

Cocaine snatches away young lives

By **EDDY LANDRETH**
Sports Editor

In recent weeks the dominant sports news has been the untimely death of Maryland basketball star Len Bias and Cleveland Brown

defensive back Don Rogers. Despite, or maybe in spite of, the avalanche of news reports on each, there are several things worth mentioning.

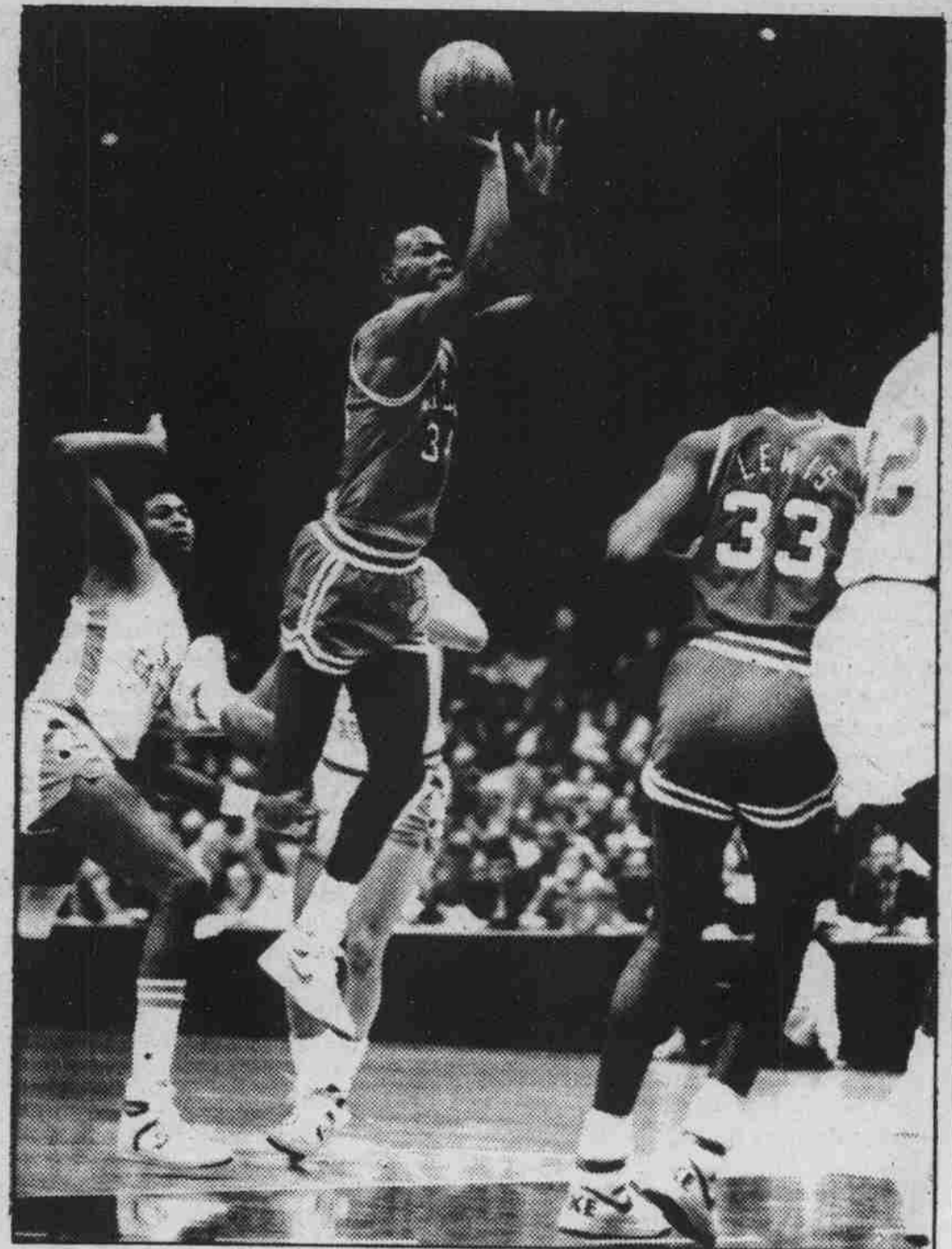
Both of these young men died at a young age because of their invol-

vement with cocaine. Each man was extremely talented at his particular sport. They were each more than talented, they were outstanding. But folks, it seems we are missing the point somewhere: the tragedy lies not in the fact that they were gifted athletes, but that they were human beings with a lifetime ahead of them. Being famous athletes should only serve to place them before our eyes and magnify their deaths. Are those not-so-famous men and women being swept away by this white death any less tragic?

The use of drugs is not just a sports problem in this country. Far more non-athletes use drugs in the United States than athletes, if for no other reason than there are far more non-athletes. If you could take a cross section of American society you would find people of all races and occupations involved in the drug culture.

Many people seem to have the idea that athletes suddenly begin taking drugs when they become professionals, with hordes of money. Most of those who use drugs as professionals used drugs as amateurs; the money only increases their ability to acquire them. And believe it or not, everyone of these people taking drugs is not addicted, although the potential certainly exists.

There has been a tremendous amount of criticism concerning the media's role in these affairs. Many people say the press has dragged their names through the mud. Well, my friends, although there are times when the media deserves criticism, the death of these men was news and deserved to be covered. Not only did it deserve to be covered, it had to



Len Bias, 1963-1986

Yackety Yack/Matthew Plyler

be or the press would have been remiss in its job. Bias and Rogers were public figures and press coverage goes with the territory, regardless

of the nature of the news. Remember, the media reports what occurred. Bias and Rogers brought their deaths, and any shame that resulted, by their own actions. This is not an attempt to lessen the tragedy or make light of their families' grief, but just a reminder of the truth for those who would search for a scapegoat.

Scapegoatism is something people seem to acquire in situations such as this. The prime example is the current talk of prosecuting one of Bias' friends who happened to be with him that night. Bias was a grown man, and I seriously doubt anyone placed a gun to his head, forcing him to take the fatal cocaine. No, he searched out the drug and decided on his own to partake. Placing someone in jail for being with him, or convicting someone of murder for selling it to him, will not bring back Len Bias or Don Rogers, nor will it serve justice. This would only make the local police feel more adequate.

Most everyone, including this scribe, is hoping these deaths will become an example to others not to take cocaine. This cannot be discounted completely, but sadly, the memory of these young men and their deaths will fade; time is like that. Let you forget, Bias died nearly two weeks before Rogers, yet Rogers still met with the same fate. The "it-can't-happen-to-me" syndrome is difficult to overcome.

The use of drugs will continue, at least until a better method of prevention comes along. This is not pessimism, just realism. It occurs far more than most realize, because most who die are not famous athletes.

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