

THE LOCKER ROOM

Magic simply won't go away

by Aaron Fantress

Last season a friend said to me, "Magic's been a wart on the butt of the NBA for too long. Somebody needs to remove him." Before last season ended it seemed that Magic Johnson and the Lakers had been removed as the top team in the Western Conference of the NBA. But as he's done so many times before, Magic has found a way to reappear.

In the Eastern Conference the torch has been passed several times. In the early eighties the Philadelphia 76ers ruled the east led by The Doctor. In the mid-eighties, Larry Bird and the Boston Celtics took over. In 1987 the Detroit Pistons, led by Isiah Thomas, became the Eastern Conference power winning back-to-back championships in 1988 and 1989. Now, Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls have knocked off the Pistons from the Eastern Conference throne. But in the west, Magic still reigns supreme.

From 1980 through 1989 the Lakers jaunted to the NBA championship series eight times. The two times the Lakers didn't make it to the championship, it was Houston who dethroned them. The second time Houston knocked off the Lakers, in 1986, it echoed all across the league that the Laker dominance in the west was over. Houston was supposed to become the new western dynasty led by their twin towers, Akeem Olajuwon and Ralph Sampson. But the towers crumbled, while the Lakers rebounded from their short set-back and won back-to-back championships in 1987 and 1988.

All this is recent NBA history that any NBA fan can remember and understand. But what NBA fans can't understand, especially western fans, is why, and how,

Magic has found his way back again. Especially now.

When the Lakers bowed out of last years playoffs in the second round, losing to the Phoenix Suns 4-1, it seemed like the Lakers were really through, for real, gone, dismissed, the end. Sports Illustrated, ran an article declaring that one dynasty was giving way to the next dynasty. Yet the so called dynasty of Sun is currently setting, and sitting at home. While the Lakers play on.

When the Portland Trailblazers made their breakthrough to the NBA championship, beating the Suns a long the way but losing to the Pistons in the final, it looked like the Blazers were now the superior team in the west. This sentiment grew stronger and stronger as the Blazers proved their 1990 playoff surge was no fluke by attaining the NBA's best record in 1991 and securing home-court advantage throughout the playoffs. Surely the Blazers were going to the championship. They had added Danny Ainge and Walter Davis to the team. This was to be the Blazers year. But look who's back. Magic.

While the Blazers did add Ainge and Davis, the Lakers added Sam Perkins and Terry Teagle. Ainge has proven valuable for the Blazer while Davis sits the bench. Teagle is hot and cold for the Lakers, while Perkins has moved into the starting power-forward spot and has given the Lakers a fourth post-up threat. Something that is killing the Blazers in the playoffs.

But none of this was supposed to matter. Perkins, Teagle, who cared? The Lakers were old.

Ah, the cries of the desperate. While Portland fans wanted to believe the Lakers were old they forgot the facts. The Lakers oldest

starter was and is, Magic Johnson. Old maybe, MVP two years in a row, definitely. The fact that Blazer fans and the Portland media seemed to jump on the band wagon carrying a sign saying "The wicked Lakers are old," they were at the same time conceding that the Blazers were not better than the Lakers, but younger.

The Celtics dethroning of the Sixers, the Pistons beating the Celtics, the Bulls knocking off the Pistons. None of these passings of the torch had anything to do with age. One team simply caught up to another. The Blazers, nor any other team in the west for that matter, have caught up to Magic and the Lakers.

For Laker fans, such as I, it's a time to gloat a little, but most of all to appreciate the genius of Magic Johnson. The fact that he never dies, even when he's supposedly old to be breathing. The fact that no matter what new kid comes on to the block, there's no doubt who's territory the NBA is. He may not win another championship after this year, he may not even win it this year. But for him to lead his team back again after being declared dead is a reminder to all what Magic stands for. Winning.

For Blazer fans this season is no doubt most discouraging. After all the money spent on Blazer cable by adoring Blazer fans, the team still didn't win. But look on the bright side; the announcers pronounced Rick Adelman's name right, people in on the east coast now know there is another Portland other than the one in Main and Magic will have to retire sometime. Until then, a championship will be a tough trick to turn.

Writers note: If by any chance the Blazers come back and win the series, please dis-regard this article.

Spreading The Magic To Fans Everywhere

BY ULLYSSES TUCKER, JR.

There are thousands of Magic Johnson fans throughout the nation, many of whom will never receive the opportunity to meet him or see his no look passes, million dollar smile, or how he leads the Los Angeles Lakers to NBA Championships. Simply, put into perspective, Johnson has been to the eighties what Julius "Dr J." Erving and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was to the seventies. Michael Jordan, Patrick Ewing, David Robinson, Kevin Johnson, and Jerome Kersey will rule the current decade.

Fans love Johnson's showmanship, style, and grace on the basketball court. He has a way of touching them with his magic wand. One such fan, Rochelle Kirkland - Gantt, lives in Washington, D.C. She loves the basketball court that Magic plays on and everything about him, even the Kentucky Fried Chicken Hot Wings commercial. Two years ago, Kirkland - Gantt, complained to her finance (Hank Wages) about the high prices to attend Washington Bullet basketball games and even worse, she never got the chance to meet her hero Magic Johnson. All she wanted to do was shake his hand and get an autograph, like millions of others. In her mind, paying top dollar to see NBA superstars and not being able to meet them was an outrage. It bothered her a great deal.

Several weeks later, Kirkland-Gantt shared the same frustration with her cousin in Portland, Oregon, an NBA sportswriter without her knowledge. Laughing at her complaints and reinforcing to her that NBA players are constantly hounded by fans, Kirkland-Gantt's cousin invited her out to Oregon and promised a meeting with Magic Johnson. Two days later, she had a ticket in hand and approval from her job at the Environmental Protection Agency to take a few vacation days. Imagine, Magic Johnson (her hero) was just a cousin or telephone call away. Everything was set. A flight to PDX, tickets to Trail Blazer game against the Supersonics and Los Angeles Lakers. Psyched to the ultimate degree, embarked on a coast to coast journey only to learn that Johnson would not make the Portland road trip because of a hamstring injury. To say the least, Kirkland - Gantt was upset and wished that she would have stayed in the nations capital.

A trip in vain? Thanks to her cousin, Kirkland - Gantt was still able to meet and take photographs with all of the Lakers, Blazers, and Supersonics. She also received an autographed basketball from the Lakers and Blazers. Despite it all, nothing could ease the sting of not meeting Magic Johnson after such a long flight. Later during that season (1988-89), Magic agreed to appear on a television show produced by Kirkland - Gantt's cousin at KATU-TV 2. He worked at the station full time and free lanced as a sports writer. When told the story by Kirkland - Gantt's cousin, Magic could only smile and admire the impact he has on people. After the interview, Magic autographed a basketball and agreed to videotape a personal message to be sent along with the basketball and a copy of the television show (Sunday Northwest) he would be featured on.

Kirkland - Gantt couldn't get time off work last season to make the trip out to Portland and planning her wedding this summer (July 13) prevented a trip during these current NBA play-offs. Still, she lives the dream through her cousin, the sportswriter. Already this year, she has sent Magic Johnson a Los

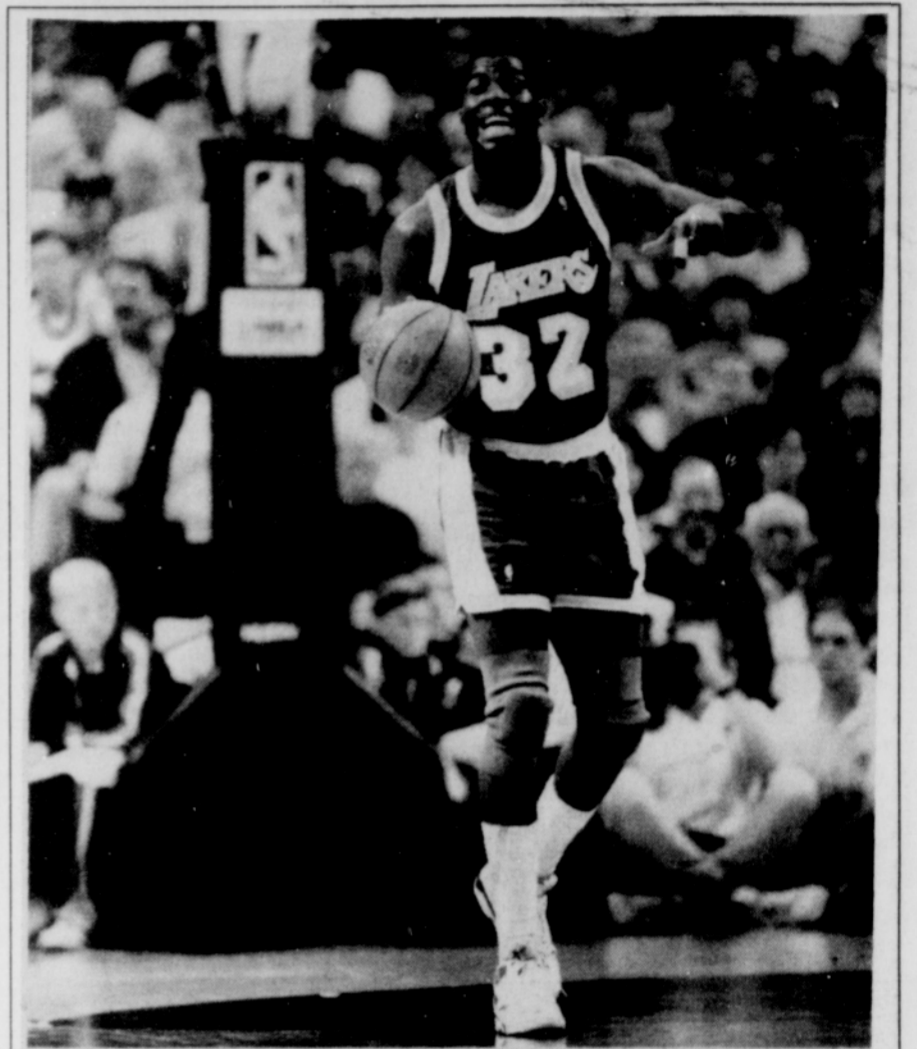
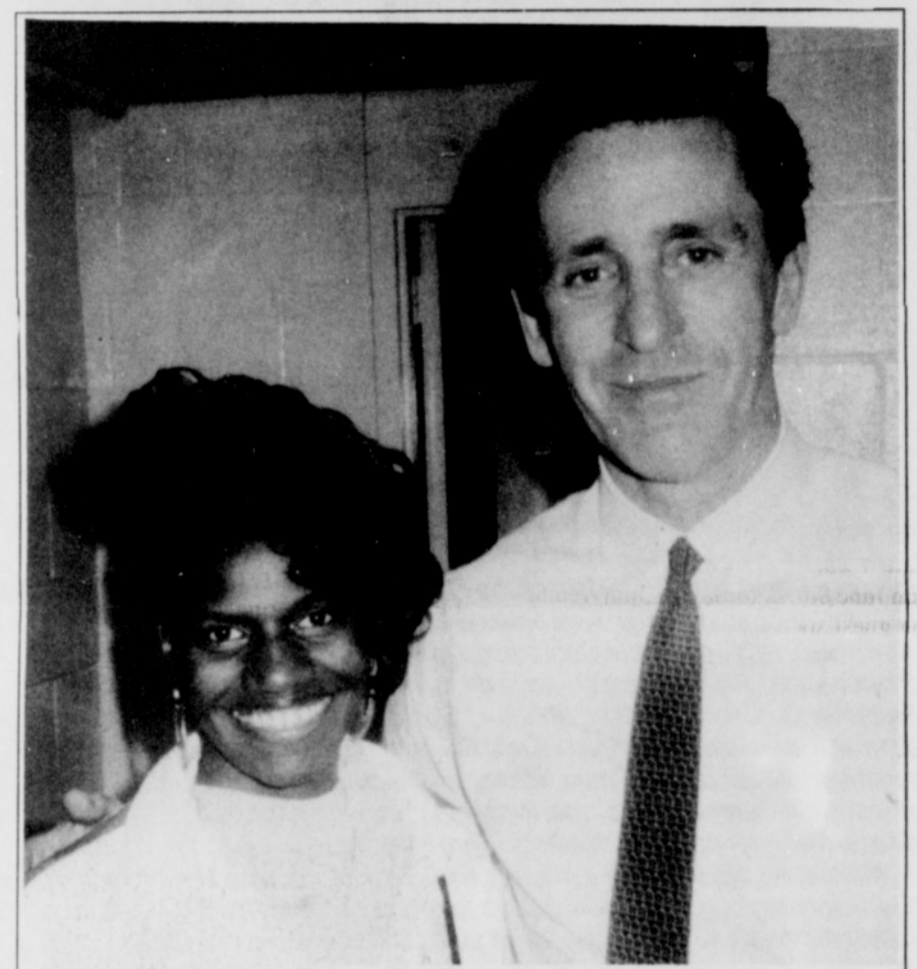


Photo By Veronica Green



Rochelle Kirkland-Gantt chats with former Los Angeles Laker head coach Pat Riley, soon to be coach of the New York Knicks during her visit to Portland in 1989.

Angeles Laker basketball cap with "Magic" imprinted on the side in rhinestones and a nice letter. He later mailed her an autographed action shot taken by noted photographer Veronica Green. Her cousin recently sent one of Johnson's tennis shoes he used during the first two games against (autographed) the Blazers. All season, she has harassed her cousin about the Magic surrounding their team this year. All Season long she criticized the Blazers about not having discipline in their offense, no half-court game, and being a bunch of crybabies. It was only appropriate that it came down to cousin versus cousin. Laker fan versus Blazer. Family versus family. It doesn't matter to her cousin that it looks (as of this writing) that he is going to have to wear a Los Angeles Laker tee-shirt back to Washington, D.C. this summer despite hating the Lakers and it doesn't really matter to her when she meets Magic Johnson. She knows that the dream is not far away and neither is the NBA Champi-

onship. She predicted back when Sam Perkins and Terry Teagle signed with the Lakers this summer. It doesn't matter to her cousin that he is going to lose a dinner bet and have to listen to all the chatter about the Los Angeles Lakers. What matters most to her cousin is that he loves her and cares for her very much. He's just happy to bring joy to her life. By the way, her cousin is Ulysses Tucker, Jr.

Crunch Time: No team has ever come back from a 3-0 or 3-1 deficit to win an NBA Final. Five teams have come back after being down 3-2: Syracuse in 1955, Boston in 1962, Boston in 1969, Washington in 1978 and the Lakers in 1988...What are the most important games to win in the best of 7 NBA Finals?

Other than the seventh (obviously), stats show it's games 1 or 3. Teams that have won games 1 or 3 have gone on to win 31 of 44 NBA Titles, a .705 percentage.

Local Community Tennis Camp is ready for business!

The third Annual Summer Tennis Camp at Irving Park is set and ready to go. This year's camp the PAL/USTA Summer Tennis Camp will start on June 17th and run through August 9th. The camp is for kids ages 7 to 16 and is for beginners, intermediate and advance players. Camp dates and times are: Monday thru Thursday - 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Registration forms will be delivered to local Elementary and Middle Schools on June 3rd. Kids may also register at Irving Park on June 15th during Park Clean-up and Tennis Carnival. This carnival is intended to provide kids and parents with a sampling of the camp's format and activities. Registration will continue throughout the summer for late applicants.

Irving Park Community Tennis Association

The next meeting of the newly formed IPCTA will be held on June 5th, 6:30 p.m. at the Augustana Lutheran Church at 2710 N.E. 14th. The IPCTA is an United States Tennis

Association - National Chartered Member formed to promote tennis and tennis related activities in the North/Northeast Portland communities. All meetings are open to the general public. We encourage you to attend.

Portland-Seattle Tennis Challenge Renewed

On June 15th at Irving Park and the Portland Tennis Center some of the Pacific Northwest best tennis players will gather to renew an old rivalry. Players from the Emerald City Tennis Association of Seattle will play members of the Irving Park Hitters and Ebony & Ivory Tennis Teams. Weather permitting play will commence at 2:00 p.m. at Irving Park and continue until 3:30 p.m. Matches will resume at the Portland Tennis Center at 4:00 p.m. and conclude at 8:00 p.m. This event is also open to the public to participate. If you are interested in playing contact Don Johnson at 281-4102; cost \$15.00 per person. Levels of competition will include "A,B, and C" with singles,

doubles, and mixed doubles categories.

Irving Park Clean-up & Tennis Carnival

On Saturday, June 15th two special events to help kick-off the Summer Recreational Programs and Tennis Camp will take place at Irving Park. Starting at 10:00 a.m. representatives from local neighborhood associations will join forces with the Irving Park Community Tennis Association, the Coalition of Black Men, Portland Park Bureau to perform a general walk-through and clean-up of Irving Park. The areas to be cleaned will be limited to the Irving Park Tennis Courts, the Wading Pool, Sand Box, Swings & Recreation Office. The clean-up is slated to last one hour. Food and refreshments will be provided by the IPCTA, Augustana Lutheran Church's youth program, and the coalition of Black Men. The Tennis Carnival will start at 11:00 a.m. and end at 1:30 p.m. Please attend.

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Portland Opera Presents Rodgers And Hammerstein's Unforgettable Carousel

In what has become its season-ending tradition, Portland Opera closes out its 26th season with Rodgers and Hammerstein's American musical classic-Carousel.

Carousel catches us up in the heart-rending relationship between Julie Jordan and Billy Beigelow and spins us toward a conclusion that sings with the conquering emotions of hope and forgiveness. From curtain to curtain, from the plaintive "If I Loved You" to the inspirational "You'll Never Walk Alone," Carousel whirls with dance and song certain to enshrine it in the memories of yet another generation.

With six performances sure to delight the entire family, including a special Father's Day Matinee: June 15, 16 (matinee), 19,20,21,22. All performances at 7:30PM, except the 2:00 Matinee. At the Civic Auditorium, Portland.

City Council Acts To Expand South Park Blocks Urban Renewal Area

Portland City Council authorized expansion of the South Park Blocks Urban Renewal Area by 27 acres, making possible the broadening of low-income housing goals under the Downtown Housing Preservation Program (DHPP).

The expansion area contains more than 1,000 single-room occupancy (SRO) units, which typically serve as low-income housing. Many are in deteriorating condition. DHPP's focus since it was established in 1988 has been to preserve low-income housing and makeup for past losses.

"Expansion of the South Parks Blocks Urban Renewal Area opens up a treasure trove of housing in need of

improvement that can and should be made available to needy Portland citizens. The DHPP has a proven track record with renovations such as the Henry Building and Golden West and all the partners in the program are poised to begin improvements in the expansion area," said PDC's Director of Housing Randall Mullen.

The Council's action, the first amendment to be made to the South Parks Blocks Urban renewal Plan, opens the way for DHPP efforts to save and rehabilitate low-income housing units in the expansion area.

Today's action also will allow improvement of the area's living, shop-

ping and working environment as well as redevelopment of underutilized land, said officials of the Portland Development Commission, the city's urban renewal, housing and economic development agency.

PDC will begin working on similar amendments to all other present central city urban renewal plans to allow for housing activities modeled after DHPP. The agency will consider including such activities in any future urban renewal plans as well.

A total of 482 low-income housing units have been developed by DHPP to date in the Downtown Waterfront Urban Renewal district and there are plans to develop 800 more units over the next three years.

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