

# SPORTS

## Hopes High for NBA Draft Thursday

(AP) — Everyone wants LeBron James, the projected No. 1 pick in the NBA draft. There's only one team and city that desperately need him.

And that's Cleveland, just a 40-minute drive from his Akron home.

"The last time LeBron was here, we had a 1 1/2-hour waiting list," said waitress Cindy Grindstaff, crossing her fingers before carrying away a tray of drinks at a steak house across the street from Gund Arena.

"We need LeBron," she said.

This week, almost everyone in Cleveland is saying or thinking the same thing.

On Thursday, the Cavaliers and Denver Nuggets - who tied for the league's worst record - will have the most chances (225 of 1,000) in the NBA draft lottery, where the top prize this year is the right to draft James, the hyped high school hoops star from nearby Akron.

Any of the 13 teams in this year's lottery would love to have James, the 18-year-old who probably would have been the No. 1 overall pick a year ago, too.

The Cavaliers covet him.

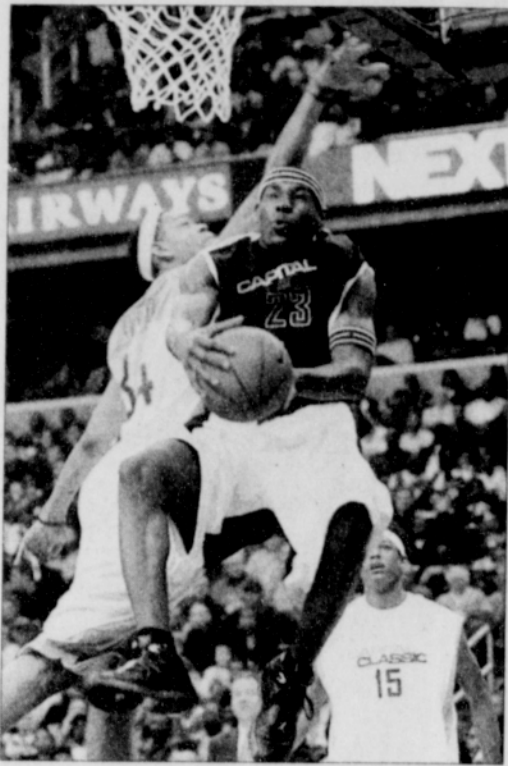
The 6-foot-8 James could immediately help Cleveland, possibly as the point guard they didn't have last season when they went 17-65.

James would help fill the Gund, which drew an average of just 11,497 fans this season - the league's lowest figure and a drop of nearly 4,000 per game from last season. The team won't disclose its season ticket base, but it has dropped significantly in recent years.

The hometown kid would bring the franchise some much-needed national attention.

The Cavaliers have not played on network TV in three years, and the exposure, plus having James, could help the club sign free agents who have been turned off by the city's rough winters and the team's rougher records the past few years.

James, who will soon sign a multimillion dollar en-



LeBron James soars under the basket. The high school senior is expected to be the No. 1 pick in Thursday's NBA draft. (AP photo)

dorsement deal with Nike, Adidas or Reebok, also could provide a shot in the arm for Cleveland's economy.

David Gilbert, president of the Greater Cleveland Sports Commission, which works to attract major sports events to the city, said James' influence on the business vitality might be difficult to quantify.

## Dallas Keeps Finding Ways to Win

### Mavericks take early lead in Western finals

(AP) — The Dallas Mavericks missed their first free throw and made their final 49. Yep, 49 in a row.

That superb free throw shooting - along with a few defensive gimmicks from Don Nelson's book of tricks - was how the Mavericks pulled off a stunning comeback and beat the San Antonio Spurs 113-110 Monday night in Game 1 of the Western Conference finals.

The Mavericks closed the game with a 24-9 run after falling behind by as many as 18 points and trailing nearly the entire game.

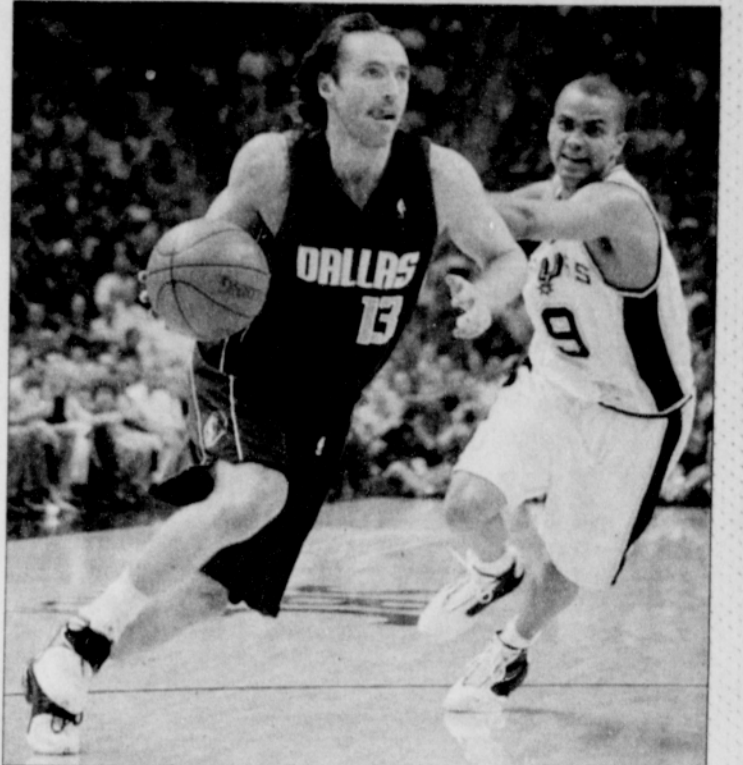
Dirk Nowitzki led Dallas with 38 points, going 17-for-17 from the line, and Michael Finley was 10-for-10 at the stripe while scoring 26. Nick Van Exel was 7-for-7 at the line for 14 points, and Steve Nash was 6-for-6 and scored 22.

NBA playoff history includes 10 games in which a team made all of its free throws, with the best of the bunch a 28-for-28 performance by Phoenix in 1989.

That makes what Dallas did even more impressive, given that they were 0-for-1 from the line after Eduardo Najera missed the first one with 2:25 left in the first quarter.

That was the same first quarter in which this game looked totally different from the way it ended. Tim Duncan was nearly unstoppable, Dallas was frustrated, and it looked as though the Spurs might turn it into a runaway.

The three-hour, one-minute



Dallas Mavericks guard Steve Nash drives the ball around San Antonio Spurs guard Tony Parker in the first half of game 1 of the Western Conference finals in San Antonio, Monday. Dallas won, 113-110. (AP photo)

game sure didn't turn out that way. Duncan immediately after he caught the inbounds pass.

After Dallas fell behind 101-87 with 8 1/2 minutes left, the Mavs made their comeback. Finley ended it by driving around his defender and scoring on a floater over Duncan for a 111-110 lead with 14 seconds left.

Duncan shot an airball from in close while being double-teamed, and Nowitzki made two free throws with 4 seconds left for a three-point lead.

The Mavericks wouldn't allow the Spurs to attempt a tying 3-pointer, choosing instead to foul

Duncan missed both free throws - a fitting ending on a night when he missed seven of 19 foul shots and the Spurs missed 17 of 48.

Duncan tied his career playoff-high with 40 points and had 15 rebounds, while Tony Parker had 18 points.

Bruce Bowen, the object of Nelson's Hack-a-Bruce strategy - added 13 points for the Spurs, who were outscored 30-19 in the fourth quarter. The referees called a total of 72 fouls - 36 on each team.

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## Cheeks Meets GM candidate

(AP) — Trail Blazers coach Maurice Cheeks has reportedly met with Boston Celtics general manager Chris Wallace to discuss the Blazers' GM opening.

According to The Oregonian, the two met in Los Angeles Monday night.

It is the first known interview conducted by the Blazers since Bob Whitsitt resigned as president and general manager on May 7.

Cheeks is not in charge of hiring a new GM, but he has been included in the decision making process.

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