

N.C. State Beats Iona In Festival by 61-58; St. John's Tops Penn

By ALEX YANNIS

Jim Valvano was booed loudly upon his return to Madison Square Garden last night, but it was a triumphal one for him. His North Carolina State squad reached the final of the 29th Holiday Festival with a 61-58 victory over Iona, the team Valvano coached last season.

The Wolfpack, making their first appearance in the tournament, will clash in the final tonight with St. John's. The Redmen downed Pennsylvania, 66-58, in the opening game before a crowd of 12,463.

The St. John's victory was the 1,200th in its basketball history, a number reached by only three other colleges, Kentucky, North Carolina and Kansas.

St. John's, the defender, will be trying to win the tournament for the fifth time in 21 appearances, the most of any college. Valvano called the contest tonight against the Redmen and their coach, Lou Carnesecca, a "game against the master."

Valvano Unperturbed

Commenting on the loud jeers that greeted him when he stepped on the court, the 34-year-old Valvano said: "I kind of enjoyed it. The letters I got about leaving Iona were 50-50, and they were all from my family."

Iona fans were angry with Valvano when he left the Gaels for North Carolina State after he had led Iona to a 29-5 record and an upset victory over Louisville, the eventual National Collegiate

champion. A few days after Valvano's resignation, Iona fans were further disenchanted when the school's star center, Jeff Ruland, disclosed that he had played his junior year despite an illegal agreement with an agent.

Last night, the Wolfpack proved to be quicker than Iona and triumphed primarily because of the play of its two guards, Sidney Lowe and Dereck Whittenburg, both of whom played the entire game.

Whittenburg led all scorers with 23 points and Lowe got 5, but Lowe led all players with 13 assists. The next closest in assists was Steve Burt of Iona, who had four.

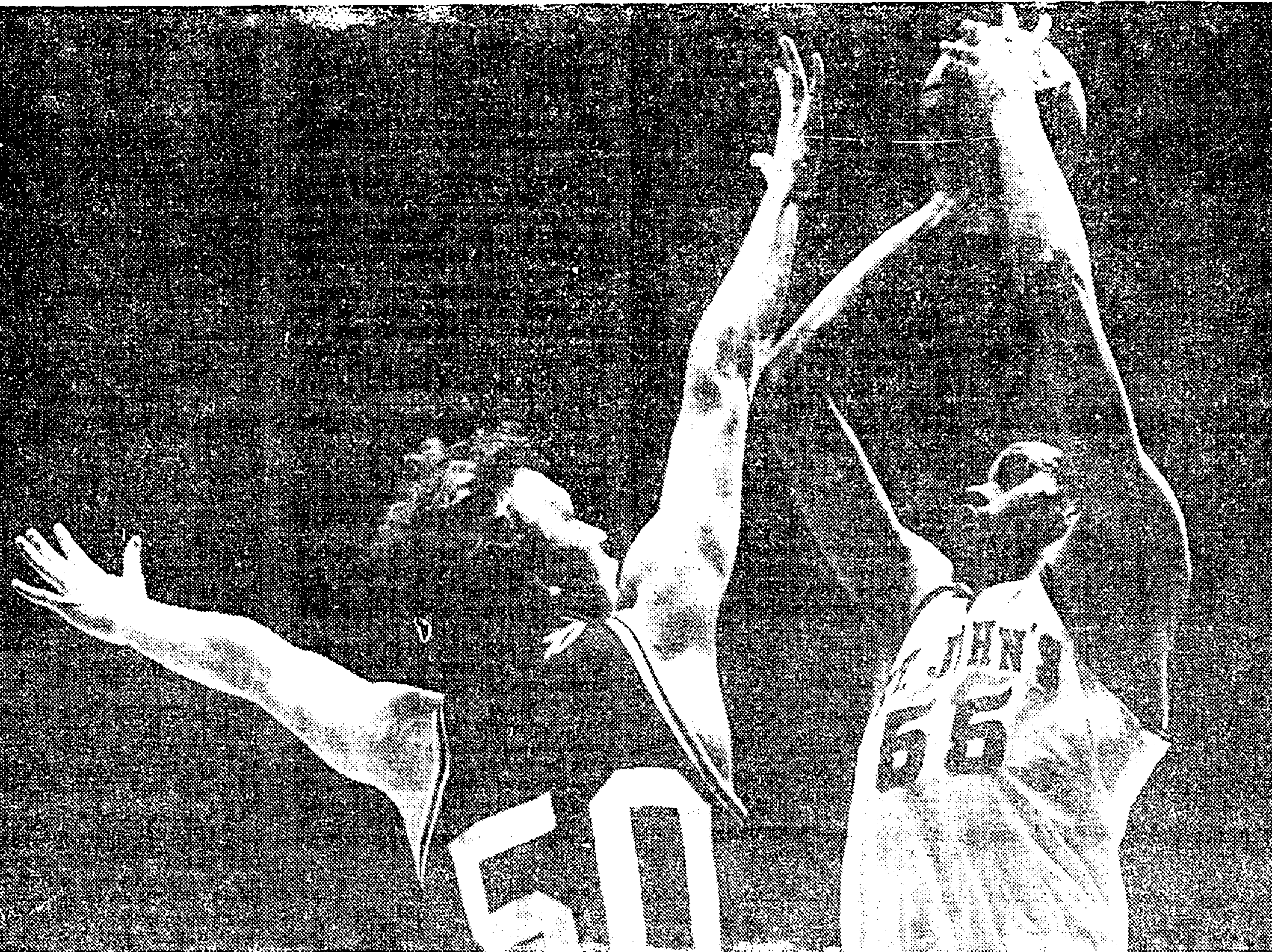
Poor Shooting by Both

Iona and North Carolina State shot poorly from the field, but the Gaels dominated the boards, pulling down 42 rebounds to the Wolfpack's 27. Valvano said the rebounding was what made the game close, but it was also Iona's foul trouble.

Three of Iona's starters fouled out, including its two big men, Kevin Vesey and Mike Ice, both 6-10. Vesey, who ended the night with 4 points, fouled out with 5:51 left, and Ice departed with 3:32 to go.

The third Gael to foul out was Burt with 1:59 remaining and North Carolina State leading, 61-58, the final score. The last scoring came with 2:51 left

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New York Times Larry C. Morr

Wayne McKoy of St. John's going up for shot against George Noon of Pennsylvania in first half last night at the Garden

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N.C. State, St. John's Triumph

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when Tony Iati hit a long jumper for Iona.

The Gaels had three chances to make it closer, but they turned over the ball each time, and thus suffered their sixth loss in nine games. North Carolina State improved its record to 7-2 and will go into the final with the same number of victories as the Redmen, who are 7-1.

Help From the Reserves

The Redmen starters did not look impressive, but Carnesecca got plenty of help from his reserves, who contributed 23 points on a night their opponents shot only 22 of 66 from the floor and 14 of 21 from the free-throw line, statistics that disturbed Bob Weinbauer, the Penn coach.

"You can't come in here and expect to win when you play like we did," Weinbauer said. "We stunk the place up. We have no excuses."

Part of the reason for the Redmen's unimpressive statistics was that David Russell connected on only 3 of 12 floor shots. Russell, last year's most valuable player in the tournament, scored 10 points, and he blocked three shots.

Wayne McKoy blocked four shots for the Redmen, who played only 20 minutes because he got into early foul trouble. Luckily for the Redmen, Trevor Jackson filled in ably for McKoy.

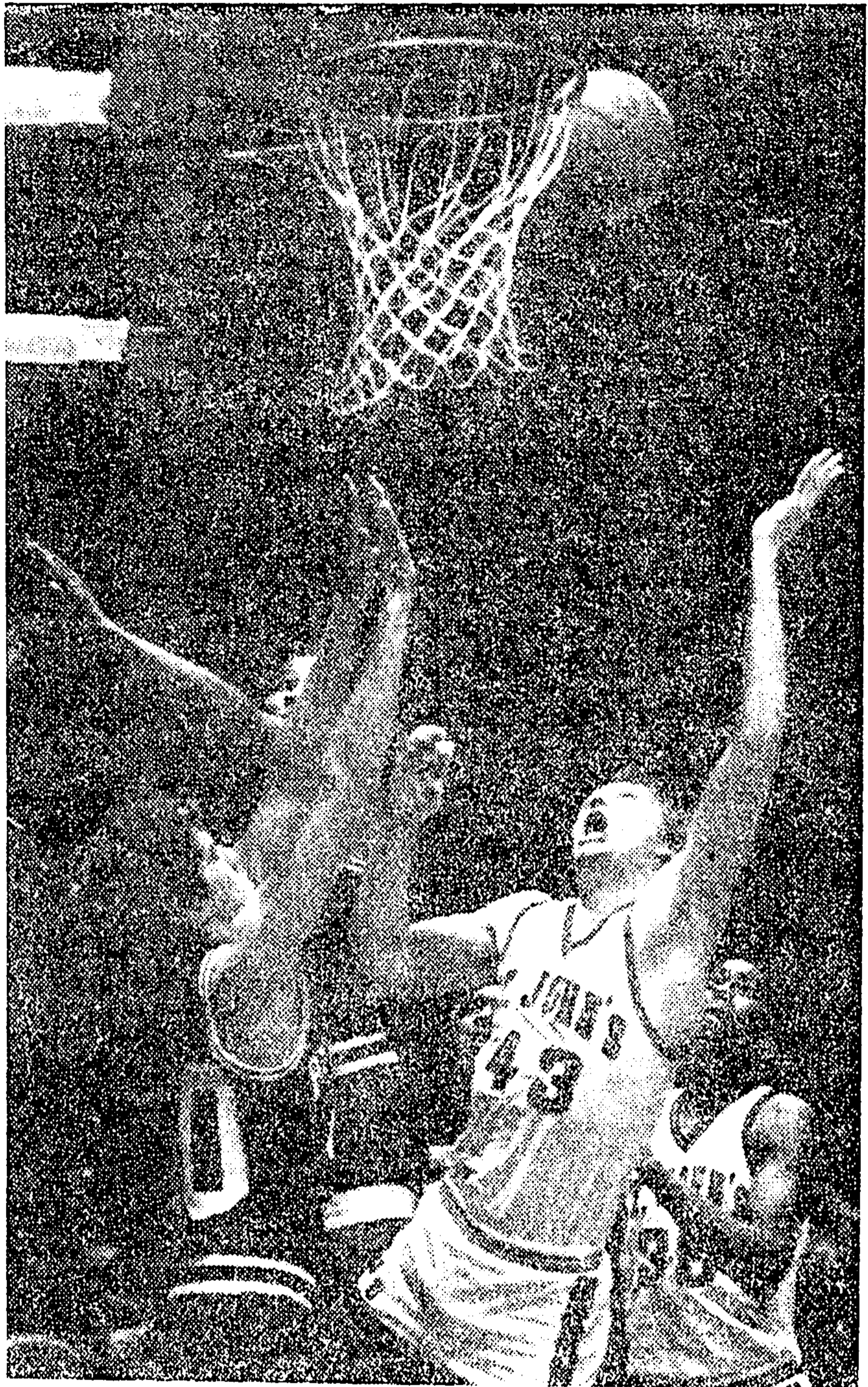
Jackson Fills In for McKoy

"Jackson did a heck of a job when our big man was out," Carnesecca said. "It was really the guys off the bench who won the ballgame for us. They made a heck of a contribution."

Another big contributor for the Redmen was Larry Washington, a guard, who filled in well on a night in which George Garrison, one of the starting guards, went scoreless.

Curtis Redding, the Redmen's other starting guard, led all scorers in the first game, in which St. John's froze the ball with 3:53 left and leading, 61-54.

"The freezing was done by accident," Carnesecca said. "It wasn't done by design. It was a calculated risk by the kids. But it worked."



The New York Times, Larry C. Morris

Frank Gilroy of St. John's taking a shot last night at the Garden

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