

SPORTS REVIEW

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EDITOR & PUBLISHER
Ernest H. Pitt

PRODUCTION
Scarlett Simmons Cover
Kathy Lee
Charlotte Newman

STAFF WRITERS
Langston Wertz, Jr.
Derrick Mahone
Gregory Clay

MICHAEL JORDAN'S NUMBERS SHOULD SILENCE CRITICS

Where are all the critics now? The ones who said that this Grand Experiment, granted only because Michael Jordan was Michael Jordan, this gift opportunity for Air to play baseball, was going to fall on its face.

Kerplunk.

Well, Air has hit better than .300 for much of the season, even had a 13-game hitting streak playing Double A ball for the Birmingham Barons. As of this writing, May 9, he was going through a slump and his average had dipped to .261 (24 for 92), but Jordan is making hits.

Of his 24 hits, five are doubles and he has seven walks to help offset 29 strikeouts. In the outfield, he has 34 putouts, one assist and three errors. For a 31-year-old guy with a slightly bum left knee who haven't played baseball in 15 years that ain't bad.

"I saw him in a couple of minor-league games in Florida," Larry Schmittou, who oversees two minor-league teams in Nashville, the double A Express and the triple A Sounds told the Fort-Worth Star Telegram. "He couldn't even make contract against Double-A pitchers. He's come a long way in a month."

Jordan is showing no signs of giving up, even threatening to tarnish, if only slightly, his bigger-than-life image, his seeming ability to never fail. But maybe that's the beauty in all of this.

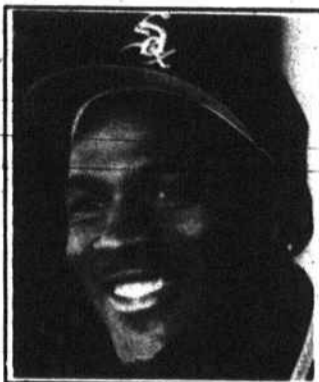
In basketball, Jordan was perfect. We couldn't imagine approaching his level of greatness. In baseball, Jordan is everyman. Talented, yes. But everyman anyway. He's got to learn the game. He messes up.

Michael Jeffery Jordan is, after all, human.

People relate.

Jordan is selling out ballparks wherever he goes, he's signing autographs, he's selling cleats and bubble-gum cards. At a time when baseball need a hero, some spotlight, here comes Mike, even though some major-leaguers resent that the bald headed menace has taken over their hallowed grounds.

"I don't know if more than 1 or 2 percent of those who saw Jordan play will come back," Schmittou said. "But I do know two things: Those who were here had a good time, and Jordan did something we've been unable to do for years, get black families into the ballpark. Baseball could spend a million promotion dollars trying to get minority families to the games and not have near the impact Jordan has had."



'Air' Jordan

Why Didn't THE NFL DRAFT CHARLIE WARD?

Draft Day Afternoon, a/k/a April 24 at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York City, came and went and Charlie Ward's name was not called by NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue.

Ward, the Heisman Trophy winner from Florida State, was rendered a non-factor by the NFL's talent scouts. Did the quarterback receive a raw deal? That burning issue has spurred much passionate debate the past few weeks.

I say Ward was a victim of the system, even though the NFL claims Ward's downfall was his two-sport resume.

"The NFL was pressuring Charlie to tell them something," said Eugene Parker, Ward's agent who also represents Deion Sanders. "They said we need a commitment from you."

"And Charlie said, 'Can you give me a commitment?' They obviously said no. Charlie said if you take me in the first round, I will play football. He asked, 'Can you commit to me?'"

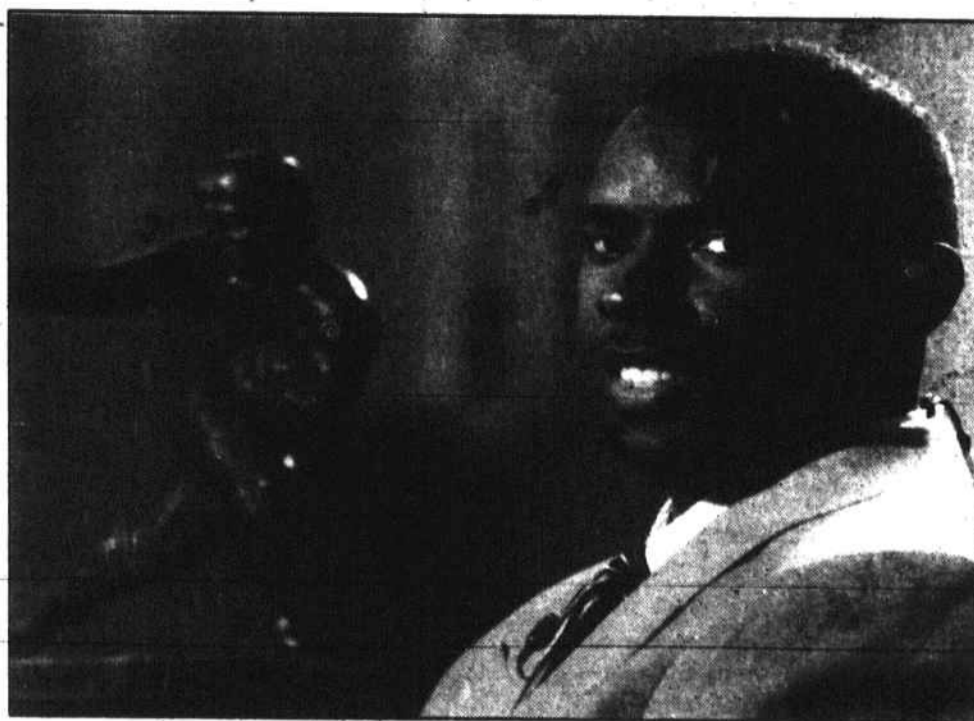
"He said if you don't take me in the first round, then I'm leaving my option open. It wasn't an ultimatum."

Ward's options were playing in the NFL, or the CFL, or the NBA, or a combination. But, you can essentially rule out the NFL at this point.

So that leaves the NBA and CFL. Ward has played in pre-draft all-star basketball camps, and was named MVP of one such camp in Charlotte during the weekend of the Final Four. Parker believes Ward will be taken in the second half of the first round.

Now, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers of the CFL hold his rights in that league. And with most of the CFL schedule being played during the late summer and early fall months, Ward may opt to play both leagues.

Charlie Ward's father, Charlie Ward Sr., who played football for Jake Gaither at Florida A&M, said:



Florida State University quarterback Charlie Ward.

"We are following Junior. Whatever he does, we are following him and backing him as a family.

"He has his degree in therapeutic recreation. So he can go to work like anybody else, just like the rest of us if he has to. If he's happy, we're happy."

The bottom line is this: The NFL apparently did not believe Ward worthy of being a No. 1 pick. His critics and detractors questioned his height and arm strength. NFL scouts list him at 5-11 3/4, I believe he's taller than that. I've seen Ward attired in a suit, and he wasn't wearing high-hill shoes, either. Is Ward the Incredible Shrinking Man?

He must be in the NFL's eyes.

But why not select Ward in the seventh round, if nothing else, to gain his rights for the future. You have to admit that many of the players selected in the seventh round won't make the league anyway. That counters the argument that the league draft is only seven rounds, so you can't "waste" a pick.

That's company hogwash. Some teams even "waste" a pick in the first round. Because their drafting and talent-evaluating ability is no better

than that of a 5-year-old. Did someone say the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who have been drafting in the top five-top 10 for the past decade (it only seems longer) but still wallow in mediocrity.

Some have put the blame on Ward for supposedly issuing the NFL an ultimatum with the first-round statement. I don't consider that an ultimatum. It's just good business. Ward obviously didn't want to be an afterthought in the draft, as so many black quarterbacks have been. He was saying essentially: I have stock; so take stock in me.

Ward Sr. indicated that he was not angry with the NFL, saying, "I was shocked and surprised that nobody would take a chance on the best quarterback in the land. The Wards are confident people. When you say we can't do something, we do it. We are people who like challenges."

Well, so far the NFL has proved - whether justly or not - that it's one challenge the Wards haven't been able to overcome.

— Gregory Clay

HILL TAKES JOB IN CANADIAN LEAGUE

Hampton assistant football coach Donald Hill, in the works of the old "Jeffersons" T.V. show, is moving on up.

Hill, who's served the past two years on coach Joe Taylor's staff was recently hired by the Canadian Football League's Baltimore Colts.

Prior to joining the Hampton staff, Hill spent two years at Virginia Union as a quarterbacks and receivers coach. The Suffolk, Va. native is a Union

graduate and finished his master's degree in counseling at Hampton in May.

Hill helped run the Colts tryout camp in Hampton and worked the club's open tryout in Baltimore. He officially joined the Colts on May 1.

As a college assistant, Hill helped the Pirates to a 39-8-1 record in four years. During the last two, Hampton was 21-3-1.

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