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Sports Editor

SPORT TALK • SPORT TALK

NBA

I'm poolside at the Torrey Pines Inn, in sunny San Diego, California, gathering my thoughts to talk NBA basketball with you. In the last few days, I've discussed roundball at the Bing Crosby ProAm in Carmel, at the Forum in Los Angeles and on the golf course here at Torrey Pines. The consensus of these conversations has been crystal clear, Jack Ramsey and Stu Inman are not the gurus of hoop Oregonians believe them to be.

After L.A. beat the Blazers Tuesday night, Stu Inman said, "If I could think of a single word that describes the team and the coaches at this stage, it would be 'frustration'. I think the frustration level is so high that frustration breeds doubt."

Inman calls it frustration, but I call it emotional mutiny. Ramsey has created a situation that doesn't allow for consistency and his players are simply rebelling emotionally to what they can't physically or verbally.

The toughest circumstance for any professional athlete to endure is playing behind someone that he can out-play. The Trailblazers have three such players in that intolerable position — Clyde Drexler, Jerome Kersey and Steve Colter. The anxiety and turmoil that these guys are suffering through cannot be described by me. They must speak for themselves. Understandably, they can't, because that's a one-way ticket to Jack's doghouse.

After Portland's loss to Boston Sunday, Larry Bird wondered aloud, "How can a team with so much talent have the record that Portland has?" Coach K. C. Jones and Danny Ainge were in a wonder, too, as they echoed the same question. The answer is Jack Ramsey's system. Jack continually stresses his team's lack of consistency but overlooks his own. Here's an example of Ramsey inconsistent coaching:

Prior to the Boston game, Jerome Kersey had been used sparingly for approximately 8 games and suddenly he's in early and gets big minutes against the Celtics. His play was paramount in Portland's run at the Celtics, so Jack brought him back the next game for 25 minutes against the Lakers. Kersey responded to Ramsey's confidence by scoring 18 points and 4 rebounds in the L.A. game. We're talking consistency here, right? Against the last place team in the conference, Golden State, Kersey gets 9 minutes in a 20-point victory. Emotional mutiny makes sense to me. True, anyone can point to the problems, so I'm going a step further and offer my solution. Until Kenny Carr comes off the injured reserve list, here's my lineup: M. Thompson, Kersey, Bowie, Paxson and Drexler. When Carr returns it's Carr, Kersey, Thompson, Drexler and Paxson. That's right, no Valentine! I don't see enough imagination in Darnell's game plus he doesn't have a shot. Any guard coming out of college can give you Valentine's stats.

Anticipating your arguments, I'll explain why no Kiki, also. Who needs a forward starting that can't get a weak rebounding team any boards? He either can't or won't play defense because he's slow afoot. Vandeweghe needs picks and screens to score and the current Blazer team doesn't have enough players that are proficient at setting screens. This squad has open



Portland's Kiki Vandeweghe goes past Utah's Thurl Bailey for two of his 15 points. The Blazers finally had a chance to romp, and did, beating the Jazz, 126 to 106. (Photo: Dan Long)

court players that can create their own shots. Paxson's numbers are down this year for that same reason.

My team has speed, rebounding depth and scorers, not shooters. In half-court situations, Carr and Mychal know how to set those screens for Pax to hit that deadly jumper. They also know how to pick and roll to keep the defense on Paxson honest. My bench becomes stronger with Bowie, Kiki, Colter and Bernard Thompson. No, I didn't forget Valentine. Tell the truth, is this team bad or what?

"I still think this team will emerge somewhere down the line as a very good team," Inman said. "When this will happen I don't know. It will probably be next year sometime." Sounds like something we've heard before, doesn't it?

It's All-Star time in the NBA and you're going to see some of the top teams either move out or begin to slow down. Boston is one of the teams I expect to see slow down. Those three tough games against Portland, Detroit and Philadelphia have shown the wear and tear on Boston's starters and how weak their bench truly is. Parish was in trouble early and that let Moses do his thing for 38 points and 24 rebounds. In the '76ers' four previous games, Moses had averaged only 16 points per game. He had not had more than 15 rebounds in a game for a month. But with Parish playing only 26 minutes, Moses had time to work on his next Nike commercial. Larry Bird had averaged 38 points in his previous three games, but could only get off 15 shots against Philly.

Look for the Lakers to start coming back to the pack in the Pacific Conference, too. I was on the plane with the Lakers Wednesday morning when they departed PDX. They left their hotel at 6:30 a.m. and they were tired. I watched L.A. play Houston later that night in the Forum, realizing

the Blazer game was taking its toll. Tuesday night Kareem played 36 minutes, Cooper and Johnson 40 minutes, Worthy 31 minutes. Against the Rockets, Kareem logged 39 minutes, Magic 42, and Worthy played 46 minutes in their 116-113 loss.

I've been asked on numerous occasions to list my all-time NBA team in order to reveal my knowledge of the game. I agree that such a list does translate into insight, but it's still only an opinion. I'm going to list my all-time team, with explanations, primarily to make a point regarding Larry Bird. Here it is:

- Jerry West - guard
- Oscar Robertson - guard
- Wilt Chamberlain - center
- Elgin Baylor - forward
- Bob Pettit - forward
- Robertson and West can't be argued!
- Elgin Baylor was every sweet move you

NBA fans set sights on slam

When Dr. James Naismith issued his official 13 rules of basketball in 1892, he recommended a horizontal goal elevated 10 feet from the floor. He never intended the participants of his new game to reach the rim.

But taller athletes, like those in the upcoming Gatorade Slam-Dunk Championship, have greater athletic skills than Dr. Naismith could imagine. They are playing the game of professional basketball high above the rim. And their blend of strength, skill and savvy has set new and higher standards for those blessed with the talent and determination required to compete in the National Basketball Association.

A steady diet of turnaround jump shots and behind-the-back passes makes for good theater in the NBA. But it is the soaring, twisting slam dunk that rips the fans from their seats and brings down the house.

"The slam dunk is a pace setter. It gets the team fired up as much as it does the fans," said Chicago Bulls star forward Orlando Woolridge. "And we all know how important emotion and momentum are in the game of basketball."

For the second year fans will feast on some of these gravity-defying slam dunks as the NBA salutes its sultans of slam who earn their daily bread above the rim. On Saturday, Feb. 9, the day before the NBA All-Star Game in Indianapolis, eight of the league's most powerful and stylish dunkers will take to the air in the second Gatorade Slam-Dunk Championship.

Leading the impressive list of NBA stars who hope to slam and jam their way to the crown are last year's champion, Larry Nance of the Phoenix Suns, and Julius "Dr. J." Erving, dunker extraordinaire and runner-up to Nance in 1984. The other participants selected by a panel of sportswriters and broadcasters are Woolridge and Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls, Charles Barkley of the Philadelphia 76ers, Clyde Drexler of the Portland Trailblazers, Darrell Griffith of the Utah Jazz, and Dominique Wilkins of the Atlanta Hawks. More than 18,000 fans are expected

see today with the stats to back him up. The controversy will surely start at the center position, especially from Bill Russell if he reads this. I think the best barometer of a truly great player is the changes he makes in the sport he plays. Can you name an athlete, in any sport, that created more rule changes than Wilt? If you can, write to me and I'll print it. For the sake of brevity I'll name just a few NBA rule changes that Wilt was responsible for. Three foul shots to make two was adopted to prevent players from killing the man. No inbound passes over the backboard, to prevent Wilt from jamming. No breaking the plane of the foul line on free throws, again to prevent his jamming from the line. The paint was widened to keep him out. If that's not enough, consider this: add the year he played with the Globetrotters and make him a career 50 percent foul shooter and Kareem would never have caught his scoring records. Yes, Russell won championships. However, he was never a scoring threat nor did he change one rule. By the way, after Wilt retired, the NBA decided to drop the rule for three chances from the foul line.

Where's Dr. J, right? Doc didn't make my team because he's never had a jump shot. Julius ruled the ABA because the league was short on big men and Doc penetrated the middle. Once in the NBA, where good big men protected the paint, Doc's scoring went down quick. With Wilt down low and Baylor twitching his head and driving, I can't use the Doctor. If you ever saw Bob Pettit play the game, you know he belongs opposite Baylor at the other forward spot. Pettit was twice the player Larry Bird is.

Bird is bad and there's no doubt about that fact. What I personally resent is the way the media tries to make him the grandest player in the history of the game. Many of these broadcasters and journalists know nothing of the NBA prior to 1960. All of the talk about Bird and his triple doubles is just hype for the league to sell a white player in a sea of blackness. Check out the books. Oscar had a full season of triple doubles, playing guard. Baylor had a season where he placed in the top five of every major statistical category. Until he withstands the test of time, Bird is just another very good basketball player, car-

rying the biggest burden in life — potential.

When Pettit played for the St. Louis Hawks, St. Louis was as far west as the league went. Consequently, many of you Portland fans weren't privileged to see his game. The NBA was predominately white until the latter years of Pettit's career, thus it wasn't necessary for the media to blow his horn as loudly as they do bird's. I can still remember watching Pettit against the Celtics in the playoffs with a broken arm, playing in a cast and scoring 55 points. Want some more?

I'm going to really get bold now. I'm going to list the worst field goal shooters in NBA All-Star games (check out No. 10) and stick with my all-time team. Let me hear from you if you have a better squad. You know I'm openminded!

Worst field goal shooters in NBA All-Star games*

Player	Pct.	FG-A
1. Tom Heinsohn...	328	22-67
2. Bob Cousy...	329	52-158
3. George Mikan	350	28-80
4. Ed Macauley	381	40-104
5. Bill Sharman...	385	27-70
6. Vern Mikkelsen.	386	27-75
7. Lenny Wilkens.	400	30-75
8. Elvin Hayes...	403	52-129
9. Richie Guerin...	411	23-56
10. Bob Pettit...	420	81-193

*50-point minimum in All-Star games

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