

Johnson excels in international, pro hoops

DWAYNE McLEMORE Sports Editor

Shannon Johnson's basketball career at USC ended more than a year ago, and she hasn't been anything less than busy since.

The former Gamecock standout has been competing in international and professional basketball. And two recent happenings are proof that she's been making her mark in both.

On Aug. 4, Johnson was one of 12 players selected to the 1997 USA Women's World University Games Team. Her selection came less than two weeks after she extended her contract with the Columbus Quest of the American Basketball League.

"It's the best feeling," Johnson said. "I played on the Jones Cup team two years in a row. I feel like I'm making progress in the USA program. By 2004 I would like to be in the Olympics."

Johnson and 36 others went through three days of trials before the World University Games Team was chosen. She's counting on her ABL experience to be a plus when the World University Games begin Aug. 21.

"I think the level I played at professionally will help me as I lead on the court and relate to the younger players how important it is to be mentally and physically ready for each game," she said.

The games, which take place every two years for current university student-athletes or recent graduates, are being held in Palermo and Trapani, Italy through the 29th. The United States team won the silver medal in 1995, the bronze in 1993 and the gold in 1991.

And Johnson is no stranger to medals. She helped the U.S. Jones Cup team win a gold medal in 1996 and a bronze in 1995. She also received a gold in 1993 playing for the U.S. Olympic Festival team.

And she had a gold medal career for the Gamecocks from 1992-96, finishing as the school's second all-time leading scorer with 2,230 points. A three-time All-SEC selection, Johnson averaged 24.7 points as a senior, garnering honorable All-American honors.

Prior to that, she led Hartsville to the State 4-A title in 1990 and 1992. Her other two high school years saw her lose the state title in the championship game.

For the first 22 years of her life, Johnson lived in the Palmetto State. Since August of last year, she has been on the road with her game. And she said she comes home on holidays and any other chance she gets.

"I miss the people and the weather," Johnson said. "Pro basketball is a whole different level and I enjoy it. College was much more fun because of the friendships."

This past season, she helped guide the ABL's Quest to a league-best 31-9 record and the championship in the league's inaugural season. Playing for the Quest was a dream come true for Johnson.

"This opportunity gives me a chance to play professionally in the U.S.," she said. "In college, I was more of a scorer. Professionally, I'm more of a point guard. It's more physical in the pros, and the SEC is one of the more physical conferences."

She shined in the pro game, leading the

league in 3-point shooting percentage, nailing 69 of 144 (.479) from behind the arch. She was also seventh in assists (3.8 apg) and even set an ABL record for 3-pointers in a game with eight.

She led the team in field goal percentage and set the Quest record for points in a game with 31. Her small size earned her the nickname of "Pee Wee."

Small size, maybe so. But her giant contributions haven't gone unnoticed, as she added two more years to her contract with the Quest. Just ask Brian Agler, Quest head coach and general manager, how important Johnson has been.

"She was definitely one of the foundation players of our success last year," Agler said. "She has a great future in this league and we're happy to have her back in the fold."

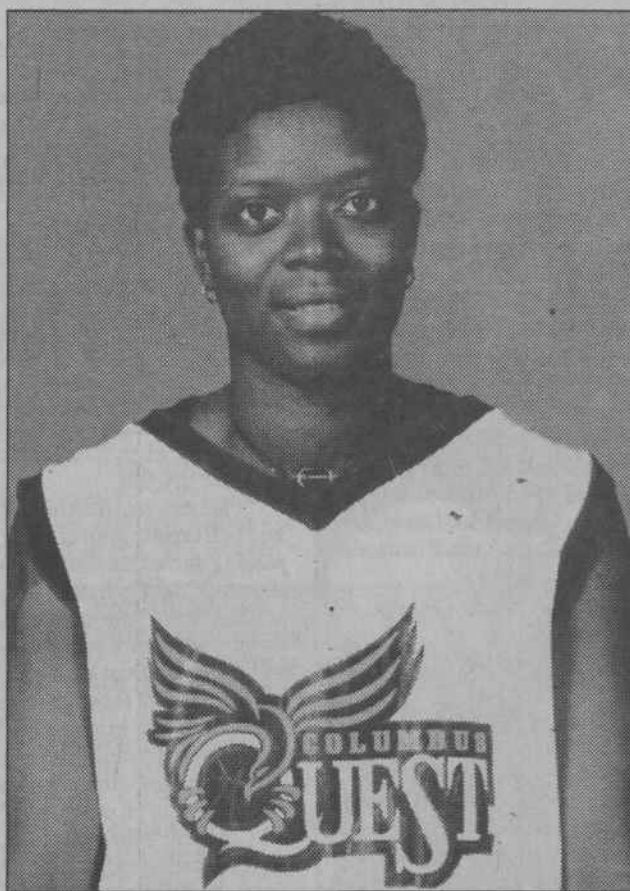
Johnson was also very excited to have re-signed.

"Re-signing with the Quest was the most important thing because we should have our core of seven players back that won the championship last season," she said. "That means we have another good opportunity to win it all again and I'm excited about it."

But for now, Johnson will be focusing on helping the World University Games team capture the gold medal. And once she's finished doing that, she won't have much time to rest.

The Quest opens its training camp in early September and will set out to defend its title when the ABL season begins in mid-October.

For Johnson, it's "busy-ness" as usual.



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK
Former Lady Gamecock Shannon Johnson helped lead the Columbus Quest to the inaugural American Basketball League title.

SPORTS BRIEFS

World University Games to showcase six current and former Gamecocks
The 1997 World University Games, being held in Palermo and Trapani, Italy, features six current and former Gamecocks.

Current student-athletes Crystal Brownlee and Brad Snyder will be competing in the shot put Aug. 28 and 29, respectively. And Clint Mathis and Josh Wolff will be a part of the Men's World University Games soccer squad.

Former Gamecocks Dawn Ellerbe and Shannon Johnson will also be participating in the Games. Ellerbe will be competing Aug. 28 in the hammer, while Johnson is part of the Women's World University Games basketball team. Both were standout athletes while at USC and have been participating in numerous international events since their graduation.

The event takes place every two years for current university student-athletes and recent graduates and begins Friday.

Franco-Fone Games to feature two former Gamecocks

Two former Gamecock track and field athletes, John Stoikos and Glenn McAtee, will represent Canada at the Franco-Fone Games later this month in Madagascar.

The event features all the former French provinces.

Stoikos and Glenn McAtee will compete in the hammer.

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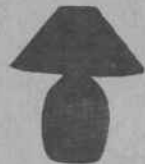
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