

Johnson 'Confident' Role Will Increase

By BRAD BROTHERS
Assistant Sports Editor

Will Johnson spent his summer balling in a place that white guys with red hair tend not to inhabit often. Harlem.

No, seriously. Johnson, slated as the team's backup forward, spent his summer working for Morgan Stanley with the Morehead scholarship program.

Being in Manhattan gave the 6-foot-8 junior an opportunity to hone his skills on the various blacktop courts in Harlem.

"I played after work, I played on the weekends," Johnson said. "It was plenty of good basketball in New York - it's part of the reason I went."

Johnson played in an upper league in Harlem, competing in various playgrounds against various hoopsters, ranging from college players to local talents.

The junior Academic All-ACC from Hickory hopes his summer lessons can transcend to more minutes on the 2001-02 Tar Heels.

UNC lost backup forward Max Owens to graduation and is thin down low behind starting forwards Jason Capel and Kris Lang.

"It still just depends at this point," Johnson said on his expected contributions.

"Hopefully with every year, your role increases. So that's what I'm looking to do this year. I'm excited about this year."

I'm confident that my role will increase."

Johnson saw action in 22 games, averaging 1.2 points on .450 shooting from the field.

At UCLA on Dec. 23, Johnson entered the game with UNC leading the Bruins by eight and chipped in five points, leaving the game seven minutes later with the Tar Heels leading by 19.

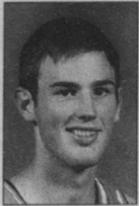
But his shining moment came during UNC's Dec. 4 contest at home against Miami.

When Capel left the game in the first half with a leg injury, Johnson filled in capably, scoring a career-high 10 points and five rebounds.

Johnson's strengths include offensive rebounding and outside shooting, services the Tar Heels might need to call off the bench.

Regardless of his role in 2001-02, Johnson is confident in his team's abilities.

"I think this year's team will be a team where a different guy will come in and score each game," Johnson said. "I think we are going to surprise some people."



Junior forward Will Johnson averaged 1.2 points on .450 shooting from the field in 22 games.

Fingleton's Skill, Identity Develop

After redshirting last year, 7-foot-5 UNC center Neil Fingleton is finally able to show his basketball skills.

By ADAM D. HILL
Staff Writer

When North Carolina signed Neil Fingleton, many criticized the move.

The critics claimed that basketball had become a quicker sport that rewarded quicker players and that the Tar Heels simply didn't have the time it would take to develop the England native.

With Fingleton in Chapel Hill, such debate is moot, but everyone - coaches, fans and players alike - is still figuring out the personality of the 7-foot-5 enigma and what to expect in the way of

contributions.

The 2000-01 season didn't provide much insight. Fingleton underwent back surgery in the summer before enrolling at UNC and tried to progress enough to play but couldn't. He ended up sitting out all of last season, save a couple late-season practices.

Now, with the season approaching, the nature of Neil Fingleton seems to be more readily accessible.

Will he make a noticeable impact on the court this season? "I really didn't know how much



UNC center Neil Fingleton scored 13 points on 5-of-7 shooting in the Tar Heels' Blue-White Game.

potential he had until the other day in the Blue-White Game," said forward Kris Lang. "He really impressed me because he ran up and down the court very well. We're not expecting Neil this year, of course, to play 30 minutes. But if he can give us five to 10 minutes very hard, then that'll be great."

With the loss of Brendan Haywood, UNC is pressed for inside play, especially given the strength of rest of the ACC's big men.

Fingleton says he's ready and capable to bang around down low, rebound, block shots and block out with the rest of the ACC.

Last summer, Fingleton played in the World University Games in Beijing and with the British National Team - both of which helped his progression as a low-post player.

But Fingleton also has shown some speed - something not expected from

him - this preseason.

"One day, I kind of made it tougher on him in sprints at the end of practice," said UNC coach Matt Doherty, who likes to call Fingleton "Chief," referring to the reticent character from "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

"I said, 'You have to make it to this point, otherwise you'll have to run it again,' and he ran it almost as fast as Brian Bersticker. Brian Bersticker's pretty fast for a big guy. I kind of shook my head and said, 'He's been holding out a little bit.'"

Fingleton probably won't be out front leading a fast break, but if the preseason is any indication, he will not be a liability on them, either.

The emergence of Fingleton doesn't stop with his play on the court.

"Neil's hilarious," Lang said. "He doesn't act like that around you guys, or in front of anyone else, but in front of the team he's a great guy."

Holmes Caught in Point Guard Shuffle

By JAMIE AGIN
Assistant Sports/Saturday Editor

Much has been made of the battle for the starting point guard position for the North Carolina basketball team. For junior Jonathan Holmes, it's not just a battle. It's D-day.

With last year's starter, Ronald Curry, poised to be playing into January for the UNC football team, the time has

never been better for Holmes to make an impact. And he knows it.

"I think the point guard spot is obviously a very integral part of the team," Holmes said. "And I think I'm pushing every day."

Holmes saw a sharp decrease in playing time during his sophomore year. He saw action in only 14 games last season after appearing in 25, including a Final Four game against Florida, as a freshman.

But while playing in less games, Holmes bettered his 1999-2000 numbers. He tallied 23 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists compared to seven points, 17 assists and four rebounds from his first year. And Holmes thinks his game is still improving.

"You're a year older, you're stronger, and you've had another year of playing," Holmes said. "You just get that much better. I think each year you see such a change in your game. And I feel like even from my freshman year, I've improved considerably."

Holmes worked during the offseason to improve his conditioning, acknowledging that he is in much better shape this year than he was last year. But he added that he tried to improve all aspects of his game.

The versatility Holmes seeks is a common thread among his competition, including Adam Boone and freshman Melvin Scott.

While the competition for UNC's starting point guard spot has been fierce, it could also be fruitless.

Speculation has increased recently that Curry will in fact rejoin the basketball team, meaning that Holmes could potentially win the battle for UNC's starting point guard spot but lose the war.

The division of labor at the point guard spot might be up in the air, but Holmes' goals for the season are not.

"For me, they've been the same ever since I set foot on campus," Holmes said. "To contribute however I can, whether offensively, defensively, whatever that may be."

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