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Iverson Voted NBA's Most Valuable Player

Allen Iverson, who led the over-achieving Philadelphia 76ers to the best record in the East, was picked as the NBA's Most Valuable Player on Tuesday.

Iverson got 1,121 points to beat out San Antonio's Tim Duncan (706 points) and Los Angeles' Shaquille O'Neal, last year's winner, who had 578 points from the panel of sports-writers and broadcasters in the United States and Canada.

Iverson — at 6 feet the shortest player in NBA history to win the award as well as the lightest at 165 pounds — had 93 first-place votes out of a possible 124. Duncan had 18.

He is the first Sixer to win the award since Moses Malone in 1982-83, the last year Philadelphia won a championship. Wilt Chamberlain and Julius Erving also won the award for the Sixers.

Iverson led the league in scoring for the second time in three years, with an average of 31.1 points per game; was first in steals (2.51); and

tied for first in minutes (42.0).

He earned MVP honors in the All-Star game after his 25-point performance led the East back from a

21-point deficit, was NBA Player of the Month for January and was Player of the Week twice.

Iverson scored 40 or more points 17 times during the regular season, including a career-high 54 against Cleveland on Jan. 6. He matched that with a scintillating performance last week in Game 2 of the Eastern Conference semifinals against Toronto.

Last year, Iverson was the only player other than O'Neal to get an MVP vote from among 121 cast. O'Neal would've been the first unanimous MVP choice.

The award caps an amazing turnaround for Iverson, who was nearly traded last summer because of his contentious relationship with coach Larry Brown.

Iverson promised to change his ways before training camp opened and lived up to it, taking over as

team captain, playing unselfishly and becoming a leader on the court. He also overcame controversy surrounding the pending release

of his debut rap CD, which contains lyrics that NBA commissioner David Stern called "coarse, offensive and anti-social."



Allen Iverson earns the NBA's Most Valuable Player award.

Drexler May Move to Blazer Front Office

(AP) — Clyde Drexler said he might return to the Portland Trail Blazers next season as an assistant general manager or a part owner.

One of the most popular players in Blazer history, Drexler said he and owner Paul Allen have agreed that he will be back in some capacity.

"Paul Allen and I have talked,

and he has agreed he wants me involved, and I have agreed that I want to be involved," Drexler said.

Drexler, who did rule out coaching the Blazers, has long expressed interest in working in an NBA team's front office. It

appears now that the only hurdle to him joining the Blazers is finding a position.

"I haven't been offered anything, but we have agreed to do something," Drexler said. "What that will be defined as... hopefully we will find out in the coming month. I'm looking forward to being part of it, but it has to be a good offer, a good position."

General manager Bob Whitsitt, who signed a contract extension last June, has been assured by Allen that he will return next season in the same position. The Blazers' assistant general manager, Mark Warkentien, is said to be a candidate for the general manager position with the Den-

ver Nuggets.

Drexler, who turns 39 in June, has not had a good relationship with Whitsitt.

Drexler was critical of Whitsitt after Whitsitt fired many front office personnel when he was hired in 1994. Seven months later, Whitsitt granted Drexler's request to be traded, sending him to Houston.

Drexler was the Blazers' first-round draft pick in 1983 and is the team's leader in most offensive categories.

The team retired his jersey in March.



Clyde Drexler

New Football League Folds After One Season

NEW YORK (AP) — X-it, stage left.

The XFL folded Thursday after one season that was a critical and TV ratings disappointment for the football league founded by the World Wrestling Federation and jointly owned by NBC.

The WWF said its share of after-tax losses will be about \$35 million. NBC's loss should be similar.

"Despite where our heart was, we just couldn't make it work from a financial standpoint," WWF chairman Vince McMahon said. "We tried to figure out every conceivable way to make this work."

Even with many adjustments during the season, very little worked for the XFL between the much-hyped and well-rated season opener and the April 21 championship game, which was watched by about 75 percent fewer people than the debut on NBC.

The final game's national rating — the championship game between the Los Angeles Xtreme and the San Francisco Demons — was a 2.1.

tying for 93rd place among prime-time shows that week and lower than anything else on the four major networks. Each rating point rep-



World Wrestling Federation's Vince McMahon gives up on new XFL.

resents a little more than 1 million TV homes.

"It was a risk we all thought was a smart one in this wildly escalating TV rights scene," said NBC Sports chairman Dick Ebersol, who had hoped to provide his network with football after it lost its NFL rights contract after the 1997 season.

NBC hoped to parlay McMahon's promotional skills to draw the young male viewers that advertisers crave and air games on Saturdays, which generally have poor TV ratings.

In the end, the XFL lasted two years fewer than another outdoor spring football league — the USFL, which started airing on ABC in 1983 and folded after three seasons.

Early games had lascivious cheerleader shots, anti-NFL bluster from WWF types, sophomoric double entendres and screaming announcers — including Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, a former WWF wrestler — who sounded more like skills than analysts.

J.K. McKay, general manager of the first and only XFL cham-

pion Los Angeles Xtreme, said the demise came as a surprise, especially since the league held meetings just a week ago in Connecticut.

"I feel very badly," McKay said. "It's been a lot of fun. We took a lot of heat in the media. We tried to put a good product on the field and allow people to come to football games who never could have afforded to."

Although the quality of the football might have improved during the season, it was telling that the league's MVP, Tommy Maddox, threw more than twice as many interceptions as touchdowns during a brief NFL career.

The XFL did give fans impressive access to the game, including cameras in huddles and microphones in helmets.

"In terms of the innovations that NBC and WWF brought to the game — I would suggest that you will see those in the NFL," McMahon said. "Our whole imprimatur was to bring the game closer to the fan."



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