Buckle UP

Alabama and 5-stars. Typically, this phrase brings Alabama football to mind as Nick Saban has a 5-star at every position on defense. However, Alabama’s basketball coach Avery Johnson has shown no fear of pursuing national prospects, competing among the likes of Duke, Kentucky, Kansas, and North Carolina.

The last 5-star to play in Coleman Coliseum was JaMychal Green. Certainly, the ties to Alabama helped Anthony Grant land Green as the number fourteen recruit in the country grew up in Montgomery, Alabama. Green averaged 13.5 points per game over his four-year campaign, averaging 10.5 points as a freshman. Since Green’s graduation, Anthony Grant failed to attract talent to Tuscaloosa, but it’s certainly possible shown by Nick Saban; Alabama fans are accustomed to seeing 5-stars dominate competition in Bryant-Denny Stadium but look for a new level of talent under Avery Johnson. Johnson showed his capabilities last spring with the commitment of Terrance Ferguson. Unfortunately, Ferguson decided to spur Alabama to play professionally in Australia and will become a lottery pick in the 2017 NBA Draft. Still, Alabama’s class of Braxton Key (named Top 5 newcomer to SEC by ESPN) and 6’6 shooter Armond Davis will provide major minutes for Johnson in the upcoming year as shown by BamaHammer.com’s projected lineup. With added depth and versatility among the forwards, the new up-tempo

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**2015-2016 Depth Chart (9 total players)**
- **PG** – Retin Obasohan – Justin Coleman
- **SG** – Arthur Edwards – Brandon Austin
- **SF** – Riley Norris – Shannon Hale
- **PF** – Michael Kessens
- **C** – Jimmie Taylor – Donta Hall

**2016-2017 Projected Depth Chart**
- **PG** – Dazon Ingram – Corban Collins – Avery Johnson Jr
- **SG** – Armond Davis – Brandon Austin
- **SF** – Nick King – Riley Norris/Shannon Hale
- **PF** – Shannon Hale/Braxton Key
- **C** – Jimmie Taylor – Donta Hall
system fits the preferred playing style of the players and should allow for improvement upon Avery Johnson’s 19-15 record in his first season.

Alabama fans are certainly excited about next year, but Johnson has the Crimson Tide primed to make a possible Elite 8 run in 2017 with the combination of a heralded 2017 recruiting class and returning talent. Let’s take a look at the possible recruits for Alabama’s 2017 class.

**Collin Sexton**
The top target. The 6’2 fiery point guard emerged as a top 10 player in the country this spring and summer after leading the Nike EYBL in scoring with 31.7 points per game along with earning MVP of the FIBA U17 World Championship in Spain. While everyone knows his name now in the AAU basketball world, Collin Sexton was not a known name outside of Georgia until his EYBL performance in Hampton, VA this spring. However, Alabama’s assistant coach Antoine Pettway identified and offered Sexton last summer, becoming the first major school to offer him a scholarship. Due to Alabama’s long pursuit of Sexton, many believe he’ll end up at Alabama shown by 247Sports Crystal Ball’s prediction including 13 of 13 predictions to Alabama. With Sexton expected to sign in the early signing period, it may be too late for North Carolina, Villanova, Arizona, and Kansas to secure his commitment. Sexton is the type of player to change a program and attract other top recruits to join him in his efforts, leading Alabama to national prominence.

**John Petty**
The top in-state target. How good is John Petty? Well, he was Kentucky’s first 2017 offer. Luckily for Alabama, John Calipari has shown more interest in Hamidou Diallo and Lonnie Walker as of late. The understanding is if Kentucky wants Petty, then he’ll wind up at Kentucky. However, the longer his recruitment drags on, the better it looks for Alabama as Johnson & staff turn up the heat and convince him to join the likes of Herb Jones and Alex Reese to stay in state. If Petty does wind up Alabama, he’ll provide a long, athletic 2 guard who can stretch the floor. Paired with Collin Sexton and Dazon Ingram, Petty would thrive in an up-tempo system and play 25-30 minutes a game which Kentucky cannot offer.
Troy Brown
The long-shot. The Las Vegas native is one of the most versatile players in the country due to his ability ball handling and passing ability at 6’6. California, Oregon, and Arizona are making a strong effort to keep Brown out West, but Avery Johnson is really confident in his chances with Brown. Johnson has enough confidence for Johnson to travel to Milwaukee for a AAU tournament with no other targets there. Brown has reciprocated the interest with an official visit to Tuscaloosa on the first weekend of September. Avery Johnson’s NBA experience is another factor as Brown is a likely one and done player, and Johnson could provide valuable insight and mental preparation for the NBA. While Alabama’s chances with Brown remain slim, the commitments of other top targets such as Collin Sexton, John Petty, and Alex Reese could sway Brown to join Alabama’s 2017 class.

Alex Reese
The most important target. Reese may not be the highest rated prospect among the ones mentioned, but when is the last time Alabama had a power forward who can score? For Alabama to compete with Kentucky and other blue-bloods, they need front-court talent which Reese will provide. Whether or not John Petty or Troy Brown commits, Alabama will still return Nick King, Riley Norris, Dazon Ingram, and Braxton Key on the wing. A match-up problem at 6’10, Reese can stretch the floor with his shooting range but also has the ball handling ability and athleticism to take opposing bigs off the dribble. Paired with Daniel Giddens and Donta Hall, Alabama’s 2017-2018 frontcourt will improve from Jimmie Taylor and Shannon Hale. The Pelham native is considering Alabama, Arizona State, UAB, Vanderbilt, and Cincinnati, but most project the No. 38 player in the country to choose Alabama.
Herb Jones
Alabama’s target with the most upside. The 6’7 combo guard, ranked No. 50 by 247Sports, has always had great vision along with handles and a lefty stroke. However, his increased athleticism along with a 3 inch growth spurt over the last year turned Jones into a matchup problem and commodity among college coaches. Jones is similar to current Alabama point guard Dazon Ingram in terms of his versatility and passing ability; Jones shoots better than Ingram but lacks Ingram’s speed with the ball. Still needing to add strength to his wiry 180-pound frame, he may need a year to become accustomed to the physicality of SEC play. However, his high basketball IQ and work ethic will translate and ultimately be the deciding factor upon his success. Most predict Herb to land in Tuscaloosa over the likes of Florida, Georgia, and Western Kentucky as he is a top in-state target for Avery Johnson. Alabama is the perfect spot for Jones as Avery Johnson won’t need him to play right away while Alabama basketball strength & conditioning coach Lou Deneen adds weight to his frame.

Rayshaun Hammonds
The sleeper target. Not many Alabama fans are familiar with Rayshaun Hammonds as he is not an in-state or 5-star prospect, but the No. 67 player in the country possesses a unique skillset. Similar to Herb Jones, Rayshaun Hammonds is a long athletic southpaw at 6’8. Hammonds plays above the rim and doubles a power forward due to his rebounding ability. Playing for the Alabama Challenge in the Nike EYBL, Hammonds averaged 18 points and 8 rebounds per game. Alabama will compete with Georgia to lure the Atlanta native to T-Town.
Projected 2017 Class (four spots)
1. Collin Sexton
2. John Petty
3. Herb Jones
4. Alex Reese

Notable Alabama Returnees for 2017-2018
1. Nick King
2. Dazon Ingram
3. Riley Norris
4. Daniel Giddens
5. Armond Davis
6. Braxton Key
7. Donta Hall

Review
Alabama has not made it to the NCAA Sweet 16 since 2004, but with the addition of a potential top 5 class and 7 experienced players, Alabama will certainly have the depth and talent to compete with Kentucky for a SEC Championship and Sweet 16 birth. The 2017 class has the opportunity to turn around the Alabama basketball program similar to Nick Saban’s 2008 class of Julio Jones, Mark Barron, Marcell Dareus, Mark Ingram, and Dont’a Hightower. When Alabama makes the Sweet 16 in 2017-2018, remember you heard it here first on Spartan Report.

-Jack Brewster
Works Consulted


http://247sports.com/player/collin-sexton-89069

http://www.d1circuit.com/roster_players/11698240

http://247sports.com/Player/Alex-Reese-80061

http://247sports.com/Player/Troy-Brown-39065

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