

Jack Worthington

Freshman has stabilized Horns' backcourt

by Frank L. Christlieb
Sports Editor

Jack Worthington says it wasn't hard for him to decide where to attend college.

The freshman guard, who entered the Texas Longhorns' starting lineup during their second game of the season, has found transition from high school to college easier than he'd anticipated. After graduating from Spring High School, where he led the Lions to a 32-7 record his senior year, Worthington has found that UT has all the answers he's been looking for.

"Before I came here," Worthington says, "they told me I had a good chance to play a lot, and I've worked hard to get where I am. I feel real comfortable with the system here. I'm not as comfortable as I was when (Mike) Wacker was in there, though."

Worthington was referring to former UT starting forward Wacker, who will sit out the rest of the season after sustaining a serious knee injury in the Longhorn's 69-59 loss to Baylor last week. Without Wacker's 16 points and 10 rebounds a game, Texas has become an incomplete team.

"We're not the same team without Wacker," Worthington said. "With him and LaSalle (Thompson), we were really tough inside."

Worthington visited only two universities — Texas and the

University of Missouri — before deciding upon UT.

"I visited Missouri, but I really didn't think they supported their athletics that well," Worthington said. "They're ranked number one in the nation, but they don't get the support that UT does."

"The crowd here really gets me going — it really fires me up. We have some really good fans. Everyone's so high on athletics here at UT and they're really great."

Worthington, a well-disguised version of a basketball player, stands 6-2 and weighs only 160 pounds. For that reason, he usually avoids the Longhorns' bigger opponents by shooting from the perimeter and by handing out assists.

During his high school senior year, Worthington averaged 27.1 points a game and scored 30 or more points in 16 games. With his father, Jack Worthington Sr., as his high school coach and personal adviser, the UT freshman has had an advantage over other young basketball players.

"My dad has really helped me in developing my game," Worthington said. "He's the guy that made me practice and work on fundamentals and skills."

And Worthington has found it easy to set priorities in his new college life.

"I was just an average student in high school," Worthington

said. "I was more interested in basketball than school, but in college, it's different. You have to forget about sports and concentrate on studying."

Worthington has progressed a great deal since he started playing basketball in third grade in Clear Lake City. After leading the Spring Lions in scoring three of his four high school seasons, Worthington was sought by several colleges for his shooting and defensive abilities.

Worthington suffered torn ligaments in his foot last spring, then injured an ankle two weeks before the Longhorns' season started. However, UT Coach Abe Lemons saw enough talent in Worthington to move him into the starting lineup when the Longhorns played the University of Colorado in the season's second game.

Worthington's performance in that game, in which he scored eight points and made only three of nine field goal attempts, didn't attract any attention. But since that game, Worthington has strengthened the UT backcourt with solid ball-handling and a scoring average of eight points a game.

Worthington attributes to one source his success and his desire to play basketball.

"It's got to be my relationship with the Lord," Worthington said. "I'm a Christian and I feel this is what he wants me to do. He's given me this talent and I

feel I should use it. "I'd like to play after I get out of college, but I'm more serious about studying now, and if playing in the pros comes, then I'll worry about it when it does."

Worthington, majoring in business at UT, has taken 15 hours each of his first two semesters at the university. Taking that many hours and playing basketball would seem to make life hectic, but Worthington says his interest in studying will overcome the difficulty of the courses.

Worthington played poorly in his team's 71-69 overtime loss Saturday to Texas A&M, but he's not an athlete who dwells on his bad performances. After hitting only one of seven field goals, Worthington had only praise for the Aggies.

"We had always heard that they had a good inside game, but we didn't know they could shoot so well outside," Worthington said. "They've got a good combination out there right now (with starting guards Reggie Roberts, Tyren Naulls and Milton Woodley)."

"All those guys are real good. They're all great shooters and penetrators."

Worthington said the Longhorns have will have to struggle to remain in the thick of the conference race, and that a replacement for Wacker must be found right away.

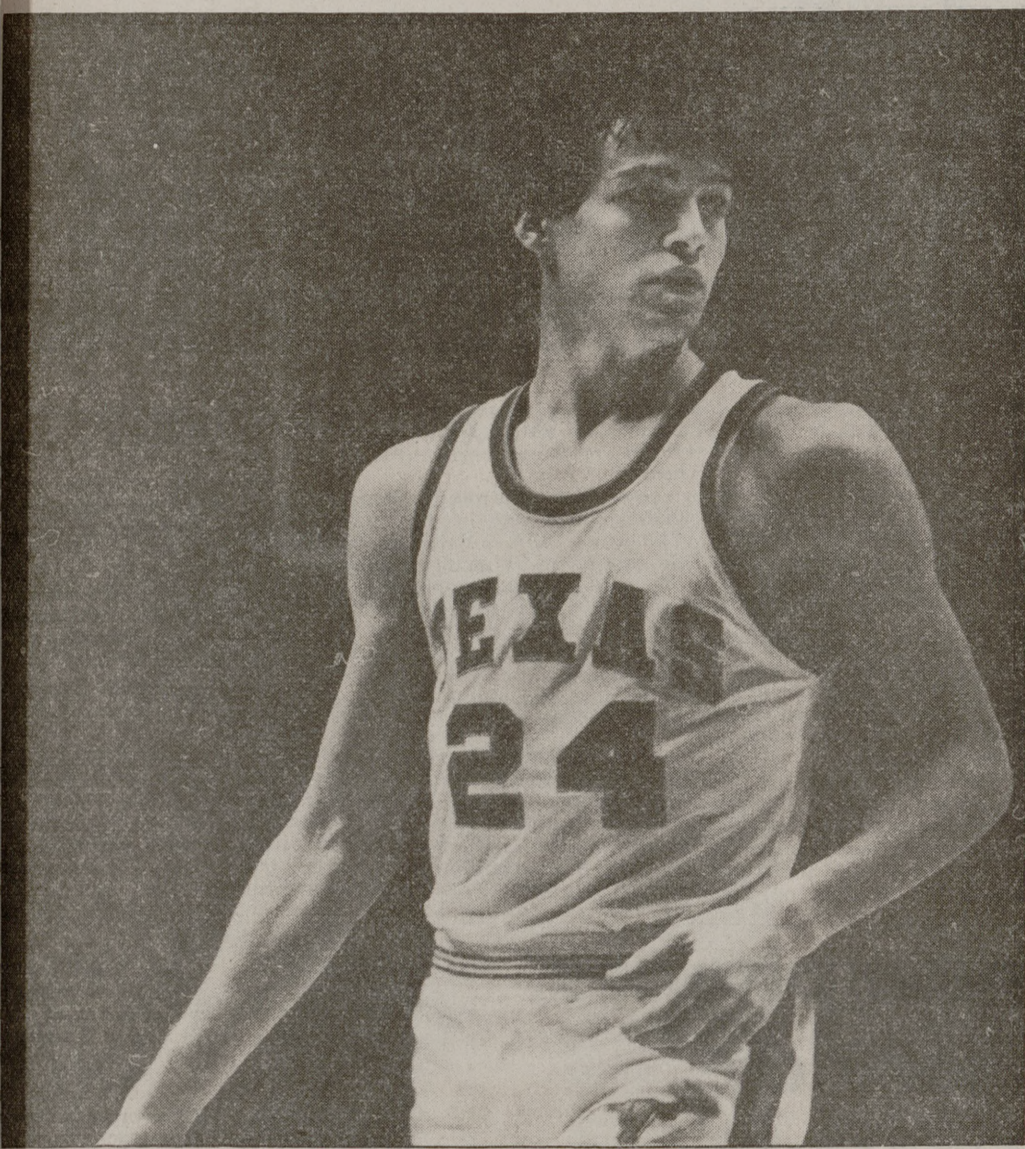


photo by Greg Watermann

Freshman guard Jack Worthington of the University of Texas, averaging eight points a game, moves downcourt during the Longhorns' 71-69 loss Saturday to Texas A&M.

Jones back at A&M after knee operation

Texas A&M forward Roy Jones, who suffered torn knee ligaments in the Aggies' 68-59 win over Rice Jan. 23, returned Sunday to the University after a week-long hospital stay.

After having his right knee operated on Tuesday at the Baylor Hospital in Dallas, Jones left Dallas wearing a leg cast, which he will wear for several weeks. He said Sunday that he is having a hard time moving around on crutches, which he has never used.

Jones, who watched from his hospital bed the Aggies' 71-69 victory Saturday over the Texas Longhorns, said: "It (not being able to participate with the team) kills me. I watched the game and really wished I was out there."

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