

Lady Ags look to freshmen to fill void left by departed seniors

BY JEREMY FURTICK
THE BATTALION

Youth will be served this season on the Texas A&M Women's Basketball Team. After losing five seniors from last year's squad, the Lady Aggies will field a team consisting of eight underclassmen, five of which are freshmen.

A&M Head Coach Candi Harvey said the younger players were a major concern going into fall practice, but they have surprised her thus far with their level of play.

"At some point in our first two exhibition games, each of our freshmen, and all of our players off the bench, have given us positive results," Harvey said. "They have done more good things than bad. At this point, we expected the opposite."

Even with the unexpected progress of the underclassmen, Harvey said one of the main obstacles the Lady Aggies will face is being able to raise the level of their game as the competition becomes stiffer.

"We're going to be playing great basketball teams, some of which are much more experienced than we are," she said. "We're trying to simulate as much pressure and intensity in practice as we can so we won't be in total shock when the pressure of an actual game hits us."

"This team is going to have to learn to deal with adversity on the court and learn how to make changes on the floor as the game goes along."

Freshman forward Prissy Sharpe said the underclassmen have no choice but to contribute to the team.

"The underclassmen play a big role on this team," Sharpe said. "We are going to have to make an immediate impact in points and minutes if this team is going to be successful."

Sharpe points to the team's senior leadership as the key to grooming the freshmen into top-notch college players.

"The seniors have done a great job picking us up when we're hanging our heads and showing us our role on the team," Sharpe said. "They expect us to play hard and make contributions now; they're not just preparing us for next year."

Senior guard Christy Lake said she feels her job as a senior is to keep the freshmen focused.

"As seniors, we've got to help the younger kids adapt to college ball," she said. "We need to help them realize our goals and stay focused on them while we also teach them."

Harvey said she is also looking to the seniors for leadership.

"A team is only as strong as its senior leadership," she said. "They have had a taste of the postseason and hopefully their hunger and desire will point us in that direction again."

Harvey said the Aggies' depth, along with their leadership, will be their biggest asset this season.

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Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Sophomore guard **Kerrie Patterson** avoids a defensive attack at Tuesday's practice at G. Rollie White Coliseum.

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even though it's young depth," Harvey said. "I think this will present match-up problems for other teams. If they stop one of us, we can put someone else out there that gives a little different look and can hurt them."

Lake said quickness and defense are the team's strong points.

"When we are pushing the ball in an up-tempo game and using our quickness and defensive strength is when we will be at our best," Lake said.

With such a young team, Harvey said the Aggies will make positive strides throughout the season.

"You're definitely going to see one team in November, a different team in December, and another in January," Harvey said. "At the end of the season, we will be a much-improved team."

"If we stay healthy, I think we will potentially be a NCAA tournament team," Sharpe said the Aggies have similar aspirations and they know what their first steps need to be to reach them.

"All of us know that everyone is going to play and we all have to contribute for us to be a good team," Sharpe said.

The tie that binds

As an integral part of talented '96 team, senior team captain Lana Tucker leads by example

BY SARA DUESING
THE BATTALION

At first glance, Lana Tucker may not seem like much of a threat to opposing teams. But for Tucker, a guard on the Texas A&M Women's Basketball Team, looks can be deceiving.

Behind her sweet smile and lighthearted laugh is a competitive and dedicated athlete. Standing just 5 feet 7 inches tall, and in her second year as team captain, Tucker has been a key component to the Lady Aggies' success through her contagious work ethic.

"Lana gives 110 percent every night," A&M Assistant Coach Dee Gibson said. "She is very unselfish and plays very hard."

Being a leader on the team and making herself available to her teammates is a responsibility Tucker takes

"Lana gives 110 percent every night. She is very unselfish and plays very hard."

Dee Gibson
A&M Assistant Coach

when you're a veteran."

Tucker said she lets nothing get in the way of basketball's greatest benefit — having a good time.

"With all the hype there is, it is just a game," Tucker said. "If you take the fun out of it, you lose what basketball is all about."

Tucker, who started playing the sport in the third grade, said her interest was sparked by her friends' involvement, and that at first, it was not something she took seriously.

"My dad saw the potential in the sport and really encouraged me to play," Tucker said. "He pushed me when sometimes I didn't

really want to play.

"My high school coach, who passed away after my senior year, was also a great influence. I'm inspired to play well for her."

In the Lady Aggies' two exhibition games last weekend, Tucker averaged 9.5 points in victories over Zala Volan (Hungary) and the Women's

Armed Forces.

However, the senior from Dun-

canville is more recognized for her stingy

defensive ability and

a knack for staying calm in pressure

situations.

"I don't get too emotional," Tucker said.

"I don't let bad calls get to me, and I try to stay poised under pressure."

Tucker is also recognized by her teammates and coaches as being a team player, putting team goals ahead of her own.

"Lana is the glue that holds our team together," Gibson said.

"She is a hard-nosed winner and she is also committed to giving back to the community."

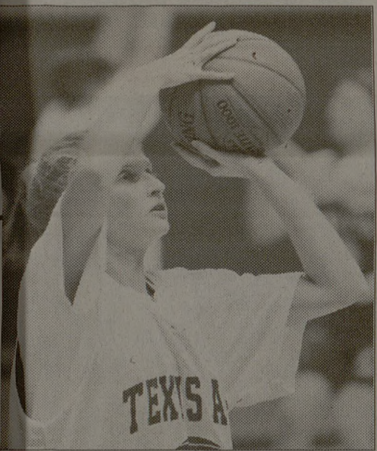
Before a competition, Tucker likes to spend time by herself and just relax. She also prides herself on a superstition she shares with NBA superstar Michael Jordan.

"I take a shower before each game just like he does," Tucker said. "I heard that he did that, so I tried it and it really helps. I feel more awake and ready to play."

Tucker, a business major, plans on pursuing a career in athletic administration following her graduation. The senior said she always wants to be involved in sports — but not as a coach.

"I admire coaches a lot," Tucker said. "But it's just too stressful."

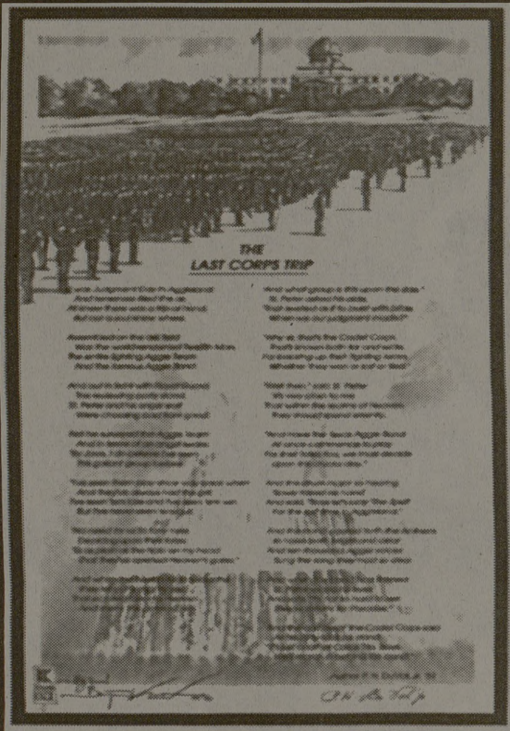
A fiery, intense competitor on the court, but an engaging and approachable personality off it, Tucker proves looks really can be deceiving.



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Freshman guard **Natalie Tucker** practices free throws Tuesday.

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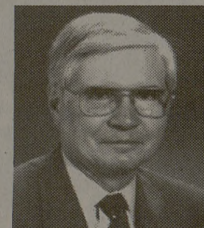
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