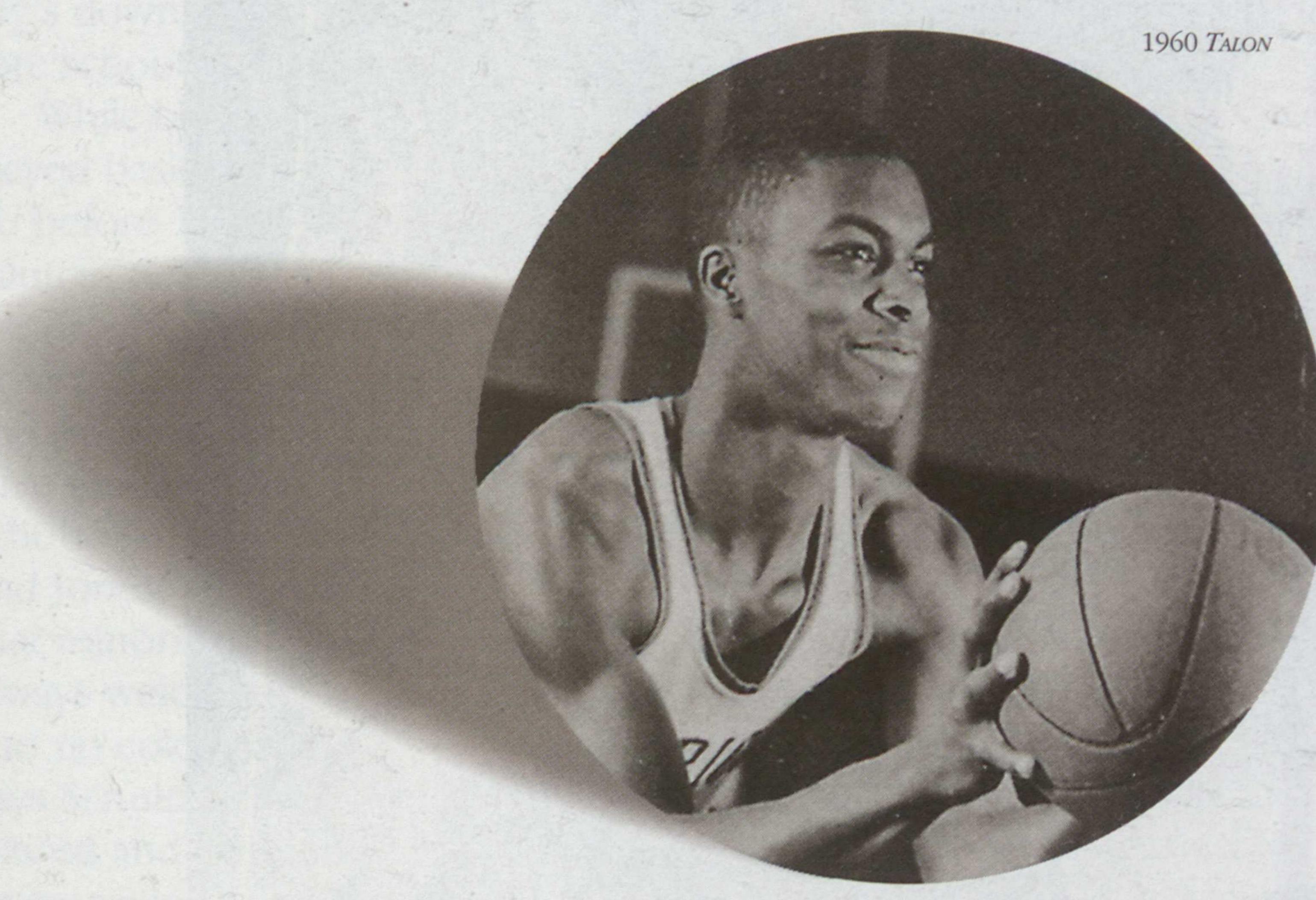
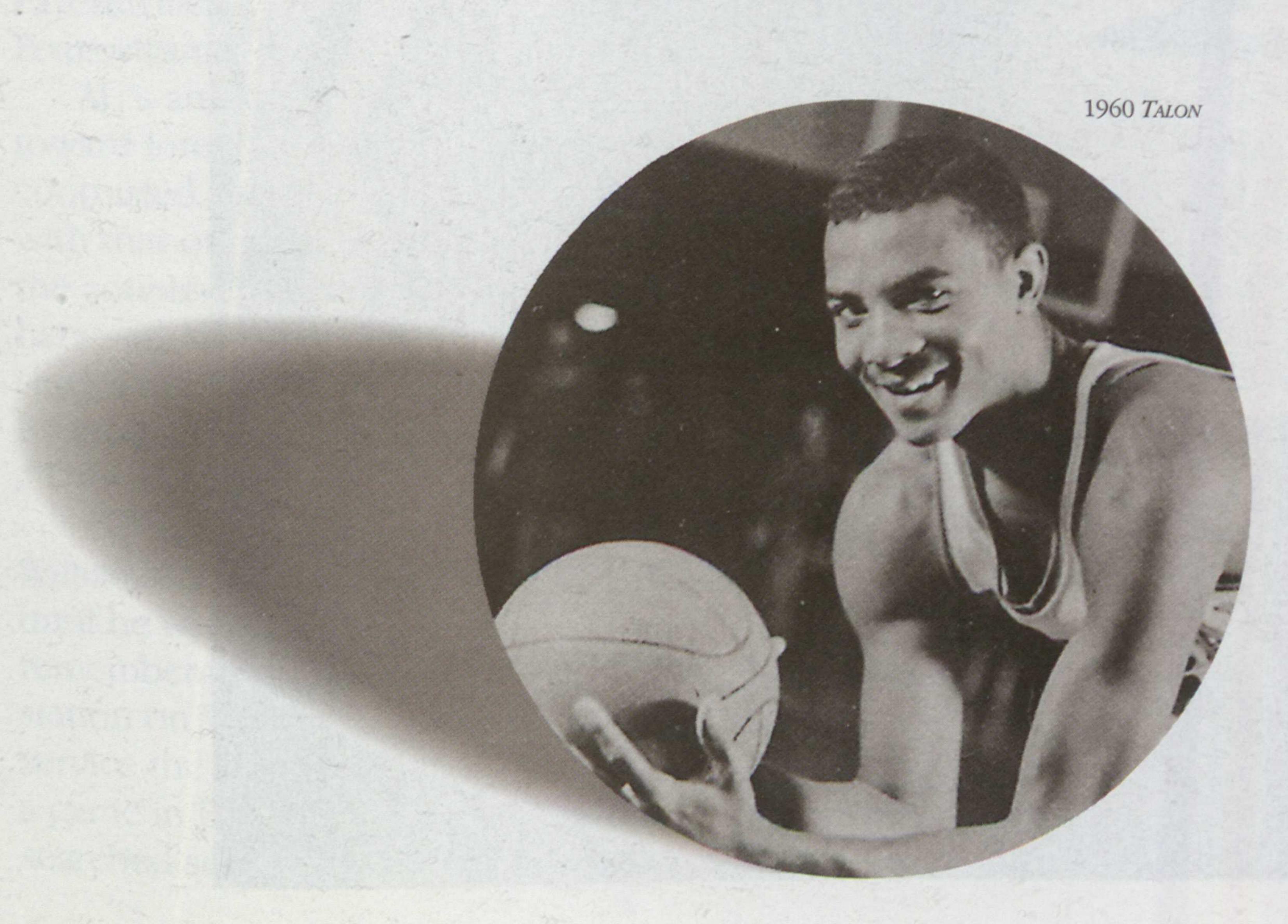
Willie, Dickie, and Beanie







Ask those who had to guard Wil Jones '64 or fight Dick Wells '65 for a rebound, and they'd tell you that the basketball program's first African Americans were more

than pioneers. They were very talented players.

Dick Wells '65, the first African American player to take the court at AU, made a specialty of grabbing rebounds and setting picks for Carrasco's championship teams.

Wells and Jones were two of the District's best scholastic players from the Class of '56. They led their respective high school teams to the city championship game that year. (Jones and Dunbar High School defeated Wells and Spingarn.)

Wells and Jones came to AU with help from Jones's high school coach, Jesse Chase. He approached then head coach Hugo Schultz '41 in the summer of 1956 on behalf of Wells and Jones, neither of whom wanted to leave the capital city for the more integrated north, where the District's best players, such as Wells's Spingarn teammate Elgin Baylor, were forced to go if they wanted to play college basketball. Regarded as one of the game's greatest players, Baylor went to Seattle University in 1954 before moving on to

Jim Howell '62 helped blaze a trail for future African American players and, a decade later, for black basketball officials.

a Hall of Fame career in the NBA. Wells nearly followed Baylor to the Pacific Northwest before he learned Schultz wanted to talk to him about coming to American. Jones, meanwhile, put off a scholarship offer from Michigan State.

Burly, 6 feet-5 inches, and tough, Wells excelled at doing the so-called dirty work. "Dick knew his role, and that was to get rebounds and set picks for me," says Jones, reminiscing in his office at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), where he has served as men's basketball coach for two decades. "He did his job well. He'd take my head off if I took a rebound away from him." Wells, in fact, once pulled Jones aside during a game after the 5-foot-9-inch guard grabbed an

Team leader Wil Jones '64, a 1960 college division first team All-American, "might have been the best pure shooter to ever come out of Washington," according to teammate Jim Howell '62.

errant shot. "You shoot all you want," Wells told him angrily. "The rebounds are mine."

Wells collected his share. When he finished his career, he had been named to the NCAA's honorable mention All-American college team in 1958 and owned every AU rebounding record. Those records stood until

Kermit Washington '73 came along. "Know something?" says Wells, a physical education instructor in the D.C. public school system for the last 30 years, "I would have had a



Friends forever: From left to right, Dick Wells '65, Wil Jones '64, and Jim Howell '62 pose for a photo outside W. Bruce Evans Middle School in Northeast Washington, D.C., last December.

lot more rebounds if Willie [had] missed some shots."

Jones's shooting ability is still legendary at AU and on the D.C. playgrounds. "Wil might have been the best pure shooter to ever come out of Washington," declares former teammate Jim Howell '62, now a retired D.C. principal, who saw many of the city's finest players during a 30-year career as a college basketball official. (Howell, who retired his striped shirt two years ago, now evaluates officials for the Big East and Atlantic 10 conferences.)

In his senior year, Jones became AU's most prolific scorer, passing the smooth-shooting Frank Weiss '58, '61. When the Eagles swept through the 1960 Mason-Dixon playoffs, Jones scored a tournament-record 85 points in three games. In his last game in an AU uniform on March 9, 1960, he set the NCAA record for points in a tournament game with 54 in the Eagles' 101–91 loss to defending national champ Evansville. The record has yet to be broken.

Jones, described the following day in the *Evansville Courier* as the "gunner with a million moves," was named NCAA college division first-team All-American and was invited to the 1960 and 1964 U.S. Olympic team tryouts. Jones reports he was the last cut from the 1960 team, although he did outscore several future NBA stars during the Olympic camp.

Jones has since excelled as a coach and recruiter. In

the 1970s, he was Maryland coach Lefty Driesell's top talent spotter. At UDC, he coached his team to the 1982 NCAA Division II national title.

Howell wasn't bad either. Nicknamed "Beanie," the 6-foot guard, who passed on a football scholarship to Notre Dame after graduating from D.C.'s John Carroll High School, was good enough in his freshman year to score 26 points in a Mason-Dixon Conference playoff win over Baltimore's Loyola College in 1959. With another African American, Al Dillard '64, he was also a mainstay on the 1960–61 and 1961–62 AU teams that won 15 and 10 games, respectively.

After he left AU, Howell blazed a trail for future African American basketball officials. He was one of the first African Americans to officiate in the Atlantic Coast Conference (he says he endured far more racism as an official than he ever did as a player) and was the first to referee an NCAA championship game: the 1973 contest between UCLA and Memphis State.

