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Atlanta Hawks: More to Stevenson than SpongeBob socks

11:59 pm November 21, 2012, by Chris Vivlamore



DeShawn Stevenson reacts to hitting a 3-pointer during a game against the Pacers at Philips Arena in November.

Vivlamore reporting from vacation. Here is the feature story on DeShawn Stevenson that will run in the Thanksgiving Day print edition of the AJC.

DeShawn Stevenson was a sight to behold as he left a recent Hawks workout. The veteran guard walked down a near empty corridor in the bowels of Philips Arena wearing a dark hoodie and sweat pants pulled up to his knees.

How else was he going to show off his bright yellow SpongeBob socks?

A vast collection of outlandish hosiery is just a part of what makes Stevenson the most unique character on the Hawks roster. A tattoo of Abraham Lincoln on the center of his throat is part of his vast collection of body art and piercings. His on-court persona comes to life with his signature 'goggles' gesture following a made 3-pointer.

Stevenson knows how to enjoy the business of professional basketball.

"I like to have fun," said the veteran, acquired by the Hawks in the Joe Johnson trade with the Nets. "You see when I'm out here playing with the guys (following practice), I'm a jokester. You have to be serious but at the same you have to bring some fun to it."

Where to begin with what makes Stevenson tick?

The socks: Those began with a way to amuse his young daughters. The girls like to wear crazy socks and one day Stevenson donned a pair. The family enjoyment was enough. Now, no trip to the mall is complete without the purchase of a new set.

Stevenson said Anthony Morrow and rookie Mike Scott have gotten into the act because of him. They each politely decline such a notion.

“No man, I already had my funky sock deal when he came to New Jersey,” Morrow said. “He was probably doing it before me because he’s old. I’ll pay homage but I did that on my own. I started that trend with my era.”

Stevenson is still the one to top, according to at least one. Kyle Korver noted that Stevenson ‘crushes’ all such fashionistas.



DeShawn Stevenson got a tattoo of Abraham Lincoln on this neck, just part of his body art collection. PHOTOS BY CURTIS COMPTON

The tattoos: That has become an addiction. Stevenson spends his summers getting inked – major body parts at a time. He said he will spend 12-13 hours in a session with his artist in Orlando getting work done on his arms, back, neck and more. The tattoo artist even makes house calls.

“They are used to me,” Stevenson said. “I spend a lot of money on tattoos.”

The Lincoln portrait was not his first choice. Stevenson let Gilbert Arenas, then a teammate with the Wizards, know his intention to get a tattoo of Martin Luther King Jr. Arenas did so first. Stevenson settled on Lincoln for “all the things he did for us.” He added a pair of 5s on each side of the image, as in a five dollar bill, to avoid confusion for admirers of the work.

“It hurt,” Stevenson said simply in describing the process of getting the tattoo in such a location.

The gesture: That has taken on several forms. Early in his career, Stevenson would place his hand over his eye after a 3-pointer. When he played for the Mavericks, where he won an NBA title, he altered the move. He now forms a circle with his thumb and index finger leaving three fingers extended. He will move the circle to his eye and after a few seconds snap it away as a salute. It caught on and continues.

The move was not always appreciated early in his career.

“Me being in the league for 13 years now, people know I’ve got gimmicks,” Stevenson said. “They tend not to feed into it but when I first started, it kind of (ticked) some guys off.”

Stevenson, who is also active on Twitter, is often referred to as 13 by his younger teammates, a reference to his number of years in the league. The 31-year-old has played for the Jazz, Magic, Wizards, Mavericks and Nets before joining the Hawks this season. His career started as the 23rd overall pick in the 2000 NBA Draft by the Jazz straight out of high school.

Stevenson has become a valuable on-court presence for the Hawks. Despite his aging knees, coach Larry Drew turns to him as a defensive presence at the guard and small forward positions.

"I've always admired his game from afar, just the fact that he knows who he is," Drew said. "He doesn't come out and try to do too much. From a defensive standpoint, that is his strength and that is who he is. I like that he brings that to the table. My biggest concern was how healthy he would be and how healthy we would stay. So far, he has been really good for us."

- Chris Vivlamore

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