

Washington Bullets fire head coach, assistant

■ **COACH:** Jim Lynam and Buzz Braman were let go midway through a disappointing season

The Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Jim Lynam was fired Wednesday as coach of the Washington Bullets, who are fast making a mess of a season that began with great expectations.

General manager Wes Unseld flew to Denver and met with Lynam at a hotel before announcing the firing.

The Bullets were to play the Nuggets on Wednesday night, with assistant Bob Staak the interim coach.

"Jimmy and I both had talked about the importance of the team's effort, the importance of our productivity on the court," Unseld said during a news conference after arriving back at Washington-Dulles International Airport. "And it just wasn't happening."

Unseld told the team of his decision before the morning practice, meeting with every starter and most of the reserves individually.

He also fired assistant Buzz Braman.

After a 19-15 start, the Bullets lost nine

of 12 games and were coming off a 30-point blowout loss against the Los Angeles Lakers and a 22-point defeat in Utah when Unseld made the move.

The Bullets, who have the fifth-highest payroll in the league, arguably are the league's most disappointing team as the all-star break looms.

Although Unseld said he had been considering the move for some time, the final straw was the lopsided losses to the Lakers and Jazz.

"It wasn't so much that we lost, it was how we played that I think brought it more to a head," Unseld said. "I didn't like the effort that I saw in the last two games."

Lynam made no excuses.

"I'm very disappointed at not having the opportunity to see this through," the former coach, who was 82-128 in 2 1/2 seasons with the Bullets, said in a statement.

"I take full responsibility for the performance of the team and I certainly feel that our record is not reflective of the talent on this team," Lynam said.

Citing rumors about Lynam's future, Unseld said he decided not to wait until the all-star break to make the move to avoid a "witch hunt" of media speculation.

However, it also gives him a five-day window to find a new coach before the Bullets' next game on Tuesday.

Unseld said he had a "short list" of possible replacements, including assistants elsewhere in the NBA.

He wouldn't name any candidate because the team must first receive permission from other teams to talk to those coaches.

"I'm looking for a good coach," Unseld said. "I'm not looking for a high profile. ... A good coach is one that I think can motivate these guys to play the way that I think we all know they can play."

Unseld did rule out hiring someone from the collegiate ranks, and emphatically said he had no interest in returning to the bench.

Unseld in 1988 was the last coach to lead the Bullets to the playoffs.

Washington's string of eight straight seasons without a playoff appearance is the longest current run in the NBA.

There was reason for optimism this season, though. A healthy Chris Webber was expected to team with Juwan Howard and newcomer Rod Strickland to make Washington a contender.

With Webber back from shoulder surgery, Howard signed to a long-term contract and Strickland set to run the offense, the Bullets figured to compete for the Atlantic Division crown this season.

They were confident that their playoff drought would end after the NBA voided the contract Howard signed during the off-season with the Miami Heat. That opened the door for Washington to re-sign the third-year forward to a \$100 million contract.

The deal came after Washington made a deal with Portland to get Strickland, who was supposed to rejuvenate an offense that also featured Calbert Cheaney, 7-foot-7 center Gheorghe Muresan and newly acquired reserves Tracy Murray and Lorenzo Williams.

"We have committed a tremendous amount of resources to this team," Unseld said. "But it was just not working."

Lynam seemingly did a better job last season with a squad that did not have nearly as much talent. Despite losing Webber and guards Robert Pack and Mark Price for much of the season, Washington remained in playoff contention until the final week and finished 39-43.

NBA will be watching Rodman's return closely

■ **SUSPENSION:** Another incident like kicking a cameraman could force the Bulls' star out of the league

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Dennis Rodman will be back in the spotlight — and under a microscope — when he returns to the Chicago Bulls.

NBA commissioner David Stern has warned him that another incident, such as the episode when Rodman kicked a court-side cameraman last month, could end his NBA career.

Rodman, 35, has been suspended nine times since 1992 and three times since last March.

Chicago coach Phil Jackson said Rodman must realize he has to behave.

"Dennis has to understand that the league is watching him. He has to be on his best behavior," Jackson said.

The Bulls' Scottie Pippen said he's glad Rodman is returning, although he doesn't approve of his teammate's antics.

"I have a problem with it," Pippen said. "It's pretty stupid. ... But he's not going to change for me. He's just going to have to deal with the consequences whenever he gets caught."

Stern, who lifted Rodman's suspension on Tuesday, effective after the All-Star break, said he was satisfied that Rodman recognizes that his behavior in the cameraman-kicking incident on Jan. 15 was unacceptable.

"Dennis told me that while he does not plan to change the way he plays the game, he will conform his conduct on the playing court to acceptable standards, and he knows that any further incidents of this nature may end his career in the NBA," Stern said.

Rodman also was ordered to undergo counseling during his suspension, but Manley reportedly

said he had not.

Rodman, whose aggressive play has made him the NBA's top rebounder for the past five seasons despite the fact he's only 6-foot-8 and 220 pounds, said he doesn't intend to change his style.

"I just live life day-to-day. I'm not going to change the way I am. My goal is still to contribute and be on one of the greatest teams of all time," Rodman, sporting dark nail polish and sunglasses, said Tuesday night as he sat courtside at halftime of the Lakers-Clippers game at the Anaheim Arena.

Rodman, who is eligible to play next Tuesday night against the Charlotte Hornets at the United Center, is eager to go back to work, even if he's going to be giving away his paychecks. He's donating his salary for his first 11 games back to charity.

"I could say I'm sorry until I'm blue in the face, and it wouldn't prove anything. But I'm going to play for free. That shows that it is-

n't all about money," he said.

"I wanted to do something to thank the fans who have been so supportive of me. ... I think it's unfortunate for the fans and everybody else that it (the incident) occurred. I'm glad I can come back and play like I do again."

Manley said that his client will donate his pay from each of the 11 games to a different charity, on "behalf of the Chicago Bulls, myself, and Dennis."

When Rodman's suspension ends, it will have lasted 11 games. The salary lost for those games plus the donated money will total some \$2 million. Rodman also paid the cameraman \$200,000.

Asked why Rodman decided to make the charitable donations, Manley said: "Because he'll be the first person to say, 'I deserve more money and pay me more money,' and when he makes a mistake, he'll be the first person to say, 'I don't deserve the money,' and he wants to thank his fans for sticking with him."

Blazers begin All-Star break after losing five-straight

■ **NBA:** Neither players nor coaches are too worried about the losing streak

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — The Portland Trail Blazers enter the All-Star break on a five-game losing streak and with their big center on the injured list.

Not to worry, point guard Kenny Anderson said before he left for a quick vacation with his wife in Mexico.

"It's early, baby," he said. "It will be all right. I guarantee it will be all right."

The losing streak, capped by a strong but futile effort in an 88-84 loss to the Chicago Bulls Tuesday night, is an aberration, Anderson says.

"It's just one of those potholes right now that we ran over," he said. "Earlier in the year we were on a high. This is just one of those low peaks right now. That's all. It's good this break is here. We'll pick it up."

Although much less colorful in his assessment, coach P.J. Carlesimo also believes that his young, temperamental team can be a force in the Western Conference.

"If we get our guys healthy and get them playing together, I think we can be a very, very good basketball team," he said. "Right now we're not even close to either one of those things."

The Blazers' most consistent trait has been their maddening inconsistency.

They have beaten the Los Angeles Lakers twice, won at Houston and beaten Detroit.

They also have lost to Toronto twice, including an embarrassing 36-point blowout on their recent 0-4 trip to the East.

It is a roller-coaster ride that is to be expected with the NBA's youngest team.

The recent woes have been aggravated by the loss of Arvydas Sabonis, who has missed the last seven games with a bruised leg. Without the skill and savvy of the 7-foot-3 center, Portland's offense has sputtered.

Sabonis likely won't be ready to play when the Blazers' season resumes Tuesday against Phoenix. But he shouldn't be out much longer. Rasheed Wallace, out for 17 games with a broken left thumb, came back for the Chicago game but still is far from the form he showed early in the season, when he led the NBA in field goal percentage.

And then there's Stacey Augmon, obtained in the trade that sent Aaron McKie and Randolph Childress to Detroit. Augmon is far out of shape after spending his brief time with the Pistons on the bench and in coach Doug Collins' doghouse.

"What Stacey and 'Sheed need now is not rest. They need to play basketball," Carlesimo said. "But I think the break is going to help Kenny, Clifford (Robinson) and J.R. (Rider) more than anybody right now because I think they could really use the rest. Those guys have been playing big minutes and carrying us. And I think it's going to be invaluable to Sabas (Sabonis)."

Carlesimo also has not resolved the season-long dilemma of who will back up Anderson at point guard. Late, rookie Marcus Brown, more of a scorer than a ball-handler, has been

Carlesimo's choice. But it's starkly apparent that without Anderson running the offense, the Blazers are in deep trouble.

Meanwhile, Robinson is trying to ignore the trade rumors that have swirled around him. The trade deadline is Feb. 20 and, with Robinson in the final year of his contract, the Blazers might try to trade him rather than lose him to free agency.

But Robinson's defense and experience have been invaluable to the young Blazers.

"To tell you the truth, that's been the farthest thing from my mind," Robinson said. "If it happens, it happens."

Robinson, Rider and Anderson all have had their run-ins with Carlesimo, whose aggressive coaching can be irritating to players. But the players, despite their reputations, have gotten along well with each other. And Carlesimo says he likes a team that shows its emotion.

Rider, off to a rocky start that included a citation for marijuana possession, has averaged more than 20 points per game the last 18 contests and has stayed out of trouble off the court.

Keeping Rider happy might be more difficult with Wallace's return because it will mean fewer shots. And what about Gary Trent, who has flourished in Wallace's spot at starting power forward? Trent has made 68 of 99 shots (69 percent) in his last nine games and is fourth in the NBA in field goal percentage.

Jermaine O'Neal, Portland's baby-faced 18-year-old, has had some spectacular moments as his playing time slowly increased. And his playing time won't diminish even though Wallace has returned, Carlesimo said.

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