

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.



MIKE OGLE STAFF WRITER

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.

International, expects him to be selected in the late first round or early second round. Marty Blake, NBA director of scouting, was not even sure that he would be drafted.

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

Okulaja was a consistent contributor his first two years. He struggled during much of his junior year, particularly from three-point range.

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 he has not been able to work-out for any NBA teams other than at the collective pre-draft camps.

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

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.

Mike Ogle can be reached at mogle@email.unc.edu.

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