

Archie

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I VEIEN. MÅ JOBBE FOR Å BETALG
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SKOLEPENGENE MINE!



ALLE TIDERS OPPREVAR
I DAG, ARCHIE! OPPLAG
AT VI KOMMER TIL
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JEG ER
IKKE HELT
SIKKER PÅ
DET!



VI KAN IKKE TAPE SÅ LENGE
VI TO ER PÅ LAGET, ARCHIE!

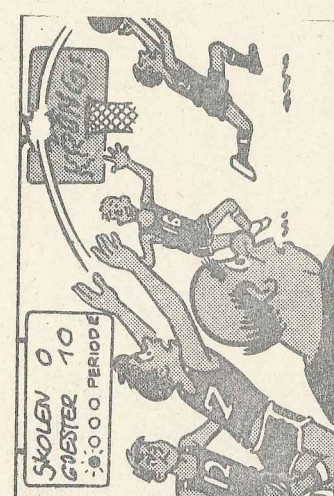


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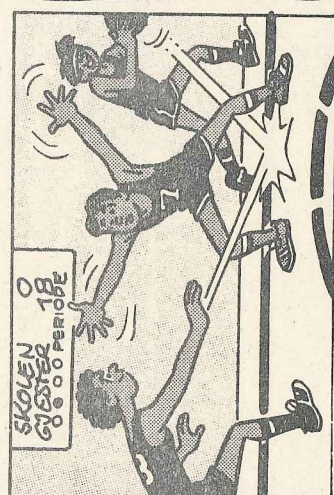
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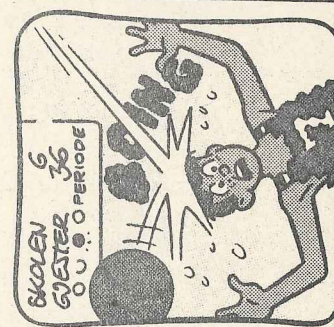
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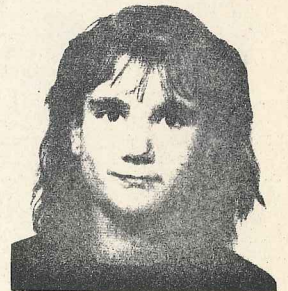
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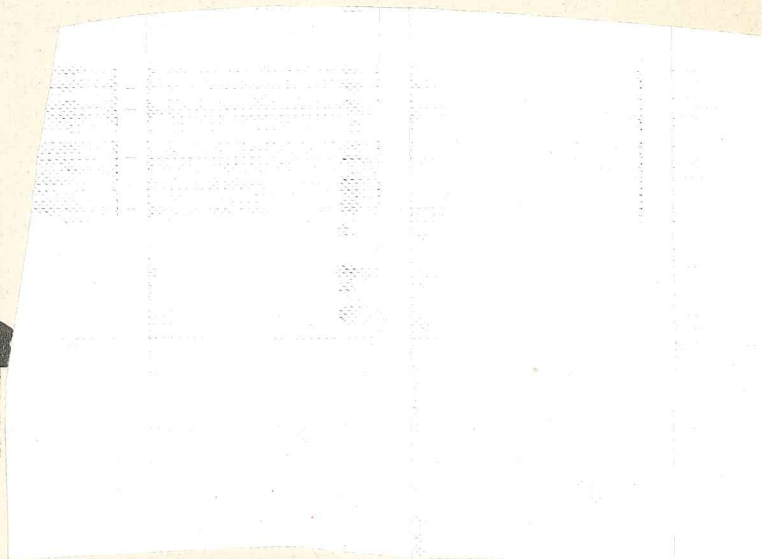
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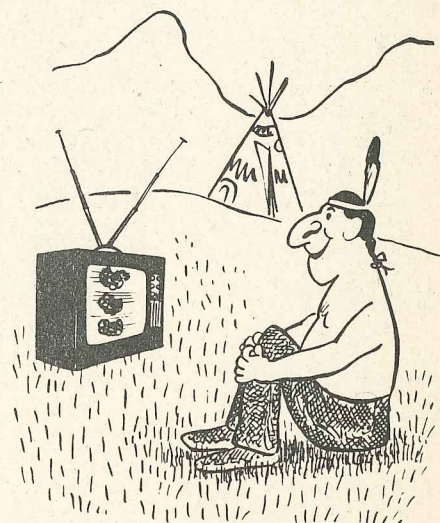
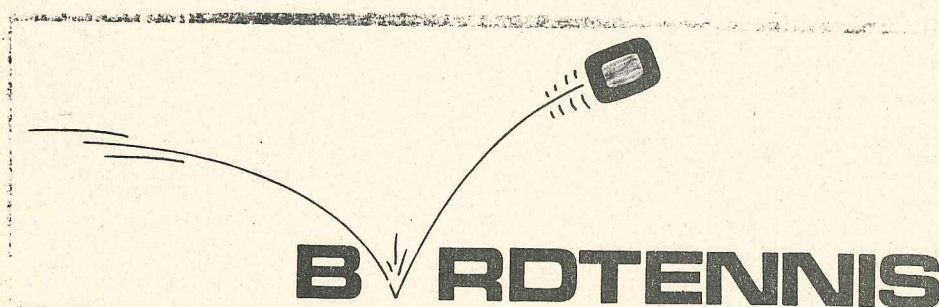
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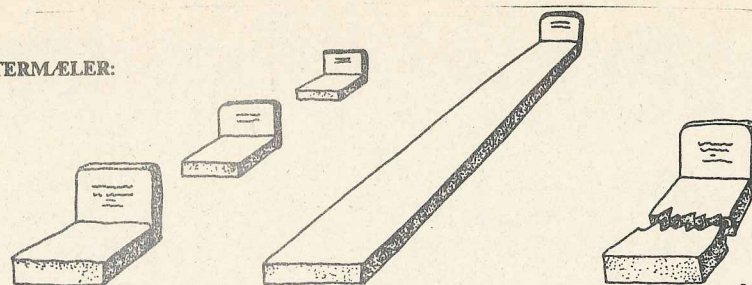
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ETTERMÆLER:



«MESTER I TRESTEG»

«BASKETBALLSPILLER»

«MESTER I KARATE»

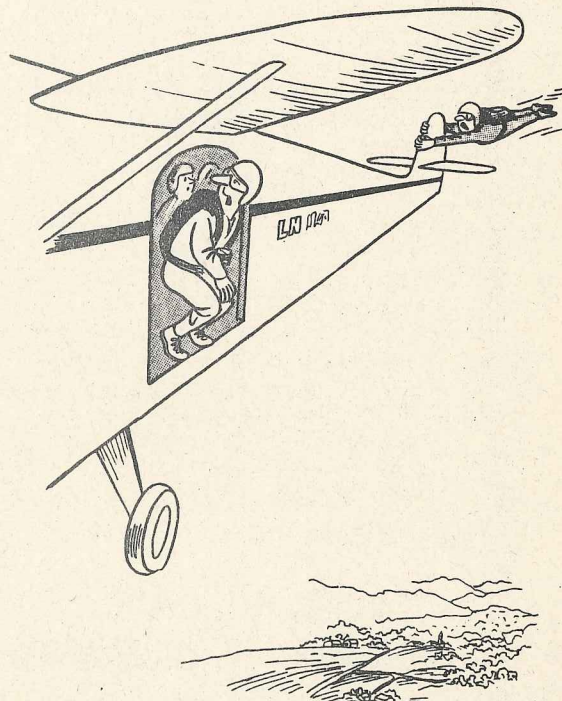


- Jeg skjønner et hint.
Du får heller begynne
å spille håndball igjen!



- Emma, det er
bilde av meg i avisen!

- Olsen har ombestemt
seg igjen!



WESTERN CONFERENCE

By Kevin Simpson

Kevin Simpson, a reporter for the *Denver Post*, writes frequently about basketball for SPORT.

How many times since 1980 have you heard this one: "The balance of power has shifted in the Western Conference, away from weary Los Angeles and toward the ever-improving Midwest Division?"

How many times have you bought it, figuring the rest of the West had finally caught up with the Lakers? Every year, this conference figures to be the site of drastic upheaval that never happens. Well, don't be fooled again.

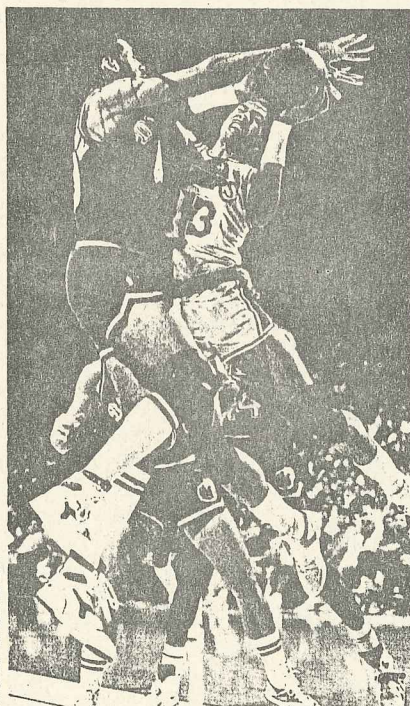
Although it's true that the Midwest Division has spawned legitimate playoff contenders like Denver, Dallas and Utah, the best those teams can do is make a serious run at L.A. The pretenders rely on too delicate a chemistry and require a magical set of circumstances to survive in the playoffs, much less endure three straight seven-game tests as the Lakers did last spring. Magic remains a way of life in the City of Angels.

Maybe it's true that everyone east of Inglewood has gotten just plain tired of turning on their television sets to see Jack Nicholson and his Cheshire-cat grin at courtside in the NBA Finals. But don't touch that dial America. Showtime ain't over yet.

PACIFIC DIVISION

1 LOS ANGELES LAKERS

"This team sucked it up three times," Magic Johnson said after the Lakers had beaten Dallas, Utah and Detroit in three consecutive seven-game series. "It's a sign of greatness." Unfortunately, greatness has become so devalued in the sports vernacular that the truth of Magic's observation tends to fly over our heads—something like, say,



ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN

Competition in the West will be even tougher for Mychal Thompson and the Lakers.

James Worthy on the way to the hoop.

But the Lakers, who have had great players this entire decade—and five NBA titles to prove it—also possess a more ethereal, collective greatness that's still in the embryonic stages at other Western Conference locales. And greatness not only creates champions, it perpetuates them. Why else would Orlando Woolridge take a pay cut to become a role player in L.A. when he could've gotten more money—and certainly more minutes—by signing elsewhere?

Newly motivated and in the right environment—and in L.A. he'll be close to his drug support group—Woolridge should more than compensate for the lost rebounds of departed free agent Kurt Rambis, who could play a believable Superman only as long as his phone booth resided in the 213 area code. Frontcourt offense looms critical because Utah's size and depth make the Jazz best-equipped to challenge L.A. in the playoffs. So, the Lakers will also

need Woolridge's scoring, especially with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's production tailing off dramatically in the post-season, where only Michael Cooper's mysterious misfiring looked worse.

There has been a lot of talk about Kareem's age, and about fate and fame and their toll on the Lakers. Abdul-Jabbar may not be the player he once was, but he's still 7-2 and knows how to play. The Lakers still won 62 games last year, five more than any other team in the league.

That's not to say the Lakers won't need a motivating force in the wake of the long-awaited back-to-back titles. Last season, Coach Pat Riley's guaranteed championship did the trick.

"I guarantee one thing," Riley said last June after beating the Pistons in Game 7. "We'll enjoy this all summer long." Look for L.A. to enjoy it at least until next June, when once again it will fall to somebody from the East to revive intimations of the Lakers' mortality.

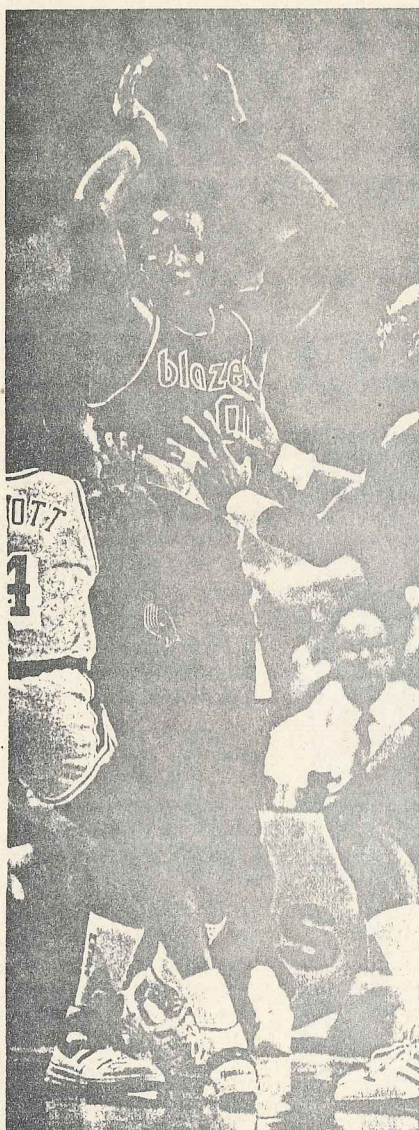
2 PORTLAND TRAILBLAZERS

Before you armchair coaches start wishing you were in Mike Schuler's shoes, indulge us in a brief statistical analysis. First, note that Schuler improved on his honeymoon first season, one that saw him win 49 games and Coach of the Year honors, by racking up 53 victories in the regular season. Now look at who the Blazers beat.

They went undefeated against the Clippers, the Suns and the Spurs, and finished with a 26-2 record—nearly half their total wins against Western Conference teams that finished below .500. That says wonderful things for Schuler's meticulous preparation—he beat the teams he was supposed to beat—but little for the influence he exerts over his players when the competition gets tough. Against the real teams in the West, Portland went 13-19.

Now let's really turn up the heat. Remember the 1977 NBA championship team that was supposed to signal the beginning of a dynasty? In the ensuing 11 seasons, the Blazers have won a grand total of two playoff series—one a now defunct three-game mini-series and the other a five-gamer. They haven't won a real, seven-game playoff since a bearded Bill Walton cut down the net.

Ask yourself why and some quick answers come to mind. The team is young, it hasn't had a dominant two-way power forward since Maurice Lucas (in his prime) and it has been continually beset by injuries. Sam Bowie looks like a total washout and Kiki Vandeweghe's bad back not only has kept him out of the action, but reduced his trade value dramatically from the days when he was worth



MIKE POWELL/ALL SPORT USA

Kevin Duckworth and his Portland mates hope to blaze further in the playoffs.

a Calvin Natt, a Fat Lever and a Wayne Cooper.

But the real reasons for the Blazers' post-season demise are less tangible. Schuler and Clyde Drexler have waged a divisive battle of wills that utterly cripples the team in big games. Where Schuler wants a more controlled game, Clyde wants to be free to create. That works fine against clubs he can dominate, but not against the best of the West. In the playoffs, the Blazers are more than just a little soft in the middle—they're gutless. After splitting the first two home games of their playoff series against Utah, Portland just plain quit at the Salt Palace.

If Portland expects to beat teams that thrive on chemistry—like Denver, Dallas and L.A.—then the Blazers have to conjure some chemistry of their own. But before any mix can work, say the people in Portland, either Schuler or Drexler must go.

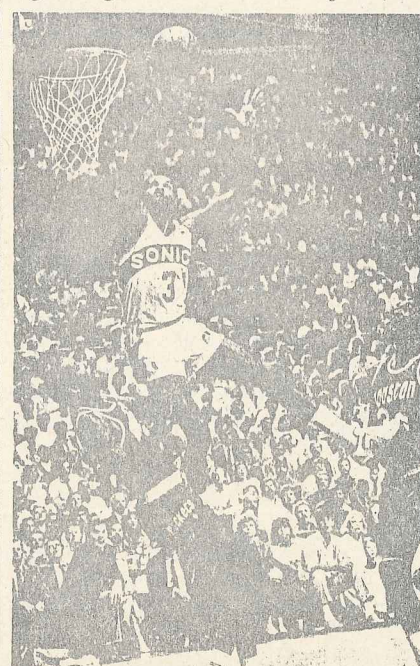
3 SEATTLE SUPERSONICS

Most of what went wrong in Seattle eventually found its way, along with the morning paper, to Tom Chambers' doorstep—that is, until he left a forwarding address in Phoenix. He scored too much, he rebounded too little, never showed the raw steel of a superstar. The litany of criticisms stretched from training camp to playoffs, interrupted only briefly while Mrs. Dale Ellis and Mrs. Alton Lister engaged in fistcuffs outside the team's locker room in their unique rendition of "Stand By Your Man" (Alton received the big contract that Dale coveted).

So now that Chambers is gone, and more precisely now that the Sonics have in Michael Cage the kind of rebounding machine they haven't seen since Lonnie Shelton, who'll take the heat when things go awry? A team seldom dismisses 20 points a game without some repercussions, and the Sonic boom is likely to be felt both frontcourt and back. Not only must Ellis and Xavier McDaniel take on a great offensive burden, but even point man Nate McMillan (7.6 ppg) will have to do more than just wheel and deal.

But the greatest pressure now falls to Lister, who may start hearing the Sonics' lineup compared (unfavorably) to a donut—or worse, himself compared to other pastry products. Seattle remains a team without a center, a fact easily overlooked as long as Chambers could be faulted for not carrying his share of the load on the boards.

Now, though, Lister's 5.6-point scoring average will become a sore point, es-



Hard-charging Dale Ellis and the Sonics are primed to leave the excuses behind.

pecially since Cage never has been regarded as an irresistible offensive force. Not even the center-by-committee approach will ease the strain by much—not with Clemon Johnson and, at times, Olden Polynice backing up Lister.

If anyone steps forward to save the day, it will be do-it-all Derrick McKey. Coach Bernie Bickerstaff's problem isn't getting McKey minutes—he could easily play 35 a game as the Sonics' top sub—but where to put the 6-9 stringbean who showed he can play everywhere from the point to the pivot. Aside from Seattle's lopsided scoring triumvirate, McKey causes defenses the most problems—and stands to cause even more with an expanded role.

With Chambers gone, the only one left to fill is scapegoat.

4 GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS

If Don Nelson could make millionaires of Paul Mokeski and Randy Breuer, imagine what he can do for Ralph Sampson. Just don't expect it to look pretty.

Nelson's penchant for intricate defensive schemes and odd personnel combinations made for some of the ugliest basketball ever seen in the Midwest, but also for some of the most successful teams. Nelson's approach is to mess opponents up, hoping they'll respond to his odd lineups by getting away from their game plans.

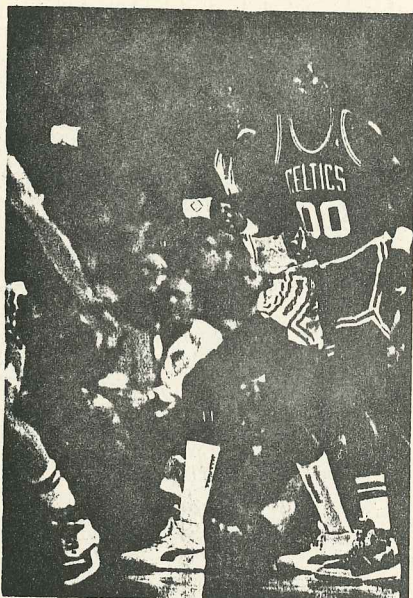
By the Bay, he takes over a team that won but 20 games last season, but a roster of remarkable height—Manute Bol's 7-6 to complement Sampson's 7-4—and intriguing potential. Most of that potential will have to be fulfilled at the defensive end of the floor, which is why Nelson used his first-round pick on Mitch Richmond instead of Hersey Hawkins.

It's also why Nelson will move Chris Mullin out of the backcourt, where he proved too slow afoot to be of much use on transition defense. As for Ralph, the demands figure to be team- and defense-oriented, not the monstrous statistical expectations that haunted him while in Houston.

Elsewhere, the Warriors need drastic improvement from power forward Tellis Frank and confirmation of their faith in Keith Smart, a second-round pick who will back up Winston Garland at the point. But no matter how you mix it up and who you put on the floor, this club is no scoring machine. Basically, you're going to see a lot of 93-89 games in the Coliseum this season as the West gets its first megadose of the Nelsonian philosophy.

Nelson's descent from front office to the bench prompted Utah's Frank Layden to say, only half-kidding: "I wish he

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN



Ralph Sampson and the Warriors will be reaching to reclaim respectability.

would've stayed the hell back in Milwaukee, freezing his balls off and dreaming up those weird defenses."

Perhaps the Warriors should consider a similar exile for the idea-people who thought up their nifty slogan for the 1988-89 season: "Anything Can Happen." It's an old idea, and it hasn't been very effective. The Seattle Mariners tried it in 1987. They lost close to 90 games that year.

5 PHOENIX SUNS

Gather round, trivia hounds, and tell us which member of the Phoenix Suns has the longest stretch of active service with the team. No, no and no. All those guys are history. The old warhorse is 25-year-old Jeff Hornacek, who is now two whole seasons closer to his pension.

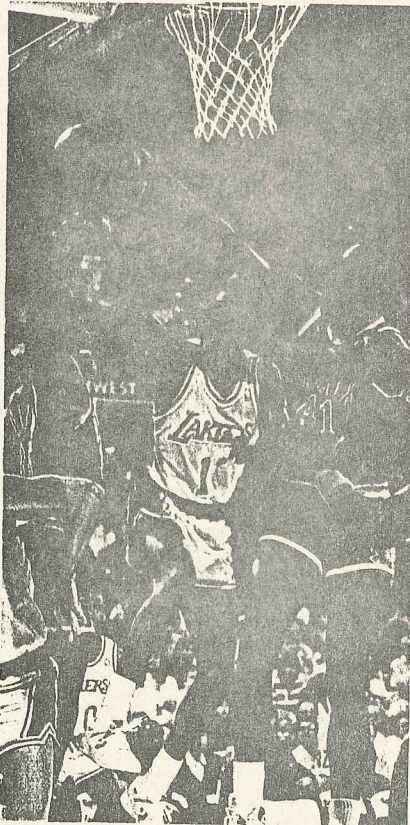
Give the Suns credit for this much: As they stumbled to 28 victories last season, management began dumping all vestiges of the bitter past—and then finished the job last summer. Once upon a time you could've made a pretty fair team out of Jay Humphries and Walter Davis in the backcourt, James Edwards at center, and Larry Nance and James Bailey at the corners. Now none of them even play in the same time zone.

Purged of the cancerous elements that comprised their well-publicized drug scandal, the Suns spent \$9 million in the free agent market for Tom Chambers and now hope the 29-year-old former Seattle whipping boy can provide maturity and leadership for the third-youngest team in the NBA. Maybe the Suns know something the Sonics didn't—why else would they phone Chambers' agent, Howard Slusher, one minute after midnight on the day the free-scoring for-

ward became a free agent and offer him the moon?

Not coincidentally, Phoenix also raised ticket prices. Blame Chambers for the increase if you must, but the guess here is that the Suns needed big bucks to fill a more critical void, created by the departure of yet another familiar face. Henry Rojas, who achieved fame as the team's crowd-pleasing Gorilla mascot, has hung up his skin. It will be filled by a gymnast whose identity management has guarded closely.

For all the familiar faces that have left—with fans wishing most of them good riddance—one actually has returned. Cotton Fitzsimmons has been charged with making sense out of a massive rebuilding project—one anchored by Chambers and Armon Gilliam and given some measure of hope with the drafting of promising Dan Majerle, the Central Michigan swing-man who impressed with the Olympic team.



Armon Gilliam and Mark West lead the Suns, striving for a new rising.

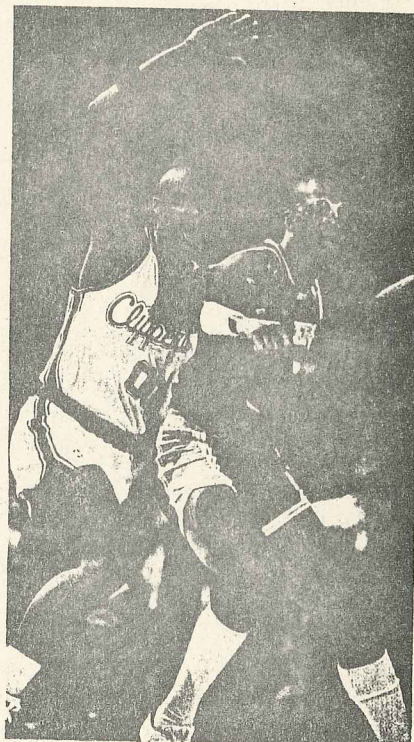
But with this kind of housecleaning, a benevolent David Stern should have made the Suns eligible for the expansion draft. As it is, they do have the lottery to look forward to.

6 LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS

They traded away their two leading scorers (Michael Cage and Mike Woodson) and the league's leading rebounder (Cage). Last year's

rookies proved mostly disappointing (Reggie Williams and Joe Wolf). Suddenly, people are getting excited about the new and interesting Los Angeles Clippers.

It turns out supreme awfulness has its rewards. After a flurry of drafting and dealing, L.A.'s basketball stepchild has placed its hopes in the hands of Danny Manning, Charles Smith and, to a lesser extent, Gary Grant—three first-round draft picks, albeit in a draft that wasn't considered particularly deep. That's the new part. The interesting part is how those three will mesh with a 23-year-old head-case at center, a point guard who hasn't played for two years, and an NBA sophomore who has to hope the jinx isn't any worse than it was in his freshman season. In other words, Benoit Benjamin, Norm Nixon and Reggie Williams are supposed to be stabilizing factors on a team that won only 17 games last year.



Despite a cast of collegiate whizzes, Benoit Benjamin remains the Clippers' center of attention.

As usual, the Clippers don't look nearly as bad on paper as they figure to look on the court. Manning, after all, was college basketball's player of the year and Smith performed well with the Olympic team. Grant, who made almost everybody's All-America team, will have to overcome concerns about knee and groin problems that persuaded him to skip the Olympic Trials and other post-season camps. Even more importantly, the Clippers have to rediscover a rebounder after sending Cage—the only guy on his team who gave a consistently honest effort last season—to Seattle.

In spite of the wholesale restructuring of a team that, like Phoenix, more closely resembles an expansion franchise than one that simply hasn't made the playoffs in 12 years, season ticket sales are up about 2,000 over last year. In L.A.'s favor is the infectious enthusiasm of three rookies who are not accustomed to losing. With luck, their attitude can infect the seven-foot Benjamin, who so far in his disappointing career has appeared immune. He claims to have adopted a new attitude. Of course, that's what he said last year and the year before that. If the sheer joy of winning doesn't lull him out of his sleepwalk (he averaged but 13 points and eight rebounds last season), maybe the realization that he's in the last year of his contract will.

And speaking of contracts: Gene Shue, who will attempt the patient approach with this group, has two years remaining. Will he last long enough to reach his next milestone? Already he ranks fourth in career NBA victories, just 34 behind Dick Motta. On the other hand, he only needs 167 more losses to become the first 1,000-game loser.

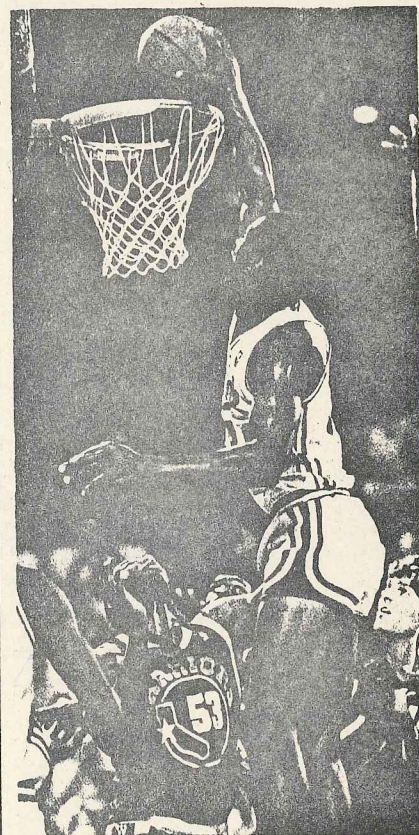
Place your bets.

7 SACRAMENTO KINGS

Can failure be retroactive? Can it be so miserable and pathetic that it carves backward into a man's career to reduce his stature and devalue his previous success? If so, then how will Bill Russell's post-retirement achievements diminish our perception of his life in basketball? Will we recall him as a journeyman center who stuck around the NBA just long enough to collect a pension?

The Kings used to be a playoff franchise until Joe Axelson started a string of front-office blunders that Russell proudly continued, until now, even flickering hope has been extinguished (Russell, now in just the second season of his seven-year deal, moved from his coaching fiasco into the player personnel job). This is a team that probably will start Joe Kleine at center—and hope he can prove he belongs in this league. Derek Smith, recipient of the largest free-agent contract in team history, hasn't come close to the level of play he showed in Los Angeles, and also faces a pivotal season. And those are the bright spots.

Enormously popular Reggie Theus is gone, but it's doubtful the team's best player, Otis Thorpe, has the assertive personality to fill the leadership void. For that, the Kings must look to second-year man Kenny Smith, who should mature rapidly in the face of all the adversity he'll be seeing. Sacramento got one-dimensional Randy Wittman from Atlanta and Ricky Berry in the draft, but



Among the Kings, only outstanding Otis Thorpe plays within the realm of royalty.

those deals hardly give coach Jerry Reynolds—a "just glad to be here" guy and the lone sympathetic figure in this whole fiasco—the raw material to stay out of the divisional basement. The Clippers are glad to have ya, fellas.

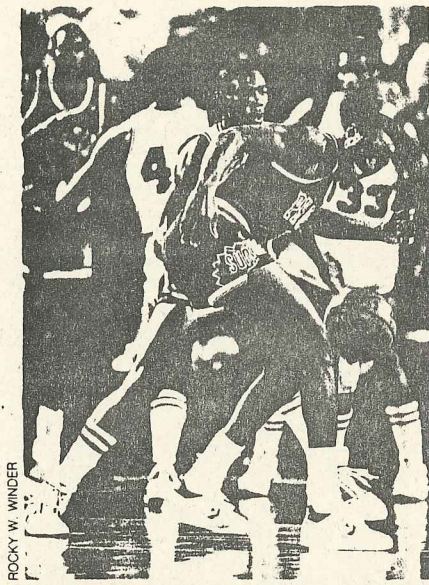
The Kings figured they were moving into a prosperous new era with the signing of Russell to a long-term deal, but they prospered only at the gate, where a small arena facilitated three years of sellout crowds. Now the team's playing in a big arena and it still stinks.

If Kings owner Gregg Lukenbill wants to make any more seven-year commitments to charity, may we suggest the Special Olympics.

MIDWEST DIVISION

1 DENVER NUGGETS

When Doug Moe took over the Nuggets in the winter of 1980, he immediately promoted better living through chemistry. Eight years later, All-Star forward Alex English is the only



ROCKY W. WINDER

Leaving his Phoenix problems behind, Walter Davis joins a more golden team in Denver.

remaining ingredient from the original formula, yet the Nuggets continue to achieve the improbable with a cohesiveness that has become their coach's signature trait.

On paper, Denver has never looked particularly imposing, yet last season only an injury to guard Fat Lever kept the Nuggets from advancing past Dallas to the conference Finals. They ran on Moe-momentum, pure and simple. How else could a trade that brought Jay Vincent and Michael Adams to Denver suddenly propel a team from 37 to 54 victories?

The signing of free agent Walter Davis, *persona non grata* in Phoenix, is a calculated risk that could provide the ingredient that moves the Nuggets to the next echelon of playoff contention—provided the drug-rehabilitated backcourtman doesn't resume chemistry experiments on his own. Davis represents the irresistible offensive force—a full-size, bona fide shooting guard, not a snub-nose streak shooter—Denver long has coveted for its bench. Further easing the transition are the facts that Davis loves to run and, like Moe, bleeds Carolina blue.

If Calvin Natt eschews retirement and sheds his chronic knee problems and injury-plagued Wayne Cooper returns to health, Denver could find itself equally deep in the frontcourt, where the signing of free agent center Danny Schayes assures continuity. With or without Natt and Cooper, Moe will blend first-round pick Jerome Lane, the NCAA's leading rebounder, slowly into his rotation.

Although Moe threatened to personally phone sportswriters last season and shower them with epithets unless they agreed not to name him on Coach of the Year ballots, who could resist? And surely, now that he's won the award and lent a traditional respectability to his

methods, observers will recognize that there may not be a more defense-oriented coach in the league.

That's right. Beneath that "just roll out the balls" image is the mastermind of a highly effective helter-skelter defense. Want proof? Only five teams had a better point differential than Denver last season. So think nothing of the fact that their 112.7 points-allowed ranked 19th. As Moe has often taunted his doubters: "We're only the second worst defensive team in the league. The worst is whoever's playing us."

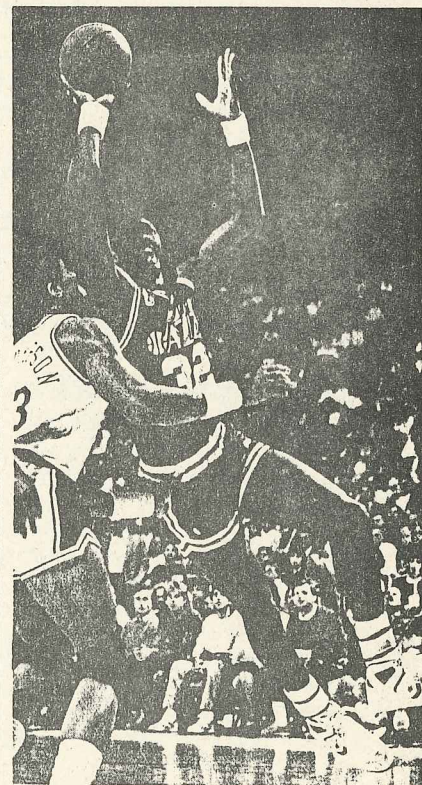
If every Nugget has just a good year, if Schayes has a great year, if Walter Davis fits in, Denver can go to the Western Conference Finals and push the Lakers. And remember, last year, Denver was the only team in the NBA to have winning records against both Boston and Los Angeles.

2 UTAH JAZZ

No one has ever questioned Frank Layden's appetite for two things—pasta and big guys with .45 caliber elbows and bulldozing backsides.

Size may be the only thing Layden can't teach, but nobody can stop him from importing it.

If the Utah coach adds any more beef to the Jazz roster, he'll need a license from the USDA. To a front line that already features Mark Eaton, Karl Malone and Marc Iavaroni (average weight:



ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN

Karl Malone and the Jazz plan on stamping their postmark all over the Midwest Division.

256), the Jazz welcomed 6-11, 240-pound rookie Eric Leckner and 6-10, 260-pound Mike Brown (from Charlotte in exchange for Kelly Tripucka, who under Layden suffered from the unbearable lightness of being).

The Jazz already proved in a narrow playoff loss to the Lakers that they have all the right ingredients—all they lacked was seasoning. They return intact in two respects: The roster remains essentially untouched, and Utah managed to retain three critical free agents—Head Coach Layden and assistants Scott Layden and Jerry Sloan, all of who were considered for head coaching or upper management positions elsewhere.

And since Layden effectively whittled his rotation to seven players by playoff time, there are really only two training camp mysteries: the stability of Darrell Griffith's injured knee and a backup to league assist leader John Stockton at the point. If Thurl Bailey's improved shooting touch is for real (up a whopping five percent from the previous two seasons) and Malone and Stockton stay healthy, come June the Jazz could be dining on some deep-dish playoff pie.

Utah won 47 games despite the fact that Layden spent the first half of the season doodling with his lineup and trying to dish out minutes in nice, even portions. When he streamlined the system and let the big dogs eat, the Jazz showed they could dominate. Of course, Layden does need to trim some fat from the roster—and he could lop off 260 excess pounds simply by offering whale-like Mel Turpin as the catch of the day on the waiver-wire menu.

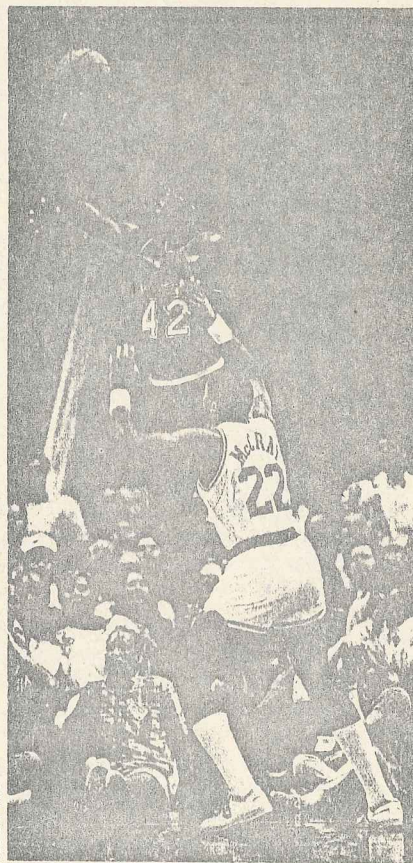
With its army of behemoths wearing down the opposition, Utah is a team made for playoff basketball—if not necessarily for the long, 82-game haul. They can win the West. The Jazz should have beaten L.A. last year and they know it. They still might have the best chance.

3 DALLAS MAVERICKS

Has a team ever been this hamstrung between goodness and greatness? Look at the Mavericks: They were perhaps six minutes away from the NBA Finals before succumbing to the Lakers. On the other hand, they were one healthy Fat Lever away from a second-round elimination by Denver. So what to do with a team whose impeccable bloodlines include no fewer than 10 first-round draft choices, but whose harmony has been horribly interrupted?

The answer: Nothing.

That may not be what Coach John MacLeod or the Dallas front office wants to do, but the rest of the league has left little room for negotiation. For the Mavs to move to the next echelon of playoff



With Roy Tarpley emerging as a phenom, the Mavs believe they can bulldog a title.

contention, Mark Aguirre has to go. The only problem is nobody wants to take him—not for a scorer of comparable value and not with Dallas so eager to deal. Although Aguirre has been the acknowledged team leader almost since the franchise was christened—and, indeed, he can make an average team good all by himself—his playoff performances have fallen short of expectations and even his new, improved attitude holds little fascination for anyone who watched him mope on the bench in the Denver series.

But with fans convinced they're watching a team that's a heartbeat away from an NBA championship, Dallas can't afford to simply dump Aguirre and risk a monumental fall from grace. Even so, Roy Tarpley has not-so-quietly become the team's most dominant player (he has led the NBA in rebounds per minute for the last two seasons) and must get more than the 28 minutes he's been afforded off the bench. Where will those minutes come from? Hint: Not from James Donaldson or Sam Perkins.

The Mavs' front office probably never built this into their master plan, but the team just may have stumbled into a situation that requires them to regress before making any more progress. A cruelly disappointing year with Aguirre in the lineup could provide all the impetus the Mavs need to simply get what they can

for him and cut their losses. Of course, if they somehow inject their All-Star forward into a Big Green Machine that supplants the Lakers in the West... well, then....

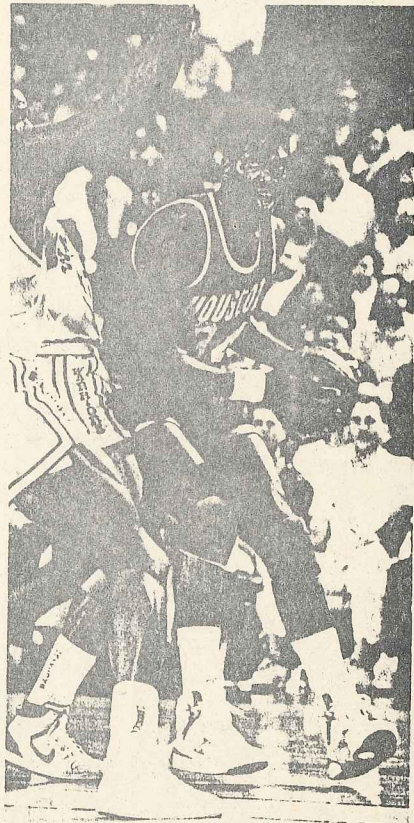
If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Right?

4 HOUSTON ROCKETS

All Don Chaney wants is a chance to coach, and no, the Los Angeles Clippers don't count as a squandered opportunity—a pre-ordained fiasco, perhaps. Not that Chaney's going to find nirvana on the Gulf, but at least the disparate personalities on this team can play something besides dead.

The question for Chaney is whether they can play together, especially after Akeem Olajuwon's candid but destructive criticism of selected teammates last season—particularly point man Sleepy Floyd, whose allegiance became caught between The Dream and Reality According to Bill Fitch. The ex-coach wanted Sleepy to be more of a scorer, while Akeem felt he should be more of a playmaker—with the top priority of getting the ball more often to the man himself.

The word is that Chaney smoothed over team relations after going one-on-one with the game's most dominant center. Two disgruntled vets, World B. Free and Robert Reid, are now gone,



Akeem is still king, but the Rockets must restore order among the loyal subjects.

but Joe Barry Carroll, an alleged all-star bad influence, remains. It seems likely the Rockets will have to endure more upheaval before their new coach can begin manipulating a stable roster.

All summer GM Ray Patterson tried to deal for a strong rebounder in the frontcourt. He tried to arrange a homecoming for Moses Malone, but the salary cap—Carroll's salary, in particular—proved too great a hindrance. Then it was Rodney McCray and Jim Petersen to Sacramento for Otis Thorpe—until Thorpe's contract demands threatened to put a hole in the salary ceiling. Trading Carroll is the obvious solution—so obvious that Patterson hasn't been able to get anything close to fair market value.

Although Houston's best combination was Akeem, Petersen and McCray up front with Carroll off the bench (the Rockets won 20 of 28 that way), there have been loud noises about starting Carroll at center and moving Akeem to power forward—a move he described, in a gesture of uncanny diplomacy, as "a challenge." At least by moving Purvis Short out of the backcourt Houston can correct one miscast position. And Mike Woodson, another Clipper refugee, could find new life with the Rockets.

But it's still up to Chaney to play peacemaker, orchestra conductor and chemist. Strangely, he works in the shadow of the now-retired K.C. Jones, who righted Boston's ship after the players mutinied against Fitch. Frustrated fans expect Chaney, also renowned as a communicator, to clean up the same sort of mess in Houston.

Did we say mess? The Rockets did manage to win 46 games, which is precisely the sort of mess Chaney must have prayed for in L.A.

5 SAN ANTONIO SPURS

So maybe the only good thing about San Antonio isn't guacamole, as well-traveled Larry Brown once asserted—a long, long time before the good folks in South Texas offered not only to make him their basketball coach, but also a very rich man. Maybe he was thinking of Nacogdoches.

What's to like about San Antonio? There's a young and talented backcourt in Alvin Robertson and Johnny Dawkins. There's a 6-10 kid named Greg Anderson who looks ready to bust into prominence under the right kind of coach. There's an even bigger kid named David Robinson who looks like he could win you the whole enchilada.

The last part may be getting a little bit ahead of the story—but then again maybe not. Robinson was excused from his Navy commitment to prepare for the Olympics, which ran well into October.



Following a championship in Kansas, Larry Brown travels south to polish the Spurs.

Now he has only a few months left to serve, so why not split the difference and let him join the Spurs, say, right around Christmas? The club hasn't pressed the issue, but it expects Robinson to run the idea up the flagpole and see if anyone in the Secretary of the Navy's office salutes. It's a distant hope.

Even without Robinson, count on Brown to continue his unblemished string of winning seasons. The Spurs won 31 games under Bob Weiss. Brown's sheer intensity, combined with good, raw talent, a strong draft (Willie Anderson, Shelton Jones and Vernon Maxwell) and the fact that four other teams in the bottom-heavy Western Conference failed to win 30, should guarantee that San Antonio moves into the middle of the pack.

With his emphasis on defense but the Spurs' lack of dependable frontcourt scoring, Brown did have to consider the Walter Berry dilemma, though. "Coach Brown is a fundamental coach and I'm not really a fundamental player," Berry observed after one typically pathetic defensive effort in summer camp. But Brown didn't have to give Walter's act the benefit of the doubt. Instead, he traded him to New Jersey. Now who does he turn to when he really needs a hoop—Frank Brickowski?

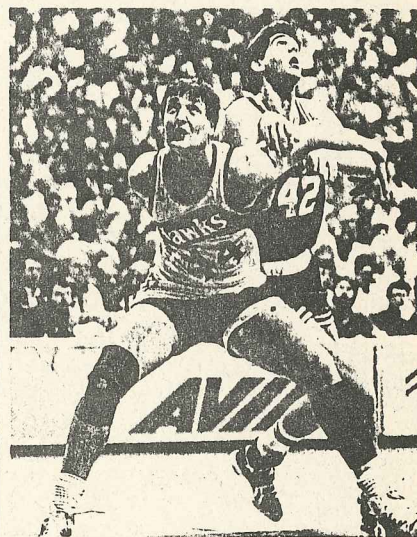
6 MIAMI HEAT

As the newest member of the Western Conference, the Heat can count on setting the torch to two records: most losses to L.A. Clippers and most frequent flier miles accumulated, single season. The club was poised to

take a run at the record for longest restroom lines (modern era) before the builders tore out a few walls in \$52.5 million Miami Arena, added a few stalls and thankfully fell into compliance with the NBA's minimum requirements.

Beyond that achievement, the best Miami fans can look forward to in this inaugural season is celebrity mascot Don Johnson making frequent courtside appearances. On a team determined to cultivate youth and build slowly, Johnson could be the most recognizable face at courtside for seasons to come—unless you expect great things from Hansi Gnad and Conner Henry.

Mostly, Coach Ron Rothstein will build around rookie center Rony Seikaly—provided he doesn't make good on his threat to bolt for Greece—and a cast of castoffs like Billy Thompson, John Sundvold, Pearl Washington and Scott Hastings. If the Heat gets lucky on all of



Scott Hastings jumps from the Hawks to help turn up the Heat in Miami.

its draft picks, especially first-rounder Kevin Edwards of DePaul, and if acquisitions like Andre Turner make the pieces fall into place faster than expected, Miami could win, oh, maybe eight games.

That would be great news for Rothstein, the intense ex-Detroit assistant who signed a three-year deal with two seasons guaranteed. "I had a great lawyer who negotiated my contract," he jokes. "In my contract it says, 'Three wins.'"

Not that it really matters. If Rothstein can just instill some of the Detroit defensive magic he helped conjure last season, he could ease the team's permanent transition to the Atlantic Division a year from now. A year after that, when players with five years' experience can become unfettered free agents, the Heat may start chasing serious veteran talent.

Until then, Miami won't be feeling flush anywhere except in those new restrooms.

Fort's nestle nr.

