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Blazers Continued from Page 2B

The playoff elimination, courtesy of the Denver "Trailnuggets," should seem appropriate. The Nuggets played the entire series without defensive standout Bill Hanzlik and center Wayne Cooper. There seemed to be hope for the Blazers.

Denver coach Doug Moe said before the series that "the team with the most guts will win the series."

Well, there you have it sports fans. I wish Mike Ditka knew a little bit about basketball.

This team is so predictable (and so boring) that it lost nearly every close game it played. Opposing teams had no trouble figuring out that, when it came down to crunch time, the Blazers would fall apart and leave Clyde Drexler to exhibit his playground — but low-percentage — moves to the hoop.

This is a far cry from a few short years ago. That is when guard Jim Paxson had an all-star season and was considered "the best in the NBA" when it came to moving without the basketball. That is when Calvin Natt could power over anyone and dunk and drive to the hoop at will. That is when Portland had no qualms about substituting Lafayette Lever for Darnell Valentine at point guard.

With this lineup, Portland could draw up first, second, third and fourth options for the offense during money time: Paxson cut to the basket, Paxson jumper, inside to Natt or Kenny Carr, Wayne Cooper jumper.

Compare it to the present: Steve Colter to Drexler. Put your head down, drive and pray.

Exit Valentine, Audie Norris, Cooper, Lever, Natt, Valentine. Enter Vandeweghe, Bowie, Colter. By-pass Michael Jordan. Exit the conservative, heady offense. Enter a team trying to copy the Los Angeles Lakers fast-break style, but without Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Magic Johnson and James Worthy. And Petur Gudmunson.

Since winning its the NBA championship

in 1977, Portland has suffered countless setbacks: the foot injury and eventual departure of Bill Walton, Lloyd Neal's early retirement and failing to make the playoffs in 1981.

Portland fans and even I can understand all of the above. However, it is amazing what the worst trade in NBA history — in the history of mankind — and a very poor draft decision can do to a respected team.

The Vandeweghe trade was done after Blazer owner Harry Weinberg said this team "is the nucleus we want to work with." He also said he would not change anything on the roster except the addition of a center, which would be provided by the draft.

Never call tails. The chance to draft Akeem Olatajawon was lost with a fallen coin's fate. With the awareness of an injury-prone Sam Bowie and the availability of Michael Jordan, how many teams would have taken Bowie with the second pick?

Only the Blazers.

This season was not to be absent of turmoil. Portland handled the Valentine trade horribly and inhumanely. First the Blazers announced the former starter was no longer of use to the team, and then they took him off the roster while the negotiations fizzled. I truly believed the Blazers did a handy job of ruining Valentine's career.

The same situation is happening with Paxson, whose playing time has diminished behind Clyde Drexler. He's an outstanding player and a great leader with a lot of years left. Play him or trade him.

I leave it to Ramsay to rock the boat even though he still has a year left on his contract. He cannot feasibly imagine that Bowie's return will lead to a rebirth. Harry Glickman, the Blazers' former general manager, already did us a favor and left for the Milwaukee Bucks' front office.

Thanks, Jack. But all good things, and bad things, must come to an end.



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