

Young sprouts into a valuable scoring threat

[Mike Jones](#)

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All season, the [Washington Wizards](#) have sought a scorer off the bench to help fill the void left by the departure of guard Roger Mason Jr., who signed as a free agent with San Antonio in the offseason. And they've also needed that scoring punch to help compensate for Gilbert Arenas' absence.

Now 37 games into the season, it appears the Wizards have their player in [Nick Young](#). After he began the season strong, then battled a slump for nearly two months, the Wizards' second-year guard has adjusted to his role.

Young, whom the Wizards drafted 16th overall out of Southern Cal in 2007, broke out Friday in Chicago with a career-high 28 points, including an 18-point fourth quarter. The fireworks continued Monday as Young scored 30 points on 12-for-19 shooting.

"That's the Nick Young we thought would be a consistent force, and I'm glad he's here," Wizards coach Ed Tapscott said of Young, who the last three games has averaged 23.3 points on 69.8 percent shooting. "In one word, hallelujah. I don't think it's been any big change for Nick. I think he hit a couple of shots, and all of a sudden the rim grew. It just grew in size and presented a much bigger target because confidence comes that way."

Young said his sudden boost in production indicates he has adjusted to his new role. Last season, he entered the game to score here and there, but if he couldn't find a rhythm, he returned to the bench while a veteran answered the call.

This season, however, the short-handed Wizards are relying on Young to produce. The shift meant a new pressure placed upon Young, and now he has learned how to handle it.

"It's just been my teammates giving me confidence," Young said. "Everybody around me giving me confidence just builds me up. I feel like the basket's a little bigger, [and] Coach is calling plays for me, which is always good."

The downside is the Wizards have to adjust to Young's emergence on the fly. In the Chicago and Milwaukee games, star forward Caron Butler shot a combined 3-for-21. With Butler struggling and Young effective, Tapscott "went with conventional coaching wisdom and rode the hot hand."

Said Butler: "It's tough. It's different personnel now. Nick is more and more coming into his own, and I may have it going one night with Nick and have to incorporate Antawn. Or them two had it going [Monday], [and] I didn't want to mess up what the young fella had going, so I had to be the guy to facilitate, run the floor, try to do a good job on defense. But we've just got to eventually get on the



Peter Lockley / The Washington Times Reserve guard Nick Young has averaged 23.3 points in the Wizards' last three games.

same page. It's new players, it's new chemistry out there, so eventually we've got to get a feel for each other."

Tapscott said Young will continue to play as a reserve but his minutes will increase. Once Young, Butler and Jamison begin to click, the coach said Washington can get over the hump.

Peter Lockley / The Washington Times Reserve guard Nick Young has averaged 23.3 points in the Wizards' last three games.

"It should help balance us quite honestly. Now, basically, you have Nick at long range, Antawn up close and Caron midrange. So, it should offer some interesting balance where if you take away one part of our range, you've got two other elements," Tapscott said. "Now we have to run the offense to Nick, to Caron, to Antawn and then decide who we're going to run the offense through - who's going to be the facilitator? We were in the game with Nick and Antawn scoring. If we have Caron scoring as well, we probably win the game. But it's a process."

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