

2009 NBA Draft Recap at Madison Square Garden: The Top 10 picks

The L.A. Clippers made a solid choice with forward Blake Griffin who was probably the most consistent player in the draft, even if he was not the top scorer. I was a little disappointed that Hansbrough (one of the most offensive minded players in the draft) was drafted as late as he was, but Indiana did the right thing by finally staking a claim to him. He will make a good addition to point guard, Danny Granger (2009 Most Improved Player in the NBA). Center Hasheem Thabeet was another smart selection; the Grizzlies went with the top defensive player and will see that improve their finish in the final standings next year.

Round 1

Blake Griffin, Power Forward, (drafted 1st overall by the Los Angeles Clippers) - "Consistency" is the label for Blake Griffin. Just as easily as hockey comes to John Tavares (top pick at this year's NHL draft), basketball seems to do the same for Griffin. In the NBA's scouting report, Griffin is described as the "prototypical power forward." This couldn't be truer. With his 6' 10," 250 pound frame, he drives to the hoop with a strong presence and repetition that is hard to beat. Griffin is not only hard to defend because of his physical presence and size, but because of his accuracy from every position and angle on the court including from the three point line and when he takes fade away shots. The Clippers got to see their boy in action this July in their first NBA Summer League game vs. the Los Angeles Lakers. No one on either side could match Griffin as he recorded a double-double and totaled 27 pts, 12 rebounds, and 1 assist. This past season at the University of Oklahoma, Griffin improved nearly all his career high college statistics by playing in 35 games in which he recorded 794 points, a .694 field goal pct (field goal percentage), and 22.7 points per game (ppg.). Griffin's sophomore year (2008-2009) also saw him sharpen the defensive aspects of his game as he recorded 504 rebounds and 41 blocks. Prior to college, Griffin played basketball in high school as a stand-out at Okalahoma Christian School. He has drawn comparisons to former NBA player, Karl Malone. Overall, Griffin's determined work ethic and flexible personality will help phase the Clippers out of their recent slump.

Hasheem Thabeet, Center, (drafted 2nd overall by the Memphis Grizzlies) - If anything else, Tennessee's NBA franchise keeps getting more and more interesting. While struggling on the court, off-court the scouting staff is slowly making Memphis more and more diverse. Thabeet is the first Tanzanian born basketball player to be drafted and slotted to play in the NBA. He becomes the 4th international player to enter the team's current roster in addition to Marc Gasol (Spain), Hamed Haddadi (Iran), and Marko Jaric (Yugoslavia). Thabeet has clearly persevered as the #2 selection in this year's draft. Coming from a broken home across on the other side of the Atlantic, Thabeet managed to turn into a stand-out defensive prospect after only beginning to play basketball at the age of 15. His size (7'3," 263 pounds) definitely gives him an advantage at his position, but his college statistics are clear indications of his dedication to the game of basketball. In his junior year at the University of Connecticut this past season, Thabeet established

career highs in many categories including games played (36), blocks (152), rebounds (388), and steals (22). Thabeet also established a healthy respect amongst competitors on offense with 489 points, a 64.0 field goal pct., and a 13.6 ppg average. Thabeet's honors include being named the "NABC Defensive Player of the Year" for two consecutive years (2008 and 2009). Defensively, Thabeet's height will give him an advantage over other players especially when it comes to blocking shots; in turn I would like to see how LeBron James approaches a center such as him. Offensively, Thabeet's height will be a major factor again on rebounds and second chance points. "Yahoo! Sports" compares him to DeSagana Diop (Charlotte), but I'm tending to lean toward the consensus opinion that he compares with Emeka Okafor (New Orleans).

Tyreke Evans, Guard, (Drafted 4th overall by the Sacramento Kings) - Evans was a player who went from having a rough start last year to a team leader. However, after he found his game about halfway through the season at the University of Memphis, he took off. Evans played point guard with the Tigers in his freshman year, but can play shooting guard as well. He likes to drive the ball often straight to the hoop for the lay-up and put in a quick basket. Evidence to the point that he is a shooting guard as well, Evans is also capable of making numerous fade-aways from behind the 3-point arc. This season he recorded 632 points, 17.1 ppg, and a .455 field goal pct. on 505 attempts. Evans was also sound defensively notching 177 steals (2.1 steals per game), 29 blocks (0.8 per game), and 198 rebounds (5.4 per game). In high school, he was an All-American at American Christian Academy in Aston, Pennsylvania. During his senior year he averaged 32.1 points per game and was named MVP at the McDonald's All American game. Evans has continued to develop this game after being drafted by Sacramento by playing on the Kings' summer league team. In his 2nd game in the summer league, he recorded a double-double with 25 points, 10 rebounds, and six assists. Overall, Evans shows a lot of promise for the Kings who would strongly benefit from some up-tempo offense. However, in my opinion, to work out any remaining kinks he may have in his game he should play in the NBA-D League (NBA Developmental League). He still is very young and could benefit from a farm-system team (The Reno Bighorns) to improve his defensive game if he continues to play point guard. At 6'6," 220 pounds, Evans will definitely be a force within the paint.

Ricky Rubio, Point Guard, (Drafted 5th overall by the Minnesota Timberwolves) - Rubio will definitely bring a sense of freshness with his fast, up-tempo European style of play. Rubio is definitely the complete package of a point guard. He shoots, scores, passes, and plays aggressive defense. At 6'4," 180 pounds Rubio can hold his ground amongst players on the court, but what's more impressive is his ability to do so against larger and taller opponents. On offense, he particularly loves to drive into the lane for the lay-up regardless of whose on defense and 80% of the time seems to make the shot. However, he also fulfills the generic point guard description as well with his excellent ball-handling and passing. Rubio seems to find his teammates from any point on the court and make whatever pass is necessary including numerous behind-the-back bounce passes and toss-up's for alley oop's. Look out for him to become the league leader in assists one day. On Defense, Rubio's most vital asset is his ability to simultaneously pressure other point guards and hold his ground and yield no space at all to his opponents. His size and

speed make him effective at stealing the ball. Rubio has played the past four seasons with DKV Jovenut Jugadors of Liga ACB (the Spanish ACB League) and has led the squad to three Catalan Championships (2006, 2008, and 2009). Rubio has been compared to current NBA Star, Jason Kidd (Dallas Mavericks). Fun facts: His nicknames include “La Pistola” and “The Rolling Earthquake.”

Stephen Curry, Guard, (picked 7th overall by the Golden State Warriors)- One would think that leading NCAA Division I basketball in points per game would give a player a higher draft pick, but Curry was plucked when was. This season with the Davidson Wildcats Curry was the leading scorer with 28.6 points per game. He also established career highs in points scored (974), assists (189), and steals (86). In his sophomore year (2007-2008), Curry established a new NCAA single season record after making 162 three-pointers. That same season, Curry established highs in all shooting percentages which included field goals (.483), three-pointers (.439), and free throws (894). Curry comes from a strong basketball oriented family. His father, Dell Curry, spent 16 seasons in the NBA for 5 teams (the bulk for the Charlotte Hornets, 10 seasons) and his brother Seth Curry spent his freshman year at Liberty University, where he led all NCAA Division I freshman in points per game (20.2). Curry is a very offensively focused player, but has also improved on the defensive aspects of his game over the course of his three years at Davidson College. He can score comfortably from almost anywhere on the court, but possesses the unique ability to consistently score from outside the paint whether it be a long shot for 2 points or a 3-pointer. As so many have already said, his shot range is what makes him phenomenal overall. Dave-Te Thomas of “rivals.com” compares Curry to Mike Bibby of the Atlanta Hawks. Curry is originally from Akron, Ohio; where LeBron James is also from (NBA MVP 2009). Despite choosing to not attend Davidson for his senior year, Curry still plans to earn a degree and is in the midst of online summer classes.

Gerald Henderson, Guard, (Drafted 12th overall by the Charlotte Bobcats) - If there is anything that Henderson will bring to the Bobcats then its improvement. The Caldwell, New Jersey native started his freshman year at Duke with only 6.8 ppg and 219 points scored by the end of the season. Since that point, Henderson has improved his game both offensively and defensively. This past season Henderson registered 16.5 ppg, 610 points, 91 assists, 183 rebounds, 46 steals, and 28 blocks. Henderson’s 16.5 ppg. led all Duke basketball players in scoring. Henderson’s father, Gerald Sr., spent 13 seasons in the NBA compiling 3 championship rings with the Boston Celtics and Detroit Pistons. The two words that describe Henderson best are “stealth” and “speed.” On offense, he drives deep into the paint (often unnoticed) and receives a pass either for the lay-up or alley oop. He also shows good consistency with his turn-around j-shots. On defense, Henderson is a big force on his side of the court dishing out block after block. Overall, this is a good investment for the Bobcats who could really benefit from a two-way player.

Tyler Hansbrough, Power Forward, (Drafted 13th overall by the Indiana Pacers) - He nearly had a 4 year career total of 2,900 points (2,872 was his final total) and gets drafted 13th? He also finishes as the ACC scoring leader and gets drafted after Henderson? Everyone has their reasons, but my guess is a lot of teams were speculating that he may

be another J.J. Reddick (a stand college star in ACC competition, but has struggled in the NBA). Hansbrough's 2,872 points career points ranks 12th all-time amongst NCAA Division I players. His junior year (2007-2008) at the University of North Carolina was his best when he tallied 882 points, 22.6 ppg., a .540 field goal pct., 399 rebounds (UNC's all-time career leader with 1,219), and 59 steals. This year, Hansbrough established a career high in free throw pct. (.841) in addition to putting up a notable 704 points, 20.7 ppg, and 276 rebounds. Hansbrough's ability to score in heavy traffic is his biggest attribute. He manages to control the ball well and finish his shots cleanly a lot of the time against pressure from 2 or 3 players. Overall, he should be a nice addition to the Pacers and complement current players T.J. Ford and Danny Granger.

Earl Clark, Small Forward, (Drafted 14th overall by the Phoenix Suns) - Clark fits the definition of a small forward in that he dabbles in a little bit of everything. The NBA scouting staff describes him as a "long and athletic forward with a good overall skill set." Clark has consistently improved his game in each of the three seasons that he has played for the Louisville Cardinals. This season Clark recorded 525 points, 14.2 ppg, 322 rebounds, a .326 three-pointer pct., and 119 assists. On offense, Clark is aggressive and will battle through traffic to help his team get the extra two points. On defense, Clark possesses tenacity and is good at stealing the ball and blocking shots; this past season he averaged 1 steal per game and 1.4 blocks per game. Clark's weakness is probably his do-it-alone attitude. His 6'8, 220 pound frame gives him a lot of leeway to take the ball deep into the paint, but if you match a center such as Hasheem Thabeet (7'3, 263 pounds) or B.J. Mullens (7'0, 275 pounds) on him, then problems could arise. However, he emerged as more of a team player this year with his 3.2 assists per game. His game may take a little time to develop before he can make the active roster for the Suns, but he should prove to be a standout star. Dave-De Thomas of "yahoo! sports" compares Clark to Danny Granger of the Indiana Pacers.

Jermaine Taylor, Shooting Guard, (Drafted 32 overall by the Washington Wizards) – Judging by his interviews he's one of the more mentally sound players in the draft. He's upbeat, determined, optimistic, and confident in his abilities. Jermaine Taylor this past season finished a successful 4-year tenure at the University of Central Florida and ranked 3rd in the nation in points per game (26.2). Taylor finished with career highs this year in almost every category including points scored (812), field goal pct. (.480), free throw pct (.812), rebounds (161), assists per game (1.9), and blocks per game (.8). Taylor's total of 1,979 career points ranked third all-time at UCF and his 251 three pointers established a new school record. Taylor fits the typical role of a traditional shooting guard in his innate ability to score, but differs from some for his aggressive attack of the basket and love for dunking the ball. At 6'4, 205 pounds, the Tavares, Florida native shows tremendous athleticism, an attribute he believes to be the reason why many scouts compare him to Miami shooting guard, Dwayne Wade. Other sources, such as yahoo.com, have also compared him to Rodney Stuckey of the Detroit Pistons. Taylor is a good player, but still has some work to do. By dunking the ball as much as he does it seems he might be making one too many moves to score; this could become a problem because in the NBA defending players in the paint possess superior size and height making it easy to block the lane for a shot. He may have some work to do on his jump shot, but based on his field

goal pct. and 3-pointer pct. from the past season this shouldn't be too much of a problem. Taylor has also been compared to Rodney Stuckey of the Detroit Pistons by Yahoo! sports. Overall, he was definitely one of the better steals of the 2nd round.

Sam Young, Small Forward, (picked 36th overall by the Memphis Grizzlies) - ESPN analysts dubbed him one of the more "active sleeper picks." Underdog, maybe. Sleeper, no. Young was the eldest of five children born to Marquet Craig, who was a single 14-year old mother at the time of Sam's birth. Young grew up in Clinton, Maryland on the outskirts of Washington D.C. Young attended Friendly High School and helped lead his team to back to back state championships in 2003 and 2004 (2A in 2003 and 3A in 2004). As a senior, he showed tremendous potential on both offense and defense to take his game to the next level recording game averages of 24.6 points, 14 rebounds, and 6 blocks. However, he went fairly unnoticed amongst college recruits; an event which prompted him to pursue a post-graduate program at Hargrave Military Academy (prep school) in Chatham, VA in order to improve upon his high school grades and to further develop his basketball game. He was a noticeable standout during the single year (2004-2005) he spent at Hargrave averaging 23 points and 11 rebounds for his almost undefeated team (28-1). After accepting an offer to play for the University of Pittsburgh, Young struggled during his first two seasons with the Panthers starting very few games and recording modest, but not exceptional statistics. That would all change his junior year (2007-2008) when he recorded career highs in almost all categories including rebounds per game (rpg) (6.3), assists per game (apg) (1.2), steals per game (spg) (1.1), blocks per game (bpg) (1.1), and 3-pointer pct. (.383). He repeated his stellar performance his senior year at Pittsburgh and recorded 19.2 ppg, 690 points, a .740 free throw pct., 6.3 apg. and 1.0 spg. Overall, Young is a quick two way forward who likes to score either on the dunk with panache or from outside the 3-point arc. At 6'6, 215 pounds he shows tremendous presence which gives him a distinct advantage in blocking shots and stealing the ball on defense, but at the same on offense allowing him to bury quick shots. In an interview, Young did not compare his style of play to anyone in the NBA. Young is known for having a specialty pump-fake which he learned as a child during street basketball and reintroduced the move once he entered college. Solid second round choice by the Grizzlies. I admire their pursuit of defensive and two way players in the draft.

Breakdown of the Top 10 Picks

<u>Team</u>	<u>Previous Club</u>	<u>Position</u>
Memphis Grizzlies- 2	DKV Joventut (Spain ACB) - 1	Power Forward- 2
L.A. Clippers- 1	University of Oklahoma- 1	Small Forward- 2
Sacramento Kings- 1	University of Connecticut- 1	Center- 1
Minnesota Timberwolves- 1	University of Memphis- 1	Guard- 3
Golden State Warriors- 1	Davidson College- 1	Point Guard- 1
Charlotte Bobcats- 1	Duke University- 1	Shooting Guard- 1
Indiana Pacers- 1	University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill- 1	
Phoenix Suns- 1	University of Louisville- 1	
Washington Wizards- 1	University of Central Florida- 1	
	University of Pittsburgh	

