

# blazers

## Blazermania has become 'a social thing'

PORTLAND (AP) — Oregon's winters are wet, gray and gloomy, but the sun always seems to shine on the Portland Trail Blazers.

The Blazers, winners of the National Basketball Association title last season after six years of losing, have spawned a following as rabid as any in professional sport. They call it Blazermania.

To know Blazermania, you had to fight your way through the sleepy, boozy mob of 5,000 who waited at Portland International Airport until 5 a.m. to cheer the Blazers on their return from Philadelphia after a victory in last spring's championship playoffs.

Or see Bill Walton rip the shirt from his back after Portland won the title and hurl it into the wild throng descending on the basket-

ball court in Portland.

Or watch the champagne cascading off of Coach Jack Ramsay's bald head.

Or be there when Walton balanced a beer bottle on top of the head of Mayor Neil Goldschmidt as some 100,000 cheered in downtown Portland the day after the Blazers won the title.

But even if you were there, you probably still don't know what Blazermania is.

"Blazermania is kind of a hard thing to define," says Blazer General Manager Harry Glickman, who's promoted sports in Portland for more than two decades. "I suppose it was coined by some sportswriter about midway through last season.

"The best I can come up with is

it's a love affair between a team and its fans," Glickman said.

"There is a kind of chemistry of the players and coaches," he said. "It sounds trite but it is kind of a team effort."

Perhaps Walton summed it up best when he said, "I have experienced Blazermania in many forms, and most of them are good."

As the Blazers rip through the NBA this season, Blazer maniacs continue their antics, although in a more subdued form. The Blazers have become the first team to sell out all home games for an entire season. As of late December, there were no tickets left for any Portland games at the Memorial Coliseum, capacity 12,666.

The game also is shown down-

town about a mile and a half from the coliseum on closed-circuit television at the old Paramount Theater, where capacity is near 3,000. Nine of the 19 telecasts there have been sellouts, and attendance has averaged 88 percent of capacity.

When Blazer tickets suddenly became a cherished item, scalpers had a holiday because the city had no anti-scalping ordinance. None had been needed.

Now, despite such an ordinance, scalpers are even at work outside the Paramount, where one young man was arrested for trying to sell a \$5 ticket for \$10.

When Portland won the title last June, the city went berserk. Downtown streets were blocked off as Blazer maniacs danced the night

away, basking in the first professional championship Oregon had ever known.

That is one of the reasons for Blazermania. The NBA is the only game in town. World Team Tennis flopped here last year. The World Football League was good for a few laughs for two seasons before it disappeared. The Pacific Coast baseball league abandoned creaky Civic Stadium several years ago but has promised to try again this summer.

Only the Blazers have managed to thrive.

Rita Zunke, also known as "Teresa Trail Blazer," started the Blazer Boosters four years ago with an initial enrollment of six. Now there are 300 members, and their attempts on behalf of the Blazers in all-star fan balloting will result in at least two Portland players starting in the game.

"Everybody loves a winner," says Mrs. Zunke, who will be 50 in May and teaches mentally handicapped youngsters at a Portland area elementary school.

"There are very few people who don't know the Blazers and what they stand for," she says, noting that youngsters at the school where she works use Blazer play-by-play to learn to count by twos.

John White, the Blazer publicist, says Blazermania has become "a social thing."

"You don't have people jumping into swimming pools like they were during the championship series," he said, "but I defy you to go to any bar or restaurant or just about anywhere else after a game and not find people talking about the Blazers.

"Going to a Blazer game has become the 'in' thing to do."

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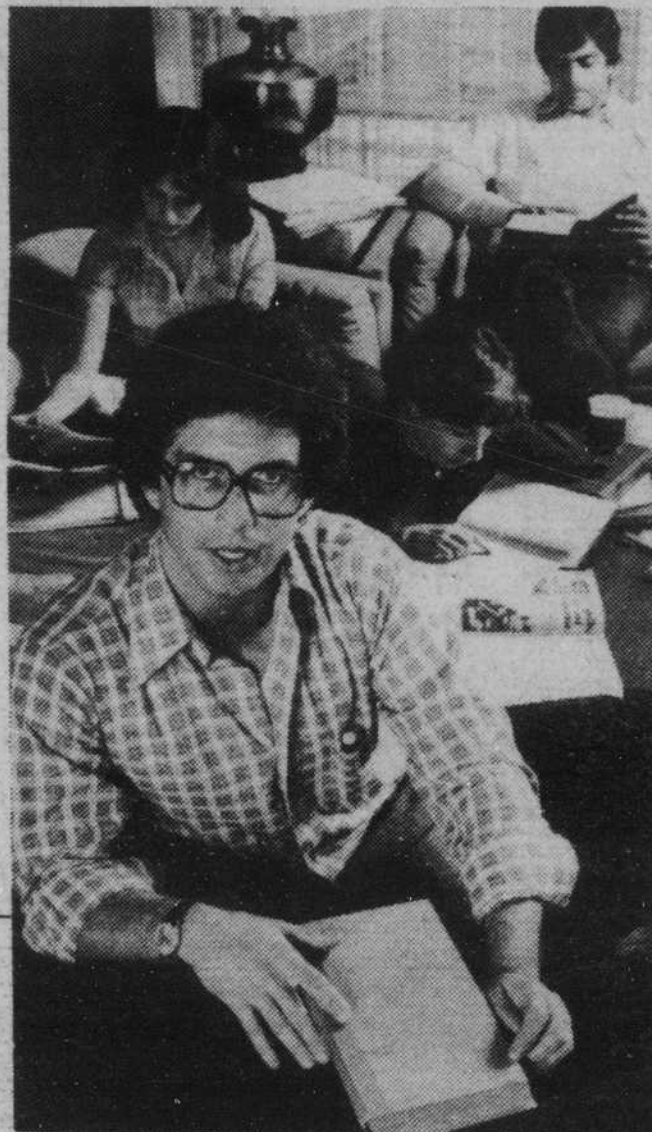
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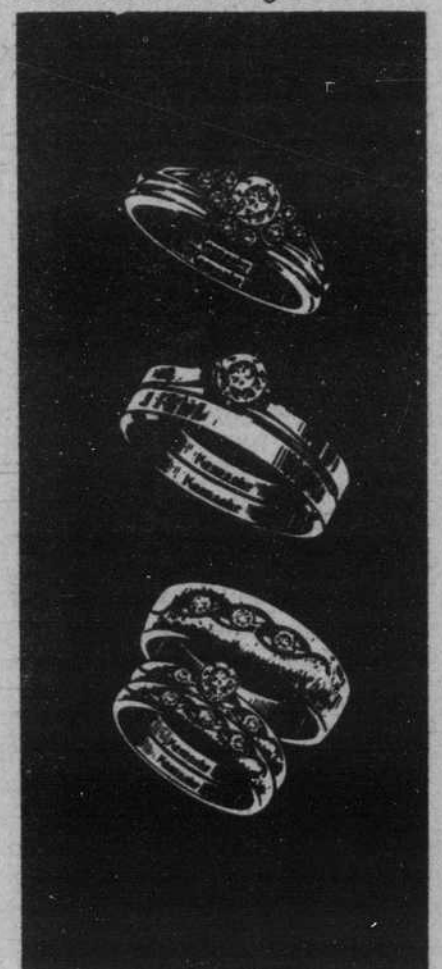
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