

Blazer success rekindles interest

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Reporter

It's been a fun year following the National Basketball Association.

I don't usually follow the NBA with much interest until the playoffs roll around and the Los Angeles Lakers are going for the umpteenth title in a row. Personally I find more ex-

A dynasty loomed on the horizon until Walton came crashing down with more leg injuries and the hopes of diehard Blazer fans crashed down too.

Since then the Blazers have been struggling to recover that championship magic, struggling through opening round playoff debacles against Kansas City, Houston, Utah and Los Angeles.

The Blazers have also been beset by bickering and fighting within the team that led to the dismissal of Ramsay and Mike Schuler and players such

After Sunday's win over the Spurs, the Blazers are 53-22. They are 4 1/2 games behind the Lakers in the Pacific Division, but have the third best record in the NBA. The fans have to be careful about getting too excited for the playoffs because a couple of years ago the Blazers were 53-29 and were eliminated in the first round.

It doesn't appear that will happen this year, however. At least I hope it doesn't. It would be nice to see Portland in the Western Conference finals or possibly the Finals.

Wouldn't you like to see the Blazers win it all and see Clyde the Glide in the finals rather than Magic Johnson and Isiah Thomas exchanging kisses? Wouldn't you rather see Jerome Kersey throw down a dunk to cap an NBA title than Dennis Rodman, the arrogant little worm, point at the crowd and go into some kind of stupid dance?

I know I would, and I'm sure all Blazer fans would too.



From The Sidelines

citement in the college game where zone defenses are legal, the referees really do call traveling and defense is actually played. Plus, the NCAA Tournament is the most exciting championship event in sports.

But this year things are different. I'm actually looking forward to the NBA postseason and a team other than the Lakers - Boston or Detroit - sipping champagne in June.

The reason: the revitalization of the Portland Trail Blazers.

The difference in the Blazers this season is more profound than the transformation in the San Antonio Spurs. Yes, Portland might even make it past the first round of the playoffs this year and might contend for the first championship since 1977.

I remember 1977 very well. I was finishing up the school year in second grade and the term "Blazermania" was rampant throughout the state. It was a special time for Oregonians, listening to radio play-by-play announcer Bill Schonely's "Rip City" battlecry, watching Bill Walton and Maurice Lucas rip down the league's taller big men, and marveling at Jack Ramsay's checkered pants.

Portland was hot late in the season, had an easy time in the Western Conference playoffs — beating the hated Lakers 4-0 in the conference finals — then won the championship in six games over Philadelphia and everyone was going crazy.

as Jim Paxson, Darnell Valentine and Kiki Vandeweghe.

Fortunately for us long-suffering Portland fanatics, things are turning around this year thanks to an infusion of new players and a respected coach.

The off-season acquisition of Buck Williams from New Jersey might have been the best move the front office ever made. Williams has given the Blazers an aggressive power forward and a work ethic and leadership that Portland teams of the past sorely lacked.

The coaching of Rick Adelman, a former player and assistant coach with the Blazers, has also helped. Adelman is referred to as a "player's coach," by guard Clyde Drexler, a necessity in a league filled by ballooning egos.

The play of the Portland bench — most notably Danny Young, Wayne Cooper, Drazen Petrovic and Cliff Robinson — has allowed Adelman to rest his starters and get quality play from the reserves, another crucial element in the NBA.

The key to the team, as they call it in the pros, is chemistry. The team blends together well and likes to play together. And there isn't that ugly selfishness that you see on so many teams.

Portland has been a refreshing sight in the NBA and a fun team to watch. The people enjoying the ride to the top the most are the fans, which is what the NBA is about. Don't they call it "Fantastic!"

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