

# Anthony Bennett starts over with Timberwolves determined to put rookie season behind

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By Israel Fehr

12/2/2014



PORTLAND, Ore. – [Anthony Bennett](#) went into this past offseason determined to make sure the Anthony Bennett from last season would stay there.

Every pushup, every sprint, every second he spent working out on the court was another step away from his rookie year with the Cleveland Cavaliers. Bennett arrived in Cleveland as the first overall pick, the first Canadian to go No. 1, but a pre-draft left shoulder injury limited just how much he could prepare for the 2013-14 season.

It was clear from his first game that he wasn't ready. He struggled with his shot and was out of shape. He only played in 52 games for the Cavaliers, averaging a measly 4.2 points per game and shooting 35.6% from the field as he battled an assortment of ailments.

First it was his right shoulder, then his knee, both knocks forcing him to rehab and get in shape while also dealing with persistent asthma problems, sleep apnea, and eyesight so bad he [required LASIK eye surgery](#).

When [LeBron James](#) decided he wanted to come back to Cleveland, the move to Minnesota happened quickly. Bennett and Andrew Wiggins – a fellow Canadian and the 2014 No. 1 pick - were shipped to the Timberwolves for [Kevin Love](#). The deal was agreed to in July, just weeks after James signed with the Cavaliers, and was officially consummated in August.

After his disappointing first season, Bennett was grateful for the opportunity to start over. Finally healthy, he focused on getting stronger and worked on his conditioning this summer; motivated to improve and leave the injuries and underwhelming performances behind.

"Actually having a summer to work out and come into the season strong has really helped my confidence a whole lot," said Bennett before a recent game against the Portland Trail Blazers.

Through the pain, both professional and personal, he gained perspective on life in the NBA. In the span of a year he went from top pick to traded. He learned that he needed to have a short memory to survive and he embraced the daily grind.

"This whole thing is a business. You've got to be ready to work every time you step onto the court," said Bennett. "I'm confident. Every game I feel like I can go out there and do my thing. You got to go out there and play hard."

The transformation also includes changes to his on-court contributions. Timberwolves head coach Flip Saunders told Bennett he wanted him to play more like a traditional power forward. Saunders instructed Bennett to play closer to the basket and not shoot three-pointers. So far this season he hasn't attempted a single three. The idea behind the adjustments is that if Bennett can work hard on both ends of the floor and be active, the game will start to open up for him.

When Minnesota traded Love for Bennett and Wiggins, they also acquired [Thaddeus Young](#) from the Philadelphia 76ers. Young, now in his eighth season in the NBA, is the perfect player for Bennett to watch and listen to because of his experience and their similar skill sets.

"He's a versatile big, goes in and out, that's what I'm trying to be in the league, too," said Bennett. "I'm learning from him each and every day. He tells me a lot of things that will help me going forward."

Through the first month of the season, Bennett is averaging just over 17 minutes per game as Young's backup. The overall numbers aren't gaudy (7.6 points, 3.5 rebounds per game) and the team isn't winning much (4-12), but Bennett's slow and steady individual progress is showing. His shooting percentage is up over 51%, he had his first 20-point game, and he made his first career start when Young was out of the lineup. Physically he's never looked better; he's lean and poised to only get stronger.

Bennett no longer dwells on the negative. With all the work he's putting in, the 21-year-old has reason to believe this is just the start of something big.

"This year I'm going out there and playing," said Bennett. "Last year, it's over and done with. I'm with the Wolves now and I'm ready to work."

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