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TOP STORY

WKU MEN'S BASKETBALL

Anderson ready for season with new position, improved shot

Sophomore will take over Hilltoppers' primary point guard duties

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Western Kentucky guard Josh Anderson (center) shoots between center Charles Bassey (23) and guard Taveion Hollingsworth (11) Saturday, October 20, 2018, during a scrimmage at E.A. Diddle Arena. (Bac

Josh Anderson showed in spurts as a freshman why he was a top-60 national recruit in the Class of 2017.

Now a sophomore, the Western Kentucky guard had all offseason with the program to train, learn a new position and improve his game.

Coach Rick Stansbury thinks Anderson is ready to unleash his potential.

“I’m pleased with the progress he’s making,” Stansbury said Saturday after the team’s open scrimmage. “He’s got a ways to go. There are some things that he doesn’t do at certain times. But there’s no question he’s getting better.”

Anderson will play point guard this season for the Hilltoppers after working on the wing last year. The 6-foot-6, 195-pound sophomore isn’t a traditional point guard, but his coach thinks the move can make Anderson more dangerous.

Stansbury said that with Anderson possessing the ball in the middle of the floor, it gives him more options on how to attack a defense.

“Where Josh’s strengths are is getting that ball and getting it out in transition and pushing that thing on missed baskets,” Stansbury said. “As he continues to get more comfortable with that, he’ll get better too. Quickness and athleticism-wise, he’s about as good as any of them.”

Lamonte Bearden and Darius Thompson handled most of WKU’s point guard duties last season. Thompson is now playing professional ball in The Netherlands, while Bearden is back but academically ineligible for the Tops’ first nine games this season.

Anderson is set to start at the position when WKU hosts NAIA school Campbellsville on Tuesday in its first exhibition. The Hilltoppers open the regular season Nov. 6 at No. 25 Washington.

“I’ve been playing basketball for a long time so just communicating really was the biggest adjustment I had to make,” Anderson said of his position change.

Anderson isn’t “naturally a talker,” Stansbury said, so the coach has encouraged him to become more vocal in his new role.

“You’ve got to know what everyone else is doing,” Stansbury said. “You can’t call a set and start a set when there are two guys out of position. So that’s all a new adjustment for him.

“But he’s getting better. The more he understands what he’s supposed to do, it’s easier for him to talk.”

Dalano Banton and Taveion Hollingsworth can also play point guard until Bearden returns. Anderson credited the redshirt senior Bearden for pushing him in practice as he gets a handle on his new position.

“ ‘Monte, he’s been helping me out a lot, coaching me up at the point guard position,” Anderson said. “That’s been big. We’ve just been competing every day in practice.”

Anderson sat out the first 15 games of WKU’s 2017-18 season as the NCAA reviewed his academic eligibility. The former four-star recruit was finally ruled eligible Jan. 5 and responded by scoring 16 points in his college debut the next night in a win at Marshall.

The Baton Rouge, La., native appeared in each of the Toppers’ final 23 games. He averaged 7.4 points and 2.3 rebounds per game, shooting 55.3 percent from the field.

Anderson’s highlights included a career-high 19 points in a home win against Charlotte, 12 points and two key steals in a home victory over Alabama-Birmingham and a thunderous dunk in a home win against Marshall.

Teams were able to neutralize Anderson some though by playing off him on the wing and making it harder for him to do what he does best, which is driving to the basket.

Anderson spent the offseason working on his jump shot so teams would have to respect it. The hope is that if he can show that he's a shooting threat, defenders will scoot up to guard against that, which will make it easier to blow by them and go to the basket.

"I just came in the gym and put up shots, pretty much," Anderson said. Assistant coaches got with me and worked on my form and stuff like that. ...

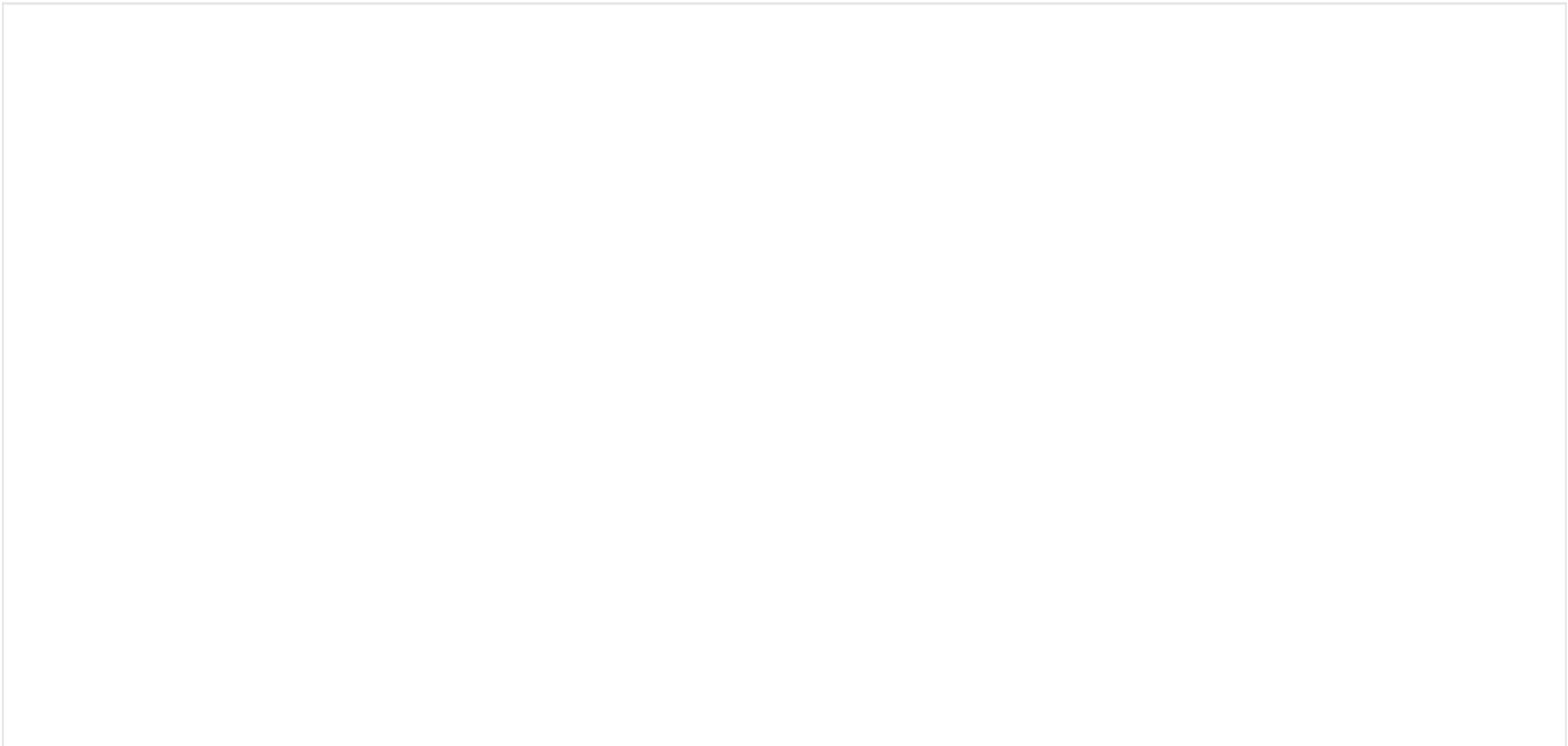
"The way the ball was coming off my hands, I had to adjust my hands. But I feel more comfortable shooting now, so I feel like that's a big improvement for me, personally."

Anderson showed off the improvements in his game Oct. 11 in front of about 20 NBA evaluators at the team's first Pro Day. He made some highlight plays Thursday at Hilltopper Hysteria, then finished a 42-minute scrimmage Saturday with 23 points, 12 assists and only one turnover.

"Josh is excited to be where he is," forward Marek Nelson said. "Coach has got a lot of trust in him and we all do. We all have a lot of trust in Josh as our point guard. ...

"He's going to put on a show, I know that."

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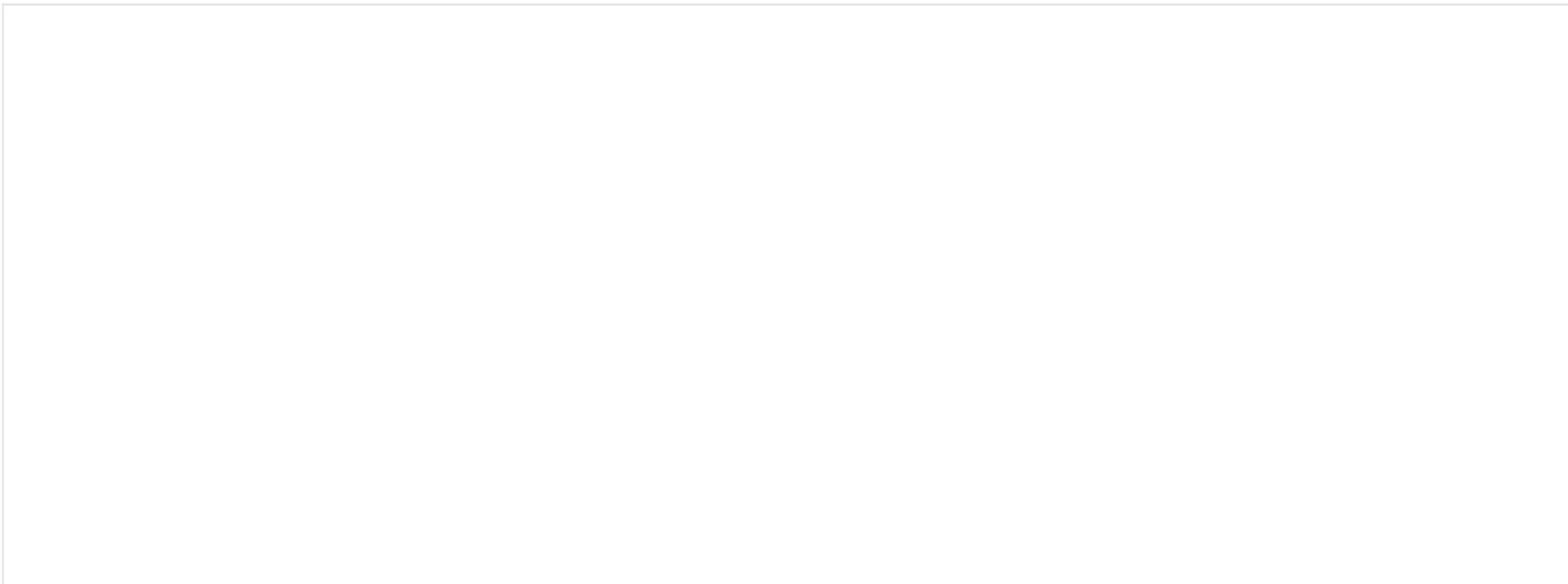


VIDEO: WKU coach Rick Stansbury on the Hilltoppers' open scrimmage
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VIDEO: WKU forward Marek Nelson on Hilltopper Hysteria
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