

## **NBA: Montreal-native Joel Anthony a key player on Miami Heat**

### **6-foot-9, 260-pounder was once cut from the basketball team at Dawson College**

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May 20, 2012



**Joel Anthony #50 of the Miami Heat rebounds against Tyson Chandler #6 of the New York Knicks in Game Two of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals during the 2012 NBA Playoffs on April 30, 2012 at American Airlines Arena in Miami, Florida.**

**Photograph by: Nathaniel S. Butler , NBAE via Getty Images**

WASHINGTON – To say that the odds were stacked against Joel Anthony ever becoming an integral piece of a National Basketball Association title contender would be putting it mildly.

Anthony was an undrafted Summer League invitee in July 2007 when the Miami Heat took a flyer on the 24-year-old Montreal native. He was the No. 3 centre on the team’s Summer League depth chart – about the equivalent of being a third-string goalie at a National Hockey League rookie camp.

“He’s one of our favourite stories,” Miami head coach Erik Spoelstra said at a late-season Heat shootaround on the campus of Georgetown University.

Spoelstra was an assistant coach under Pat Riley in 2007, but served as head coach during the July Summer League in Orlando, Fla.

“There was one Summer League game where we were really looking at someone else, three players got hurt and so we had to play him,” Spoelstra recalled. “He wound up with seven blocks that game and four goaltending (calls), so we just said: ‘Let’s keep this guy on the radar.’”

Three months later, Anthony was invited to Miami’s main training camp, where his primary purpose was to serve as “an added number,” according to Spoelstra.

“We just needed to fill out the last couple of roster spots and he had shown enough during that Summer League to earn that right,” the coach said.

Embracing his role as a shadow to future Hall of Famers Shaquille O’Neal and Alonzo Mourning, Anthony did more than just fill a training camp roster spot. The 6-foot-9, 260-pounder, who was once cut from the basketball team at Dawson College, survived one of Riley’s notoriously gruelling training camps and earned an NBA contract.

“Ever since then,” Spoelstra said, “he’s been one of our hardest workers and he’s really grown tremendously in the last four years.”

The first-ever Selwyn House alum to reach the NBA, Anthony has gone from unknown rookie to a key complimentary piece to Miami’s “Big Three” of LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh.

“He’s one of those guys whose impact with the game doesn’t show up on the stat sheet,” Bosh said. “For the most part, his game is about altering shots, contesting shots and playing defence. He’s just a special player and this team wouldn’t be the same without him. You need role players like that to come in and roll up their sleeves and do their job.”

Anthony started a career-high 51 games in the lockout shortened 2011-12 season and further solidified his role as one of the Heat’s most reliable defenders. He also had per-game career-highs in minutes (21.1), rebounds (3.9), blocks (1.6) and points (3.4).

“Personally, I’m a lot more comfortable in my role with what I have to do to help the team and I’m having a good time with it,” Anthony said. “After being with this team and going through what we did last year, we’re definitely a lot more comfortable with each other.”

With James and Bosh making their Miami debuts last season, the Heat fell to the Dallas Mavericks in six games in the NBA Finals. It was a year unlike any other for the Heat, beginning with a premature celebration of their free-agent signings in which James predicted multiple NBA titles in the team’s future.

“It was crazy,” said Anthony, who signed a five-year \$18-million deal of his own less than a week after The Big Three was assembled. “It was a circus every day and every night – just getting to and from our hotels, all the media coverage and having a target on us in every arena.

But looking back, it was a special experience. ... The first year that that team was put together – those are memories that I’ll always keep with me.”

While the added attention was new for Anthony and many of his teammates, fellow Montreal native Bill Wennington went through a similar experience 15 years earlier with the Chicago Bulls. Wennington, who won three championships playing alongside Michael Jordan, also used the word “circus” to describe what he and his teammates experienced from 1995-98.

“We’d get to hotels at 2 or 3 in the morning and there would be hundreds of people just waiting to see us walk into a building,” Wennington said in a phone interview.

“The attention was similar, but I think the way (the Heat) went about it was different. They brought a lot of the (attention) upon themselves, by promoting themselves and all of that. ... For us, Michael got the attention, but he didn’t have to do all that other stuff – he just went out and played.”

Wennington retired as an NBA player in 2000 and has served as a colour analyst on Bulls radio broadcasts since 2004.

The Heat remain under a microscope with the glitz and glamour of South Florida surrounding them, but Anthony says that this season has been far more business-like, with outside distractions kept to a minimum.

Anything short of a Larry O’Brien Trophy this year will be considered a failure in Miami. Bosh has been sidelined with an abdominal strain, meaning more responsibility has fallen to Anthony and teammates Ronny Turiaf and Udonis Haslem.

“We still believe that we’re a team that everyone wants to beat,” Anthony said late in the season, “but we also know that we’re a team that can beat anybody else in this league.