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WKU MEN'S BASKETBALL

Hollingsworth to take over Hilltoppers' primary PG duties

Stansbury moving guard Anderson back to wing after 6 games

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Western Kentucky Hilltoppers guard Taveion Hollingsworth (11) drives while guarded by West Virginia Mountaineers guard Jermaine Haley (10) during WKU's 63-57 win over West Virginia in the Myrtle Beach Invitational on Friday, November 16, 2018, at the HTC Center in Conway, S.C. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Austin Anthony

A 63-54 loss Saturday at Indiana State caused Rick Stansbury to sit back and re-evaluate his roster.

“Sometimes it takes an L to make you make adjustments,” the Western Kentucky coach said Monday on his weekly radio show.

Stansbury said he wants forward Desean Murray playing in the post rather than attacking from the wing. He also wants to get forward Tolu Smith – who’s mostly backed up center Charles Bassey – playing alongside Bassey in certain lineups.

But the primary change Stansbury has made will come at point guard. Taveion Hollingsworth will handle those duties at 6 p.m. Saturday when WKU (3-3) hosts Tennessee State (2-4) at E.A. Diddle Arena.

Josh Anderson has played point guard through much of the first six games for the Hilltoppers, and the team’s struggled to score.

WKU's averaged 67.2 points per game across its six outings, which ranks 12th among 14 Conference USA schools. While the Toppers have certainly played a tougher schedule than many of their league peers, they're on pace to score more than 10 points fewer per game than Stansbury's 2017-18 squad (78.4).

"I haven't had teams average (67.2) points," Stansbury said. "You've got to score the basketball."

WKU's last outing Saturday at Indiana State was especially anemic. The Hilltoppers shot 36.8 percent from the floor and 22.2 percent from the 3-point line while posting an 8-to-15 assist-to-turnover ratio.

Bassey scored 16 points on 6-of-7 shooting, but the rest of the team combined to shoot only 15-of-50 against the Sycamores.

Anderson played 27 minutes and finished with two points, two rebounds, two blocks and zero assists vs. five turnovers. It was another tough day for the sophomore who Stansbury moved this offseason from the wing to point guard.

Through six games, Anderson's averaging 5 ppg and 3.2 rpg and posted 14 assists vs. 21 turnovers. His five-assist, two-turnover performance Nov. 18 in a loss to Central Florida marked the only time he's posted a positive assist-to-turnover ratio this season.

Anderson's best scoring night came Nov. 16 in a win over West Virginia. The 6-foot-6 guard added 12 points that night, six of which came on thunderous second-half dunks.

But in three of WKU's six contests, Anderson has scored two points or less. That includes scoreless days vs. UCF and Nov. 6 at then-No. 25 Washington.

Stansbury said he thinks Anderson will benefit from moving back to the wing.

"Moving him off the ball a little bit will free his mind," Stansbury said. "It'll take the handcuffs off of him. He's going to be a lot better now."

Hollingsworth has played primarily as a two-guard during the first 44 games of his Hilltopper career. The 6-2 sophomore averaged 13.3 ppg last season and is averaging a team-best 15.8 this year.

The Lexington native Hollingsworth will probably only be WKU's primary point guard for the next three games: Saturday vs. Tennessee State, Dec. 5 at Missouri State and Dec. 8 at Arkansas.

Lamonte Bearden, the team's most experienced point guard, is scheduled to return for the Tops' Dec. 16 home game vs. Troy. He's academically ineligible to play until after the end of the first semester.

Freshman Dalano Banton has backed up Anderson at the position and can also fill in if need be.

"We know we have 'Monte coming back (after the next) three games, but we're going to go on and make that move now," Stansbury said of his point guard change.

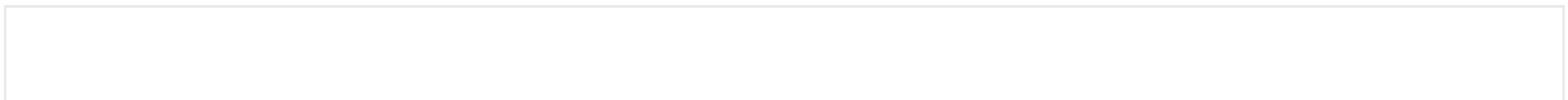
Hollingsworth averaged 34.5 minutes over 38 games last season and tallied 71 assists vs. 67 turnovers. Through six contests this year, he's posted 12 assists and 11 turnovers in 36.5 minutes per night.

"That'll put some strain on him, now, having to do some things he's never done," Stansbury said of the move to point guard. "But again, one thing I know about him, he's going to be in attack mode.

"He can score it multiple ways. You make a mistake guarding him on a ball screen, he'll shoot it. He's a good mid-range guy off a ball screen. ... He's going to give you everything he's got."

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