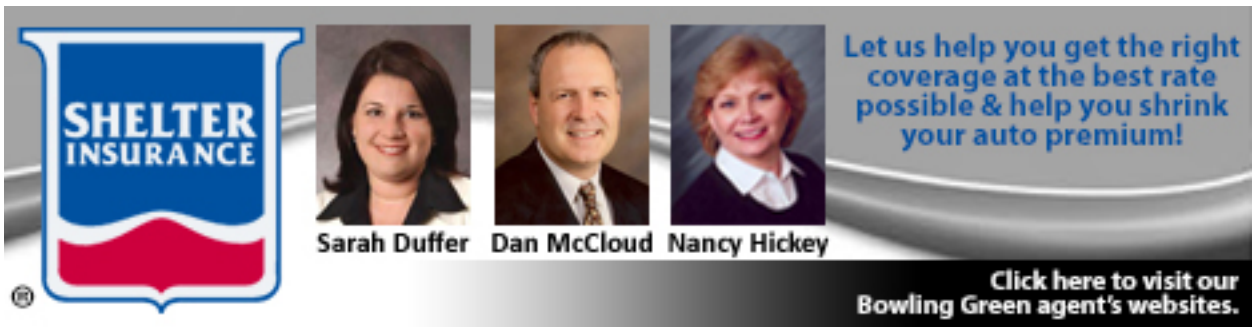


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WKU MEN'S BASKETBALL

WKU forward Williams drawing comparisons to Justin Johnson

Williams expected to make impact after transferring from NKU

ELLIOTT PRATT epratt@bgdailynews.com 1 hr ago



Western Kentucky forward Carson Williams Wednesday, October 9, 2019, during Pro Day at E.A. Diddle Arena. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Before playing for Western Kentucky was in the plans, Carson Williams watched Justin Johnson become one of the best Hilltoppers in the current era.

Johnson, now playing professionally in Italy, probably has an easier time talking than Williams. The latter may be tougher.

WKU's new 6-foot-5, 230-pound forward is drawing the comparisons before he's even played one game as a Hilltopper. Take that from those who played with Johnson and those who coached him.

"They both have their own type of play styles, but you can definitely see the resemblance," junior guard Taveion Hollingsworth said at WKU's media day event recently. "I can tell you now Carson plays harder than Justin. Go ahead and tell (Johnson) that."

Williams will have two years to make his impact as a redshirt junior who sat out last season after transferring from Northern Kentucky. The Mr. Basketball of 2016 and Owenton native played primarily inside for the Norse and averaged 11.4 points and 5.8 rebounds per game in his two seasons at NKU.

He joined the Hilltoppers the offseason after Johnson led the team on a National Invitation Tournament semifinal run and finished 10th on WKU's all-time scoring list and fifth in career rebounds.

"To have a comparison like that, he's a great player so that feels good to me," Williams said in his first public comments as a Hilltopper. "He brought a lot to the program and people loved him down here so to be compared to that, I'm happy about it."

WKU coach Rick Stansbury sees the evolvement of Williams going the same as Johnson's. In his first two seasons, Johnson made one 3-pointer, but expanded his arsenal to hit 73 3-pointers in his last two years under Stansbury. His rebounding rate increased by two boards per game and he finished averaging nearly a double-double.

Williams was 7-of-21 on 3s at NKU.

"Carson is very similar," Stansbury said. "He came in as a paint player and we worked hard on his perimeter game and no question, all that has gotten better. There's a big learning curve still with the mental part of it and only time will cure that. Justin is probably a little bigger. From there on though, a lot of similarities. If you're asking me about what Taveion said about Carson being tough, no question about that."

Not much for words, Williams' teammates assure that the former Owen County High School star knows one speed. Stansbury said Williams is a player who may need guidance on when to slow down.

"Dude knows one speed and that's 100 miles per hour," senior guard Cam Justice said. "He's coming down the lane and there's dudes stepping out of the way just because they don't want to get hit. He brings a toughness and edge to this team for sure."

In his season watching from the bench, Williams worked to drop weight and develop more explosiveness. He said he developed a better outside shot and ball handling skills in addition to – as hard as it may be to believe – being more physical.

"I'm never going to shy away from my strengths and what got me to this point," Williams said. "My physicality, attacking the glass and scoring inside. I've been able to guard a variety of positions on the court. I'm getting quicker, working in the weight room and that type of thing. I'm really just looking to go wherever they need me."

What was needed, Stansbury said, is a player with the attitude similar to Johnson that the team missed last season. The fourth-year coach said he'll take toughness over a talker any day, but the right mix of both is what he got with Johnson and wants to continue developing with Williams.

"He's got to become a better communicator," Stansbury said. "There's one thing everybody really respects, and that's how hard he plays. But if you get a guy that does it every day, and he talks, that's the best of both worlds. What you're talking about with locker room stuff, there's immediate respect for Carson. The better he can get verbalizing things, talking is energy.

"Between those lines you can play hard, but when you're talking that's even more energy you give your teammates. We couldn't ask more from what he's given us. He's a gym rat. One guy you've got to tell to back off a bit. You have to put that bit in, pull those reins back. That's a good ability to have."

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