

The Battalion Sports

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Riley ready for future

Aggie forward looking toward NBA with hope

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It seems like just yesterday that Claude Riley made his first appearance in a Texas A&M basketball uniform. But believe it or not, the 6-10 forward nicknamed the "Crockett Rocket" has played in 121 of 23 Aggie games in the past four years. During his first three years on Coach Shelby Metcalf's squad, Riley didn't miss a game, but mononucleosis kept him out two before the start of the 1982 Southwest Conference season.

Riley, whose basketball career at Texas A&M ended two weeks ago when the Aggies lost to TCU in the league tournament, has come a long way since his freshman season in 1979-80. That year, Riley teamed with Vernon Smith, Rynn Wright, Rudy Woods, David Britton and David Goff to bring Texas A&M its fifth conference title and a sparkling 26-8 record.

In Riley's next three seasons here, the Aggies never regained their championship status. And after averaging 16.3 points and 0.2 rebounds a game in his junior year, the Rocket seemed to have a bit of engine trouble, coming back to earth to manage 4.2 points and 9.2 rebounds.

But Riley, who expresses a desire to pursue basketball further, says he's been happy with his career at Texas A&M. In an interview on Wednesday, Riley discussed several aspects of his four years here and of the 1982-83 season, when the Aggies finished 17-14 and in third place in the SWC.

Q. Looking back at the past season, how would you describe the way things went for the Aggies?

A. I would say this was an up-and-down season for us. We never really got it together consistently. We'd play two games

really well and then we'd play another couple of games not too well. So it was kind of up and down the whole year—we never could keep a consistent pace going.

Q. At times, it seemed like the team looked unbeatable and there were times when things didn't go so well. Why do you think things didn't click sometimes?

A. One of the main problems we had was that we weren't playing together as a team. We had a lot of talent but we weren't putting it all together. That's not to say that some players were being

"One of the main problems we had was that we weren't playing together as a team. We had a lot of talent but we weren't putting it all together." — former Texas A&M forward Claude Riley.

selfish — that never created a problem. But we could never get our talent grouped as just one team. The times we looked unbeatable were when we had all that talent going for us at one time — all five players playing up to their maximum. When we played that way, we looked unbeatable, but when we didn't play that way, we couldn't quite get it together.

Q. During the last three games of the season, the team seemed to be playing better. Did you and the players think going into the tournament that you could keep that going?

A. That's basically what we were talking about. We felt like it took us a long time to finally get it together and that we did that

near the end of the season. A lot of things started going for us and we had a lot of confidence going for us, too, because we thought we'd finally gotten where we wanted to be. So we were really looking forward to going into the tournament.

Q. And how much of a let-down was it to lose to TCU?

A. It really does hurt, because it could have given us a chance to keep playing in the NCAA tournament or in the NIT. But we just didn't play very well. It makes you feel bad, especially for those guys who are coming back, because you usually want to build up your next season on a real good game. But in that game, we didn't play very well and that can be kind of crucial. It really did hurt us because we had intentions of going further.

Q. Do you think the rumors surrounding Coach Metcalf's job situation affected the team?

A. When we first heard the rumors, we all talked about them, but it never got to the point where it was affecting us. The situation didn't get so bad that Coach Metcalf had to call us together and tell us not to pay attention to the rumors. It just never got that bad. I don't even know how that rumor really got started.

Q. A lot of people thought your performance dropped off this season. How do you regard your play this year?

A. I think that at the beginning of the season, I was playing outstanding. I was doing a lot of great things. After the Alaska Shootout (in November), I started feeling myself not performing the way I wanted to. I had it in my mind to do it, but physically I wasn't able to do it. That's when I felt myself becoming sick. I knew something was wrong then, because I couldn't do what I wanted to do.

Q. Did your sickness affect your play a great deal?

A. It affected me a lot. It took away all my strength and it took me a long time to come back. Early in the conference season, there were a lot of rebounds I couldn't get and I couldn't move as fast as I wanted to on defense. It created a lot of problems for me but I just had to stay in there and deal with them.

Q. Speaking of rebounding, is that what really motivates you?

A. That really does. I'd rather have more rebounds than points. They motivate me because they're based more on individual effort. You have to get into position for them, because every rebound that hits the rim doesn't come right to you. When I'm rebounding, I'm fired up, because that motivates me to either go down and play offense or defense, whether it's an offensive or a defensive rebound.

Q. Is there any certain year that you regard as your best with the Aggies?

A. My coming in as a freshman and playing with Rynn

sophomore year, I was just trying to do the best I could.

Q. Did you learn from your sophomore year, when the team had a losing streak and then came back to win seven of the last eight games?

A. I learned that you just keep hanging in there and keep a positive attitude. We kept that and turned it around in the second half.

Q. Have you had professional scouts approach you during the last year?

A. Most of the time they'll call me instead of making personal contact. If Coach Metcalf happens to know them personally, then they'll contact him and if he feels like I should know what they have to say, he'll tell me. But I never had too much problem with them hassling me here, even though I was contacted a lot during the season.

Q. And what has come out of all that?

A. Well, I feel real good about Claude Riley having a future in basketball. Some of the scouts feel like I have the ability to play in some all-star games. And there some agents who are interested. It makes you feel good to know they think you have a chance of making it, because they want to represent you. When you have scouts contact you saying that you can play in the NBA if you accomplish certain things, it makes you feel that you can make it. So right now, I feel that Claude Riley does have a future in the NBA. I am feeling really confident, because toward the latter part of the season I started picking up tremendously. The scouts who had seen my performance earlier saw that I was playing much better at the end and hopefully they'll want to give me a chance to really prove myself. I've just got to play the kind of game Claude Riley can play, whatever it takes.

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"I've got to say that we really did look ahead. When we first realized we were going to the tournament, right away we looked to Arkansas because we wanted to beat them." — Riley.

(Wright) and Vernon (Smith) was an inspiration for me, because they're one of the reasons I came. Being on a championship team and going into the NCAA playoffs really matured me a lot and prepared me for the next seasons too. So I feel that my freshman and junior years were my best ones. My

Claude Riley's A&M basketball statistics

1979-80
5.2 pts., 3.4 reb.
46.5% FG, 78.2% FT

1980-81
10.6 pts., 6.2 reb.
46.9% FG, 63% FT

1981-82
16.3 pts., 10.2 reb.
45% FG, 81.1% FT

1982-83
14.2 pts., 9.2 reb.
51.9% FG, 74.2% FT

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