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Robinson's exit is 'Admirable'

Sam Smith
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

CHICAGO — Now this is the way for a Hall of Fame basketball great to leave, perhaps helping his team to a championship with inspired, unselfish play. We can be sure we'll be saying goodbye to David Robinson.

No, he's no Michael Jordan in a lot of ways. Will Perdue, when he went to the San Antonio Spurs, said it was much more pleasant to play with Robinson than Jordan was because Robinson didn't blame you when the team lost. Of course, Jordan had six times more championships. Maybe that's what it takes.

But it doesn't seem to be doing much good these days for the Lakers, who trail the San Antonio Spurs 2-0 in the Western Conference semifinals with Game 3 in Los Angeles tonight.

"Other guys in the locker room need to stand up and make contributions to this team," Shaquille O'Neal said after the Spurs blew out the Lakers in Game 2.

Being that those other guys are Mark Madsen, Kareem Rush, Stanislav Medvedenko and Jannero Pargo, coach Phil Jackson's first four

players off the bench recently, that might not be the place to look.

Sure, the Lakers are going home. And yes, they're three-time champions. And of course they have Kobe Bryant, Shaq and Jackson. But surely they're in big trouble this time. They need Robert Horry to score instead of standing around waiting for a deflected ball to heaven in.

It's not that the Lakers lost the first two games of the San Antonio series, as much as how they lost them. O'Neal and Bryant are combining to average almost 60 points per game. And the team is laboring to score 80.

It's hard to turn it back on when the knob is falling off.

Blame this one on Lakers management for failing to pay to acquire some reserve help in the off-season. Blame it on injuries to Rick Fox and Devean George. Blame it on fatigue from three championship seasons. Blame it on the Spurs. They're pretty good.

When the Spurs won the NBA championship in 1999, one team insider said it was the worst thing that could happen to the franchise. He said coach Gregg Popovich would now believe his throw-it-to-Tim Duncan-and-

stand-around offense was good.

But those old guards — Terry Porter, Avery Johnson, Mario Elie — got older. So the Spurs came up with Tony Parker from France and Manu Ginobili from Argentina. Popovich is not quite sure what they're doing, but it seems to work.

Which brings us back to Robinson. His knee is bad, but so is his back. He's not exactly stopping O'Neal, who is averaging 25.5 points and 15.5 rebounds in 35 minutes per game, but he has stationed himself between the basket and O'Neal, and hasn't budged.

"For me, this last stretch, playing against the best teams, that's the way you want it," Robinson said. This is the last stretch.

He has had a great career, Olympic gold medals, an MVP award, a championship, a scoring title, rookie of the year, defensive player of the year, 10 All-Star teams. And the nation doesn't seem worried about what he'll do next.

He built a school. Robinson spent \$9 million of his own money to found and finance the Carver Academy, a small private school serving inner-city San Antonio. He'll go to work there raising more money and helping finish the

school. Named for George Washington Carver, the school opened Sept. 17, 2001, with 60 pre-kindergarten through 2nd-grade children. A 3rd-grade class was added in 2002.

Once fully operational, the school will accommodate up to 290 students through 8th grade. The students from Carver Academy, from the city's poorest neighborhoods, scored above the national mean on the Stanford Achievement Test in 2001-2002.

Robinson, 37, won this year's citizenship award from the media, and the league named its sportsmanship trophy for him. He has represented more of what people want in a professional athlete than perhaps anyone in the history of the NBA. Call him "the Admirable," though it no doubt will be a quiet exit after these playoffs.

"You spend the whole year getting ready for this time," he said. "Now I'm ready."

The Spurs appear to be as well. And it would be a heck of a way for a deserving player to go out.

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Softball

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boost from its final road trip of the season. The Ducks narrowly missed a win over No. 2 UCLA on Friday, 4-3, but traveled to Seattle and picked up two 6-5 wins over then-No. 4 Washington. The wins in Seattle were Oregon's first since 1998.

Saturday's game went into the eighth inning before Poore hit a solo home run for the win. The Ducks scored four runs in Sunday's first inning. Right fielder Beth Boskovich and outfielder Janell Bergstrom each added an RBI single to help Oregon earn the victory.

"Tremendous credit (for the season) goes to the seniors for being good leaders and good role models," Arendsen said. "They've been a very special group of people."

Saturday's doubleheader will be Senior Day for the Ducks, as the second game is the last home game in the college careers of five seniors.

Laux was named to the 2003 Verizon Academic All-District VIII Softball Team on Friday. Laux, Andrea Vidlund and Amber Hutchison are four-year starters for the Ducks. Vidlund has split her time between pitching, first base and left field, while Laux played three seasons at second base before making the switch to first. Hutchison starts in both the left fielder and designated player roles.

Bergstrom played only a small amount in the 2000 season before starting frequently beginning in 2001, mostly in the outfield. Lynsey Haij has started all but four games in her collegiate career. Haij trans-

Pac-10 softball standings

1. Arizona (48-4 overall, 17-1 Pac-10 Conference)
2. UCLA (43-5, 15-3)
3. California (40-16, 9-9)
4. **Oregon (30-16, 8-10)**
5. Washington (40-13, 7-11)
6. Arizona State (30-20, 7-11)
7. Stanford (36-23, 5-13)
8. Oregon State (31-27, 4-14)

ferred from Texas Tech after the 2000 season and has played at shortstop and third base, where she has spent this season.

"With the diversity and everything else that's gone on throughout the years, I think our senior class is just really close," Vidlund said. "We've stuck together through all the hard times. We get along really well — we hang out on and off the field — and I think that's contributed a lot to our team chemistry."

Oregon has not sent a team to the NCAA Regionals since 2000, making Laux, Vidlund, Hutchison and Bergstrom the only Ducks with post-season experience.

After their last homestand, the Ducks await Sunday's announcement of the 64 teams selected for a trip to the regional tournament. The selection show begins at 7 p.m. on ESPNEWS.

The team is hosting a viewing of the selection show that is open to the general public in the Pittman Room at the Casanova Center.

Contact the sports reporter at mindirice@dailyemerald.com.

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