

# Kermit Washington: Blazers' modest hero

By Ulysses Tucker Jr.

When most National Basketball Association players egos are high as America's inflation rate, it's refreshing to know people like Kermit "Chairman of the boards" Washington exist.

The new member of the Portland Trailblazers is articulate, mellow, and modest; a rare quality in these days of mega-buck contracts, all Black teams, and players not willing to give up their selfish desires for the good of a team.

Webster defines the word modest as: "Having or showing a moderate opinion of one's own value, abilities, achievement, etc; not vain or boastful; unassuming, not extreme, humble, not forward..." The characters fit Kermit like a fat rat in a barrel of cheese. Proof?

--Upon the return of power forward Maurice Lucas: "It doesn't matter to me who starts. Whatever Coach Ramsay wants me to do, I'll do and be happy to do it. If I come off the bench, it won't affect me at all. I came off the bench with L.A. and Boston. If you hear me complain, I'll give you half of my paycheck," he said.

--After the Blazers 90-88 victory over Kansas City in which Kermit tapped in the winning basket at the buzzer: "It was just as much luck as it was anything. I remember I put my hand up and that's about all I remember. Anybody could have done it..."

--In Denver earlier this season Kermit shot the winning free throws to help Portland's 88-87 victory. "To be honest, Tom Owens actually was the one fouled, not me."

--Most recently, Kermit scored 27 points and gangstered 17 rebounds as Portland beat Cleveland 103-96. Afterwards he said, "Sometimes I shoot good, sometimes I don't. It even continues over to rebounding, sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. I'm insecure in my shooting. On the teams I've played on my role has been to rebound, pass and play defence."

--Before the Blazers 100-95 victory over Seattle, Coach Ramsey told Kermit that there was more pressure on him to score since Portland had only eight healthy players. Washington responded with 15 points, 15 rebounds and four blocked shots. "I don't want to hurt the team with my

shooting," he said after the game. "If I had missed a few, I would have stopped. I was just amazed." Convinced?

The 6'8 power forward was obtained by the Blazers along with Kevin Kunnert as compensation from San Diego for Bill Walton.

A degree holder from the playgrounds of Washington, D.C. and a 1969 graduate of Calvin Coolidge High School, Kermit learned the game in a city that produce standouts like Elgin Baylor, Dave Bing, Fatty Taylor, Austin Carr, Kenny Carr, Fast Eddie Jordan, Adrain Dantley, Duck Williams, and a host of others N.B.A. greats. At American University, which is also in the Nation's Capital, Kermit became one of the seven players in N.C.A.A. history to average 20 points and 20 rebounds a game.

The others were "Doctor J., (Massachusetts), Artis Gilmore, (Jacksonville), Bill Russell, (San Francisco), Elgin Baylor, (Seattle U.), Paul Silas, (Creighton), and Walter Dukes, (Seton Hall). Kermit was also American's All-Time leading rebounder with 1,478 and the school's third leading scorer with 1,467 points. The Los Angeles Lakers drafted Washington in the first round in 1973.

Washington's first three seasons in the N.B.A. were tough, averaging only 3.8, 4.5, and 3.4 points per contest. He played just 400 minutes, 949 minutes, and 492 minutes.

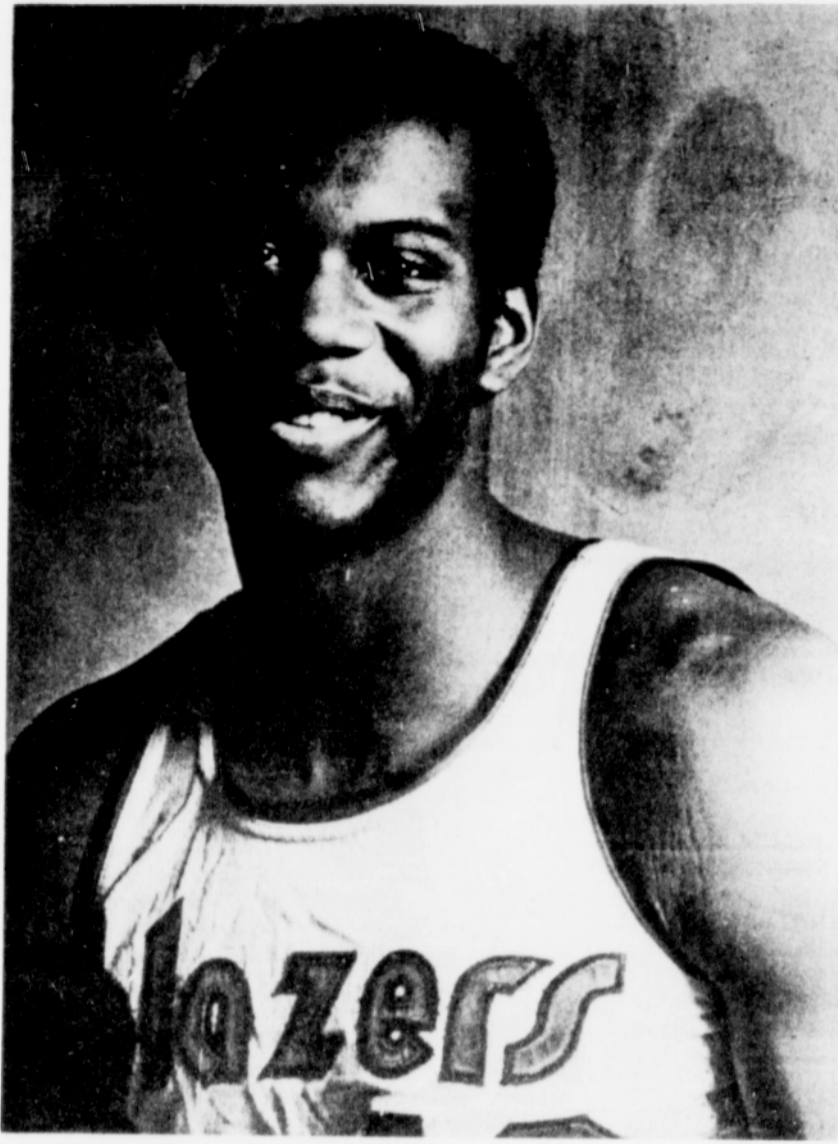
In 1976-1977, Kermit played 1,617 minutes, averaged 10.8 rebounds and 11.6 points per game, while playing for the Boston Celtics and the Los Angeles Lakers.

Last season Kermit was a defensive and rebounding specialist with the San Diego Clippers. He grabbed ten or more rebounds 41 times, led his team 26 times and pulled in 17 on three occasions.

Washington led the Clippers with 800 rebounds, 296 of those coming on the offensive end of the court which placed him fourth in the National Basketball Association.

He also averaged 11.3 points a game, shot .562 from the field (sixth in the N.B.A.), and played a total of 1,617 minutes.

With the Blazers Washington is averaging 10.2 points and ten rebounds per contest. He has led the team in rebounding 15 times this



KERMIT WASHINGTON

season, and is one of the key reasons why Portland leads the league in defence with a 94.5 average. Kermit blocks two shots a game. "I like his style," said Willie Smith, a former Trailblazer who is now with Cleveland. "He rebounds, block shots, dives for loose balls, and plays within his limitations. Kermit is a total team player and a scrapper."

Ron Brewer said, "I've been impressed with his game from day one. He plays so aggressively. And he takes so much pride in his game. You're never going to get less than he gives."

The biggest problem Kermit has faced this season is being away from his family. "It won't be possible for my family to move here, at least not this season," he said. "I'm going to

miss my family, that's the only thing that disturbs me."

By the N.B.A. allowing the fans to have a vote in who plays on the all-star team, Kermit is a sure bet to represent Portland this season. The "Blazermaniacs" love him and his contributions.

Washington was voted the "Trailblazer of the Month" recently and donated the \$500.00 check to Shriners Hospital to aid handicapped children.

When asked about Kermit's play, Coach Jack Ramsey said, "I have never seen a player who is as determined and consistent at the boards. He's a truly dedicated team player which is probably his greatest attribute. He is the special one."

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