

## Aggies' Mission: MEAC Championship

Contributed by Malcolm Eustache - Black College Wire  
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This is the year to put it all together

The Aggies are about business this year. No cubicles. No desktops. No suitcases.

After winning a mediocre six games in the 2005-06 season, A&T's men's basketball team's stock rose in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference last year by finishing tied for third in the conference. They proved they had the necessary goods to potentially compete in the MEAC marketplace at a level that has not been witnessed since the Don Corbett golden era of the 1980s. Simply put, the businessmen in blue and gold are looking to trump the competition this season.

"We know now that we can win," said senior forward Jason Wills. "Last year we definitely had a chance. FAMU won the whole thing and we beat them twice last year. Winning a ring is our main focus."

Although they were a championship threat last season, crushing opponents was not their forte as their margin of victory maxed out at 1.0 with an average of 73.4 points per game. Head coach Jerry Eaves realized this in the off-season and devised a business plan to address the issue: score more points.

"I've been doing a lot more shooting than I've ever done in my life because Eaves told me we have to put up points this year," said senior guard Steven Rush.

"I probably shoot about a thousand shots a day. I literally come to the gym in the morning and shoot about 400 to 700 shots on my own. Then in practice we have little shooting drills. The points have got to come from somewhere."

Last season, that "somewhere" was behind the three-point arch for Rush.

The self-described "scoring point guard" transferred from UNC-Asheville two academic years ago. NCAA transfer regulations prevented the High Point native from playing until the 2006-07 season. His impact was felt almost immediately.

Rush, who led the men in scoring last season, has always had a knack for finding the back of the rim from three-point land. It served him especially well last season as he ended up third in the nation in three-pointers made per game.

"Most guys don't want to guard you that far away from the basket because they think you're going to go around them and I work on it enough to know that," said Rush. "So if a guy backs off and he's too late, I'm going to burn him every time. Once a guy starts respecting that, then you can go around him."

When it comes to records, Rush seems adamant on just busting through them. Last season he broke A&T's single season three-point record with 115. He needs merely 95 three-pointers to break Carlton Becton's school record of 99 treys in an A&T career. The pressure has not shown any signs of seeping into the scholarly mind of the All-MEAC

Academic team honoree. The Aggies' three nationally televised ESPNU games last year brought out the best in Rush as he averaged 29.3 points per outing.

"I know the guy who holds the three-point record very well," Rush said. "It would be nice, but my main focus this year is a championship. That's what we need here at A&T - we need a championship team. It's good to be good, but we need some champions."

Last season, the team needed to attack one glaring problem - height. Eaves and his staff recruited four forwards (Ed Jones, Julian McClurkin, Kam Shepard and Thomas Coleman) during the off-season; none are shorter than 6 feet 7 inches.

Despite the addition of two freshmen and two transfers into the system, the senior leadership should make for a smooth transition as seven seniors return this season. No one is more understanding of the struggle than Jason Wills.

"Even though we have seven seniors, me and Trahern Chaplin are the only ones who have been here for four years," Wills said. "We were here for the six in the morning practices when we were winning just five games. Now with all of the additions we're just that much better."

Wills, the team's leading rebound man last season and a Maryland native, has arguably been the most versatile player in an Aggie uniform since his arrival here in 2004-05. At one point or another during his career here he has led the team in scoring, rebounding, field goal percentage, and minutes played. His six career double-doubles attest to his versatility on the floor.

Basketball season is officially upon A&T. The Aggie Pride that many say is lost seems like it will be found in Corbett every game this season.

"Everybody talks about bringing Aggie Pride back," Rush said. "Well, I wouldn't mind pioneering that run. Anything less than championship is unsuccessful."

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