

Schneider: If Magic can pull it off, more power to him

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tary for NBC and even owned a portion of the team he helped make famous.

No player really ever captured the overall love of the fans like Magic.

Larry Bird never quite looked comfortable in front of the camera. Charles Barkley was ejected from a few too many games and spit on a few too many fans to become a popular icon. And even with the enormous talent of Michael Jordan, he always seemed a bit too aloof for the average fan.

In short, Magic was the man for the NBA until he was struck down from his lofty pedestal by the virus that causes AIDS.

Now the NBA needs Magic to throw it another rope and pull the league back into the safety of fan popularity. My main question is, why would Magic want to do it this time around?

To begin with, Magic is not the man he was when he guided his Lakers to a loss to the Bulls in the NBA Finals five years ago. At 36, Magic is at the stage in his life when players begin to wind down their careers, not try to start over.

At his news conference, the former superstar didn't look super at all. He looked, well, old. It is obvious to the casual observer that Magic is carrying an extra 20 pounds on his once impressive 6-foot-9 frame.

He said his doctors have given him clearance to resume his NBA career, but conceded that it will take time to get back into

"game shape."

Remember, Magic is not planning to make a return to street pick-up games, but to real live NBA basketball, against the greatest players in the world.

The first time he has to chase down Shawn Kemp or has to guard Reggie Miller, he'll see what a five-year layoff can do to a superstar. If an out-of-shape 36-year-old can pull it off and not make a total fool of himself, then more power to him.

Magic will also have to face the inevitable negative feelings and fears of the NBA players and fans when it comes down to the reality of an HIV-positive player participating in pro basketball. This may prove to be the biggest obstacle Magic will have to overcome.

Right after the Olympics, Magic was frozen out of a comeback bid by his teammates who feared they might contract AIDS by playing with him. Now, with the improvements of AIDS education and NBA commissioner David Stern's league HIV-prevention program, most players are aware of how one contracts AIDS and that the risk of infection while playing with Magic is relatively low.

Still, NBA players are human, and each may harbor his own personal fears and resentments about AIDS. Most players have been supportive since Magic started hinting about his return last week. Chicago forward Scottie Pippen and Utah's Karl Malone,

among others, yesterday voiced their support of his comeback.

Only Philadelphia's Vernon Maxwell has made a negative public remark against Magic's return. It is not what the players say in the papers that will have an effect on him, but what will be said in locker rooms and behind closed doors across the league.

Magic also had to give up a lot to make a return to pro basketball. Under league rules, Magic had to give up his 5 percent team ownership to return to the NBA. We're not talking about Monopoly money here — shares in a professional sports franchise do not come cheap.

Giving up that ownership shows me that Magic is serious about his return and that this is not just an attempt to put fans in the Great Western Forum's seats.

The game has changed considerably since he left, and his old cronies will not be around to receive his passes.

Will we see the old, brash Magic who ruled the NBA with arrogance? Or will we see a new, more mature version who could provide leadership for younger teammates like Nick Van Exel, Cedric Ceballos and Anthony Peeler?

When Magic steps onto the court in Lakers yellow tonight, he will be doing so in a whole new world.

Pete Schneider, a senior majoring in journalism, is a sports reporter for the Emerald.



ON THE TUBE

January 30

■ 4:30 p.m. ESPN

NCAA basketball, Iowa at Indiana.

■ 5 p.m. PRIME

NCAA basketball, Ala.-Birmingham at Marquette.

■ 5 p.m. TNT

NBA basketball, Chicago at Houston.

■ 6:30 p.m. ESPN

NCAA basketball, LSU at Arkansas.

■ 7 p.m. USA

Boxing, heavyweights, Chris Byrd vs. Jeff Wooden

at Auburn Hills, Mich. Supermiddleweights, Thomas Tate vs. Rocky Gannon.

■ 7:30 p.m. TNT

NBA basketball, Golden State at L.A. Lakers

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Horoscope by Frances Drake

For Tuesday, Jan. 30, 1996

ARIES

(March 21 to April 19)

Think twice about that financial advice, which is not to your best advantage. Someone close to you has ulterior motives that would interfere with your success.

TAURUS

(April 20 to May 20)

The morning hours find you darting here and there, trying to get things done. You're a veritable flurry of activity in and of yourself. Others pick up on your energy.

GEMINI

(May 21 to June 20)

When all is said and done, not much progress is made. You take one step forward and two steps back. However, look to the future and take heart, since things change for you rapidly.

CANCER

(June 21 to July 22)

You're in quite the quandary concerning a problem a friend presents to you. Although you're not directly involved, the outcome affects you. Patience is the key.

LEO

(July 23 to Aug. 22)

Although you're not particularly motivated, do not give in to a bout of laziness. There is much to be done on the job, and bigwigs are watching. Evening hours feature friendships.

VIRGO

(Aug. 23 to Sept. 22)

You're keeping someone waiting who is anxious to hear from you. Although you'd like to hold out, you're being unnecessarily petty. Take the high road.

LIBRA

(Sept. 23 to Oct. 22)

The week is still in its infancy, but you already have your mind on the coming weekend. You want to seek out parties and friends. Tend to tasks at hand.

SCORPIO

(Oct. 23 to Nov. 21)

Family life is most satisfactory. Everyone is in a cooperative mood, and harmony reigns. The evening is good for entertaining guests on a modest scale.

SAGITTARIUS

(Nov. 22 to Dec. 21)

You're being unusually resilient, and someone is just champing at the bit to get you out of your shell. The situation could develop into a romance. At night, spend time quietly.

CAPRICORN

(Dec. 22 to Jan. 19)

You're tempted to let things slide on the job. However, it is not a good time to indulge yourself. Evening hours find you happily pursuing leisure activities.

AQUARIUS

(Jan. 20 to Feb. 18)

Your mental powers are not at their best. Perhaps it would be wise to take care of only what must be done on the domestic scene. Even then, you are tempted by distractions and daydreams.

PISCES

(Feb. 19 to March 20)

You're being uncharacteristically coy with a close tie who doesn't deserve such treatment. Come clean and say what you're feeling. Cooperative projects prosper.

YOU BORN TODAY are self-sufficient. You rarely need others to help you along. If you make up your mind to do something, you know exactly what steps you need to take. Others sometimes find you a bit standoffish. However, once people get to know you, they realize you are strong, sympathetic and compassionate. You succeed at anything you try, provided that you are self-employed.

Birthdate of Brett Butler, comedian; Louis Rukeyser, syndicated financial columnist; Christian Bale, actor.

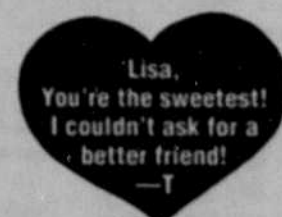
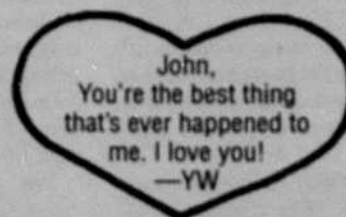
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