

Blazers not on trail for playoffs



**BLAZERS
OPINION**

Andrew Millbrooke
Sports Editor

Many Blazer fans are happy to hear that new head coach Terry Stotts is bringing an exciting style of basketball to Portland this season.

Long gone are the days of Nate McMillan's plodding, half-court sets as Stotts preaches an offensive philosophy of pushing the ball, featuring lots of movement, passing, and cutting. That is the good news for Blazer fans this season.

Unfortunately, with one of the youngest rosters in the NBA combined with the fact that many unproven players will be forced to play significant minutes this season, the Blazers have no chance of making the playoffs.

Let's examine the five main reasons that Portland will miss the playoffs this season and be in the running for a high lottery pick in next year's NBA draft.

1. The combination of a rookie point guard and first-year head coach means that the Blazers have major question marks at two of the most important positions in NBA basketball.

While rookie Damian Lillard has proven to be a capable penetrator and scorer in the pre-

season, he has not been consistent or shown the ability to hit the three-point shot — two traits that are essential for NBA point guards.

2. New head coach Terry Stotts has a mediocre career record of 115 wins against 168 losses in his two previous stints as an NBA head coach with the Atlanta Hawks and Milwaukee Bucks.

Stotts gained valuable experience during the last four seasons as an assistant for the Dallas Mavericks, but trying to win with the second-youngest and least talented team in the NBA will be next to impossible.

3. All-Star forward LaMarcus Aldridge, while a very capable

offensive player, is not a big-time defender or rebounder. Aldridge fails to block out consistently in the low post and rarely steps up on defense to take a charge or get a big blocked shot to ignite the crowd.

While 'L.A.' earned his first all-star nod last season, his game seemed to plateau during the past couple of seasons.

4. The Blazers do not feature a true center on the entire roster. J.J. Hickson is a player that any team would want to solidify its front line, but as a reserve — not the starting center.

The Blazers gambled by drafting rookie big man Meyers Leonard early in the first round, but he could end up being a

very solid player in the league, SOMEDAY! Leonard has shown unbelievable raw athleticism, but his game will definitely take a few years to mature.

5. The Blazers have a bench that is comprised of a literal "Who in the world is that guy?" lineup of stiff. I'm sorry, but Nolan Smith, Luke Babbitt, Ronnie Price, Jared Jeffries and company will not be able to compete with any bench in the league.

So, Blazermaniacs — If you want to watch an exciting brand of basketball, stay tuned to the Portland Trail Blazers all season long, but if you would prefer to watch a winning team, you might try becoming a Laker fan.

Don't count them out in 2012-13



**BLAZERS
OPINION**

Steven Weldon
Copy Editor

The Oakland Athletics, the Baltimore Orioles, the Seattle Seahawks, the New York Giants and the Portland Timbers winning the Cascadia Cup despite a terrible season. What do these have in common? 2012's surprises in sports. It's time to add one more to that list.

Don't tell me I'm not being realistic, but the Portland Trail Blazers will make the playoffs in the 2012-2013 season.

Every sports news outlet that exists is currently penciling in their NBA season predictions, and where do we fall? Dead last in the Northwest Division.

Coming off of a year short-

ened by a lockout, muddled by Raymond Felton and Jamal Crawford's constant bitching, and effectively ending when head coach Nate McMillan was handed his pink slip on trade deadline day, the Blazers future looked bleak.

Do you know why I think this? On that fateful trade deadline, the Blazers brass traded aging stars for future commodities.

Among the most important, Gerald Wallace was traded to New Jersey (now Brooklyn) for their 2012 first-round draft selection, as long as it sat outside of the top three selections.

How did we cash in? Damian Lillard, the No. 6 pick in the 2012 NBA Draft. The man out of Weber State University knows adversity. He grew up in Oakland, Calif. and was not highly heralded out of high school.

Lillard laughed in the face of college scouts for not looking at him, and tore the Big Sky Conference up. The last time he played in Portland in college, he dropped 38 points on Portland State and CCC alum Chehales Tapscott. The man knows how to score.

As a result of the mediocre 2012 campaign, the Blazers

ended up with pick No. 11 in the same draft. Meyers Leonard arrived on our radar, and we snatched up the 7-foot-1 monster out of Illinois.

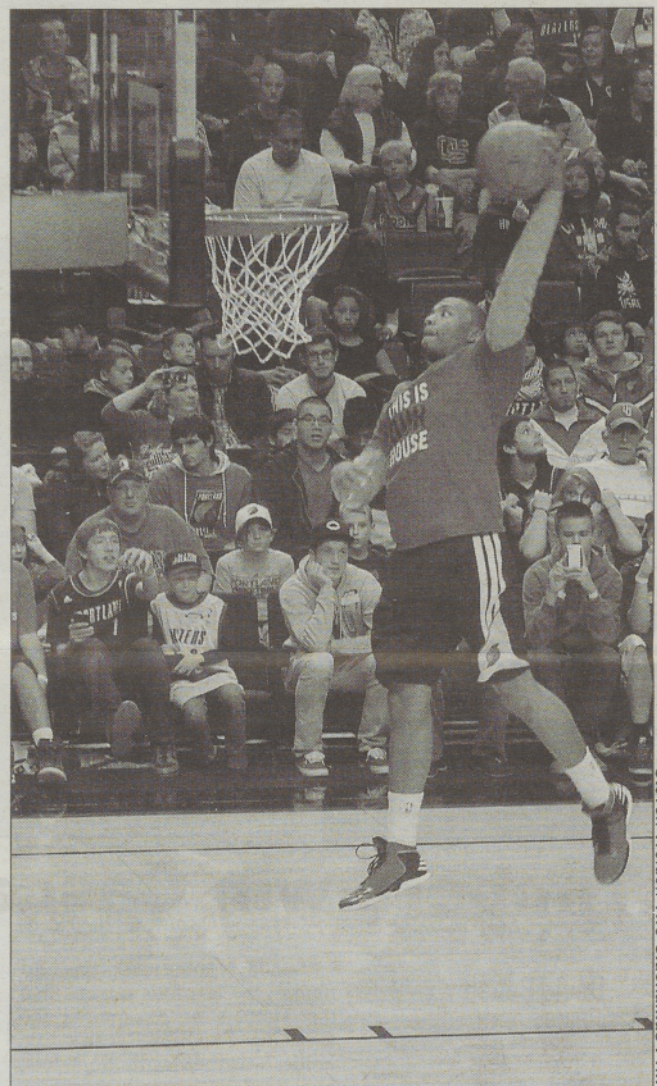
You want inside presence? You got inside presence. Leonard averaged 13.6 points per game and 8.2 rebounds per game in his sophomore season for the Fightin' Illini. His favorite thing to do in games is dunk.

Outside of our spectacular rookies we have the usual suspects. The return of LaMarcus Aldridge. Nicolas Batum getting the contract that he should be earning.

Wesley Matthews and his hard working mentality. As a bonus, re-signing of J.J. Hickson gives the Blazers a solid option off of the bench, or in an incredibly talented starting lineup.

Our questions come from our bench, but we've seen this before! So many new players, it's bound to work.

With a new leader in head coach Terry Stotts, who has made playoff trips before, the chemistry that this team can create will carry them into April as the surprise team of the year. You won't even have to join the crowded bandwagon of Lakers fans parading past in Dwight Howard jerseys.



Damian Lillard (left) practices dunking before a scrimmage at Blazers Fan Fest at the Rose Garden on Oct. 21.

Steven Weldon The Clackamas Print

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