

FRANCIS TRYING TO FIND SIXTH SENSE

By **NICK PARISH**

The Knicks aren't going from Team Titanic to Team Tranquility with two consecutive wins. But guard Steve Francis, tagged "The Franchise" when he arrived in Houston in 1999, said yesterday he's willing to adopt another role.

Francis isn't starting for the first time in his NBA career, but he's not looking for the Sixth Man of the Year award. Rather "Sixth Man of the last two months."

Francis said his older brother Terry slapped him with the new tag, now that he's come off the bench in the Knicks' last five.

"I've never done it before," Francis said. "It's a humongous adjustment."

Knicks players didn't jump at the chance to revel in their recent successes after yesterday's practice. Coach Larry Brown admitted they've still got lots to work on, but said leadership from Quentin Richardson and Malik Rose is leading the way in workouts. Francis fits into that equation in whether or not he'll be able to adapt to the new duties.

"It's tough, when you've started your whole career, to come off the bench," Francis said. "But if that's the role that I have to play to help this team get better, then you've got to put your pride aside for the bigger picture."

Scoring 11 points in the latest wins, at Indiana and Milwaukee, isn't indicative of Francis' potential or his reputation. But within Brown's system, his successes paired with Jalen Rose in the backcourt may point to a shift.

"I think both of them can pass the ball, and they're threats to score," Brown said. "You've got to guard them, so it spaces the floor out a little bit better, and you get a little bit more penetration and it's easier to post the ball."

Francis also gets a good look at plays from the sideline before he's called to execute them.

"Sometimes Coach is calling stuff and I don't even understand some of the things that he's calling," Francis said. "I'll ask [assistant coaches] Phil Ford or Herb Williams just to give me some insight."

But Francis seems to know the lineup alchemy Brown has been employing to try to turn lead into gold this season.

"I guess it's about who's playing real good at the time, that's the situation, and that's the way that he goes."

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