

Blazers President Stays Focused

Larry Miller looks to the long term for a championship-winning business

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Recent setbacks for the city's only professional-sports team will not hamper Larry Miller, who was made president in June.

Reporting that ticket sales and sponsorships have increased significantly, Miller sees the Trail Blazers as a long-term project that has to make financial gains on a yearly basis.

"I don't want to talk wins and losses, because we're a young team," he says. "If the team goes out and plays hard every

night, but they don't necessarily win every night, I think people will feel good about that."

Miller understands the alienated position of many Portlanders, since he also fought his better judgment to remain a fan through the mid '90s, when the team's reputation sunk considerably.

"I was still a fan of the game, but I definitely struggled to stay connected with the team," says Miller, thinking back to the "Jail Blazer" years. "I felt like coming here now gives me an opportunity to be a part of getting

the team back to where people can feel good about the team."

The Blazers' moral fiber is a big deal for Miller in striving for Portlanders to feel better than ever about the team's status.

"We've got a group of players that represent the kind of character that I think the city is looking for, and that's going to get fans excited so that they reconnect," says Miller.

He considers the players' personalities to be much more important than their man power, saying, "the players are

going to be out in the community and doing what they can in terms of helping the community, but I think at the end of the day it's really about who they are as people."

Miller, who joined the Blazers after 10 years in Nike's basketball sector, comes to the game with an eye on profit margins.

He guarantees that his more than 200 employees are "managing the (basketball) business like a business, and really making sure we focus on the fact that it is a business, and we've got financial targets and responsibilities that we're working towards."

One of his first major decisions for the Blazers was to stick with Global Spectrum as

the company to manage the Rose Garden Arena to avoid another transition period that might re-open wounds from the bankruptcy and contentious layoffs that plagued the team in 2005.

Saying he has "the building blocks to get the team back to where it needs to be, to get people excited about the team again," he considers hype his number-one job.

"This year I think the major goal is to get the fans back excited again, get people back in the arena and to really get the city back excited about the team again, and I think we're getting there," he says.

He can't promise that this won't eventually result in lower-income people getting shut out

of games.

"We have taken some price increases, but we're trying to maintain prices as much as we possibly can," he says. "We'll still do a lot of the things that we've done in the past in terms of group sales and packages."

He responds to another sore point from fans who don't like Blazer games being carried on KXL, a radio station also owned by Blazers owner Paul Allen that is loaded with the commentaries of white conservatives.

Miller hopes that fans don't associate the opinions of the commentators with the team: "That there are people on the

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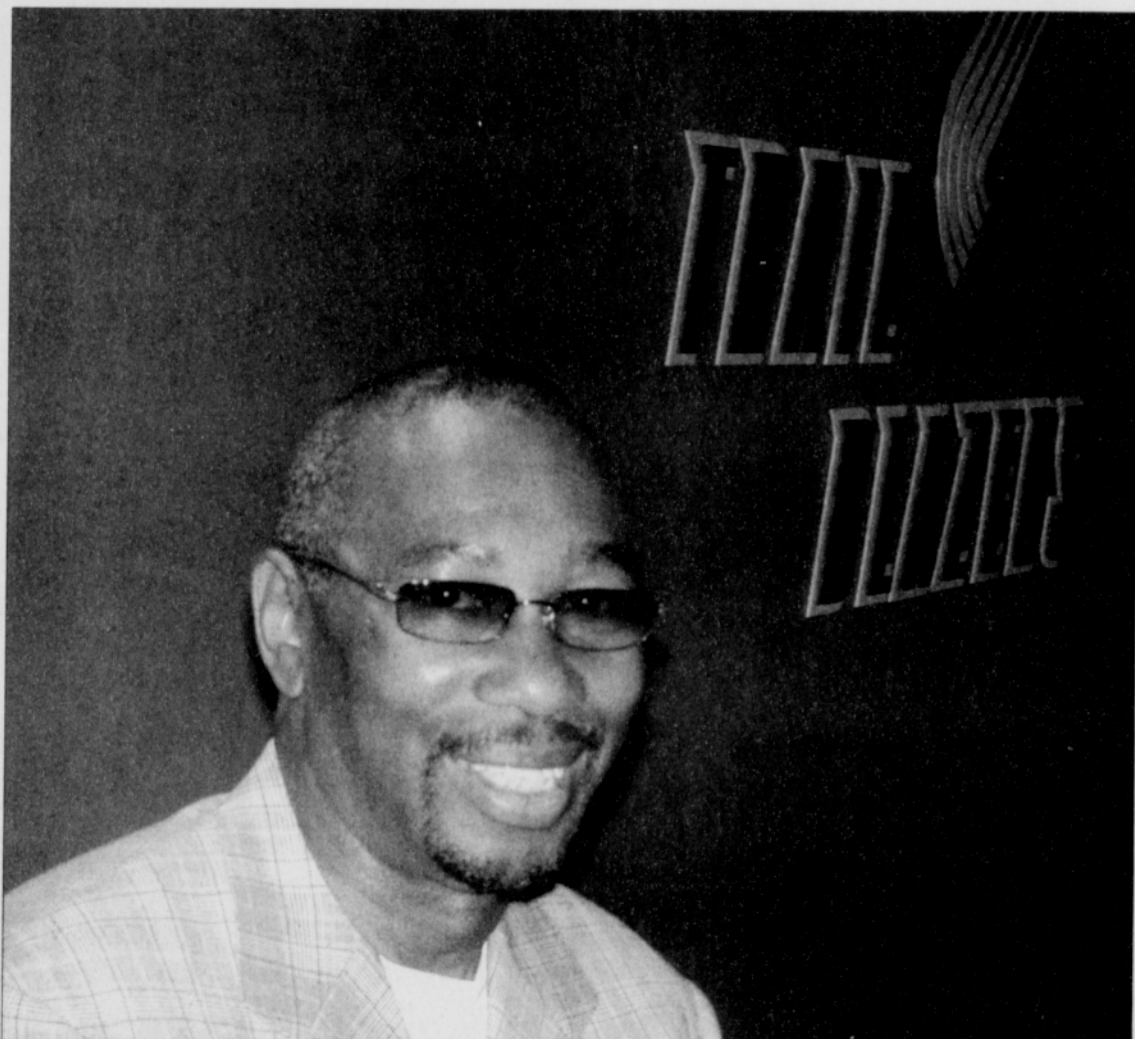


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Portland Trail Blazers President Larry Miller sees the building of a money-making, championship-winning team as a long process that involves intensive public relations.

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