

'Scary,' but Jackson, knee pass first test

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DATE: 12-25-1999

PUBLICATION: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

EDITION: Home

SECTION: Sports

PAGE: G8

It was the worst moment of the season, early fourth quarter, Jim Jackson writhing in pain under the basket, holding his famous left knee, trainers hovering over him. In a surreal twist, a group of men, oblivious to Jackson's agony, were shoving a trampoline under the same basket, nearly hitting the prostrate player with it, so a Hawks mascot, SkyHawk, could entertain the crowd.

This was NBA basketball two nights before Christmas in Philips Arena.

"Downright scary," Jackson said after colliding with Cleveland center Andrew DeClercq. "We hit knees, bam! The pain shot through my leg like you wouldn't believe. He's so big he didn't feel anything."

It took a few minutes, but SkyHawk and his minions slinked away, and the pain in Jackson's knee dissipated. He walked off at 9 minutes, 29 seconds of the fourth and came back at 7:37, frisky enough to score twice and get a steal as the Hawks repulsed a threat by the Cavaliers and went on to win 108-90.

Game over, Jackson had 19 points, 10 rebounds and four assists.

Had he not sought treatment on his knee, Jackson was asked, how would he have dealt with the DeClercq incident?

Jackson winced. "I don't want to think about it."

It has been two weeks since the 29-year-old forward finished his "shock wave" treatments at the Sonorex Therapy Center in Toronto. As promised, the condition of his knee has continued to improve. He no longer wears a sleeve on the knee, but has gone to a tibial band, which permits greater freedom of movement.

Wednesday's game marked the first one in which Jackson played with the abandon of a talented athlete who can do anything he likes on the court. It was reflective of how good Jackson's knee feels.

"They told me it would continue to heal and it has," he said. "It's truly a remarkable difference. I can do almost anything I want to do on the court right now. And the rest will come when I've had a chance to rehab my left quad. That's what I have to work on right now."

The left quadriceps muscle is much smaller than the one that runs down Jackson's right thigh. That's because during four years, his tendinitis was so painfully debilitating that he could not attempt the lifting exercises that strengthen it.

"I don't want to rehab it game days because it will weaken the leg when it's time to play, so I'm trying off days. When we've got a string of them like we're getting this weekend and next and a week in January, I can really get into it. But once I get that done, I'll be good, real good."

With Jackson's career headed up with a bullet, LaPhonso Ellis is back on the floor and playing like a man possessed --- 17 points, 16 minutes Thursday --- the Hawks are showing dimensions of speed and defensive

intensity that were sorely lacking in their recent slide.

Will it translate into another turnaround? The answer is coming next week when they play at Charlotte and Detroit around a rare home game in the afternoon Wednesday against Indiana.

Certainly, good health is a start.

ILLUSTRATIONS/PHOTOS: NEXT

Opponent: Charlotte Hornets.

When; where: 7:30 p.m. Monday; Charlotte.

TV; radio: Fox Sports Net South; WSB-AM (750).

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Jeffrey Denberg, Staff, 'Scary,' but Jackson, knee pass first test., 12-25-1999, pp G8.