

# SPORTS

## House Cleaning Opens New Era

### Blazers hire interim coach; bid farewell to McMillan

(AP)—Nate McMillan came to Portland in 2005 with a mission to rebuild the Trail Blazers into a Western Conference contender and repair the once-proud franchise's tattered image with its adoring fan base.

The dignity and respect have largely been restored, but the division titles and playoff successes have proven more difficult to come by. And with the losses getting uglier each time they hit the court, the Blazers brass felt it was time for McMillan to go and to start the process all over again.

McMillan was fired on Thursday as part of a massive overhaul by team owner Paul Allen and President Larry Miller that also included the release of former No. 1 overall draft pick Greg Oden and came one day after a 42-point drubbing in New York.

McMillan's firing means three-quarters of the nucleus that was supposed to lead the Blazers back to greatness is gone. With McMillan drawing up the plays for All-Star guard Brandon Roy and forward LaMarcus Aldridge, and with Oden getting acclimated to the league as a prized rookie, the Blazers won 54 games in 2008-09 and looked to be a team on the rise.

But Roy was forced to retire in December because of recurring knee problems and Oden saw yet another season go down the drain when he had his third microfracture knee surgery in February. The Blazers waived him on Thursday to make room for several players arriving via trades.

Assistant coach Kaleb Canales was made interim head coach, leaving Aldridge as the only franchise face left from that promising core.

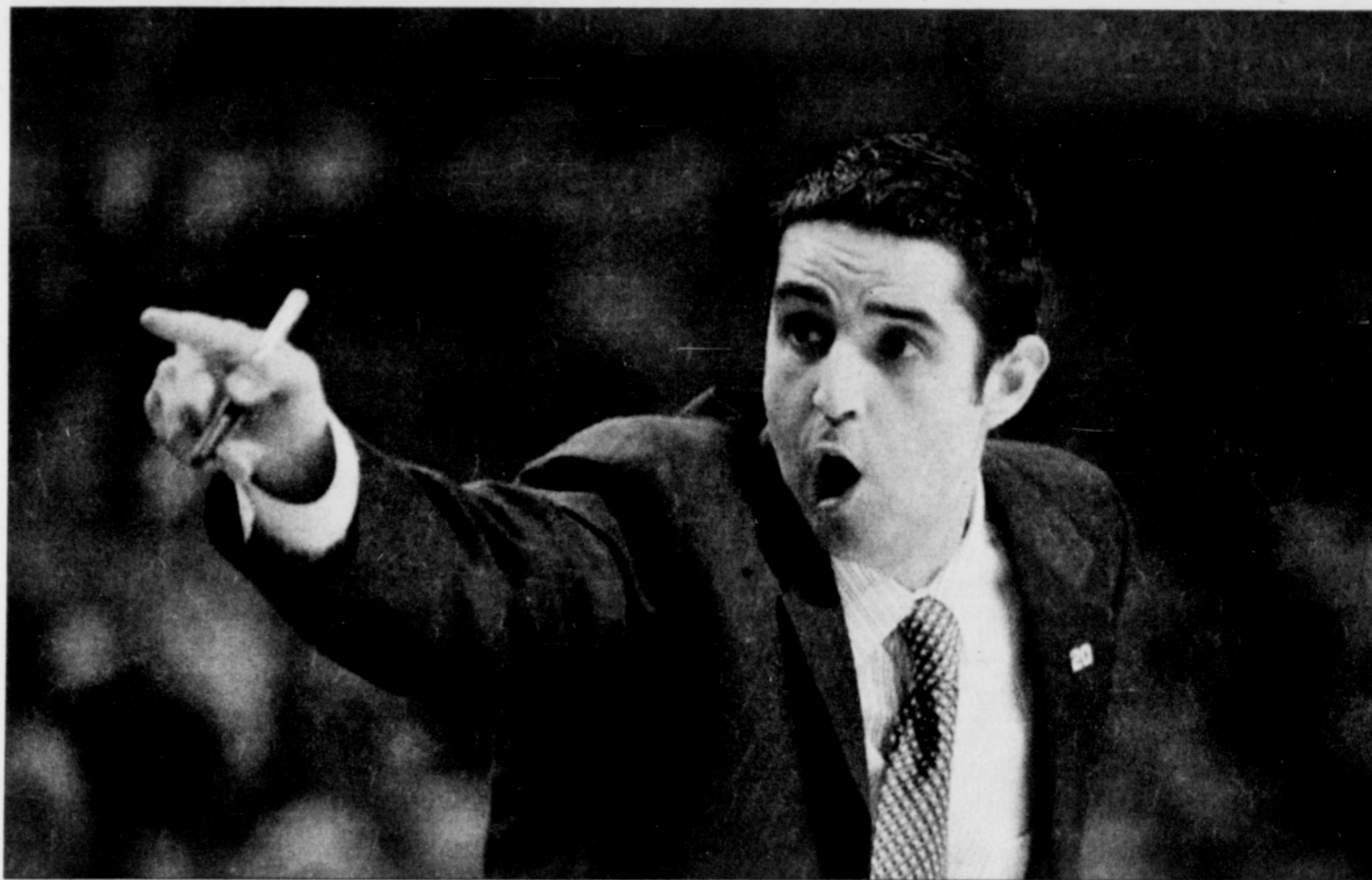
The Blazers also traded veteran center Marcus Camby to the Rockets for center Hasheem Thabeet and point guard Jonny Flynn and versatile forward Gerald Wallace to the Nets for center Mehmet Okur and forward Shawne Williams.

McMillan went 266-269 in over six seasons as coach of the Blazers and led them to the playoffs the previous three seasons.

But the Blazers failed to make it out of the first round in each of those trips to the postseason, and the warning signs started to pop up pretty early that this season was going to be rough.

General manager Rich Cho was abruptly fired in late May, just weeks before the NBA draft. Once the lockout was lifted in December, Roy, the heart and soul of the team, retired after the Blazers used the amnesty clause on his contract, Aldridge was slowed in camp by a heart condition and Oden was on the operating table again in February.

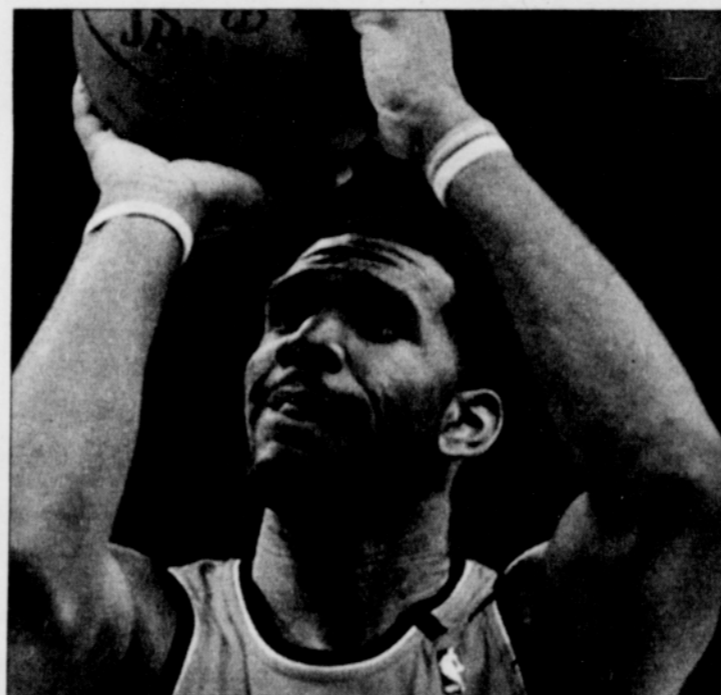
The chemistry in the locker



Kaleb Canales calls for a sub in his first game as interim head coach for the Trail Blazers against the Chicago Bulls, Friday in Chicago. The Blazers won, 100-89.



Former Blazers Coach Nate McMillan came to Portland in 2005.



The Blazers waive Greg Oden, a former #1 draft pick whose NBA career has been cut short by injuries.

room, and on the court, seemed to disintegrate as well. Aldridge made the All-Star team after quickly recovering from his heart ailment, but point guard Raymond Felton has bounced in and out of the starting lineup, shooting guard Jamal Crawford

has openly complained about the way he has been utilized and the competitiveness has vanished.

McMillan leaves with the third-most victories in Blazers history, behind Jack Ramsay and Rick Adelman. He is just the second

coach in NBA history to improve a team by at least nine wins or more in three straight seasons and helped instill a new culture of accountability for a team that was plagued by malcontents like Darius Miles and Zach Randolph before he arrived.

The 34-year-old Canales has been with the Blazers since 2004, starting as a video intern and being promoted to video coordinator before being named assistant coach in 2008.

Miller said the search for a permanent coach and general manager would begin after the season.

"(Canales) has great connection with our player, he has great enthusiasm for the game, and we just thought that to give someone like Caleb the opportunity to finish out the season for us was the right thing to do."

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