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Payne being mentored by Hawks' big men

By Chris Vivlamore

Here's a bonus blog with some leftovers from Monday's exhibition opening win against the Pelicans.

Interesting to note that the Hawks started with 2/5ths of their regular-season lineup and the Pelicans started 4/5ths of their projected group. The Hawks led by as many as 21 points in the 93-87 win before the Pelicans made a late run with most veterans, on both sides, on the bench.

* Hawks coach Mike Budenholzer was asked following the morning shoot-around what he wanted to see rookie Adreian Payne work on in the game and overall

"Defensively, his awareness is where we need him to improve," Budenholzer said. "I think understanding how the ball can move and how he can be a facilitator and understanding spacing and where the shooters are."

It was noted that the Hawks have several big men with a similar skill set as Payne – Al Horford, Paul Millsap, Pero Antic and Mike Muscala – who could be used as mentors in his progression to the NBA game.

"Just watching those guys play, observing, talking and hopefully asking questions," Budenholzer said of the mentoring process among the forwards/centers. "I think he's coming into a system or a style of play where some of our most important players, you can at least say he is similar to them, and there is not a drastic change and we are not asking him to do things that he can't get real comfortable and real confident doing."

Payne finished with four points, on 1 of 6 shooting, and had seven rebounds. His length was apparent on defense.

* Funny incident from last night. As I reported, DeMarre Carroll twisted an ankle in practice Saturday and was questionable for the game. Carroll said after shoot-around he would test the ankle and expected to play. Budenholzer even listed Carroll as a starter when I asked for the lineup.

So, I watched Carroll warmed up before the game. As he was leaving the court I asked if he would play and Carroll immediately said he was good to go. So, of course, I immediately tweeted that Carroll would play.

Not two minutes later, Carroll walks back on the court and informs me that "Bud said no" and that he was headed back out to get in some extra work. So, of course, I immediately tweet that Carroll was out.

I then headed back to the media room to check the lineup and Thabo Sefolosha was already listed among the starters. Sounds like the decision had already been made.

I asked Budenholzer following the game if the Hawks were just being cautious with Carroll.

"I think DeMarre, very typical of him, was wanting to play and pushing to play," he said. "I think caution was probably the proper choice tonight."

* I asked Pelicans coach Monty Williams how he planned to handle the minutes of star Anthony Davis after the forward spent so much time this summer with Team USA for the FIBA World Championships. He had a pretty interesting answer (and even got a bit animated).

"We've talked to our training staff to make sure we give him the proper rest but at the same time he's 21 (years old)," Williams said. "He doesn't get tired until he's like 28. All this recovery talk now in the league it prevents guys from working the way they need to. We talk about playing into June and then we always tell guys to take time off. It doesn't make sense. If you are going to play into June, you've got to condition your body to go through the really tough, tough times. All this recovery talk is good but the one team that talks about it all the time is San Antonio and they are conditioned to do what they do. The rest of us have to work at it. I'm not going to get too happy on the farm with keeping him out of games."

I will try to incorporate more NBA-wide news in my coverage this season.

Return later for reports from the Hawks' Tuesday practice.