

# BUCKS BEAT: Henson starting to pull his weight

Gery Woelfel - [journaltimes.com](http://journaltimes.com)

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ST. FRANCIS – If you had asked some NBA officials for a scouting report on John Henson last season, they would have likely told you this about the Milwaukee Bucks' third-year pro:

Easy-going. Gregarious. Talented. Excellent defender. Intriguing upside. Athletic. Team oriented.

And they would have inevitably added this:

Too-easy going. Inconsistent scorer. Not focused. Not dedicated. Soft. Own worst enemy.

Those same scouts may have to revise their reports this season. After all, it seems like Henson shattered many of those perceptions over the summer.

While many of his NBA colleagues spent their offseason staying up late and getting up late, Henson rose at the crack of dawn and went to bed early.

He adhered to a strict daily workout program, one that clearly showed his dedication and commitment to becoming a better basketball player.

"I would wake up at 7 a.m., get breakfast and then lift weights," said the, yes, still affable Henson. "I did that just because I could go to sleep earlier at night. Sleep actually helps you put on weight. I would go to bed usually around 9, 10 o'clock.

"That's unusual, but at the same time, I had a routine. I wanted to put on 15 pounds and I did, so it worked."

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Henson played his first two seasons with the Bucks at around 216 pounds -- anorexic by NBA big man standards. He repeatedly got thrown around under the basket like a rag doll by opponents who often outweighed by at least 50 pounds.

Henson knew it was imperative for him to get bigger and stronger if he was going to take his game to another level.

So, shortly after the Bucks' wrapped up the worst season in franchise history last April, Henson delved into a rigorous offseason regimen.

He worked out regularly at Performance Compound in his hometown of Tampa, Fla., a facility that usually teems with pro and college football players like Buffalo Bills rookie sensation Sammy Watkins.

In May, Robert Hackett, the Bucks' well-respected strength and conditioning coach, flew to Florida and pushed and prodded and encouraged Henson even more.

Hackett left Florida highly pleased.

"I stayed with him for about a week and he really worked hard," said Hackett, who also got together with Henson in July at the NBA Summer League in Las Vegas. "He was really locked in. Whatever he was asked to do, he did it.

"You can see his strength and confidence have grown. He's still a work in progress, but he wants to get better and he is getting better."

Not that Henson was shabby last season. He made a significant jump from his rookie season. After averaging 6 points, 2.9 rebounds and 0.7 blocks his first season, Henson nearly doubled his scoring and rebounding output last season with 11.1 points and 7.1 rebounds, respectively. He also averaged 1.7 blocks per game – ninth best in the NBA.

Henson also had flashes of greatness last season, especially from a defensive standpoint. He had three games where he grabbed at least 15 rebounds, including 17 against the Washington Wizards on Dec. 5. He also had three games in which he blocked six shots. And, in a game against Chicago on Dec. 10, Henson was spectacular: 25 points, 10 rebounds and six blocks.

The new-and-improved Henson, who now weighs 232, has looked sharp in preseason and is already convinced he'll reap the rewards of his offseason investment.

"I have noticed a difference and I think my teammate have noticed a difference as far as my balance, my moves, my rebounding," Henson said. "I think it's going to help me out."

Henson, who consumed 2,000-calorie protein shakes to gain weight, makes no bones about his desire to start. He started nine times as a rookie and 23 times last season. He contends he's ready to take that next step.

That won't be easy, though. Henson has been alternating between center and power forward, positions where the Bucks are saturated with talent and experience.

Veteran Larry Sanders is scheduled to start at center with veteran Zaza Pachulia behind him. At power forward, highly-touted rookie Jabari Parker is expected to start with veteran Ersan Ilyasova being his primary backup.

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"I have seen him up close now and he can pass the ball, he knows how to finish, he's long, he can rebound and he can block shots," said Kidd, who coached the Brooklyn Nets last season before replacing Larry Drew as the Bucks coach this summer. "He's picked up the system quite well, quite fast.

"He's going to play a lot of minutes. We got quite a few guys who can play a lot of minutes and he's one of them. It's not an issue.

"It's 82 games. No one, I can tell you, will average anywhere close to 38 minutes. We're too deep.

"If anything we want to keep it around 35 (minutes). That means their careers will be longer but, as young guys, they only see right now. So, hopefully, we can get that message across."

In turn, Henson is hoping to send a message to Kidd that he's capable of being a full-time starter.

"I do want to start," Henson said. "That's always a goal for me. I've made improvements and still have improvements to make. But, yeah, starting is a goal of mine."

Another of Henson's goals is righting the Bucks' wayward ship. While most NBA prognosticators are predicting another dismal season for the Bucks, the 23-year-old Henson is convinced the Bucks can prove them wrong.

"I think we could be really good," Henson said. "I don't think the expectations for us are high, but if we can get it together defensively, I think we could be really good this season.

"I just want to be part of something special here. It would be good say I was here for the 15-win season and I was here for the 50-win season."