



Dominic McGuire: Defender, Hustler and Now Starter

Published by [Rashad Mobley](#) on January 7, 2009



It was 20 minutes after his team defeated the Eastern Conference leading Cleveland Cavaliers, 80-77, and the Washington Wizards forward was still in front of his locker methodically getting dressed. He slowly put on one shoe, and then the other. He sidestepped cameramen and journalists who were on their way to speak to All-Star Antawn Jamison, and then he put his shirt on and sat back down on the bench in front of his locker. As he sat down he gently blotted his towel under his left eye, and when he took the towel away, I noticed a slight cut.

When I asked him how he got the cut he said, “LeBron (James) hit me in the eye on the last rebound.”

Given that Dominic McGuire had his first career double-double and grabbed the rebound that led to the game winning shot for the Wizards, somehow I don’t think that cut bothered him too much.

During the first 25 games of the season, McGuire was usually the third or fourth guy off the bench and his numbers reflected as much. In 10 minutes of play per game, McGuire averaged 3.4 rebounds, no assists, and 1.9 points a game.

He always hustled, he always played stellar and aggressive defense, but the second year player out of Fresno State simply did not get substantial minutes.

Over the last seven games, since Coach Eddie Tapscott inserted him into the starting small forward spot, McGuire has gotten those elusive minutes and his numbers reflect the upgrade. As a starter, McGuire is averaging 31 minutes, 8 rebounds, 3 assists and 4.5 points a game. The hustle plays have increased along with the minutes, but McGuire told Hoops Addict that his approach never changed.

“I haven’t really changed anything with my approach, I’m just practicing hard and was working out when I wasn’t playing,” McGuire said. “So I just tried to keep the same routine and just be prepared.”

McGuire’s best friend on the team, Nick Young, tells a different story and says he’s seen a slight change in McGuire.

“Earlier in the season when I was playing more, and he wasn’t, we would push each other, but he really wasn’t comfortable yet,” Young told Hoops Addict. “Now he’s still playing hard, hustling, doing all the little things he always did, but he’s in more of a comfort zone and he’s getting better.”

Coach Tapscott inserted McGuire in the starting lineup back on December 23rd. Wizards guard DeShawn Stevenson was struggling mightily, and voluntarily asked to come off the bench to improve this team's chances of winning. That moved Caron Butler from small forward to shooting guard, and allowed McGuire to play his natural position of small forward. Since that switch, McGuire and the Wizards have played much better with victories over playoff teams like the Houston Rockets and the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Tapscott had always been impressed with his defensive prowess, but even he has been impressed with McGuire's ability to step up and do whatever is asked of him.

"Dominic (McGuire) has been terrific. He's been a good player most of the year, and since he's been starting, he gives you another one of those guys that does those other things people normally don't speak about," Tapscott said. "He rebounds the ball, he defends well and in this game [against the Cavaliers] we asked him to defend a two guard [Delonte West], a 3 [LeBron James], and a 5 [Anderson Varejao]. That type of versatility is a great thing because he works at it and embraces his role."

When I informed McGuire of Coach Tapscott's comments, he downplayed his own accomplishments once again.

"I don't really think about whoever they tell me to guard. I just go out there and do it to the best of my ability. That's what I do on this team, and that's how I'll stay in this league."

McGuire did admit to me that it was a bit of challenge guarding Cavaliers forward/center Ben Wallace. Although both McGuire and Wallace are both 6'9", McGuire checks in at a slender 220lbs, while Wallace is not only a solid 250 lbs, but he's widely regarded as one of the strongest players in the NBA.

"Ben Wallace is a strong guy," McGuire said with a slight chuckle. "I just tried to keep him off the boards and that was about it. I didn't really have to worry about him scoring, I used my weight, and kept him off the boards because he's really strong and really aggressive."

After the game, Tapscott explained his need for McGuire at the center position.

"On defense we needed quickness so that's why we put McGuire at the "5", so he was about a 6'9" "5" man out there, but we needed him to switch off the ball," Tapscott remarked. "We know they [the Cavaliers] were going to run that screens with Varejao and Wallace for James, so we wanted good defenders at the point of attack."

Right before I finished my interview with McGuire and walked away from his locker, I jokingly asked him if he got a chance to retaliate against the elbow James connected with on his eye. McGuire, who had been relatively stoic during our interview, immediately broke out into laughter.

"Nah, it was too late. But we got the win, so I guess you can say that's getting him back even more."

Spoken like a true team player.

Photo Credit: ICON Sports Media