

NBA

from page 15

6. Miami — Only one team will finish with a worse record than Charlotte this season, their expansion brother. Miami shied away from veterans in building its team, veterans who might bring you a handful of wins in the short term.

This season, the Heat will be very cold, though, and finish dead last. Has any team ever lost 75 games in a single season?

Pacific Division

1. Los Angeles — Yeah, Kareem is too old, and Magic looked weary in last year's playoffs. But Los Angeles is still the best team in the NBA until somebody takes away the crown.

The Lakers added David Rivers to give Magic a coffee break during the season, so he'd still have some tricks up his sleeve come playoff time. They also picked up Orlando Woolridge to give them more scoring punch down low.

The Lakers aren't as bad off as some people think. Look for them again to sport the league's best record, somewhere in the neighborhood of 62 wins.

2. Portland — The Trail Blazers won 53 games last season and picked up Mark Bryant in the draft. Bryant won't block a lot of shots, but is a big-time bruiser who could tire Kareem some and allow Portland and Clyde Drexler to glide by the Lakers if L.A. isn't careful.

But the Lakers are careful — careful enough to give Worthy the ball against Portland, who have no one to stop him.

3. Seattle — Was it that long ago that Seattle had Tom Chambers and Dale Ellis and Xavier McDaniel and a city talking title? But Chambers' selfishness (he was affectionately called "Tommy Gun") created some internal problems on Bernie Bickerstaff's up-and-coming club.

Chambers was let go and Seattle signed rebound king Michael Cage away from the Clippers — reducing

the Supersonics' Big Three scorers to the Big Two. Result? More wins, but still not enough to catch Portland.

4. Phoenix — The Suns resemble a night-time soap opera. Characters have been eliminated for new stars and an entirely new plot. Gone are Walter Davis, James Edwards, Larry Nance and Mike Sanders.

But look on the bright side. New in town are Tom Chambers and rookies Tim Perry and Dan Majerle. The triumvirate will someday help Phoenix improve on last year's abysmal 28-54 finish — but not this year.

5. Golden State — The Warriors made the playoffs in 1987, but last year shrunk to 20-62. They bring back Ralph Sampson and have Manute Bol to (sort of) rejuvenate the Twin Towers effect Sampson enjoyed in Houston.

But in Houston, Sampson had Akeem, and Manute ain't Akeem. Golden State doesn't have much else, so they won't have too many victories.

6. L.A. Clippers — The Clippers had The Draft. They picked up Danny Manning, Charles Smith and Gary Grant, and brought smiles to the faces of their coaches and owners.

But don't expect too much success too soon. They are all rookies, Benoit Benjamin still isn't sure if he wants to be a good NBA center yet, and Joe Wolf can't hit the bottom of a haystack.

Oh, yeah, and they have Dave Popson, too. The Clippers won't be that much better than last season's 17-65 record.

7. Sacramento — The Kings feature Joe Kleine at center, and that pretty much says it all, except for mentioning their 24-58 record last year. The Kings let go of Reggie Theus in the offseason and will now structure their team around point guard Kenny Smith and the newly acquired Rodney McCray.

Restructuring, unfortunately, will take quite a while.

The Playoffs

In the **Western Conference**, age will finally catch Kareem and the Lakers. Magic won't be able to do it — this time — all by his lonesome. Dallas and Utah will battle it out for the Western crown, Aguirre will be The Invincible and Maverick depth will overcome Utah heart in six grueling games.

In the **Eastern Conference**, Boston will succumb — and surprisingly quickly. Jordan and the Bulls will challenge, but their pretender status will become quickly apparent. The Knicks will challenge as well, but the Eastern finals will be an all-Central affair — Detroit and Atlanta.

The plodding, banging Motor City Maulers against the talented, athletic Hawks.

Hawk youth, Moses' boards, Theus' jumper and most importantly, a freed-up Dominique will all spell Detroit's doom in seven, and Mike Fratello will travel to where no Hawk has gone before — the NBA Finals.

In six games the Hawks will prove to the NBA that they are the best — and dominantly so. Dallas won't be able to match up with the Hawks' front five and Atlanta's depth (read Antoine Carr and Cliff Levingston) will be too much for Dallas to handle.

MVP East — Without a doubt, Air Jordan. Michael may simply go wild this season, adding high rebound and assist totals to his already-proven ability to drop numbers.

MVP West — It's a tough pick, here. Magic came into camp in the best shape of his career and will probably play the best 100-plus games of his career. Yes, he's still getting better. But even with Magic doing it only as Earvin can, Karl Malone will deliver a bit better.

The Mailman should continue to progress, using last season's playoff performance against L.A. as a stepping stone to turn his dominance into prominence.

A guide to the best players in the U.S.

By **LANGSTON WERTZ**
Staff Writer

Who are the top 10 players in the country. Who's the best? Well, I'll tell you, and let us waste nary a precious second, pilgrim.

First Team

Point Guard: Give me Sherman or give me death. Syracuse's Douglas is a 6-foot senior fireplug whose excellent defensive skills give him the nod here over Iowa's B.J. Armstrong. "Sher" can make you hate to handle the rock, use his explosive first step to go by you and runs the best fast break college hoops has seen since Indiana had a kid named Isaiah. What's scary is that his shooting has improved and in the clutch, the Big East has no one better.

Shooting Guard: Duke's Billy King has graduated from the college ranks, and King was the only one who could stop my pick for the best shooting guard in the nation — 6-5 Temple sophomore Mark "Shakin' and Bakin'" Macon. The kid has the drive, the touch, the intelligence — and this year John Chaney may even allow him to speak a word or two. Strangely, the right-hander's only weakness is his inability to go right.

Swing Forward: Without any doubt, thank you John Thompson, Arizona 6-9 senior Sean Elliott is the best 3-man in the country. The kid can jump out of the gym, stick the jumper like a guard, bring the ball up against the press and is the best thing in the open court college basketball will know this year.

Power Forward: Herman Reid, Jr., is the best player in the nation in 1988-89 and is obviously the best power forward/center. He has his weaknesses, though — he can't hit anything past a 10-footer, his defense is still questionable — and there's no reason why a 6-9, 260-pound mass of muscle can't grab 12 boards a night.

Nevertheless, he's still the best. What will happen when he eliminates those weaknesses?

Center: He's 6-10, a senior and goes to Oklahoma, he was college basketball's most improved player last season and is its best center this year. Stacey King. King's a cat-quick big

man with a cotton-soft turnaround move with great shotblocking ability and a dominating presence inside.

Second Team

Point Guard: King Rice. Okay, just joking. Iowa's 6-2 senior B.J. Armstrong here. He's the complete point package, nothing spectacular, everything good. He can drill the 20-footer and pass very well.

Shooting Guard: I almost hate to type it in here, but you've got to go with Todd Lichti, Stanford's 6-4 senior. Though Lichti will get far too much ink this season, much, much more than his talent merits, the kid can drop numbers.

Wait, let's call it a tie, and give me UNC-Charlotte star Byron Dinkins. Dinkins will get far too little ink this season, much, much less than his talent merits. This kid can really drop numbers — from a long way out. Dinkins has it all, the great legs, the long-range bombs, the quickness and leadership ability.

Swing Forward: Though many want Michigan's Glen Rice here, I want Tennessee's 6-7 senior, Dyron Nix. Nix, along with Dinkins, is one of basketball's best kept secrets. Nix made the final 20 in the U.S. Olympic Trials this summer. He's a great scorer and gets even better in the clutch.

Power Forward: Duke's 6-10 senior All-Everything Danny Ferry here. If not for J.R. Reid, Ferry would be the best college player in the land. As it is, Ferry is still one of the country's premier players, and when the chips are down, there's none better. He can damage you inside with his half-hook, or step outside and bang home the three-pointer.

Center: "Never Nervous" Pervis Ellison is the Louisville Cardinals' best choice for a sure hoop. The 6-9 senior embodies everything you'd want in your big man — shot-blocking ability, good court speed, strength, and most importantly, Ellison is a fine finisher.

And there you have it, from top to bottom, the 10 best college basketball players — by position — that this great country of ours has to offer.

Rice

from page 24

then I started reading the newspapers and people said I couldn't make the shots, it got to me a little bit," Rice said. "There were times when I would have an open shot and I wouldn't even look to shoot it because I wasn't sure I could make it."

Rice also had to deal with playing in Kenny Smith's shadow.

"Last year when I first got here people had high expectations and they were saying, 'Oh, he's going to be the next Kenny Smith,'" he said. "I didn't see that happening for me, because Kenny was such a great player and I was only going to be a freshman."

But throughout Rice's troubled season, coach Smith kept faith in his flat-topped freshman. Rice cited the opening game of last year's ACC Tournament in Maryland as a prime example.

"We were winning by about 15 or 20 points, he put me in and I had like four turnovers in a row," he said.

"Most of the times he would have taken me out, but in this situation he left me in and told me just to play through them, and I think that gave me a lot more confidence."

Rice impressed Smith this fall with a time of 4.6 in the 40, tied with Lebo for tops on the team. Now, with a rejuvenated jump shot and a positive attitude, Rice will try to make an impression on the court as well and at the same time try to shake the post-Kenny Smith syndrome.

"I don't think anybody can do the things that Kenny did while he was here at Carolina," Rice said. "I just have to look to do the things that King Rice can do and not the things that Kenny Smith was doing."

Things are looking better for Rice already this season. In a preseason game against the Russian national team on Nov. 12, he scored eight points on 4-of-6 shooting, perhaps indicating that, despite the rumors, he actually is King Rice.



● **BLAUPUNKT**

High-Performance
Car Stereo
ON SALE NOW!



Seattle SQR27 AM/FM auto-reverse
cassette. Digital tuning with presets.

\$199⁰⁰
was \$229.00

Plus:

FREE INSTALLATION!

Buy this or any other Blaupunkt
car stereo before Nov. 15,
and we'll install it

FREE!

**Electronics
Unlimited**

FINANCING AND LAYAWAY



**Have Your
Own Outdoor
"Blue Heaven"**

After you enjoy watching the games indoors, enjoy playing the game outdoors—this weekend and all year long. Fitch Lumber has just what you need for building your own outdoor "Blue Heaven": basketballs, backboards, rims, nets, poles, pumps, and all the mounting accessories. We also carry autographed basketballs by Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Kevin McHale. Be a basketball star in your own backyard.

Open daily 8-5, Sat. till noon
309 N. Greensboro St., • 942-3153
Carrboro/Chapel Hill

FITCH LUMBER

GO HEELS!!!