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Canadian combo reconnects at UT

Thompson, Joseph face first tests in New York

By **MIKE FINGER**
Austin Bureau
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Deborah Cannon AP

Tristan Thompson plans to model his game after former Texas center LaMarcus Aldridge.

AUSTIN — In the fifth grade, Tristan Thompson wasn't looking for a lifelong friend.

He had no clue he was destined for prep school and college in the United States, where he would eventually be able to use a friendly face and a passer who could feed him in the low post.

All pre-teen Thompson knew at the time in youth leagues of Ontario, Canada, a kid named Cory Joseph won more basketball games than he did.

"His team was always beating my team," Thompson said. "So like the saying goes, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.'"

Now, almost a decade into their well-traveled relationship, Thompson and Joseph are about to find out if their combination is as unbeatable in big-time college basketball as it was in small Canadian gyms.

Familiar faces

The two Texas freshmen, who joined the Longhorns this season after becoming McDonald's All-Americans together at Findlay (Nev.) Prep, will receive their first major tests this week at the 2K Sports Classic in New York. The Longhorns (2-0) face No. 13 Illinois (3-0) tonight at Madison Square Garden and either No. 5 Pittsburgh or Maryland on Friday.

With last year's three top UT scorers all in the NBA, the Longhorns are relying on their two newcomers to lift them to a 13th consecutive NCAA tournament. Whether they're good enough to do it is yet to be determined, but communication shouldn't be an issue.

"I pretty much know (Thompson) like the back of my hand," Joseph said. "He's not going to surprise me."

At Findlay, a national powerhouse where the duo played with both a guard who preceded them at UT (Avery Bradley) and one set to join them next year (Myck Kabongo), Thompson and Joseph honed the rapport UT coach Rick Barnes would love to see continue all season.

Joseph, the 6-3 point guard, mixed his own perimeter shooting with an ability to get the ball to the 6-8 Thompson in both the open floor and the half-court. Thompson, who said he wants to model his game after former UT center LaMarcus Aldridge, is a post player by position, but isn't content to walk from one basket to the other.

"He brings a lot of energy," UT senior forward Gary Johnson said.

'Most complete guard'

And so far, Thompson is bringing the production. During his first two games, Thompson is averaging 14.5 points, 7.0 rebounds, 2.0 steals and 1.5 blocks off the bench.

Joseph, who's starting at point guard, hasn't enjoyed the same kind of immediate success (he's averaging 6.5 points, 5.5 rebounds and 3.3 assists but is shooting just 31 percent from the field). But Barnes raves about Joseph's ability to do a bit of everything, calling him the team's "most complete guard."

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