (1975-'84) Dallas Cowboys offensive guard was instrumental in his team's 27-10 win over Denver in Super Bowl XII.

Mike Bragg (University of Richmond): Known for the "hang time" on his towering kicks, he served as Washington's punter in the 14-7 loss to Miami in Super Bowl VII.

Cornelius Johnson (Virginia Randolph, Virginia Union): In helping Baltimore Colts to 16-13 win over Dallas in Super Bowl V, the offensive guard blocked for QBs Johnny Unitas and Earl Morrall.

Michael Robinson (Varina): In Seattle's 43-8 win over Denver in Super Bowl XLVIII, "M-Rob" was lining up at fullback and providing much of the protection for Seahawks' QB Russell Wilson.

Just missed: Special team's player **Trenton Cannon** (Virginia State) would have reached this year's Super Bowl if the San Francisco 49ers had hung on to defeat the Rams. Cannon was placed on injured reserve in Week 13 but was activated Jan. 29 and played against LA in the Conference final.



Willie Lanier, Russell Wilson, Larry Brooks, Herb Scott, Michael Robinson and Cornelius Johnson

CIAA rivals face off this Saturday at Barco-Stevens Hall

One team is battling for first place while the other is simply scrapping to get out of the cellar.

Squads that have been heading in different directions will collide Saturday when Virginia State travels to face Virginia Union at Barco-Stevens Hall.

Tipoff is about 4 p.m., following a 2 p.m. women's contest between the same CIAA rivals.

Coach Jay Butler's Panthers have been cruising in the fast lane with an overall 14-6 record that includes three losses in overtime.

Meanwhile, the Trojans have sputtered to a 7-10 overall mark in what has been a rare down season for Coach Lonnie



Robbie Osborne B.J. Fitzgerald

Blow's squad. VSU has been among the CIAA leaders ever since Coach Blow came on board in 2013.

VUU showcases a balanced attack with eight different players averaging between 12.3 and 5.7 points per game.

VSU boasts two All-CIAA candidates in 6-foot-6 B.J. Fitzgerald, a junior from Danville, and 6-foot-5 junior Terrence Hunter-Whitfield from Matoaca High in Chesterfield.

Fitzgerald averages 18.2 points and 5.7 rebounds while Hunter-Whitfield averages 13.2 points and 7.1 boards.

This will be a rematch of VUU's 88-70 victory over VSU Jan. 15 at the Multipurpose Center in Ettrick.

There is a chance they could meet for a third time at the

CIAA Northern Division standings			
	Division	Conference	Overall
Lincoln	3-2	7-2	14-5
Virginia Union	3-2	7-3	14-6
Bowie State	3-2	5-4	7-13
Shaw	3-2	3-5	7-7
Elizabeth City	1-3	4-6	11-9
Virginia State	1-3	4-6	7-10

*Games through Jan. 29

Willie O'Ree awarded Congressional Gold Medal

Free Press Staff and Wire Reports

President Joe Biden on Monday signed legislation into law honoring Willie O'Ree, who became the first Black player to appear in a National Hockey League game, with a Congressional Gold Medal.

The news comes after the House of Representatives passed a bipartisan bill to award the Medal to O'Ree.

The 86-year-old was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal "in recognition of his extraordinary contributions and commitment to hockey, inclusion and recreational opportunity."



Willie O'Ree

he took the ice for the Boston Bruins in January 1958. He played just two games for the Black and Gold in 1957-58 before

being sent back down to the minors.

O'Ree returned to the Bruins for the 1960-61 season, appearing in 43 games. He tallied four goals and 10 assists in 45 career games. The New Brunswick native has had a large impact off the ice as well, serving as the NHL's director of youth development and an ambassador for diversity.

The Bruins recently honored O'Ree by retiring his No. 22. He is just the 12th player in franchise history to have his number hanging in the rafters at TD Garden.

Ernie Francis gears up for St. Petersburg race

African-Americans are as rare on the IndyCar circuit as snowmobiles in Haiti, but that doesn't bother Ernie Francis Jr., the latest contender for IndyCar honors.

The Florida-born Francis, whose parents actually are from Haiti, will ride the No. 99 open-wheel car for African-American operated Force Indy Race Team on the upcoming Indy Lights Presented by Cooper Tires Championship.

Indy Lights is a level of Indy Racing one peg below the cars that compete at the most prestigious races such as the Indianapolis 500.

There is a bit of a local angle. Handling the publicity for Force Indy Race Team is Tracey Hughes Royal of Tracey Royal Communications.

She is married to Dr. Frank Royal Jr. of Richmond.

Francis, 24, is a seven-time champion in the Trans Am Series (2014-to-2020) and has a record 47 victories on that tour.

His first race on the 11-event Indy Lights circuit will be Feb.



Ernie Francis Jr.

25-27 in the Streets of St. Petersburg competition.

Force Indy Race Team has African-American Rod Reid as principle co-owner, along

with Team Roger Penske. Crew chief Stuart Kelly and chief mechanic Derrick Morris are both African-American.

There is a short list of

African-Americans to appear in the famed Indy 500. Willy T. Ribbs ran in 1991 and '93, placing 32nd and 21st, respectively.

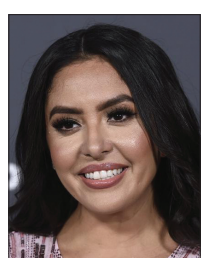
VUU vs. VSU teams ready for the weekend

Virginia Union University fans will be able to return to women's and men's basketball games Saturday, Feb. 5.

Virginia Union's women's basketball team will meet Virginia State University at 2 p.m. while the men tip off against the Trojans at 4 p.m. at Barco-Stevens Hall in Richmond.

General admission is \$20. VUU students, staff and faculty are admitted free with a valid VUU I.D. Masks and proof of vaccination will be required.

Kobe Bryant's widow honored for her sports leadership



Mrs. Bryant

Vanessa Bryant will be recognized as one of the leading women in sports at an event during Super Bowl week.

Mrs. Bryant—the widow of Kobe Bryant — will be honored at the third annual Sports Power Brunch: Celebrating the Most Powerful Women in Sports on Feb. 8 in Beverly Hills, Calif.

She will receive the "Be Your Own Champion Award" for her leadership through the Mamba & Mambacita Sports Foundation, the Sports Power Brunch

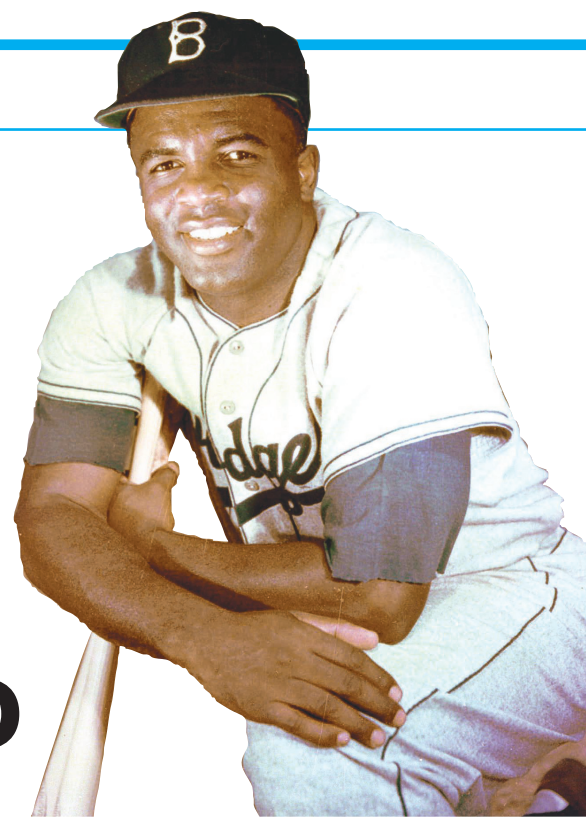
organization said in a statement Tuesday.

The organization was founded to create a positive impact for underserved child athletes in honor of her husband Kobe, and daughter Gianna "Gigi" Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash that also killed seven others in 2020.

Other women in sports honorees include Los Angeles Sparks Senior Vice President Natalie White, EAG Sports management CEO Denise White, and Terri Hines, executive vice president of communications at FOX Sports.

Stories by Fred Jeter

Remembering Jackie Robinson's historic play breaking the color line 75 years ago



It has been 75 years since Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color line, and the cheers are only getting louder.

Jackie Robinson Day was celebrated at ballparks across the nation last Friday, April 15, in honor of Robinson breaking the color line with the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947.

Since 2004, when Jackie Robinson Day became official on the Major League level, all players, managers, coaches and umpires have worn No. 42 to commemorate the historic day. Also, No. 42 has been retired across America. No other player will ever wear that number except on April 15.

This year, there was an added touch. All uniformed players wore No. 42 in Dodger Blue regardless of the ball club's traditional colors. On their own initiative, many players wore blue cleats and blue socks.

The Diamond: The Richmond Flying Squirrels got into the act with about 1,000 fans receiving commemorative No. 42 jerseys. In addition, a bold No. 42 was painted behind home plate.

California Dreamin': The Brooklyn Dodgers moved to

Los Angeles in 1958, a year after Robinson retired. On April 15, a mural marking Robinson's achievement was unveiled at his alma mater, John Muir High School in Pasadena, Calif. Attending the ceremony was Robinson's 99-year-old wife, Rachel Robinson.

Counting players of color: Based on opening-day rosters, only about 8 percent of current big leaguers are African-American. That is extremely misleading to the more casual fans. Counting players of color from the talent-rich Caribbean, the figure jumps to about 30 percent.

The Philadelphia Phillies are an example of that. The 2022 Phils have no African-Americans on the squad. However, they have eight players of color, including starting infielders Didi Gregorius, who grew up in Curaçao, and Jean Segura from the Dominican Republic.

Rookie Robinson: It didn't take No. 42 long to show he belonged. In his first season with the Dodgers, he was named Rookie of the Year and finished fifth in MVP balloting. In 701

plate appearances, he struck out only 36 times. MLB's Rookie of the Year award is named in Robinson's honor.

Local sightings: Robinson played in at least four exhibition games in Richmond at Moers Field and Parker Field. He also came to Richmond several times to support civil rights and political causes. He had speaking engagements at Virginia Union University, the former Mosque and Moore Street Missionary Baptist Church.

Close behind: While Robinson is most celebrated, four other Black players debuted during the 1947 Major League Baseball season. Doby was a seven-time All-Star, a two-time American League home-run leader and, in 1988, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Bill Veeck: As Cleveland owner, Veeck tried as early as 1942 to sign African-Americans and dark-complexioned Latinos. His efforts were thwarted by baseball Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis, an unapologetic racist.

By 1947, Landis had been replaced by a more fair-minded Happy Chandler, and the doors began to crack. Veeck signed Doby in 1947 and Satchel Paige in 1948 and Cleveland went on to win the 1948 World Series. In 1951, Veeck signed Cuban Minnie Minoso, the first Black Latino to play in the big leagues.

Don't forget Moses: Robinson is the first Black MLB player of the "modern era," but not first ever. Long before No. 42, Moses Fleetwood Walker was the catcher for the Toledo Blue Stockings—then a major-league team—in 1884. It was soon after that a "gentleman's agreement" among owners kept Blacks out of baseball until Robinson's storied arrival in 1947.



Blazing a trail

Black players who debuted during the 1947 Major League Baseball season

April 15, 1947	Jackie Robinson, Brooklyn Dodgers
July 5, 1947	Larry Doby, Cleveland Indians
July 17, 1947	Hank Thompson, St. Louis Browns
July 19, 1947	Willard Brown, St. Louis Browns
Aug. 26, 1947	Dan Bankhead, Brooklyn Dodgers

**In 1948, Roy Campanella joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and Satchel Paige joined the Cleveland Indians.*

Richmond Flying Squirrels get high marks for attendance



On their first report card, give the Richmond Flying Squirrels an "A" — for attendance.

The Eastern League team was strong on the field (4-2) and even stronger at the box office.

The latest edition of the local pros drew 38,917 fans for the season-opening, six-game series with the visiting Altoona Curve. That included a complete sellout of 9,810 for the first game of the series at The Diamond on Tuesday, April 12.

The Squirrels will return home Tuesday, April 26, to begin a six-game series against the Bowie Baysox of Maryland.

Turnstiles spinning

Results of the Flying Squirrels' first home stand at The Diamond against the Altoona Curve.

Tuesday, April 12: Richmond loses to Altoona, 3-2; sellout crowd of 9,810

Wednesday, April 13: Richmond wins, 10-6; 7,729 crowd

Thursday, April 14: Richmond wins, 5-4; 3,311 crowd

Friday, April 15 (Jackie Robinson Day): Richmond loses, 6-1; 6,789 crowd

Saturday, April 16: Richmond wins, 8-4; 7,110 crowd

Sunday, April 17: Richmond wins, 6-2; 4,168 crowd

Home stand record: 4-2 • Total six-game attendance: 38,917



Photos by Carlos Bernate

Six-time MLB All-Star Will Clark hugs Richmond Flying Squirrels catcher Brandon Martorano after throwing out the ceremonial first pitch April 12 to open the Squirrels' season at The Diamond. Clark's No. 22 jersey will be retired by the San Francisco Giants this summer. Nutzy, the team's mascot, greeted young fans among the sell-out crowd. The Flying Squirrels lost the home opener 3-2 to the Altoona Curve, but went 4-2 overall in the six-game home stand against the Pennsylvania team. The Flying Squirrels currently are on the road playing the Erie SeaWolves and will return home Tuesday, April 26, to launch a six-game series against the Bowie Baysox.

Manchester sophomore Aiden Harris gives high sign to U.Va.

Aiden Harris is only a sophomore at Manchester High School in Chesterfield County, but already he knows where he'll play college baseball.

The 6-foot-3, 215-pound right-hander has given a verbal commitment to suit up, three seasons from now, for the perennial powerhouse University of Virginia.

The U.Va. baseball team won the NCAA title in 2015, was runner-up in 2014 and has been to the College World Series six other times, including last year. Twenty-three former Cavaliers are playing Major League Baseball.

Harris, who threw a no-

hitter last week in a victory over Henrico's Highland Springs High School, can play virtually any position and packs a lot of punch at the plate.

In addition to starting for Manchester Coach Ricky Saunders, Harris has earned much exposure with the Richmond Braves travel organization.

U.Va. has only one Black athlete on this year's roster. Coincidentally, it is Jay Woolfolk who comes from the same Midlothian area of Chesterfield as Harris. Woolfolk grew up



in the Manchester district, but played sports and graduated from Benedictine College Preparatory.

Rookie pitcher Hunter Greene sets MLB record

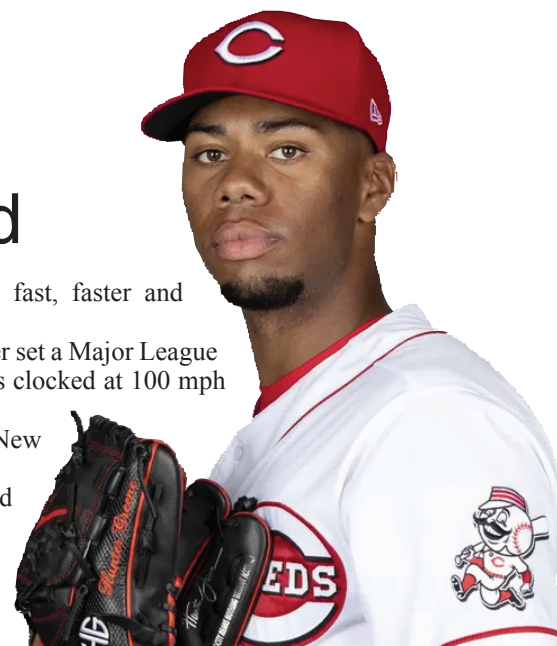
Hunter Greene's three best pitches are fast, faster and fastest.

The Cincinnati Reds' rookie right-hander set a Major League record Saturday, April 16, with 39 pitches clocked at 100 mph or more.

The previous mark was 33 set by the New York Mets' Jacob deGrom last June. Despite his blazing fastball that topped at 102 mph, the Reds lost 5-2 at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles. It was something of a homecoming for Greene, who is from nearby Sherman Oaks, Calif.

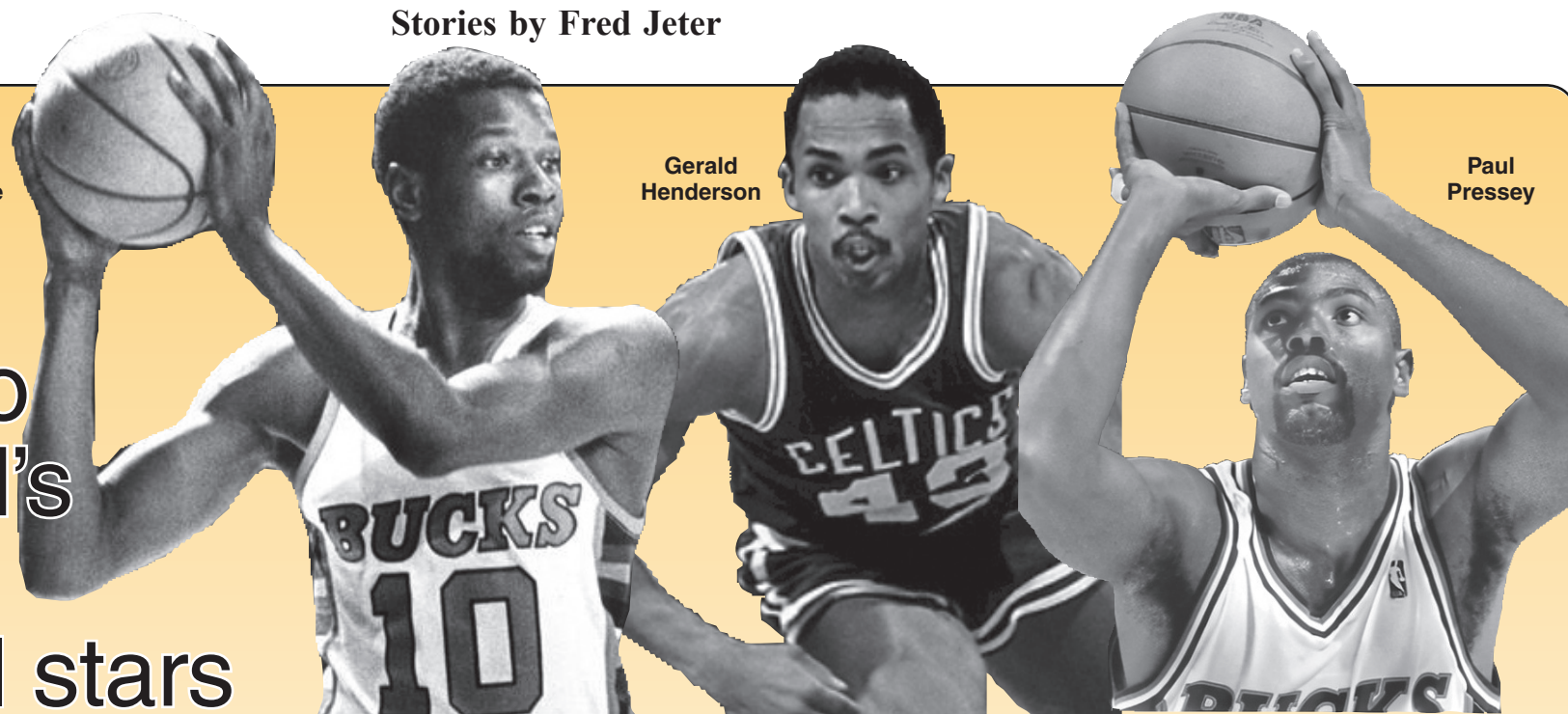
The 6-foot-5 Greene threw a total of 80 pitches against Los Angeles before coming out in the sixth inning following a Trae Turner home run. He finished with six strikeouts.

Greene was selected by the Reds with the second overall pick in the 2017 draft. In 184 minor league innings, he struck out 241 batters.



Sports

Stories by Fred Jeter



A salute to Richmond's notable basketball stars

Robert L. "Bobby" Dandridge, aka "Greyhound," "Bismarck," and "Pick," was born in Richmond on Nov. 15, 1947. He became a headliner at Maggie L. Walker High (Stretch Gardner) and Norfolk State (Ernie Fears), and was drafted in the fourth round by Milwaukee in 1969.

In 1971, in his second NBA season, Dandridge helped the upstart Bucks shut out Baltimore, 4-0, in the finals.

Teammates included a young Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and veteran Oscar Robertson.

Dandridge added a second title in 1978 with Washington. The Bullets defeated the Seattle SuperSonics in the Finals, 4-3. Elvin Hayes and Wes Unseld were the headliners, along with Dandridge, who scored 15,530 points in his career.

Dandridge was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame in 2021.

June 11 has been designated Bobby Dandridge Day in Richmond, with ceremonies

to take place at the now Maggie L. Walker Governor's School. Coordinating the Bobby Dandridge Remembrance Committee is former Walker AD Howard Hopkins. More details are forthcoming. Dandridge also is a "Strong Men & Women in Virginia History" 2022 honoree, a program sponsored by Dominion Energy and The Library of Virginia.

In addition to Dandridge, other Richmond Public Schools athletes have left a lasting impression on the NBA Finals.

Gerald Henderson (Huguenot High) and Paul Pressey (George Wythe) combined for six championship rings, turning RVA into "Bling City."

Henderson won three as a player, Dandridge two as a player and Pressey, following a brilliant playing career, one as an assistant coach.

While there are no 804 area code players involved in the current chase for basketball's highest team honor, let's turn back the clock

on the scoreboard and review the past.

Jerome McKinley "Gerald" Henderson was born in Richmond on Jan. 16, 1966. He starred at Huguenot High School (Coach John Bunsavage) and VCU (Chuck Noe, Dana Kirk) before reaching the NBA as third round draft pick by San Antonio in 1980.

In 1981, Henderson came off the bench to help Boston defeat Houston, 4-2, in the Finals.

In 1984, he had a more prominent role, helping the Celtics top the Los Angeles Lakers, 4-3. Henderson's last-gasp steal of a James Worthy pass led to a Boston win in Game 2.

His Celtics' teammates included Hall of Famers Larry Bird, Robert Parish, Kevin McHale and Dennis Johnson.

In 1990, Henderson played a more limited role in Detroit's 4-1 triumph over Portland.

Paul Matthew Pressey, aka "Point Forward,"

was born in Richmond on Dec. 24, 1958. Coached by Bob Booker at Wythe and Nolan Richardson at Tulsa, he was a first round draftee by Milwaukee in 1982.

Pressey never reached the NBA Finals, but he did play in 16 playoff series and 75 games during his illustrious career with the Bucks and San Antonio.

He was head coach Gregg Popovich's right-hand man on the sidelines in 1999 when the Spurs topped the New York Knicks, 4-1, in the finals. Leading roles were played by Tim Duncan and David Robinson.

The Henderson and Pressey NBA legacies continued. Gerald's son, Gerald Jr., went on to play in five playoff series (15 games) with Charlotte and Portland between 2009 and 2017.

Pressey's son, Phil, played in the NBA from 2013 to 2016, and took part in the 2015 playoffs for Boston.



Virginia State University's new football coach sports impressive record

Well-traveled Henry Frazier III has been given the head coaching whistle at Virginia State University.

The 54-year-old Washington, D.C. native will succeed Reggie Barlow, who left VSU after six seasons (34-16 record) for a position in the NFL.

Coach Frazier has been around. He's had previous coaching stops at Bowie State (two stints), Prairie View A&M, North Carolina Central, and the University of Maryland.

At Big 10 Conference Maryland, he served as director of leadership and character development.

Coach Frazier was the standout quarterback at Bowie State before graduating and pursuing a career in coaching.

The incoming coach's work is cut out for him in Ettrick. While Barlow's overall record was excellent, the past two seasons have been difficult.

VSU opted out of the 2020 season due to the global pandemic and struggled through a 3-6 campaign this last season with a rotating group of quarterbacks.

The Trojans will open the 2022 season on Sept. 3 at NCAA Division II powerhouse Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, N.C.



Coach Henry Frazier III

Head college coaching record

Bowie State	(1999-2003)	26-24
Prairie View A&M	(2004-2010)	43-30
North Carolina Central	(2011-2012)	8-14
Overall record:		77-68

Former VSU, Hermitage High athlete heads to Commanders



Will Adams

Will Adams has his cleated foot in the NFL door. The former Virginia State University safety has signed a multi-year undrafted free agent contract with the Washington Commanders.

Adams' stock rose following standout performances at the HBCU Combine in Mobile, Ala., and HBCU Legacy Bowl in New Orleans.

The former Hermitage High athlete will be part of the Commanders' 90-man preseason roster for the mandatory minicamp June 14-16 in Northern Virginia.

Washington's roster will be cut to 53 at the end of summer training camp, with an additional 16 players kept on the practice squad.

VSU wins inaugural baseball tournament

Virginia State University followed a rocky flight of a baseball season with a smooth landing.

Coach Merrill Morgan's Trojans recently won the inaugural New South Atlantic Conference tournament by capturing a hard-to-believe four games in one day.

VSU went 18-28 during the regular season. Due to lack of participating schools, there was no CIAA tournament this spring, opening the door for a new baseball-only conference.

Here's what happened May 10-11 in Elizabeth City, N.C.

May 10: VSU defeats Thomas Nelson Community College of Hampton, 5-4.

May 11, 10 a.m.: VSU loses to Appren-

tice School of Newport News, 18-6.

May 11, 1 p.m.: Trojans trounce host Mid-Atlantic Christian University of Elizabeth City, N.C. 20-2.

May 11, 4 p.m.: Trojans defeat Apprentice, 6-1.

May 11, 7 p.m.: VSU closes the deal with a 9-6 win over Apprentice.

With victory came the spoils.

VSU's first team All South Atlantic picks were shortstop Tahraun Hammond (from Tappahannock), pitcher Cole Spain (Prince George), and outfielder Ricky Jones (Hopewell).

Second team Trojans were pitcher Nick Woolfolk (Thomas Jefferson/Richmond) and catcher Dawsyn Hock (Hopewell).



VSU President Makola M. Abdullah, in white jersey, helped the university's baseball team celebrate winning the New South Atlantic Conference tournament May 10-11 in Elizabeth City, N.C.

VCU reaches scholarship allowance



After much traffic coming and going, there is finally a "no vacancy" sign on the VCU basketball roster.

Coach Mike Rhoades' Rams now have 13 scholarship players, the maximum allowed in NCAA Division I.

Sideline note (and certainly nothing new to basketball stalwarts): Money for scholarships comes from various sources, starting with student activity fees.

In VCU's case, it helps having nearly 30,000 students. Then there are boosters and revenue earned through TV contracts, ticket sales and NCAA playoff payouts.

Here's how the new roster happened:

Seniors lost: All-Atlantic 10 Vince Williams, Ke-Shawn Curry (11.0 points per game) and Levi Stockard (4.7 ppg).

Transfers lost: Hason Ward (to Iowa State), Jimmy Nichols (Coastal Carolina), Mikeal Brown-Jones (UNC-Greensboro), Marcus Tshonis (Long Beach State)

Incoming freshmen: 6-foot-7 Alphonzo Billups (from Varina High), 6-foot-10 Christian Fermin, 6-foot-8 Toibu Lawal

Incoming transfers: 6-foot-4 Zeb Jackson and 6-foot-9 Brandon Johns from Michigan; 6-foot-6 David Shriver from Hartford, Conn.

Returning players from 2021-2022: 6-foot Ace Baldwin, 6-foot-4 Jayden Nunn, 6-foot-5 Josh Banks, 6-foot-6 Nick Kern, 6-foot-9 Jalen DeRoach

Returning from 2021-22 injury list: 6-foot-7 Jamir Watkins, 6-foot-4 Jarren McAllister

Also on the roster is senior walk-on Arnold Henderson VI out of St. Christopher's School.

Shriver, known for his three-point shooting range, becomes just the third white player to sign a VCU scholarship offer since the Rams moved into the Siegel Center in 1999.

Others were Russian Kirill Pishchalnikov (2007 to 2010) and Floridian Sean Mobley (2017 to 2019).

Lawal becomes the Rams' third British player, following Martin Henlan (1986 to 1990) and Nick George (2002 to 2006). The 6-foot-8 Lawal is a native of London who played this past season at Lee Academy in Maine.

The Rams are coming off a 22-10 season that ended with a loss at Wake Forest in the second round of the NIT.

Looking at the upcoming schedule, VCU has signed a two-year contract with Temple University, as reported by College Hoops Today. The Rams will travel to Philadelphia this coming season, with the Owls coming to Richmond in the 2023-2024 season.

Welcome home



Following a 12-game road trip, the Squirrels returned to the Diamond this week for a six-game series against the Hartford Yard Goats (Colorado Rockies affiliate). Remaining games:

Thursday, May 26 - 6:35 p.m.

Friday, May 27 - 6:35 p.m.

Saturday, May 28 - 6:05 p.m.

(Fireworks)

Sunday, May 29 - 1:35 p.m.

(Bucket Hat Giveaway)

Armani Smith enjoys playing in Richmond, but the outfielder left his heart in San Francisco.

The 6-foot-4, 215-pound right-hander grew up in Walnut Creek, Calif., just a long fly ball from the San Francisco Giants' Oracle Park.

Smith was a passionate Giants fan as a youngster, with Barry Bonds being

his favorite player. He attended many games, including one World Series contest.

As fate would have it, Smith was selected by his hometown Giants in the seventh round of the 2019 amateur draft following a stellar career at UC-Santa Barbara.

En route to Richmond, Smith has moved up the minor league ladder from the Giants' rookie league in Arizona, to Salem-Keizer, Ore., to San Jose and to Eugene, Ore., before a promotion to the AA Eastern League Squirrels on May 15.

If successful in Richmond, he may earn a promotion to the AAA Sacramento River Cats and, perhaps eventually, to the parent Giants.

He's off to a promising start here. After collecting his first AA hit May 17 at Altoona, Smith added three hits May 18 and two more May 20 versus Altoona.

The more hits he accumulates in Richmond, the closer he'll be to a trip back to the Bay Area.



Armani Smith