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Sonics owner lauds labor deal

*Seattle is looking to
reconnect with its fans by
using a new 'Sonics
Madness' program*

By Jim Cour

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — Barry Ackerley loves the NBA's new labor agreement.

Making a rare appearance at a news conference Tuesday, the Seattle SuperSonics' owner applauded the agreement that was reached last Wednesday to bring an end to the lockout that threatened the season.

"I think it's going to give us, the owners, an opportunity to get a little bit better handle on our costs," Ackerley said.

"I think in the long term, speaking as a businessman, it's important that you always have some control or at least a way to estimate how to control your costs, whatever business you're running."

Ackerley said it was important for the owners to reign in escalating costs that saw teams signing players to \$100 million contracts.

"I think this agreement is going to be extremely helpful for the game," he said. "I think it will give the owners an opportunity to get a better handle on the costs of operating a team."

"Salaries are related to years played in the league now, and there's a rookie scale."

Ackerley, chairman and CEO of The Ackerley Group, said he didn't know whether the NBA was headed for \$150 million or \$200 million contracts before the new labor agreement was hammered out. And he didn't think the league was doomed because of its huge contracts.

"I don't think it would have gone to Armageddon," he said. "Armageddon is a terrible thing. My goodness gracious, I hope not."

Ackerley said he thinks the new

deal is a fair one for the players, too. If it wasn't, there probably wouldn't have been a season, he said.

"I'm very delighted they have been able to split the difference," he said. "Do I think that this will hurt the game? I have absolutely no idea. I know we're working very hard in Seattle to reconnect with our fans."

That's what Tuesday's news conference was all about. Ackerley sat at a table at the Sonics' practice facility and faced the press with team president and general manager Wally Walker and new coach Paul Westphal. He discussed the team's new program, "Sonics Madness."

Ackerley announced the Sonics will hold a scrimmage Jan. 27 at the Key Arena with free admission. In addition, the Sonics will give their season ticket holders a ticket for no charge to see the team play the Vancouver Grizzlies Jan. 30 in an exhibition game at Key Arena.

Jordan retirement in the offing

*The announcement will
probably be made today,
say teammates, friends*

By Jim Litke

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — For six months, Michael Jordan teased, taunted and tantalized a nation awaiting his answer.

At last, he appears to have one. The greatest player in NBA history and the most popular athlete since Muhammad Ali is expected to announce his retirement Wednesday, a source with close ties to the NBA told the Associated Press on Monday night. The Bulls scheduled a news conference for noon EST Wednesday.

If so, it would be the second time in five years that Jordan has

walked away from the game.

"I knew Michael wasn't coming back," Bulls free agent Dickey Simpkins said today at the team's training site in Deerfield. "He dropped hints last season and last summer that this would probably be his last go-around."

"Ending on top was how he wants to do it and that's about the best way you can do it."

Just as with Jordan's first retirement, a number of factors — his age, a picture-perfect ending to last season, a fractured beginning for this one — appear to have influenced his decision. And just like last time, Jordan could change his mind and return at some point.

"We look forward to seeing him sometime in late March when he makes his return again in Market Square Arena," Pacers coach Lar-

ry Bird said.

But for now, he is expected to once again leave the game that bears his indelible mark, leave it when he's at the top, the way he said he would.

"This is a man who truly, as far as I'm concerned, is the modern day Babe Ruth," former NBA great and current Lakers vice president Jerry West said recently.

Jordan did not return a message left on his phone, and Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf, reached at his Arizona home, said: "I don't have any reaction. I don't have any comments."

Buzz Peterson, the Appalachian State basketball coach who was Jordan's teammate and college roommate at North Carolina, said he believes Jordan made up his mind a long time ago.

Erickson

Continued from Page 11

Oregon State athletic director Mitch Barnhart, desperate to find a big-name coach and save the recruiting season, crisscrossed the country looking for a new coach, flying aboard a private jet lent to him by a university booster.

In two days, Barnhart also interviewed Idaho coach Chris Tormey, Kansas State offensive coordinator Ron Hudson and Nebraska linebackers coach Craig Bohl. Colorado State coach Sonny Lubick also was interviewed by Barnhart last week, but turned down the job, according to published reports.

Barnhart contacted Erickson on

Friday, and the two met Saturday in Seattle. They talked again Monday to complete contract details. Erickson toured the campus with two members of his Seahawks coaching staff: offensive line coach Gregg Smith and offensive quality control coach Eric Yarber.

Erickson has one year remaining on his \$1.3 million Seahawks contract for next season. He will receive \$1.15 million from the Seahawks — the difference between his NFL contract and the OSU base salary. Erickson also gets \$150,000 a year from a radio and TV contract, but unlike Riley, will receive no housing allowance.

Erickson was 113-40-1 record at

Miami, Washington State, Wyoming and Idaho. His Miami teams went 63-9 from 1989 through 1994. The Hurricanes won national championships in 1989 and 1992.

Barnhart said he didn't go after Erickson because of his marquee value, but said calls for season tickets already have come pouring in.

"It's a good day to be a Beaver," he said.

Former OSU athletic director Dee Andros, who wanted to hire Erickson in 1984 but had his recommendation rejected, said today that he's thought all along that Erickson was the right coach for the Beavers.



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