



Josh Smith lifts Hawks to victory at Pacers

By [Michael Cunningham](#)
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INDIANAPOLIS — Joe Johnson is still out of the lineup, and Al Horford won't re-join it until the postseason, if at all.

With those two Hawks All-Stars out, that puts a heavy burden on forward Josh Smith. He has proved up to the challenge.

Smith's 27 points powered the short-handed Hawks to a 101-96 victory at Indiana on Tuesday night. The Hawks improved to 12-0 when Smith scores at least 20 points, which he has done in four of the past five games.

"I'm playing confident basketball," Smith said after scoring a game-high 27 points. "My teammates are looking for me. I know they need me to score a little more than I have in the past. They need me, and I feel like I can't let them down."

Smith scored 13 points in the first 10 minutes Tuesday to help the Hawks build a 16-point lead, and then several Hawks players made key plays to hold off the Pacers.

That's become a winning formula for the Hawks: lots of everything from Smith, and a little bit of something from nearly everyone else.

"With no Joe and no Al, he's the guy," Drew said. "We are going to go through him as much as we can and hope he makes the right plays. He's been phenomenal."

Smith led the Hawks (23-15) to victory in the opener of a six-game trip that continues Wednesday in Miami. It was a quality victory under trying circumstances.

Johnson (knee) watched from the bench in street clothes along with reserve guard Willie Green (back). Horford hasn't played since suffering a torn pectoral muscle in Indiana on Jan. 11.

The Pacers (23-14) had won six games in a row before losing Monday at Eastern Conference-leader Chicago. The Hawks won for the second time in three games against Indiana, which trailed by as many as 16 points in the first half and led only briefly in the second half.

When the Pacers cut their deficit to 82-81, Jannero Pargo made the last of his three consecutive 3-pointers, and Tracy McGrady dunked for an 87-81 Atlanta lead. Zaza Pachulia's three-point play gave the Hawks a 95-87.

The teams traded missed baskets with the Hawks leading 97-93. Williams cut off Danny Granger's drive to the basket but turned his back to Granger, who scored as he was fouled and added a free throw to trim the deficit to 97-96 with 23.1 seconds left.

The Hawks closed the victory with two free throws each from Jerry Stackhouse and Williams.

The Pacers rallied from a 10-point deficit in the first half to gain a 62-62 tie early in the second half. They tied it twice more before finally edging ahead 71-69, their first lead since 10-8, only to see Hawks forward Marvin Williams answer with a 3-pointer.

The Hawks never gave up the lead again from there. They closed the quarter with a 7-0 run to lead 76-71 entering the fourth quarter and turned back each Indiana challenge.

The Hawks opened the game with crisp ball movement and good shot selection. Smith made his first six shots while scoring 13 points in the opening 10 minutes.

Smith scored on a fadeaway jump shot and a 3-pointer. He threw down dunks to finish fast breaks and dropped in soft hook shots after spin moves.

Smith's 3-pointer capped a 17-5 run that the Hawks' lead to 25-15. The Hawks didn't slow down when their bench players took the floor.

Rookie forward Ivan Johnson gave the Pacers fits in the paint. He scored nine points on strong moves at the basket and free throws as the Hawks' lead grew to 40-24 in the second quarter.

That's when the game became the kind of physical slog the Pacers prefer. Officials called a total of 16 fouls in the quarter, including 11 on Atlanta, and the Pacers got back in the game by making 12 of 16 free-throw attempts.

But Indiana missed 11 of its 40 free-throw attempts for the game while the Hawks made 17 of 22.

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