



Cavaliers sophomore forward Tristan Thompson has really done it this time. He got himself written up in the [New York Times](#) , which routinely saves its praise for the scum and lowlife that inhabit the Big Apple.

The feel-good piece by Jim Cavan harkens Cleveland fans back to the days of playoff baseball, Fausto Carmona and Lake Erie midges — which wasn't as long ago as it feels, but longer ago than we care to admit.

Thompson (T.T., for short) is, surprisingly, deserving of the honor. When he was drafted No. 4 in the 2011 NBA college draft, nobody — but nobody, outside of Chris Grant — had any confidence that the Canadian would ever live up our measly expectations. At the time, we were praying for Grant to draft Jonas Valanciunas, Jan Vesely, Bismack Biyombo or some other schlub who, it turns out, hasn't done jack.

And when Thompson's name rang out, Cleveland fandom could be heard asking a collective

“Who?”

Clearly, today, it appears the right choice, even though T.T. retains his gangly awkwardness from baseline to baseline. Indeed, we happily find ourselves asking, “How do I love thee, Tristan?”

>> Is it because he’s made a quantum leap on offense, adding some post moves and a nice 10-foot push shot that’s sort of a half-hook flicker?

>> Is it because he’s improved his foul shooting immensely?

>> Is it because he’s more aggressive on the boards since starting center Andy Varejao went down with an injury?

>> Is it because head coach Byron Scott says the kid is the hardest worker on the team?

>> Is it because he routinely registers upwards of 10 points and 10 rebounds a game?

>> Is it because he does more than his share of community service here in Cleveland?

>> Or is it because he gives thoughtful, interesting media interviews — and can actually speak English better than many Americans?

By the Book

Last year, the 6-foot-9 T.T. filled in at center when Varejao was injured. This season, with the draft selection of 7-footer Tyler Zeller, T.T. has reverted back to his natural position, power forward, with more success than most fans ever thought imaginable.

According to the *Times* article, “Thompson has registered 24 games of 10 points and 10 rebounds or more (second only to Orlando’s Nikola Vucevic among second-year players), including five double-doubles in his last six outings. His shooting has improved from both the field and the free-throw line (65 percent, up from 55 percent last season), while his offensive rating — an estimate of points produced per 100 possessions — has increased 12 points, from 98 a year ago to 110 through 64 games his season.”

He stood out again in the recent All-Star Weekend BBVA Rising Stars Challenge, showing that he can dribble and run at the same time, a feat that not every big man can pull off. And, according to the *PD*, since Dec. 18 when Varejao went out, T.T. has averaged 13.6 points and 10.4 rebounds per game, shooting 50.3 percent.

His assists per game stat has almost tripled, from 0.5 last season to 1.4 this season, indicating that he’s starting to catch on to the NBA game.

And he only just turned 22.

Not Fully Developed

Despite the fact that he’s made a quantum leap in offense, he’s still not a complete player by any means. But, then again, he would still be playing for the University of Texas had he not decided to make a run at the pro game.

Thompson will always be able to block a few shots because of his athletic ability, but he really isn’t tall enough to be a shot-blocking force, especially around the basket.

He has not added a jump shot to his arsenal — and maybe never will, unless he gets some good coaching. Judging by his free throws, he still has not mastered the concept that any shot from 15 feet or more has to have some air under it.

T.T.’s shooting percentage isn’t quite what you’d want from a big man, and he still gets too

many shots blocked. Yet he's showing improvement in that area, too: 43.9 percent from the field in his rookie season to 49.1 percent this season.

Most stalwart basketball observers are quick to point out that many of his current problems can be resolved with more experience and a bit more work. As a matter of fact, almost everyone now can see him as a starting power forward on a playoff team, which nobody would dream of even thinking last year.

Telltale Observations

Head coach Scott: "I think he's made big-time strides. His stats show that. We said that from Day 1 in training camp, he worked harder than anybody we had this summer."

Gary Swartz of bleacherreport.com: "He's got the right attitude and passion for the game that you look for in a player with so much potential. Given a few more years of experience, it's not unreasonable to think Thompson could be an 18-point, 11-rebound-a-night All-Star power forward."

Cavan: "There's little doubt that Thompson's steadfast production and improved repertoire make him an ideal counter-balance to [Kyrie] Irving's remarkable penetrating abilities."

Thompson himself: Cleveland fans are "blue collar, they want hard-working players that are going to battle every night, and that's kinda my personality and the type of player that I am."

You want your blue-collar potential All-Star at power forward for many years to come? That's what it appears we've finally got in Tristan Thompson.