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WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

A special section of the College Heights Herald ♦ Thursday, November 6, 1997

Starting



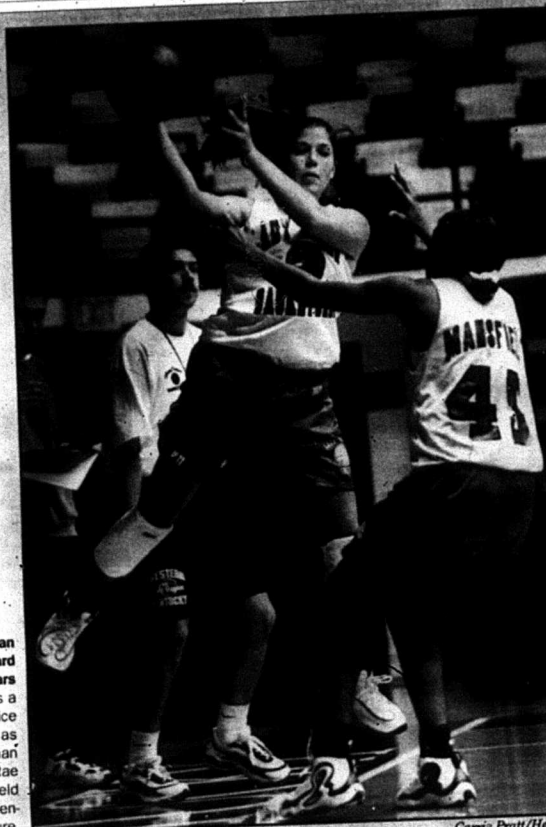
Carrie Pratt/Herald

The Lady
Toppers have a
new coach and
a new style

Above: Senior center Leslie Johnson, an All-American candidate, hopes to return to her old form and lead the Lady Toppers this season.

Over

SCHEDULE — PAGE 2A ♦ TEAM OUTLOOK — PAGE 3A
LADY TOPPER THEME — PAGE 4A ♦ ROSTER — PAGE 4A
PLAYER PROFILES — PAGES 5A - 11A



Freshman forward Rachel Byars attempts a pass in practice Oct. 25 as freshman forward ShaRae Mansfield applies defensive pressure.

Corrie Pratt/Herald

Lady Toppers

1997 - 1998 season schedule

November

6	Sports Tour Exhibition	7 p.m.
10	Basketball Travelers Exhibition	7 p.m.
14	Preseason NWIT (vs. Louisville)	7 p.m.
16	Preseason NWIT	TBA
20	Preseason NWIT (Semifinals)	TBA
21	Preseason NWIT (Finals)	TBA
25	Northwestern	7 p.m.
28	vs. Long Beach State*	6 p.m.
29	vs. St. Francis or Texas Tech*	TBA

December

3	Indiana	5 p.m.
5	Oregon	7 p.m.
8	Kentucky	7 p.m.
13	Miami (Ohio)	7 p.m.
20	vs. North Carolina**	3 p.m.
29	Xavier	7 p.m.

January

2	Arkansas State	7 p.m.
6	George Washington	7 p.m.
8	at South Alabama	7 p.m.
11	at Wisconsin	1:30 p.m.
15	Texas-Pan American	7 p.m.
17	Southwestern Louisiana	7 p.m.
22	at Arkansas State	7 p.m.
25	Louisiana Tech	2:30 p.m.
29	at Maine	6:30 p.m.
31	at Southwestern Louisiana	TBA

February

2	at New Orleans	7 p.m.
7	at Louisiana Tech	7 p.m.
14	Lamar	7 p.m.
16	New Orleans	4:30 p.m.
21	at Lamar	7 p.m.
26	South Alabama	7 p.m.
28	at Texas-Pan American	7 p.m.

March

5-7	Sun Belt Conference Championships in Ruston, La.	TBA
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* Games played at Cancun Shootout in Cancun, Mexico
 ** Games played at Beach Ball Doubleheader Classic in Myrtle Beach, S.C.
 All home games are in bold
 All times are Central

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Team ready for new start after soured season

◆ With a new-found attitude and a new style of play, enthusiasm has returned to Lady Topper basketball

By JERRY BREWER

Expectation and enthusiasm put on (big) red gloves and boxed somewhere around midcourt on a honey-colored Diddle Arena floor last winter.

Expectation knocked out enthusiasm in a grueling 12-round fight. By all accounts, it was the first time expectation had beaten enthusiasm in Diddle.

Expectation's prize for winning? Sole possession of the Lady Topper basketball team.

The Lady Toppers' love for the game was bruised and battered. A 1996-97 season that began with hype and NCAA Final Four aspirations ended with an uninspired 76-54 loss to Arizona in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Though Western finished at 22-9 and with a No. 22 ranking, the team didn't reach its potential.

"Last year, it wasn't much fun," said sophomore guard Jaime Walz, who as a high schooler marveled at the spirit and excitement the Lady Toppers had. "It was like a job."

In July, the bad taste from last winter became more sour. Coach Paul Sanderford, who had guided the Lady Toppers through 365 wins, 12 NCAA Tournament appearances and three Final Fours, left to try to make Nebraska into a national power.

Later that month, the university put Steve Small, an assistant with the Lady Toppers the past 13 seasons, in the head coach's spot.



First-year head coach Steve Small explains strategies to junior guard Katashia Witcher, senior guard Laurie Townsend and senior forward Sha'Ronda Allen during practice. The Lady Toppers take the court tonight in Diddle Arena for their first game, the Sports Tour Exhibition.

Enthusiasm asked for a rematch. Enthusiasm whipped expectation this time — quickly — in, oh, about the time it took Small to walk up to the podium at his press conference.

Youths dribbling basketballs on Diddle's floor during practice. Fans coming out of their slouched postures and journeying courtside to shoot free throws with the team. Lady Toppers dancing after made 3-point shots. An affable coach who lets his players play, shouting instructions with a smile.

That's Lady Topper basketball

now. It's like it used to be — fun.

"I'm enjoying keeping Lady Topper basketball at the level it has been," Small said. "I find humor in life. When basketball stops becoming a game, I personally will think it's time for me to get out. I promised my wife that when I retire from coaching, I'll go out and get a real job."

Western returns all five starters and 10 letterwinners from last season. In addition, this season's five-player recruiting class is ranked No. 6 nationally. But the Lady Toppers are leaving expectation on the floor.

his mouthpiece dangling from a puffy lip. They'll keep stepping over expectation instead of letting him get up and stare at them.

Western wants to learn from last season, correct past mistakes and leave the past behind.

"It's always frustrating to lose games that you were well capable of winning, to lose against teams who shouldn't have even been on the floor with you," said senior center Leslie Johnson, who helped Purdue reach the 1994 Final Four as a freshman before transferring to Western.

two years ago. "That's always going to be frustrating. But I think what frustrates you the most is knowing we can be so much better than what we're showing."

"It's a personal frustration, too. I was thinking, 'Man, I know I can rebound better than what I'm doing. Why am I not getting it done?'"

"But now I think it's so important to let last season go. I don't want to hear about Arizona. I don't want to hear about how we lost to Louisiana Tech at home. It's a new season. Let's go out there and get it done."

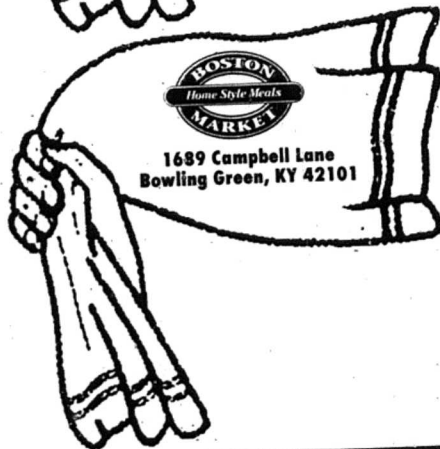
Western will play an up-tempo, full-court, pressure-oriented, fast-breaking style of play this season, which it hasn't done in the past few years. It's all part of an effort to make basketball fun again — to make the game a player's game.

"Our coaches are involved in the players' lives, and we have so much faith in the players," Small said. "When I became coach, I wanted to take the 'I' out of Lady Topper basketball and put the 'we' back in it. I hope my approach has rubbed off on the players."

"The players are the ones who play the game. They will have the leverage to win or lose ball games for us this year. I want them to get us to a position with two minutes left in the game with the score tied, and we'll let them win the game. This is our team. Our university. Our program. That's what I'm trying to portray in everything I do."

The fight is over. Excitement has retired, championship trophies still around his waist, opting to live out his days on the Hill. Now Western can battle a competitor of a different sort, one just as fierce as expectation.

The other team



These
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Team feels like a family

BY JERRY BREWER

Family picture: 15 players stand at center court in Diddle Arena, their hands raised on top of each other, smiles on the faces of all. Down close to the knee of senior forward Danielle McCulley is 3-year-old Lariah Stockton dribbling a basketball. In the middle of the player's huddle is 4-year-old Meri Kate Small, hiding from her daddy, who just happens to be the head coach. And then there are the parents. Western's five women's basketball coaches — off to the side a bit, grinning.

Oops, 3-year-old Lane Embry wasn't in the picture, as he was running around Diddle Arena. And the husbands and wives of the coaches are over there, out of focus, near the locker room. We'll have to try it again.

It's a family thing. You wouldn't understand.

That's what Lady Topper coach Steve Small figures.

In his inaugural season as the Lady Toppers' coach, Small has something no other team in the preseason Top 25 team has — a true family atmosphere.

All the coaches on Western's coaching staff are married with children, a characteristic lacking in the nation's 24 other top notch programs.

"I have a family here that backs me up," said junior center Wendi Huisman, whose hometown of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., is a 16-hour drive from Bowling Green. "That is something you can't replace. You can feel the family atmosphere here. It relaxes us and makes us feel no pressure."

So, how does this basketball family stack up?

With five returning starters, 10 let-terwinners and the No. 6 recruiting class in the nation, the Lady Toppers are one of those big families that people turn heads to see.

Guards

Senior Laurie Townsend leads a deep and talented backcourt from the point position. An All-Sun Belt Conference selection last season, Townsend averaged 9.1 points per game. Sophomore Jaime Walz (8.7 ppg) returns at shooting guard. She also averaged a team-best 3.7 assists last season. Walz has been slowed this preseason because of an arthroscopic knee operation she had done three weeks ago to repair a meniscus tear. But Walz is expected to be 100 percent by the Nov. 14 season opener.

Sophomore Jamie Britt (4.2 ppg), who made a successful transition from high school center to college guard last season, sprained an ankle on the first day of practice but has recovered. Her ability to create scoring opportunities and improved outside shooting will get her more playing time this season.

Junior Kátashia Witcher, a transfer from Barton County (Kan.) Community College, brings quickness and the ability to break down defenses to the Lady Toppers. She averaged 14.3 points, 6.3 assists, 5.5 rebounds and 3.5 steals per game last season and earned All-Jayhawk Conference honors.

Freshmen LaVonda Johnson, who is cousins with Britt, and Natalie Powers complete a talented but young backcourt. Powers, a finalist for Miss Kentucky Basketball, averaged 19 points, five rebounds and four assists for Owensboro Apollo High School. Johnson, perhaps the quickest Lady Topper, was a first-team All-State selection after averaging 23.9 points and 4.2 steals for Warren East High School.

Forwards

McCulley can and may play all five positions for Western. The senior averaged 13 points, nine rebounds, three assists and two steals for the Lady

Toppers last season.

Perhaps the most improved Lady Topper is junior Shea Lunsford (8.7 ppg, 5.8 rpg). Her numbers fell from the 11 points and six rebounds she averaged as a freshman due in part to a bout with mononucleosis last December. But Lunsford entered the preseason ready to play and has been dominant in practice.

"She has learned how to focus on what she has to accomplish," Small said. "In the past, she hasn't done that. Shea has matured so much over the past six to eight months."

Senior Sha'Ronda Allen will play a key role as Western's defensive stopper. At 5'11, she can defend at either the guard or forward position. Feisty, aggressive junior Kristi Hartley (4.0 ppg), who Small calls the team's spark plug, figures to get more minutes this season because the Lady Toppers' plan to play up tempo.

Freshman ShaRae Mansfield (6-2) may be the most talented recruit Western signed. Her versatility, poise and skill have Small thinking potential All-American. Mansfield, who also was a finalist for Miss Basketball, averaged 18 points and 10 rebounds for Louisville Manual High School as a senior.

Also in the picture at forward are 6-3 sophomore Jennifer McGinnis, who red-shirted last season because of back surgery, and 1996 Kentucky Miss Basketball Rachel Byars, who averaged 20 points and 10 rebounds for Union County High School last season.

Centers

Senior Leslie Johnson (15.6 ppg, 6.1 rpg) lost 31 pounds this summer and looks like the player who averaged 19 points and nine rebounds as a freshman for Purdue in 1994, which reached the Final Four that year. The All-American candidate is joined by Huisman, who at 6-4 is Western's tallest player.

Lady Topper roster

3	LaVonda Johnson	guard
	5-6 freshman	
5	Natalie Powers	guard
	5-11 freshman	
10	Rachel Byars	fwd.
	6-1 freshman	
13	Sha'Ronda Allen	fwd.
	5-11 senior	
14	Laurie Townsend	guard
	5-7 senior	
21	Jaime Walz	guard
	5-11 sophomore	
24	Kátashia Witcher	guard
	5-6 junior	
25	Wendi Huisman	center
	6-4 junior	
30	Shea Lunsford	fwd.
	6-2 junior	
31	Kristi Hartley	fwd.
	5-11 junior	
33	Danielle McCulley	fwd.
	6-3 senior	
34	Leslie Johnson	center
	6-1 senior	
42	Jamie Britt	guard
	5-9 sophomore	
45	ShaRae Mansfield	fwd.
	6-2 freshman	
52	Jennifer McGinnis	fwd.
	6-3 junior	

Good Luck
Lady Topper
Basketball

College Heights Herald

November 6, 1997

Herald

Guard's game like poetry

BY JERRY BREWER

In its purest form, basketball is poetry in motion, an open court where players physically show their desire to compete and love for the game.

But sometimes the pressures of winning cause those motives to stray. Laurie Townsend has a way to combat that.

She writes poems about basketball.

Last season things got tight for Townsend and the Lady Toppers. They had fallen out of the Top 25 and had suffered a most embarrassing 63-50 loss on the road to Arkansas State, a game in which the point guard had an 0-for-7 shooting performance.

And then No. 4 Louisiana Tech was coming to Diddle Arena on Sunday.

So Townsend started typing. She called it "The Game."

Here's an excerpt:

I concentrate, the pressure mounts,
My palms begin to sweat,
Butterflies make my stomach turn.

Revenge I have to get.
Townsend scored a career-high 24 points against Louisiana Tech that Sunday. A struggling Western team regained respect and its spot in the Top 25.

Now Townsend is a senior, ready to lead the Lady Toppers

Laurie Townsend, 14

Senior Guard

Height: 5'7"

Hometown: Owensboro, Ky.

Last Season
Points: 9.1
Rebounds: 2.1

into another expectation-filled season.

"Laurie Townsend is a very focused senior," Western coach Steve Small said. "She has a new attitude, a new approach to the game, and she is ready to compete this season."

Known as a fighter, Townsend enters this season after a junior year when she was often criticized for her play. Whenever the Lady Toppers lost last season, the blame often fell on the guards.

It was said the guards were not quick enough and they didn't get the ball into the post — considered the Lady Toppers' strength — often enough.

Here's the flip side: Townsend averaged 9.1 points per game last season. She earned All-Sun Belt Conference honors.

"We just kind of took it, and

half the time we just let it roll off our backs," Townsend said. "A lot of times it was our fault. A lot of times it wasn't. People did do a lot of criticism, and we just took it. That's part of our job."

But when criticism reached its peak, Townsend showed her mettle. Flash back to the Louisiana Tech game. Flash back to a three-game stretch last January when Townsend scored 48 points (16-point average) after a bad game in a loss to Iowa.

"I try not to let criticism affect me very much," Townsend said. "I just try to come out, bounce back and try to get a win."

"Ever since I was young, I've been a competitive person. I don't like people to get the best of me. I've always been a firm believer that if you get knocked down, you should get back up and go at it again."

Townsend has persevered and looks to build on to what has been a solid collegiate career during her final year.

But, as with any player in the public's eye, there will always be questions — always be expectations — always be pressure.

always be

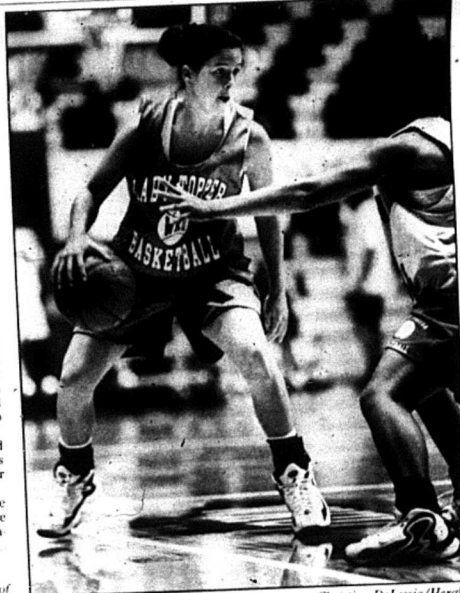
Poetry

A little ball — eight pounds of

a basketball's its name.

A dribble, a pass, a shot to win.

Man, I LOVE This game!



Christine DeLusso/Herald

Senior guard Laurie Townsend breaks down the defense in practice Tuesday, with pressure by freshman guard LaVonda Johnson.

Johnson seeking old form

BY JERRY BREWER

Two No. 34 jerseys, one stitched in crimson and the other in white, rest comfortably on bangers in a Diddle Arena locker room, both with "Johnson" written above them.

After a one-year separation, senior center Leslie Johnson will don her old number again, one that revives memories of sterling seasons past and achieved accomplishments.

Rather than ask guard Stacie Gamble, who graduated last year, to give up her No. 34 number, Johnson instead wore No. 43 in her first season with the Lady Toppers.

"I didn't want to come in here and bombard my way to get that number," said Johnson, who transferred to Western two years ago after one and a half seasons at Purdue because of team turmoil. "I was like much respect to Stacie. I've had different numbers, but 34 is my collegiate number."

The number switch is symbolic of a back-to-the-basics movement by Johnson. It's a move back to days of glory when Johnson was a third-team All-American who led Purdue to the 1994 NCAA Final Four.

She averaged 19 points and nine rebounds per game as a freshman on the Boilermakers' Final Four squad and then garnered national Freshman of the Year honors.

Leslie Johnson, 34

Senior Center

Height: 6'1"

Hometown: Fort Wayne, Ind.

Last Season
Points: 15.6
Rebounds: 6.1

"I want to get back to the player I once was," said Johnson, whose statistics fell to 16 points and six rebounds per game last season partially because of a sprained ankle suffered in December.

I was disappointed the most in my rebounding. That's three whole boards I could've gotten some offensive rebounds and put-backs to raise my scoring average if I would've gotten more rebounds."

Johnson dropped 21 pounds off her 6-1 frame this past summer. She has trimmed down 73 pounds since arriving at Western.

The weight loss means more quickness in the post for Johnson who, despite the extra pounds, already had near-deadly post skills filled with jukes, fakes, fade-aways, and good footwork.

"When I was a freshman, I

used to do anything I could to avoid going against Leslie in practice," junior center Wendi Huisman said. "I tried to get on her team. I tried to get somebody else to guard her. When I first played against her, I was like, 'What am I doing in Division I college basketball?'"

"If you can guard Leslie Johnson, you can guard anybody in the country. She's definitely got the talent and skills to play pro basketball."

And here's the thing about Johnson. She whips her teammates in practice but teaches and encourages them to do better. It's a leadership quality she has developed with experience.

"Leslie's year ethic and her focus this year has been nothing short of excellent," Western coach Steve Small said. "And she has emerged as a vocal leader on this basketball team."

In short, Johnson is ready. Ready to play. Ready to prove she's still got it. Ready to help this Lady Topper team etch its name in the history books as one of this storied program's elite.

"This is the first time I can even sort of open my mouth and say I'm in shape," Johnson said, chuckling. "It used to be just raw ability, just skill, just talent that got me over the hump. But after playing last year and getting back into game shape and working hard this summer, I expect nothing but a great season from myself."

Conference standings 1996-1997 season

Team	W	L	Pct.
Louisiana Tech	12	2	.857*
Western	12	2	.857*
Arkansas State	10	4	.714
New Orleans	10	4	.714
South Alabama	5	9	.357
Texas Pan-American	3	11	.214
Lamar	2	12	.143
Southwestern Louisiana	2	12	.143

* Regular season Co-champs

Sun Belt Conference Tournament Champs

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Go Toppers!

Senior's up-tempo style key to Lady Tops defense

BY MIKE FINCH

For the first time in two years, Sha'Ronda Allen is excited about playing basketball.

The 5-11 senior guard/forward is looking forward to the upcoming season like it is her freshman year. She has a new attitude and a new drive.

"I wanted to leave the Hill with a positive attitude," Allen said. "With Coach (Steve) Small's style of play, playing basketball has become fun again. I look forward to practice and to playing. It's kind of like a new beginning."

Allen will probably benefit the most of any of the Lady Toppers under Small's style, an up-tempo, run-and-gun style of play Western hasn't seen in a couple of years.

And Allen has adjusted to it. "With no disrespect to Coach (Paul) Sanderford, he's a great coach, but we were playing under him," Allen said. "We were the players, he was the coach. We only got credit for anything that happened on the court when we did some-

Sha'Ronda Allen, 13

Senior Forward

Height: 5'11"

Hometown: Louisville, Ky.

Last Season
Points: 2.6
Rebounds: 2.1

thing wrong or when we didn't win. Coach Small's not like that. He's a player's coach. He realizes that players win and lose games, and he's just there to help guide us.

"Playing under Coach Sanderford, I felt like a robot. He was so into controlling every play of the game. We're like a pack of wild dogs, and Coach Small has let us loose."

The up-tempo style benefits Allen because of her quickness and defensive skills.

"That's my game," she said. "Defense and rebounding. I'm

not a scorer, but I might score some more points now than I would have before. This is how I like to play the game."

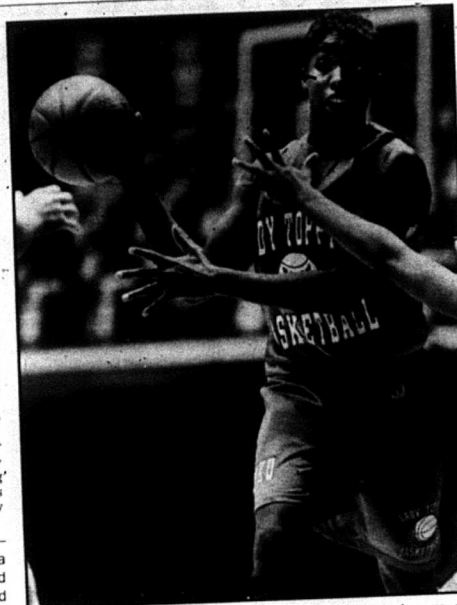
Small "doesn't look for Allen's role to change, just to grow."

"Sha'Ronda will continue to play the role of key defensive stopper for this team," he said. "Because of our new system, I look for her to be a spark. I see a player who can stop the opponent, rebound, be physical and even score. I look and see the same spark I saw in her as a freshman, that bit of her that's just a little bit cocky."

And Allen is just waiting to prove herself again.

"I'm adjusting very well," she said. "I'm feeding off my teammates and they're feeding off me. There aren't any robots out here anymore, just Lady Topper basketball players."

Senior forward Sha'Ronda Allen attempts a pass around Bowling Green freshman guard LaVonda Johnson in practice Tuesday.



Christine DeLessio/Herald

Silence sends big message

BY JERRY BREWER

Hers is a silent grace, like leaves falling on an autumn day.

Danielle McCulley's game is so smooth, so versatile, so complete. She's a scorer, rebounder, defender, passer and leader. And her 6-3 frame makes her a most-feared player.

"Danielle McCulley is what all the opposing coaches talk about," Western coach Steve Small said. "When I talk to coaches around the country, they say, 'Man, if I had Danielle McCulley on my team.' She is truly one of the best small forwards in the college game."

But the soft-spoken, lead-by-example senior forward is not getting the national recognition that many coaches around the country feel she deserves.

"Greatness is often defined by only one stellar trait (i.e. scoring or rebounding ability) a player possesses."

Perhaps McCulley's greatness lies in the fact that she's good at so many things.

Here are her stats from last season: 12.8 points per game, 8.7 rebounds per game, three assists per game, two steals per game and 76 percent shooting from the free-throw line.

But despite her long line of stats, none of the nation's basketball magazines has McCulley listed as even an honorable mention

Danielle McCulley, 33

Senior Forward

Height: 6'1"

Hometown: Gary, Ind.

Last Season
Points: 12.8
Rebounds: 8.7

All-American.

"I've never been the type of player who's concerned with whether my name's going to be in the paper," McCulley said. "I'm the type of player who just goes out there and tries to let the game come to me."

McCulley goes about doing her job without being boastful. Without trash talking. Her laid-back style may hurt her as McCulley often goes unnoticed because of her consistency.

But her teammates respect her.

"She's blessed with so much ability," freshman forward Rachel Byars said. "She has already taught me so much about college basketball and what it takes to be a good player."

McCulley transferred to Western two years ago after spending her first two seasons at

Purdue, which advanced to the NCAA Final Four in 1994. McCulley and senior center Leslie Johnson, her roommate and friend, both left the Boilermakers at the same time because of team turmoil.

Five starters return from last season's 22-9 team this season, and the Lady Toppers have high hopes once again.

So, what does it take for a team to reach the Final Four?

"The main two things that are going to get you there are defense and rebounding," McCulley said. "Your offense is going to come, but you've got to be able to rebound and stop your opponent. If we do those two things, then I don't see why we wouldn't make it as far as we can go."

For national hype's sake, perhaps McCulley can give just one instance of trash talking.

McCulley, say a forward has been containing you all game but by using uncalled fouls. She keeps yacking in your ear about it, too.

Finally, you score and get fouled by that player, who subsequently fell to the ground, in the process. Standing over that player, what would you say to her, Danielle?

"You can't hold me," McCulley said. Then she burst into laughter.

Well, there's an All-American smile, at least.

Player	mi/gm	rs/gm	ast	ppg
Leslie Johnson	26.9	6.1	38	15.6
Danielle McCulley	28.9	8.7	89	12.8
Laurie Townsend	29.2	2.1	81	9.1
Jaime Walz	27.8	3.0	97	8.7
Shea Lunsford	20.7	5.8	18	8.7
Tarshia Bronner*	16.9	4.5	10	7.5
Jamie Britt	9.8	1.5	25	4.2
Kristi Hartley	10.9	2.7	19	4.0
Stacie Gamble*	16.0	2.9	42	3.0
Sha'Ronda Allen	9.7	2.1	14	2.6
Jaana Heikkila*	6.9	1.4	21	2.0
Tenisha Pinnix*	5.2	1.7	8	1.8
Wendi Huisman	5.4	1.1	1	1.5
Jennifer McGinnis	3.0	0	0	0

* seniors last season

Lady Topper

1996-1997 statistics

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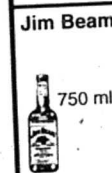
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Bud & Bud Light \$31.99
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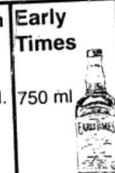
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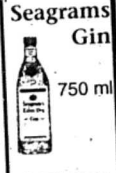
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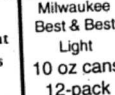
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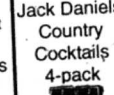
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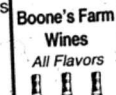
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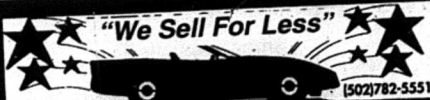
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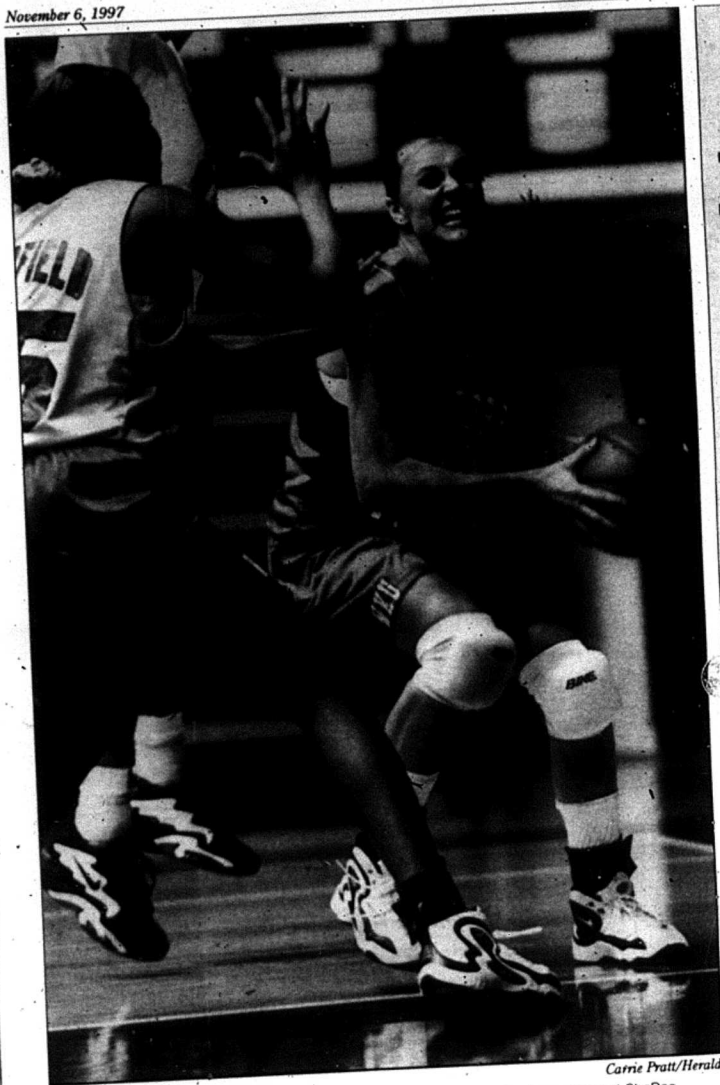
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Carrie Pratt/Herald

Junior forward Kristi Hartley attempts a shot during practice while freshman forward ShaRae Mansfield traps her on the baseline.

'Crowd favorite' sparks Lady Topper teammates

BY TRAVIS MAYO

Losing is unacceptable for Kristi Hartley. The Lady Topper junior forward has won all her life.

She won her first state basketball title as an eighth grader and added another her junior year of high school. Hartley averaged 33.7 points and 14.4 rebounds as a senior center at Roy High School in New Mexico, where she finished with a state record 3,260 points.

"When we lose, I hate it," Hartley said.

She doesn't think Western has proven enough in her first two seasons. Now Hartley wants to win on the Hill.

"The last two years we have not shown anybody that we have anything," Hartley said. "But I think this year we can really show something. We have the talent to do it — it's just having a little bit of luck and making everything click together."

If everything's going to click on this team, its new coach said

Kristi Hartley, 31

Junior Forward

Height: 5-11

Hometown:
Roy, N.M.

Last Season
Points: 4.0
Rebounds: 2.7



Hartley will be a factor. Calling Hartley a "crowd favorite," Western coach Steve Small said her hustle and enthusiasm will also be a factor in Hartley's role this season, which will be helping the team win.

"If helping the team win means going in and taking two charges, or blocking shots, or diving for the ball out of bounds to save one or scoring 10 straight points for the team, she just gives you everything she's got," Small said.

Giving it her all was how Hartley was raised. She was

taught that if she didn't do something 100 percent, she shouldn't be doing it at all. She wants people to leave Diddle Arena with that kind of impression — her giving everything on the floor.

Junior center Wendi Huisman knows what kind of talent Hartley possesses as a spark for the team.

"That girl can score," Huisman said. "She can score just as well as she can do anything."

Hartley averaged four points and 2.7 rebounds in 11 minutes a game last season, along with a 55.8 field goal percentage. She also brings the phrase "no fear" to life. To Hartley, that's natural.

"It's something that you just have or you don't," she said. "I've never really been afraid of anybody, no matter if they outweigh me by 70 pounds or are five inches taller. I think that's the kind of attitude you have to have, especially on the college level."

And Kristi Hartley is certainly not afraid of winning.

Lady Topper history

First year of women's basketball — 1921

Overall All-Time Record — 526-256 (.673)

NCAA Tournament Appearances — 12

1996-1997 record — 22-9

Final 1996-1997 AP ranking — 22nd

Head Coach — Steve Small

Associate Head Coach — Mary Taylor
Cowles

Assistant Coaches — Blane Embry,

Lillie Mason-Stockton

Administrative Assistant — Debbie Houk

Head Athletic Trainer — Bill Edwards

Women's Basketball Trainer — Paula
Upright

Letterwinners returning — 9

Letterwinners lost — 4

Starters returning — 5

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McGinnis gets chance

By SARAH RAMSEY

For the past two years, Jennifer McGinnis has waited patiently — enduring more than one person should have to — so she could play basketball for Western.

She waited patiently while she sat out the 1995-96 season after transferring from Duke.

She waited patiently after being red-shirted last season because of a back injury she received in the first three minutes of the season opener.

She waited patiently as she underwent laser surgery in early December.

But now there is no more waiting, and all her patience has been drained.

The junior forward is practicing with the Lady Toppers in some pain, but is enjoying every minute of it.

"I will always have some pain, but it is not as intense as it was last year," McGinnis said. "I have gotten used to it."

Western coach Steve Small said he looks forward to seeing McGinnis return to basketball.

"McGinnis is playing with a little bit of pain, but is very excited, happy and

nervous, which is to be expected because she sat out for two years," Small said.

After sitting out, McGinnis is going to have to find her place on the team.

"A lot of what she has to go through is finding herself and her niche, which is exciting and fun to watch," Small said.

"I know she is excited to be out there and contribute to the team."

And if her high school stats are any indication of her talent, Western is going to have an excellent addition to the team.

While at Oak Ridge High School in Oak Ridge, Tenn., McGinnis scored a last-second shot to win the Tennessee State Championship title in 1994.

McGinnis was the lone freshman on the 1994-95 Duke team, playing in 13 of 31 games and achieving 333 percent from three-point range, 429 percent from the field and 556 percent from the free-throw line.

"McGinnis is one of the best shooters on the team from anywhere on the court," Small said.

"She is an extraordinary girl with the ball in her hand. She has a really good feel for the game."

Jennifer McGinnis, 52



Junior Forward

Height: 6'3"

Hometown: Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Duke University Points: 2.6 Rebounds: 2.2

DETERMINED: Lunsford called 'most improved'

By CHRIS ABRELL

For the dedicated, there are no excuses, and junior forward Shea Lunsford said illness was no excuse for a season she felt was below her potential.

"(Being sick) kind of took my confidence down," Lunsford said. "I guess I didn't handle it that well. I think I'm 100 percent now, and I'm ready to get started."

Lunsford missed six games in the middle of last season with mononucleosis. Even though she feels she could've done better, new Coach Steve Small said he saw nothing but determination in her preparation for this season.

"In my eyes and the staff's eyes, Shea Lunsford ranks up there as one of the most improved players on the team," Small said.

"She took advantage of the summer and hit the weight room hard, got herself focused."

Lunsford was the Lady Toppers' fourth-leading scorer at 8.7 points per game and finished third on the team in rebounding with 5.8 per contest. She also

managed to equal her career best, scoring 22 points at Wofford.

Lunsford said by all indications this season would be a good one for her and the Lady Toppers, and that the team was

responding well to Small's new upbeat style of leadership.

"Practice is going well," Lunsford said. "The team is going extremely hard, and (the team is) getting along. The attitude is there, and things are better than they have been in the past."

Small said Lunsford's range of abilities offer many possibilities for her on the court.

"Shea can score from 15 feet. She can take it off the glass," he said. "Shea's jumping ability is something to behold. She has a knack to go and get the ball on the offensive boards and block shots. I'm going to give her the freedom to go and get those things done."

Lunsford still maintains modesty about her personal goals.

"I've been working on my defense a lot," she said. "I want to try and do a little bit of everything, just whatever I need to do to help the team."

Shea Lunsford, 30



Junior Forward

Height: 6'2"

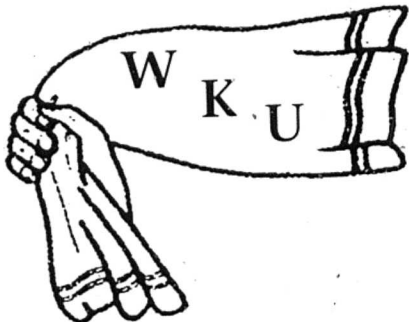
Hometown: McKee, Ky.

Last Season Points: 8.7 Rebounds: 5.8

Street & Smith's TOP 25

1. Tennessee
 2. Louisiana Tech*
 3. Old Dominion
 4. North Carolina
 5. Connecticut
 6. Stanford
 7. Illinois
 8. Texas Tech
 9. Florida
 10. Vanderbilt
 11. Alabama
 12. Georgia
 13. Iowa
 14. Virginia
 15. Arizona
 16. Colorado
 17. Western Washington
 18. George Washington
 19. Duke
 20. Stephen F. Austin
 21. Wisconsin
 22. Kansas
 23. Nebraska
 24. Marquette
 25. UCLA
- * Sun Belt opponent

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•Must have I.D. ready•

November 6, 1997

Herald

Speed, defense make Witcher hard to handle

BY SCOTT SISCO

The women on the Lady Toppers basketball team cringe when they are at practice. They aren't scared of failure or their opponents.

They are scared they will have to play against junior guard Katashia Witcher.

In fact, Western coach Steve Small said Witcher is so fast she either blows past her teammates or steals the ball away before they know what hit them.

Witcher is a 5-6 junior college transfer. She led Barton County Community College to a 28-5 record last year, including 14.2 in the Kansas Jayhawk Community College Conference.

She received all-conference honors last season while averaging 14.3 points, 6.3 assists, 3.5 steals and 5.5 rebounds per game.

The team captain was also selected to the Region 6 All-Tournament team.

Small said one of Witcher's greatest assets is her quickness.

Katashia Witcher, 24

Junior Guard

Height: 5-6

Hometown: Athens, Ga.

Barton Com. Col. Points: 14.3 Rebounds: 5.5



"We have somebody that can guard the quickness the (Louisiana Tech) point guard has," Small said.

Small said Witcher has a great work ethic, works hard to keep up that quickness also has a great point guard mentality.

"I try to work hard on my defense," she said.

Witcher said her defense is probably the best part of her game and takes it very seriously.

Small said besides her quickness, she is also very determined and strong.

Witcher had already committed to Western when former Western coach Paul Sanderford announced he was leaving the Hill for Nebraska.

Instead of sitting out a year somewhere else, she decided to come here and try her luck with Small's system.

That decision could have been a very good one for Witcher.

She said she fits in Small's up and down the floor system of basketball better than with Sanderford's half court system.

She said Small's system is about the same as the one she flourished in at Barton County. Witcher said she also likes playing for Western because she is closer to home in Athens, Ga.

Witcher said she also gets along well with the other Lady Toppers.

"I fit in well with every body," Witcher said.

Witcher is looking forward to using her speed on her opponents instead of just her teammates when the season begins.

So are her teammates.



Carrin Pratt/Herald

Katashia Witcher drives past senior guard Laurie Townsend.

Junior ready for playing time

BY TRAVIS MAYO

There's always a bright spot on the sidelines for the Lady Toppers. Bad days don't darken it, but only bring encouragement. The ray of sunshine is Wendi Huisman, lover of life.

"I just want people to know that I love life, and I love everything about Lady Topper basketball," she said.

The junior center would also love to see more playing time this season, but knows that such a decision will come down to how hard she wants it. If it happens, it happens, Huisman said.

She's done nothing but improve her first two seasons on the Hill. The reason for that has been going up against senior center Leslie Johnson and senior forward Danielle McCulley every day in practice.

Huisman said learning from the upperclassmen has been her goal the past two years. Western coach Steve Small said it's paid off.

"There's nobody that Wendi's going to go into the game and face who's going to

Wendi Huisman, 25

Junior Center

Height: 6-4

Hometown: Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Last Season Points: 1.5 Rebounds: 1.1



be better than what she's taken in practice daily," he said.

Huisman also wants to contribute to a couple of championships for the Lady Toppers this season.

"We want a Sun Belt championship and we want an NCAA championship, and I think we have the talent to do it," she said.

Huisman is also happy with the new system under Small. She said while the new coach is physically working the team members as hard as he can, Small's keeping them mentally relaxed. Huisman added that

the players are just doing what they have naturally done since they were children — play basketball.

In the eyes of close friend and roommate, junior forward Kristi Hartley, Huisman has the ability to play the game and play it well. Hartley added that she's always the same, cheerful Wendi Huisman.

"When you see her cheering on the sideline, you know that she really means it," Hartley said.

"That's Wendi and that's the one thing she takes a lot of pride in — making sure we know she's always going to be there cheering for us."

Hartley will be in Huisman's wedding next June. By that time, both would like to be talking about a season to remember that ended a few months earlier.

Speaking in the present, Small stressed the impact Huisman has on the women's basketball program.

"There hasn't been a better example of what Lady Topper basketball is all about than Wendi Huisman," he said.

All-Sun Belt 1996-1997 conference team

- Alisa Burns, junior center, Louisiana Tech
- Tamara Carter, junior forward, South Alabama
- Julie Hagood, freshman guard, Arkansas State
- Tamicha Jackson, freshman guard, Louisiana Tech
- Leslie Johnson, junior center, Western
- Monica Maxwell, sophomore forward, Louisiana Tech
- Danielle McCulley, junior forward, Western
- Amy Towne, junior guard, Arkansas State
- Laurie Townsend, junior guard, Western
- Amanda Wilson, sophomore forward, Louisiana Tech

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Walz returns to court after preseason surgery

BY CHRIS ABRELL

It's just a new season, a new coach, a little surgery, no big deal — not when you're Jaime Walz.

"Just by watching practice I think everybody's going really hard — a lot harder than we probably did last year," Walz said. "It's a whole new attitude, and that's the big thing. At practice we're going at it hard, but we're having fun at it."

"Coach (Paul) Sanderford put a lot of pressure on us last year. This year Coach (Steve) Small just wants to go out and play hard, and if we play hard we're going to win the games."

Walz had a small meniscus tear repaired three weeks ago. She said not knowing was the worst part of the experience.

"Whenever I would run I would hear it clicking and there was pain," Walz said. "When you're hurt, you don't know what's wrong. I'm just glad it's taken care of and I can look forward to the season now."

Walz is already back at practice, and Small said she would most likely finish rehabilitation in time for the Lady

Toppers' first game.

"We feel like she's about to break through and become the All-American that I know she can be," Small said. "I think she will come back a whole lot better. I'm looking for big things."

As a freshman, Walz accomplished some big things. She started 25 of 31 games in 1996 while moving into the school's top 10 in three-point field goals (49), attempts (165) and percentage (.297), and led the team in assists (31 per game). She also averaged 8.7 points per game.

Walz said Small's new approach to coaching lifted some of the

pressures she felt last season. "I have (the pressure), yes, but not as much as I had to in the past," Walz said. "I know the team is going to rely on me to show leadership. We're talented enough that if we all go out and play, we're going to win the games."

The Sophomore guard said the preseason has only been hectic on the surface and the change in leadership only amounts to a newfound feeling of fun for Lady Topper basketball — and peace of mind for her.

Jaime Walz, 21
Sophomore Guard

Height: 5'11"

Hometown: Fort Thomas, Ky.

Last Season Points: 8.7 Assists: 3.7

Guard goes to boards

BY JENNY CHRISTIAN

Not only did Jamie Britt make a smooth transition to collegiate basketball last year, she also moved from playing inside (she was a high school center) to the shooting guard position. Coach Steve Small said the 5-9 sophomore adds another dimension to guard play.

"She's a good shooter with the ability to go inside," Small said.

Small added that defensive players are not used to a guard going to the boards.

Last season, Britt showed her talent by grabbing 43 rebounds. She shot 51.8 from the field and 37.5 from the outside. Averaging 9.8 minutes a game, Britt, a native of Bowling Green, racked up a career-high 15 points and three steals in the game against Wofford.

"She had a very, very good freshman year — she accomplished a lot for a freshman," Small said.

Britt is now concentrating on the Lady Toppers' 1997-98 season.

"I want to step it up and play more minutes," Britt said. "As a team, win Sun Belt Conference, go to NCAA Tournament and possibly the Final Four."

If the workouts are any indication of the future, then the Lady Toppers should be

able to accomplish these goals.

"We're playing a whole lot looser and playing together," Britt said. "If you play loose, you'll be successful."

While most would look at this goal as added stress, Britt sees it as just the opposite. To her, basketball is an outlet.

"For me, it's stress relief," Britt said. "When you're going through college, you need a way to relieve stress."

Britt added that basketball has helped her to become more responsible by having to juggle practice, games and classes.

This season is also a reunion of sorts for Britt, who is joined on the team by her cousin, freshman guard LaVonda Johnson.

"It's like old times," Britt said.

The two played high school ball together at Warren East, and now that Britt has settled in to the Western squad, she is helping to make the transition smooth for Johnson.

"I see Jamie as being a mentor," Johnson said. "She helps me out a lot, tells me what to expect."

Whether she's going to the boards or shooting from the field, it is evident to all that Britt is a hard-working player.

"She's a great basketball player with a lot of talent," Johnson said.

Jamie Britt, 42
Sophomore Guard

Height: 5'9"

Hometown: Bowling Green, Ky.

Last Season Points: 4.2 Rebounds: 1.5

Freshman adds spark with smile

BY JENNY CHRISTIAN

Coach Steve Small has a saying: "When you feel terrific, notify your face."

Freshman LaVonda Johnson personifies this saying every day.

"She's all smiles," Small said. "She ran a 5:50 mile and smiled the whole way. She brings a lot of spark."

Graduating from Warren East High School, the 5-6 guard led her team in scoring and steals her senior year. Johnson averaged 23.9 points per game and 4.2 steals per game. From the field, Johnson shot just over 50 percent, and from the three-point line she shot 37 percent.

Johnson is now on the Hill, drawn here by the reputation of the Lady Toppers and the location.

"I like the enthusiasm," Johnson said. "It's close to home — and I like the program."

LaVonda Johnson, 3
Freshman Guard

Height: 5'6"

Hometown: Bowling Green, Ky.

Warren East HS Points: 23.9 Steals: 4.2

Preparing for the Lady Tops' 1997-98 season, Johnson has set some goals for herself.

"Just to play hard and not to be timid," Johnson said.

Small feels confident in his guard to do just that. He said she can do a lot with the ball, she's quick and she's not afraid.

"She's just a spark plug," Small said.

When talking about basket

ball, Johnson is smiles and tells what the sport means to her. "I love basketball," Johnson said. "It's a hobby. It's just my only hobby really."

Sophomore guard Jamie Britt knows quite a bit about this "spark plug." Not only did the two play together at Warren East — they are cousins.

"On the floor she's aggressive," Britt said. "Off the floor she's kind of shy."

When thinking of what Johnson brings to the Lady Tops' squad, Britt had one thing to say.

"Quickness — a whole lot of quickness."

Johnson's love of the game is evident when she speaks of it. With such an impressive high school career, the future looks bright for this talented player.

"This coach is excited to have her in the program," Small said.

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Diddle Arena

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Restrooms

Restroom facilities are located on both levels of Diddle Arena. Women's restrooms are located through ramps 4 and 8 on both levels adjacent to entrances 2 and 3. Men's restrooms are located on both levels through ramps 1 and 5, adjacent to entrances 1 and 4.

Concessions

Concessions Stands are located through ramps 1, 4, 5 and 8 on the second level of Diddle Arena. WKU concessions serves Pepsi products, popcorn, nachos, candy, hot dogs, coffee, hot chocolate and Domino's pepperoni pizza.

Impressive freshman draws comparison to All-American

BY SCOTT SISCO

ShaRae Mansfield used to look forward to the big Louisville Manual vs. Louisville Male football game. Now she looks forward to a new rivalry, Western vs. Louisiana Tech.

Mansfield said she always looked forward to the spirit week festivities before the Manual/Male game.

She said rumor has it that the Western and Louisiana Tech rivalry is much bigger. And she's ready for it.

Mansfield, a 6-2 freshman forward from Louisville, was a 1996 second team preseason Street and Smith's High School All-American and a starter for the 1997 Kentucky All-Star team.

Mansfield led her team to a 26-3 record last year while averaging 18 points a game. Manual was ranked as high as No. 10 in the nation by USA TODAY, but was knocked off by Elizabethtown in the Region 7 Tournament.

Coach Steve Small said the upperclassmen on the team are looking over their shoulders at Mansfield. They know she is the

ShaRae Mansfield, 45

Freshman Forward

Height: 6'2"

Hometown: Louisville, Ky.

Manual HS
Points: 18.0
Rebounds: 10.0



future of Lady Topper Basketball.

"ShaRae has the ability to be the next Lillie Mason," Small said, referring to current Lady Topper restricted earnings coach Lillie Mason-Stockton, who was a three-time All-American while playing at Western in the mid-1980s.

Small said Mansfield is as impressive a freshman as Western has ever had. She has good speed and agility for her size and she can outrun someone her size.

Former coach Paul Sanderford's decision to leave didn't affect her decision to come here. Mansfield isn't worried about

Small's first year at the helm for Western.

"The program is in good hands," she said.

Small has had Mansfield working in the weight room to prepare her to play against some of the top teams in the nation.

She also worked on her jump shot and learned the plays in Small's play book.

Mansfield said she enjoys the atmosphere on the Hill. She said she doesn't feel much pressure to play perfect basketball. The team is just a big, happy family.

Mansfield said the main reason she came to Western was for the communications program. Basketball is just a perk.

"When I came here on my college visit, I knew I was meant to be here," she said.

Freshman forward ShaRae Mansfield snags the rebound from junior guard Katashia Witcher during practice. A product of Louisville Manual High School, Mansfield led the Lady Crimsons to a 26-3 record last year.



Carrie Pratt/Herald

Powers carbon copy of senior

BY SARAH RAMSEY

If Natalie Powers is the future of Lady Topper basketball, she looks a lot like the past and the present.

The freshman guard has been compared to one of television's Full House twins and former Lady Topper Renee Westmoreland by Coach Steve Small.

"Powers and (senior guard Laurie) Townsend remind me of Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen because of their similarities on and off the court," Small said.

"She also reminds me of Renee Westmoreland because she has a real head for the game and understands it very well. She is a good passer and has the ability to come down the floor, stop and shoot."

Powers and Townsend may not look like twins, but could be mistaken as twins.

Both played for Apollo High School in Owensboro. Both set numerous high school records, played on Kentucky All-Star

Natalie Powers, 5

Freshman Guard

Height: 5'11"

Hometown: Owensboro, Ky.

Apollo HS
Points: 18.8
Rebounds: 5.1



teams and were Academic All-Star selections.

Powers averaged 18.8 points, 5.1 rebounds and 4.2 assists during her high school career. She was also named team MVP for three years. Powers played in 133 games, started as a freshman and did not miss a game all four years.

Both Powers and Townsend came to Western and know the value of a good education. Powers even recently pledged Alpha Omicron Pi sorority, the

same one where Townsend is a member.

Powers made the decision to play for Western on her own but is excited to play with Townsend again because Townsend has taught her a lot about the game.

"Powers is the future of Lady Topper basketball," Small said.

"When you look at all the freshmen, she is the future. She'll learn a lot and will contribute to the program."

Powers also looks forward to being coached by Small because "he enjoys the game and makes it fun for us even though we are working hard."

"I am ready to come out and do anything the coaches need even if it is to come off the bench, play defense and get some rebounds," Powers said.

"Being at Western is everything I hoped it would be. I am really glad that I am here and I know I made the right decision."

Byars adjusting to college game

BY MIKE FINCH

Expectations are something Rachel Byars has lived with all of her life. They're also something she'd like to forget.

The 6-1 freshman forward and reigning Kentucky Miss Basketball is ready to drop those expectations to be a part of the team. The Lady Topper team.

"Everybody here is as good as everybody else," she said. "You have to work for everything you get just like everybody else, and it's kind of nice."

But Byars isn't intimidated by the expectations of being the 10th Kentucky Miss Basketball to play for Western.

"I try not to put any pressure on myself," Byars said. "I've learned that college is a lot different than high school, how much the game is different."

Byars said the intensity of the college game was something she had to adjust to.

"In high school we would practice, but not like here," she said. "Everything is so much more intense here. When we practice, we practice hard the whole time."

Byars is also a member of what Western coach Steve Small

Rachel Byars, 10

Freshman Forward

Height: 6'1"

Hometown: Morganfield, Ky.

Union County HS
Points: 20.0
Rebounds: 10.0



calls the "Final Four," this year's freshmen recruiting crop that has been ranked the No. 6 recruiting class in the nation. Small said he feels the "Final Four" is a bright future for the Lady Toppers to look forward to, and Byars is a key member of that group.

"She's a strong, hard-nosed worker," Small said. "She's intense and does everything she can to contribute to this team."

Byars said getting to play with the three other incoming freshmen (forward ShaRae Mansfield and guards Natalie Powers and LaVonda Johnson) during the Kentucky All-Star games helped build camaraderie.

"It made playing here easier because we got to play together this summer and get a feel for each others' style of play," she said.

Small said Byars has been through a learning process during the early workouts and team practices.

"She's found out that she's got some weaknesses that she didn't have before in high school," he said. "She's learning some of the skills she didn't pick up in high school, but she's such a winner, nothing stands in her way."

In fact, the only thing Small said he thinks stands in Byars' way is her own demeanor.

"She's just too nice," he said. "I love it when the kids have really good attitudes, especially toward other people. But basketball is a battle, a war. She's just a little too nice right now and we have to work that niceness out."

Small also said Byars has become the leader of the "Final Four."

"She wants to make sure that everyone is happy, and she'll do whatever it takes to make them happy," he said. "She's going to be a whole lot of fun to coach."

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