

Lawson plays well beyond her years

Tennessee freshman major reason for Vols run

By Josh Daeche
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Kara Lawson bench presses 235 pounds. She also scored three touchdowns for a peewee team and played middle linebacker when she was only 8 years old.

But this season Lawson led the Tennessee women's basketball team back to the national championship game.

And she is only a freshman.

The point guard from Virginia plays for a team that expects victory and rarely tastes defeat. While the average 18-year-old might buckle under this much pressure, Lawson's strength proves she is far from average at that age.

"Freshman, what freshman? I think Kara has stepped up her role all season," All-American teammate Tamika Catchings said. "Coming onto a college team, you can't play as a freshman. When you think of a freshman, you think of someone who is scared of handling the ball in pressure situations and I think Kara has given us everything we need to handle the pressure."

In Friday's Women's Final Four victory against Rutgers, where Lawson scored 19 points, the freshman showed the nation what Tennessee fans have witnessed all season.

During the game, Lawson has showed poise in creating offense off turnovers and finding her teammates for open shots.

That goes to show what a fast learner she is, as she was quick to pick up coach Pat Summitt's style of play — lead with an aggressive defense and opportunities on offense will come. Lawson showed she could capitalize by playing that way Friday, but could not repeat it in Sunday's championship game.

As much of a passer and floor general as Lawson has been all season for the Vols, she also has been looked at as a mentor.

"Kara, I mean, she's a great player," teammate Kristen Clement said. "She's sort of like the second coach. She basically will reiterate what coach says, but with a straight face and different demeanor."

While growing up, Lawson studied some of the best at their positions, including leg-

endary Chicago Bears linebacker Mike Singletary. Lawson watched his eyes and how he focused the whole time on what was happening around him.

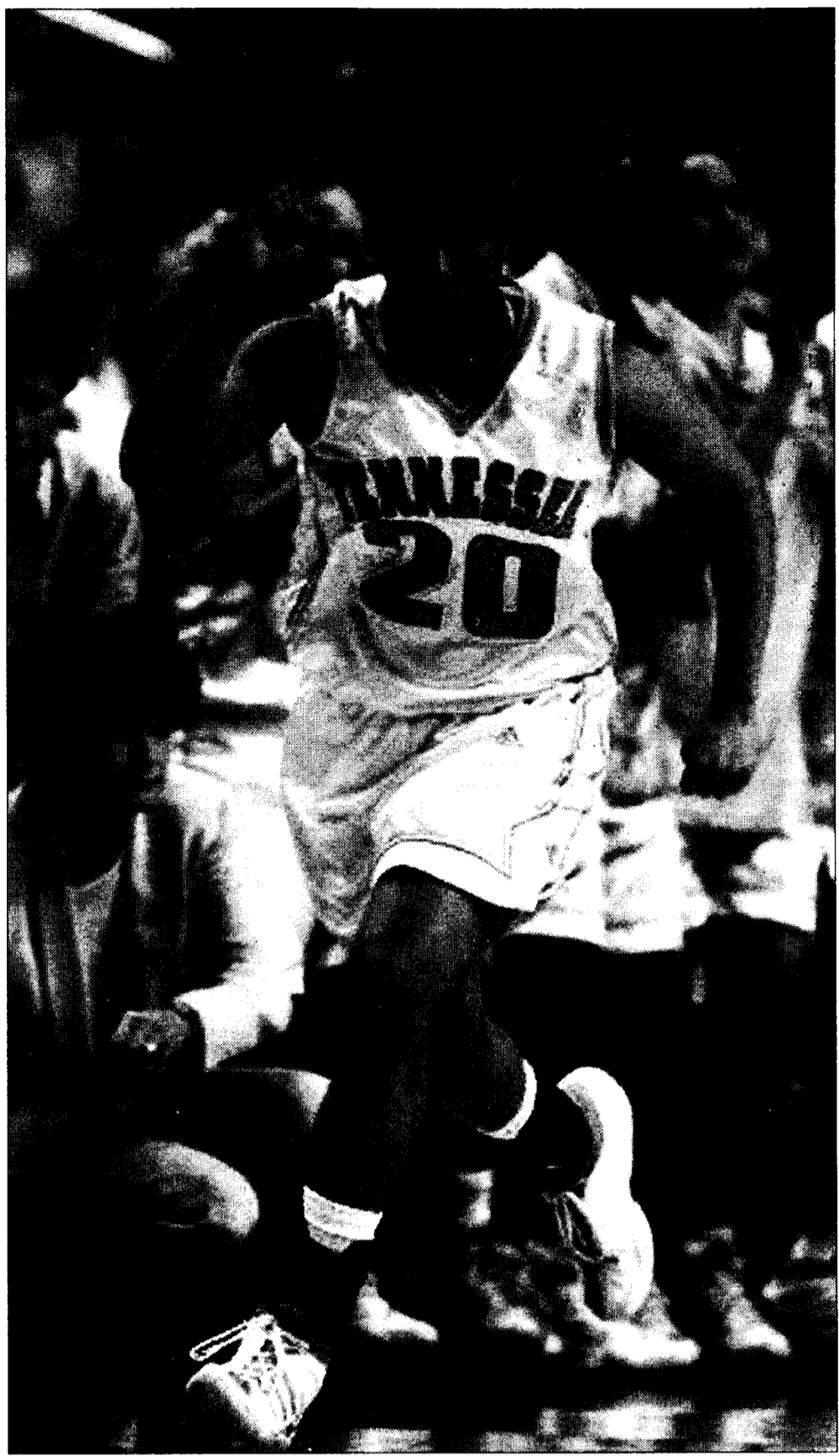
At her young age, Kara knows and understands the game better than some juniors and seniors her age. This is why she appears unfazed when the term "freshman" is labeled to her.

"Freshman can do it. I think there have been just as many freshmen and sophomores that have led their team," she said. "Mike Bibby did it in for Arizona and I think there was a freshman at North Carolina that did it, too."

While labels and comparisons always seem to be placed on younger players who produce in big games, Lawson appears unfazed and handles herself with a tremendous amount of composure for a freshman.

This season she was a freshman who won the respect of her peers, coaches and teammates.

Next season she has one goal in mind — to bring Tennessee back to the championship and help her team cut down the nets.



Tennessee's Kara Lawson celebrates after hitting a shot earlier in the NCAA Tournament.

Catchings ends her career among Lady Vol greats

By Josh Daeche
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

As a freshman Tamika Catchings shattered every rookie record Chamique Holdscaw set when she was at Tennessee.

The woman referred to as the female version of Michael Jordan when it comes to women's basketball, now can only watch her protégé run a team she once led to three national titles.

"She hustles on defense, great rebounder, offensive game in there and now that Chamique is gone people are starting to see her stand out," Tennessee center Michelle Snow said. Living in the shadows and waiting her turn has been a part of Catchings' life, the three-time All-American and this year's NCAA Player of the Year has followed the shadows of great athletes even in her own family. Her father Harvey Catchings played 11 years in the NBA and older sister Tajua spent the past four seasons at Illinois. So being blessed with a lot of athletic ability is no surprise. But it's the story that evolves off the court that makes this All-American so special. The All-American has a hearing problem in her left ear and it has forced her to wear a hearing aid much of her life.

Though the hearing problem is evident when she speaks, the junior is open to talking about the problem.

"I had it my whole life and I remember wearing hearing aids when I was growing up," she said. "I don't think I receive any special media attention about it."

But like most kids growing up, Catchings had to overcome the adversity of being picked on for wearing the hearing aid.

Eventually she stopped wearing it.

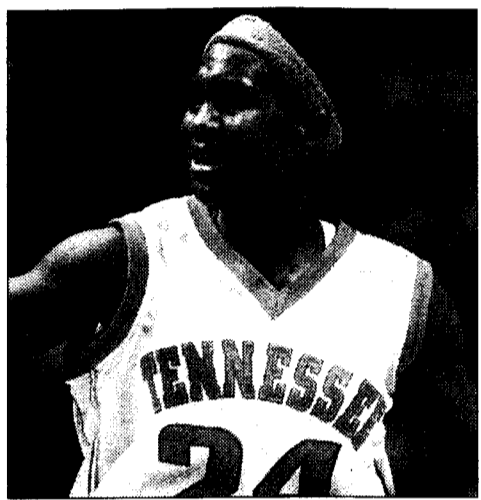
Catchings did not wear a hearing aid from seventh grade until Tennessee coach Pat Summitt recommended she wear one, which was hard at first but she gradually agreed.

"The support of my teammates and coaches — it kind of made me feel not self-conscious of wearing it," Catchings said.

While her on-court ability has the potential to take over games, Catchings' work has found the hearts of her teammates. This year she scored in double digits in all but five games, making her the third leading scorer in NCAA history.

"She's obviously a blessing," Tennessee point guard Kristen Clement said.

"She's brings a lot of energy to the team, a lot of emotions. You can tell she's a true competitor she hates to lose even if we are



Catchings runs back after scoring.

playing pick-up games in practice she's always yelling and trying to get her teammates rallied up."

Adversity, enthusiasm and the athletic ability is something that comes with hard work and is something she has experienced her whole life.

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