

Out of Bounds

What will save the NBA?

JASON SNYDER

Only weeks ago, I vowed to turn my back on the greed and arrogance of the NBA players. Many people did. The critics were more skeptical, the fans felt betrayed. And even though the critics continue to run their mouths about how the NBA will never be the same, the fans are beginning to prove that any true lover of basketball can't turn their head away from the new look the NBA is sporting. The league is changing, players are moving, and there are actually teams besides the Bulls that have a shot at a ring.

This whole NBA makeover began with the retirement of the man that for so long was the savior of the league. With the conclusion of Michael Jordan's career, people began to whisper that it is blessing in disguise for the NBA. Now of course that won't help the television ratings, it won't help the attention the NBA will receive, and it for sure won't help the Chicago Bulls. But it will help in leaving the fans unsure of themselves as to who is the team to beat.

Now don't get me wrong. I was probably the last person that wanted to see the Bulls dismantled and the great one leave his playground. But when people say "who will win the NBA championship," there will begin to be a question mark behind the answer as opposed to an emphatic exclamation point behind the Chicago Bulls' name. It's all up in the air, waiting to see which team will pick up the ball that the NBA and its players dropped.

Among the teams to beat are the Indiana Pacers, the New York Knicks and the Miami Heat from the Eastern Conference and the Houston Rockets, the Los Angeles Lakers and the Utah Jazz from the Western Conference.

The Indiana Pacers didn't waste any time in making sure that their roster stayed the same as last

season's that took the champion Bulls to a seventh game in the Eastern Conference Finals. The Pacers didn't have much business to do during this off-season besides the signing of their big man Rik Smits. The biggest move they made was the signing of free-agent Sam Perkins. Add him to Reggie Miller, Mark Jackson, Chris Mullin and the Davis duo (Antonio and Dale), the Pacers have to be the frontrunners to begin a new era in the NBA.

Once again the New York Knicks signed big names in the off-season, and once again it won't matter. Every year, New York goes out of its way to sign new players and every year, they find some way to blow their season with stupid antics in the playoffs. Just looking at the names, it would seem that they have half of the NBA All-Star team on their squad. The only problem is that their roster could also be the main event in a professional wrestling pay-per-view. As if Patrick Ewing, Marcus Camby, Chris Childs, Allan Houston, Larry Johnson and Dennis Scott weren't enough of a threat to the health of the league, the Knicks added Latrell Sprewell to the list. I just pray that he and Knicks' coach Jeff Van Gundy don't tangle. But maybe Van Gundy has added more than just his infamous leg-grabbing move to his arsenal. The "Knickerboxers" will live up to their name.

Well, I go from one team with a bad attitude, to another. The Miami Heat and Pat Riley can finally stop running their mouth about how they will knock off the Chicago Bulls. I got pretty tired hearing Alonzo Mourning brag about how good his team was. But not much has changed in Miami during the off-season besides Mourning's shaved head and his increasing attitude problem. Still, any Riley coached team has to be considered a contender. He wouldn't have it any other way. Tim Hardaway, Dan Majerle, P.J. Brown and Jamal Mashburn will once again join Mourning in '99. Newly acquired Clarence Weatherspoon and Terry Porter could also play a role in the overall success of the Heat.

It is a scary thought to imagine what will happen when the playoffs roll around and these three teams are all vying for supremacy in the Eastern Conference. Reggie Miller is notorious for sparking tension in big games and the Knicks and Heat are notorious for responding violently. If all my other predictions are wrong, you can be sure to take this one to the bank. There will be some fines handed out when June rolls around. The Bad Boys from Detroit could look like angels when this season is through.

The Western Conference looks to be playing the role of the good guys this season. And as usual, it is up in the air as to which team will reign out west.

The Houston Rockets made out the best in the dismantling of the Bulls, picking up Scottie Pippen and losing no big names for him. Hakeem Olajuwon and Charles Barkley will once again bring their talent and experience to the floor as Barkley is still trying to get a ring for his bare fingers. But besides these stars, the Rockets are pretty weak. Antoine Carr, Eddie Johnson, Matt Maloney, Brent Price and Matt Bullard will have to step it up if Houston has any chance at the championship. The Rockets with a championship this season would have three in the 1990s as opposed to the Bulls' six. Not bad considering they are the only other team besides the Pistons in 1990 to win a championship this decade. Believe it or not, Pippen could win his seventh championship in nine years to move him ahead of Jordan. I guess that would be enough for Pippen to leave the great one's shadow.

The L.A. Lakers are one signing away from being the frontrunner in the Western Conference. With word spreading around that Dennis Rodman could either sign with the Magic or the Lakers, there is hope in L.A. that their only weak spot in the line-up could be filled. With Rodman,

the Lakers would have the most physical inside game in the league. The young Lakers with Shaquille O'Neal, Eddie Jones, Robert Horry, Rick Fox and Travis Knight all provide a bright future for the Lakers. Throw into the mix "the next Michael Jordan", Kobe Bryant who might actually play in the starting line-up this season, and L.A. could win their first championship in 11 years.

The Utah Jazz and Karl Malone must have the worst timing. For two years, the Jazz have been favored to win in the west. They did that. Then they were forced to face arguably the best team in history. Well now that the Bulls are finished winning, the Jazz would be the favorites to win it all, right? Nope. The aging Jazz will now have to go through the younger teams like the Lakers that had good off-seasons. The Jazz lost Antoine Carr and didn't add anyone else to their line-up. The biggest news in Utah was Malone's impatience with management. But the Jazz still are legitimate contenders. John Stockton, Jeff Hornacek, Howard Easley, Bryon Russel and Greg Foster all are returning. Utah can only be thinking... "If Jordan would have left one year earlier..."

The NBA has a long road ahead in getting fans to regain interest. But the sport of basketball is too important and exciting to so many people for the game to be forgotten. I can't just walk away from a sport that has given me so much enjoyment through the years. And I don't think other fans will either. Sure, it will be a nuisance to give these players the pleasure of being watched and cheered for, but I look at it as us using them for our enjoyment; not them using us for theirs. When they look around and see the empty seats in their arenas, maybe they will begin to appreciate that without fans, they are nothing.

Snyder is the sports editor for the Beacon. Out of Bounds appears weekly on this page.

BEHREND BRIEFS

Nestor named AMCC Athlete of the Week

Penn State Behrend women's basketball player Carrie Nestor was named the Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference Athlete of the Week for the week of January 25 - February 1. Nestor is a graduate of McDowell High School in Erie, PA. She is the junior point guard for the 12-6 Lady Lions.

Nestor sparked the Lady Lions to a 2-0 week with wins over Washington and Jefferson College and LaRoche College. In the Lions' win over W & J, Nestor sparked the women with her hustle and all-around play on both ends of the floor. Nestor scored seven points, six rebounds, six assists and six steals to help Behrend's cause.

In the next game against LaRoche, Nestor scored 12 points on 5-8 shooting including pulling down seven rebounds, dishing off seven assists and finishing with five steals.

Nestor and the Lady Lions have won six straight and are 5-0 in the AMCC. Their next home game will be on February 10 at 6:00 p.m. against Pitt-Bradford.

All Sport Water Bottle Night holds big AMCC matchup

On February 4, the Penn State Behrend Lions will host a doubleheader against Pitt-Bradford. The Athletic Department will be having an All Sport Water Bottle Night where the first 100 fans in attendance will receive a free water bottle.

The last time the Lions faced Pitt-Bradford, the men were defeated for their lone loss in the AMCC, and the women came away with a victory. The men lost 77-61 while the women pulled out a 69-64 win.

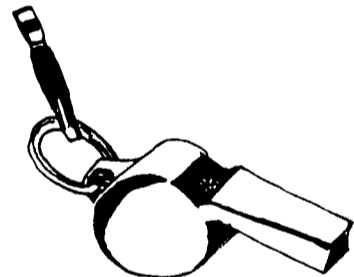
Fan participation is needed as the Lions hope to pull away in the AMCC standings.

Behrend's Buck moving up three point list

Tiffany Buck needs only one three-pointer to tie Becky Swartz for second on the all-time three-point list at Behrend. She trailed by one entering last night's AMCC game against Lake Erie College.

You Make The Call!

Do you think Lawrence Taylor belongs in the Pro Football Hall of Fame? Why or why not?



"Yes, because he doesn't have to be a priest to be in the Hall of Fame. The NFL only judges on football credentials and not moral standing. A more serious criminal offense, maybe, should keep him out."
Craig Hartle, 07, Pol Sci

"I don't think so. He was in a position to be a role model, and he didn't live up to his end of the bargain."
John Flick, 06, MIS

"Yes. The NFL doesn't have a good faith rule. On the field is how you are perceived, and he was one of the very best."
Shawn Roberta, 07, Ops Mgt

"Why not. He was a great player, and his personal life shouldn't have anything to do with it."
John Gatto, 08, Ops Mgt

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Housing and Food Service Athlete of the Week

Name: Brian Emick
Sport: Men's basketball
Position: Forward
Class: Senior
Date: January 25 - February 1

Brian Emick, a senior forward, has been named the Housing and Food Service Athlete of the Week. Emick has helped lead the Lions atop the AMCC with a 4-1 record and a 14-3 mark overall.

On Wednesday, Emick hit for four points and seven boards in limited action. Behrend romped Hilbert 71-41 on the road in Hamburg, N.Y. Emick clutched up and had a huge game in a key AMCC contest against LaRoche on Saturday. In front of a packed Erie Hall, Emick led the charge with 19 points on 6-10 from the field, 2-2 from three-point land and 5-8 from the charity stripe. He also pulled down a game high 15 rebounds which include eight from the offensive side.

On the year, Emick is averaging 7.3 ppg and leading the team in rebounding at 5.1. He also shoots 48% from the field and averaged two assists per game.

For his career, Emick has pulled down 458 rebounds which is 13th best all-time and scored 724 points. Emick is a graduate of Mercyhurst Preparatory High School.

INTRAMURAL ROUNDUP

Intramurals

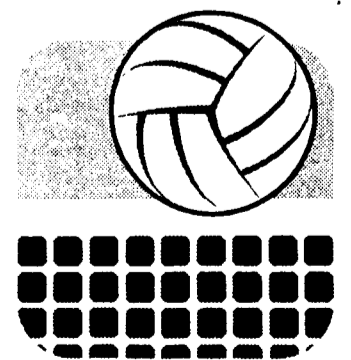
SPRING 1999

4 vs. 4 Coed Volleyball

Registration Deadline: February 19

Play starts on February 22

Season will last one week



Spring semester Intramural schedules are available in the IM office and on the Reed and Erie Hall IM boards.