



SHORTHORN: Leslie White

Above, Freewheeler Abu Yilla demonstrates new training equipment in the Physical Education Building weightroom. Right, Yilla checks a student's conditioning progress.



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'Wheelers land Englishman

by Karen Shuman

Shorthorn Staff

When "the best wheelchair athlete in England" wanted a United States college to attend, he chose UTA.

Abu Yilla became acquainted with the Freewheelers when his University of Nottingham team, the LGS Jets, played UTA during Homecoming 1983.

"I really liked Texas and the Dallas-Fort Worth area when I came over," he said. "I wanted to come to America, and Jim Hayes made it possible."

Yilla's first choice was the University of Kentucky at Lexington, but plans fell through. Hayes, coordinator of Handicapped Student Services, helped him arrange a dormitory room here, scholarships and an afternoon job with Handicapped Student Services.

"We put him on staff as an assistant during the weightlifting, basketball and track and field PE classes," Hayes

said. "His international experience will be helpful. He's the best wheelchair athlete in England."

Yilla moved from his native West Africa to England when he was 3. He has played basketball since 1975, when he was 18.

He played as a point guard for the LGS Jets, eight-time British champions who also have won seven British cups and placed fourth in Europe.

"I've played internationally 96 times since 1977," he said. "In the '84 Olympics, when the U.S. beat Britain in the quarterfinals, I played against (UTA silver medalist) Chris Cooper. I'm looking forward to working on the same side."

Yilla had preferred American universities because they offered financial aid with his degree of physical education including therapy for the disabled. Yilla had difficulty receiving financial

aid from English schools, partly because he already had an economics degree obtained with a scholarship.

"He still wants a PE undergraduate degree from the United States so he can apply that to the English system," Hayes said. "I think it's an admirable goal."

Hayes said Yilla's international experience will be an asset in more ways than one.

"Without question, he's a good player. In terms of a peer group, he's going to add a lot of insight. He'll be a good spokesman for the group. He'll also give the team some depth, so if one player fouls out, the whole game won't be shot."

Yilla plans to return to England after he receives his degree, but Hayes has other ideas. He said Yilla may change his mind in a few years.