

Charlotte must be patient with Hornets' mediocrity

Chris Spencer
Asst. Sports Editor

The crowd was mostly buttoned-down and neck-tied, with a few exceptions. Most had white-and-teal buttons affixed to their shirts, and they crowded around the widescreen TV in Charlotte's Civic Center on June 28 for the city's biggest step on its long, dusty path to recognition as a top American city.

Some Charlotteans have been known to rejoice over the mention of the city by itself in type without the "N.C." designation.

But back to that historic, sweltering Tuesday. Around 1 p.m., a man named David Stern, who happens to be commissioner of the National Basketball Association, stepped to a podium in New York City's Madison Square Garden. The crowd grew quiet as Stern made the following announcement: "With the ninth pick, and their first ever in the NBA, the Charlotte Hornets select Rex Chapman of Kentucky."

So the college draft is over, as is the expansion draft, in which the two new teams (the other being the Miami Heat) get to draft the dregs off the rosters of their NBA brethren. And come Nov. 4, the Hornets will jump center in their first regular-season NBA game, against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Like most native Charlotteans, as well as a few loyal others in this state, I am excited by the thought of the Queen City finally landing a professional sports team. George Shinn, the 5-foot-5, elfish businessman who approached the NBA and made the league take notice of Charlotte, is a godsend to the city.

But just what is happening with the Hornets? Well, it has been a busy, charged summer for Shinn and his cohorts, general manager Carl Sheer, director of player personnel Gene Littles and coach Dick Harter, since that college draft.

First, though, let's look at what the Hornets got in the expansion draft. At the top of the list is Dell Curry, a second-year player plucked from the up-and-coming Cavaliers. Curry is a steal, a player who could be a solid guard for years to come.

Then there's Kelly Tripucka, who the Hornets obtained from the Utah Jazz for a draft pick. Why?

Tripucka, who was a frequent All-Star in the early 1980s, is over the

hill and certainly not worth his \$971,000 price tag. He probably wouldn't merit a look at a half-price sale, either.

The only other mentionables of that draft are Ricky Green, the probable starter at point guard, and 6-foot-11 Dave Hoppen, a backup center on any other team (he was just that in Golden State, backing up Ralph Sampson). But, hey, this is like putting together a jalopy — you just mix and match parts, and hope it will run.

Oh, yeah, the Hornets also picked one of the ugliest players in the league, former Wake Forest point guard Tyrone "Muggsy" Bogues, who was Washington's first pick last year and who bombed in the little time he spent on the court. Here's hoping he was drafted for trade bait.

Of the players mentioned so far, only Hoppen is taller than 6-8. In the college draft, Scheer elected to go for "backcourt speed" over size and selected Chapman, who is 6-4.

They did get some size in the second and third rounds with 6-8 Tom Tolbert of Arizona (You remember him from the NCAA West Region Finals, don't you?) and 6-9 Jeff Moore of Auburn, who missed most of his senior season with a hand injury.

Then came the courting of 6-10 Kurt Rambis, who started for 4½ seasons with the L.A. Lakers before A.C. Green beat him out. Some compare him to Clark Kent, but he often plays like Casper, the Friendly Ghost — he just disappears.

Rambis signed a four-year contract for \$2.4 million on July 27. He averaged just 7.4 points per game last season.

Following that, the team made a good move by picking up former Houston Rocket forward Robert Reid, who provided them with a no-lose situation by agreeing to an unguaranteed \$400,000 contract. That way, the Hornets don't have to pay him if they get a good offer from another team.

The team also signed former L.A. Clipper Earl Cureton, a 6-9 forward who will give them some help off the bench. Cureton was signed July 20, the same day the team showed off its new uniforms, designed by world-famous, native North Carolinian Alexander Julian. At least they'll look good in their pleated shorts and striped jerseys.

In an early August set of rookie games, one of the most notable players was, of all people, Ranzino Smith, the 6-foot shooting guard fresh out of Dean Smith's program. But, alas, the Hornets said they had enough guards and instead elected to keep ex-L.A. Clipper bench-warmer Tim Kempton, a 6-10 player who impressed Littles with his "scrappy play."

If all these transactions make you wonder if Scheer, Littles and Harter are just Larry, Moe and Curly in disguise, the key phrase is "Be patient." While the Hornets have drafted some players of questionable worth, you can't expect them to go out and sign Mr. Jordan to a contract. It just doesn't work that way.

It's called paying your dues, and as the new team on the block, Charlotte will have to endure its share of losing seasons. That's to be expected, and everyone in the city, from the sportscasters on the evening news to the barbers at the Coliseum Barber Shop, has used that "P" word when discussing the team.

But will they be patient? Charlotte has an image it's trying to stifle as a town for losing teams, who often did so because they had no fan support. This time around, it's the "big time," for never before has the city had a team in a major league. They even built a sparkling, 23,000-seat coliseum for the Hornets.

So far, the signs point to success. Season-ticket sales have gone over the 15,000 mark, and you don't have to look far to spot Hornets paraphernalia across the town.

However, until the team hits the floor and endures a few humiliating losses, no one can fairly gauge the support. The Hornets will probably be bad for a while — maybe even four or five seasons.

Let's just hope they don't get as bad as, say, the Atlanta Braves. Then, we'll have something to worry about.

Ex-UNC star Taylor nabbed for drugs again, out 4 games

From Associated Press reports
Seven-time All-Pro linebacker Lawrence Taylor of the New York Giants, who had vowed to make this his best season, was suspended for 30 days Monday for violating the NFL's substance abuse policy for a second time.

Coach Bill Parcells and NFL spokesman Joe Browne said Taylor, a former North Carolina star, was suspended after testing positive in a recent mandatory drug test. They declined to disclose what substance was found.

Taylor had acknowledged that he underwent treatment for a cocaine problem in 1986. He followed with his finest season as the Giants went on to win the

Super Bowl, becoming only the second defensive player in league history to be named the NFL's most valuable player and setting a club record with 20½ sacks.

The suspension means Taylor will miss four games, including the season opener Monday night against the Super Bowl champion Washington Redskins.

"Obviously when you lose a player of that nature, it will have an affect," said Parcells, whose other All-Pro linebacker, Carl Banks, ended a 43-day holdout and signed a four-year pact Monday.

"However, that player could have been hurt in the first play of

practice on Wednesday and we'd have had to make an adjustment. "I am a little surprised," added Parcells, a hard-liner on drug problems. "You don't expect these types of things. I had every reason to believe everything was all right with Taylor."

Taylor, 29, is the ninth player suspended this summer for substance abuse problems.

Seven others, including Dexter Manley of the Redskins, were suspended for 30 days in training camp after failing preseason drug testing. All will be back for the regular season, including Manley, who reported to the Redskins on Monday.

Arizona, Iowa and DePaul on difficult Tar Heel hoops slate

From staff reports
Even though it's just early September, and all the talk on campus is centering around the football Tar Heels and their vibrant new coach, basketball lurks just around the corner.

Before you know it, Oct. 15 and the official start of practice will be here, and everyone will be talking about whether UNC will ever beat Duke again and if the Tar Heels can break their ACC Tournament title drought. At last count, wasn't it up to 28 years or something like that? Maybe it just seems that way.

Anyway, the 1988-89 men's basketball schedule was released back in June, believe it or not. We thought

you might like to have a gander at it.

UNC's schedule calls for 20 games against teams which played in post-season tournaments of some sort last year, including nine tilts against teams which finished ranked in the Top 20.

Coach Dean Smith's Tar Heels will be looking for their 23rd straight trip to a post-season tournament, including a record 15th straight appearance in the NCAA tourney.

Here 'tis:
NOVEMBER
1 — MARATHON OIL (exhibition)
12 — USSR NATIONAL TEAM (exhib.)
18 — TENNESSEE-CHATTANOOGA (NT)
26 — STANFORD
DECEMBER
2-3 — Tournament of Champions at Charlotte (First Round pairings: UNC vs. Arizona, Temple vs. Missouri)

JANUARY
3 — at Pepperdine
5 — at DePaul
7 — OJIA
11 — MARYLAND
15 — at Virginia
18 — at Duke
21 — NC STATE
25 — at Wake Forest
28 — GEORGIA TECH
FEBRUARY
1 — at Clemson
9 — at NC State
12 — VIRGINIA
14 — at Old Dominion
16 — WAKE FOREST
19 — at Maryland
21 — NEVADA-RENO
25 — CLEMSON
MARCH
1 — at Georgia Tech
5 — DUKE
10-12 — ACC Tournament at Atlanta, Ga.

Women's track team rated sixth nationally

From staff reports
The September issues of *Track and Field News* has ranked the UNC women's team No. 6 in national dual meet rankings for 1988. All but two Tar Heel athletes who were regular scorers will return for the 1989 season.

Contributing writer Jay Wenos ranked the country's top teams using

four criteria: won-lost record, average margin of victory or defeat, difficulty of schedule and a hypothetical head-to-head matchup of all finalists. Point totals give the teams were actually a percentage of raw points scored compared to the top-ranked team, which always has a score of 100.

UCLA was the top team, followed by No. 2 Texas, with 96.7 points.

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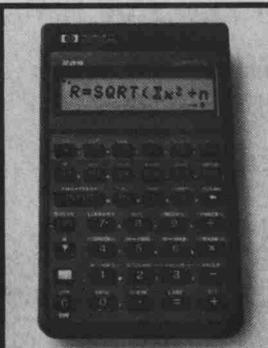
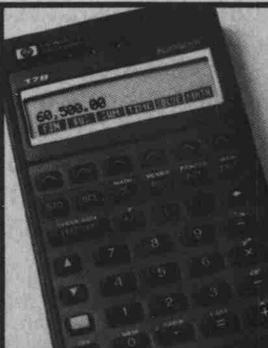
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