

Hard work, love of the game have Sheppard in fold for Gamecocks



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[Gamecocks "came out and did their job" in easy win over North Carolina A&T](#) (story by Collyn Taylor)

Things don't always work out the way they are planned.

Sometimes they work out better, sometimes they go the other way.

In the case of 6-foot-6 South Carolina freshman guard Shamiel Sheppard one of the toughest things he has ever gone through has now turned into him exceeding expectations and returning to the Gamecocks much earlier than expected.

Sheppard tore his ACL in the summer of 2014 and he was originally told that he would be sidelined for the entire 2014-15 South Carolina men's basketball campaign.

Determined, Sheppard worked extremely hard to get his knee back into position to be able to play college basketball and a full month ahead of schedule he returned to practice earlier this week.

Sheppard saw game action for the first time as a Gamecock in South Carolina's 91-54 demolition of North Carolina A&T on Tuesday, Dec. 30.

Whether he would officially be back in the fold for the Gamecocks this year was not decided until 90 minutes prior to tip off of the game with the Aggies.

Sheppard let South Carolina men's basketball head coach Frank Martin know that he wanted to talk with him while Martin was working out prior to the game.

A short time after Martin's workout the two connected and the decision was made that he would suit up for the Gamecocks this season.

"He was great," Martin relayed. "He said he felt real good and he wanted to try and go and I told him the original plan with him not being healthy until the end of January I was going to be against him playing, but with him having 20 games in front of him - that's a lot of games - and now it's my job to integrate him to what we do using his talents without disrupting our team and the chemistry that we've created. That's my job. I've got to figure that one out. He's got to get in better shape. He's got to learn what we do better, so I can take a smaller sample size from all the things we do and find the little package of things that we can utilize when he's in there."

Sheppard logged five minutes against North Carolina A&T. He knocked down a 3-pointer and brought down two rebounds.

"I'm just excited to get back out on the floor," Sheppard noted. "Like I said before, I'm surrounded by support and they've just picked me up the whole way and I'm just glad to be in."

Sheppard said that nothing other than playing in his inaugural college basketball game was going through his head when he checked in for the first time.

"The only thing that was really going through my head was just the excitement to be back on the floor and the excitement just to play basketball again," Sheppard stated.

Sheppard knows there are some things he needs to work on to be where he needs to be as a player, but he feels like he is 100 percent physically.

"Being prepared to play the game and our style of play and defense, I feel like I've got some work to do on that, but I can catch on," Sheppard said.

Even with so many kinks to get worked out for Sheppard his decision was simple after conversations with those close to him.

"I had a lot of conversations with the coaching staff, I had a lot of conversations with close relatives to me and basically everybody said the same thing," Sheppard commented. "if you love the game and you can give 100 percent then just go out there and perform' and that's what I did."

A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Sheppard's first game action comes just days before the Gamecocks come to his backyard to play No. 9 Iowa State at the Barclays Center on Saturday, Jan. 3.

"I'm actually excited to go back home and play in front of my friends and family, but (as a team) we're just going out there to handle business," Sheppard remarked.

Martin is thrilled that the Gamecocks will be able to have his services in his hometown.

"He's five months removed from ACL surgery and he snatched a rebound there standing under the basket just jumping and he was like elbows on the rim," Martin said. "He brings athleticism. He's got a toughness to him. He's an unbelievable person to sit around and have a conversation with; how thoughtful he is and articulate he is. When he goes on the court he's not backing down from anything and he brings that little edge to him on the court that I think is good for our basketball team."

To Martin it all goes back to the fact that things don't always go the way they are planned.

"The first thing I told him (when talking about his return) was, 'you remember in June when you were down and you thought the end of the world was coming?' I said, 'you see sometimes things go wrong and they're not as bad as they seem,'" Martin mused. "You kept your head up, you got through a difficult moment and now you get to go home and play in front of your family.' I'm

happy for him."

****Story by Brian Hand/Photo by Allen Sharpe****