

mndaily.com

Senior Jarvis Johnson an unheralded leader for the Gophers

Nick Jungheim

4-5 minutes

Johnson has spent four years with the team despite never receiving medical clearance to play.



[Tony Saunders](#)

Senior Jarvis Johnson watches the game at Williams Arena on Tuesday, March 5.

In 2015, Jarvis Johnson came to the Gophers as the crown jewel

of head coach Richard Pitino's recruiting class.

Of the five players Pitino granted a scholarship to that year, Johnson had the highest recruiting grade according to ESPN. He was the first Minnesota native who committed to the program under Pitino's tutelage.

Although he celebrated senior night with the team at Williams Arena for the final home game of the season, the highly-touted recruit never got to suit up for the Gophers on the arena's signature raised floor.

"Jarvis was the first guy we set out to get in the Twin Cities," Pitino said. "We felt like we needed him, he fit our style of play, we loved him as a kid. We really worked hard to get him, and unfortunately, he wasn't cleared."

Following an incident in eighth grade, during which Johnson went into cardiac arrest and needed to be revived, he was diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM). Team doctors didn't clear Johnson to play prior to his freshman season at Minnesota, citing health concerns.

Other schools have since cleared players with HCM to participate in games; however, Minnesota's medical staff never allowed Johnson to take the court for the Gophers. Instead of testing the possibility of another school clearing him, Johnson chose not to transfer.

"The main focus was to obviously play," Johnson said. "But I knew the education here was good, and just the culture around the whole team. I wanted to be a part of something special, honestly. I think we had ups and downs and we made memories that will last a long time."

Overnight, Johnson's role and expectations at Minnesota completely changed. In high school, he started on four consecutive state championship teams at DeLaSalle High School, just over two miles from Williams Arena. Suddenly, Johnson had to adjust to supporting his teammates from the bench, a transition that didn't come easily.



“It was definitely hard to adjust to,” Johnson said. “Especially after playing for so long, just sitting having to watch gave me an ‘itching’ feeling. I had to mature quick.”

Four years later, Johnson thrives in his role of supporting his teammates. He received praise from his coach for his work behind the scenes.

“[Johnson] has been a terrific member of our team,” Pitino said.

“He’s got great perspective, [he is] great on the bench, great in the locker room, great in the dorms talking to the guys. I mean, he’s a leader in a lot of ways people don’t know about.”

Had Johnson been allowed to play, he would have joined an already celebrated group of four-year players graduating from Minnesota this season. Jordan Murphy, [the school's all-time leader in rebounds and double-doubles](#), will be remembered as one of the most successful players in program history.

Fellow senior Dupree McBrayer surpassed 1,000 career points earlier this season and has started 91 games for the Gophers as of Tuesday. Though Johnson never got the opportunity to play alongside Murphy or McBrayer in a NCAA game, he fondly remembers their four years together.

“Just to see the accomplishments they’ve made, it’s been fun,” Johnson said. “It’s been a fun ride. I wish nothing but the best for the both of them. It seems like yesterday we just moved into our small dorms, and now we’re almost out of here.”



Johnson said it still doesn't feel real that his time at Minnesota is coming to an end, a sentiment his fellow seniors share.

“I definitely look back on and think about a lot, knowing that time does fly,” Murphy said prior to the senior day game against Purdue. “This day is already here, something I didn’t really expect to get here this fast. But, it’s here and we have our backs against the wall, and we’ve got to win.”

In order to send the seniors out with a NCAA Tournament appearance, the Gophers will have to finish strong. Following senior night, the team has just one regular season game remaining, a match up at No. 24 Maryland on Friday.