

Ramsay discusses Blazer prospects

by Joe White

The Portland Trailblazers played at times last season like a boat with leaks.

Holes kept popping up and the team had to work at patching many holes to prevent the vessel from capsizing.

Well, changes were made. Gone are Kelvin Ransey and Billy Ray Bates. In Ransey's place will be second year man Darnell Valentine with number one draft choice Lafayette "Fat" Lever as his backup.

The addition of rebounders Kenny Carr and Wayne Cooper has shored up the physical aspect of the team. Old dependable Jim Paxson, Mychal Thompson and Calvin Natt are all coming off good seasons.

With all these tangibles, head coach Jack Ramsay is ready to take the ship to sea again and battle. "I think we're going to have a better team than last year," Ramsay said. "We'll be a stronger team, a better rebounding team, a better defensive team."

Rebounding was one of those leaks last year. It may have been the largest one. The early season retirement of Kermit Washington left the team without the physical power forward. Kenny Carr has solved

that problem and adds a dimension that Washington didn't—an offensive threat. Ramsay said, "Kenny has a lot of dimensions to his game at big forward. Kenny has a lot of spread to his game offensively." Ramsay explained that Washington was, "a good defender and rebounder but his offensive game was limited."

Cooper will play alongside of Thompson at times but is mainly the backup center. The addition of both Carr and Cooper pleases Ramsay. "They've both done very well for us," Ramsay said. Both are good rebounders, both are physical. That's a quality we lacked very badly last year."

The Blazers chalked up 42 wins last season but hope that the improved defense will bring more. Thompson said his first team goal was to win 50 games and "progress significantly in the playoffs." Ramsay said, "I think we will score nearly as much but our opponents should score significantly less—and that I think will bring us more victories."

How many victories? Ramsay is unsure because, "It's too early. We're too young with many new players. It depends on how well the team develops, if we can win on the road."

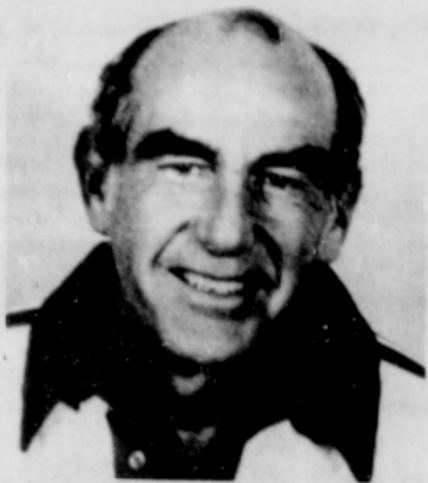
Six new players will open the 1982-83 season in Blazer uniforms. Of the three rookies, Lever and Audie Norris are "going to play some significant minutes for us," Ramsay said.

The other rookie is Linton Townes and he'll be situated at small forward alongside Jeff Judkins and behind Natt. The shooting ability of Towners and Judkins is what eventually led to the release of Michael Harper. Ramsay called Towners and Judkins "great shooters" and said, "We opted for the shooting quality."

New players worry Ramsay somewhat but the bench strength doesn't. "The bench will be better. We have good depth on this team," he said. "The biggest concern that I have is that we have so many new players and so many young players."

"Winning a lot of games," is what Carr expects to do. He said, "I'm going to go out and play." The main function of his play he agrees is rebounding and "That's what I plan on doing," he said.

Thompson wants to get all the way to the semifinals of the playoffs. "We can beat teams like Seattle and the Lakers," he said. "It's tough thinking about getting out of the Western Conference." If the



JACK RAMSAY

Blazers do get out of the Pacific Division, Thompson would like to "get to the semifinals and go from there."

Valentine will pester opposing guards all season long with his defense. Ramsay said, "Darnell is a good player. He goes at it 100 per cent all the time. He's an excellent defender." Ramsay said Valentine is a "much more capable defender than Kelvin Ransey was," and gives Ransey an overall edge in perimeter shooting only.

"I'm not sure how positive a factor that is for your ball handling guard," Ramsay said. "Your play-making guard should get the ball to

other people then shoot it."

Many people in the Portland and Corvallis area were upset when the Blazers drafted Lever instead of Lester Conner of Oregon State. Lever could change some minds with his ball handling. His assist to turnover ratio during preseason was 5 to 1 while Valentine's was 2 to 1. Ramsay said, "Fat sees the floor better (than Valentine)." He called Lever's ratio, "probably the best ratio that anybody is going to have in the league." Ramsay doesn't see Lever slacking off either. About Lever, Ramsay said, "He has great instincts for finding the open people

on the floor and makes the simple pass."

Valentine is still the lead guard but his understudy will play in every game according to Ramsay, averaging between 15 and 20 minutes a contest.

As far as the race in the Pacific Division goes, Ramsay sees the Blazers right in the middle of it. "We're in the thick. We're in the fight. I don't know just where but we're competitive with everybody."

Hopefully the momentum picked up during a 6-2 pre-season campaign will carry into the regular season.

Newman pushes auto safety

CARSON, CALIF.—Actor Paul Newman is making rare appearances on television and radio this fall to carry a safety message that

the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration feels will have a dramatic impact on American driving habits.

Newman has lent his support to the National Safety Belt Education Campaign in combating the declining use of belts by emphasizing his "second career" as a successful professional automobile racing driver.

The theme of the 30-second television and 60-second radio messages is "Belt Yourself," as developed by Nissan U.S.A., which is sponsoring the safety program along with local Datsun dealers, including Jim Fisher Datsun in Portland.

Newman, a two-time national sports car racing champion who currently drives a turbocharged Datsun 280ZX in competition, declares that race-car driving is actually safer than driving on the street "because the drivers are professionals and you know what to expect."

"Still I wouldn't dream of taking a lap without belting myself," he says. "And, when it comes to the real tricky part—the drive home—the very first thing I do is buckle-up."

The NHTSA estimates that only 11 per cent of the driving public uses safety belts.


"There is evidence that, if worn, belts could save as many as 15,000 lives each year," said Tetsuo Arakawa, president of Nissan U.S.A.



PAUL NEWMAN



Alberto Salazar, formerly of the University of Oregon, won his third consecutive New York City Marathon in 2:09.29. He outran Rodolfo Gomez of Mexico by 4 seconds. Salazar is pictured above at the Oregon Indoor Invitational.



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