

'DOCTOR J.' ERVING

Doctor J: The model athlete

by Ulysses Tucker, Jr.

Without a doubt, Julius Winfield Erving will go down as one of the greatest basketball players in National Basketball Association history and there are not many people who will argue that fact.

Blessed with divine guidance, Erving has achieved a level of basketball wizardry unimagined by mortal basketball players and he has received every honor with the exception of an NBA title even though he knocked on the door three times.

"Doctor J.," as he is affectionately known around the world since he knows how to operate on the court, has also found the time to give himself to organizations like the Lupus Foundation, Easter Seals, the United Negro College Fund, March of Dimes, and a host of others.

"He epitomizes the model professional athlete," says Billy Cunningham, the head basketball coach of the Philadelphia Seventy-Sixers and former NBA great himself. "I've known a great deal of players in this merry-go-round league but there has never been anyone like Julius. He is very intelligent, articulate, civic minded, a great leader, a fine human, and he has helped our younger players adjust to the life-style of pro basketball. He is great for the organization and for the game of basketball. I could go on and on about him. He is a statesman for the NBA."

How does a person who has been labeled as one of the all-time greats stay motivated for basketball?

"First of all, it is a tribute to be considered one of the greatest players ever to play the game of basketball and I must thank those people responsible like the owners, sportswriters, and promoters of the sport. I remain motivated because I think this is by far the best job in America and there is nothing else that I'd rather be doing at this point in my life. I enjoy meeting the variety of people that I do and many will help me after basketball. Basically, I guess you can say that I'm still preparing myself for life after I retire," said Erving.

"I also enjoy playing with the guys on this team," he continued. "We have been playing together for a few years now and we are very in tune to each other. Everyone on the team understands their role and each of us play it well. I think this club can be one of the best in the history of the organization if we keep playing at our present pace. Lastly, I stay motivated because I still have the dream of winning the NBA championship."

A soon-to-be five-time NBA All-Star team member, Erving, a native of New York City, just signed a multi-million dollar contract (three years) and he plans to play it out. He says that he is in better physical and spiritual shape than ever before in his career.

When questioned about his once

questionable knees, Erving said that they are no longer a problem as in the past and they are much stronger.

"Before each game I put heat on them and then I ice them down afterwards. It helps to have such a deep bench because I don't have to play a whole lot of minutes. The new rule that prohibits players from doubling up (on me) on the inside like the used to also saves wear and tear. It can get real physical in there sometimes," he smiled.

Since declaring hardship from the University of Massachusetts and being drafted by the Virginia Squires of the old ABA, Erving has tallied 21,635 points, grabbed 8,091 rebounds, dished out 3,718 assists, and the totals increase each night he appears on the court. He also has the second highest scoring average (20.8) in All-Star game history and he played on two ABA Championship teams with the New York Nets.

President of his own corporation called the "Erving Group, Inc.," the Doctor handles the majority of his business transactions and he stresses to the younger NBA athletes how they should learn how their money is working for them and where it is being used because many players go out of the league "broke."

What do you think of the new contract that the Columbia Broadcasting Company recently signed with the cable companies which allows kickback to the owners and not to the players?

"Our player representatives (Steve Mix and Lionel Hollins) are now being briefed on the situation and I'm sure we will know more about it after the Players Association meeting during the All-Star break in February. What probably will happen is that we will try to establish some type of fund for the players asking the owners to put a portion of the money into it. I really don't know that much now," he said.

How do you feel about the future of the NBA?

"Like all large corporations, it will continue to have its ups and downs. But I think the future of the NBA is a very bright one even though some critics may not think so. The league is doing some very positive things in the communities around the country and the players are being treated much better. True, there are a couple of franchises hurting economically and the attendance is down in some cities but with the emergence of these talented young superstars into the league, it will get better."

When asked about young athletes desiring to be like him, Erving only smiled and considered it a blessing and an honor.

"It's a nice feeling to know that people look up to me and respect me the way they do. I don't make any efforts to make them like me or want to be like me. That's why I believe it has something to do with spiritual significance. I really do."

Billy Ray: Trouble in Rip City for the milk baby

Grassroot News, N.W.—In Portland, the most highly publicized, most misunderstood basketball player is Billy Ray Bates. From the back hills and dirt roads of Mississippi Bates' abilities carved out a place for him in the National Basketball Association.

He recalls when he first picked up a basketball. "I was about five or six years old. My mother went out and bought us a basketball, a little rubber ball. I built a court and a goal. I gave the ball to my oldest brother because I wanted him to take the first shot. When I built the goal I left a nail out and when my brother took the first shot he busted the ball. Later, we played on dirt courts."

Does Bates believe that there's a difference in people from the North as compared with the South? "I think there is more prejudice down South. The main job is sharecropping, where you live and work on other people's land. You get half and they get half. For me to go down there and see that it is still happening today hurts me. I kinda want to get them out of that situation but they don't want to come up here because they aren't used to the West Coast."

Bates concedes that prejudice exists here in the Northwest as well, but it's hidden and more internal. "A lot of things that you think people care about, they really don't. One is Black people. It has always been that we were the underdog. It

won't change until we as a unit get together and do something positive."

He now has a perspective about his instant success in Portland. "When I first came here I was going to prove something to myself. I thought it was going to be my last chance to play or try out in the NBA. I had been cut from three teams, Houston, San Diego and Philadelphia. When I went to Maine to play in the Continental League I used to wonder if I was going to stay where I was or get into the NBA."

"I came to the Portland Trailblazers to give it my best shot. They built their offense around me because they needed a person to score and create something. They needed a flash, someone unique. I fitted right into that category. I came in and did a good job, and everything went my way."

"The next year I didn't start. My agent questioned that and asked me if I would like to stay in Portland. I did. There's a lot of politics in the NBA. You just never know what's going to happen. You live day by day. I could get cut tomorrow and traded. Maybe cut from that team and that would be the last story of Bill Ray Bates."

Within the last few months critics have popped up everywhere questioning the talents of Bates, claiming his playing abilities were in a slump. "I was really depressed. Things weren't going my way in '81. My playing time began to go down

from 15 to ten, five and two minutes. My close friends told me to talk to Jack Ramsey. That maybe it wasn't a personal thing. It wasn't. I wasn't doing the right things in the offense to benefit the team as a whole. I was working without the system. Now I've started working within the system and the coach has started to give me more time. Some said that I was in a slump but I just felt my playing time was limited." Bates feels that since the make-up of the team has changed the offense now is built for everybody.

The mass media in Portland has never bitten its tongue when it came to Billy Ray Bates. "The media here is tough. When you play good you seem to get good write-ups. But when you got them working against you they think that they can make you or break you. They made me and they tried to break me. But I ain't going to snap! If they make a decision on my life I'm sure that I won't cry or my bones won't break. I'll just go somewhere else and be happy."

"Some people in this town interfere in my personal life too much. I'm not as easy as they think. If I feel that I want to be with someone, or try to help them, I will. People feel at ease with me. When we exchange phone numbers and I happen to explain my situation to them the next thing I know is that it's all over town. I had no idea that Portland was so small a town. It seems like people can't hold it in, that they

have to tell somebody."

As a Portland Trailblazer, does Billy Ray Bates feel some people are more lenient, tolerant and more willing to shine on to him? "Yes, sometimes. It also depends on the people and the situation. My life here in Oregon is the best it has ever been. I've been able to help my family and myself. I'm not always a basketball player. When I'm out in public most people come up to me and talk basketball. I would rather talk about something else like business or life. Just something else."

Does Bates feel that Black athletes owe anything to the communities from which they came? "Yes. Black kids always approach me. My advice to them is don't revolve yourself around basketball. There are a lot of other professions. Doctors, dentists and businessmen to name just a few. Playing basketball in the NBA is a very frustrating business. And a lot of Black people don't come by it all the time. I would say to the community as a whole that whatever you become, be successful."

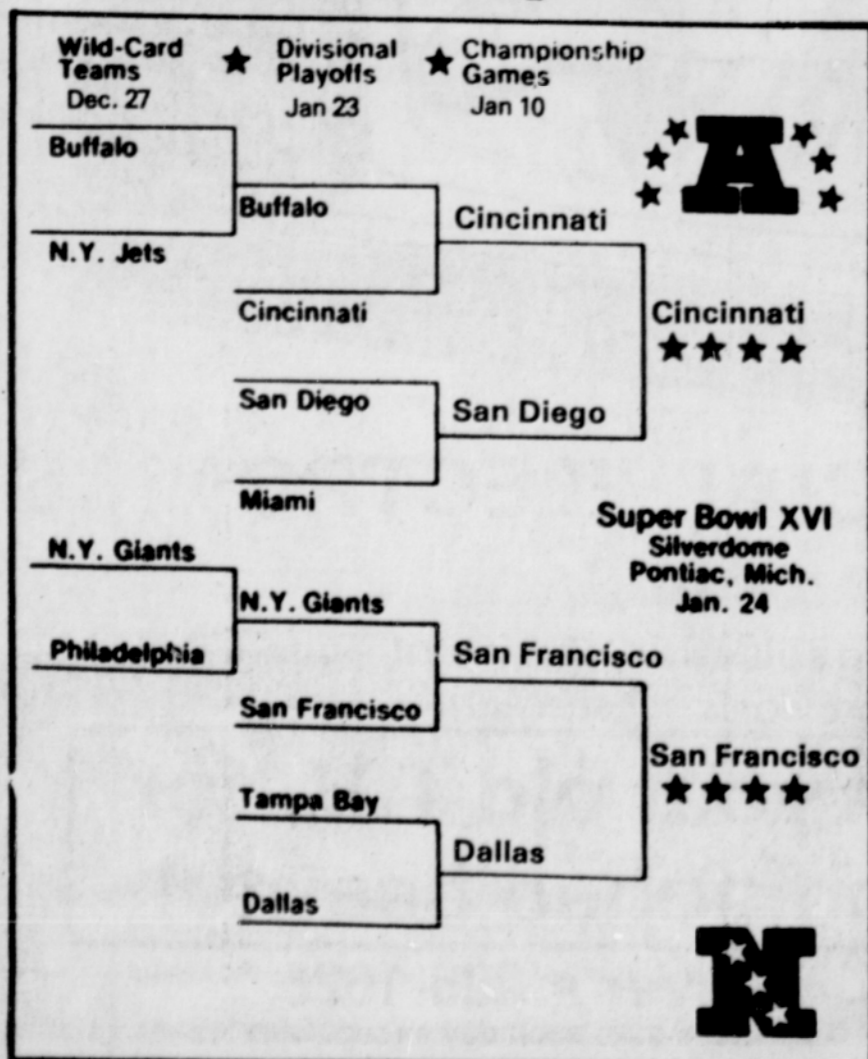
It was brought to our attention that Billy Ray Bates overslept during last Friday's game. Because of this various members of the press have unfairly criticized Bates for it. We feel that the fine that's been assessed is adequate compensation. As Bates concluded our interview, "Now is the time to think basketball. Basketball is now on my mind."



BILLY RAY BATES

(Photo by Richard J. Brown)

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Strangely, sharks must keep moving 24 hours a day or they die; if they ever rest without moving, their lungs fill with water and they drown.

Ten nations in the world have capital cities which have the same name as the country itself: Andorra, Guatemala, Kuwait, Luxemburg, Mexico, Monaco, Panama, San Marino, Singapore and the Vatican.

The nation of the Philippines is composed of more than 7,000 different islands.

The *New Yorker Magazine*, oddly enough, is printed in Chicago.

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