

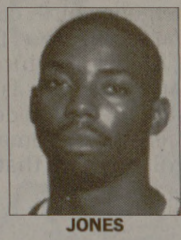
European Vacation

Aggies' Basketball struggles against European pro teams, while gaining confidence and showing signs of greatness

BY AL LAZARUS
The Battalion

Think of it as *Saving Private Ryan*, hoops style. The basketball team from the United States travels to Europe for a five-game exhibition tour in two different countries. Things get pretty ugly at times, but in the end, everything turns out OK.

That was the case for the Texas A&M Men's Basketball team this summer, and no, Matt Damon did not see any of it.



JONES

The new coach Melvin Watkins at the helm, the Aggies traveled to Holland and Germany in August to play five games, against a different professional basketball team. Senior Shanne Jones, the Aggies' leader last season, said A&M's goals were simple heading into the tour. "We wanted to win games and have fun," Jones said. "That was our focus there."

Bayer-Leverkusen and Telekom Baskets Bonn. To close out their tour, the Aggies traveled to Hagen, Germany, on Aug. 23 for a game against Brandt-Hagen. Things finally came together for the men in maroon and white, as they rolled to a 96-85 victory.

Highlighting the winning effort for the Aggies was senior Chris Clayton, whose game-high 34 points included a staggering 10 three-pointers in only 14 attempts.

Clayton, who showed similar signs of greatness last season before missing the Aggies' last seven games due to injury, said despite finishing 1-4 on the tour, the team has reasons to be optimistic.

"We got better every game, and what a lot of people don't realize is that those guys are pros over there," Clayton said. "Some of them have been playing together five or six years."

After finishing the tour as the team's leading scorer at 20.6 points per game and hitting 25 of 43 three-point attempts, Clayton said he is ready for a breakout year.

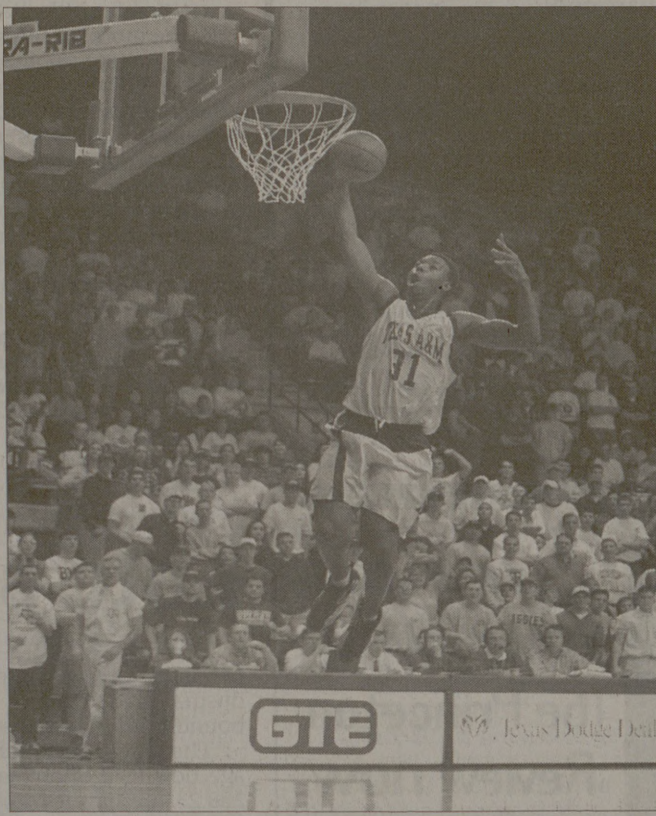
"I feel confident," he said. "I was hitting a lot of shots over there, and having a good season will depend on having a lot of confidence."

Another bright spot in the Aggies' victory was their 11-12 performance from the free-throw line, a place they had major problems connecting from last season.

Also giving A&M reasons to expect improvement this season was the play of sophomore Aaron Jack, who averaged a double-double on the tour with 11 points and 10.6 rebounds per contest.

As Jones looks ahead to the upcoming season, he emphasized that, regardless of the Aggies' record last season and this summer in Europe, there is reason to be confident.

"We have five new players, and with the proper coaching and grooming we should be a pretty good team," Jones said. "We are optimistic, because we know we have nowhere to go but up."



JAKE SCHRICKLING/THE BATTALION

Shanne Jones scored 28 points in the Aggies' 96-85 victory.

McGWIRE

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"I would not rule out Ken Griffey," McGwire said. "The man is going to get hot. There's a great possibility that it's going to be two or three guys doing something that people are waiting for."

Sosa was tied with McGwire for 24 hours, then went 0-for-4 Tuesday.

"Now it's getting a little exciting," Sosa said. "Mark has 57 and that's a lot. Everybody knows that everybody is pulling for Mark, and I'm pulling for Mark, too. And I want him to break the record first."

Wilson's 68-year-old NL mark was erased in electrifying fashion. Mighty Mac overtook Hack with a pair of majestic clouts that traveled an estimated 450 and 472 feet to center field — impressive even for the Paul Bunyan of batters.

"All you can do is turn around and see where the ball lands," Livan Hernandez said. "When he hits it, you've got to watch it."

An 11-year-old Little League outfielder and a 17-year-old part-time magician recovered the souvenirs and gave them to McGwire in exchange for autographed balls, bats, jerseys, photos and tickets to another game. The youngsters won entertaining scrambles for the balls, with clusters of kids sliding wildly across a banked tarp beyond the center-field wall.

They were doing more than chasing history. They were riding the wave.

KORA

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This year, people who visit volleyball games will see a team that consists of a much younger team than the previous year.

Sykora is aware of the added pressure on her to perform on a younger team.

Of course there is going to be pressure, not only for being only senior, but also for being one of only two returning starters, because we are young," Sykora said.

"It is pressure, but it is good. I need that, because everybody is looking at you to perform, and when things go wrong, you need to fix it."

Sykora seems to take her pressure to the next level and to be "fix" when things are going wrong.

When things aren't going the way, that is when Stacy Corbelli knows how to turn the team around and by picking up her pressure," Corbelli said, "and it is action the team follows."

Whether on or off the court, Corbelli said she loves to perform, an assessment Corbelli she agrees with.

Off the court, she has a personality that they [her teammates] really enjoy," Corbelli said. "She likes to have fun and doesn't take too many things too serious, and that adds a lightness to the team."

Volleyball is not the only challenge Sykora has tackled in college. So far in her A&M career, Sykora has lettered in volleyball and basketball.

She lettered in basketball during her sophomore year and track and field her freshman year.

She captured the Southwest Conference championship title in the heptathlon her first time competing in the event.

She also has not ruled out competing in basketball during the upcoming 1998 season.

"Right now I'm undecided," she said. "It all depends on the volleyball season. Volleyball is the most important right now."

The Aggies get their season underway Friday at the University of Pacific Tournament in Stockton, Calif.

The tournament kicks off a week-long road swing in which the Aggies also will visit San Marcos, Texas, for a contest with Southwest Texas and Ann Arbor, Mich., for another tournament.

For Sykora, it is the beginning of her final year at A&M.

The Burlington, Texas, native adds to a stellar career that she speaks loudly of her legendary A&M performance once it is gone.

If you can't get it when you want it, what good is it?

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