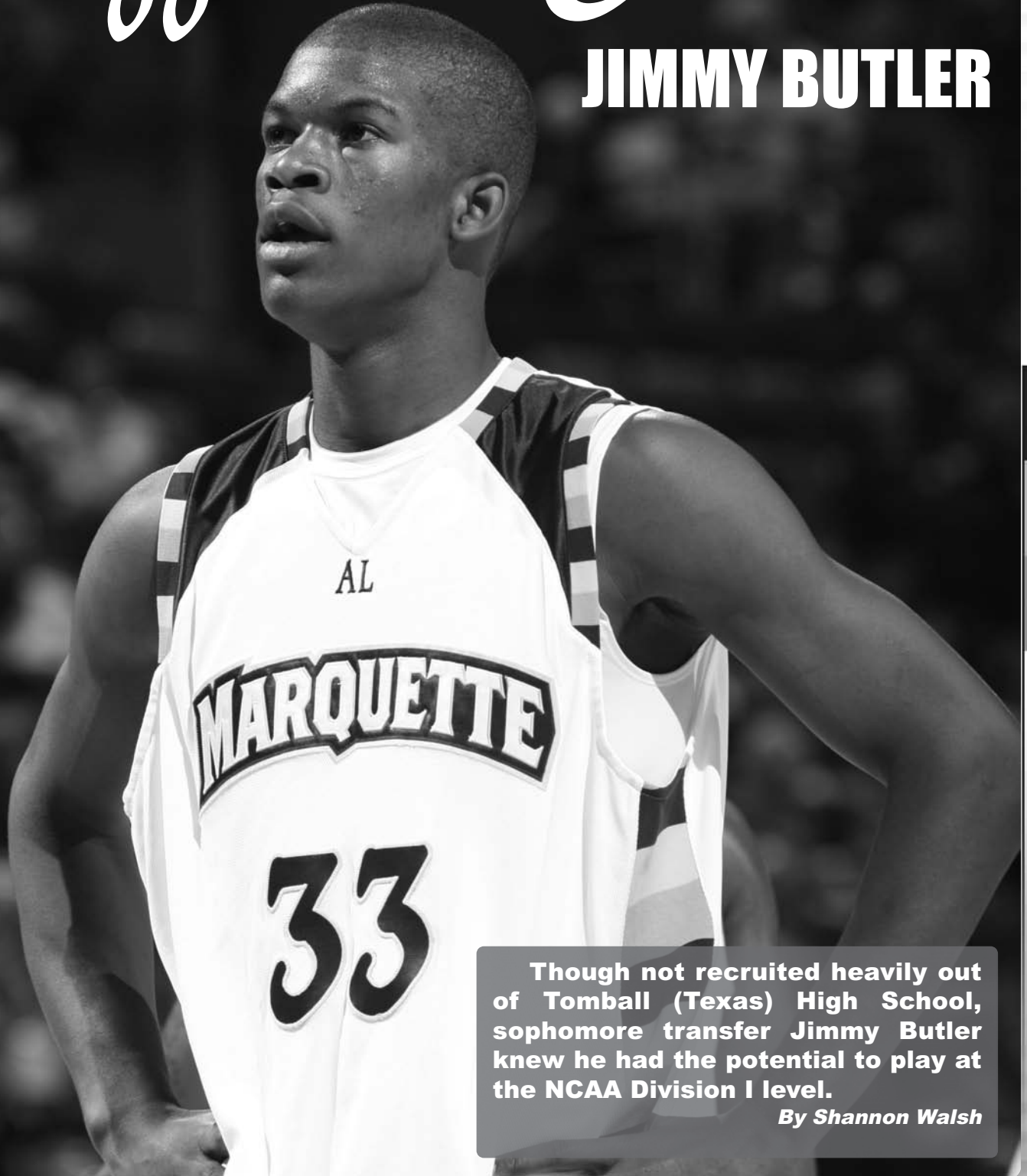




# Off the Court

## JIMMY BUTLER



Though not recruited heavily out of Tomball (Texas) High School, sophomore transfer Jimmy Butler knew he had the potential to play at the NCAA Division I level.

*By Shannon Walsh*



Knowing he didn't want to attend a prep school, Butler found the perfect fit at Tyler (Texas) Junior College.

"I hardly got any exposure out of high school and people said they could see me playing at a major Division I. I wasn't really trying to go to prep school, and people were talking about JUCO, so I decided to take that up," Butler said of his decision.

His lack of exposure out of high school came mainly because of a delayed growth spurt and progression. A first team all-district selection as a senior, Butler averaged 19.9 points and 8.7 rebounds per game.

"As a freshman at Tomball, I wasn't a big factor. When I came to my junior year I started to progress and get taller, and Coach [Brad Ball] started playing me a lot. My senior year, I had to score a lot and do a lot of things for the team to be good."

The 6-foot-6 guard continued his growth at Tyler Junior College, guiding the Apaches with 18.1 points, 7.7 rebounds, and 3.1 assists per game. He was recognized as an NJCAA Honorable Mention All-American, after scoring 43 points in a triple overtime loss to Panola College in junior college a play-offs game.

"Tyler made me mature a lot as a player and I learned a lot of stuff that I didn't learn in high school. I did get a lot of exposure because the team that we had was winning and we had many different weapons who all just fit into our offense. With Joe [Fulce] on the team, it made things a lot easier."

The duo helped lead the squad to a national ranking of 10th in the country, and secured the program's first outright league title in 21 seasons. Though Butler and Fulce appear to have seamlessly translated their junior college game to Division I play, Butler recognizes the differences between the two.

"At Tyler, we got up and down the floor like here, but not nearly as fast. We scored a lot of points, just like here. The defense that we played at Tyler was nothing like this, because we played zone there," said Butler.



The similar styles of play appealed to Butler as he began to be heavily recruited. Following Marquette's offer, many schools jumped in late, including Kentucky, Clemson, Iowa State, Mississippi State, and Texas A&M, amongst others, according to the Texas native.

Butler, also attracted to Marquette's program tradition, committed to the

Golden Eagles following the naming of Coach Buzz Williams as Tom Crean's successor.

"In terms of the path from Tyler to Marquette, I knew MU was a basketball school and was someplace that I really wanted to play," Butler said. "I knew what Coach Buzz was all about - he was an honest coach and he just

wanted players who played hard and good people who would do what he asked them to do. Without a doubt, I knew I wanted to play for him.”

Fulce helped Butler get attention from Marquette, as the coaches visited Tyler and saw not only Fulce, but noticed Butler at practices.

“When the coaches saw me [at Tyler], they saw Jimmy in the practices and stuff. They approached Jimmy but it was nothing too serious,” said Fulce. “When Crean left, a few days into Buzz being head coach, they had an open scholarship and they said they needed some more size and athleticism. And I told Buzz, ‘You don’t need to look any further.’”

Fulce’s recommendation came not only about his play on the court, but about the quality of person Butler is.

“He came out of nowhere. He came out of Tomball, Texas, a real small town on the border of Houston. Jimmy has been through it all. Just life situations and how he fought through it and excelled over it. He is a great person and a friend. As a roommate, there is nothing that I wouldn’t do for him,” said Fulce. “When you have that type of person on your team who can play 15-20 minutes of the two and the three and then in crunch-time he can switch to the point without hesitation it is pretty special.”

The transition from Texas to Wisconsin has been difficult for Butler, especially in terms of weather. Furthermore, the discrepancies between junior college play and Division I action challenged the sophomore during summer and preseason workouts.

“You have to be strong and fast, especially here, because of the way that we get up and down. You’ve also have to be able to do the little things right.

Accompanying Butler and Fulce to Milwaukee was former Tyler coach Scott Monarch. Monarch, now the Golden Eagles’ Director of Basketball Operations, realizes Butler’s struggles.

“You’re looking at a kid who came from a bad high school team and then here, every single moment is extremely

intense and he’s not used to that,” said Monarch. “That’s his biggest transition - his ability, his athleticism, and his skills are really good - he’s not used to that intensity for the entire time. He’s used to playing four tough games every year at Tyler and now it’s every single practice. Every single practice here is like those four best games used to be.”

Butler has looked to senior Wesley Matthews for guidance, both on and off the court.

“Wes is a person I can look up to because he always helps out in every single way. Since we were playing open gym in the summer, he’s been teaching me how to get around screens, get

through screens, and just calling out that type of stuff.”

Butler’s first action as a Golden Eagle came in a 94-73 exhibition win over Colorado State-Pueblo. He scored nine points in 19 minutes of play, shooting a perfect 7-of-7 from the foul line.

He described his first game wearing Blue and Gold, saying, “I don’t think there’s another experience like it, just seeing all the people up there. At first, I was a little nervous but the team talked to me and told me to calm down and just play. Once I got into a rhythm, I felt really calm and just played ball.”

