



Mavericks' Tarpley possesses knack for the ball

DALLAS (AP) — Familiar terms such as "banger" and "leaper" and "board-crasher" don't seem appropriate in describing Roy Tarpley, the Dallas Mavericks' 7-foot, 244-pound rookie power forward.

He rarely knocks people from his path. When he jumps — he blocked 11 shots in two games last week — no one tries to measure his vertical leap. And when someone knocks him to the floor, the building doesn't quiver.

"The guy just has a knack for the ball. Somehow he just flits around under there," Dallas Coach Dick Motta said. "Sometimes he doesn't even jump, but he's just there. It's like you're walking down the street, something falls out of the sky and lands in your hand and it's a dollar."

Tarpley set a Mavericks rookie record with 20 rebounds in Dallas' 133-117 victory over Milwaukee recently. NBA statisticians project Tarpley would average 20 rebounds if he got extensive playing time each night.

"I've always been able to tip the ball and catch it," Tarpley said. "I've always had those abilities. I can hustle and get the loose balls. I've always had a knack for the ball."

If Tarpley's gracefulness and fitness could be grafted into James Donaldson's 7-2, 277-pound power frame, the result might be a scoring, rebounding, shot-blocking machine

that could rival the original and still unmatched model, Wilt Chamberlain.

Tarpley is no plodder. Although he describes himself as a "banger," he dribbles behind his back, throws behind-the-back passes, launches successful three-point shots and dis-

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plays an ever-growing assortment of layups. And this isn't showing-off-before-practice stuff. This is prime time.

"He'll take some shot out of the blue that you wouldn't put up in a school yard," Motta said. "He put up a jump hook from 20 feet against Milwaukee after I'd just finished telling him to use the 24-second clock

every time. Then the shot goes in. The guy just gets the ball and does something with it. I don't know how he does it."

Tarpley, who has averaged 9.8 points, 11 rebounds, 3 blocked shots and 52 percent shooting from the field during his past 143 minutes (six games), gets constant reminders about shot selection — his coaches encourage dunking — and his other occasional fits of flamboyance.

"At every level, people have always told me not to do certain things, but I always tried them anyway," Tarpley said. "Sometimes they worked, sometimes they didn't. You always need to keep expanding your game. You can't be one-dimensional."

Born in New York City, Tarpley has made a nomadic study of the game that became his profession. Fearing the effects of a city-wide strike by coaches and teachers in his hometown, he accepted his grandmother's invitation to begin his high school career in Mobile, Ala.

Ironically, the future Big Ten Player of the Year for Michigan and first-round draft choice by the Mavericks was cut from the varsity his sophomore year. Despite a junior season with the first team, an uncle suggested that Tarpley could further improve by spending a summer in Detroit.

Sam Washington, who identified

himself to Tarpley as "the godfather of basketball in Detroit," served as guide, taking Tarpley to St. Cecilia's recreation center, which Lakers guard Magic Johnson, one of its cum laude graduates, describes "as the proving ground."

"I had to prove myself there," Johnson said. "Everyone who comes from Michigan has to prove themselves. If you could play, you had to go to St. Cecilia's."

After being unanimously selected as "Big Ten Player of the Year" after his junior season at Michigan, he was the logical nominee for "College Player of the Year" and first pick in the draft as a senior.

But he underwent arthroscopic knee surgery in October 1985, cut his hand on a backboard and had a long bout with the flu. Those complications lowered his statistics, and, coupled with several underclassmen turning pro, made him the seventh player picked in the draft.

Motta generally gives rookies exposure during the exhibition season and takes it away when people start keeping score.

"But he's running the court now and I don't have to hide him quite as much on defense as I did before," Motta said. "He just gets the ball. He seems to know where the ball is all the time. He's improving and he's willing to work. He should get better and better."

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