

Jordan's off to save the wonderful Wizards

By Barry Jackson
Knight Ridder Newspapers

(KRT) The worst-kept secret in sports — Michael Jordan's comeback with the Washington Wizards — was confirmed Tuesday, but with two unexpected twists:

- Jordan signed a two-year contract. If he plays both years, he will suit up at the age of 40 during the second half of the 2002-03 season.

- Jordan announced he will donate his entire \$1 million salary this season to relief agencies working with the victims of the terrorist attacks.

So now speculation turns to how effective he will be: Will Air Jordan's comeback be Err Jordan?

"There's enough left in his game to still be great," said Chicago Bulls forward Ron Artest, whose errant elbow cracked two of Jordan's ribs in June. "All I can say is, he's still Michael Jordan."

Jordan, who won six championships as a player but could not quench his competitive desires as a front-office executive, will not address reporters until Monday.

In a statement issued Tuesday, Jordan said, "I'm returning as a player to the game I love. I'm especially excited about the Washington Wizards, and I'm convinced we have the foundation on which to build a playoff-contention team."



JORDAN

Washington for their loyalty and support strongly influenced my decision."

Jordan, who will turn 39 in February, will earn the minimum salary for players with at least 10 years of service. He was required to relinquish his minority ownership in the Wizards, valued at less than 10 percent. He also gave up his title as the team's director of basketball operations.

"The greatest player in the history of the game is joining my team, and for that I'm extremely honored and pleased," Wizards owner Abe Pollin said.

Said NBA commissioner David Stern: "I'm happy to welcome Michael Jordan, the player, back to the NBA, although as commissioner, I'm sorry to lose him in the boardroom. Michael has always brought joy to basketball fans around the world, and in these difficult times, we can all use a little more joy in our lives."

Jordan — who won five MVP awards, six championships and a league-record 10 scoring titles — will play in his first NBA game since June 1998, when he led the Bulls past Utah in the NBA Finals. A shooting guard throughout his career, Jordan is expected to play mostly small forward for the Wizards.

"I'm doing it for the love of the game, nothing else," Jordan said in his most recent interview Sept. 10. "I want to play for years. I know there are lot of naysayers out there. I still have my jump

shot and I still draw double-teams."

Pistons coach Rick Carlisle, who observed a Jordan workout recently, said, "You can nitpick about whether he's as explosive as he used to be or if he's as quick as he used to be, but he made shots and made plays. Look, I know a great player when I see one, and he looked like a great player to me."

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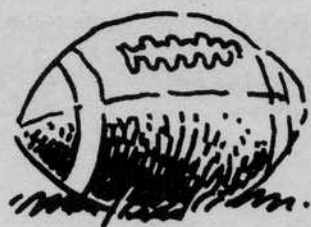
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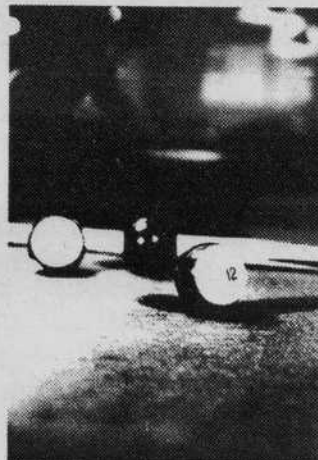
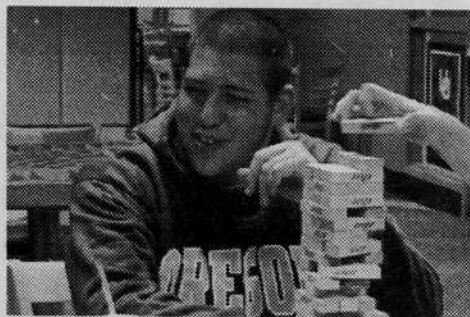
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