



VETERAN BENEFITS

THADDEUS YOUNG AIMS TO HELP GUIDE YOUNG BULLS

When Indiana Pacers All-Star Victor Oladipo crumpled to the floor with a season-ending injury late last January — a situation that could easily have crushed the playoff hopes of his team, one player refused to let it happen: Thaddeus Young.

“I basically barked (at everyone) we had to approach this (situation) with a ‘next man up mentality.’ We worked way too hard to give up with more than half a season left (to play). I just reminded the guys it was important for us to lock in the rest of the game, and then we could tell Victor we won (the game) for him.”

Young didn’t just talk the talk that night. The 6’8” forward ended the night as the game’s leading scorer with 23 points, while also posting a

season-high 15 rebounds, to go along with three assists, two blocked shots, and two steals in leading Indiana to a 110-106 victory over Toronto.

“That’s our captain,” the Pacers head coach Nate McMillan exclaimed during his post-game press conference (Young and Oladipo were co-captains with the Pacers last season). “Thad’s been leading us like that all season. After Victor went down, he knew we needed a lift, so he took over. He was defending, rebounding, knocking down big shots, doing it all.

“Thad also spoke up a lot during timeouts, constantly reminding everyone in the huddle what we needed to do to stay together. He flat out willed us to this victory. He pretty much did everything.” >>

STORY BY ANNE E. STEIN



RON HOSKINS/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

“Thad knows exactly what to say, and how to say it. He’s very supportive of everyone, players and coaching staff alike.”

Bulls Head Coach Jim Boylen

The Pacers went on to win 48 games while also leading the NBA in fewest points allowed last season. That success earned them a spot in the playoffs as the 5th seed in the East.

“Victor was our most important player, but we also had a lot of guys who could take care of business, too, like Darren Collison, Cory Joseph, Myles Turner, Domas (Domantas Sabonis) and Bogey (Bojan Bogdanovic),” Young recently reflected. “I was one of the more vocal leaders in the locker room, pumping everyone up, telling them, ‘I believe in you, you have the talent to take (the game) over when we need it,’ that sort of thing. I was trying to show the guys I had confidence in them while also encouraging everyone to keep fighting hard and grinding every day.”

That wasn’t the first time this veteran has stepped up when one of his teams needed a boost. In fact, this is an intangible aspect of Young’s game that has been long admired throughout NBA circles.

Selected by the Philadelphia 76ers with the 12th overall pick in the 2007 Draft, Thaddeus Young spent his first seven seasons as a pro in Philly, learning from the likes of former head coach Doug Collins, and All-Star teammates Elton Brand, Andre Iguodala and Jrue Holiday. In Young’s final Philadelphia season (2013-14) the Sixers were in the early stages of a complete rebuild, with the team finishing 19-63, the second worst mark in the league.

“I was the last one standing from our last playoff team two years earlier. Man,



BILL SMITH/CHICAGO BULLS

AD PAGE

that last year was rough," Young says with a bit of a chuckle. "We were terrible. We had trouble scoring, trouble rebounding and we turned the ball over a lot. But you know what? It would have been easy for us to feel sorry for ourselves, but I believed it was my job to show everyone quitting wasn't an option.

"We had a lot of young guys (on the team) who were new to the league and with me being in my seventh season, I knew I had to be a leader and show them how to play in order to survive in this league. It was like bringing a butter knife to a gun fight every night, but if we were going to go down, I wanted us to do it swinging."

At age 31, Thaddeus Young, who signed with the Bulls as an unrestricted free agent over the summer, will be the oldest player on Chicago's roster this season. However, Bulls head coach Jim Boylen insists he's everything a team could hope for.

"Thad knows exactly what to say, and how to say it," Boylen says forcefully. "He's very supportive of everyone, players and coaching staff alike. He's the first to speak up and take ownership, which I love," Boylen adds. "As a team I think it's important for everyone to take ownership on how we play, on how hard we work, on how hard we practice and on how well we communicate (with one another). I want everyone to care, and Thad cares a lot!"

Young puts it simply: "I've always believed in hard work and making sure when my team shows up for practice or steps onto the floor to play (a game) everybody's ready to compete. Anything less is a waste of time."

A gifted player known for defensive prowess and a knack for taking control in the paint at both ends of the floor, Young was born in New Orleans on June 21, 1988, but grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. He later went on to attend college at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. He enters the 2019-20 season with 51 games of playoff experience, including 13 postseason contests in 2012 when he played a key role off the bench in the Sixers' opening round upset of the No. 1-seeded Chicago Bulls. At the time, Philadelphia head coach Doug Collins (now a special advisor with the Bulls) said, "Thaddeus Young is one of the most special people I have ever been around. He is the epitome of a great all-around person. He's a great husband, a great father and a great teammate and leader. He gives us a chance to win every night."



RUDI AYASSI/CHICAGO BULLS

AD PAGE

Winning is what Young expects every time he laces up and double knots his shoestrings. He also relishes the opportunity he has this season to make a positive impact with a talented and hungry group of young players looking to turn some heads.

“When you’re given the chance to join a team like the Bulls, a team that’s up and coming, loaded with potential, you jump at it.

“My role is to show these guys how to win in this league. How to take the next step and get to the playoffs,” says Young, who received interest from a lot of teams as a free agent this past summer. “The Bulls needed some veteran leadership, so I thought this was a perfect opportunity (for me to make a difference).

“During the last couple of years with Indiana, the Bulls would pop up on the schedule and we knew we were going to be in a fight. Chicago played as hard as anyone in the league. They always gave us fits. Those are the type of guys I want to be with. Those are the type of guys I want to grind and work hard with every day.”

“Thad provides a number of things every team has to have to succeed,” says Bulls Executive Vice President for Basketball Operations, John Paxson. “He’s a hard-working, team-first player. He also seems to always come up with a key rebound or loose ball when you need it the most. He’s not afraid to talk truth to young players, which leads to the building of trust between teammates and coaches.

“Thad’s a terrific example of what we want all our players to be,” Paxson adds, “and we feel really fortunate he chose to join us and not somebody else.”

“Thaddeus Young is an amazing person,” confirms Milwaukee Bucks superstar and reigning NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo with a smile and nod. “He always plays hard. He’s a great defender. I hate going up against him because he makes the game tough.

“I can also see he’s a great teammate. He’s always encouraging his guys (on the floor) and getting them to play hard like him.”

Throughout his NBA life Young has also shown remarkable productivity and durability. Over his 12-year career, he’s averaged double figures in scoring every season except his rookie year, while making almost 700 starts and playing on average a little over 30 minutes a game. In fact, in each of the last two seasons he started 81 games each for the Pacers.



JIMMY MITCHELL/CHICAGO BULLS

So, what’s Young’s secret to having this kind of endurance? Nothing more than a deluge of sweat and a steadfast work ethic. Each offseason he stays in shape by running, lifting weights and forever practicing his outside shooting touch with the goal of showing up to training camp in tip-top shape. Plus, whenever he does suffer an injury, his hardnosed mindset refuses to allow him to take it easy.

“The only way I’m not playing basketball is if I can’t walk,” Young says with a grin. “A couple of years ago, I hurt my wrist pretty bad and I should have been out for the year. But after eight games and watching us go 2-6, I couldn’t stand it anymore and came back.

“I talked to coach and our training staff and together we decided that although I couldn’t shoot, I could go out there and do whatever I could (to help). If that meant not scoring but making sure somebody got to the

right spot and doing things defensively to disrupt opponents, that was better than me sitting at the end of the bench going crazy.

“We ended up in the playoffs that year. And even though we got swept in the first round, we gave LeBron (James) and Cleveland a rough ride.”

Off the court, the Bulls can expect plenty of smooth sailing when it comes to their free agent pickup. A devoted husband and father of two young boys, Young and his wife Shekinah (they met in high school and have been together ever since), are extremely active in their hometown of Memphis, where Thaddeus grew up playing football, basketball and running cross country.

Through the couple’s Young for Youth Foundation, which both of them established during the early days of Thaddeus’ career, the Youngs sponsor an AAU team as well as run a summer basketball camp every

AD PAGE



PHOTO BY ALEX MORRIS DESIGN/COURTESY OF THE YOUNG FAMILY

year that not only provides quality coaching and guidance; they also supply food, clothing and other necessities so that every camper is properly taken care of. Over the years the foundation has also helped close to 100 neighborhood kids receive some form of college scholarship.

Every spring at prom season Shekinah, who owns the Forever Young Beauty Bar located just outside Memphis, volunteers to help with makeup and nails, as well as supply prom dresses and shoes for local students who oftentimes can't afford such things. The couple also holds an annual "Back to School" event in which they hand out backpacks and other school supplies to neighborhood kids. And although they never want to talk about it, they've also donated tens of thousands of dollars to the athletic department of Thaddeus's high school alma mater to help pay for new equipment and new uniforms for both the boys and girls varsity and junior varsity teams.

"A couple of years ago I stopped by my old high school and visited the weight room and saw they were still using stuff I used back in my day. I thought it was time to get them some new, state of the art weight machines and exercise equipment," explains Thaddeus. "Two classrooms ended up being combined to make the (weight) room something to be really proud of. We freshly painted the walls and put the school logo up before the new equipment arrived. Once everything was put into place the kids went crazy. Everybody loved what had been done."

An academically gifted student who sported a 4.3 grade point average his senior year of high school, Young spent a year at Georgia Tech before jumping to the NBA at the age 19. At the time he promised his mother, who has since passed away, he wouldn't give up the goal of earning a college degree – a mission Thaddeus completed in 2011. Currently he is just two classes shy from a master's degree in Organizational Leadership.

"After basketball I might like to try my hand in a front office position if a team will hire me. So, I'm trying to learn how to deal with different aspects of organizations, people, and entities," explains Young. "I'm already good at dealing with different personalities but I think you should always try to educate yourself as life goes on."

Unmistakably, Thaddeus Young will look to tap into some of those leadership skills this season as he and his family attempt to enjoy a fresh start in a new city with a new team. Rest assured, Bulls fans, this veteran is up for the challenge.

"If you've ever watched me play before, you know I'm going to give my heart and soul to the Bulls. I've done that everywhere I've played. I'm part of this Bulls family now and I am both feet in. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to help us win and get back to being one of the most feared and respected teams in the NBA." ■