

SPORTS BRIEFS

Phil Jackson Agrees to Become Lakers Coach

The saga of Phil Jackson's return to the NBA is apparently coming to a close.

The New York Post is reporting that Lakers owner Jerry Buss has tentatively agreed with Jackson on a four-year deal worth just over \$6 million per season.

The Post said the deal will not be formally signed until Jackson returns from his vacation in Alaska. Jackson has a scheduled appearance with former New York Knicks teammate Bill Bradley in Los Angeles on Wednesday.

"We're not going to deny the fact that we've talked to Phil Jackson about coaching the Lakers next season," Los Angeles general manager Jerry West said in a prepared statement this afternoon. "With the success he's had in the NBA, he's definitely an attractive candidate. However, we're exploring several possibilities with different individuals and no decision has been made yet."

Peter Vecsey, who wrote the article in the Post, told ESPN Radio 1000 in Chicago this morning that Lakers stars Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant went to bat for the former coach of the six-time NBA champion Chicago Bulls.

Vecsey said that O'Neal indicated he might decide to exercise an opt-out clause in his contract and become a free agent, while Bryant added he might seek to join a different team when he becomes a free agent should Jackson not be the choice.

A source close to the Lakers told ESPN to expect a major announcement on Wednesday or Thursday.

With the Lakers, Jackson would be only the coach.

Surin Runs Season's Fastest 100

Canadian Bruny Surin ran the fastest 100 meters of the year Sunday at the Nuremberg Track Festival after Donovan Bailey failed to qualify for the final.

Surin won in 9.92 after breaking out of the blocks first and leading all the way.

"I thought I could run a fast time, but that's fast? I'm surprised," said Surin.

Bailey, the world record holder at 9.84 and 1996 Olympic gold medalist, was timed in 10.51 seconds and eliminated in a preliminary heat after finishing third.

Golf-Duval Burns Hand but Says Will Play in Open

David Duval, the world's number one ranked golfer, burned his right hand on a hot teapot and may miss a few practice rounds but aims to be ready to tee off Thursday in the U.S. Open, The New York Times reported.

The newspaper in a Saturday report said Duval sustained second-degree burns on his right thumb and forefinger Friday when he picked up a hot teapot at his Florida home.

"I certainly can't play for a couple of days," he said in a telephone interview, "but I've got to aim to be ready to play on Thursday."

Duval's agent Charley Moore said the golfer suffered a blister "the size of a dime" on his thumb and another blister on his forefinger.

"We got it treated right away, and the doctor said there would be no permanent damage," Moore added.

The four-day Open will be played at Pinehurst Resort and Country Club in Pinehurst, North Carolina.

Astros' Dierker Will Have Brain Surgery

Houston Astros manager Larry Dierker will have brain surgery to remove a blood vessel mass that caused his seizure during a game at the Astrodome.

Dierker, 52, will have the surgery Tuesday at Methodist Hospital, Astros general manager Gerry Hunsicker said Monday.

Dierker was taken there after he collapsed and shook violently during the eighth inning of Sunday's game against the San Diego Padres. Tests concluded there was no tumor, just the blood vessel mass, Hunsicker said.

"I talked with Larry this morning, and he was coherent and very positive and encouraged," Hunsicker said. "He was kind of joking around, but he said the last couple of days he had severe headaches and that was unusual for him."

Dierker told Hunsicker he didn't remember anything after the second inning of Sunday's game. Dierker didn't even recall Derek Bell's sixth-inning grand slam, which put the Astros ahead 4-1.

"Larry said he was sorry he missed the grand slam," Hunsicker said.

Hunsicker described Sunday's collapse as a grand mal seizure, a condition that can be associated with epilepsy.

It's uncertain how long Dierker will be away from the team. Matt Galante, Houston's bench coach, was appointed interim manager Sunday.

Late Eagle Lifts Tryba to Rain-Delayed St. Jude Title

Ted Tryba eagled the 16th hole and shot a 5-under-par 66 today to win the rain-delayed St. Jude Classic by two shots over Tim Herron and Tom Lehman.

Tryba pulled away from a cluster of contenders with his eagle on the 528-yard, par-5 hole. His second shot was a 4-iron from 234 yards that stopped about 8 feet from the hole. He then sank the putt to get to 19-under, where he finished for a four-round total of 265.

"This was a nice one to win," Tryba said. "To not back in, to shoot a 66 and go out and grab it. It feels great."

Herron, who started the day one stroke off the lead, birdied the 16th, then saw Tryba eagle the hole and knew his work was cut out.

"I knew I had to get maybe a little more aggressive," said Herron, who shot a 68.

It was Tryba's second career PGA Tour victory. His first was the 1995 Anheuser-Busch Golf Classic. He tied for second at this year's Nissan Open on the strength of a third-round 61 that included a bogey on the final hole.

Tryba injured his ribs in March while repairing an irrigation system at his home and missed three of the next four cuts. He finished 74th at last week's Memorial Tournament, but said the hot, humid weather in Memphis loosened the ribs, making it easier to swing freely.

SPORTS

Knicks Take Long, Strange Trip to NBA Finals

By CHRIS BERNUCCA
SPORTS TICKET

New Jersey - The buzzers sounded and Jeff Van Gundy ran onto the court. He found Allan Houston and the two shared a long hug, accomplishment and relief spreading wide smiles across their faces.

The New York Knicks were headed to the NBA Finals, ending a year-long trek that so many times had seemed impossible.

"A lot of things that we've been through this year have made us stronger," Houston said. "My mother always said what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

"I haven't seem him quite that happy before," center Chris Dudley said of his coach.

The journey had been a tough one, marked by questionable trades, debilitating injuries, public demotions and private meetings. Mistrust ran rampant among players and coaches, coaches and management, management and ownership.

On more than one occasion, the Knicks were no more than a shot or two from the end of their season. Now they have a shot at an NBA championship.

"It's all about results in this business," Van Gundy said. "When you get great results, I think everybody shares in it equally."

Although Van Gundy will not discuss it, his share is a bit more equal than others. By reaching the NBA Finals, he triggered an option in his contract

for \$3.5 million for next season. Not bad for a guy whose team was muddling along at .500 two months ago while his boss was secretly meeting with a prospective replacement.

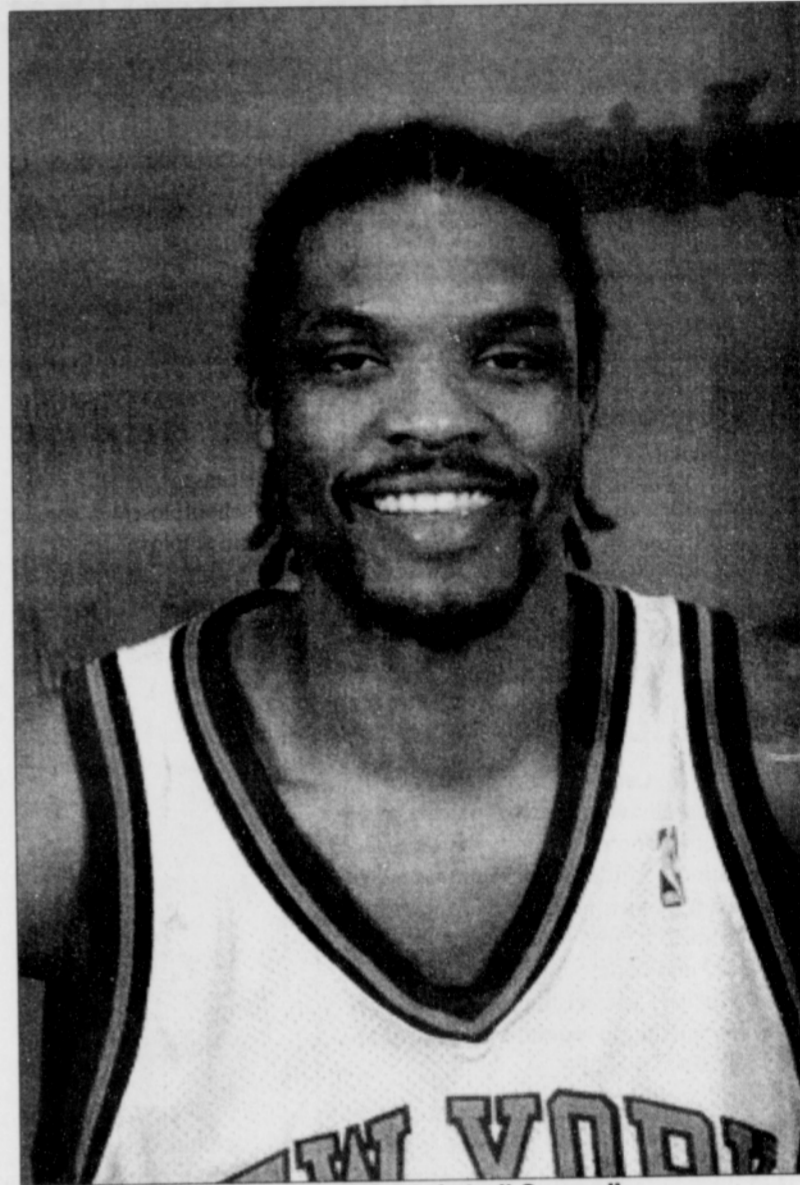
Perhaps his share should be more equal. It was Van Gundy who had to incorporate two new players that forced him to change his team's style. It was Van Gundy who had to find a way to compensate when key players went down with injuries. It was Van Gundy who had to face the media every day and explain the team's shortcomings. And as it always is in the NBA, it was Van Gundy whose job was on the line.

"They rallied around him," Madison Square Garden president Dave Checketts said. "It's one of the great stories ever in sports. That's how I feel about it."

"This is a team that came together in spite of adversity, injuries, difficulties, uncertainties and they clearly decided they wanted to win this series and played together like no team I've ever been around, and I've been in the league 15 years."

On Wednesday, the Knicks meet the San Antonio Spurs, who are hot, healthy and heavily favored to win the NBA title. Most observers feel that this is where the improbable run finally will end. In fact, there will be nearly 30,000 in the Alamodome and the only ones who think the visitors have a chance will be the 12 guys wearing orange and blue.

"You guys buried us, covered us, started shoveling dirt on us," Ewing said. "We still believe in ourselves."



New York Knicks, Latrell Sprewell

NBA Finals May Give San Antonio New Arena, New Identity

By KELLEY SHANNON
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SAN ANTONIO (AP) - Winning the NBA Finals would be more than a basketball triumph for the San Antonio Spurs.

It would mean long-sought national recognition for the city. It might even mean a new arena for the franchise.

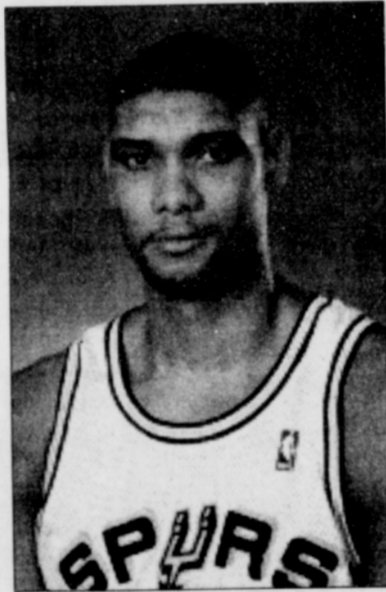
Players and coaches say they've got an opportunity to do something special for fans in a city often overlooked in the sports world.

"It's just a thrill to be able to give this to them. I couldn't be happier for them," said Spurs coach Gregg Popovich.

Home for the Spurs is the Alamodome, a football stadium where seats are plentiful and tickets

are cheap by league standards. Spurs executives would like to move into a smaller, more profitable facility as soon as possible.

Defeating the New York Knicks in the championship series ultimately could help the Spurs - the only major league sports team in town - gain support for a new taxpayer-funded arena.



San Antonio Spur, Tim Duncan

PEOPLE EXPOSED TO SECONDHAND SMOKE AT WORK ARE 34% MORE LIKELY TO GET LUNG CANCER.

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Multnomah County Tobacco Prevention Coalition