

LJ learning new life in NBA

by Richard Munson

The most dominant name in college basketball last season has become one of the NBA's newest premiere players. Former Runnin' Rebel Larry Johnson has gone from one of the best to one of the worst—teams that is.

The No. 1 draft pick in the NBA draft last year, Johnson has gone from UNLV where in his two-year career he had only lost two games, to the Charlotte Hornets where as of Wednesday, the Hornets have won only 11 games while losing 25.

On Jan. 14, Johnson made Hornet history—or what little the expansion team has. Johnson's game-winning basket with no time left on the clock beating the Seattle SuperSonics 117-116, led him to the highlight reel of nearly every sportscast. After his game-winning basket, Johnson was attacked by his teammates as if they had just won the NBA championship.

"It was like winning the NCAA tournament (in Denver)," Johnson said.

Johnson has a career high of 29 points, scored against the Washington Bullets and has pulled down a career high 18 rebounds.

But life isn't so easy in the NBA. The biggest difference between college basketball and the NBA is travel Johnson said. The day-to-day rigors of traveling from city to city takes a pounding on a body he said.

"It's tough, you've got to love the game. You just have to keep coming out night after

Johnson and Johnson battle against AIDS

by Richard Munson

In his rookie season Larry Johnson has made a large impact in the NBA. But his impact off the court could loom as large as that on the court. Johnson has teamed up with another Johnson—Magic—to promote AIDS awareness.

Both NBA stars endorse Converse shoes which is running an advertising campaign directed toward teenagers, promoting safe sex. Converse will be putting forth \$1 million toward the AIDS awareness campaign. The ads have already run nationwide.

Larry Johnson had little trouble in agreeing to do the ads. In fact, he was eager to team up with the superstar when he was asked.

"They asked me to do it, so I did—It's Magic," Larry Johnson said.

Johnson has already taped a public service announcement for television advising safe sex.

Converse will also give \$100,000 to the Magic Johnson Foundation for AIDS research.

night and giving it your all," Johnson said.

This could easily be seen by the cut above Johnson's right eye sustained in the victory against Seattle. In the locker room before the Hornets' game with the Lakers, Hornet teammate Mugsy Bogues credited Johnson's basket for "taking out" his first NBA coach. Seattle's coach K.C. Jones was fired after the SuperSonics' loss.

But Johnson is enjoying himself, as he did when he was at UNLV. He is in the top 10 in rebounds and he will be at this year's NBA All-Star Game participating in the slam-dunk contest with former teammate

Stacey Augmon, now playing for the Atlanta Hawks. Johnson said that he has to beat Augmon or he will never hear the end of it.

Johnson stays in constant contact with Augmon and ex-Rebel Greg Anthony, now playing for the New York Knicks.

"I'm always calling up 'Ice' (Augmon) and Greg Anthony. We're always talking," Johnson said.

Always a character on the court, Johnson joked with a writer from the Associated Press during pre-game warm-ups saying that he would grant him a second interview only if he liked the first interview. The

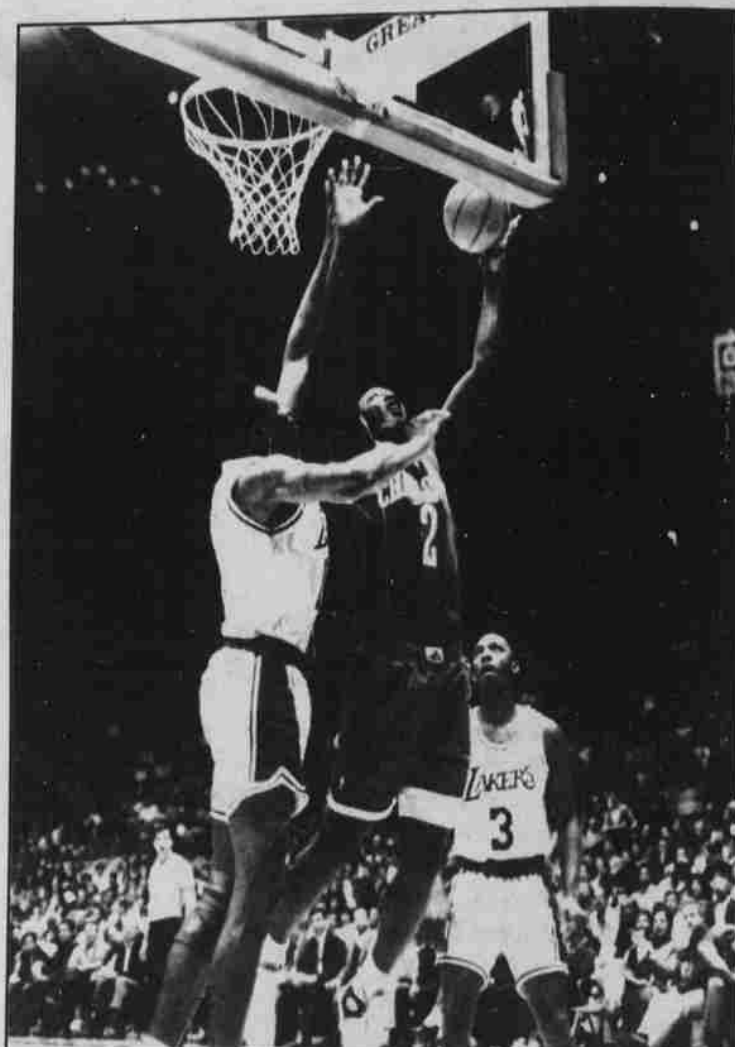


photo by Ched Whitney

Former UNLV All-America Larry Johnson has made an impact on the NBA in his first season with the Charlotte Hornets.

two making light of his two years spent at UNLV where he and his teammates were often at odds with the press.

Charlotte Assistant Coach Bill Hanzlik could not find enough adjectives to describe the play of Johnson. Hanzlik was even more impressed after seeing Johnson in person.

"He's awesome. He could be the next Larry Bird or Magic Johnson. He's that sort of guy

in this league," Hanzlik said.

Hanzlik credited Johnson's ability on the court with his work ethic. He's a competitor, a hard worker and a great guy for other players to be around Hanzlik said. Hanzlik did note one weakness and that is Johnson's jump shot from 15-18 feet.

"Teams will leave him open from that distance until he is able to consistently make that shot," Hanzlik said.

Only one Johnson at the Forum this night

by Richard Munson

As Larry Johnson makes his way out of the Great Western Forum locker room for the first time, there is no empty or cheated feeling—Magic Johnson will not be at the game. For Larry Johnson it is a bit of a homecoming. Los Angeles fans are large supporters of Rebel basketball, and on this night, this former Rebel basketball star was turned the Great Western Forum sea of purple and gold into a sea of Hornet green and Rebel red.

This was Larry Johnson's first trip to the Forum and it's a trip without former Laker Magic Johnson. Magic was in Washington D.C. the day before speaking to President George Bush about his role in the war against AIDS, and was unable to make it to the game.

Larry Johnson was asked before the game if he felt cheated about not having Magic on the court against him. Larry Johnson was quick to say "no," saying that he really felt for

Magic and what he is going through. He still thinks of the Lakers as a great team.

"I don't feel cheated. My first response isn't that Magic isn't out there, it's that this team is together and it is still a tough team," Larry Johnson said.

Johnson was greeted warmly during the pre-game introduction by the Los Angeles crowd, but had a dismal first half against the Lakers, scoring only four points. His second half efforts brought the Hornets back and after his basket with 21 seconds left in the game, the Hornets and Lakers were tied at 93.

There could have been thoughts of his game-winning basket against Seattle the night before running through Johnson's head but it would not happen this night. The Lakers had the ball for the last shot of the game and Sam Perkins did what Larry Johnson had done the day before, the Hornets and Larry Johnson lost 95-93.

After the game, the Hor-

nets players sat quietly knowing that they had a chance to pull off a miracle for the second straight night. All were quiet except for Larry Johnson, who had a close friend to talk to in the locker room—"coach" as Johnson called him—Coach Jerry Tarkanian. Tarkanian "brought a plane load" down to see Larry Johnson play. Johnson and Tarkanian talked about the present, the future and joked about the past.

"In college he wanted to play and not practice, now he plays and doesn't (have time to) practice," Tarkanian said, referring to the grueling NBA schedule.

Tarkanian raved about Johnson's performance this year and told him that he could not dream of him doing any better than he was.

"I saw the game against Larry Bird. You posted him up so well, he couldn't score. You've had a hell of a year," Tarkanian said.



photo by Ched Whitney

Larry Johnson scored 12 points, bringing the Hornets back from a large deficit before losing to the Los Angeles Lakers, 95-93.