

Aggie basketball sets sights on winning

Wright takes over as team leader, ponders NBA future

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M basketball and the National Basketball Association aren't known to have much in common, but that is changing with the emergence of sophomore swingman Antoine Wright.

Wright, projected as the ninth pick in the 2004 NBA Draft by NBADraft.net, could be the first Aggie selected by an NBA team since Brooks Thompson was drafted No. 27 overall in 1994 by the Orlando Magic.

That is, if Wright chooses to leave A&M early, which is another new concept to the Aggies.

"He's a little more realistic about it than most kids," said A&M coach Melvin Watkins. "He's balanced it thus far and he's trying to be able to continue to balance it without it becoming a distraction to our team."

A&M is entering what many programs have been dealing with for the past decade since athletes began to skip college and go directly from high school to the NBA. A domino effect has hit the college ranks as more underclassmen leave school early for their NBA riches.

Only nine of 29 2003 NBA first round draft picks had completed all four years of their college eligibility, up from seven in 2002. The number is certainly going to go back down as more players leave early.

"You recruit them and you may think you're job is done," Watkins said. "In some programs you have so many players come out early

it's hard to keep your program at a level you want to keep it at because you're constantly having so much turnover, but that's the reality of what we do today. What you really hope is once they get into the environment of the campus, the camaraderie with his teammates, may want him to stay around a little longer."

Having young players draw the attention of NBA scouts is not a completely negative thing. It has given A&M some name recognition, something the team would like to capitalize on this season in recruiting.

"I've been allowing NBA guys come to our practices, which I used to do at Charlotte," Watkins said. "We haven't had very many NBA guys that want to come down to our practices, and then all of a sudden now they want to come."

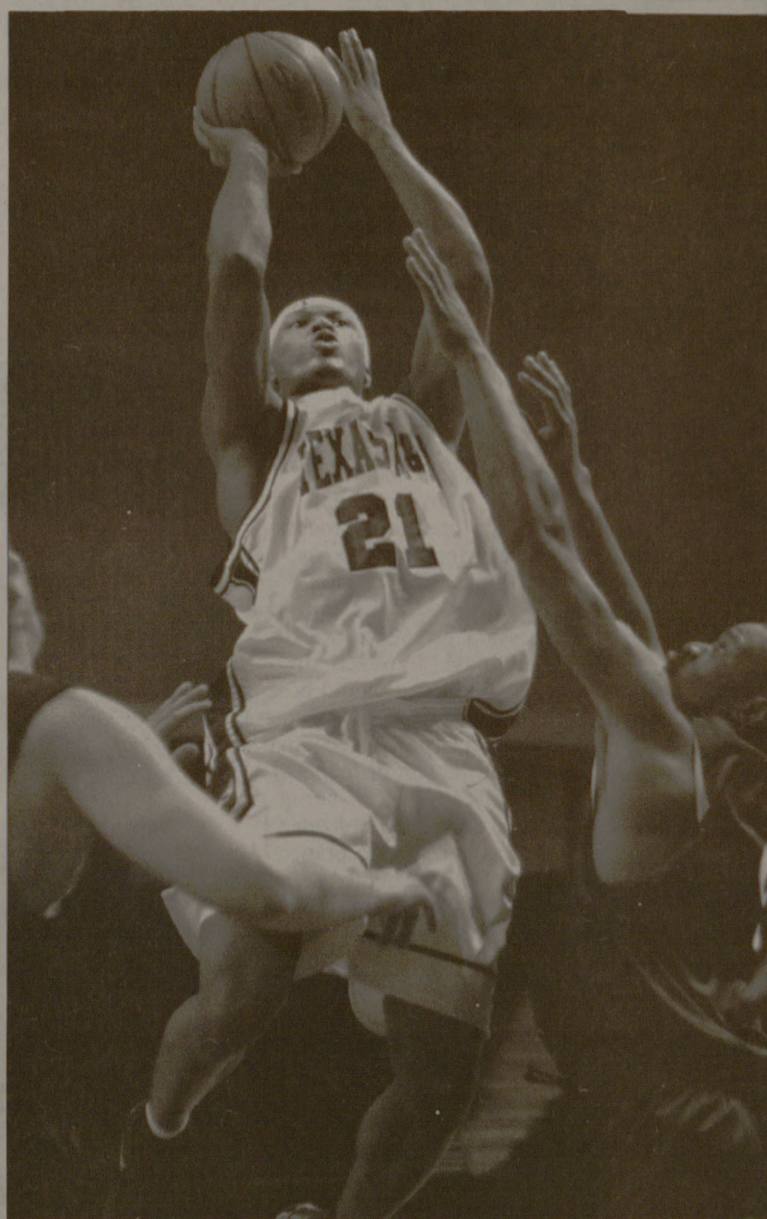
Sure everyone knows they are in College Station to see Wright, but the rest of the team loves the opportunity to practice in front of professional scouts, possibly making a name for themselves.

That aspect just makes the team work harder in practice, which could pay dividends on the court come game time.

"I think it helps everybody," Wright said. "A lot of guys on our team might have a shot down the road. I think it just pushes everybody to play harder."

But for Wright, the draft is a long way off and he still has a full season ahead of him with the Aggies. Who knows though, Wright may stay for another season after all is said and done.

But one thing is certain: If the



SHARON AESCHBACH • THE BATTALION

Sophomore swingman Antoine Wright goes up for a jumpshot during the Aggies exhibition game win against Team ezybonds last Wednesday.

Aggies want to make it to the post-season for the first time since 1987, Wright is the horse who will carry them there.

"I haven't really thought about

(the draft)," Wright said. "It seems like more people are asking about it than I am thinking about it. Right now I'm just focused on getting us to the (NCAA) tournament."

Aggies set for run at post-season action

By Troy Miller
THE BATTALION

After its first non-losing season in eight seasons, the Texas A&M basketball team is setting its sights on something bigger: its first NCAA Tournament since 1987.

Despite a talented ball club that began the 2002 season 8-3, chemistry seemed to be a problem late in the season as the Aggies lost six of their last eight games to finish the season at 14-14. This season, chemistry figures to be a thing of the past after the team spent 10 days touring last this summer.

"The chemistry started there, and when we came back we were a lot more competitive," said sophomore guard/forward Antoine Wright. "Our practices are a lot more like games, and the chemistry is starting to come along real well."

Along with the new chemistry is a new attitude. In the past, Aggie teams would die emotionally when things didn't go their way on the court.

As seen in preseason exhibitions this year, the Aggies have a newfound positive attitude throughout ball games, and, surprisingly, actually look like they are having fun.

"A lot of times last year we would get into situations late in a game, like teams coming back, our attitude would go down and guys would start blaming other guys," Wright said. "This year as a team I think we are a lot more close. We have a lot more focus and a lot more ready to take the coaching."

This is easily the deepest team the Aggies have fielded since head coach Melvin Watkins came to College Station six seasons ago to take over a program in the waning days of the Big 12 Conference.

Even though the Aggies lost four starters to graduation from a year ago, including all-time A&M leading scorer Bernard King, Watkins believes this team will be his best yet.

"Being able to compare what we did in the past and what we did last year I feel this is going to be a better team," Watkins said. "We're excited, but you still have to go out and prove it."

Everyone knows about Wright, an ESPN Preseason All-Big 12 selection, coming into the season, but he has

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Blair on mission to raise support for A&M women

By Eric Ambroso
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M women's basketball coach Gary Blair wants to raise fan support and expectations for the Aggie women's basketball team as it begins its regular season against LaSalle Nov. 22 in Boston.

As he is beginning his first season as head basketball coach for the Aggies, Blair said gaining the support of the fans is a major part of creating a winning atmosphere for the team.

"I want to change attitudes," Blair said. "I want the fans to show up 30 or 40 minutes before the game and get into the atmosphere. This isn't the movie at the Hollywood Theater where you show up at game time. You get ready, you prepare and you come early like basketball fans, like football fans."

In his first months in Aggieland, Blair has done much more behind the scenes than just coach.

He passed out sausages on a stick at women's soccer games and became the first Aggie coach to activate his roster spot in the 12th Man Team Rewards program, attending more than 15 Aggie

sporting events.

He also started the "Junior Aggie Club" for children under 14 years old. For \$15 they get tickets to all home games, a T-shirt, a newsletter and admission to clinic sessions with the players and coaches.

"This isn't the movie at the Hollywood Theater where you show up at game time. You get ready, you prepare and you come early like basketball fans, like football fans."

— Gary Blair
A&M women's basketball coach

"On the women's side you have to do more than just coach the game," Blair told the 12th Man Magazine. "You've got to be everywhere. I think we're in the grassroots stages of it. When I can see

what volleyball and soccer are doing marketing-wise, then I think we can do the same thing."

While the A&M women's soccer team ranks first in attendance in the Big 12 conference, the women's basketball team has not had much fan support. The team needs the same kind of support the Aggie fans show their football and baseball teams, Blair said.

"They're showing up for every other sport, but we need them right now," Blair said. "We need that sixth man or that 12th man. We need people to help us fight through while we learn the game the correct way."

Blair has proven successful in his previous stops as well, creating excitement among teams he's coached for the possibilities.

He was the head coach of the Arkansas women's basketball team for 10 seasons before coming to A&M. He has been to 11 NCAA Tournaments and has a winning percentage of 71 percent in his 18 years of coaching at Arkansas and Stephen F. Austin. He led the Razorbacks to the Final Four in 1998.

Senior Toccarra Williams said she is

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JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Senior point guard Toccarra Williams led the Big 12 in steals last year and hopes to repeat her defensive prowess from a year ago under new coach Gary Blair.

A&M BASKETBALL SCHEDULE CORNER

Men's basketball schedule

Nov. 24	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	7 p.m.
Nov. 26	Alabama A&M	7 p.m.
Nov. 29	Prairie View A&M	3 p.m.
Dec. 2	at Tennessee	6 p.m.
Dec. 6	at Oakland	5 p.m.
Dec. 13	A&M-Corpus Christi	7 p.m.
Dec. 18	at UTSA	8 p.m.
Dec. 21	Grambling	7 p.m.
Dec. 27	at Houston	7:30 p.m.
Jan. 3	at Louisiana Monroe	7 p.m.
Jan. 6	Long Island	7 p.m.
Jan. 10	*at Missouri	12:30 p.m.
Jan. 17	*Kansas	3 p.m.
Jan. 21	*at Kansas State	7 p.m.
Jan. 24	*Texas Tech	5 p.m.
Jan. 28	*at Iowa State	6:30 p.m.
Jan. 31	*Texas	12:30 p.m.
Feb. 3	*Oklahoma State	7 p.m.
Feb. 7	*at Baylor	5 p.m.
Feb. 11	*Nebraska	7 p.m.
Feb. 14	*Oklahoma	12:30 p.m.
Feb. 18	*at Texas	8 p.m.
Feb. 21	*at Texas Tech	3 p.m.
Feb. 25	*Baylor	7 p.m.
Feb. 28	*Colorado	12:30 p.m.
Mar. 3	*at Oklahoma	8 p.m.
Mar. 6	*at Oklahoma St.	12:30 p.m.

*Big 12 Conference game

Women's basketball schedule

Nov. 22	at LaSalle (Boston)	12 p.m.
Nov. 23	at Boston/Florida (Boston)	TBA
Nov. 28	at Minnesota (Bahamas)	1 p.m.
Nov. 29	at USC/Seton Hall (Bahamas)	TBA
Dec. 3	Arkansas-Little Rock	7 p.m.
Dec. 6	North Texas	2 p.m.
Dec. 13	McNeese State	2 p.m.
Dec. 17	Louisiana-Monroe	7 p.m.
Dec. 21	Marshall	2:30 p.m.
Dec. 30	Houston	7 p.m.
Jan. 3	Texas State	2 p.m.
Jan. 7	*at Oklahoma State	7 p.m.
Jan. 10	*Baylor	2:30 p.m.
Jan. 14	*Oklahoma	7 p.m.
Jan. 17	*at Nebraska	7:05 p.m.
Jan. 21	*at Colorado	8 p.m.
Jan. 25	Texas	2:30 p.m.
Jan. 28	*at Texas Tech	7 p.m.
Jan. 31	*Iowa State	7 p.m.
Feb. 4	*Oklahoma State	7 p.m.
Feb. 7	*at Oklahoma	12 p.m.
Feb. 11	*at Texas	7 p.m.
Feb. 14	*Texas Tech	7 p.m.
Feb. 18	*Kansas State	7 p.m.
Feb. 21	*at Kansas	7 p.m.
Feb. 28	*at Baylor	7 p.m.
Mar. 3	*Missouri	7 p.m.

*Big 12 Conference game

TEAMS AT A GLANCE

Men's roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Cl-Exp
1	Acie Law	G	Fr-HS
3	Jessie King	F/G	Sr-3L
5	Nick Anderson	F	Sr-2L
10	Leandro Garcia-Morales	G	Sr
11	Luis Clemente	F	So-RS
12	Dylan Leal	G	Sr-3L
21	Antoine Wright	F/G	So-1L
22	Kevin Turner	G	Sr-1L
23	LaKeith Blanks	F	Fr-HS
30	Bobby Leach	G	Jr-TR
32	Marcus Watkins	G	So-1L
33	Justin Loewe	G	Fr-HS
42	Marlon Pompey	F	Fr-HS
50	Andy Slocum	C	Sr-3L



Melvin Watkins
 • Seventh year overall
 • Fifth year at Texas A&M
 • Overall record:
 95 - 111
 • Record at A&M:
 53 - 91
 • Two NCAA appearances

Women's roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Cl-Exp
1	Toccarra Williams	G	Sr-3L
2	Carol Price	P	Sr-3L
3	Charlotte Castile	G	Jr-TR
4	Janae Derrick	F	Sr-3L
12	Mindy Garrison	G	Jr-2L
13	Amanda Blankenstein	G/F	Fr-HS
15	Jamila Ganter	G	Fr-HS
20	Erica Roy	G	So-TR
22	Jennifer Wilks	F	Fr-HS
23	D'Nika Romero	G	Jr-TR
30	Tamea Scales	G/F	So-1L
31	Melissa Picone	G/F	So-1L
40	Ogadi Chinweze	P	Fr-HS
55	Lynn Classen	P	Sr-3L



Gary Blair
 • 18th year overall
 • First year at Texas A&M
 • Overall record:
 408 - 163
 • 11 NCAA appearances