

Thornton finds 'dream' at Aggieland

San Antonio product becomes cage star in late season

By TONY GALLUCCI
Staff Sports Writer

The American Dream has come true at A&M for John Thornton. To Thornton, that dream has been a road from high school basketball to major college stardom sprinkled with tragedy and disappointment.

Thornton got his start at San Antonio Holmes, where he was an Honorable Mention All-District quarterback. "I hurt my back during my junior year," states Thornton, "and had trouble deciding whether to stay with football and possibly hurt my back again, or concentrate on basketball."

Thornton decided to stay on the court but gives credit to his coach, Paul Taylor, for guiding him in the right direction. Just a week before the start of the season, the 30-yr. old coach died of leukemia. "He was a really fine man and I admire him," says Thornton, noting his death was probably the teams' downfall that season.

The big postman was recruited sparsely, but among those who

wanted him was A&M. Coach Shelby Metcalf was looking for a forward and apparently seeing the possibilities in Thornton, suggested he attend junior college to sharpen his skills. Thornton entered San Antonio College to play under coach Ronnie Culpepper (brother of Aggie assistant coach Jim Culpepper).

"It was a big letdown, it was such a big deal to go to a major college," reminisces Thornton, "but I decided I could improve there (SAC) and I don't regret going."

After his two year stay in San Antonio, Thornton felt he could play ball at A&M. "And that's where I am today."

In his transformation from post to forward at A&M, Thornton averaged 12.4 points and 6.9 rebounds (15.4 and 7.6 in conference play). Since he began his starting role in conference he averaged 20 points per game.

"I've always felt like contributing or helping the team," Thornton continues, "it doesn't matter

whether I come off the bench or start." Looking back on his first year as an Aggie, he says, "there was a lot of pressure, there was no easy game. Anyone could beat anyone in this conference. We lost a couple and it was hard to get back on track."

Looking ahead Thornton contends, "we have the nucleus to build a solid team."

Trying to avoid himself, Thornton heaps praise in every direction.

"C. W. (Guthrie), Webb (Williams), Ray (Roberts) and Mike (Johnson) are responsible for our bench depth, our quickness, speed, hustle and defense."

Thornton, who shared the spotlight with Cedric Joseph at Rice, continues, "Ced took the pressure off me. He got the crucial baskets."

Of coach Shelby Metcalf, Thornton says, "He's a really great person, he knows basketball."

The word has gotten around that coach Norm Reuther has really helped Aggie post play. "Yes," says Thornton, "he has helped me greatly."

Thornton is also quite appreciative of his sister, whom he says receives too little attention. She is a sophomore transfer from Baylor who, notes Thornton, "helps me a lot. She is always around when I need someone to talk to. She never gets tired of basketball and I really appreciate it."

Thornton, himself deserving of praise, finds it abundant.

Says co-captain Joe Arciniega, "he really impresses me. He has a lot of leadership both on and off the court. But you have to be careful when you room with him," says Arciniega, who roomed with Thornton on the Christmas road trip, "or he'll use up all of your shampoo."

In his first conference start (against Arkansas) Thornton scored 29 points, pulled down nine rebounds, and scored eight clutch points in overtime to insure the Aggie victory.

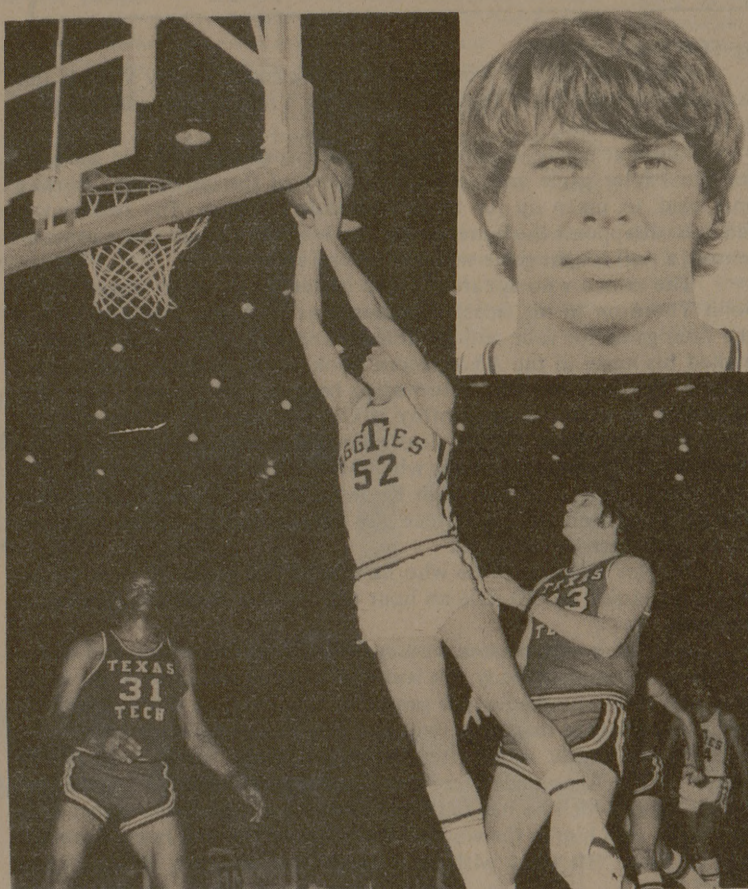
Upon leaving the game early in the second half, he received a well deserved standing ovation.

At a later press conference, Metcalf said, "John is a real fine person. The kind of kid you want your daughter to bring home. It just so happens he plays basketball, too. Tuesday (against Arkansas) was a just reward for a guy who really paid the price."

Against Baylor on Tuesday, Thornton connected on 12 of 19 field goals and seven of eight free throws to total 31 points, his season high. The most Thornton could spill out after the game was, "it feels great."

Somewhere in the press box during the Rice game were heard mumbles that Thornton might be in the running for all-SWC next year if he keeps improving at the present rate. Thornton shrugs if off saying he just plans on improving and doing what he can for the team.

Thornton will be back next year as a senior to help that "solid team" chase the SWC crown and he might do it in all-conference form.



JOHN THORNTON sinks another one on his way to becoming the star of the A&M basketball team in the late season. (Photo by Steve Krauss)

Netters travel to two tourneys

Texas A&M tennis players will be in two tournaments this weekend, at Corpus Christi and Kingsville.

A&M's top seven players—Bill Hoover, Bill Wright, Dan Courson, Charles Emley, Mark Silberman, John Kirwan and Tom Courson—will play in the Corpus Christi meet while Kermit Smith Scooter McMeans, Fred Herring, Alan White, Jeff Carter and Hal Harkocy will play in the Texas A&I tourney in Kingsville.

A&M's first team will face Brigham Young in the first round at 11 a. m. Thursday. Should they lose they will play the loser of the Texas Tech-Trinity match at 9 a. m. Should the team win they will come up against the winner of the above match. Other teams in A&M's bracket are Pan Am, New Mexico, Kansas and top-seeded Houston.

Both meets are team, not individual, elimination events.

Intramural Results

Class B Racquetball
F-1 over L-2
Squadron 4 over D-2

Class C Racquetball
White over Hart
Puryear over Law

Class A Softball
Squadron 9 over L-1
White Band over K-1
Squadron 5 over C-1
Squadron 7 over K2
A-1 over Squadron 12
Maroon Band over H-1
Squadron 13 over B-2

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Bud Drinkers, can you figure this out?

Ralph bought a 6-pak of Budweiser and invited four friends over to share it. Since he bought, he expected to have two cans to himself, but unfortunately when he returned to the refrigerator for his second, he found it missing. So he asked who took it. Al said, "Joe drank it." Joe said, "Dan drank it." Dan said, "Joe, that's a lie!" And Bill said, "I didn't drink it." If only one of these statements is true, who really drank it?



ANSWER: If you assume Al is the guilty one, Dan's and Bill's statements are true. If you think Dan did it, then Joe's and Bill's statements are true. Obviously, if you think Dan did it, then Al's and Dan's statements are true. And if you think it's Joe, then Al's and Dan's statements are true. Moral: If Ralph had bought five 6-paks, they could have spent more time drinking and less time arguing.