

Young talent growing at Arizona

■ **DIAPER DANDY:** Wildcats' freshman point guard Mike Bibby is turning heads as he leads Arizona

By Chris Hansen
Sports Reporter

What do Damon Stoudamire, Steve Kerr, Khalid Reeves and Reggie Geary all have in common? For starters, they are all currently on NBA rosters.

And secondly, they all played point guard for the Arizona Wildcats.

So it should be no surprise that one of the Pac-10's most talented players is once again a point guard at Arizona. But what might be surprising, however, is that this point guard is an 18-year-old true-freshman.

In the 11 games that the Wildcats have played this season, Mike Bibby has started, and turned heads, in them all.

Not only has Bibby put up some pretty decent numbers, 13.1 points and six assists per game, he has already established himself as a shooter who can hit a shot when it matters the most — when the game is on the line.

In the Wildcats' conference opener, Bibby nailed two free throws with just seconds left on the clock to give Arizona an 81-80 victory over California.

"It comes from practice," Bibby said, referring to the confidence he has in his shooting ability. "I practice a lot. I'm out there shooting every day, every time I get a chance."

"He has great composure and poise on the court," Arizona head coach Lute Olson said. "He has outstanding basketball ability and

he is not a young man who thinks he knows it all. He came in with a great attitude."

With the success Bibby and the rest of the Arizona team is having comes the comparisons to all the former Wildcat standouts at point guard. But Bibby, whose father is a former UCLA and NBA player, and now the head coach at USC, just takes it all in stride.

"I like it," admitted the McDonald's and *Parade Magazine* All-American. "It builds up my confidence and I like it when people think highly of me."

Bibby, who is a Phoenix native and has been a fan of Wildcat basketball all

his life, most enjoys watching former California Golden Bears' guard Jason Kidd.

"I don't model myself after anybody," Bibby said. "But I do like to watch the way Kidd passes because I like to pass too."

His love for passing is much to the delight of his Wildcat teammates. Bibby's passing ability has been one of the leading factors in the team's success.

But even a kid this cool under pressure and this confident in himself has to be in awe of his environment occasionally. For Bibby, that time came against the then 7th-ranked North Carolina Tar Heels at the beginning of the season.

"I'm never intimidated because I think I can play with any-

body if I put my heart into it," Bibby said. "But I was real nervous, probably as nervous as I have ever been. But when I got out there, it was just like another game."

Too bad for the Tar Heels.

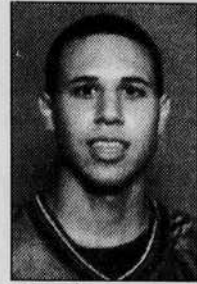
With a national television audience watching at home, Dick Vitale screaming Bibby's name from the court-side broadcast table, and 9,000 fans packed into the stands, Bibby pushed his nervousness aside and introduced himself to the world of college basketball. He scored 22 points, dished out five assists and grabbed two rebounds in the upset of North Carolina, prompting Vitale to proclaim Bibby as a "diaper dandy" and a "prime-time player."

"The North Carolina game was sort of his coming-out party," Olson said. "And there is no question he played even better than what he displayed to us in practice. He is an unusually talented young man and I don't really think the job that he is doing is surprising to the people that know him or watch him play."

He didn't have the same success in Arizona's victory against Stanford on Jan. 4 when Brevin Knight came to town and taught Bibby a thing or two about defense, holding him to four points and three assists. But for Bibby, it is all part of the learning process. The bottom line was that Arizona won the game.

"We have a great team," Bibby said. "We come at you from different angles. We have shooters, inside players, and great drivers."

And once again, the Wildcats also have a great point guard.



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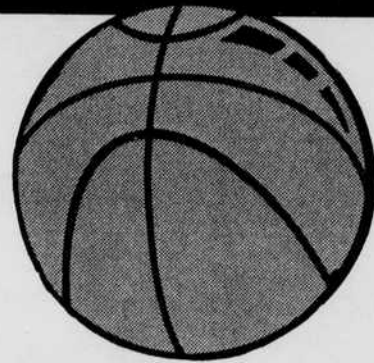
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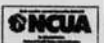
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