

Pope travels long road to become an Aggie

By BETH YOUNG
Battalion Reporter

To go from a seventh-grader who couldn't even make the junior high basketball team to an all-America basketball player in college sounds almost impossible. Not for Peggy Pope, No. 31 for Texas A&M's women's basketball team.

Not only did she accomplish this, but she was selected to the all-district basketball team twice in high school, was named all-regional and all-conference and was a member of the two-time national championship team.

Pope, who came to Texas A&M this year from Panola Junior College in her home town of Carthage, said she became interested in basketball by watching her brother play in high school.

"We began to play at home all the time," she said, "but he started getting too rough and I wouldn't play with him much anymore."

Pope said that she really became interested in basketball as a sophomore in high school. She also ran on the mile relay team, the 100-yard dash and long jumped, triple jumped and high jumped, winning recognition at the state level in the jumping events.

Despite the fact that she did win honors for basketball in high school, Pope said she had not planned on playing basketball in college.

"I was just going to go to school at Panola until the coach there talked me into playing basketball for them," Pope said. "She offered me a scholarship and I took it."

After leaving Panola, Pope said that she was offered scholarships at several schools including Texas Tech, the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, the University of Houston and Sam Houston State University.

"Basketball was just a way of prolonging my education without paying for it," Pope said, "and since I liked it so much, I stuck with it."

Because Pope played defense in high school, she was forced to learn to shoot in order to play college ball. Pope credits her coach at Panola, Mary Ottwell, with teaching her how to shoot.

"For 30 minutes before practice everyday, Coach Ottwell practiced with me, teaching me to shoot jump shots," Pope said. "Eventually my shots started going in and I made myself shoot so they went in every time."

At 93, the oldest champ still busy

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NEW YORK — Every day, rain or shine, Jam Handy swims a thousand yards or a medley of the butterfly, breast stroke and backstroke, and if you don't think that's such a big deal, neither does he.

Jam Handy is 93. He's also America's oldest living Olympic medal winner and he doesn't think that's such a big deal, either.

Way back in 1904, two years before the San Francisco earthquake and eight years before the Titanic hit that iceberg, young Jamison Handy earned an Olympic bronze medal for finishing third in the 440-yard breaststroke. Twenty years later, he picked up his second bronze medal as a member of the U.S. Water Polo team.

Fine, you say, but what has he done lately?

Plenty. A day doesn't go by that he isn't in some pool or other showing kids or whoever else is interested the style with which he set world records in the butterfly, breast stroke and free style. Tuesday was a little special for him because he was among those kicking off a first-ever public service campaign, created by volunteer agency Cunningham and Walsh, to bring in most of the remaining \$13 million needed to train, equip and transport U.S. Olympians to Moscow in 1980.

By continuous practice, Handy became an outstanding water polo player. Sometimes water polo can be rougher than wrestling a bear and after participating in it 14 years, Handy, who was only 5-foot-2 and 155 pounds, decided to quit.

"When I quit, which was about 1908, I had my heart examined. The doctors told me I was big-hearted," he says, his blue eyes twinkling as they often do when he talks. "I had a 25 percent over-sized heart. I said it was good to be big-hearted, but they told me if I didn't use that extra capacity, that there'd be a fatty degeneration and the heart would split. I told the doctor I swam and would keep at it."

"Well, as I said, I had no real athletic talent, so the only way I could win championships was by using my head. I got around the rules by taking advantage of what they hadn't covered. For example, when I was 14, no 16, I was trying to shave. I noticed there was no mouth on the top of my head and I knew the idea in swimming was to keep your head above water so you could breathe. But I also knew that slowed you up."

"So I figured, why lift the entire top of your head out of the water and force your body down?"

And that was how he first introduced head-down breathing into swimming. Hanslo was the first to use a much narrower kick in the breast stroke and alternating arms in the backstroke, so that when he was elected to the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., he was cited as "the father of modern speed swimming and our sport's greatest innovator."

However, the 5-foot-10-inch junior said she still thinks that her rebounding and man-to-man defense are her finest points on the court.

Despite the fact that she was recruited by so many other schools, Pope chose Texas A&M for various reasons.

"I had heard about the spirit and bonfire at A&M," she said, "and I wanted to see what it was like. I also wanted to go to a school where people came to see you play ball, but it hasn't been what I expected."

Pope said that when she first came and talked to Aggie Coach

Wanda Bender, she was told that there was always a big crowd at all the games.

"I've been rather disappointed in the crowds so far," Pope said. "If there isn't a men's game following our's, no one shows up. I know that at the beginning the team wasn't really together, but we are now and people need to see us."

Pope said that she really wanted to come to A&M after Lisa Hughes, Lola Baker and Karen Gentz, three of the five starters at Panola last season along with Pope, decided to come.

"I wasn't recruited very much at first," Pope said, "because Coach Bender didn't think I would come here. After I showed some interest, she really started recruiting me pretty heavily."

Pope said she had hoped that the four from Panola could come to A&M and start winning all over again. "I got used to winning at Panola and I'm not used to losing as much as we have," she explained.

Pope said that there are some differences in playing basketball at the two schools, Panola and Texas A&M.

"In junior college everyone knew me because I played basketball," Pope said. "And here no one knows me from anyone else. Also, at Panola, the basketball team lived in the same dorm on the same floor. I don't even know where half the team lives here."

Pope said that A&M has a good program, except for her dislike of the late practices, but that she feels they need to run more in practice. "We would beat people by running them down at Panola," she said. "Here, even though our practices

are long, we don't get much accomplished."

Pope also said she thinks many of A&M's losses have come due to being tired in the second half. "We have the potential," she said, "and we're a lot better than the teams that have beaten us."

Pope added that she played her best game against the University of Houston.

"That's the first time since I've been at A&M that I've played the whole 40 minutes without going to the bench," she said. "We all decided before the game to do what it

took to win and we did it."

Pope, a P.E. major who will be a recruiter for a university she graduates, has a lot to offer for as far as basketball is concerned. Along with all the hard work and recognition, she said she has taught her about sports and people and their feelings. "I brought her a lot of friends and wouldn't have met others."

"It would be hard to live without basketball," she said.

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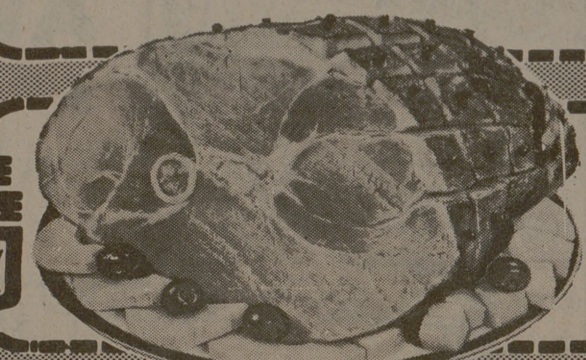
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