

# Mourning ends holdout; signs contract with Hornets

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The Charlotte Hornets have reached a contract agreement with Alonzo Mourning, ending the holdout by their No. 1 draft pick, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

The Hornets and Mourning agreed to a multiyear deal, ending an impasse that kept the 6-foot-10 rookie center from Georgetown out of the Hornets' preseason schedule and the first three games of the regular season, *The Charlotte Observer* reported, quoting an NBA source close to the negotiations.

Hornets president, Spencer Stolpen, expressed hope that Mourning soon would be wearing a Hornets uniform, but declined to confirm that an accord had been reached.

"We're very close," Stolpen said in a telephone interview early Wednesday. He would not say whether a first-year salary of \$2.5 million cited in one report was accurate.

"I won't even tell you if that's close," he said.

Stolpen said he expected to resume talks with Mourning's agent, David Falk. "I can't pre-

dict exactly when, but I'm confident it will happen very soon," he said.

While the Hornets are off to a 2-1 start, most observers consider Mourning the final component in Charlotte's bid to make the playoffs for the first time in the club's five-year history. His rebounding and defensive skills are just what the Hornets need after finishing near the bottom of the league in both categories last season.

Currently the Hornets are splitting time at center between 6-foot-11 Mike Gminski and 6-8

Kenny Gattison.

Stolpen was unavailable for further comment on Wednesday. A Hornets spokesman said he would be tied up in meetings until the start of the Hornets-Celtics game at 7:30 p.m. The spokesman said no immediate announcement was expected.

Falk did not return phone calls to his office in Washington D.C.

Mourning, the No. 2 overall pick in the draft last June, could join the team sometime

this week. However, the Hornets must first reduce their payroll to fit Mourning's first-season salary under the NBA's \$14 million per-team salary cap.

The Hornets have \$1.96 million available under their salary cap this year. To sign him, they will need an additional \$300,000 to \$500,000, the *Observer* said.

They can do so by trading a player or renegotiating one or more contracts. For weeks, the Hornets have been discussing potential trades.

Recent reports have indicated the Hornets are working on a deal that would bring disgruntled Detroit Pistons forward Dennis Rodman to Charlotte in exchange for J.R. Reid and Johnny Newman.

Six NBA scouts attended one of the Hornets' preseason games, heightening speculation that Charlotte was trying to work a deal.

Hornets owner George Shinn and John Thompson, Mourning's college coach, expanded their roles in the talks last week, bringing the sides closer.



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