



# 2006-07 Season Preview



## Different Faces, Same Philosophy...Defense!!

North Carolina A&T women's basketball coach Patricia Cage-Bibbs likes competition. During the 2005-06 season, she didn't feel like she was seeing enough competition on the court. When Bibbs discusses a lack of competition, she is not referring to the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference.

In fact, during her eight years of coaching in the MEAC, she has seen every program improve tremendously, which is why the competition within her own team bothered her.

"I want to see my non-starters challenge my starters," said Bibbs. "If there is someone starting over you, they should have to sweat each and every day in practice to keep that position. I don't care who they are. Last season, it seemed like players were happy with the status quo. They were happy with the way things were."

"I don't want that. I want to see people compete. It makes each player better, it makes the team better and helps the chemistry of your team because you eventually respect people who are going to make you work harder."

In 2006-07, North Carolina A&T will feature 11 new players. There are two holdovers from last season in sophomores Ahmad Williams and Emilee Christopher.

Williams is the only player on the Aggies current roster who has started a game (she started 12 times last season) for N.C. A&T. Christopher, who missed seven games with an ankle injury, averaged 2.9 points per game while playing out of position in the power forward slot all season. Neither player averaged more than 18 minutes per game.

"I don't believe in quick fixes," said Bibbs. "We are not where we want to be in this program, but we are taking the steps necessary to get there."

## PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER

Bibbs knew when she was hired that the Aggies program needed some repairs. It was made even more apparent when the veteran coach ran into some firsts last season. A Bibbs-coached team failed to reach 10 wins for the first time, and a Bibbs-coached team failed to finish higher than fifth for the first time.

Bibbs, who is her 22nd season of collegiate coaching, believes building a program is a detailed process that can't be measured solely on wins, but the character of the people you bring in and how they grow within your ideals. While the characters of the players she had during the 2005-06 season weren't in question, Bibbs felt she needed to head in another direction in terms of growing the Aggies program.

The construction started early. Bibbs is known as a coach who loves to press full-court. She needs quickness to see her "pressure cooker" defense be at its best. She wanted to land a player who could both defend, while at the same time finish in transition after forcing turnovers.

Amber Bland met the criteria. Bland, a 5-11 guard out of Boardman, Ohio, was leaving Penn State and looking for an environment where she could grow and bond with her coach. She found that in Bibbs and transferred to Aggieland. She sat out last season per NCAA transfer rules, but was still able to learn the Bibbs system, which will be crucial this season.

Not satisfied with signing a versatile perimeter player, Bibbs also went after a versatile post player who can post and face the basket. After watching another player looking to transfer -- Brittanie Taylor-James -- on tape she saw a player who could fill that role. Taylor-James is a 6-foot forward who came in from UC-Santa Barbara.

The Illinois native was also looking for a place where she could blossom. Like Bland, she played behind a veteran player at her previous school, and like Bland, she sat out last season because of NCAA transfer rules. Therefore, she too was given an opportunity to learn the system while sitting.

Bibbs jumped into her recruiting toolbox again after bringing in Bland and Taylor-James, and went after a post player and the position that has helped her win 380 games as a head coach -- a defensive stopper.

The junior college ranks provided the needs for the Aggies this time. Pratt (Kansas) Junior college transfer Jasmine Gordon, a 6-1 center out of Raleigh, will give the Aggies a needed presence inside in terms of rebounding and defense. Nancy Rembert out of Lon Morris (Texas) is Bibbs' type of player. She thinks defense first, and looks to be an excellent in Bibbs' full-court pressure defense.

Bibbs and her staff added six freshmen to go along with Christopher, Williams and the four transfers to complete the new Aggie look.

"Chemistry is always a concern, but it shouldn't be an issue if everyone comes in and works hard to learn the system" said Bibbs. "Everything my coaches and I have seen so far has been positive. We like what we see in terms of the ladies getting along, having fun with each other and being loose. We like most of all the way they push each other to be better."

## A DIFFICULT CONFERENCE

Bibbs stresses that her new-look team has to become quick learners in a MEAC conference where wins have become harder to come by. Coppin State is 35-1 over the last two years in the conference and return two of their top stars in Rashida Suber and Shalamar Oakley. Second-place Delaware State has four starters returning. Maryland-Eastern Shore, 12-6 in the conference last season, has MEAC Defensive Player of the Year Kristi Veltkamp back.

More than anyone, the Aggies know the balance that exists in the conference. They were defeated by the 11th-seeded Bethune-Cookman Wildcats in the MEAC Tournament.

"I don't care who is here, if they are not willing to work hard, we're not going to be successful," said Bibbs. "When you are shaping a team you have to find people who are self-motivated, who are committed to what they're doing. You have to want to play. If you come to play the person playing beside or the person playing behind you is going to work harder."

"If you're totally committed to something good, only good can come out of it. We're going to build this program on committed players because those same players are going to be committed to this program for years to come."

## POINT GUARD

Freshman point guard Ta'Wuana Cook has plenty of years to come in the Aggies program. Cook's high school success is in part what attracted the Aggies coaching staff to her. Cook won two state titles at Seventy-First High School in Fayetteville. She, however, has some huge shoes to fill in her first season as an Aggie.

The Aggies lost the excellent play of point guard Shareka "Mia" Glover to graduation. In not having Glover, the Aggies lost their leading scorer, leading assists person, their best free throw shooter and one of the best players to ever enter the program.

"Tweet (Ta'Wuana) was a leader on those championship teams, so she comes here with leadership qualities," said Bibbs. "You try to recruit players who have had success in

high school because they know what it means to win and what it means to be a leader. We know she's young, but we think she can mature quickly."

Cook will likely earn major minutes at the point guard spot, but Rembert can play both guard positions and will serve as the No. 2 point guard at the start of the season.

### SHOOTING GUARD

The Aggies are looking to present some match-up problems at the shooting guard this season. Bland will headline the position with her ability to shoot over defenders and take them down to the post. Bibbs said the one attribute that sticks out about Bland is that she is a winner, and losing really bothers her.

While, she didn't have overwhelming offensive numbers at Penn State, Bibbs has assurances that the 5-11 guard can score, and can be an impact player in the MEAC. Rembert will step in and play some shooting guard to give Bland a breather. Rembert and Bland could see a lot of action on the floor together. Bibbs said both guards are outstanding defenders.

### SMALL FORWARD

The only two players returning from last season should occupy this spot. With the Aggies lack of height a year ago, Christopher had to play out of position at the power forward spot.

This season Bibbs is loaded with power forwards, which should help Christopher develop at her natural position. Christopher missed seven games with an ankle injury, a factor that Bibbs believes also slowed her development.

When she was on the court, Christopher showed a willingness to do the little things – go after loose balls, crash the boards and play defense – to help her team win. "Emilee is turning into our vocal leader," said Bibbs. "She is the kind of player who is going to do things right, so that others will follow her example."

"If there is an instance when she doesn't get it right, she's going to work hard until she gets the job done. You like having that on your team."

Williams will play some shooting guard to spell Bland, but mostly she will play the 3. Williams showed a desire to be aggressive offensively as a freshman, but Bibbs says the sophomore out of Zachary, La., has been impressive on the defensive end.

"It's like there is a new Ahmad out there playing defense," said Bibbs. "I think if Ahmad puts her mind to it, she could lead the conference in steals one day. She is that quick. If Ahmad wants it, should could really be a great defensive player."

Williams averaged 5.6 points and 2.3 rebounds on 31 percent shooting last season. Her best scoring performance was a 19-point effort against S.C. State.

### POWER FORWARD

There are plenty of bodies at the power forward position, but not a lot of experience. Taylor-James will not be available to the Aggies until after the first semester.

Freshman Lonise Coulter will be looked to fill the void. Coulter could also see a lot of action at the center position as well. The Flint, Mich., native has excellent footwork and could turn into an important rebounder for Bibbs.

"She has the potential to be a force down in the post," said Bibbs about Coulter. "She's real go-getter, so at times we have to calm her down because she is really getting after it. But she is a person who is always in good spirits, and that's a good thing."

Freshmen Shantar Waddell and Sharee Avent will give the Aggies more depth at the 4 spot. Bibbs will also have Nyra Taborn once the junior middle hitter on the Aggies volleyball team is finished with her fall sport.

"We really didn't have much height down there last season," said Bibbs. So it's something we wanted to address right away."

### CENTER

There is more size to come when talking about the Aggies center position. Again, the Aggies are young here but talented. Freshman Lamona Smalley is still in the development stages as a player, but the talent she possesses has the Aggie coaching staff excited.

Bibbs also had quickness in the post with Gordon. Bibbs also likes Gordon's footwork and her ability to catch and make a move in the post. Six-foot five freshman LaPorsha Lowry closes out the center position. The Charlotte freshman has tremendous size and could become one of the better shot blockers in the MEAC.

"We have the height and the speed to be a good defensive team," said Bibbs. "Now, the question is, will we be willing to put in the work to make us a great defensive team?"

