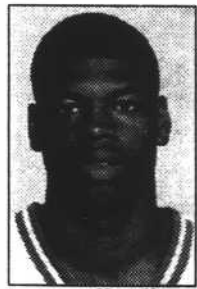


Hamilton looks to improve game

BY SAM MCKEWON
Senior editor

The talent is there. Always has been. Especially when it comes to rebounding.



Hamilton

Venson Hamilton, NU's career leading rebounder, will tell you that. He's been a strong rebounder in college, averaging 7.8 boards for his career. He was a strong rebounder at Oak Hill Academy in high school and in the pee-wee league in his hometown, Forest City, N.C.

Hamilton has always had a nose for rebounding. Coaches say so. Teammates say so. Hamilton says so. In that same breath, the coaches, the teammates and Hamilton himself will say he could be doing more — a lot more.

His numbers last season weren't bad. Hamilton averaged 11.2 points and 9.8 rebounds per game while leading the Big 12 with 17 double-doubles. But the book on the 6-foot-10, 240-pound senior is that he doesn't fulfill his talent; he should score more, make better decisions and be more dominant.

The Sporting News said the same in its preseason basketball issue. It called him overrated. Not just overrated, but the Big 12 Conference's most overrated player. The reason? He could do so much more.

Hamilton, while not as severe, levels some of the same criticism at himself.

"I know I can do better," Hamilton said. "I know I'm going to have to..."

He stops. Starts again. "Just say it like this: I need to develop my talent more. I know I got talent. I know it. I need to show it more — instead of letting it waste."

So Hamilton works toward fulfilling that talent. Every day last summer, he worked with former Husker Bernard Garner on developing post moves. When he wasn't doing that, Hamilton was part of the Big 12 All-Star team that went on a European tour.

The tour pitted Hamilton against, in his words, "bigger, stronger and faster players than me." He developed his offensive game. He found a 15-foot range on his shot. He became a better free-throw shooter.

But most of all, NU forward Andy Markowski said, his frontcourt teammate matured into a better decision-maker on the court.

"He's cleaned up his game a lot," Markowski said. "He's learning how to catch the ball outside and make plays. He works at it, like what he's doing right there."

Markowski points out to the court, where Hamilton works with NU Assistant Coach Jimmy Williams on his shooting. Hamilton, who's averaging 13.3 points and 9.1 rebounds a game, shoots around a chair, which serves as an imaginary defender. Except for point guard Joe Holmes shooting free throws,

"I need to develop my talent more. I know I got talent. I know it. I need to show it more — instead of letting it waste."

VENSON HAMILTON
NU center

Hamilton's the only one left practicing.

But there is a learning curve to being the go-to player on offense. After playing a secondary scoring role to Tyrone Lue for two years, Hamilton has had growing pains adjusting to his role as "the man," as Hamilton puts it.

NU's 52-49 loss to Tulsa on Tuesday serves as an example. Hamilton's first two shots were from 12 feet, and both were airballs. He finished two of 13 from the floor and had eight points.

As always, he rebounded well, grabbing 12. But with Chicago Bulls' and Minnesota Timberwolves' scouts in attendance, Hamilton missed key makeable shots down the stretch.

"He can be disorganized on the court," Williams said. "He plays out of sync; there's no pattern to what he's doing. I'm working with him to be more consistent."

"Instead of having 10 moves, he needs two or three. It's a question of doing too many things and none of

them really well."

Another problem Hamilton had in the past was playing to the level of the opponent, he said. That was fine in big games, but against lesser opponents, Hamilton had a tendency to play softer.

"It doesn't matter who I play," Hamilton said. "I've got to get up for every game. I didn't get up for the little games that much. I underestimate my opponents, which I shouldn't do."

Ultimately, Hamilton hopes to develop a game strong enough for the NBA. Williams said scouts currently tab the senior a second-round draft pick. The Bulls scout at the Tulsa game commented no further than to call Hamilton "a prospect."

Williams said he'll be disappointed if Hamilton doesn't make it to the pros.

"He's got a great shot," Williams said. "He'll run the floor. He'll catch the ball and do some with it in the transition. But he's still got to make sound decisions on the floor because he's got the talent."

So for Hamilton, the goal now is to not let that talent be a curse — to fulfill it like he knows he can.

"Work, work, work," Hamilton said. "The great players, they just work a lot. I've got to be a workaholic."

The Stats

The following are Venson Hamilton's statistics.

Yr.	Pts.	Rebounds
'95-'96	6.1	5.0
'96-'97	10.8	8.4
'97-'98	11.2	9.8
'98-'99	13.3	9.0

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Nepo, Pettit honored by conference

AWARDS from page 9

The award is Pettit's second Big 12 Conference coach of the year honor and the ninth league coach of the year honor of his 22-year career.

Pettit, who claimed his 700th career victory earlier this season, also won the award in the 1996 season, when the Huskers won their first Big 12 title.

Nepo, who won the first of her three league first-team honors in 1996, averaged 14.29 assists per game during Big 12 play. A two-time AVCA All-American, Nepo also is a strong national player-of-the-year candidate.

"It's a blessing and an honor to win that award," Nepo said. "I was a little surprised I was chosen, but I think a lot of why I won was because our team won the Big 12 title. If we hadn't, I think Demetria (Sance, of Texas) would have gotten the MVP."

Sance, the Big 12 player of the year last season, was one of two selections from Texas. The other, Erin Aldrich, earned newcomer of the year honors.

Colorado and Kansas State each placed two players on the first team. Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor each placed one player on the first team. All the teams except Baylor are playing in the NCAA Tournament this weekend.

League coaches tabbed Texas A&M's Jenna Moscovic as the Big 12 freshman of the year.

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