

Emirates NBA Cup

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Atlanta Hawks

Jalen Johnson

Semifinal Practice Day



Q. Do you feel this is the best the team has played this season? The way you played in the Garden, for example, to get here. Big scenario, being in Vegas, offensive and defensive way. I don't know, I've been talking with your teammates, and they say the improvement in defense is awesome, but do you think on both ends of the floor, this is the best moment for the Atlanta Hawks?

JALEN JOHNSON: We're going in the right direction, I will say that. I don't think we're near our best yet. Even though we've been winning, I think we can still get a lot better. We're all still winning to learn and grow in many areas.

We're doing a great job defensively and offensively, as you said. Just got to keep stacking days with that.

Q. For you individually, which part of the game are you enjoying most?

JALEN JOHNSON: Winning. I'm enjoying the wins that we're getting.

Q. We talked to Coach a little bit ago, and he mentioned one of the words that's been consistent for you guys this season is presence. How do you feel like you've been letting your presence known -- not just on the court, but off the court, with your teammates? Whether it's being a leader, talking to them, giving them advice?

JALEN JOHNSON: I think we're all a pretty tight-knit group. We're all relatively around the same age. That kind of helps, especially locker room-wise and team chemistry-wise. I think we're doing a great job of just holding each other accountable. Nobody's afraid to say anything to each other. We're all open to constructive criticism. That's sometimes tough. Everybody has an ego in their own way.

We've done a great job of just listening to one another, and I think that's what's going to help us win at the end of the day. If we can continue to do that, that's going to be good.

Q. I asked before to Damian Lillard about how easy or tough is it to be focused during those two, three, four days when you are playing for a Championship and you are in Vegas. He said he's not 22 anymore. You are 22.

JALEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm 22, but I'd say I'm pretty mature for my age. My priorities are winning this NBA Cup. So I got to -- I'm not focused on all the other antics and going out in Vegas. We're just focused on going out here and getting a win.

Q. No plans off court?

JALEN JOHNSON: Maybe grabbing a dinner. I might do that with my family, but other than that, no.

Q. It seems like this year everybody is really enjoying, you can see them, playing with Trae. I'm curious, what's your favorite part about playing with Trae?

JALEN JOHNSON: Trae is just so -- he's so good, man. It's crazy, like just seeing it in person and on TV prior to me playing with the Hawks and getting drafted by the Hawks, it was crazy just watching it -- a guy that's undersized, being able to score at will, being able to make any pass at will.

And then next thing you know you're his teammate and you're on the receiving end of those passes. Watching those clutch late game buckets, it's a joy to watch. It's a gift that he has that's very special and not many people have had it at that elite of a level.

It's been great being his teammate. It's been a blessing. We're just looking to continue to grow together as a duo, as a unit, and especially as a team, so yeah.

Q. First off, congratulations on the contract. Much deserved. You made me look good in the group chat because for years I've been arguing about you going at 20, and I was telling a lot of people that a lot of teams are going to make a mistake for doing that. Speak to the course. You had a G League experience. This didn't come overnight for you. You worked for this. Talk to us about how you've learned from that

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experience and then waiting your time and staying the course. A lot of times people don't really get to the spot they want to be at, and then they kind of give up. For you, you've been through this process. You've heard the naysayers and everything, and you still managed to get to the point that you are now.

JALEN JOHNSON: I think that G League experience that I had coming in was a very humbling, but an experience that was much needed for my development, not only as a basketball player, but as a man, as a guy that's maturing every single day, I needed that. It humbled me in a way that allowed me to enjoy the process a lot more than I did previously.

I didn't really embrace every single day as its own new day. Coming up in college and high school, I was always looking forward, ahead, and planning out future things instead of just staying in the present and allowing me to be where my feet are at.

I think that whole experience allowed me just to -- like I said, just embrace the grind and just take everything slow because I know the work I put in at the end of the day. I know how hard I work in the offseason, during the season. I think that just allowed me to continue to get better, man.

When you got that mindset, there's no ceiling on what you can do as a player and, more importantly, as a man. It's helped me off the court as well, just keeping that same mindset.

Q. What can you say to the players that do the one-and-done process and they think they're just going to go right into the starting lineup and they get that rude awakening? What can you say to them in terms of ways they can stay this course and with their development too?

JALEN JOHNSON: I think the biggest thing, man, is just staying in the gym. Staying in the gym consistently and constantly pushing yourself. Even if you don't see results right away, I can attest to it that it's going to come. It's going to come, and eventually you're going to be more comfortable in certain situations that you weren't comfortable before.

I still remember checking into my first NBA game the stomach turning I had. Now when I go out there, it's a whole different feeling I have as far as -- it's weird, it's like I'm playing in high school again, like the feeling and the joy that you get from playing basketball. It's a lot more comfortable you get.

I think you've just got to stay the course, man, and keep

your head down and work and be a sponge. I think that's one thing I also learned too is that you've got to ask questions in this league. You've got to learn from what other people have been through, different experiences. Not everybody has been through the same experience.

So being able to absorb knowledge from this guy and that guy, like you're going to eventually learn and pick up a lot and create your own identity throughout.

Q. Just kind of following up on that, you've really shown off your versatility this year, last year as well, but scoring, playmaking, defense, everything. What does your versatility kind of unlock for you guys? Obviously we know what Trae can do, but you being able to do what you do on both ends, what does it unlock for you guys?

JALEN JOHNSON: It just allows Coach to kind of put me in spots wherever he needs me at, and I think that's the fun part about it. It's like wherever he needs me, whatever he needs me to do at that certain time, I have the capabilities of doing that.

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