

Ford, Iverson ready to move on after early spat

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — After fining Allen Iverson for the second time in his short tenure as interim coach of the Philadelphia 76ers, Chris Ford said Monday the matter is closed and both parties are ready to move on.

Iverson did not attend the Sixers' 81-74 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Sunday because of a stomach ailment on top of the bruised shoulder that's been plaguing him.

Ford said Iverson will be docked for failing to contact him directly.

One of the first things Ford did after replacing the fired Randy Ayers on Feb. 9 was made it clear to players they must speak with him whenever a problem arises that could cause them to miss or be late for practice or the pregame shootaround.

One of Iverson's intermedi-

aries called a member of the Sixers medical staff, but not Ford.

Last month, Iverson was fined for missing the team's first post-All-Star Game practice in Denver, claiming his chartered flight out of Los Angeles was delayed.

Ford also benched Iverson

the first 7:21 of the Sixers' game with the Nuggets, infuriating the star guard, who vowed that any chance of them having a personal relationship was already finished.

But after meeting with Iverson prior to practice Monday, Ford said there will

be no additional repercussions.

"I spoke to him this morning and everything is all right," Ford said.

He expected Iverson, who has missed the last four games because of his shoulder, to return to the lineup Wednesday in New York.

Olympic anxiety running high for Athens venue organizers

By Steve Wilstein
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Olympic stadium and swimming pool remain roofless. Housing is unfinished. The marathon route is still not all paved.

Five months from opening ceremonies, the 2004 Athens Games are looking like a big, fat Greek mess.

Throw into the mix a possible government shake-up in next Sunday's national elections, the firebombs of Greek anti-Olympic activists and the threat of international terrorism, and it's no wonder anxiety is high.

These are an Olympics that ought to be majestic, a return to the roots of the games, surrounded by the beauty and history of Greece, and hosted by some of the world's most charming and convivial people. If anyone knows how to throw a party, not to mention a discuss, the Greeks do.

Instead, work stoppages, politics and procrastination threaten to turn the ancient home of the Olympics into a modern-day fiasco.

Athens has had seven years to get ready for the games. Now, 164 days before the opening ceremony on Aug. 13, so much remains to be done that it seems only the intervention of Zeus can help.

For all the urgent calls from the International Olympic Committee to step up the pace, a tour of Athens reveals no rush to finish.

IOC president Jacques Rogge is so worried that he told the Greek organizers on Saturday to forget the frills and to focus on the "core business."

If that means there won't be a glorious glass and steel roof on the main stadium as planned, Rogge doesn't care anymore. The missing roof

may hold Greece up to ridicule and hurt the country's self-esteem, but it won't stop the track and field competition.

The missing roof at the swimming venue is another story. That's where it will affect racing times, leave athletes and spectators roasting in the sun, and hurt television broadcasts.

The marathon course needs to be finished, as do the housing and the tram and light-rail lines.

"It's going to be challenging, but it is feasible," Rogge said of all the work to be done.

The IOC issued a strong warning to Athens organizers in 2000 after three years of chronic delays. Rogge said the situation improved markedly after the government increased its involvement and Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki took over the organizing committee.

"Very much has been achieved, much remains to be done," Rogge said. "There is still enough time to have excellent games, provided our Greek friends continue at a fast pace. I remain confident."

Rogge told Athens to concentrate on a few "vital" areas - ensuring safe games, good conditions for the athletes, smooth transportation, well-run venues and compelling television images.

"I am interested in the core delivery of the games," Rogge said. "If we have the stadium without the roof, but still functioning well, I am perfectly happy."

IOC member Kevan Gosper of Australia has been impressed with the progress the Greeks have made since his last visit six months ago.

"There is some nervousness because normally this

close to the games you would see the venues and infrastructure complete," Gosper told The Associated Press. "I think they'll get there, but there's no room for any disruption."

Disruption, though, is almost certainly guaranteed, whether from labor, politics or protests.

Much attention has been focused on security for these Summer Games, the first since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. U.S. athletes are being warned to prepare for a hostile reception in Athens, and more than half of Americans surveyed in a recent AP poll say they believe a terrorist attack is likely. Four out of 10 say American athletes are most likely to be the target of any such attack.

Security remains the highest priority, with more than \$800 million budgeted to protect athletes and fans. The main worries have been about international terrorists, yet last week's firebombing of two environment ministry trucks showed that dangers lurk within the country.

A group calling itself "Phevos and Athena" - the names of the Olympic mascots - said in a call to an Athens newspaper the attack was tied to the meetings of the IOC and the Association of National Olympic Committees.

"This is a welcome message to the members of the International Olympic Committee," the caller told the newspaper.

The attack was in the western suburb of Ilion, about six miles from the central Athens hotel where the Olympic meetings took place.

That surely added to the

anxiety surrounding these games, where expectations have been lowered to the point that everyone will feel relieved if they simply go on as scheduled with no violence and a minimum of problems.

If the Greeks push ahead down the stretch to complete the stadium roof, let's hope no one tries to save time by leaving out a few crucial rivets.

Steve Wilstein is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at swilstein@ap.org

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Mon. - Fri. 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. • Sat. 8 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

• Brake Job
Front \$35.00
Back \$45.00



• Oil Change - \$21.88

3401 Tuckaseegee Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
(704)393-1109

Ford's Busy Bee Mini Mart
505 Beatties Ford Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28216
(704)333-8448

1222 Central Ave.
Charlotte, NC 28204
(704)377-0870



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With experience and health, Bulls expect improvement next season

By Herbert L. White
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Johnson C. Smith's streak of NCAA tournament appearances ended at three, but the Golden Bulls are in position for a return next season.

Smith, which finished 16-13 after losing to Virginia Union in the CIAA tournament, overcame inexperience and injuries to finish third in the West Division. The lack of an experienced go-to player forced the Bulls to improvise, especially after losing shooting guard Vernon Benjamin to academics before preseason drills.

"Every coach looks for continuity from year to year, that's what I told the guys in the locker room" after the Virginia Union loss, Smith coach Steve Joyner said. "Don't hold your heads down; there are things we can take from this year."

The most promising of those youngsters was freshman point guard Jerome Givens, who was named to the all-rookie team. Although he was inconsistent at times, Givens flashed the potential to be one of the league's top guards.

"I thought the team had a youth problem we had to overcome with a freshman point guard," Joyner said. "I thought he grew up a lot this year and got some outstanding experience this year."

With Benjamin out, forwards John Fulton and Chris Clyburn developed quickly as scoring threats. Fulton led the Bulls in scoring and Clyburn, a junior from Charlotte, led Smith in three-point shooting. They had to grow up fast after a season as role players when injuries forced lineup changes.

"We had more injuries this year than we ever had in the last 15-16 years," Joyner said.



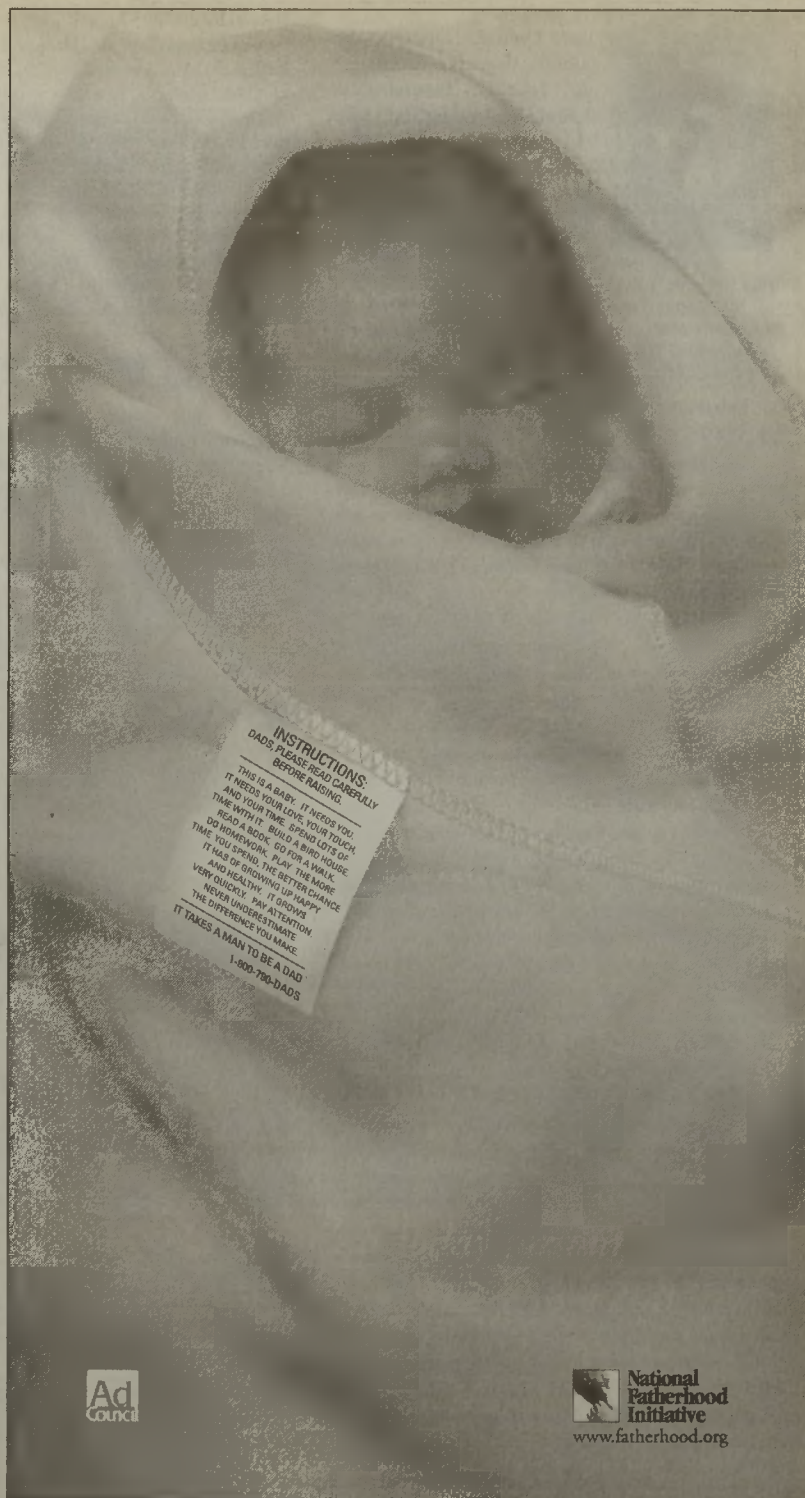
PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

John Fulton, who led Johnson C. Smith in scoring as a sophomore, should be a focal point for the Golden Bulls' 2004-05 season.

"I thought our guys did a good job of overcoming that, so there are a lot of positives.

Chemistry, which the Bulls didn't develop until the conference season was underway, should be better next season. With four of five starters returning and several redshirts expected to contribute immediately, Smith is poised to make a run at the top.

"I don't think we played well together at the beginning of the year," Joyner said. "We didn't move the basketball, we didn't share the basketball, we didn't understand our offense and defense and what we were trying to do. I thought we showed maturity from that, so there's a lot from this year that we can take into next year."



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