

Freshman foundation Contributions of four freshmen help Texas A&M women's basketball team

BY BRIAN RUFF
The Battalion

When the 2000-01 season started for the Texas A&M women's basketball team, questions arose about its lack of depth on the young team that has only five juniors and seniors.

Now however, newcomers Toccara Williams, Janae Derrick, Alaina Johnson and Chereny Woodard are making a bigger impact than expected at the beginning of the season.

Williams has started at the guard position all 17 games this season and made a lasting impression on the other Aggie players and coaches in her first exhibition game at Reed Arena.

"I wasn't as nervous as everyone thought I was at my first game," Williams said.

The 5-foot-9 Hollywood, Fla. native showed no sign of jitters and dished out 17 assists during the pre-season game, which would have broken a Reed Arena record had the game been official.

Just more than a month later, Williams tallied 14 assists against Pepperdine and nipped the 1999 Reed Arena assist record of 13, held by Tina Jones.

"That is phenomenal that a player can come in as a freshman and be chasing records," said A&M women's basketball coach Peggie Gillom. "It is great for her, and great for the team."

Williams has tallied a total of 122 assists this season and is on the verge of breaking another Aggie record.

A&M women's basketball's lone All-American, Lisa Branch, currently holds the record for assists as a freshman with 149. If Williams continues at her current pace, the upstart freshman will record almost 200 assists on the season, smashing the previous record.

"I hope I break the records, because if I do, I know I will be helping the team," Williams said.

Derrick also has been valuable to the A&M squad. The 5-11 forward continues to make an impact as one

of the team's best defensive rebounders and denies many opponents' shots. The Trotwood, Ohio, native is among the leaders on the team in blocks.

Derrick got her first start in an Aggie uniform against Nebraska, when she took over the power forward position after junior forward Latoya Rose went out with an ankle injury.

The freshman did not buckle to the pressure of starting in her first collegiate basketball game. Derrick hit the winning shot against the Huskers to give the Aggie a two-point win, 67-65.

"I was a little nervous at the start of the game, but as the game got going, I got more comfortable," Derrick said. "When I hit the winning shot, it was like the perfect ending." Johnson is another player getting more playing time this season.

The 6-foot-1 forward has been a force underneath the basket as of late, tallying 13 rebounds off the bench in only six conference games this season.

"Both of the coaches are working real hard to make me a better player, and I want to be productive off the bench and make it to the NCAAAs," Johnson said.

In A&M's 87-81 upset victory over Baylor Saturday, Johnson made two free throws and played strong defense during the Aggies' biggest scoring run of the game. The run put the Bears on their heels before the halftime buzzer.

"Janae and Alaina have made a big impact for us this season," said Gillom. All four players said that Gillom has been a major part of



CHAD ADAMS/THE BATTALION

(Clockwise from top left) Freshmen Alaina Johnson, Woodard are providing fans with a good look at the future of Texas A&M women's basketball. Janae Derrick, Toccara Williams, and Chereny

FABULOUS FRESHMEN			
TOCCARA WILLIAMS	JANAE DERRICK	ALAINA JOHNSON	CHERENY WOODARD
7.9 PTS PER GAME	3.7 REBOUNDS PER GAME	42 REBOUNDS THIS SEASON	5 ASSISTS IN ONLY 25 MINUTES THIS SEASON
7.2 ASSISTS PER GAME	10 BLOCKS ON THE SEASON (THIRD ON TEAM)	21 OFFENSIVE REBOUNDS (THIRD ON TEAM)	WILL SEE MORE ACTION WITH INJURIES
4.8 REBOUNDS PER GAME			

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

See FRESHMEN on Page 9.

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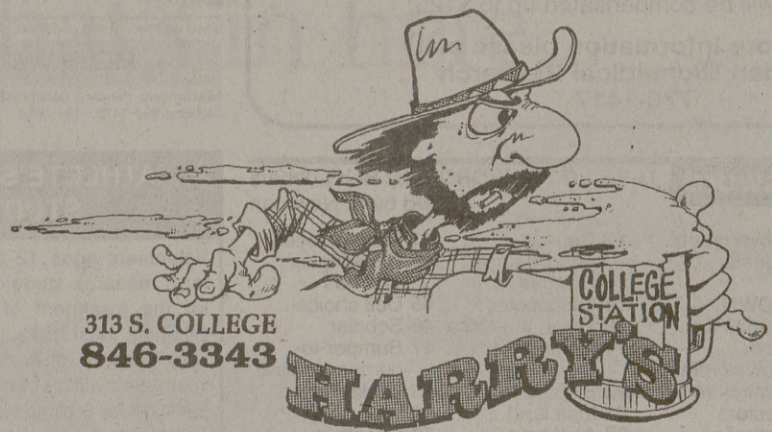
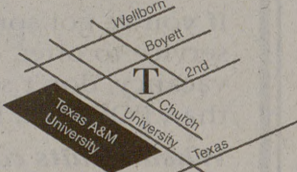
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