

WNBA

## In Jackson the Liberty trusts

By [Bill Oram](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Thursday, July 10, 2008

SAN ANTONIO — With time running out in the first quarter Tuesday night, New York Liberty coach Pat Coyle turned to her bench. The San Antonio Silver Stars, tied for the WNBA's best record, were in the midst of a 9-0 run and Coyle needed something to change the game.

She summoned Tiffany Jackson, who peeled off her warmups and jogged to the scorer's table, entering the game with 2:27 left. On her second offensive possession, she was left open for an 18-foot jumper.

She hesitated, then fired.

Swish.

"Good to see that jumper," Jo Jackson — Tiffany's mother — later said from her seat nine rows behind the Liberty bench. "Reminds me of high school. I think she lost it a little bit at Texas."

On the next play, Jackson again found herself with the ball on the perimeter. She drove past her defender with a pump fake, scoring on a slick reverse layup.

Two possessions, two shots, four points. Momentum had swung back to the Liberty.

That's what Coyle expected from Jackson. It's what she always expects from Jackson, her lightning rod off the bench. The former University of Texas forward, now in her second WNBA season, has become the Liberty's most trusted reserve, the one who's expected to come in off the bench and turn things around.

"She can change the direction of the game," Coyle said. "When she gets on the floor, it's all about business and getting it done."

This is where Jo Jackson dreamed her daughter would be, because it's what her daughter dreamed about.

When Tiffany Jackson wasn't starring at Duncanville High School, it was one traveling all-star team after another. She played year round, kind of like now. Last offseason, she played in France with Liberty teammate Jessica Davenport. When the WNBA season ends this fall, it's on to a league in Russia.

Jo Jackson, who drove down to San Antonio from Dallas on Tuesday after leaving her job as a probation officer early — just like she did for every Longhorns home game from 2003 through 2007 — follows her daughter's career closely. But she's also now a diehard fan of the Liberty, just as she was of the Longhorns.

She knew that a win Tuesday night would be a boost to New York, sitting at 9-8 and in fourth place in its conference and desperate to finish the five-game road trip on a winning note.

"It's always good when you go back home with a win — Come on, Tiff! Yes! Way to go, Tiff!" she screamed, interrupting herself when Jackson nailed a turnaround jumper in the lane.

It was the move Tiffany Jackson said before the game that she would use to beat Kobe Bryant one-on-one.

"I'm already on the opposite side, so he can't stop it," she said.

She also said she could beat her idol, Houston Comets forward Tina Thompson. Finally, she admitted that no matter what name was thrown at her, she'd predict victory.

That confidence — bravado bordering on cockiness — is what made Jackson great, said her college coach, Jody Conratt.

"That's one of the most difficult things to find in players. ... Nobody hated to lose more than Tiffany," Conratt said, sitting beneath the basket closest to the Liberty bench.

Despite the expectations of bigger things, Jackson's Longhorn teams never made it past the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament. She was a three-time preseason candidate for national player of the year, named the national freshman of the year in 2004, and was a three-time All-Big 12 first-team selection.

But those accolades were more about her than the team. In her final two seasons, Texas missed the NCAA tournament altogether.

"Every athlete plays to win championships, and not to do that was very disappointing," said Jackson, the fifth overall pick in the 2007 draft. She said she wants to win a WNBA Sixth Man of the Year Award, and to become an All-Star, but above all, she wants an Eastern Conference championship, a chance for the Liberty to regain prominence and authority in the WNBA.

Whenever her daughter got the ball Tuesday, Jo Jackson leaned forward in her seat, head cocked, as if anticipating something good and preparing to let out a triumphant shout.

And the good things kept coming for the 6-foot-3-inch Texas ex. Another jumper in the lane ("Way to go, Tiff!"), an easy layup ("Yes!"), all in front of her mother, her former coach and Texas fans in the crowd of 6,107. Jackson made her first seven shots, finishing with 14 points and seven rebounds — both well above her season averages — but the Liberty still lost, 83-79.

After the game, she attributed her good night to "easy buckets." The loss stung. A failed opportunity to steal one from arguably the league's top team never goes over well, but the season doesn't stop.

"I don't think we can worry about it," Jackson said.

Tonight, the Liberty host the Detroit Shock, the top team in the East. With a good performance — but still a loss — in the rearview mirror, Jackson boarded a bus for her hotel, ready for her flight back to New York the next day.

Jo Jackson got some time with her daughter after the game, but had to get on the road herself, just like she did when Tiffany Jackson was a Longhorn. Back to Dallas. Back to work at 8 a.m.

woram@statesman.com; 445-3677

Vote for this story!

[Buzz up!](#)

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.statesman.com/sports/content/sports/stories/other/07/10/0710jackson.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.