

BASKETBALL

Puff Johnson can immediately join Ohio State basketball team, judge rules



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Ohio State will be adding Donovan "Puff" Johnson to its roster after a judge has approved a temporary restraining order awarding him immediate eligibility.

Judge Sheryl K. Munson of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas signed her approval Jan. 16, giving Johnson the ability to immediately join the [Buckeyes](#). Johnson had previously [sued the NCAA](#) for immediate eligibility in November but had [his lawsuit denied](#).

A freshman in the 2020-21 season, Johnson has accumulated 111 games in five seasons, the first three at North Carolina and the last two at Penn State. He played in 14 games as a freshman for the Tar Heels and 17 as a fifth-year senior for the [Nittany Lions](#), averaging a career-high 10.2 points and 4.4 rebounds before a broken wrist prematurely ended his season.

"We're very excited that Puff will be eligible to play for Buckeyes basketball team this weekend," his lawyer, Mark D. Wagoner of the Shumaker law firm, said in a statement. "Puff is fighting for not only his right to play

this season, but for all student-athletes in similar situations where the NCAA seeks to improperly foreclose their ability to realize the educational and financial benefits of playing college sports."

Johnson has been enrolled in courses at Ohio State and is likely about to start making his way to campus. He has not been with the team and, although eligible, would not be likely to join the active roster for the team's next game. The Buckeyes host UCLA on Jan. 17.

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In the lawsuit filed Jan. 15, Johnson described it as a "last resort" in the filing, saying if his request is denied, he will "forever lose the opportunity to complete his collegiate basketball career with the Buckeyes." The lawsuit stated that Johnson would also miss out on name, image and likeness compensation that he was promised if he played this season.

Ohio State filed for a medical hardship waiver on Johnson's behalf after his enrollment. The NCAA denied that request and an appeal of that denial in September.

In November, Johnson filed a similar lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio which was denied less than a week after its filing. The federal ruling said the NCAA's denial of Johnson's hardship request did not violate antitrust laws.

Dispatch reporter Bethany Bruner contributed to this story.

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