

## Looking at the future

Guards Bernard King and Jamaal Gilchrist hope to lead the Aggies to new heights

BY JASON LINCOLN  
The Battalion

Their reason for coming to Texas A&M was selfish. They had the choice of attending many of the top basketball programs in the nation. Instead they settled for a school without the winning numbers, without the established history and without a big supporting class.

The reason — Jamaal Gilchrist and Bernard King are looking to establish themselves as the Big 12 Conference's best guard combo and did not want anything to overshadow their efforts.

Texas A&M proved to be the right place for such an effort as the two guards quickly jumped into the starting role and began to dominate the Aggie backcourt.

With the Aggies coming off a 12-15 season and only having one returning starter, the opportunity for Gilchrist and King to make an impact was at its prime.

"I chose A&M because I wanted to star in a new program — be part of something new," Gilchrist said. "I thought if I came here I would be one of those the one's that started it."

The guards knew that in A&M's rebuilding state under coach Melvin Watkins, they would be called on to perform early.

Little did they expect that in a matter of a few games, they would be called on to lead the team from game to game.

It started when returning point guard Clifton Cook was declared academically ineligible for the 1999-2000 season.

That left the Aggies without an experienced leader to run the floor. The opportunity allowed Gilchrist to earn the starting role immediately.

King would soon follow Gilchrist's lead, taking over as the Aggies' top shooting guard.

After becoming A&M's main leader-

ship in the backcourt, the two guards were immediately matched-up against seasoned collegiate backcourts.

In spite of the challenges, Gilchrist and King came in and not only performed, but excelled as two of the conference's top players.

"We need to be leaders," King said. "Like coach says — we're young, he wants us to grow up — he doesn't want us to be freshmen anymore. He wants us to [play like] juniors and seniors. We just have to grow into each other every game."

"The ball's in our hands now," Gilchrist added about the leadership and performance expectations.

As Gilchrist and King have transitioned into the spotlight, they have been matched against some of the NCAA's top guards and still came out on top.

The most recent matchup was between the 1998-99 Big 12 Freshman of the year, University of Kansas point guard Jeff Boschee, and Gilchrist in Jan. 17 conference game.

Despite the fact the Jayhawks won the game by 21 points, Gilchrist came out with the clear win in the point guard battle. Boschee was held to only one of six from the floor for only two points and two assists, an uncharacteristic low for the heralded player. Meanwhile Gilchrist had nine points, three assists and two turnovers.

The performance of the freshmen guards has drawn a lot of attention throughout the conference, including the praise of Kansas coach Roy Williams.

"These youngsters played extremely hard I thought," Williams said. "They were very enthused to play us. To play on national television like that, you can tell they are going to do a lot of great things for Melvin [Watkins] and that team."

In the midst of matchups against a number of the conference's top guards such as Boschee and University of Texas guard Ivan Wagner, the freshmen combo has seen nothing impressive that they do not see for themselves in the near future.

"They didn't impress me that much," King said about the guards he has faced this season. "They're good players but I could see myself being better."

"A whole lot better," Gilchrist added. The pair of guards have always been expected to perform well. In high school, Gilchrist and King led their respective teams to state championships in Virginia and Louisiana.

Gilchrist came out of high school as

See FUTURE on Page 10.

### Head of the Class

In just their freshman seasons, Aggie guards Bernard King and Jamaal Gilchrist are already in the Top 10 in the Big 12 in major statistical categories (Through Monday)

#### Scoring

Bernard King 16.9 (17)

#### Free Throw Pct.

Jamaal Gilchrist 78.6 (6)

#### Assists

Bernard King 4.00 (17)

#### Steals

Bernard King 2.00 (6)

Jamaal Gilchrist 1.79 (9)

#### 3-point FG per Game

Bernard King 2.79 (3)



CODY WAGES/THE BATTALION

With no time or room for a learning curve, A&M freshman guards Bernard King (left) and Jamaal Gilchrist have turned out to be solid performers for the Aggies in their first season.

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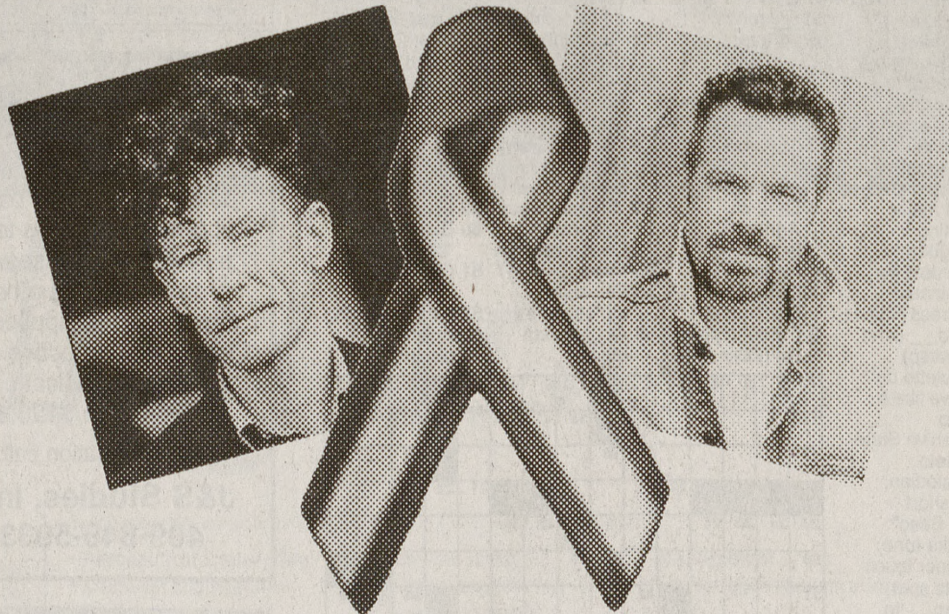
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