

Webber to leave college, enter draft

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — Chris Webber, an All-American who led Michigan to the NCAA championship game for two consecutive years, said Wednesday he will skip his final two years of eligibility to enter the NBA draft.

"Not winning a college championship makes leaving hard to do, but that's not going to make or break me," Webber said at a news conference, where he was joined by his family and Michigan coach Steve Fisher.

"It's a decision I felt was necessary for me to keep moving and move on. There's no doubt in my mind that I'm ready for the next level."

Webber, whose illegal timeout call with 11 seconds to play cost Michigan a last chance to win the NCAA title, was a part of the Fab Five recruiting class considered one of the best in college basketball history.

Michigan lost to Duke in the 1992 title game and to North Carolina this year, but Webber said he has no regrets about his

college career.

"I learned how to be patient," he said. "I learned how to take criticism. I learned how not to make excuses. That's it, but it's a lot."

Webber joined Michigan along with Jalen Rose, Jimmy King, Juwan Howard and Ray Jackson and the unit quickly became known as the Fab Five.

Webber led the Wolverines in scoring, rebounding, shooting percentage and blocks.

"There will never be another Fab Five," Webber said. "You can put that name in a safe because that's the last time ... you're going to see it. You're never going to see five guys come in like that as freshmen like that again."

They were blown out in the championship game last year by Duke. This year the Wolverines were trailing North Carolina by two points with 11 seconds to play when Webber called a timeout when his team had none left. The resulting technical foul sealed the game — and

the title — for the Tar Heels.

"That was just one play," Webber said. "If I can play a good game and just mess up 30 seconds, I can live with that. Nobody died from it, it didn't cost anybody their jobs. It hurt, but I'm going to have to keep living."

Webber is expected to be among the top three picks in the June 30 draft. Philadelphia 76ers general manager Jimmy Lynam said Wednesday he has no doubt Webber is ready for the NBA.

"Sure he's ready," Lynam said. "What he does he does as well or better than any other college player."

Fisher also said he's certain Webber will be successful.

"Luck will not be part of it," he said. "He's destined to be every bit of as successful on the professional level as he's been in high school and on the college level. That success will follow him. That's part of who he is."

Webber said the lure of a weighty NBA contract was a "big part" of his decision, but not all.

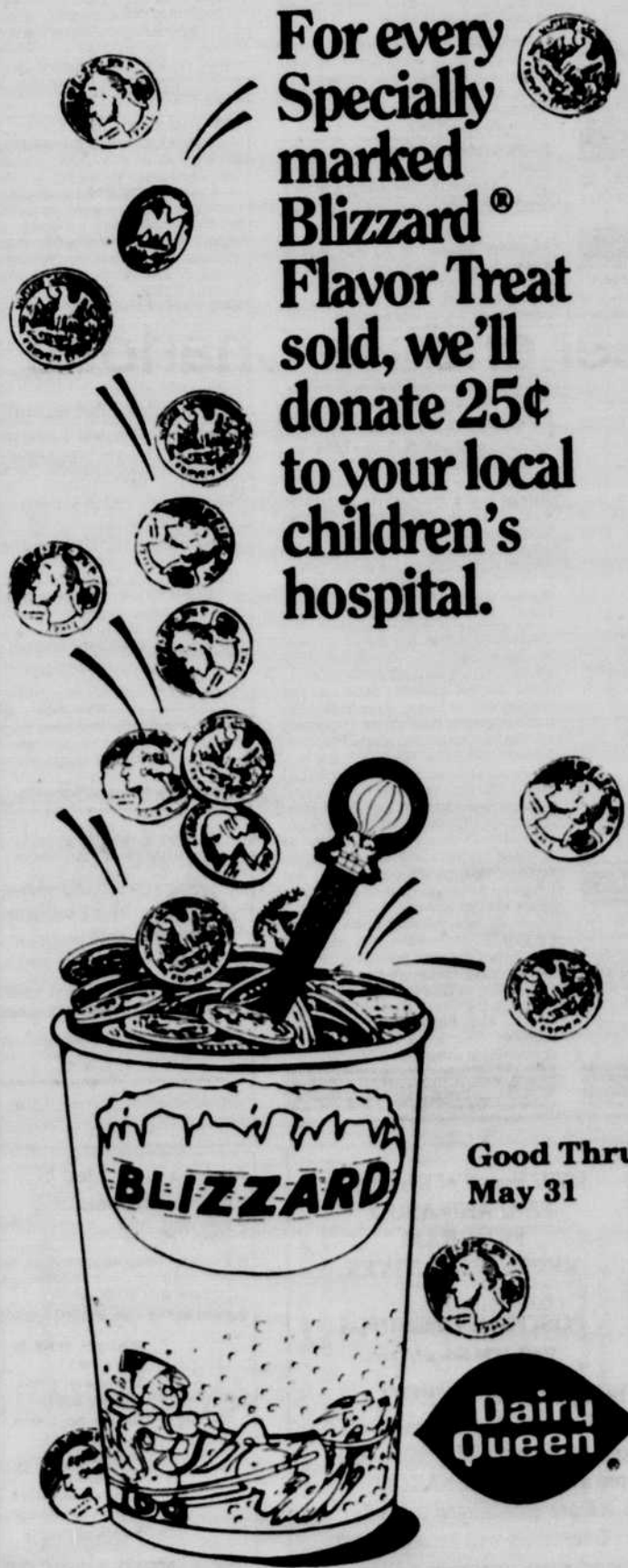


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