

Hoosier Happenings

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The latest news from the world of Indiana University athletics

Amber alert



Photo by A.J. Mast

Amber Jackson's road to Bloomington was long, but her presence is helping the Hoosiers make some noise in the Big Ten

By Mike Johnston

Imagine for a second: You are a 14-year-old basketball player, one hardly versed in the rigors of the sport, yet motivated enough to overcome it. Immersed in the game you are not — you are the definition of a neophyte — and you didn't start seriously playing the game until a few weeks ago. Reverse lay-ups and drop steps won't be considered part of your repertoire for at least another two years. You are a step behind the rest of your colleagues in experience but light years ahead when it comes to heart and dedication.

Imagine you have the smarts and passion to make up for lost time. While your high school teammates are worried about the miscellaneous, you concern yourself with improving every day, building your skills and muscle tone and becoming the best post player you can be. Imagine you have genetics on your side to boot — your sister has played professional basketball, after all. Yet, genetics mean nothing without the will to improve, and that is one thing you will never lack. So you sweat, you sprint, you improve, and indeed, four years after you could

barely make a lay-up, you are a collegiate recruit.

Imagine you live in Oxnard, Calif., a city of nearly 200,000 people that is known more for its strawberry exports than anything else. The Dallas Cowboys have held their training camp here on several occasions if that means anything these days. Two naval bases lie here — but your city is known more for the folks who get out than for those who stay put. So, when San Jose State University comes calling during your senior year of high school, it isn't hard to imagine that you are excited to take the next step on your journey.

Amber Jackson's topsy-turvy trip to Bloomington began in San Jose, Calif., one of the biggest cities that no one seems to know about. It just happens to be the 10th largest city in the United States, located at the southern end of the San Francisco Bay. San Jose State University, located in the heart of the city and home to 30,000 students (many of whom commute), was where Jackson's collegiate basketball career took off.

It didn't take long for other college coaches to

realize they had missed out on a heck of a player, one that could dominate the interior on any given night and happened to do just that more often than not. As a freshman, Jackson was one of the most well-rounded players in the Western Athletic Conference as she averaged nearly 15 points and pulled down better than eight rebounds per contest. Jackson broke a school record by shooting better than 65 percent from the field on the season. That astounding percentage was good enough to place her second in the nation in field-goal percentage and helped Amber earn second-team All-WAC honors.

Her sophomore season was even more impressive. Jackson led the WAC in both scoring and rebounding, averaging more than 17 points and nine rebounds. But, it wasn't enough to get San Jose State over the hump as the Spartans struggled and finished with a 13-15 record. It was after her sophomore campaign that Jackson began seriously considering a transfer. One of the schools hot on her trail was Indiana University, whose brand new

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coach, Felisha Legette-Jack, was looking for a post player who could be a difference-maker in the rough and tumble Big Ten. Jackson, with a 6-2 frame and a vast array of post moves, fit the bill perfectly.

"It all happened very quickly," Jackson says. "Coach Jack and I had several discussions, and I really liked what she had to say, her energy, and all of that. One of her old assistants was an assistant at San Jose State so that's kind of how the connection began. What ended up bringing me to Indiana was everything about the institution and the program. I just loved the campus, the gym, the coaches and the players I met, and I knew it would be a good fit."

In fact, Jackson's overwhelming memory of Indiana basketball wasn't about the Hoosier program itself, but the tradition and love affair that the state has with the high school game.

"When I was in high school, we used to always watch 'Hoosiers' on the team bus, and that always got us pumped up and ready to play. There is a lot of passion for the sport in Indiana, and that is something I love about playing here."

Due to NCAA transfer rules, Jackson had to sit out the 2006-07 season, but that didn't stop her from making an impact. Jackson used her practice time to learn Coach Jack's system and get acquainted with her teammates. Changing schools is never easy for a student-athlete, but Jackson made it look that way. By the time the 2007-08 season began, she was more than ready to prove that she belonged in major conference basketball.

It didn't take long for the rest of the Big Ten to realize that Jackson was going to be a force to be reckoned with. Jackson's 52.4 percent field-goal shooting led the Big Ten, and she saved one of her best games for Indiana's biggest rival, scoring 20 points and ripping down 10 boards vs. Purdue in

the quarterfinals of the Big Ten Tournament. Although the Hoosiers came up short that day, Jackson's late season performance foreshadowed what was to come in 2008-09.

"I think my biggest strength is my passion for the game," Jackson says. "That's something that you need to have in order to be successful, and I've always had that since I started playing. When I'm in a game, I'm going to give it everything I have, and my teammates are the same way."

That unbridled, "let it loose" passion has propelled the Hoosiers to their best start ever in Big Ten play and a 14-3 record overall. As of January 23, the Hoosiers' 7-1 conference record was good enough to place them atop the league ladder, a half game ahead of Ohio State. Indiana's most recent victory, a 60-50 road victory over Michigan, was fueled by Jackson's post play. The senior finished with a game-high 18 points and corralled nine rebounds, as well.

That type of statistical output is quickly becoming the norm for Jackson, who is shooting nearly 60 percent from the floor and averaging more than 14 points and seven boards. She has also been incredibly consistent from the free throw line, knocking down over 77 percent of her attempts on the year. Those types of numbers are sure to get her noticed by professional scouts, especially as Indiana continues to rack up the wins. With a spot in the top 25 virtually guaranteed next week, the spotlight will shine a whole lot brighter on Jackson and the squad.

Although some might shrink from the spotlight, Jackson appears ready to take the next step in her basketball career. She has benefitted greatly from the advice that her older sister, Angela, has been able to give. A four-year letter winner at the University of Texas, Angela knows the ropes of big time college hoops and is well aware of what it

takes to get to the professional level. The elder Jackson, now 31, played in the WNBA for the Washington Mystics and has been able to pass along some of the trade secrets to her younger sister.

"She (Angela) definitely thinks I have what it takes to make it to the next level," Jackson says. "The best advice she has been able to give me is that I need to stay in the moment right now and focus on what our team is doing. You never know if your next game might be your last because of injury or so many other reasons so I'm really trying to stay focused on each minute of each game and give it all I've got. Everything else will take care of itself."

Whether or not there is more basketball in Amber's career after Indiana remains to be seen, but with the Hoosiers playing as well as they are, she isn't anxious for this season to end any time soon.

"The senior class is extremely close," Jackson says. "For most of us, we had never been on a 20-win team or a team that made it to the NCAA Tournament so it was now or never. We had to put the work in and earn it, and I think we're seeing that work pay off."

For a journey as winding and unique as Jackson's has been, a run deep into the NCAA Tournament would be a fitting end to a 'Cinderella' career. From Oxnard to San Jose to Bloomington, one thing has remained true: Jackson's will to win.

"My passion for the game can consume me at times, but I think it's the main reason I've gotten this far," Jackson says. "I have to remind myself after a loss that there is another game around the corner."

No matter how this season ends, it's a safe bet that there will be plenty more games in Jackson's future. Not bad for a kid who couldn't make a lay-up eight years ago. Not bad at all.



Photo by A.J. Mast

Fast friends — Senior Amber Jackson quickly grew close to her teammates after transferring from San Jose State, and the bonds she forged upon her arrival in Bloomington are reaping big rewards for IU this season.

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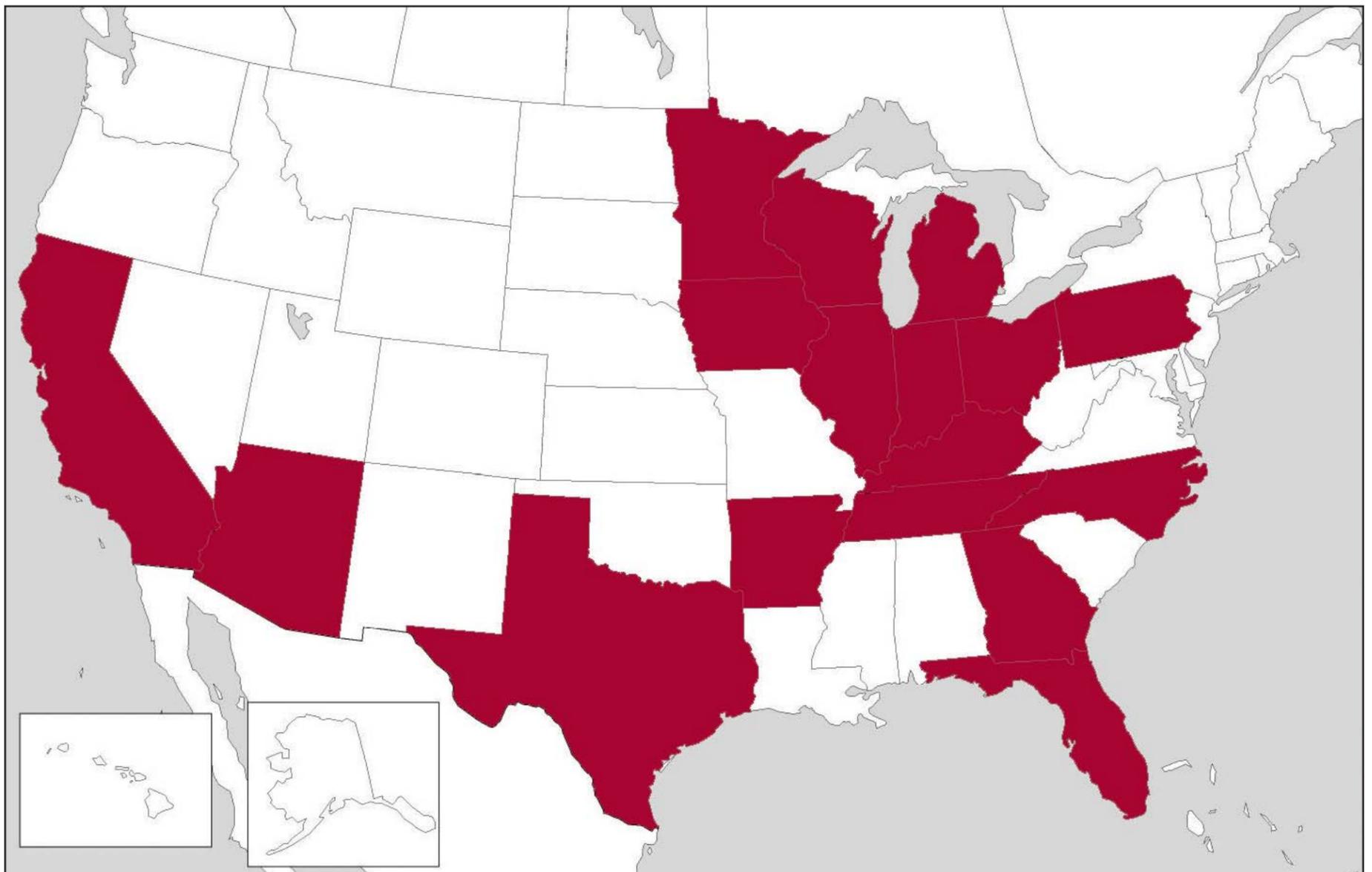
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Where are the Hoosiers?

Indiana's winter athletic schedule is in full swing, and the Hoosiers are traveling across the country to carry on the glory of old IU. Take a look at the map below to see if the Hoosiers are going to be visiting your state and check the schedules at the bottom of the page for information about when Hoosier athletic teams might be visiting your area.



Men's February athletics

Baseball

- Feb. 20 — vs. West Virginia at St. Petersburg, Fla.
- Feb. 21 — vs. Georgetown at Clearwater, Fla.
- Feb. 22 — vs. South Florida at St. Petersburg, Fla.
- Feb. 24 — IPFW
- Feb. 27 — vs. Ball State at Clarksville, Tenn.
- Feb. 28 — at Austin Peay

Basketball

- Feb. 4 — Iowa
- Feb. 7 — at Michigan State
- Feb. 10 — at Minnesota
- Feb. 15 — Illinois
- Feb. 19 — Wisconsin
- Feb. 21 or 22 — at Purdue
- Feb. 25 — Northwestern
- Feb. 28 — at Penn State

Golf

- Feb. 13-14 — Big Ten Match Play Championship; Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Swimming & Diving

- Feb. 7 — at Purdue

- Feb. 26-28 — at Big Ten Championships; West Lafayette, Ind.

Tennis

- Feb. 1 — vs. South Carolina; Athens, Ga.
- Feb. 7 — vs. Nebraska; vs. Georgia State
- Feb. 13-16 — ITA National Indoors; Champaign, Ill.
- Feb. 14 — vs. Kentucky; Louisville, Ky.
- Feb. 21 — Alabama

Track & Field

- Feb. 6-7 — Meyo Invitational; South Bend, Ind.
- Feb. 13 — Hoosier Hills
- Feb. 13-14 — Tyson Invitational; Fayetteville, Ark.
- Feb. 28-March 1 — Big Ten Indoor Championships; University Park, Pa.

Wrestling

- Feb. 1 — at Michigan
- Feb. 6 — Purdue
- Feb. 13 — at Illinois
- Feb. 15 — Northwestern
- Feb. 20 — Iowa
- Feb. 22 — at Minnesota

Dates subject to change

Women's February athletics

Basketball

- Feb. 1 — at Ohio State
- Feb. 5 — at Iowa
- Feb. 8 — Illinois
- Feb. 12 — Michigan State
- Feb. 16 — at Wisconsin
- Feb. 19 — at Northwestern
- Feb. 22 — Ohio State

Golf

- Feb. 1 — vs. Wisconsin at Phoenix, Ariz.
- Feb. 8-10 — Lady Puerto Rico Classic; Rio Grande Puerto Rico

Softball

- Feb. 6 — vs. San Diego State at Los Angeles; at Cal State Fullerton
- Feb. 7 — vs. Pacific at Los Angeles; at UCLA
- Feb. 8 — vs. Cal Poly at Los Angeles
- Feb. 13 — vs. Texas State at Houston, Tex.
- Feb. 14 — vs. Oklahoma; vs. Oklahoma State at Houston, Tex.
- Feb. 15 — vs. Oklahoma State at Houston, Tex.
- Feb. 21 — vs. UC Riverside at Tallahassee, Fla.; at Florida State
- Feb. 22 — vs. East Carolina at Tallahassee, Fla.; vs. Michigan at Tallahassee, Fla.
- Feb. 27 — vs. Stanford at Fullerton, Calif.; vs. UC Riverdale at Fullerton, Calif.
- Feb. 28 — vs. Auburn at Fullerton, Calif.; vs.

- Oregon State at Fullerton, Calif.

Swimming & Diving

- Feb. 19-21 — at Big Ten Championships; Ann Arbor, Mich.
- Feb. 28 — Last Chance Meet

Tennis

- Feb. 1 — Maryland; Butler
- Feb. 6 — at Duke
- Feb. 7 — vs. Princeton; Durham, N.C.
- Feb. 14 — DePaul
- Feb. 20 — at Tennessee
- Feb. 22 — at Kentucky
- Feb. 28 — Wake Forest

Track & Field

- Feb. 6-7 — Meyo Invitational; South Bend, Ind.
- Feb. 13 — Hoosier Hills
- Feb. 13-14 — Tyson Invitational; Fayetteville, Ark.
- Feb. 28-March 1 — Big Ten Indoor Championships; University Park, Pa.

Water Polo

- Feb. 7 — at Stanford; vs. Arizona State
- Feb. 8 — vs. USC
- Feb. 28 — at UC Santa Cruz; vs. Cal State Monterey Bay; vs. Pacific

Dates subject to change

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Practice facility construction update

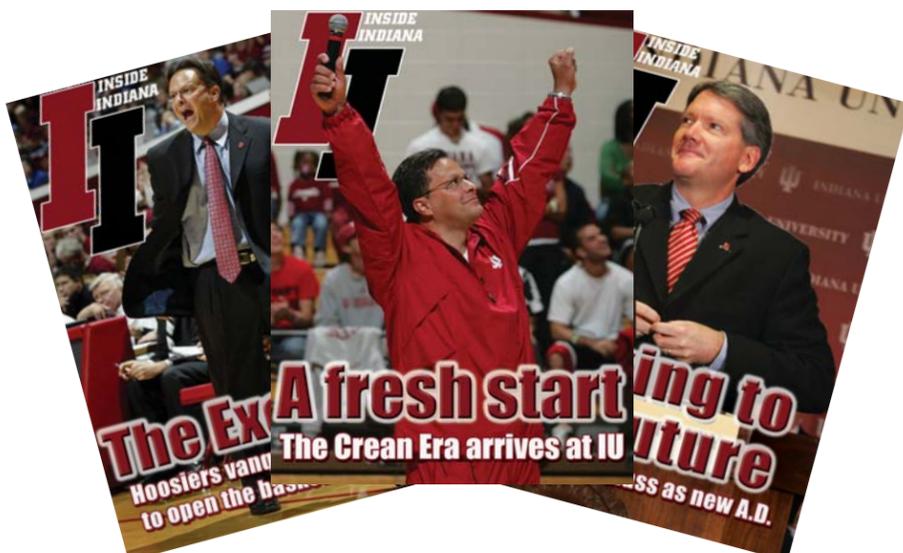
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