

Is exhibition series the best preparation?

By ERIC K. ENGLEBARDT
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GREENSBORO — Carolina basketball fans go into catatonic states of ecstasy when names like those of James Worthy, Walter Davis, Phil Ford, Bobby Jones and Mike O'Koren are mentioned. Last Thursday at the Greensboro Coliseum, fans were not only treated to those former UNC stars, but Michael Jordan, Sam Perkins and the U.S. Olympic basketball team as well. But playing against professional players a month after the NBA season has ended may not provide the challenge for the Olympians that the Games themselves will.

The Olympians, preparing for next week's Los Angeles Summer Olympics, are in the midst of a nine-game exhibition tour against NBA all-star teams.

"We are very appreciative of the NBA Players Association for setting up the opposition that we've had. They've done a heck of a job," said Olympic coach Bob Knight.

One reporter, apparently unaccustomed to Knight's occasional ravings, asked the Olympic coach if he thought playing against NBA players was the best way to prepare his team.

"Who would you suggest we play?" Knight replied.

"Bring in some foreign teams, like the (Olympic) baseball team," replied the reporter, also mentioning that the play of the professionals was sloppy.

"Why don't we just go about it the way we want to go about it and let the baseball team go about it the way it wants to go about it," retorted Knight.

Indeed, many have questioned the use of an exhibition series against players not at the top of their game for training the Olympic team. Jordan, for one, said the NBA players might not be that tough a test for the best amateur players in America.

"They're not in the best of shape, as we are," Jordan said. "We've been practicing for four or five weeks now and they have not, but they're not going out there and letting us win."

"We've experienced an excellent situation from the standpoint of the kind of talent that we're playing against," said Knight.

The talent in Greensboro also included Kenny Carr and Thurl Bailey from N.C. State, Eric "Sleepy" Floyd from Georgetown

and Gastonia, Frank Johnson formerly of Wake Forest and former Missouri star Steve Stipanovich. Despite the accomplishments of these professionals, the Olympic team won rather easily, 96-85.

Perkins, a three-time UNC All-American, felt the pros were giving the Olympic team a test.

"It's an experience to try to do a lot of things against them," Perkins said. "It's helping us as an Olympic team to get prepared for the playing that we will face."

Being that the Olympic team has breezed through their exhibition schedule without a loss, one might wonder if the team will become overconfident going into competition against amateurs in the Olympic Games.

"I don't think we're getting that attitude," Jordan said. "I think Coach Knight is really keeping our heads straight and not letting us think 'Hey, everything's coming easy now.'"

"We all know that they're not in the best of shape, they're not playing the best basketball that they can play. We're not going to base anything on that."

Despite the speculation that perhaps this preparation method may not be the best, the team will find itself in Los Angeles next week favored to win the gold medal.

Coaches, pros' confident of U.S. hopes

By MIKE SCHOOR
Assistant Sports Editor

GREENSBORO — Billy Cunningham and Antonio Diaz-Miguel have nothing in common, save a wealth of basketball knowledge and praise for the 1984 U.S. Olympic Team and the star of last Thursday's exhibition in the Greensboro Coliseum, Michael Jordan.

Cunningham, a UNC alumnus and coach of the NBA all-stars in Greensboro, talked about the unselfish team that defeated the professionals, 96-85.

Diaz-Miguel, head coach of the Spanish Olympic Basketball Team, communicated in broken English, saying one word again and again. That word was Jordan.

"No one in Spain jumps like Jordan," Diaz-Miguel said. "I first saw him three years ago and he surprised me. Not now."

Meanwhile, Cunningham put the Olympians' victory in proper perspective, mixing admiration with admonition.

"I'm impressed by how well they've come together offensively and defensively. I hope they don't

have a false sense of security (though). The other Olympic teams have played together for many years. The big problem for our NBA team was not having practice time."

The shortage in practice time visibly hurt the NBA team offensively. Defensively, the off-season players were slow to react to the Olympic team's fluid ball movement. Many Olympians passed up open shots, in favor of coach Bob Knight's let's-run-the-patterns strategy.

Bobby Jones, UNC alumnus and 1972 Olympic basketball team member, said the U.S. team won't get as many shooting opportunities in Los Angeles.

"There's a little hesitancy about shooting the ball," Jones said. "They may have too much patience."

That's all Jones could criticize. He joined 1976 Olympic gold medalists Phil Ford and Walter Davis in astonishment over a team that may be the best America has ever sent into international competition.

"They're big people and exceptional players," Jones said. "Jordan is the hub and the

catalyst. They're enthusiastic, aggressive and bang the boards."

Ford, joining Jones, Davis, Cunningham, Mike O'Koren, and James Worthy as former Tar Heels returning to Greensboro, noted how difficult it is to compare Olympic teams.

"Coach Knight's team is playing good basketball right now," Ford said. "What makes them so tough is that they can beat you so many ways."

Davis likes the Olympians chances going into next week's Los Angeles games and obviously can't wait to guard Jordan in the NBA this fall.

"They play unselfishly and pick defenses apart," Davis said. "I'm amazed by Jordan. His court sense is incredible."

When the Greensboro Coliseum crowd broke into the familiar chant, "USA ... USA ... USA," Davis said he remembered the pressures, responsibilities, and joy of representing his country.

"Hearing people chant is a great feeling," Davis said, capsulizing his Olympic experience. "It brings back many emotional memories."

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