Vandy players make school history at NBA draft

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For the first time in Vanderbilt basketball history, the Commodores saw two players taken in the first round of the NBA Draft.

John Jenkins went No. 23, to the Atlanta Hawks. Festus Ezeli was the last first round player taken, No. 30 by Golden State. The Commodores could have made it three, but Jeffery Taylor was the first player taken in the second round.

The only draft picks to get guaranteed money are first rounders. Those in the second round start their NBA careers behind the 8-ball, as their teams don't have significant money invested in them.

Prior to Jenkins and Ezeli, the Commodores have had only three first round picks, dating back to the first year of the draft, 1957.

Clyde Lee became the first Vandy player taken in the first round, in 1966. He went on to have the best NBA career of any Commodore. Jeff Turner went to the Orlando Magic in 1984 and after his playing days were over, Turner joined the franchise's broadcast team. Will Perdue was taken in the first round in 1988. He was a back-up center for Chicago and San Antonio where he picked up more NBA title rings than any other Vandy alum.

So how will this year's draft class fare? Jenkins was the highest draft choice and the Hawks are a good fit for what he offers.

Considered by most as the best shooter in this year's draft, Jenkins' bread and butter is his perimeter shot. As the Hawks have guards that like to penetrate and pitch, Jenkins' role will likely be as a spot-up shooter.

At 6-4, Jenkins needs to improve defensively. He will be guarding players that are taller, stronger and quicker. If he is a liability on the defensive end, it will negate the good he produces on offense.

He needs to improve his handle and passing. A one-trick pony doesn't last long in the NBA.

NBA players don't play for trophies and banners. They play for houses, cars and bling.

Ezeli has the size (6-11 and change). He is an accomplished shot blocker and good defensive center. But he is raw as an oyster on the half-shell on offense. The Nigerian native is still learning the game. No longer confined to a 20-hour week as he was in college, Ezeli has the longest road to travel, but he could wind up as the most successful of the trio.

Taylor is the most interesting pick. Loaded with athleticism, Taylor must learn to make the most of it. He could slash to the rim and finish in college. At 6-foot-7, it won't be that easy in the NBA. Taylor must develop an accurate 3-point shot or teams will back off him.

He has struggled with confidence in his outside shot. Charlotte owner Michael Jordan will likely challenge Taylor to improve. If so, Taylor will either respond or wilt.

Recent Vanderbilt players who were drafted high have not made a mark in the NBA. Shan Foster (2008 second round for Dallas) has played overseas. The same goes for 2004 second round pick Matt Freije and 2000 second round pick Dan Langhi.

Langhi and LSU's Stromile Swift shared SEC Player of the Year honors while Foster was SEC Player of the Year.

They found out just how difficult it is to make an NBA roster and stay any length of time. The NBA is a man's game.

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