

Trail Blazers hungry for championship

By Landon Hall
The Associated Press

TUALATIN — They all came to Portland with their best days behind them, hoping to give the young Trail Blazers enough leadership and veteran guile to win a championship.

Now, after their first regular season together, veterans Scottie Pippen, Steve Smith and Detlef Schrempf get to see whether all their experience will be enough to get the Blazers close to their goal.

"We're a very hungry team," Scottie Pippen said before Thursday's practice as the Blazers prepare for Sunday's Game 1 of their best-of-5 series against Minnesota. "These players have a chance to do something special."

Portland advanced to the Western Conference finals last year, only to be crushed 4-0 by the San Antonio Spurs. The seasoned Spurs exposed the Blazers as a temperamental bunch that wilted under pressure despite talent.

When the unpredictable Isaiah Rider is your best player, there's only so far you can go. With billionaire owner Paul Allen's resources and his deep desire for a title, big changes were on the way.

In came Pippen, who was traded from Houston for six Blazers — one of whom, Stacey Augmon, was waived and wound up back in Portland; next was Smith, who was traded for Rider and Jim Jackson, and then Schrempf, signed as a free agent.

Their salaries caused the Blazers' payroll to balloon to almost \$74 million, and what Allen really bought was the kind of experience the Spurs had.

Pippen, Smith and Schrempf have appeared in 331 playoff games among them. The other eight players in the Blazers' rotation have 322 postseason games, and 98 of those belong to backup point guard Greg Anthony.

"You want to come to an organization that has a window of opportunity better than others, and I think we have that," Smith said. "We have a good chance, and we're probably one of six teams that really have a legitimate chance."

Pippen and Smith have had

mixed results this season. Each has played brilliantly at times but also wallowed in terrible slumps. Pippen seemed to score only when he had to, or when he had a lane to the basket and wanted to show he still could cut and slash.

Schrempf has been a dependable reserve, but has talked of retirement after 14 seasons. He averaged 7.5 points, his lowest since his rookie season, and saw his minutes cut from 35.3 to 21.6.

Unlike Schrempf, Pippen and Smith welcomed their reduced roles. Pippen averaged 33.5 minutes, down from a career-high 40 last season. And Smith's minutes (32.8, down from 36.5 last season) allowed him to keep his bad knees healthy and play in all 82 games

for the first time in his career.

"They all accepted and wanted reduced minutes, and they all had very good years," said Blazers president and general manager Bob Whitsitt. "It allowed us to get some of the younger guys minutes and let them play."

Second-year shooting guard Bonzi Wells appears to be the next Blazers' star. The 23-year-old has averaged 8.8 points this season, double his average from last season, and will make his first playoff appearance Sunday.

Asked what his advice regarding the playoffs was, Pippen replied: "You just relax and play hard. It's like the regular season; the games are just a little bit more intense."

Softball

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ball, Gustafson was the beneficiary of a phone call from her coach at Lane to Oregon head coach Rick Gamez. She was given the opportunity to try out, and she impressed Gamez and his staff enough to earn a spot on the Oregon squad.

"She was a kid that would come out early and stay late," Gamez said. "She has worked herself into a darn good player. Her stats speak for themselves."

This season Gustafson is the Ducks' second-leading hitter, with a .346 batting average. She's also tied for third on the team with 29 runs batted in.

Gustafson's tough persona has helped her come from a mere walk-on player to a major contributor. She is now the lead-off hitter

and an offensive catalyst.

"She's great. She gets a walk, a base hit, or a home run, she lets us know what the pitcher is throwing," fellow senior and roommate Jill Robinson said. "She's really aggressive."

"I always have to fight with her for the remote control at home. She's always trying to be tough with my dogs. But the other day I came home and she was asleep with my dog cuddling in her arms."

According to Robinson, Gustafson is a "softy" who tries to act tough, which is why the song that plays when she goes to bat is a perfect fit.

Gustafson said she chose "The Humpty Dance" by Digital Underground mainly as a joke.

"I really wanted the Humpty Dance because I really like rap music," Gustafson said. "It just fits me. It's funny because my

teammates know I'm really into rap and I'm laid back and funny."

This weekend Gustafson will be anything but laid back as she returns to her hometown of Corvallis to take on No. 14 Oregon State for the last time. The double header is big for the whole team because the Beavers (31-13-1 overall, 3-8 Pacific-10 Conference) got the best of the Ducks (30-18, 4-6) at Howe Field on April 11th. But Gustafson said she feels more pressure because her friends and family will be there.

"I remember going there last year and not playing the way I wanted to," Gustafson said. "And this being the last time, I wanna play the way people remember me playing in high school. It's always tough because I know there's going to be a lot of people there I know and I want to play well for them."

But Gustafson will not be able

to beat Oregon State alone. She is going to need her teammates to step up and contribute at the plate. Recently that has not been a problem for the Ducks, winners of six of the last seven. During that stretch, Oregon has scored 34 runs while giving up only 20.

"We're going to continue to try to put the ball in play and make their defense work a little bit," Gamez said. "We'll need to shorten up our swings so we can put more runners on and produce more runs."

Gustafson will be a big part of that. After starting the season batting in the third spot, she was recently moved into the lead-off spot, which has benefited both her and the team.

Since moving to the lead-off spot, Gustafson has gone seven for 21 with three RBIs and three runs scored.

"She showed signs of being a

pretty good lead-off hitter, so we moved her there and kept her there," Gamez said. "And it's paid off."

Not only has she set the table nicely for the big bats in Oregon's lineup, Gustafson has also been a steadying force in the middle of the infield, helping along younger players such as shortstop Alyssa Laux.

"Her experience has been a big factor for the infield," Gamez said. "The right side has been pretty solid all along."

It will have to remain that way to control the potent Beaver offense. Oregon State's lineup features Tarrah Beyster who leads the team in batting at .449 and in home runs (11) and RBIs (35).

"Hopefully we'll play a little better defense," Gamez said. "And we hope to get some better pitching performances up there."

Jesus: A Furious Lover or a Finger Pointing Judge?

A fresh look at a not so new Person. BY: Carl Sanders

This Sunday is the celebration of Easter, which despite being masked by Cadbury Eggs, fun baskets, and the Easter Bunny, has always brought to attention the question of: "Who is Jesus Christ?" We all bring to the table our own preconceived notions about who this person is and what he stands for. These thoughts include a wide range of views of who Jesus is and come from many different influences; what we have heard other people say about this man, what we have gathered from His apparent followers, and what we ourselves may have dreamed up to make Him comfortable. What we think of Jesus certainly influences how we view His life and message. This Easter I ask the question: Have you seen the real Jesus?

Many of us have encountered the wrong Jesus. This tragedy has resulted in an acceptance of a wrong perception of reality. A false perception because we think we know who Jesus is, and because of this, have possibly written him off as being something He is not. This tragedy is built upon misinformation. Jesus is often portrayed as a finger-pointing judge, but I am suggesting that He is a furious lover. Many, including those who claim to follow Him, have broadcast this false view of Jesus. This view that He is an earthly representation of an eternal recorder of rights and wrongs. His name has been used to justify the destruction of people's lives through colonization, war, and forced conversion. Yet when one looks thoughtfully at his life a different

picture appears. He never advocated killing or forced conversion. He simply lived His life, which included healing, performing miracles, confronting hypocrisy, and preaching about the mysteries of life. Jesus' unique personality drew people to Him. They came to Him not because of He had a judgmental attitude, but because of His furious love for people, whom He called friends. This love ultimately led to His death, a death He did not resist. What a different picture this is than what we often see lived out by those who claim to follow Him.

Brennan Manning, a contemporary author convinced that we often see the wrong Jesus, writes "He is not moody or capricious; he knows no seasons of change. He has a single relentless stance toward us: he loves us. He is the only God man has ever heard of who loves sinners. . . . But of course this is almost too incredible for us to accept." In this statement Manning raises the question: Is Jesus a finger pointing judge as He is often been made out to be or is He perhaps a furious lover.

Jesus spent most of His time on Earth with sinners, those labeled as unworthy of God's love. Simply put, Jesus loves sinners. Whether we like it or not we all fit into that category, though we may not want to admit it because of our pride. The Gospel of John reports that on one occasion Jesus was approached by a group of people known as the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law, basically a

group of folks who think they are better than most because they strictly adhered to an exhaustive list of laws. They brought to Him a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. They wanted to see if Jesus will let them publicly stone her to death as their law of the times allowed. They came to Jesus, much like many of us, with their own views on who He is. They wanted to put Him in a position that would allow them to arrest Him, because He did not fit the mold they had made for Him. Jesus once again broke their preconceived view of who they thought He was. It is said, that as all eyes were most likely on the embarrassed, paraded woman, Jesus bent down and began to write in the sand. The account doesn't report what Jesus wrote, but that is of little importance. All that matters is that He, the one everyone came to see, was doing something. With this act Jesus put all of the attention on Himself, and took it away from the woman. If anyone was going to be humiliated, Jesus would not let it be the woman, even though to everyone else she deserved such punishment. Jesus did not look at this woman, caught in the act of adultery, as we do. Jesus only saw the woman confused, lost, and in need of love. He sees her need and her hurt. We see her mistakes.

I think many who witnessed this event left with a new view of Jesus. A view that forced them to leave behind their notions that He only looked out for those who deserved something. I think they took hold of a fresh new perspective of Jesus as a furious

lover who will stop at nothing to show love to His children.

"Jesus comes for sinners, for those as outcast as tax collectors and for those caught up in squalid choices and failed dreams. He comes for corporate executives, street people, superstars, farmers, hookers, addicts, IRS agents, AIDS victims, and even used car salesman," writes Manning. This quote illustrates that Jesus is not the joyless judge we may think he is, but rather a furious lover. He is God who made himself vulnerable by invading our humanity, a God who invites you and me, no matter where we stand in the spectrum of worthiness, to be His table guests. He longs to share not only a meal, but also the true life He brings.

May we be caught by the Love of Jesus this Easter, and let go of our own ideas that He is a finger-pointing judge. May we not be misguided and accept a cheapened, fake Jesus who makes us comfortable, but seek to know Him for who He is. With this change in view of who He is, may we slowly accept the Gospel of Grace He preached. A Gospel that hinges on the fact that He came not to seek and destroy, but to save that which was lost.