

# 2012-13 Player Previews: Minnesota Golden Gophers

## LateNightHoops.com

High-level player previews and season expectation for each scholarship student-athlete on Minnesota's 2012-13 roster are included below. Players are listed in one of three sections: Point Guards, Bigs or Wings.

This year's team has enough experience and skill to produce Tubby Smith's best year since he's been in the Twin Cities. However, whereas most have described the team as having great depth, we believe there are currently 8 players that belong in the regular rotation.

At the end of this article, we offer our preferred lineups (although we fully expect the Minnesota coaching staff to use the bench far more).

## POINT GUARDS

### **Andre Hollins**

6'1", 200 | Sophomore

21.1 mpg, 8.7 ppg, 2.1 rpg, 1.8 apg

Dre is the team's best go-to scorer as he's able to score in various ways. He gets nice elevation on his jump shot and is accurate out to well past the 3-point arc. In addition, Hollins can put the ball on the floor and get to the rim. We expect he'll finish stronger and more consistently as a sophomore.

Last year, Dre made just 40.5% of his 2-point attempts (team average was 50.6%) and that must improve. Another area for improvement is reducing turnovers (26% turnover rate). Hollins had just 0.85 assists for each turnover.

As he's entering his second year at Minnesota, Dre's profile including last season's numbers point to an impressive sophomore year. The obvious growth in confidence that Hollins exhibited late last season will carry over well.

Expectations: 11-14 ppg; improved A/T ratio; eFG% increase of 2.5%+; under-90% FT%.

### **Julian Welch**

6'3", 195 | Senior

24.7 mpg, 9.5 ppg, 2.4 rpg, 2.9 apg

Welch is an excellent spot up shooter and can hit from mid-range off the dribble. He fought through injuries last year and was still one of the biggest contributors to the team. The Gophers can't afford to have him sitting on the bench too often. We believe he should play the role of backup point guard, but also get time alongside Dre Hollins as shooting guard. Very important player.

Expectations: 8-12 ppg; lower 3FG% due to high comparison (43.8%); lower TO Rate by 3-5%.

### **Maverick Ahanmisi**

6'2", 192 | Junior

13.3 mpg, 2.7 ppg, 1.3 rpg, 1.6 apg

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Despite some limitations, Ahanmisi does play with a lot of heart. We'd have him as a fill in option should Andre Hollins or Julian Welch go down, but suspect that Tubby Smith will play him for 10 minutes or so in most games.

In seven career starts against Big Ten teams, Ahanmisi doesn't have a win and has gone just 9/40 (22.5%) from the field. His turnover rate improved as a sophomore, but it's still far too high and although he can knock down an open triple, he finished the year below 30% in each of his first two seasons.

He does provide Minnesota with an experienced point guard option should they run into injury problems.

Expectations: 2-4 ppg

### **BIGS**

#### **Trevor Mbakwe**

6'8", 245 | Senior

28.7 mpg, 14.0 ppg, 9.1 rpg

Mbakwe is coming off an ACL injury and it could be awhile before he's feeling completely comfortable on the floor, but even at 80% he's be better than most guys at 100%. Absolutely ferocious on the boards, we expect he'll again be one of the best rebounders in the conference.

Thanks to his long wingspan and athleticism, Trevor can handle playing center for Minnesota, but with Elliot Eliason and Mo Walker also available he may find most of his time at power forward. We'd like to see what Mbakwe and Rodney Williams can do along with three guards on floor, but a question coming into the season is how often Tubby Smith will utilize such a lineup.

Regardless of where he plays, Mbakwe should be on the court as much as he's able to be. He's a game changer and leader on the floor.

Expectations: 11-14 ppg, 9-11 rpg

#### **Elliot Eliason**

6'11", 260 | Sophomore

15.1 mpg, 2.6 ppg, 3.9 rpg

He'll never be known for being graceful, but Eliason's size is enough to get him minutes. He put together superb rebounding numbers last year and this fall looks much stronger and even a bit taller. When Eliason and Mbakwe are in the lineup together, the Gophers should be able to keep the number of second chances for the opposition lower than last season.

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Two areas where Elliot must improve are turnovers and fouling. We believe these will still be issues for him in 2012-13, but less so than last year.

Expectations: 4-5 ppg, 5-7 rpg

### **Maurice Walker**

6'10", 289 | Sophomore

Redshirted in 2011-12

Big Mo's freshman year ended in December 2010 due to a PCL injury. He's ready for action this year and provides a different look at center than Eliason. Walker is an immense presence who can bang down low and secure rebounds despite a lack of lift.

His touch is very good for someone his size and he could turn into a nice scoring option for Minnesota. If Mo can stay healthy and get his conditioning up, he's a difference maker. Really nice potential and could be excellent on the offensive glass, but probably a year away.

Expectations: Anywhere from 4-8 ppg and he should produce a couple of standout games.

### **Andre Ingram**

6'7", 213 | Senior

8.8 mpg, 1.9 ppg, 1.6 rpg

Ingram transferred in from Butler Community College (Kan.) before last season and provided some solid minutes off the bench late in the year. He's got a history of injuries that may continue to nag, but is a strong and tough interior player with good athletic ability.

He'll be called upon to help off the bench and provides another option should one of the other bigs go down. His job will be to defend, rebound and take care of the ball when it's in his hands.

Expectations: 2 ppg

## **WINGS**

### **Oto Osenieks**

6'8", 205 | Sophomore

11.1 mpg, 3.0 ppg, 1.7 rpg

Oto was needed inside last year and will probably be called upon to play a couple of different roles this season. He was brought into the program as a perimeter threat, but was stuck inside much of last year.

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He gave a good effort on defense, but ideally we'd have him playing out on the wing on both sides of the court.

Osenieks turned the ball over a lot last year and shot just 11/41 (26.8%) from 3-point range and 16/34 (47.1%) from the line. We attribute these poor numbers largely to inexperience and nerves. While he's still not looking consistently comfortable on the floor this fall, he's a very good shooter.

With the lack of proven 3-point shooters this Gopher team has, getting Osenieks some experience and opportunities to build his confidence before the Big Ten season begins could help down the stretch. Oto needs to be confident in his shot and good things will happen.

While we see him as a reserve player at this point in time, he'll probably get a fair amount of floor time to prove himself from Tubby Smith. Osenieks is capable of having a game where he knocks down 4 or 5 3-point shots and keys a victory for Minnesota.

Expectations: Anywhere from 3 to 7 ppg; dramatic increases to his 3FG and FT percentages.

### **Rodney Williams**

6'7", 200 | Senior

31.9 mpg, 12.2 ppg, 5.6 rpg, 1.4 bpg

Williams took a big leap forward as a junior, but he can't let up. He needs to consistently produce and fully embrace a simple fact: he's an incredible basketball player.

When he's in a groove and playing with confidence, Rodney is a special player. Sure, he has his faults: his perimeter shooting is not strong and free throws are a source of frustration. However, his size and athleticism is such that he can be a star without taking 3-point shots and making only 60% of his free throws.

Potentially playing with both Mbakwe and one of the two big centers in the lineup also on the court, the coaching staff needs to find ways to keep Rodney involved in the offense.

As a junior, Williams played more minutes than he did during his freshman and sophomore years combined. While his handles aren't great, we believe as a senior he'll be able to create off the dribble a bit more and is capable of putting together an all-conference season if he can keep the fire going strong all year.

Expectations: 11 to 15 ppg and more recognition of his defensive play. The national folks know Rodney can dunk with the best of them, but this year he should further prove his value on defense. We project his offensive efficiency to go slightly down, but his overall Value Add to increase.

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### **Austin Hollins**

6'4", 185 | Junior

28.4 mpg, 9.2 ppg, 2.8 rpg

Austin was terrific overall last year, but must be consistent. On defense he uses his length well and on offense he shot the ball with high accuracy, including 51/138 (37.0%) on 3-point attempts. Hollins and Julian Welch were easily the most valuable players on last year's team after Rodney Williams.

Austin's usage rate was under 18% and in another year as a senior he'll need to increase that figure based on how the roster currently projects. This year as a junior, usage of 17-19% is fine as long as he is knocking down the deep ball at a percentage as good as, or better than, last year's.

We'd like to see better consistency and a little more aggressiveness from Austin this year. He's not the flashiest player, but he can make teams pay if they don't respect his athleticism.

Expectations: 10 to 12 ppg; team leader in 3-pointers made

### **Joe Coleman**

6'4", 200 | Sophomore

18.8 mpg, 5.8 ppg, 3.0 rpg

Joe is an aggressive attacker that can find his way to the rim and draws a lot of contact. Coleman was a strong kid coming into the program a year ago, but is even bigger this year. He's fearless when taking the ball inside and that's exactly what the Gophers need him to do.

His perimeter shooting is not good and this season it's not needed. He'll want to continue developing his outside shot, but in games this season Minnesota needs Coleman to concentrate where he excels – attacking the basket.

If he capitalizes on offensive opportunities when they're there, but doesn't push things when they're not, this can be a very nice year for the sophomore.

Expectations: 7 to 9 ppg; Top 15 in conference free throw rate

### **Charles Buggs**

6'8", 198 | Freshman

Buggs may find himself playing inside more often than out, but offensively he's a face up guy with good range. He's ridiculously long and quite athletic; an intriguing prospect.

We think it will take some time for Charles to catch up defensively at this level, but if the Gophers need him to play, his length may help mitigate him being out of position.

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Buggs looks like a versatile 3/4 that can run well, score and defend multiple positions. Give him a little time, though.

Expectations: 3 to 5 ppg

### **Wally Ellenson**

6'4", 200 | Freshman

Ellenson possesses amazing leaping abilities and a strong work ethic. While he can impress with his dunks, Ellenson can also heat up from the outside with a nice shooting stroke.

Wally suffered a broken hand in practice and is likely out until sometime in December. It's possible the Gophers would look to keep him out of action for the entire season in order to preserve a year of eligibility, but if they need minutes off the bench from a tough energy guy who can shoot, he'll be ready to go.

Expectations: Dependent on recovery and rehabilitation from injury.

Late Night Hoops' Preferred Lineups:

LINEUP 1	LINEUP 2
Andre Hollins	Andre Hollins
Julian Welch or Joe Coleman	Austin Hollins
Austin Hollins	Rodney Williams
Rodney Williams	Trevor Mbakwe
Trevor Mbakwe	Elliot Eliason or Mo Walker

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*SUBS:* Julian Welch or Joe

Coleman, Elliot Eliason and Mo

Walker

*SUBS:* Julian Welch, Joe Coleman

and Elliot Eliason or Mo Walker

In lineup 1, Welch provides a third 3-point threat and another ball handler, whereas Joe Coleman provides an attacking guard.

In lineup 2, the benefits of Eliason vs. Walker need to be compared relative to the opposition.

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