

Scott and Cavs Finally Get a Game

Written by {ga=samamico}

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INDEPENDENCE - You hear the players say it time and time again: "Byron Scott training camp."

It's in reference to the new Cavaliers coach, and it usually means lots of running, lots of work on a Princeton offense that features an up-tempo style, and few days off. Or in the case of the Cavs, *zero* days off since training camp started.

But all of that changes Tuesday, when the Cavs will face someone other than themselves -- with the preseason opener against the Charlotte Bobcats. Tip-off is 7 p.m. at Quicken Loans Arena.

While it still doesn't count as a "day off" for the players, it does give them the opportunity to gauge how they look against a real live NBA team. Finally.

And Scott will be looking for a few things in particular.

"I want to see how we defend, which is something we've talked about since Day 1. We want to continue to be a good defensive team," Scott said. "No. 2, I want to see our continuity on the

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offensive end. Those will be the first two things I'll be looking at."

Meanwhile, the players have yet another goal in mind.

"We're trying to win above anything, even though it's preseason," said forward J.J. Hickson. "Players tend to coast in the preseason, but we want a win."

As for who will actually start, Scott isn't sharing. Although he did admit to having a lineup in mind.

"I would (share) if I really knew," he said Monday from the team's practice facility. "We've got some guys who are a little beat up right now, so we're really gonna go by how we feel (Tuesday)."

What we do know is forward Antawn Jamison practiced Monday, and Scott expects Jamison to play against the Bobcats. But two other returnees and likely starters, guard Mo Williams and big man Anderson Varejao, will not play. Williams remains out with a groin injury, and Varejao is still in Brazil following the death of his grandfather.

"The way I'm gonna do things (Tuesday) is we'll have whoever starts, then five or six guys off the bench," Scott said. "Everybody else won't play, but those guys will play Thursday. So I'll give them ample time on the floor. But after we go through shootaround, I'll have a much better picture of how we're gonna do it."

He added, "It's been five or six days of good hard practice and guys are feeling it. So it'll be good to play against somebody else."

VAREJAO UPDATE

Varejao has yet to practice with the team following the death of his grandfather, and has been in his native Brazil since last Tuesday. The Cavs has been in regular contact with Varejao, who could return later this week.

"We understand the sensitivity of this matter," Scott said. "Andy lost somebody who was very close to him, so there's no real timetable. We want him to be completely healthy mentally as well as physically when he does come back."

Scott said last weekend that Varejao will start at center "unless someone else emerges" during training camp.

EYEING EYENGA

Fans who attended the team's Wine & Gold scrimmage in Akron likely came away impressed with the jumping ability of rookie guard Christian Eyenga.

Actually, the Cavs were impressed too, as Scott called Eyenga the best natural athlete on the

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team.

So how long before the Congo native is able to contribute?

“He’s still a little bit of a ways away,” Scott said. “He made a good analysis this morning, saying people compare him to (Mickael) Pietrus in Orlando. But my son said, ‘Yeah, but you don’t guard like Pietrus.’”

Scott echoed those sentiments uttered by his son, Thomas, a developmental coach with the Cavs.

“I told (Eyenga) that’s how you gotta be on the floor, you gotta guard like Pietrus,” Scott said. “He’s a guy with so much talent, so much athleticism, if we can get him to understand what we need him to do on the defensive end of the court, he’ll be a good player in this league.”

There has already been a lot of talk that Eyenga will spend time in Erie, Pa., home of the Cavs’ D-League affiliate. He also might not, Scott insisted.

“I’m not ruling that out, but I’m not saying that he’s gonna do it, either,” Scott said. “I want him up here with us. I think that’s the best way for him to learn, going against this type of competition.”

QUICK SHOTS

* Scott and Charlotte coach Larry Brown are especially close, and Scott said he has spoken with Brown numerous times since taking over the Cavs’ job this past summer. “He’s available whenever I call,” Scott said. “He gets mad at me when I don’t return his calls. I gotta do a better job of that.”

* Hickson said he much prefers to play power forward to center, but conceded he’ll man the pivot if asked. He also said he’s feeling more comfortable facing the basket and taking jumpers from the perimeter, having spent the summer working on that aspect of his game with assistant coach Chris Jent.

* What has improved most about Hickson’s perimeter shoots? “They’re going in,” he said, smiling widely.

* The Bobcats are coming off the first playoff appearance in franchise history, and feature veteran swingmen Stephen Jackson and Gerald Wallace. They lost starting point guard Raymond Felton to New York, but recently signed former lottery pick Shaun Livingston. Livingston is expected to backup third-year guard D.J. Augustin.

Sam Amico covers the Cavaliers for NBA.com and is a frequent contributor to SportsTime Ohio and The Cleveland Fan.