

Johnson to lead Lady Gamecocks into '94-'95 season



KIM TRUETT The Gamecock
Shannon Johnson led USC in scoring and assists last season. She looks for Carolina to improve on last years 14-13 mark.

LIZA ACIERNO Staff Writer

Senior guard Shannon Johnson originally chose USC because it was close to home and she liked the coaching staff. She was the first Lady Gamecock to bring home a gold medal from the Olympic festival.

Johnson led the Gamecocks in scoring last season with an average of 23.5 points per game. She lit up Auburn for 42 points as well as Mississippi State for 36 and Louisiana State for 38.

"My best moment in college basketball was when I scored 42 points against Auburn University in our 93-94 season," she said. "I only scored 16 in the first half. Everyone was expecting another boring game from me, then I began hitting my shots."

With her senior season fast approaching, Johnson said losing in the SEC tournament last year was disappointing.

"I hated getting knocked out of the SEC tournament so early last season," Johnson said. "It was intense competition, and we just came up short. The only thing we could do was wait for practice and practice harder."

Johnson said this year's

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USC basketball player Shannon Johnson

squad has experience and will be looking to improve on last years 14-13 record.

"I think we'll do well this season," she said. "We completed a great preseason workout, we have five experienced starters and eager newcomers on our team."

The level of play is high for the Gamecocks according to Johnson and is tough. South Carolina finished 2-9 in Southeastern Conference play.

"Playing in the SEC is rough," Johnson said. "I've already been knocked out twice. Girls try and steal the ball from me but end up hitting me, I'm only unconscious for a few seconds."

Johnson has set pro ball as her goal after finishing her Carolina basketball career.

"After I graduate I plan on going overseas to Europe and playing pro ball," she said. "I want to make some money so I can start up my own busi-

ness. Maybe something in retail"

While at USC she knows what being a student-athlete really means. Johnson also has advice for anyone playing basketball.

"My grades are important. They have to be good because I'm an athlete," she said. "The only advice I can give someone is play hard and never give up."

Through hard work and practice Johnson has put herself at the top of many SEC statistical categories. She averaged 23.8 points per SEC game. She also grabbed 5.5 rebounds per contest.

Johnson also led the Gamecocks in assists during the 1993-94 campaign. She dished out a total of 133 during the year.

"I started playing basketball in the seventh grade with my friends. I haven't been playing forever, it's just something I picked up."

Grant predicts Magic dominance in near future

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Horace Grant has three NBA championship rings and designs on at least two more.

The Orlando Magic's prized off-season acquisition says his new team is capable of contending for the Eastern Conference title this season and will reign over the entire league soon.

"I don't know if it'll happen this year or next year, but I guarantee we will win a couple of championships here before I retire," said Grant, who was part of three title teams with the Chicago Bulls.

Grant's signing last month heightened expectations that were already high for a franchise fortunate enough to obtain Shaquille O'Neal and Anfernee Hardaway in consecutive drafts. The Magic won a club-record 50 games last season, but lost to Indiana in the opening round of the playoffs.

Grant, a 29-year-old power forward, is viewed as the tough defender and rebounder needed to complement O'Neal and help the team move to the next level.

"I played against him for five years and hated it," the Magic's Nick Anderson said. "I welcome him with open arms. He's going to take a lot of pressure off Shaq."

The 6-foot-10, 235-pound Grant cautioned, however, about expecting too much too soon.

O'Neal and Hardaway, who's sitting out training camp because of a contract dispute, are only 22 years old. And despite the Magic's potential, it's difficult to imagine a team

going from having never won a post-season game to the Finals in one year.

"I don't think there's any question we have the tools and talent to compete for the Eastern Conference title," said Grant, who averaged 12.6 points and 8.6 rebounds in seven seasons with the Bulls.

"But the fans and the city have to be patient with us. This is a new thing for myself and for the team. We have to learn each other and get to know each other on the court. That takes time."

Grant, who became an unrestricted free agent after last season, isn't worried about being overshadowed by O'Neal and Hardaway. After all, he played in the shadows of Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen in Chicago and still made a name for himself.

"I've never pulled on anyone's coat-tails. I go out to play my type of game," he said. "You do that playing beside guys like Michael and Scottie, and you're going to get notoriety."

In some ways, Grant felt like a rookie again when training camp began last week at the University of North Florida. He described himself as being "one step above excited" about being with a new team, especially one that made a dogged effort to acquire him.

The NBA voided the original contract Grant signed with Orlando, ruling a one-year, opt-out clause violated the league's salary cap. He later agreed to a 5-year deal with a 2-year early termination option that was approved.

This week crucial for fate of NHL season

NEW YORK (AP) — Start-up or lock-out?

That was the choice facing the NHL's governors today when they met with commissioner Gary Bettman to assess the latest contract proposal from the players union.

"If we don't get something this week, then we're probably looking at a shortened season," said Jack Ferreira, general manager of the Anaheim Mighty Ducks. "I think this week is crucial."

The governors are expected to determine if the NHL can open the season on Saturday, Bettman's targeted restart date, or whether the season will continue to be shut down as it has been for 11 days now.

Bettman has never said the season won't begin without a signed collective agreement by his Saturday deadline.

He says he needs to see significant movement in the talks.

"We have never been able to understand what Gary means by meaningful negotiations," said Toronto's Mike Gartner, president of the NHL Players Association.

Union head Bob Goodenow said his group has made "significant moves" that should form the basis for a new agreement.

"We have gone the extra mile to get an agreement," he said. "We have made today's proposal to bring an end to the lockout and play hockey, not because we are interested in taxing player salaries."

Fifty-one games had been postponed through Monday, with six more today. Bettman says if the season starts this weekend, teams will play full 84-game

schedules.

But a Saturday startup date seems in danger at this point. The players' proposal on Monday only dealt with the taxation issue to help small-market teams.

Even if the governors accept the proposal, there are still other issues to be determined, such as free agency, arbitration and a rookie salary cap.

Asked whether it was possible to delay the season any further without cancelling games, Bettman said: "I believe it is possible. We have not considered that."

Bettman spoke briefly following a three and one-half-hour session in Toronto on Monday, during which he received a proposal from the NHL Players Association that stressed a new taxation plan.

"The governors will get an update

(on the proposal), and we'll have a discussion and then a decision," Bettman said.

The union's new proposal calls for an increase in the top taxation rate on salaries from 5.5 percent to 7 percent. The top four teams would be taxed 7 percent, the next four at a 5 percent rate, the next four at 3 percent and the last four at 1 percent.

Players say this would create a \$20 million pool for small-market teams, \$1 million more than the NHL's proposal. They say the proposal would give the small-market teams revenue of 72 percent of the NHL average.

The players' plan, responding to a suggestion by owners, reduced the tax on gate receipts from 5.5 percent to 3 percent. The payroll tax would be applied at graduated rates to the top 16 clubs by revenue.

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