

NBA rookie class of '92 more than holding its own

By BILL BARNARD
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Larry Johnson and Dikembe Mutombo, the class of the best rookie class in more than a decade, are showing they have what it takes to be NBA stars.

Just ask them. "My goal is to dominate," Mutombo said, and by the relative standards of the Denver Nuggets, the 7-foot-2 rookie has dominated.

Johnson also has the cocky self-confidence that characterizes many NBA superstars.

"There's no pressure on me because I know how to play," Johnson said. "I knew what to expect. I knew all about how physical it is. I felt comfortable from the start."

After a slow start, Johnson is coming on very strong in the Rookie of the Year race, averaging 17 points and 12 rebounds. Fears that he was too short at 6-5 to play inside in the NBA have disappeared.

"The guy's automatic when you get him the ball 6 feet from the basket," Hornets coach Allan Bristow said of his 250-pound forward. "We don't have any reservations with who we got (with the No. 1 pick). If we had it to do over again, we'd do the same thing."

In his meeting with Larry Bird on Nov. 16, Johnson had 27 points and 15 rebounds to 25 points and 11 rebounds for Bird, who had eight assists compared to one for the rookie.

"He's strong, quick and a great team player," Bird said of Johnson. "He takes his time and

when it's his time to score, he's there."

Mutombo, the fourth pick in the 1991 draft, is averaging 19 points and nearly 14 rebounds. He got early season tests against two of the best veteran centers in the NBA — Hakeem Olajuwon of Houston and David Robinson of San Antonio. Mutombo combined for 48 points and 30 rebounds in the two games.

"David was really surprised how big and physical he was, and David has the fat lips to prove it," Spurs coach Larry Brown said. "Mutombo plays with his hands up and when he stands behind you, it's hard to even see the basket."

"I can tell you one thing, his elbows are sharp," Robinson said.

The rookie talent does not by any means stop with Mutombo and Johnson.

Billy Owens of Golden State, Steve Smith of Miami, Stacey Augmon of Atlanta, Kenny Anderson of New Jersey, Terrell Brandon of Cleveland, Greg Anthony of New York, Mark Macon of Denver, Dale Davis of Indiana, Victor Alexander of Golden State, Rick Fox of Boston and Robert Pack of Portland all have been impressive, although not always consistent.

Not since 1981 has the rookie class shown this kind of depth.

The 1981 class included Isiah Thomas, Buck Williams, Mark Aguirre, Rolando Blackman, Tom Chambers, Larry Nance, Kelly Tripucka, Herb Williams, Danny Schayes and Alton Lister. All but Tripucka are still in the NBA.

In perhaps the season's biggest irony, Golden State coach Don Nelson, notorious for his reluctance to rely on rookies, is using Owens and Alexander (No. 17) extensively and also has gotten some help from a third first-

glowing in his comments about his rookie point guard.

"Unless you know where you're going, you can't use your speed," Fitch said. "But with Kenny, every once in a while, you see a glimpse."

Fox, picked 24th by Boston, is the star of the bottom of the first round. He is benefitting from the Celtics' system of moving without the ball, which is similar to what he played under at North Carolina under Dean Smith.

year pro, Chris Gatling (No. 16).

"The No. 1 thing I look for in the draft is guys who know how to play basketball," said Nelson, who acquired Owens from Sacramento in a trade for Mitch Richmond. "Larry Bird is a 10, but Billy Owens is right up there, an 8 1/2 or a 9. He was the best basketball player in the draft."

Many people wondered if it was worth breaking up Golden State's Run-TMC — Tim Hardaway, Richmond and Chris Mullin — to get Owens.

"We're used to watching Tim and Chris play so well, but Billy has taken that next step and is beginning to blossom," Nelson said.

Owens was taken third in the draft behind Johnson and Anderson, whose late signing has hampered his early development. Nets coach Bill Fitch has alternated among being critical, sarcastic and

Fifth in the draft was Miami's 6-7 Smith, who took over as the Heat's point guard when Sherman Douglas became a hold-out.

"Steve would rather have an assist on a good pass than score," Heat coach Kevin Loughery said. "Not many people come into the league with that kind of attitude."

Doug Smith, the No. 6 pick by Dallas, also was a late signee, but has shown signs of contributing recently with four consecutive double-figure scoring games, including 17 in a victory over Miami Dec. 10.

Macon, despite shooting less than 33 percent, starts and plays nearly 30 minutes a game no matter what his stats are.

"I'm just playing Mark as many minutes as I can to get him the NBA experience," coach Paul Westhead said of the draft's eighth pick. "I want to keep him on the

floor."

Augmon, No. 9, is a starter for the Hawks at shooting guard despite playing forward at UNLV. He also is averaging 30 minutes per game while averaging 11 points.

Brandon and Anthony, picked 11th and 12th, have settled in as backup point guards on the Cavaliers and Knicks, teams that have played very well.

Both have quickness superior to starters Mark Price and Mark Jackson, but the rookies need experience and better shot selection.

Davis, the 13th pick, has given Indiana needed rebounding muscle and occasional scoring punch as evidenced by his 19 points on 9-for-10 shooting in 17 minutes in a 141-121 rout of Houston Nov. 29.

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the Celtics' system of moving without the ball, which is similar to what he played under at North Carolina under Dean Smith.

"He's been playing hard since Day 1 of training camp," coach Chris Ford said of Fox, one of the first rookies to sign. "He makes mistakes, but one thing he doesn't do is stop listening."

The unquestioned star of the undrafted rookies is Portland's Pack, of Southern California.

"You've got to give the young man so much credit because he came into camp and there really wasn't much of a chance that he'd be on our team," Trail Blazers coach Rick Adelman said. "But he just kept impressing us and earned a spot and earned minutes."

His most impressive game was Nov. 15 when he scored 13 of his 15 points in the fourth quarter as the Trail Blazers rallied from a 21-point deficit to beat Minnesota.

Bullets' Ellison continues to make his mark

DALLAS (AP) — Washington Bullets forward Pervis Ellison believes he can hold his own against most of the league's big men.

"Size bothers me the most, not quickness," said Ellison, who scored 31 points and had 16 rebounds in the Bullets' 107-99 victory over the Dallas Mavericks last Friday night. "I had some real problems against David Robinson a couple of days ago because he has size and quickness."

Ellison, at 6-9 and 225 pounds, said his 11-point performance in the Bullets' recent 96-93 victory over San Antonio helped him two days later.

"Tonight's game, I think, was something that just carried over," he said.

Dallas forward Herb Williams hit on eight of 10 shots from the field in the second period while scoring 17 of his team-high 22 points. The surge helped the Mavericks take a 63-52 lead going into the second half.

Ellison, however, scored 11 points in the final quarter on his way to his career high.

"That's a sensational game," Dallas coach Richie Adubato said. "We didn't stop them on the defensive end. Defensively, when we needed to play we didn't stop them."

The Bullets, who improved to 8-

17 with the victory, have now won two consecutive games for the first time since late November and played Friday's contest without starter Harvey Grant.

He was suspended for a game for his role in a fight with Robinson in San Antonio.

However, Ellison more than made up the difference. He entered the game averaging 19.4 points and 11.9 rebounds.

"We played pretty well, we hit the boards hard," Washington coach Wes Unseld said. "Pervis really played well."

The Bullets' front court of Ellison, Larry Stewart and Tom Hammonds combined for 66 points and 34 rebounds.

The Mavericks (10-15) has a four-point lead going into the fourth quarter, but Washington took the lead for good on a 14-foot jumper by Hammonds to make it 86-84 with 8:05 to play.

Dallas got as close as one point at 94-93 when Rolando Blackman, who scored 16 points, hit an 11-footer with 4:12 on the clock. The Bullets, however, tallied eight consecutive points to put the contest out of reach when Dallas three-point shooters proved cold.

"When you don't take advantage of the opportunities to put a team away, it turns out that way," said Blackman. "They did a good job of hanging in there posting up,

hitting their shots."

Ellison hit on 13 of 19 attempts from the field Tuesday. Stewart added 21 points and guard Michael Adams tallied 18 points and a season-high 17 assists for

the Bullets.

"Michael is Michael," said Unseld. "He will do well no matter what the situation is, whether he's scoring or just running the floor."

RAM OF THE WEEK

Weston Travel is pleased to recognize Veronica S. Crumblin as our Ram of the Week. Mrs. Crumblin, a Winston-Salem native, is a graduate of Paisley High School and Johnson C. Smith University. Veronica began work at WSSU in 1973 in the math department. She then worked in personnel and since 1987 has been working as a vital cog in the Chancellor's Office. Veronica is responsible for a myriad of tasks as she works closely with Chancellor Thompson. Mrs. Crumblin feels fortunate to have worked with a variety of good people in each of her positions at the University. She lives day to day by her personal creed that "patience and understanding are the key to dealing with people." Veronica is a member of Our Lady of Fatima and is married to Charles T. Crumblin, Jr. Veronica and Charles have two children, Kamal and Keshia. Her hobbies are sewing, collecting Motown oldies, and following Ram Football.



Veronica S. Crumblin

Weston Travel salutes Veronica S. Crumblin for her diligence and commitment to excellence at Winston-Salem State University.

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For Rudy Washington, winning isn't always enough

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Winning alone isn't always enough for Drake coach Rudy Washington. He's interested in performance as well.

While happy with the result in Drake's 65-47 victory over Texas Wesleyan last weekend, Washington wasn't totally satisfied with how it was achieved.

Drake committed 19 turnovers and shot just 44 percent. Washington said the Bulldogs will have to be sharper if they're going to win later on.

"When you're trying to gear up a team for a championship, which is what we're trying to do, you have to realize that championship teams don't celebrate routine wins," said Washington, who heads the Black Coaches Association. "I want to get this team in a habit of more than just winning."

Still, it was a noteworthy victory. It followed a 69-67 victory at Lamar and was Drake's first in a home opener since the 1986-87 season. The Bulldogs are 2-2 heading a short holiday break. They'll play again on Saturday at Cal State-Fullerton.

"It was a good confidence builder for us coming off our big Lamar win," Washington said. "After beating Lamar, if we would have lost to Texas Wesleyan we would have had no credibility."

"Then we pick up the paper and see that Lamar beats Kansas State 116-75. So I don't know how good we can be."

Texas Wesleyan, an NAIA school in Fort Worth, fell well short of its 89-point scoring average. The Rams' previous low came in an 89-73 loss at Texas-El Paso on Thursday night.

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