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THE HAWKS SIGNED PAUL MILLSAP (LEFT) TO A TWO-YEAR, \$19 MILLION CONTRACT. THE FORWARD HAD SPENT THE LAST SEVEN SEASONS WITH THE JAZZ. (DAVID GOLDMAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS)

# HAWKS EMPHASIZE CHARACTER AS THEY INTRODUCE MILLSAP

JOHN MANASSO | Published: Wednesday, July 10, 2013, 5:39pm

ATLANTA — As Atlanta Hawks general manager Danny Ferry introduced new forward Paul Millsap on Wednesday and enumerated the player's attributes, many of them had to do with character more than they did skill.

"He embodies the things we want to have, the intangible things that we want to have in our program going forward from hard-working, toughness, relentless competitor that cares about his team and competes every night," Ferry said.

"We want to continue to add players like Paul" — then he caught himself, realizing he had yet to that point mentioned Millsap's skills that have allowed the 6-foot-8, 253-pounder to average as many as 17.3 points per game in a single season — "especially players as good as Paul, as well.



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"So we're excited to have him with us. We look forward to a lot of success and ups and downs, everything that comes with a season. When you do that with a guy like Paul Millsap you're usually in better shape."

In turn, Millsap has bought into the kind of values that Ferry wants to instill in what the GM refers to as his "program." On the playing court, those values will be imparted by new coach Mike Budenholzer, an import from San Antonio, the organization where Budenholzer and Ferry each learned about creating a winning NBA organization. Millsap said the chance to play for Budenholzer enticed him.

"To see guys, coaches and players, leave from there and go to other organizations, you want to be a part of that," Millsap said, "and you hope that they take that with them and you're sure they will. So to see him come over here, that's where I wanted to be. That's what I wanted to be a part of and I want to build off his knowledge and I want to learn as much as I can from him because of where he came from."

With Millsap essentially signed to take the spot formerly held by Josh Smith, comparisons between the two are inevitable. If the enduring images of Smith are the highlight-reel dunk or the show-stopping blocked shot, then so are that of his grimace, his public disagreements on the bench with a coach — be it Mike Woodson or Larry Drew — and being called out during the playoffs on television by analyst Hubie Brown for arguing a noncall and failing to get back in transition defense against Orlando in 2010.

The signing of Millsap — and Ferry included the re-signing of Kyle Korver in that same vein — is seen as an organizational decision to make a break with those negatives. In a league with as few players as the NBA, players' attitudes are available for all to see. Nonetheless, teams still have to do their due diligence when it comes to potential additions.

"A very important part of our process is trying to learn as much as we can about a player during college," Ferry said, "and talking to all the coaches they've had in college and the people around them, and that continues in the NBA. That intel is a vital part of our process in understanding the type of player and person you might be bringing into your program. So we've done a lot of homework."

In Millsap's case, Ferry said that speaking to Korver, who played with Millsap for three seasons in Utah from 2007-08 to 2009-10, was part of the process.

"Obviously, Kyle Korver spoke very highly of Paul and I spoke to other players and coaches that have been around Paul over the last several years," Ferry said. "There was not one person that didn't say he embodies being a great teammate, a hard worker, relentless competitor and really good player, a good teammate, a good person to play with."

"Again, I think for us to move forward, those are the types of players — those are the types of people — we want to have in our program."

To put it another way, the chances of a knucklehead playing for the Hawks going forward have virtually evaporated. Notice that the Hawks also chose not to retain forward Ivan Johnson, who took a few of the Hawks' dumb technical fouls in the playoffs against Indiana (Smith and Devin

Associated Press

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### Hawks emphasize character as they introduce Millsap

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Harris, both gone, took some of the others, as did Jeff Teague, a restricted free agent, who seemingly is set to return). Johnson would have been easy to retain as a restricted free agent and would add some traits that the Hawks happen to be short on at present: size, muscle, rebounding and defense in the post.

In fact, it's not a coincidence that Millsap and Korver both once played for the Jazz. Ferry said that San Antonio modeled itself on Utah. In 1994, when Gregg Popovich was hired as San Antonio's general manager — and he hired current general manager R.C. Buford as head sc,out that same year — Jerry Sloan had just finished his sixth season as the coach of the Jazz. (Popovich did not become the Spurs' coach until 1996.)

"Interesting note along those lines," Ferry interjected following a question to Millsap about his time in Utah, "if you ask San Antonio and you ask R.C. and Pop who they would model or who they decided to model when they first started, it was Utah — the values and the way they play, the way they went about their work, day in and day out — Utah is a program that anyone in the NBA certainly respects the professionalism in how they run their organization."

With players like Millsap, the hope is that the same becomes true of the Hawks — and that it shows in wins and losses.



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John Manasso is the author of "A Season of Loss, A Lifetime of Forgiveness: The Dan Snyder and Dany Heatley Story" and freelances for NHL.com. He also worked for the website of the Atlanta Falcons as the team's beat writer for the 2009 season.

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