



## Hawks' other Johnson making a name for himself

By [Chris Vivlamore](#)  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

7:57 p.m. Sunday, January 15, 2012

Forgive Ivan Johnson if he doesn't know exactly who he is playing against.

It didn't matter to the 27-year-old rookie when he was in training camps with the Hawks trying to make their roster. It doesn't matter now when he's making an impact at the NBA level.

"My thing is, I don't really watch basketball so I don't know who anybody is," Johnson said after sinking two free throws with 4.6 seconds left to give the Hawks a 93-91 victory over the Timberwolves Saturday. "So when I match up against them, they are a regular player. I know the major players like LeBron [James], Kobe [Bryant], [Dwyane] Wade but all the extra ones I don't know. Even if I did know them, I'm not going to be afraid. We are playing basketball."

Johnson (6-foot-8, 230 pounds) has combined for 22 points and 18 rebounds in wins over the Bobcats and Timberwolves after the Hawks lost starting center Al Horford for three to four months. Johnson has played a total of 64 minutes the past three games, including the contest in which Horford was injured in the first quarter. He combined to play 55 minutes in the six other games he appeared this season.

More time might be coming.

"I'm very intrigued with him," coach Larry Drew said Sunday. "I like the energy that he brings. He plays hard. He goes after the ball on the glass. He plays with a physicality. I've been preaching that with our big guys from day one. If he keeps playing like he's playing, I'm going to have to find more minutes for him."

Johnson's journey to the NBA has not been easy, much of his own doing. He had issues in college, was banned from the Korean Basketball League and had troubles in the NBA Development League. However, it was in the D-League last season where he caught the attention of Hawks scouts. General manager Rick Sund praised the work of Dave Pendergraft, Mike McNeive and Ron Meikle in spotting Johnson at a league showcase event last season. Johnson attended a Hawks minicamp before the lockout and started turning heads. He made two of the team's previous draft picks, Pape Sy and Keith Benson, the long shots to make the roster.

"Those guys participated, along with Ivan, in our minicamp and clearly, clearly it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out at the end of that camp who was the most impactful player after that camp," Drew said. "It certainly was Ivan."

Drew wanted to see how Johnson handled himself against the veterans in training camp. He didn't back down, a point that became clear during scrimmages.

"When you are kid trying to make a ball club, usually in that situation at times you do back down," Drew said. "But this kid just didn't back down. He didn't care who was in front of him. He didn't care how physical it got."

Sund praised Johnson's physical skills and strength, especially in the post where he is able to establish position, grab rebounds and defend bigger players. He also credited his basketball I.Q.

They were all assets that became clear in training camp.

"The players know right away who's got a chance and who doesn't, in terms of skill, body, strength and raw ability," Sund said. "It just took a day or two [for that to be clear]. Now the question is does he have the mentality to be able to do it, can he play under pressure?"

Sinking game-winning free throws is a start.

---

Find this article at:

<http://www.ajc.com/sports/atlanta-hawks/hawks-other-johnson-making-1303947.html>

 [Print this page](#)  [Close](#)