

Yates' Gardner loving life as a point guard

Damon Sayles

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To [Darius Gardner](#), life as the point guard of one of Texas' most respected basketball programs in Houston Yates has never been more exciting.

Gardner takes pride in being the floor leader for Yates, the defending UIL Class 4A state champion and a team expected to be highly ranked in upcoming preseason national polls. After a great spring, followed by an equally prolific summer, Gardner is gearing up to lead Yates back to the state tournament. After Yates' 34-1 record last season, expectations are high as the new season approaches.

"We have to go into it with the mindset that we haven't won anything," said Gardner, a 5-foot-10, 163-pound senior. "Whether it's a pushover team or a top-ranked team, we've got to go in and play the way we always play."

And that style of basketball may be the most intense in the entire state. Yates practices what head coach Greg Wise calls "32 minutes of hell," a non-stop, in-your-face pressing defense resulting in transition and fast-break buckets on offense. It helped Yates score 90 or more points in 27 out of 35 games and 100 points or more 14 times last season.

With all five starters returning from last season, expect more of the same.

"Being the point guard, it's a fun to be controlling everything," Gardner said, "but I've got to give credit to Coach Wise because he taught me how to run it. My job is easy. I run the floor and get the ball to the open man, and I throw a lot of alley-oops."

Gardner may lead the state in alley-oops thrown with the talent on his ball club. [Brandon Peters](#), at 6-foot-2, is one of the best jumping basketball players in the country. With Yates' run-and-gun style, Gardner also threw a lot of alleys to the rest of the team, including last year's starters [Joseph Young](#), [Marshall Lange](#) and [Alex Davis](#).

Gardner's style of play fits in perfectly with Yates' top-notch athletes. His court vision and unselfishness on offense and lightning-quick hands on defense make him a quality asset. Gardner led the greater Houston area in assists and steals last season, averaging 9.7 assists and 5.7 steals per game. He also averaged 16 points and four rebounds.

Gardner helped his recruiting stock by playing his first summer season with the Houston Hoops. He teamed up with big-name Class of 2010 players such as Peters, [Tobi Oyedeji](#), [Hyjii Thomas](#), as well as rising underclassmen such as 2012 stars [L.J. Rose](#) and [J'Mychal Reese](#).

"It really showed me some things I can improve on, like playing the pick and roll and working with the high-post scoring," Gardner said. "Playing with the Hoops and the talent we have, you're

going to be seen by a lot of scouts. Every time we played, it was crowded. The [Nike] Peach Jam really exposed me."

Gardner said he's received offers from Stephen F. Austin, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, UT-Arlington, SMU, Southeastern Louisiana and Texas State. He said he has a visit scheduled for the first week of September at SFA. Gardner, in addition, has received letters from Missouri State, Alabama, Wichita State, Wright State and TCU. Gardner hopes the list grows as he tries to lead Yates to a repeat 4A championship.

"I don't think there's pressure on us to win again," Gardner said. "Pressure can be burst if we just come out and take care of business. If we're focused and come with the same intensity, I don't think anybody can beat us."

Southland Conference gets Yates' Gardner

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The one they call "Pee Wee" made a grown man's decision on Tuesday.

Houston Yates senior point guard [Darius Gardner](#) ended his recruiting process and decided to play basketball for Stephen F. Austin, one of the Southland Conference's top schools. SFA is the two-time defending Southland Conference regular-season champion, and it earned its first trip to the NCAA tournament in March after winning the Southland Conference postseason tournament.



Darius Gardner

"I feel good about it," said Gardner, a 5-foot-10, 160-pound floor leader and highly underestimated defender. "I liked the chemistry and love I got from the coaches, players and community. Coach [Danny] Kaspar has recruited me for the last two years, and I have a good relationship with him."

Edward Gardner, Darius' father, added: "To know the struggle he's been through and to see him pick a university that can help him academically and athletically, you can't ask for anything else. I'm proud of him."

Gardner's commitment comes a couple days after Yates teammate [Joseph Young](#) committed to Providence. Gardner said SFA will get a player who is "humble and hungry," someone who is coachable and who has a blue-collar mentality.

Gardner, ranked No. 35 on TexasHoops.com's latest list of Class of 2010 players, chose SFA

over UT-Arlington, Texas State and Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. He is expected to bring a winning attitude to a Lumberjacks squad that has grown accustomed to winning. Gardner helped Yates finish 34-1 and win the UIL Class 4A state championship in March. Yates is expected to be a preseason top-10 nationally ranked team.

Gardner's averaged 16 points, 9.7 assists, 5.7 steals and four rebounds last season. He will bring an unselfish-yet-aggressive style of play to Nacogdoches. He statistically led the greater Houston area in assists and steals.

Gardner will receive tutelage from Kaspar, who was named the 2009 Texas Association of Basketball Coaches Division I Coach of the Year in May. Kaspar led the Lumberjacks to a 24-8 record. Kaspar also has a very high graduation rate with his players, something that really caught Gardner's attention.

"Coach Kaspar graduates 95 percent of his players," Gardner said. "A lot of players forget that this is bigger than just basketball. Most schools have big classes, but SFA has smaller classes so you can get more help from the teachers. That's important."

Oral commitments are nonbinding. The first day Gardner can sign a national letter of intent is Nov. 11.