

= Dennis Johnson =

Dennis Wayne Johnson ( September 18 , 1954 ? February 22 , 2007 ) , nicknamed " DJ " , was an American professional basketball player for the National Basketball Association 's ( NBA ) Seattle SuperSonics , Phoenix Suns and Boston Celtics and coach of the Los Angeles Clippers . He was an alumnus of Dominguez High School , Los Angeles Harbor College and Pepperdine University .

A prototypical late bloomer , Johnson overcame early struggles and had a successful NBA playing career . Drafted 29th overall in 1976 by the Seattle SuperSonics , Johnson began his professional career as a shooting guard . He eventually led the Sonics to their only NBA championship in 1979 , winning the Finals MVP Award . After a short stint with the Phoenix Suns , he became the starting point guard for the Boston Celtics , with whom he won two more championships . Johnson was voted into five All @-@ Star Teams , one All @-@ NBA First and one Second Team , and nine consecutive All @-@ Defensive First and Second Teams . Apart from his reputation as a defensive stopper , Johnson was known as a clutch player who made several decisive plays in NBA playoffs history .

The Celtics franchise has retired Johnson 's # 3 jersey , which hangs from the rafters of the TD Garden , the home arena of the team . On April 5 , 2010 , the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame officially announced that Johnson had been posthumously elected to the Hall . He was formally inducted on August 13 . He is considered by several sports journalists to be one of the most underrated players of all time .

= = Early years = =

Dennis Wayne Johnson was born the eighth of sixteen children , to a social worker and a bricklayer who lived in Compton , California , a suburb of Los Angeles . Originally a baseball fan and a Little Leaguer , Johnson learned basketball from his father , but seemed to have neither the size nor the talent to compete with his peers : as a teenager at Dominguez High School , Johnson measured just 5 ' 9 " and played only " a minute or two each game " . After high school , he worked several odd jobs , including a \$ 2 @. @ 75 @-@ per @-@ hour job as a forklift driver , and played with his brothers in summer league games after work . During this period , Johnson grew to a height of 6 ' 3 " , and developed what some later described as " rocket launcher legs " , which enabled him to jump high to grab rebounds against taller opponents .

Jim White , the coach at Los Angeles Harbor College , had watched Johnson play street basketball ; feeling that Johnson excelled in defense , White asked him to enroll . Johnson gave up his jobs and developed into a promising young guard , averaging 18 @. @ 3 points and 12 @. @ 0 rebounds per game and leading Harbor to a college junior state title . However , the young guard lacked discipline , often clashed with White and was thrown off the team three times in two years .

At the end of his junior college career , two universities offered Johnson scholarships : Azusa Pacific University and Pepperdine University . Johnson chose the latter , and in his only year in college , he averaged 15 @. @ 7 points , 5 @. @ 8 rebounds and 3 @. @ 3 assists per game , and developed a reputation for tough defense . After that year , Johnson made himself eligible for the 1976 NBA Draft , but was skeptical that any team would take him . NBA teams were wary of drafting a player with character issues , and Johnson was known to be a troublemaker .

= = Professional career = =

= = Seattle SuperSonics ( 1976 ? 80 ) = = =

The Seattle SuperSonics took Johnson in the second round of the 1976 draft with the 29th pick and gave him a four @-@ year contract , with which he earned a salary of \$ 45 @, @ 000 in the first year and \$ 90 @, @ 000 in the last . In his rookie year , the 1976 ? 77 NBA season , Johnson , playing backup to the experienced Sonics backcourt tandem of Slick Watts and Fred Brown , averaged 9

@.@ 2 points and 1 @.@ 5 assists per game . The Sonics finished with a 40 ? 42 record and missed the 1977 NBA Playoffs , leading head coach Bill Russell to resign . In the following season , the team lost 17 of the first 22 games under Russell 's replacement Bob Hopkins , who was replaced by Hall of Fame coach Lenny Wilkens , who gave Johnson a starting spot and paired him with Gus Williams . Johnson revelled in this new role , improving his averages to 12 @.@ 7 points and 2 @.@ 8 assists per game . During this period Johnson played shooting guard and was known for his aggressive slam dunking , in contrast to the more cerebral roles he played later in his career . It was at this time that Johnson 's nickname " DJ " was coined by play @-@ by @-@ play announcer Bob Blackburn , to help distinguish him from teammates , John Johnson and Vinnie Johnson ( whom Blackburn referred to as " JJ " and " VJ " , respectively ) .

Finishing strongly , the Sonics ended the regular season with a 47 ? 35 record and made the 1978 NBA Playoffs . After eliminating the Los Angeles Lakers , the defending champion Portland Trail Blazers , and the Denver Nuggets , they almost defeated the Washington Bullets by taking a 3 ? 2 lead in the 1978 NBA Finals . In a 93 ? 92 Game 3 victory , Johnson blocked seven shots ? the most blocks in NBA Finals history for a guard . The Sonics lost in seven games , however , partly because of Johnson 's Game 7 scoring drought , in which the second @-@ year guard missed all of his 14 field goal attempts . Johnson later acknowledged that he simply " choked " ; he vowed never to repeat this again and credited this game as an important lesson to become a better player .

Johnson and the Sonics got their revenge in the 1978 ? 79 season . After clinching the Pacific Division with a 52 ? 30 record , the team met the Bullets again in the 1979 NBA Finals . After losing Game 1 , the Sonics won the next four games to take the finals series , helped by Johnson who averaged almost 23 points along with six rebounds and assists per game . He scored 32 points in a Game 4 overtime victory , and was named NBA Finals MVP . It was during this season that Johnson established himself as one of the best guards in the league ; he averaged 15 @.@ 9 points and 3 @.@ 5 assists per game , and made his first All @-@ Defensive First Team and All @-@ Star Game appearance .

During the following season , Johnson averaged 19 @.@ 0 points and 4 @.@ 1 assists , appeared in his second All @-@ Star Game and was named to the All @-@ Defensive First Team and All @-@ NBA Second Team . The Sonics , however , lost in the Western Conference Finals to the Lakers , who had Hall of Famers Jamaal Wilkes , Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul @-@ Jabbar . Because of the abundance of talent on the Sonics team , Johnson later called this loss one of the worst disappointments of his professional career . Coach Wilkens grew tired of Johnson , who often clashed with him and was perceived as a growing liability to the team . At the end of the season , Johnson was traded to the Phoenix Suns for Paul Westphal and draft picks . The Sonics finished 22 games worse in the next season despite the addition of Westphal .

= = = Phoenix Suns ( 1980 ? 83 ) = = =

Johnson further established himself as a quality player in Phoenix . In his three years as a Sun , Johnson averaged 14 ? 20 points a game and provided tough defense . He played in two All @-@ Star Games , was voted into three consecutive All @-@ Defensive First Teams and earned his only All @-@ NBA First Team appearance . In this period Johnson , like in Seattle , played shooting guard and became the main scorer on the team , as opposed to being the second or third option as a Sonic .

In the first two years of Johnson 's stint , the Suns were fairly successful , reaching the Western Conference Semifinals both seasons . The Suns bowed out in the first round in Johnson 's last year . Johnson 's situation deteriorated towards the end of his career at Phoenix . Like in Seattle , he often clashed with his coach , John MacLeod , and finally was traded by general manager , Jerry Colangelo , to the Boston Celtics for Rick Robey and draft picks . Like Seattle after Johnson 's departure , the Suns finished 12 games worse in the next season despite the addition of Robey .

= = = Boston Celtics ( 1983 ? 90 ) = = =

Between the 1979 ? 80 season and 1981 ? 82 season seasons , the Celtics had lost to the Philadelphia 76ers in the Eastern Conference Finals 2 out of 3 times , mainly because physical Sixers guard Andrew Toney routinely caused problems for their defensively fragile backcourt . After subsequently getting swept by the Bucks in the 1982 @-@ 83 Eastern Conference Semifinals , Celtics general manager Red Auerbach added the perennial All @-@ Defensive Team member Johnson to his squad , hoping that it would help the Celtics fare better in the Eastern Conference playoffs , particular against the 76ers . Johnson joined a squad led by Hall of Fame forward Larry Bird , who played in the frontcourt with two fellow Hall of Famers , center Robert Parish and forward Kevin McHale , a combination often called the best frontcourt of all time by the NBA . Johnson described joining the Celtics as a " dream come true " and enjoyed the tutelage of highly successful general manager Auerbach , who was " living history " according to Johnson .

With the Celtics Johnson changed his playing style for the third time in his career : after being known as a slam dunking shooting guard with the Sonics , and an all @-@ around scorer with the Suns , he now established himself as a point guard who was defined more by playmaking than scoring . In his first year as a Celtic , he averaged 13 @. @ 2 points and 4 @. @ 2 assists and was elected to the All @-@ Defensive Second Team . The Celtics reached the 1984 NBA Finals , where they met the Los Angeles Lakers , their intense rivals since the 1960s . The Celtics won 4 ? 3 , and Johnson took credit for playing smothering defense on Hall of Fame Lakers playmaker Earvin Johnson , limiting him to a sub @-@ average 17 points in the last four games , and being at least partly responsible for several of the Laker point guard 's game @-@ deciding errors in Games 2 , 4 and 7 . As a result , Magic Johnson was taunted as " Tragic Johnson " whenever the Lakers and Celtics played against each other .

In the 1984 ? 85 season , Johnson continued playing smothering defense , earning his next All @-@ Defensive Second Team call @-@ up while averaging 16 @. @ 9 points and 7 @. @ 3 assists per game . The Celtics met the Lakers in the 1985 NBA Finals again . Johnson 's big moment came in Game 4 : when the score was tied at 105 , teammate Larry Bird had the ball in the last seconds . Being double @-@ teamed by Lakers Kareem Abdul @-@ Jabbar and Magic Johnson , Bird passed to the open Johnson , and the guard sank a 19 @-@ ft buzzer beater to win the game . The Lakers , however , took their revenge this time , winning the series in six games , powered by venerable 38 @-@ year @-@ old Finals MVP Abdul @-@ Jabbar . Johnson described this loss as one of the toughest in his career , because the Celtics were " close [ to winning the series ] " , but " could not get the job done " .

In the following season the Celtics made the playoffs , helped by the performance of Johnson , who made the All @-@ Defensive Second Team again while tallying 17 @. @ 8 points and 6 @. @ 7 assists per game . After defeating the Milwaukee Bucks in the Eastern Conference Finals , the Celtics reached the 1986 NBA Finals against the up @-@ and @-@ coming Houston Rockets , led by the " Twin Towers " of centers Ralph Sampson and Hakeem Olajuwon . Led by Finals MVP Larry Bird , the Celtics beat the Rockets 4 ? 2 , and Johnson won his third title .

The Celtics were unable to repeat their title in 1987 despite several dramatic playoff victories . Johnson played strong defense again , earning yet another appearance on the All @-@ Defensive First Team , and the Celtics embarked on a nail @-@ biting playoff campaign . In the 1987 Eastern Conference Semifinals , the Celtics split the first six games against the Milwaukee Bucks . In the deciding Game 7 , which the Celtics won , Johnson had a spectacular play with 1 : 30 left in the game : a Celtics ball threatened to fly out of bounds , but Johnson dived for it and whipped it backwards in mid @-@ air against Bucks center Jack Sikma . The ball bounced off Sikma before going out of bounds , and the Celtics maintained possession .

In the next round the 1987 Eastern Conference Finals , the Celtics faced the Detroit Pistons . The series was described as a grudge match between two intense rivals , featuring a great level of personal animosity , sharp rhetoric , and several physical altercations . The center of this feud was Pistons pivot Bill Laimbeer , who brawled with Celtics players Bird and Parish . In Game 5 Johnson was involved in a crucial play : down 107 @-@ 106 , Larry Bird stole the in @-@ bounds pass by Pistons point guard Isiah Thomas with 5 seconds left and passed it to a sprinting Johnson , who converted a difficult layup with 1 second left in the game . This play caused Celtics broadcaster

Johnny Most to shout out one of his most famous calls :

According to Johnson this was his favorite play of all @-@ time . Games 6 and 7 also featured a feud , this time between Pistons forward Dennis Rodman and Johnson . In Game 6 , which the Pistons won , Rodman taunted Johnson in the closing seconds by waving his right hand over his head . When the Celtics took Game 7 , Johnson went back at Rodman in the last moments of the game and mimicked his taunting gesture . In the 1987 NBA Finals , however , the Celtics succumbed to the Los Angeles Lakers 4 ? 2 as Lakers playmaker and Finals MVP Magic Johnson put up a great performance , averaging 26 points and 13 assists throughout the series .

The next three seasons were disappointing for the aging Celtics . In the 1987 ? 88 season , Johnson averaged 12 @.@ 6 points and 7 @.@ 8 assists , but in the 1988 Playoffs , the Celtics were unable to beat the Detroit Pistons in the Eastern Conference Finals . In the next season , Johnson ( who statistically declined to 10 @.@ 0 points and 6 @.@ 6 assists per game ) and his team made the 1989 NBA Playoffs on a meager 42 ? 40 record ( largely due to the absence of star forward Larry Bird for almost the entire season ) , but were immediately eliminated in the first round ( again , largely due to the absence of the injured Larry Bird . ) The following 1989 ? 90 NBA season was Johnson 's last . The now 35 @-@ year @-@ old playmaker relinquished his starting point guard role to younger John Bagley , but when Bagley dislocated his shoulder , Johnson returned with high level of performance and was lovingly called " our glue man " by coach Jimmy Rodgers . In that season , Johnson started in 65 of his 75 games , averaging 7 @.@ 1 points and 6 @.@ 5 assists , but the Celtics failed to survive the first round of the 1990 NBA Playoffs .

Johnson retired after the Celtics did not offer him a new contract at the beginning of the 1991 season . During his retirement ceremony , his perennial Los Angeles Lakers opponent Magic Johnson telegraphed him and lauded him as " the best backcourt defender of all @-@ time " . In addition Celtics colleague and triple NBA Most Valuable Player award winner Larry Bird called Johnson the best teammate he ever had .

= = = Post @-@ player career = = =

After retiring as a player , Johnson worked as a scout for the Celtics . In 1993 he became an assistant coach for the Celtics , a position he held until 1997 . After spending several years outside the limelight , he returned as an assistant coach for the Los Angeles Clippers in 2000 , and spent four seasons there . For 24 games toward the end of the 2002 ? 03 season , Johnson served as interim head coach after the departure of Alvin Gentry . Johnson later worked as a scout for the Portland Trail Blazers , and in 2004 he was named head coach of the NBA Development League 's Florida Flame . He became head coach of the NBADL 's Austin Toros a year later , and held that position until his death two years later .

= = Head coaching record = =

= = Legacy = =

In 1 @,@ 100 games , Johnson scored 15 @,@ 535 points , grabbed 4 @,@ 249 rebounds and gave 5 @,@ 499 assists , translating to career averages of 14 @.@ 1 points , 3 @.@ 9 rebounds and 5 @.@ 0 assists per game . Known as a defensive stalwart , he was elected into nine straight All @-@ Defensive First or Second Teams . NBA legend George Gervin said in a podcast with journalist Bill Simmons that Johnson was the hardest defender he ever played against . Johnson is also acknowledged by the NBA as a " money player " who was clutch in decisive moments , such as scoring 32 points for his team in a Game 4 overtime victory in the 1979 NBA Finals , playing smothering defense on Magic Johnson in the 1984 NBA Finals , and converting a last @-@ second layup in Game 5 of the 1987 Eastern Conference Finals after a Larry Bird steal .

Furthermore , Johnson is lauded by the NBA as a versatile all @-@ around weapon who played with " contagious competitiveness " and was known for his durability : in 14 NBA seasons , he

played in 1 @, @ 100 of a possible 1 @, @ 148 games and participated in 180 playoff games , the latter figure the 11th highest number of all time . At his retirement , Johnson was only the 11th NBA player to amass more than 15 @, @ 000 points and 5 @, @ 000 assists .

On December 13 , 1991 , the Celtics franchise retired his number 3 jersey . Johnson said he would always be a Boston Celtic , and remarked that seeing his number in the rafters gave him a " special feeling " . However , Johnson did not live to see an induction into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame , a fact that has been a considerable point of debate with sports journalists . Bill Simmons of ESPN called his Hall of Fame snub an " ongoing injustice " , stating that according to him , Joe Dumars ? a Hall of Famer known for strong defense rather than spectacular scoring , like Johnson ? was no better [ a basketball player ] than him . Colleague Ken Shouler called Johnson " one of the first guys I 'd give a Hall [ of Fame ] pass " . Contemporary Boston Celtics Hall of Fame forward Larry Bird gave Johnson ultimate praise , calling him the best teammate he ever had in his autobiography Drive , which is especially significant considering Bird 's teammates included Hall of Famers Kevin McHale , Robert Parish , Bill Walton , and Tiny Archibald . On April 3 , 2010 , ESPN Boston reported that Johnson was posthumously elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame . This was officially confirmed two days later when the Hall released the list of 2010 inductees .

On October 26 , 2007 , a learning center was dedicated in Johnson 's name in the Central Branch of the YMCA of Greater Boston . The center was made possible by the donations and effort of Larry Bird and M.L. Carr . Johnson 's family , Danny Ainge , Carr , and members of the YMCA and local community were present for the ribbon cutting ceremony . Donna Johnson said on behalf of her husband , " If Dennis were alive he would really appreciate the thought and love the idea of the Learning Center . "

The NBA D @-@ League Coach of the Year award is named after Johnson .

= = Personal life = =

Dennis Johnson was married to Donna , his wife of 31 years , and had three children named Dwayne , Denise , and Daniel . Johnson also was known for his appearance : he had freckles and reddish hair . Dennis 's brother , Joey , is a former Arizona State Sun Devils basketball star . And Dennis 's nephews , Nick , who was drafted by the Houston Rockets in the 2nd Round of the 2014 NBA Draft , and Chris Johnson who currently plays with the Arizona Wildcats , are well @-@ known basketball stars .

On October 20 , 1997 , he was arrested and detained overnight for allegedly holding a knife to his wife 's throat and threatening his 17 @-@ year @-@ old son . Johnson was later charged with aggravated assault and was ordered to stay away from his family . The prosecutors dropped the case several months later after his wife declined to press charges . Johnson reportedly went to counseling to repair his marriage .

= = = Death = = =

On February 22 , 2007 , at the Austin Convention Center , Johnson had a heart attack and collapsed at the end of the Toros ' practice . After being rushed to a nearby hospital , he could not be revived and was later pronounced dead . Johnson was survived by his wife and his children . Johnson 's death was met with shock throughout the NBA . Among others , contemporary Celtics colleague Danny Ainge called him one of " the most underrated players of all time [ ... ] and one of the greatest Celtics acquisitions " , and one @-@ time rival Bill Laimbeer called him " a great player on a great ballclub " .