In Altoona, everything changed when an ex-NBA star arrived to invigorate a basketball team.

By Dick Romain

Brandon Battles, Altoona's best play-
er, is telling his teammates about a friend who was once a star himself. Battles was talked up by his former coach a few years ago as an NBA prospect, but he ended up in Altoona, a small school outside Pittsburgh. Battles has been blossoming at Altoona, averaging 11.2 points per game.

Battles reaches the practice line and every-thing begins to change. The gym quietens. The noise around the hallway is suddenly silenced. Battles is a force, and people realize that something is happening.

Armon Gilliam, who played 13 seasons in the NBA, took over as coach five years ago. He's bringing a new approach to Altoona, using a more aggressive style of play. Battles, a veteran of 13 seasons, is excited about the opportunity to help develop young players.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to help develop young players," Gilliam said. "I think Brandon is a great example of how we can develop players here."