

# Should Magic play in the All-Star game?

## Magic should sit this one out



**FROM THE SIDELINES**

BY DAVE CHARDONNEAU

**M**ake up your mind Magic, are you sick or not?

Points per game: 0.0, rebounds per game: 0.0, assists per game: 0.0, minutes per game: 0.0, games played: 0.0.

Are these the stats of a National Basketball Association All-Star?

Yes, according to some fans.

Magic Johnson is currently second on the All-Star ballot at the guard position, which would give him a starting position with Blazer Clyde Drexler in the West squad's backcourt.

It is not Johnson's fault that the fans sympathize with him and thus give him undeserving votes, but it is his fault for egging the fans on by saying he will play in the All-Star Game if he is selected.

Ever since Magic announced his retirement, he has dabbled in the possibility of returning.

First, he said he would play on the U.S. Olympic team. That's fine, he deserves to play on a team representing the United States because of everything he's given to the game in the last decade.

Secondly, he has reportedly hinted at returning to the Lakers for the playoffs. This, too, would be fine. The Lakers have the option to sign whomever they want, and if Magic wants to return for the playoffs, it's his choice. But even Lakers General Manager Jerry West is getting fed up with Johnson's antics, saying Magic's talk is disrupting the team.

The All-Star Game is for those players who performed well in the first half of the season — not this decade, not last year, but this season. Magic hasn't even stepped onto the court this year.

If Johnson is selected to the All-Star team, it means that one of the top caliber guards in the Western Conference will be left off the team. Either John Stockton, Kevin Johnson or Tim Hardaway would

most likely be the one who suffers from the fans' ignorance and Magic's arrogance.

If Magic is well enough to play in the All-Star Game, the playoffs and the Olympics, why did he retire in the first place? It certainly couldn't be to spend more time with his family because every time I turn on an NBA game or an episode of *Arsenio*, there's Magic smiling and wavin' in the camera.

Don't get me wrong; just because a person has the HIV virus doesn't mean their life should come to an abrupt halt. It's good that Magic is continuing to enjoy life.

However, since he retired because of the HIV virus and not simply because of old age, fans, players, coaches and others involved with the NBA feel as though they "owe him" for all the fame he has brought the league.

It is true Magic has brought much to the game, and it's not unreasonable that people involved with the NBA feel some sympathy toward him.

But it's unfair for Magic to manipulate these sympathies. It is unfair to the rest of the players who have worked hard this season.

There has been talk of possibly opening up a 13th spot on the West team so no other player would miss out on account of Magic. This could solve some of the problem, but there are other problems.

- Is Magic in any shape to play? When he retired he said he had lost a lot of weight and energy, and that was over three months ago. Now that I think about it, he was struggling to get by Marky Mark in MTV's *Rock and Jock Basketball Game*.

- Is it safe for the other players? I realize this is a fairly flimsy statement. But realistically speaking, what if Magic were to get a bloody nose or cut himself? No one wants to deal with that.

- Is it safe for him? Magic's obviously in

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## Give Johnson one last chance



**FROM THE SIDELINES**

BY CHRISTOPHER BLAIR

**A**s of last week, 243,373 fans voted to give Earvin Johnson a spot on the NBA West All-Star team.

The fans have spoken. Let Magic play.

When Magic announced in November that he had been infected with the HIV virus, it seemed every basketball fan in the world was losing an old friend. We would never see Magic Johnson — a true class act in a sports world of mega-egos and hot shots — play NBA basketball again.

Now there's hope that the fans will have another chance. If the powers that be — namely NBA Commissioner David Stern — are willing, Magic could play one last NBA game.

The odds against Magic appearing on the West's roster are high, and for a few understandable reasons. Many contend that because Magic retired, he should suddenly become ineligible to play with his former teammates and opponents. Many (including a couple of quick-witted fellows on ESPN's *SportsCenter* whom I won't mention) assert the All-Star Game should be for players who have done well this year.

True, Magic retired at the beginning of the season and therefore hasn't played since. Perhaps giving Magic a spot on the West team would be like an elbow to the faces of Kevin Johnson, John Stockton and Tim Hardaway, players who have earned their spots through their work on the court.

But face it, unless the world blows up tomorrow, K.J., Stockton and the rest will have their opportunities at All-Star glory for the next five to 10 years. And no one ever said they couldn't play in February. Put Magic

*Magic's appearance in the All-Star Game would be one last chance to see him play, and appreciate the skills of one of history's greatest athletes.*

in for a quarter or two, or even just 10 minutes. It's not as though the game actually counts or anything.

Beyond the game itself, I see two opportunities here, one for the sporting world and one for society. For me, the worst part about Magic's announcement in November — aside from the fact that he had contracted a deadly virus — was that I'd never really watched him play, and would never have the opportunity to do so again.

Sure, I'd seen his full-court bounce passes to James Worthy and Byron Scott, and one impossible clutch shot to beat the evil Celtics in a game a few years ago. But I never realized the importance of his unselfish style, the magic of Magic. I celebrated when Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls won their decisive victory in last year's NBA Finals, but I didn't give Magic a second look.

For all of us, from Blazermania to Bulls fans, Magic's appearance in the All-Star Game would be one last chance to see him play, and appreciate the skills of one of history's greatest athletes.

Magic said Monday he would play for the U.S. Olympic team, sure. But who knows about Magic's health, or the whims of the International Olym-

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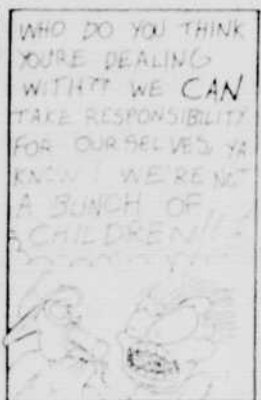
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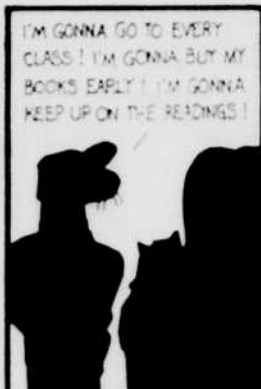
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