

# Rams' Thomas traded scoring role for leadership position

Tyrone Thomas had visions of joining a long list of prolific scorers at Winston-Salem State when he came aboard the Rams program last season.

Thomas, a Baltimore, Md. native, signed with Sam Hanger, the Rams' former coach, just before the start of the 1997-98 season. He inherited the shooting guard slot after he arrived on the scene and figured to be in that slot until he used up his two seasons of eligibility.

But all of that changed quickly when Hanger was replaced by Rick Duckett as the Rams' coach last summer.

Without a true point guard, Duckett turned to Thomas, a crafty veteran, to steady an otherwise inexperienced backcourt.

Thomas hasn't disappointed. But then, neither has Duckett either.

They have clicked throughout the season. After a fifth-place finish in the division last season, the Rams promptly marched to the top of the division before losing out for the divisional crown when they lost to North Carolina Central in the conference finale.

Like his teammates, Thomas had some reservations about his new coach when the change was announced. However, he and the rest of his teammates have made the most of their change of venue.



Thomas

They operated on 'blind' faith and it has paid off.

"I really didn't know much about him then," Thomas said of his opinion of Duckett from the outset. "But he told me what he wanted to do here and what it was going to take to do it."

There were the normal adjustments that had to be made by Thomas and the holdovers from last season's Rams team, which posted a 15-15 regular season record.

The first was getting acquainted with a tough pre-season workout program. The next was learning the tough defensive schemes that Duckett requires his team to master. But the most difficult for Thomas has been getting used to running the Rams' offense. During his two year career at Dunbar Junior College in Baltimore, Thomas played the role of designated shooter. Getting used to being a distributor took some time.

"The biggest adjustment has been getting use to his (Duckett's) offense," Thomas said. "But I think I have adjusted well. I'm still learning it and trying to do what I need to do to help the team."

Opponents who have faced the Rams this season have noticed another change in the Rams' program. The intensity level has been high, even in defeat.

"We work hard every day," Thomas said. "In practice we push each other hard because we have to keep improving if we want to have a good season."

That has also helped the team's depth. That has been a needed commodity because the Rams play a lot of full-court man-to-man defense.

"That's why we have to help build the confidence in the younger players," Thomas said. "It's not fun sitting on the bench, but when I got in foul trouble somebody had to come in and get the job done."

"That's important to the team

because we're going to need them going down the stretch," Thomas added. "Everyone is going to need to produce."

The team's success has come as a surprise to some people outside of the program. But Thomas said he and his teammates expected it. However, they still have a lot to learn. After taking a lop-

sided victory over Virginia Union, the team suffered through some disappointing losses.

"That's the thing we've been trying to tell the young players," Thomas said. "We slipped a little after we beat Virginia Union. When you're playing college ball you can't afford to slip any. You have to play hard every game."

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