

Crockett Rocket

Aggie forward Riley returning as one of nation's premier players

by John Wagner

Battalion Staff

When Claude Riley was a little boy in Crockett, he was a big little boy. And like most little boys who are bigger than their classmates, Riley began using his height advantage on the basketball court.

In the fourth grade, Riley began playing pick-up games in his neighborhood. The other boys always wanted him on their team, because of his height.

When he was in junior high school, the coaches saw Riley's potential and had him practice basketball during P.E. class. Riley would work on jump shots and inside moves while the other kids participated in class.

By the time Riley was a ninth-grader, he was determined to become a good basketball player. Tall, quick, and without the clumsiness that seems to accompany teenagers with height, Riley knew basketball was his sport.

And now, 12 years after his humble fourth-grade beginning, Riley is about to enter a season in which he will be a team leader, returning All-Southwest Conference forward, All-America candidate, and lest anyone forget, a Texas A&M senior.

Claude Riley is ready. Ever since time ran out in the final game of the Aggies' 1981-82 basketball season, the man they call the "Crockett Rocket" has been working, watching and waiting for his senior year.

And after an off-season of weightlifting, ball control drills and shooting practice, the word is out that Riley is even better than last year, when he earned All-SWC honors as a junior.

"I guess everybody sets goals as far as shooting percentage and rebounding," Riley says. "But most of all I just want to make my game better. If I was good inside, I want to get a little bit better. If I was good shooting jump shots, I want to shoot just a little bit better."

"Those were the only type goals I set for myself this year. I just want to get out there and do the best job I can — but just a little bit better than I've done in previous years."

And that could mean trouble for the Aggies' opponents this season. TCU head basketball coach Jim "Killer" Killingsworth says Riley could cause problems for SWC coaches this year.

"I think Claude Riley will be the premier player in the conference this season," Killingsworth said. "He is a very intense player — he plays very hard."

"Every time he comes out on the floor you know you have a game on your hands."

But for Riley, one of the biggest challenges this season will come from his teammates. A senior three-letterman who has played in every Aggie game since arriving on campus is expected to be a leader as well as a ballplayer.

His role as team leader is one Riley relishes, however.

"It makes you feel relaxed when the guys on the team have confidence in you, when they accept you as a player," Riley said.

"When they (your teammates) look at you doing positive things, saying positive things, it makes them have a more positive outlook on themselves. And when they have confidence in you, when you feel they trust you — that they have faith in you — it makes you relax the whole year through."

"Right now, hey, I'm relaxed. There's no pressure. I don't feel anything extra on my shoulders, like I have to carry us or anything. The guys have accepted me because they know I'm a winner. They know I have a lot of enthusiasm, and they know I have a positive attitude about winning."

And even the prospect of becoming an All-America forward rests easy on Riley's 6-10 frame. While talk about this possible honor and that possible honor swirls around him, Riley remains cool.

"Every player would like to be All-American, but it doesn't put any pressure on me, as far as trying to prove myself," Riley said.

"When you do that, you find yourself not playing your game. I hear it — and it sounds good — but it doesn't put any pressure on me. I don't feel that I just have to be an All-American."

"I've played well my last three years here and I wasn't All-American, so it really doesn't have any effect on me."

Aggie coach Shelby Metcalf says the pre-season hoopla surrounding Riley shouldn't produce negative results. But for Riley to reach such heights, Metcalf says, several things have to happen.

"First, of course, the team needs to win," Metcalf said. "With the schedule we have, he'll get the exposure he needs. He also needs to stay healthy and to stay out of foul trouble. He'll get as much playing time as those two factors allow."

"We don't have a backup for Claude."

Metcalf said Riley needs to average 20 points a game and keep his rebounding average in double figures. Last season, Riley averaged 16.3 points per game and 10.2 rebounds. He also finished the season with a free-throw percentage of 81.1 percent.

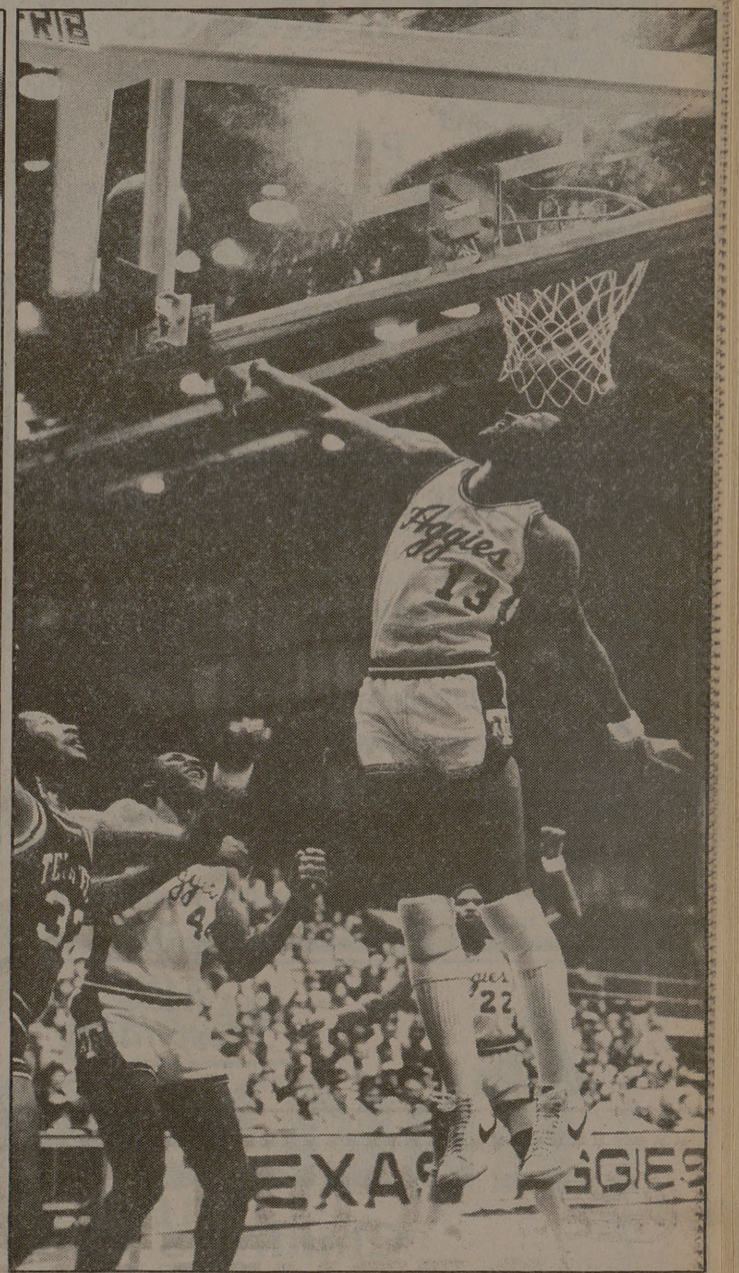
Riley has been named one of the top six returning rebounders in the country by The Sporting News.

The Aggies will need that rebounding ability when the SWC race gets underway Jan. 5. Riley said he thinks Texas A&M will be one of the best teams in the conference.

"I feel we're going to finish even stronger this year than last," Riley said. "The type of season we had last year gave us something to build on for this year. I feel real good about this year, even though the conference is going to be very, very competitive."

And just as Riley thinks the conference is competitive, most of the conference thinks highly of him, too. Just ask Killingsworth.

"You can never stop a player like Claude Riley. The best you can hope for is to try to keep the ball away from him."



Hustling on both the offensive and defensive ends of the court is the name of the game for Claude Riley, a senior forward on the Aggie basketball team. Riley passes the ball in a game during his freshman season (left) and blocks a Texas Tech shot in a

Southwest Conference game last season in G. Rollie White Coliseum. The 6-10 Riley was named to the all-SWC team for his play during his junior season and he is considered to be a top candidate for All-America honors during the upcoming 1982-83 season.

FREE APARTMENT LOCATOR SERVICE

- Apartments
- Duplexes
- Houses
- Fourplexes
- Townhouses

Now leasing for summer and fall. Special summer rates now available. Walking & biking distance to T.A.M.U.

HOMEFINDER PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
696-1006
1055 S. Texas C.S.

CAREER WOMEN

Learn things you probably weren't taught in school.

The Success Image... A Guide for the Better-Dressed Business Woman is written for women who want to be successful in business, by experts on the subject. It's a comprehensive, concise guide to correct wardrobe and image building plus pertinent tips on make-up, color, travel and other aspects of the business woman's life.

Send your check for \$7.83 (includes Texas Tax, postage and handling) to the address below for your copy of "The Success Image," 1982-83 edition, illustrated.

holsey custom clothes
2613 Richmond Avenue at Kirby Houston, TX 77098

Give a part of yourself

at the

AGGIE BLOOD DRIVE

Oct. 25-28

SOMETIMES LOVE ISN'T ENOUGH

Sponsored by Wadley Central Blood Bank, APO, OPA and Student Government.

MSC Political Forum

presents

Political Awareness Day

Groups to include

Young Democrats	A.C.L.U.
College Republicans	Common Cause
Young Conservatives of Texas	Texas Mobilization for Survival
Moral Majority of Texas	Citizens Party of Texas
Brazos County NAACP	National Organization for Women
Assoc. of Native Texans	Libertarian Party
Brazos Residents Against Drug Abuse	North Texas Abortion Rights Action League
National Democratic Policy Committee	And Much More!

Plus: A MOCK ELECTION

Various Speakers Throughout the Day

Thursday, October 28 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

1st Floor MSC

For further information contact
MSC Political Forum or
Jay Simmons at 845-1515