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Studying Dante Exum: Why the Aussie Star Will Be This Year's Michael Carter-Williams



[Daniel Lewis](#), Yahoo Contributor Network

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NBA scouts and executives alike have grown increasingly intrigued by the potential of Australian basketball phenom Dante Exum. In fact, his name has been grouped with those of other highly touted prospects such as Joel Embiid, Andrew Wiggins, and Jabari Parker, and he is widely projected as a top-five selection in the 2014 [NBA Draft](#).

And for good reason. Exum's exciting combination of skills, elite athleticism, and tree-like length has propelled him toward the top of the 2014 draft board. On the surface, it is pretty easy to see why a speedy, 6'6" combo guard represents an attractive NBA prospect.

It is one thing to be a tremendous athlete, but it is quite another to be explosive with the basketball. When Exum finds a sliver of space, he can race past his opponent and elevate over help defenders.

In half-court sets, he demonstrates the foot speed to beat guards off the dribble and get to the rim at will. His first step is deceptively quick; in fact, Peter Bukowski of *Sports Illustrated* touts it as "[absolutely lethal](#)." Moreover, on the open court, he can also use his swift, long strides to fly past defenders in transition.

At 6'6", Exum towers over the typical NBA point guard and also possesses the requisite size to operate on the wing as a shooting guard. In fact, he closely resembles [Philadelphia 76ers](#) rookie Michael Carter-Williams, who like Exum, possesses a 6'6" body with a slender build and long wingspan. Even then, Exum's 6'9" wingspan bests that of Carter-Williams by a full two inches.

Such a monster wingspan should serve Exum well in the NBA, just as it has allowed Carter-Williams to extend over opponents for points. It should also enable Exum to create mismatches at both ends of the floor and rebound well for his position.

Exum has also showcased the ball-handling skills to complement his rare athleticism. In fact, one of his greatest strengths is his ability to change pace and shift directions, be it with a crossover, a hesitation dribble, or an in-and-out fake. Combine these ball skills with his speed, and you can expect to see him to make frequent highlights featuring some embarrassed defenders.

Though he is not an explosive dunker, he remains adept at scoring with either hand at the rim and can also maneuver in the air around shot blockers.

Although his shooting remains a work in progress, he is quickly developing a mid-range and three-point game. And since he uses such sharp footwork to set up his shots-and strong moves such as post-up turnarounds, step-backs, and quick dribble pull-ups-he should have little difficulty scoring in the NBA once he refines his stroke.

In addition to his ability to run up the scoreboard, he exhibits the potential to develop into an elite NBA point guard. He possesses superior court awareness and vision and takes advantage of ability to penetrate the defense to set up his teammates. In transition and in traffic, he can deliver passes as well as any one-guard in this year's draft class.

At times, he does force the issue when passing or driving to the rim, but like with any other young guard, this weakness is one that he will undoubtedly clean up over time.

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Although Exum's draft buzz arises largely from his offensive skill set, it also stems from his incredible defensive potential.

Equipped with an immense wingspan and rare lateral quickness, Exum projects to be able to guard three positions in the NBA, locking down both guard spots and slowing many small forwards. In fact, most backcourt defenders find themselves unable to contest shots as they move laterally to stay in front of the opponent, but Exum has the athleticism and length to do both.

While these tools are exciting, even more encouraging is his willingness to defend.

The success of the similarly built Carter-Williams only enhances Exum's prospects. In his first year, Carter-Williams has shown the ability to get to the rim with ease, a skill that Exum should also demonstrate immediately in the NBA. Both players also have exceptional height and length, affording them the chance to develop a court vision that the shorter Chris Paul may never attain.

At this stage, Exum's perimeter shooting remains his most glaring weakness. He shoots the ball from the perimeter with better balance than he did last year, but his confidence and consistency still need improvement. However, Carter-Williams' shooting struggles have not stopped him from excelling in the NBA, nor will it stop Exum. Indeed, Exum stands in line to recreate the type of performances that earned Carter-Williams the 2014 NBA Rookie of the Year Award.

It takes a lot of pessimism to be down on this Australian prodigy. At only 18 years of age, Exum has showcased the dual-threat playmaking skills to grow into a star combo guard as well as the basketball IQ, intangibles, and maturity well beyond a teenager.

Things are certainly looking up for this superstar from Down Under.

Peter Bukowski. "[Prospect Watch: NBA teams falling in love with Dante Exum](#)," SportsIllustrated.com.

Published by [Daniel Lewis](#)

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