

Blazers nestle in for average year

It's about 40 games into the NBA season for most teams now, and high, preseason promises have had their chance to either blossom (Sacramento, L.A. Lakers, Utah, Orlando) or wilt away as most do (Golden State, Milwaukee, Atlanta).

But the thing we Oregonians can really appreciate about the National Basketball Association is the very special gift they gave us some 25 years ago — a mediocre basketball team.

I'm neither a Blazer fan nor am I one of those individualists who thinks it's hip to despise the Blazers. But no matter where I stand in the Blazer scheme of things, I can't help noticing how incredibly average the Blazers continue to be year in and year out.

So with 38 games under their belt this year, the mighty Trail Blazers are 20-18, a .526 clip. And last year, surprisingly enough, they were 23-15 at this point in the season.

I'm actually one to stick up for the Blazers from time to time. They won the whole shebang in



CHRIS METZ

1976-77. Not too bad. Just ask Dallas, Atlanta or the Clippers how cool it would be for them to have just one NBA Championship banner raised to their rafters, such as the Blazers do.

Perhaps Janet Jackson puts it best though, when she begs the eternal question, "What have you done for me lately?"

It hasn't been that long ago when Portland seemed just a breath away from another title. Oh so close in 1990, and as a token visitor against the Bulls in 1992, the Blazers and their fans are not that far removed from success on a major scale.

Blazer fans should look at it this way — at least things are a bit easier to gauge these days.

For as sure as the sun shines and the day is long, it's safe to bet that the Blazers, for the third year in a row, will be nowhere near the top of the heap when the season is all said and done.

About the only interesting things that have happened this season have been off the court (except for Rod Strickland's best Rocky impression against Olden Polynice). Trade demands, front office shifts and new arena's have hidden the fact that:

A. P.J. Carlesimo hasn't turned around the franchise overnight like some had hoped.

B. The Blazers still haven't traded for anybody, or more importantly, gotten rid of anybody.

C. Finally, you can drink a beer in the seating area at the Memorial Coliseum — a necessity to stomach any game that Chris Dudley is involved with.

Damon Stoudamire's comments on Monday guaranteeing a victory over Oregon at McArthur Court confuse me a little bit. More and more these

days, hokey comments such as this seem to pop up. Does Michael Irvin ring a bell? It's discouraging to see people react to them, because they're just that — comments.

After further analysis, the one thing Stoudamire probably didn't need to do was to give the Mac Court faithful any more reason to get up for the big clash. A sellout crowd, already chomping at the bit for a shot at Arizona, will undoubtedly give Stoudamire a wonderful welcome in tonight's game as a result of his promises of victory. So much for his homecoming.

I would also think that the Wildcats' 3-2 Pac-10 record would worry Stoudamire and the rest of his team at least a little bit. I know it's early in the season, but I would certainly expect Arizona to come into Mac Court with a "speak softly and carry a big stick" kind of attitude.

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THURSDAY

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Names in the game

LAKEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Half-speed "fastballs" that went just 55 feet brought a smile to the face of Colorado Rockies pitcher

Armando Reynoso

Reynoso threw from a pitching mound for the first time in more than eight months to catcher Jayhawk Owens 5 feet in front of home plate. After 45 pitches Reynoso was beaming.

"I've been working for this moment," said Reynoso, who tore the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow May 20. "I didn't think about if I'm going to feel bad. Just think positively. This will give me more motivation because I've been looking to progress."

LOS ANGELES (AP) —

Magic Johnson and his wife, Cookie, have adopted a baby girl.

The adoption took place in Michigan last week, Johnson's agent, Lon Rosen, said Wednesday. The baby, Elisa, is 2 to 3 weeks old.

Married three years ago, the couple also have a 2-year-old son, Earvin III. The retired Los Angeles Lakers star, from a previous relationship, also has a son Andre, 13, who lives with his mother in Michigan.

ATLANTA (AP) — Denver Broncos tight end Shannon Sharpe and his girlfriend face one count each of simple battery after an altercation at his home in northeast Atlanta.

Maria Ann Slee also was charged with one count of destruction of property, Atlanta police spokesman Benjamin Sims said.

Young takes Player of the Year

MIAMI (AP) — Steve Young joined former teammate Joe Montana on Wednesday as the only two-time winner of the NFL Player of the Year Award.

"It's an amazing thing," Young said. "The second time makes it even more amazing."

The San Francisco 49ers' quarterback also won the award in 1992. Montana was the winner in 1989 and 1990.

The 49ers will face San Diego in Sunday's Super Bowl at Joe Robbie Stadium. San Francisco set a team scoring record, and Young set an NFL record with a quarterback rating of 112.8.

"In a lot of ways I was able to get votes because our offense is so great," Young said. "And they think, 'Well, their offense is so great, let's give it to Steve Young.'"

"I don't feel like it's just me. It was just me, I don't think I would make it."

Sapolu savors chance at a fourth ring

MIAMI (AP) — Of all the players in Sunday's Super Bowl, only Jesse Sapolu has a chance to win his fourth ring, and he's dividing his time between looking forward to the prospect and looking back on how he got this far.

"Just to see the elite group I will join if I win my fourth Super Bowl ring, it almost humbles you," the San Francisco 49ers left guard said Wednesday.

"You almost feel like, 'Do I deserve it? A lot of players don't have one and worked just as hard as I am.' It's just one of those things that I sit in my room and think about it, be thankful about it."

Sapolu was a member of the 49ers' last three Super Bowl teams, though he was injured for San Francisco's victory over Miami following the 1984 season. Joe Montana, Mike Wilson, Keena Turner, Ronnie Lott and Eric Wright are the only players who played on all four San Francisco Super Bowl teams.

"This year, I appreciate it a lot more," said Sapolu, who will be matched up against San Diego Chargers' defensive tackle Shawn Lee in the Super Bowl.

"When we won them back to back the last

SUPER BOWL



49ers vs. Chargers
JANUARY 29, 1995

from it for a long time and have another team step up and try to take over dominance, you're just so hungry that you appreciate coming back."

Sapolu is characteristic of San Francisco's quickness and agility all along the offensive line, which struggled early in the season because of a rash of injuries only to key the 49ers' resurgence when it returned to health.

"They work together like a machine," said Chargers' defensive tackle Reuben Davis. "They know each other's movements and in Steve Young they have a great quarterback back there. He can get the ball out there in a short amount of time and a lot of times they

time, you almost feel like the Super Bowl trophy belongs to you," he said. "When you're away

don't have to block for very long."

Added Lee: "I think they fit in well with what they do. They're not that big, but for the style they play, they don't need to be."

San Francisco is returning to the Super Bowl for the first time since successive victories following the 1988 and 1989 seasons.

"There's no doubt in my mind we're going to win this game, no doubt in my mind," Sapolu said. "I'm not going to say the word 'guarantee' but I wouldn't be here if I didn't think we're going to win. Because we know we're good enough to win, and to tell you the truth, I hope San Diego feels the same way."

Sapolu enters the game coming off consecutive Pro Bowl seasons, achieved at center in 1993 and at left guard this season. It was a switch he made to help the team make up for the free agency loss of Guy McIntyre by signing another free agent, center Bart Oates.

"There aren't many players in this league who are asked to say, 'Yeah, you're an all-pro at this position. Let's move you to some new position. Make that sacrifice for the team,'" Oates said.

WEDNESDAY'S TRANSACTIONS

BASEBALL

AL
■ CALIFORNIA ANGELS—Signed Lance Robbins, second baseman.

NL

■ FLORIDA MARLINS—Announced a one-year working agreement with the Campeche Piratas of the Mexican Summer League, effective Feb. 1.

FOOTBALL

NFL

■ CLEVELAND BROWNS—Promoted Rick Venturi, secondary coach, to defensive coordinator. Named Jim Bates defensive assistant coach.
■ NEW YORK JETS—Retained Richard Mann to coach receivers and tight ends.
■ PITTSBURGH STEELERS—Named Dick LeBeau defensive coordinator.

CANADIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

■ MEMPHIS—Named Pepper Rodgers coach.

ARENA FOOTBALL LEAGUE

■ ST. LOUIS STAMPEDE—Signed John Kaleo, quarterback; and Gene Thomas, Darryl Hammond and Barry Wagner, wide receivers. Waived Falanda Newton, safety; John Shannon, lineman; Jerry Woods, wide receiver.

HOCKEY

ROLLER HOCKEY

■ ANAHEIM BULLFROGS—Named Chris McSorley director of player personnel.

HORSE RACING

■ NEW YORK RACING ASSOCIATION—Announced resignations of Bruce Lombardi, racing secretary, and Richard Hamilton, steward, effective the middle of February.

SOCCER

NATIONAL PRO LEAGUE

■ NPSL—Suspended Franklin McIntosh, Baltimore midfielder, for one game and fined him an undisclosed amount for fighting in a game on Jan. 22. Fined Rick Bush, Jon Parry, Kevin Sloan, Mike Stankovic, Omid Namazi, Chris Morgan, Lance Johnson, Jamie Christie, Brad Smith, Barry Stitz, Jason Dieter, Derrick Marciano, Baltimore players, and Dave MacWilliams, Baltimore coach, an undisclosed amount, for leaving the bench or participating in the altercation.

■ DAYTON DYNAMO—Fired Terry Nicholl coach.

Continental Indoor Soccer League

■ MEXICO TOROS—Named Jorge Espinoza coach.

TENNIS

■ UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION—Named Jai DiLouis to the national player development coaching staff.

COLLEGE

■ ASHLAND—Named David Oness basketball coach for the rest of the season.

■ BAYLOR—Promoted Harry Miller, men's interim basketball coach, to men's basketball coach and signed him to a five-year contract.

■ CLEMSON—Named Trevor Adair soccer coach.

■ HOBART—Announced the resignation of William Maxwell, football coach. Named Michael Cragg football coach.

■ WEST VIRGINIA—Announced the resignation of Mike Jacobs, assistant football coach, to take a similar post at Ohio State.