

Initiative helps walk-on succeed

By David Scott
Emerald Contributor

These days junior walk-on guard Brett Johnson is too busy to worry if there is still a chance Oregon basketball coach Don Monson will cut him from the squad.

Much has happened the past month and a half.

Johnson, all 5-foot-10-inches and 158 pounds of him, showed up for practice Oct. 15, played in his first game against the Canberra Cannons a month later and flew to Little Rock Nov. 25, where the Ducks played Arkansas. It was Johnson's first plane flight.

A psychology major, Johnson is no longer just one of the many Oregon students who dreams about playing for a Division I school. Rather, he seized the opportunity and has shown the coaching staff he's committed to playing.

"I figure (other students) had the same chance I had," Johnson said. "I just took the initiative."

Monson, too, has noticed Johnson's initiative and said Johnson's chances of sticking with the team the whole year are improving each day.

"(Johnson) very well may stay the rest of the year," he said. "He's becoming more a part of the ball club all the time."

Monson said because guard Tony Hargain, a wide receiver on the Independence Bowl-bound Duck football team, will still be playing football, Johnson will stick through Christmas and The Far West Classic in Portland at the very least.

"(Johnson's) inexperienced, and it takes time to pick things up," Monson explained. "But he's done well ... as well as can be expected. He's got some quickness, and he picks up stuff reasonably well. He's definitely helped our ball club with the practice situation."

With Johnson, Oregon has 12 players on the roster, and Johnson recently helped take up the slack when junior point guard Mike Helms was out with an

ankle injury.

Johnson, who last played organized basketball at Roosevelt High School in Portland three years ago, said he had often considered trying out for the team his first two years in college but kept putting it off. This year he acted spontaneously, a trait Johnson applies to other aspects of his life as well, such as his decision to attend Oregon in 1987.

"That's the way it was with college, too," he said. "At first I wasn't planning on going."

Johnson, who describes himself as a "fun, spontaneous" person, also has gotten used to practicing six times a week for three hours a day while juggling a full class load.

Curtis Wilson, his roommate, experienced the same busy feeling three years ago when he walked on.

"He's going to go through all that stuff that I went through, knowing that he's going to step out on the court, and all this sweat and pain is worth it," said Wilson, who now focuses his athletic energies on track as a 400-meter runner. "Basically you're on a job for six months, and you still have to watch your grades."

In the meantime, Johnson's teammates continue to provide support, respecting his hard-work ethic and ball-hawking quickness.

Starting forward-center Richard Lucas thinks highly of Johnson.

"We think of him as being part of the team, not just the 'walk-on,'" Lucas said. "I'm definitely pulling for him."

Forward Keith Reynolds, the top returning scorer from last year's squad, also spoke positively of Johnson.

"Brett will hit the outside shot, and he will drive to the hoop," Reynolds said. "At this point he means a lot to us. He works hard, and he makes our other guards work."

"At first we were like, 'Dang, he's still with us. He's still working hard,' and it was like we were just going to have to accept that," Reynolds said.



Brett Johnson

Johnson said some of the people he knows from high school have a hard time believing he made the Oregon team.

"There were these guys who were stars in high school, and when I told them I made the team, they tried to look happy, but all they could say was, 'No, I don't believe you,'" Johnson said.

Reynolds needs surgery

Oregon forward Keith Reynolds will undergo arthroscopic surgery today to repair ligament damage on his right knee. He is expected to miss at least two to three weeks.

Reynolds, a senior from Springfield, was injured in the Ducks' 68-63 win over Arizona a week ago. He aggravated the

injury in the game with Arizona State last Saturday and during Tuesday's game at Alabama-Birmingham.

Reynolds has averaged 10.3 points and 3.2 rebounds in the Ducks' 2-2 start. He came to Oregon last season as a junior college transfer from Southern Idaho College.

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