

Jordan's shadows get longer with age

Mitch Albom

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

DETROIT — The toughest defender Michael Jordan ever faced got up Wednesday morning and made breakfast for his son. Then he drove him to school. Then he went to the office, answered calls, did e-mail, and eventually, picked his son back up at school and helped him with his homework. Joe Dumars is a few months younger than Michael Jordan. But he didn't touch a basketball all day. He didn't break a sweat until late afternoon, when he worked out on a Stairmaster, while watching CNN. In the evening, he put on a white cotton sweater and brown slacks, drove to the Palace, and spent the night in his suite, watching the game.

Jordan, meanwhile, followed the same old NBA routine, just like teammates 20 years younger. He stayed at the team hotel, took the team bus to a morning shoot-around, went back to the hotel, returned on the team bus a few hours later. He dressed with the other Washington Wizards in the

cramped visitors' locker room. When he emerged on the court, the place was two-thirds empty. It was an exhibition game, meaning nobody cared who won. Jordan was not a starter. He stood while his teammates were introduced.

You wonder why he does it. You wonder how, approaching 40, this can possibly be worth it to the greatest player in history, these empty nights, devoid of glory, no longer the athlete he once was, no longer on a team that can win anything that matters.

"What would you be thinking," Dumars was asked before the game, sitting in an office as Jordan dressed down the hall, "if you were in his position right now?"

Dumars grimaced. "It would be hard to find any emotion to get up for the game." He pursed his lips. "Extremely hard."

Once, Dumars was Jordan's biggest nemesis. Their battles in the Eastern Conference Finals of the late '80s and early '90s were basketball purity, flash against fundamentals, swoop against stick.

But Dumars retired several years

ago, saying enough was enough. He had his rings. He had a family. He put on wire-rimmed glasses, became the Pistons team president, and never played the game again, not even pick-up.

"Right when Michael was first coming back, he called me and said, 'Come on, you and me, we can both do it,'" Dumars recalled.

What did you say?

He laughed, and held out a straight arm.

"I said, 'Uh-uh. Uh-uh. Don't even start.'"

When Jordan entered the game Wednesday night, with 4:43 left in the first quarter, there was considerable applause, but not like last year, when he first came back after a two-year absence. He blew a bubble with his pink chewing gum, as if to remind us — or maybe himself — that a game can keep you young.

And then he looked old. He tried backing in on 24-year-old Richard Hamilton and threw up a shot that hit the backboard. He tried an open three-pointer but clanged it off the rim. He threw the ball away. He yelled at younger teammates, in-

cluding Kwame Brown, who was in high school 18 months ago. He looked, at times, like an exasperated camp counselor.

This is not to say there isn't still some Jordan in Jordan. He eventually hit one shot, and another. He grabbed rebounds. His instincts remain impeccable. His grace in simply running the court is worth the ticket.

But there is less of him than there was before. The jumps are not dazzling. The quickness is only average. He can bury jumpers, but jumpers are like socks in a superstar's suitcase.

You wonder why he does it. When he returned to the bench, after 23 minutes and five baskets in 14 tries, he took a seat not far from Patrick Ewing, the former Knick who used to battle Jordan at Madison Square Garden. Ewing finally quit this summer. Now he wears a suit and sits on the Wizards bench, dry as talcum, while Jordan sweats. It's as if Michael is trying to outlast everyone he ever played against.

The other night, in Denver, the Nuggets, in an effort to boost their ticket sales, offered \$200,000 to the

Wizards if Jordan would play in their exhibition game. It is the first time, I believe, that an NBA player has commanded an appearance fee.

But in many ways, that is what Jordan's career has come to. People pay to catch a glimpse. It is wonderful for NBA marketers and wonderful for fathers who want to point Jordan out to their sons.

But what is in it for him? Does he love it that much? Did he find "real" life so dull? Or does he, as some suspect, truly believe he can muster enough to win another championship and shock everyone?

After the game, Dumars drove himself home to his wife and kids, and Jordan got on another team bus, headed to the airport and another hotel. He said, on his way out, that he never asks himself why he is here. He said he is "having fun." He could have left at the top of his game. Now he battles, in half-empty arenas, to try and continue to cast a long shadow, instead of becoming one.

© 2002, Detroit Free Press.
Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

Troy

continued from page 13

Polamalu is still on many national-award "watch" lists, despite missing the two Pac-10 games. He is on the short list for the Thorpe Award and the Bronco Nagurski award, both defensive awards given out at the end of the season.

Polamalu has been one of the major factors in USC's defensive renaissance this season. The Trojans are ranked first in the Pac-10 in total defense, scoring defense and pass defense, and are third-best in the conference against the rush. USC is ranked 13th in the nation in total defense and 17th in scoring defense.

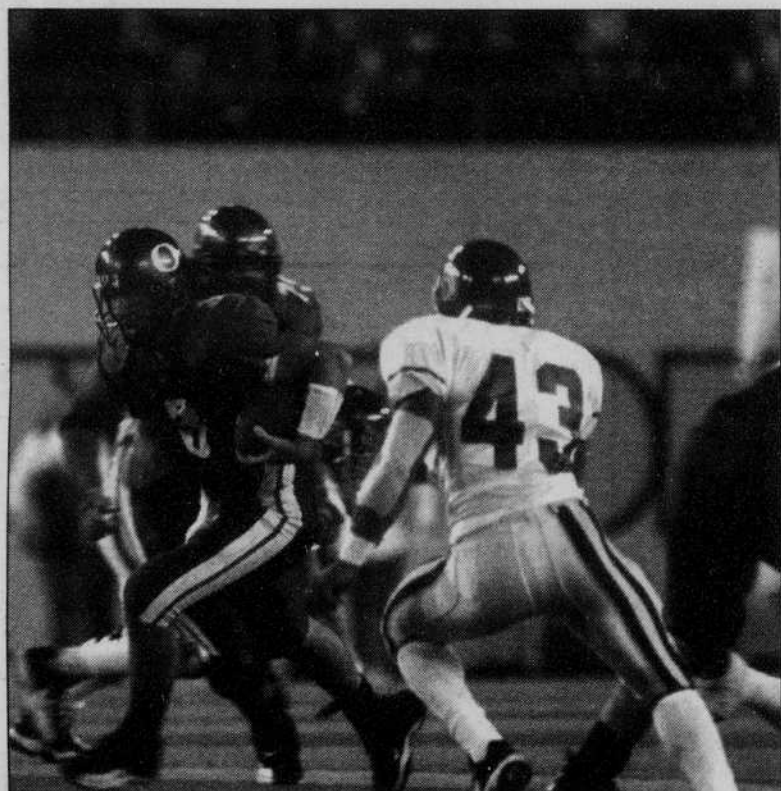
In a conference often lambasted for its lack of tough "D," the Trojans are an exception to that rule. They allow only 286.1 yards per game on average, and only 185.9 passing yards per game in the air-happy Pac-10.

The Trojans still have some conference offensive powerhouses remaining on its schedule, starting with Oregon on Saturday. USC also has Arizona State and UCLA remaining on its schedule. Oregon and Arizona State are ranked first and second, respectively, in Pac-10 scoring offense, averaging 38.1 and 36.3 points per game.

"The conference is loaded with offense," Carroll said.

But Polamalu welcomes the challenge. His philosophy on football is similar to his philosophy on life.

"Say it's first and goal, we're playing Notre Dame and we're down by two points," Polamalu said. "Someone needs to make a big play. I can tell myself in life,



Troy Polamalu (43), seen here tracking down Oregon quarterback Joey Harrington last season, is on the short list for two national defensive awards.

when my back is to the wall, I can pull myself up because I've been in a similar situation."

Polamalu's work ethic and determination led him to a rare accomplishment: He was elected as USC team captain before the 2001 season, as a junior.

"He is a team player, as shown by his desire and performance on special teams," Carroll said. "He is also a humble, dedicated team leader who is respected greatly by

his teammates."

When Polamalu leads his teammates into his home state on Saturday, they will need his leadership more than ever as they face a tough Oregon squad.

They will need him to play tough football.

They will need him to be a man of Troy.

Contact the sports editor at peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com.

Sharks 'Nab' their star goalkeeper

Victor Chi

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Just a few hours after the Sharks had announced the signing of Evgeni Nabokov to a two-year contract Tuesday worth \$7.15 million, the franchise goaltender was doing drills on the ice with mentor Warren Strelow.

How soon will Nabokov be ready to play? After a 1-4 stumble in which they have yielded 22 goals, the Sharks hope it's sooner rather than later as they begin a six-game trip Thursday in Nashville.

"It's really hard to say right now," Nabokov said. "We have games every other day, so it all depends on how much ice time I can get. I think I'm in pretty good physical condition, so hopefully it will be pretty quick, but it's hard to say."

Coach Darryl Sutter had planned to start goalie Miikka Kiprusoff against Nashville even before learning of Nabokov's signing. The club sent goalie Vesa Toskala to the minors after Nabokov rejoined the fold.

Nabokov set team records last season with 37 victories and seven shutouts. He also finished fourth in voting for the Vezina Trophy as the league's top goalie for the second season in a row.

The new deal, which pays \$3.525 million this season and \$3.625 million next season, was a compromise. Nabokov, 27, got the shorter-term deal that he had sought. And the Sharks got him at a price consistent with

what Nabokov could have gotten via arbitration, had he chosen to file.

Citing their concern for a possible drop in the age for unrestricted free agency in a new collective bargaining agreement after the 2003-04 season, the Sharks had pushed for a long-term deal because they wanted to secure one of the organization's cornerstones.

The ineffectiveness of Kiprusoff and Toskala was only part of the problem for the Sharks, but it was a glaring one as Nabokov was preparing a return to Russia.

"Hey, who are we kidding here?" Lombardi said. "To say that the performance of the team does not factor into the urgency of your analysis is just not being truthful. ... It heightened the urgency of it the way we're struggling right now. But to be truthful, to pin this start all on the goaltending is not fair. And not accurate."

"There are other issues that are reflective of this 1-4 start. To pin it on goaltending is way too simplistic. But of course you're going to miss an athlete of that caliber."

Nabokov had not skated in more than two weeks before Tuesday, and he probably won't get any ice time today because the team has an early flight.

"But I worked out all the time, two to three hours a day," he said.

© 2002, San Jose Mercury News (San Jose, Calif.). Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

CLASSIFIEDS

To place an ad,
call (541) 346-4343 or
stop by Room 300
Erb Memorial Union

Classifieds:

Room 300, Erb Memorial Union
P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, OR 97403
E-mail: classads@dailyemerald.com
Online Edition:
www.dailyemerald.com

100 LOST & FOUND

Found: Earring, on corner of 18th & University. Call and describe, Nancy, 744-1410.

100 LOST & FOUND

Missing: white Siamese-Persian female cat. \$100 reward. Missing patch of hair on back. 349-2443.

120 MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE

For sale: black leather jacket, men's large, \$80. Call 606-0577.

120 MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE

Attention New Arch. Students. Mayline + Board & folding desk. Must Go! \$100 OBO. 554-8563.

125 FURNITURE/APPLIANCES

Kenmore Washer/Dryer
Good condition.
\$100 obo. 915-3949.

130 CARS/TRUCKS/CYCLES

'00 Mitsubishi Eclipse GT. Silver, like new, non-smoker, fun car. \$15,995 obo. 954-7484.

105 TYPING/RESUME SERVICES

At 344-0759, ROBIN is GRAD SCHOOL APPROVED. 30-year thesis/dissertation background. Term papers. Full resume service. Editing. Laser pr. ON CAMPUS!

Japanese Animation: Largest rental selection in town at Emerald City Comics. 770 E. 13th. 345-2568.

Aiwa stereo system, \$199; toaster, \$11.99; blender, \$8.99; VHS videotower, \$2.99; wildlife framed posters (2), \$1.99. pictures & info. sam mylb19@msn.com. 953-0062.

"Give Me Five!"

Run your "FOR SALE" ad (items under \$1,000) for 5 days. If the item(s) doesn't sell, call us at 346-4343 and we'll run your ad again for another 5 days FREE! Student/Private Party Ads Only • No Refunds

130 CARS/TRUCKS/CYCLES

Inferno Red
2001 Limited edition PT Cruiser
5-Spd, exterior sealant, undercoat body protection, tasteful upgrades, OOOgah horn, One owner, 12K miles, non-smoker, garaged. Call Dallas. 484-0944. \$19,500.

170 PHOTOGRAPHY EQUIPMENT

Guaranteed used cameras, all formats. Buy/Sell/Trade/Repair. McRill's Cameras 688-7739

