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MAVERICKS NOTES

Mavs would like Diop to be a scoring threat

BY JEFF CAPLAN
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

DALLAS -- The way Avery Johnson figures it, new [Memphis Grizzlies](#) shooting coach Mark Price owes his job to DeSagana Diop.

The Mavericks' 7-foot center spent time at the former NBA sharpshooter's shooting clinic in Atlanta, and soon after that, the Grizzlies hired Price.

"He must have done so good," Johnson said, "that he got Mark a job."

Diop, who also joined the Mavs' summer league team in Las Vegas for offensive grooming, said it's been his hardest-working off-season. Still, the career 1.9-points-a-game scorer cautioned not to get carried away.

"I know I'm not going to be trying to go crazy and score 20," said Diop, who enters his seventh NBA season and the final year of his Mavs' contract. "I've been working the whole summer, that's all I've been doing. I have to be confident out there. It's all about confidence in this game."

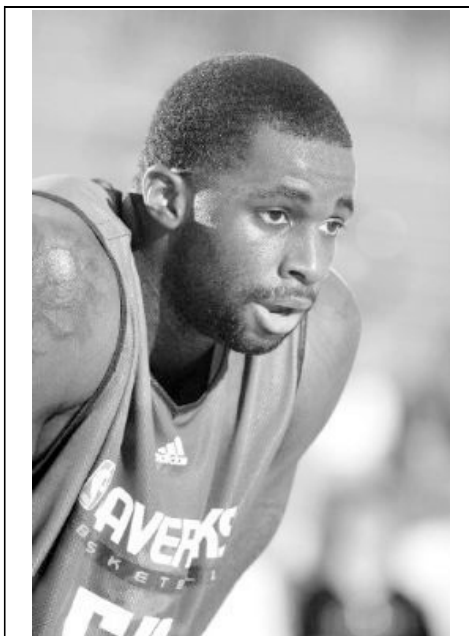
He and the Mavs will need it early. With Erick Dampier out until late November -- and he said it could be into December -- because of [shoulder surgery](#), Diop will start the season as the team's only experienced center.

He's continually improved as a rebounder and shot blocker, and now Johnson would like him to at least make defenses pay attention.

"Just be a threat offensively," Johnson said. "Just try and make sure he gets in the right spots so they can at least guard him, and he can be a threat around the basket."

With Dampier out, DJ Mbenga is next in line. But he's working his way back from a torn right anterior cruciate ligament, and Johnson said he isn't sure if Mbenga can provide minutes early on.

Recently signed forward-center Jamal Sampson must push someone out of a roster spot to make the team. Young power forwards Brandon Bass and Nick Fazekas also



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Weather	could play early at center until Dampier returns.
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RSS	Of the Western Conference contenders, only the Mavs lack a powerful inside scoring force. The Spurs have Tim Duncan, the Suns Amare Stoudemire, the Rockets Yao Ming, and the Jazz found success with Carlos Boozer.
Contact Us	Diop said he and Dampier can get the job done.
Advertise	"They're going to have to prove it," Johnson said. "I saw glimpses."
Employment	Johnson said he's still scheming for ways to get Dampier more touches down low. He said he'd like to get more inlet passes to him.
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