

PRO BASKETBALL: Jordan Ott thriving in role as video coordinator for Atlanta Hawks

McConnellsburg local has been the video coordinator with Atlanta for the last 2 years

By Shawn Michael

smichael@publicopinionnews.com @shawncmichael on Twitter

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Atlanta Hawks' video coordinator Jordan Ott, back, stands behind Hawk guard Kyle Korver at an NBA basketball game. Ott was hired by the Hawks on his honeymoon in August of 2013. (SCOTT CUNNINGHAM — NBAE)



Jordan Ott, farthest right in blue, stands in a huddle as coach Kenny Atkinson coaches the World team during the 2015 Rising Stars Challenge at the NBA All-Star Weekend. (COURTESY PHOTO)

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Three days before his wedding, Jordan Ott received a phone call from Mike Budenholzer.

It was a job offer to be the video coordinator for Budenholzer, who happened to be the new head coach of the up-and-coming Atlanta Hawks. Ott didn't need much time to think it over – he accepted the job while on his honeymoon.

Perhaps only the Hawks have risen faster than Ott, a McConnellsburg native. After working as the video coordinator for Michigan State since the 2008-09 season, Ott took the next step forward to take the same job on the big stage of the NBA.

In August of 2013, Budenholzer was looking to fill out his coaching staff after taking the job as Atlanta's head coach. "Coach Bud," as Ott calls him, made a call to Jim Boylen, who is an assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs and was

once an assistant coach for Spartans' coach Tom Izzo. Budenholzer went to Boylen looking for a student from MSU to be his video coordinator. Boylen contacted Izzo, who reached out to Budenholzer and recommended Ott.

"It was super random," Ott said. "It was a very exciting moment for me. I accepted the job on my honeymoon and went straight to Atlanta from the airport. I didn't get back to Michigan until weeks later."

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Now in his second year with Atlanta, Ott is in mid-season form, capturing video and preparing game footage for both the coaches and players while the Hawks continue to shock the league as the NBA's second-best team. With nearly an identical roster, Atlanta has gone from the No. 8 seed in last year's playoffs to the top team in the Eastern Conference with a 51-14 record.

"We had a new coaching staff and a lot of things for the players to take in (last year)," Ott said. "On top of that, we lost Al Horford to a season-ending injury. Then, in the offseason, most players go their separate ways, but the core of our guys stayed in Atlanta and worked together."

Just like the Hawks, Ott is thriving. With only four staffers assigned to video – Michigan State had a 10-to-12 man staff – Ott's main job is to help prepare Atlanta for its upcoming game. He gets video footage of the next opponent and edits it into segments for the coaches and players to break down. He also gives the players video of their own play, which he edits to show them only the minutes they are on the court. On top of that, he spends game nights recording the action, then gets it to the coaches for the next morning's staff meeting.

Budenholzer said, "Jordan is a very valued and important part of our coaching staff. In addition to the tireless amount of work he puts in breaking down video to help our players and coaches, Jordan makes contributions and assists us greatly during games, practices and meetings.

"Having been in his shoes when I started working in the NBA, I have a lot of appreciation for his important role. We are very fortunate to have Jordan. All of us, but especially me, would be lost without him."

Ott said, "It's great to be part of a team that appreciates video and uses it. I always said that if I ever left MSU, it would be to go to a place that valued video. Coach Bud uses the video room. Some teams hardly use it at all."

The position has similarities to the college game, but there's no denying the NBA has a different feel.

Ott said, "These players want to see that video; we don't have to beg them to watch tape. They are total professionals, and it's amazing to see them take their job so seriously.

"The NBA is definitely a players' league. You have to take care of them, because you need them to be prepared and ready to go on game night. Players pay attention to how well they're taken care of, and they want to hang around longer if they feel they're being treated well."

But the job does not come without sacrifices. Ott's wife, also named Jordan, is taking classes and still lives in Michigan. She and Ott have lived mostly apart for the last two years.

"When you get into this business, you have to be willing to do it for the long-term benefits," Ott says. "It's tough, but my wife has been so supportive of what I do. It's unfortunate, but it's kind of the way it is right now."

Ott is quick to point out that this job isn't the final stage for him. His ultimate goal is to become a coach one day.

Budenholzer was once a video coordinator before becoming a head coach, as well as Miami Heat coach Erik Spoelstra and Indiana Pacers coach Frank Vogel.

"You always have that pipe dream, but you also have to put a dose of reality into it," Ott said. "I never played in the NBA, and it is a very competitive league. There are only 30 teams and there are guys with much more experience waiting to get a job every year. I don't think it's something I can worry about. I'm just going to keep taking care of business, try to stand

out and see where that gets me down the road. My main goal is to make a difference somewhere, whether that's the NBA or college."

He's had a taste of coaching. After last season, Ott started draft workouts and was an assistant coach on the Hawks' summer league team. He then helped with workouts in August and September before the preseason began in October.

Despite his busy schedule, Ott hasn't forgotten about his hometown. He followed the McConnellsburg boys basketball team throughout the season, as the Spartans had their best season in recent history. He also has family ties to the team – he is related to coach Dane Pollock, as well as leading scorer Chase Novak.

"It's great what Dane is doing with those guys," Ott said. "Getting the kids to play hard is half the battle, and I really think he has their attention. He's going to do wonderful things for that program."

If Ott keeps the pace he's on now, it could be somebody else saying those comments about him as a coach in a few years.

The Ott file

High school: Graduated from McConnellsburg in 2003 ... In the 2002-03 boys basketball season, Ott averaged 9.5 points per game in 25 games for the Spartans.

College: Graduated from Penn State in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in sports management ... Spent 3 years as a manager with the Nittany Lions' men's basketball team ... Went for his Master's degree at Michigan State and spent 2 years as a graduate assistant with the basketball team ... He then got a full-time position as the video coordinator for Tom Izzo and the Spartans.

Professional: Joined the Atlanta Hawks in the summer of 2013 with new coach Mike Budenholzer ... Has worked as video coordinator while Atlanta has exploded onto the NBA scene with a 51-14 record.