UNC's Okulaja Has Earned Spot in NBA Draft

Before his senior year at North Carolina, Ademola Okulaja named former teammates Antawn Jamison and Vince Carter as two of the most influential people on his athletic career. He did not know just how influential they would become in their absence.

For three seasons at UNC, Okulaja was dependable.

The Tar Heels could rely on him to

score eight points and grab five rebounds each game. He was dubbed Role Player of the Year by ESPN television commentator Dick Vitale.

But when Jamison and Carter decided to skip their senior seasons for the NBA, they opened the door for

Okulaja took over the Tar Heels and led the team in points, rebounds, steals and three-point field goals. He earned first-team All-ACC and honorable men-

tion All-America distinctions.
On June 30, Okulaja will receive another honor many would have previously deemed unattainable. He will like ly be selected in the NBA Draft.

Where Okulaja will be taken in the draft, though, is anyone's guess.
His agent, Jeff Austin of Advantage



MIKE OGLE STAFF WRITER

International, expects him to be selected in the late first round or early second

Marty Blake, NBA director of scout ing, was not even sure that he would be

"His future may lie in Europe," Blake said. "He certainly can play some-

where."

Wherever he might go in the draft, it will be better than anyone expected one

his first two years. But he struggled during much of his junior year, particularly from three-point range. After hitting nearly 40 percent of his attempts his first two years, he only knocked down 25.8 percent his junior season.

Okulaja put all that behind him last year. He emerged as a leader on a young team and quickly regained his scoring and rebounding averages by better than 50 percent.

The Berlin native has spent the summer in Germany playing for the German National Team. He never missed a game or practice in four years

at UNC, but has not been able to work out for any NBA teams other than at the

But they've seen him blossom into the player he is now and know his capa-bilities. Okulaja is far from flashy, but has few weaknesses and a strong work

He might not end up playing in the NBA. He might prefer to be closer to home and play more steadily in Europe. But if he is on a roster in the NBA in the fall, it will be a bonus for the league.



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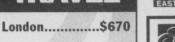
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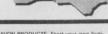
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