

# NBA parity makes Hawks the best bet

By LANGSTON WERTZ  
Staff Writer

What's the key word in the NBA this year? It's not Celtics, and it may not even be Lakers. Perhaps the key word in the National Basketball Association should be parity.

Yes, that dreaded disease that has plagued the NFL since Terry Bradshaw and the boys in Pittsburgh placed the fourth Vince Lombardi trophy on the shelf in 1980 has invaded the NBA bloodstream.

But unlike the NFL, fans may welcome professional basketball parity with a sigh of relief. In each of the championship series in the '80s, either Celtic green or Laker gold was on display, and seven of the eight championship banners bestowed in this decade can be found in either the Boston Garden or in the House That Magic Rebuilt — the Fabulous Forum in Inglewood, Calif.

But last June, the Detroit Pistons proved two things to the rest of the NBA: 1) Boston could be conquered and 2) The Lakers are teetering, ready to succumb to the forces of mortality.

Detroit took Boston in the Eastern finals before finally falling to the Lakers in seven. And it took the best performance of the James Worthy's life to do keep the Pistons from winning it all.

With the weaknesses of basketball's Eastern and Western kings now exposed, the princes and pretenders are geared and ready to step in, into the NBA Finals.

## EASTERN CONFERENCE Atlantic Division

**1. Boston** — The Celtics are weary and aging, but the Celtics are still the Celtics. True, they are a bit older and a step or two slower, but they are still good enough to win the East. New head coach Jimmy Rogers won't run his first five into the hardwood the way K.C. Jones did last season, which means Boston should still have some gas left for the postseason.

Add to the stew that Boston has perennial all-pro Larry Bird, who just signed a new two-year deal that has him making upwards of 50K per outing, and the Celts are still good for 55 wins.

**2. New York** — The Knickerbockers brought in Charles Oakley from Chicago to give Patrick Ewing some rebounding relief. As a result, Ewing should emerge as the NBA's premier center this season. The Knicks also return Gerald Wilkins (17.4 ppg) and last season's rookie of the year, Mark Jackson.

If Ewing gets any rest this season and remains healthy, Jackson can lead the Knicks (keep an eye on swing

## PRO FORECAST

### Division Champions

Atlantic — Boston Celtics

Central — Detroit Pistons

Midwest — Utah Jazz

Pacific — L.A. Lakers

### Conference Champs

Eastern — Atlanta Hawks

Western — Dallas Mavericks

### 1989 NBA Champion

Atlanta Hawks

### Most Valuable Players

East — Michael Jordan

West — Karl Malone

forward Johnny Newman) past the first round of the playoffs.

**3. Philadelphia** — The 76ers have Charles Barkley, and Barkley basically was all Philly had last season. With David Wingate, Andrew Toney and Albert King all trying their hand at shooting guard in 1987-88, it was obvious where the Sixers' weaknesses were.

Philly picked up Hersey Hawkins, Bradley's shooting sensation and the NCAA's scoring king, in a three-team trade on draft day, which means the 2-spot should be his by late November. Hawkins will join steady Mo Cheeks in the solid Philly backcourt.

**4. Washington** — The Bullets let go of Moses Malone this summer after he failed to lead them to a title run. So Malone and his 20.3 points and 11.2 rebounds are off to Atlanta, leaving the Bullets with a sizable hole at center. Washington has already traded thin man Manute Bol to Golden State for 7-1 Dave Feitl.

And for now it looks as if the job is Feitl's, a stiff and mechanical 240-pound chunk of NBA middle mediocrity. Yes, the Bullets have underrated scoring machine Jeff Malone at guard and yes, they do have Bernard King, bad right knee and all. But they don't have a center.

**5. New Jersey** — "I don't think," said Nets' GM Harry Weltman, "that we'll be picked to win our division." That's a major understatement. The Nets did pick up Auburn standout Chris Morris and did give former N.C. State center Charles Shackelford a home, but they only won 19 games in 1987-88, and another 60-loss season this year is somewhere in sight.

**6. Charlotte** — Yes, Minnesota, Charlotte has an NBA team. But no Miami, you guys won't be the only ones with single digits in the win

column. The Hornets slipped by the Clippers in only their third outing, but Kelly Tripucka and Robert Reid could be building snowmen in their back yards before the Hornets win another game.

First round draft pick Rex Chapman will become a star eventually, but for now he needs to stop shooting 25-footers while floating to one side. Square up, son, from 20 and in. But it doesn't much matter where Rex or any of the other Hornets shoot it from.

Charlotte may have the biggest and best arena, and then there's the cute pinstriped and pleated uniforms. But the Hornets are one of the NBA's two babies, and they won't sting too many people in their first 82 games.

## Central Division

**1. Detroit** — The Pistons haven't lost anything from the team that nearly won the title last year. Isiah Thomas is back. Joe Dumars is back. John Salley, Vinnie Johnson, Bill Laimbeer . . . everybody. Detroit won 54 game in '87-88 and should win 60 this season.

Detroit has the personnel to go all the way, and all of that personnel is one year and one championship series better. The Pistons picked up beefy Fennis Dembo via the draft and he could spell Adrian Dantley in the post position.

Detroit has a new arena, grandly named The Palace, in Auburn Hills, Mich. The Pistons hope the Finals will be held there.

**2. Atlanta** — The Hawks have added the two missing ingredients to their championship soup — a shooting guard and a big-time, post-up player. Reggie Theus and Moses Malone now sport Atlanta red and opposing coaches will see just that, no longer able to double-team Dominique Wilkins.

Mike Fratello's bunch won't be able to make Detroit see red enough times, but the race should be tight.

**3. Cleveland** — Last season, Mark Price and Brad Daugherty came into their own as professional players. This year, they will become stars. The Cavs also feature Ron Harper, who when healthy reminds one of Air Jordan.

But even with a poor man's Michael, Cleveland won't be able to overcome the Hawks or the Pistons. And they had better watch over their shoulders.

**4. Chicago** — Michael Jordan keeps everyone in the NBA watching, and if the Cavs aren't careful, Air and the Bulls could slip into the No. 3 spot. But as it is, Chicago has added Bill Cartwright and Will Perdue to help solidify its paint crew. Scottie Pippen has continued his steady improvement, and Chicago has found a point guard Sam Vincent who can stick the 15-footer. Air, is, well Air.

**5. Milwaukee** — The Bucks fell to 42-40 last season after averaging 54.6 wins per year this decade. Even with Sidney Moncrief back and healthy again and the likes of Paul Pressey, Terry Cummings and Jack Sikma, the Bucks don't have enough "uumph" to consistently beat their Central foes.

**6. Indiana** — Two years ago the Pacers were 41-41 and looking forward to a bright future. Last season, Indiana went 38-44, and this season, the Pacers will occupy the Central cellar.

Star power forward Wayman Tisdale is unhappy and on the trading block. Center Steve Stipanovich is sturdy — but only sturdy enough to get 13.5 points a night. There's not much offense in Indianapolis — and not too many wins.

## WESTERN CONFERENCE Midwest Division

**1. Utah** — The Jazz extended the Lakers to seven games in the Western semifinals last season, and that's where Utah should start from this year. They bring back Karl (The Mailman) Malone, who is on the verge of entering the NBA's elite club, and John Stockton, as good a magic-less point guard as there is in the league. The Jazz shouldn't have much trouble winning the Midwest if they play like they did at the end of last season.

**2. Dallas** — It's been said many times that Mark Aguirre can only be stopped by Mark Aguirre. He can be invincible one night, upset and sporadic the next. When he's invincible, the Mavericks are a championship team; when he's sporadic, they're above-average. Aguirre will be sporadic from time to time and too often for the Mavs to topple Utah.

**3. Denver** — The Nuggets were good in 1987-88. Very good, at times, in fact. They added Walter Davis and resigned Danny Schayes in the offseason and they should be ready for another run at the top of the Western heap.

Unfortunately, for coach Doug Moe's bunch of overachievers, the Mailman will deliver for Utah too often and the Mavericks will have Aguirre the Invincible one night too many.

**4. Houston** — Rockets fans don't have Bill Fitch or Ralph Sampson to kick around anymore. They do have Akeem Olajuwon and Eric Floyd back, however.

Olajuwon continues to suffer from his inability to pass and Floyd is still too inconsistent. Maybe Otis Thorpe will help.

**5. San Antonio** — The Spurs were 31-51 last season and may well finish with 40 wins this year under new coach Larry Brown, nee of the Kansas Jayhawks. San Antonio picked up Willie Anderson in the draft, and Anderson could well be the rookie of the year. He runs the court well, can handle the rock and passes it, too. He could play any of three different positions for the Spurs.

If Johnny Dawkins can learn to even pretend like he's going right and open up the court more often the Spurs, led by Alvin Robertson, could knock off some people. If these ingredients come together San Antonio could become a real spoiler in the spring.

See NBA page 30



**WE DELIVER PARTIES.**  
**The Beverage Outlet**

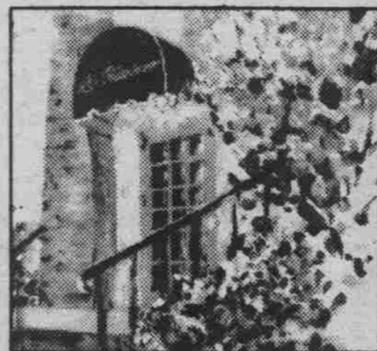
(The little place on Rosemary St.)

309 W. Rosemary St..

967-FREE DELIVERY



## La Résidence



**Thanksgiving  
Dinner**

seatings from 5 to 9  
reservations recommended

967-2506

220 W. Rosemary St.  
Chapel Hill

**looking  
glass  
café**

gnixool  
2261g  
9169

**University Square, Chapel Hill**

eat in **929-0296** take out

- Custom built burgers • Stuffed Spuds •
- Vegetarian Sandwiches • Salad Bar •
- Daily Specials • Salad Platters •
- Homemade soups & chili •
- Homemade french fries •
- Desserts • Beer/Wine •

Conveniently located in downtown  
Chapel Hill facing Granville Towers

133 W. Franklin St. lunch and dinner