

O'Neal wants six titles

JIMMY GOLEN,
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WALTHAM, Mass. -- When Shaquille O'Neal was much, much younger and a good deal smaller, he chose as a role model one of the most successful big men in NBA history.

NBA

"When I came into the league, I wanted to compete with Bill Russell for titles," O'Neal said Tuesday with Russell's 11 championship banners hanging above him at a news conference to mark his signing with the Boston Celtics. "That's not going to happen, but I'd like to almost get half of what he got."

With four titles and a Hall of Fame career already on his resume, newly christened "Big Shamrock" signed a two-year deal with the Celtics at veteran's minimum, foregoing more lucrative offers to join the defending Eastern Conference champions for a run at another championship or two.

A crossover celebrity who has appeared in feature films and his own TV show, O'Neal joked about his new nickname, his fear that his kids will develop a Boston accent and "trying to beat new teammate Glen 'Big Baby' Davis in a chowder eating contest."

But he was serious when he talked about his legacy.

"Do I have the same hunger? Yes. If I didn't, I wouldn't be here," O'Neal said. "I don't like wasting

my time. I don't like wasting anybody's time. At the end of the day, when I close the book, it's all about winning."

The news conference to introduce O'Neal wasn't the usual type for a backup. 38-year-old center who will be paid about \$1.3 million a year. There were a dozen TV cameras, perhaps 50 reporters in all and a couple hundred beaming schoolchildren in the bleachers, taking a break from their basketball camp next door.

Also in the gym: Kevin Garnett, who promised O'Neal he would fly back from Hawaii to be there.

"To me this is a very exclusive event," said O'Neal, who wore a gray pinstriped suit and a black bow tie. "It's my last (introductory) press conference. I just wanted to be very, very sharp."

The crowd was all there to see O'Neal the superstar, the former NBA MVP and four-time champion who is certain to be enshrined in the Hall of Fame down the road in Springfield whenever he decides he's had enough.

But the O'Neal the Celtics have signed is a much different player than the one who accumulated those credentials.

Now weighing in at 345 pounds -- he was 294 at LSU -- O'Neal averaged 12 points and 6.7 rebounds for the Cavaliers last season, when he was brought to Cleveland in the hopes that he would be the missing piece that would help LeBron James win his elusive NBA title. He also missed almost two months of the regular

season after injuring his thumb against the Celtics.

"I told him there won't be 30 minutes (for him) on this team; there will be 20-25," Celtics coach Doc Rivers said. "I asked him if that would be OK, because that's the only way it's going to work."

And it was OK with O'Neal, who hit the free agent market seeking a two-year deal worth a reported \$8 million to \$10 million a season. The Celtics expressed an interest -- though not at that price -- and general manager Danny Ainge moved on to pursue other options.

As the summer wore on, though, O'Neal came around. Ainge said O'Neal's agent called and said, "Shaq would like to play there, and he's willing to come on your terms."

"I think Shaq's a guy who can still make a difference," Ainge told reporters in a conference call after the news conference. "When he was in his prime, he was considered one of the best who has ever played. Shaq coming to our team right now, our expectations won't be that. We expect him to contribute to our team and play a role off our bench."

But that can be a major contribution for a team that is without center Kendrick Perkins for at least half the season while he recovers from the knee injury he sustained during Game 6 of the NBA finals. Backup Rasheed Wallace has said he will retire, though there is a chance the Celtics could do something with his contract.



Greg M. Cooper/AP

Shaquille O'Neal poses with his Celtics jersey at his introductory press conference on Tuesday. O'Neal said his goal is to win six NBA titles before he retires. He currently has four over 20 NBA seasons.

Colt McCoy content to wait and learn in NFL

By Tom Withers
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- As the Cleveland Browns sweat through another steamy training camp practice, Colt McCoy stands on the sideline with his arms folded.

NFL

He's watching, waiting.

This is all new for McCoy, the former Texas star who won more games than any other quarterback in college football history. He's a third-stringer now, buried on Cleveland's depth chart below starter Jake Delhomme and backup Seneca Wallace.

"It's hard," he said.

It's not going to get easier anytime soon for McCoy, either. Barring injuries, he's slated to spend the season in an underdog's role, learning how to play the NFL's most demanding and challenging position as a third-stringer.

It's going to take some getting used to.

"It's definitely something I've never worked on and I've got to learn," said McCoy, who slid to the Browns in April's draft before being snatched by the Browns. "It's hard, especially over the last four years where you've taken every rep and every snap in every game. I just got to get used to it because it's going to be the same way all season and I've got to be ready to go and make some plays."

While waiting for his time to come, McCoy has immersed himself in Cleveland's thick playbook. Unfortunately, it doesn't have a chapter dedicated to patience.



Amy Sancetta/AP

Colt McCoy (12) hands off during a practice session at training camp.

McCoy admits that isn't one of his virtues.

Given an assignment, he would prefer to knock it out and move on to the next one.

He doesn't have that luxury anymore. McCoy is starting from scratch as a pro.

"I think it's universal for most rookies," he said after practice earlier this week.

"Some rookies step right in and play. Hats off to them. I'm just trying to be the best I can be in the situation that I'm in and when it's time, it's time."

McCoy, who threw for more than 13,000 yards and 112 touchdowns with the Longhorns, would like nothing more than to play immediately. But he understands his current status and is tapping

into Delhomme and Wallace's experience to make him a better player.

Delhomme remembers what it's like to be a wide-eyed rookie, lost in the dizzying speed of a game moving at warp speed compared to college ball. Delhomme has been impressed with McCoy's eagerness to learn and passion to improve. He's willing to mentor and help the 23-year-old's transition.

"He's very intelligent, that's one thing you can tell just being in meetings, and it's important to him," Delhomme said. "If it's not important to somebody, then they're really not going to give you everything they have. He wants to be good. He's not getting a whole lot of reps right now, but he's doing a really good job."

Delhomme never saw the field as a rookie in 1998 with New Orleans, and he didn't make his first start until his sixth year when he was with Carolina.

He knows what McCoy is going through.

"It's hard," he said. "I did the same thing. I started all four years in high school and all four years in college. You get to the NFL, I was on a knee for 90 percent of the practice just watching. It's a major adjustment. There's no other way around it."

McCoy's baptism began on Saturday in a scrimmage at Browns Stadium.

Eager to show his stuff after getting a loud ovation from Cleveland fans, he threw two interceptions, one at the end of the first half and one that was returned by Brandon McDonald for a TD. McCoy didn't dwell on

the mistakes. Instead, he promised not to make them again.

"Those are lessons learned," he said. "Those are things you can take away from that, get back in the locker room, write it down and understand that I'm not going to do that again. B-Mac's a great player and made the play. It's a great coaching tool."

"I've still got a lot to learn."

Coach Eric Mangini was pleased to hear about McCoy's self criticism, and has been pleased with the youngster's progress in camp.

"He is a really good student," Mangini said.

"What I like about Colt is that he embraces and really understands the importance of getting with Jake and Seneca. He will get one element of understanding from the coaching staff, but a guy like Jake who has so much game experience really can help a young guy like that. He has been like a sponge, which is what he should be at this point."

McCoy has much loftier goals. But this young Colt, still on wobbly legs, knows he must learn to walk before he can run.

While Delhomme and Wallace took turns running the two-minute drill at the end of practice on Tuesday, McCoy intently studied their every move. He counted the steps in their dropbacks, listened to their cadences and as they scanned the field for open receivers, his eyes darted around too.

It's not his time. Not yet.

"I've got a long ways to go," he said, "but I'm learning more and more every day and I'm feeling more comfortable every day."

McGrady to sign one-year offer with retooling Pistons

By Larry Lage
SPORTS WRITER

DETROIT -- Tracy McGrady is getting a chance to rejuvenate his career with a team hoping for a rebound of its own.

NBA

McGrady and the Detroit

Pistons have agreed to a \$1.3 million, one-year contract, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Tuesday. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the deal hasn't been announced.

McGrady, a seven-time All-Star and two-time scoring champion, has played just 65 games the past two seasons with Houston and New York because he had major surgery on his left knee in the middle of the 2008-09 season.

The 6-foot-8 wing drew some interest from teams this summer, including the Chicago Bulls, before choosing to play for Detroit.

Now, the Pistons might have a greater sense of urgency to trade Richard Hamilton or Tayshaun Prince to fix their logjam on the perimeter.

The 31-year-old McGrady averaged 8.2 points last season, his lowest-scoring season since 1997-98 when he was a rookie with the Toronto Raptors after skipping college.

Just two years ago, though, he averaged 21-plus points for the eighth time in his career.

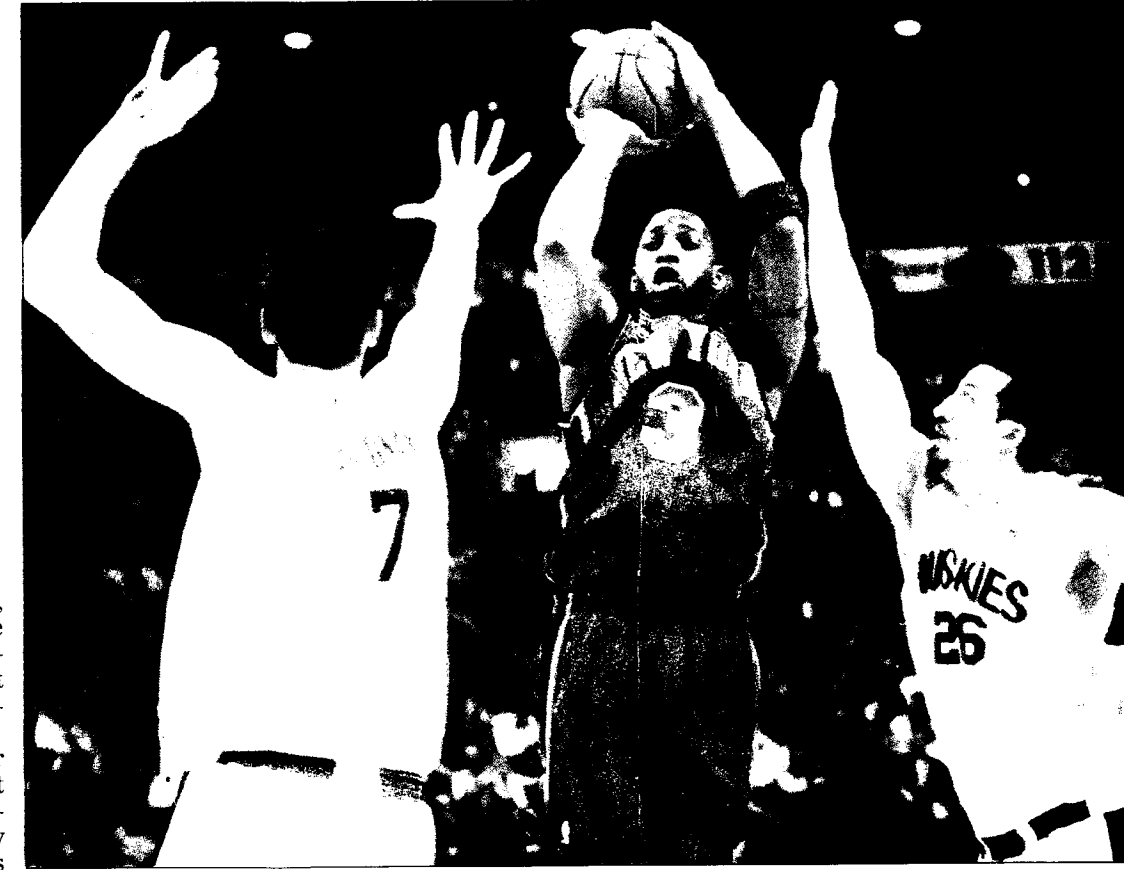
T-Mac facts

- Drafted 9th by Toronto in 1997
- Third cousins with Orlando Magic guard Vince Carter
- Has played for the Raptors, Magic, Houston Rockets and New York Knicks
- 21.5 ppg for career
- Career-high 28.0 ppg in 03-04
- Seven-time All-Star
- 2001 Most Improved Player
- Two-time NBA scoring champion
- Scored 62 points in one game with Orlando (Magic record)
- Shares NBA record with eight made 3-pointers in one half

If McGrady accepts his role, likely as a reserve, he could prove to be a bargain playing for the veteran's minimum even if he doesn't approach his career scoring average of 21.5 points.

"I've made a lot of money over my career and I could retire right now and I could be fine financially," McGrady said in February after he was traded by the Rockets to the Knicks while making \$23 million in the last year of his contract. "My kids can be fine when they get older. Money is not an issue for me."

McGrady, who is from Bartow, Fla., was drafted No. 9 overall in the 1997 draft by Toronto. He went to Orlando in a sign-and-trade



Chris Young/AP

Tracy McGrady (3) rises up for a jump shot as Andrea Bargnani (7) and Hedo Turkoglu attempt to defend.

deal in 2000 and was dealt four years later to Houston.

His last healthy season was five years ago. He missed 34 games during the 2005-06 season with back problems, elbow and knee

injuries led to him missing 16 games two years later and microfracture surgery put his career in jeopardy about 1½ years ago.

If he's relatively healthy, happy

and effective for the Pistons, McGrady will provide a boost for a team that missed the playoffs this year for the first time since 2001 with its worst record since 1995.