

Pro roundup

A league-maker and a league-saver

By Allen Johnson
Sports Editor

Julius Erving is the most exciting player in basketball. The explosive, 6-6 frontcourt performer for the New York Nets is a wonder to behold, dazzling spectators and opponents alike with his amazing quickness and leaping ability.

Indeed, there is no more magnificent a sight than the slender frame of Dr. "J" sprinting down the sideline, gripping the ball as if it were a red, white, and blue orange; weaving his way past befuddled defenders, and majestically slamming the ball through the basket.

David Thompson is the most talented and exciting performer in the history of the Atlantic Coast Conference. He is a black Superman, mild-mannered off the court, coolly intense and unstoppable on the court.

Rivals in the ACC (and elsewhere) shudder at the thought of the 6-4 Shelby native dashing toward the goal, leaping high into the air, fielding a lob pass from a teammate, and daintily dropping the ball DOWN into the basket.

While Erving's team attempts its drive for a second consecutive American Basketball Association title, Thompson must face the harsh reality of defeat and look ahead to a professional career. A valuable asset to any team and league which can secure his services, Thompson has the potential to breathe added life and excitement into the pro game.

Like Erving, Thompson is not a showman. The simple fact is that the talent of both men breeds excitement and that their crowd-appealing antics are merely a by-product of this talent.

"I just play the game the best way I know how," Erving said in a recent EBONY magazine interview. "I'm not TRYING to generate excitement. Some people say I make them feel good when they see me play. I make a note of it and thank them, but I can't come back and say 'I intended to make you feel that way.'"

The soft-spoken Thompson plays basketball because he likes it. In times when multi-million dollar contracts are bouncing back and forth between the NBA and ABA and when many players have exhibited more proficiency with their checkbooks than with basketball, such an attitude appears almost anachronistic.

Soon Thompson will make a decision that could change the entire complexion of pro basketball. If he signs with the NBA's Atlanta Hawks, he will add valuable ammunition to the older league's arsenal of talent which continually threatens to blow the ABA into oblivion.

If he signs with the ABA's Denver Nuggets, he will not only transform one of the best teams in the younger circuit into one of the best teams anywhere, but will join Dr. J. as a sure-fire gate attraction. With Erving, Thompson, and such other well-known performers as Artis Gilmore, Moses Malone, Marvin Barnes, and

Dan Issel, the ABA would be in a very comfortable position to negotiate a much-needed network television contract.

Thompson, could, in effect, save the ABA from extinction.

tidbits

Another high pick in the upcoming pro draft will be seven-footer Marvin "Eraser" Webster of Morgan State. Webster's forte is defense and rebounding, a precious commodity craved by several NBA and ABA franchises... Len Elmore, a former Maryland standout now with Indiana, has had his share of problems in his rookie year with the Pacers, but appears to be settling down as the playoff season continues... Maintaining the inside track for Rookie of the Year honors in the NBA is John Drew of the Atlanta Hawks—and he full well knows it. After putting in 38 points against Golden State and its own contender for rookie honors, Keith Wilkes, Drew declared, "I was up for this one. I wanted to prove I could beat Keith Wilkes. Even if I hadn't played well, I still think I deserve to be Rookie of the Year."... The television coverage of NBA games by CBS has improved considerably this year, largely because of the fine job done by Basketball Editor Sonny Hill, a fellow who brims with confidence and makes Pat Summerall look exactly like what he is: a football player trying to do a basketball telecast.



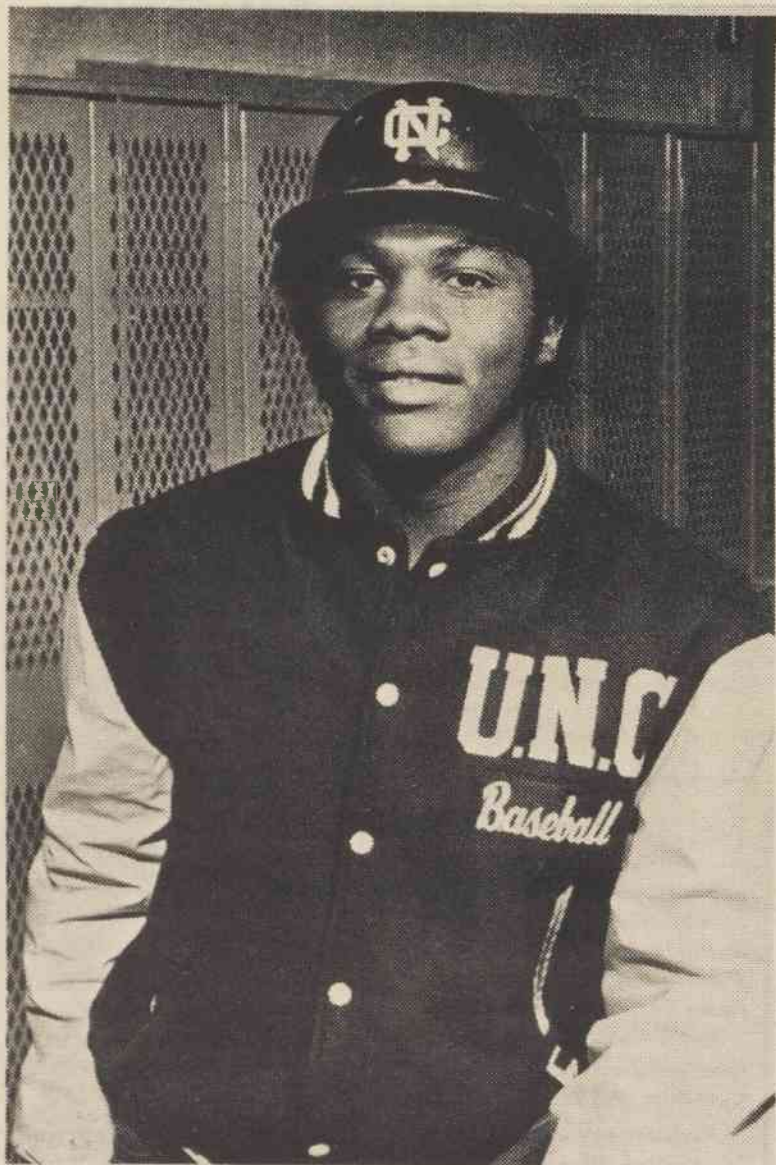
UPI Wirephoto



Staff Photo

YOUTH ON THE PRO CIRCUIT: Ed Ratleff, left, former Long Beach State standout, is key factor in the upstart Houston Rockets' surge into the NBA's post-season play-offs. Len Elmore, right, former Maryland star, now rookie with ABA's Indiana Pacers, is instrumental in his club's playoff fortunes.

Jones proves himself an all-around player



Early Jones

Michele Allison
Staff Writer

Whatever Early Jones does, he apparently likes to do it well.

Jones is a rising senior who is majoring in recreation. The multi-talented centerfielder hails from Trenton, and is 21-years-old. Trenton is a small town, but Early is definitely no small time operator.

In high school he was student body president and played football, basketball, and baseball. To cap an already amazing list of accomplishments, Early was also a Morehead Scholarship nominee. He really was and still is quite an all-around performer.

Early says that he first became acquainted with UNC when he visited the campus during his junior year in high school by way of Project Uplift. He made his final decision to attend Carolina because he was generally impressed with the athletic program here and because he was offered a baseball scholarship.

During Early's freshman year, he played Jayvee baseball and totalled an impressive seven homeruns. Since his sophomore year he has played varsity ball and so far this year he has connected for four homeruns. Of course, baseball is not Early's only sport here at UNC. Early is also on the Heels football team at the safety position.

Last year was the versatile athlete's first full football season after he had been asked by Coach Bill Dooley to join the team in the spring of '74. Now Early is virtually a year-round athlete. He also plays baseball for Carolina on the Tarheel Summer League—which is a position one has

to be chosen for on one's playing abilities.

When asked if he ever got tired of his year-round schedule, he said that he really did not because athletics is a way for him to "release" himself. "I get off on it," he said. He also added, "I like to play and see if I can improve myself." Early likes challenges to see just how much he can achieve.

Being the only Black on the team does not seem to bother Early too much. He says that it troubled him somewhat during his freshman year when "fans" would sneer and shout out derogatory things about his color.

But now he does not let his

uniqueness on the team upset him. He says that the team is "just a group of guys out there doing what they like to do." He really enjoys baseball and does not find that his being the only Black lessens his enjoyment.

Early is a rising senior and has already started thinking about what he would like to do after he completes his college education. When asked if he would like to follow an athletic career he said yes. And when asked which sport he preferred between football and baseball, Early admitted, "I like both but when thinking of a career I would lean towards baseball."

Assorted notes

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interview. "Why it's the dream of every basketball player to be inducted into the hall. If he insists on declining, he should not even be talked about in the future. I say if he doesn't want it, forget about him."

Mr. Rupp's remarks are not all surprising considering his past record in dealing with Blacks.

Two Firsts

There will be two significant breakthroughs for Black sports figures this year. Lee Elder, on April 10, will become the first Black golfer ever to compete in the Masters Tournament in Augusta, Georgia.

Although the pressure of being the "first" in any endeavor is inevitable, Elder confronts the situation with a level head and a sense of humor.

"When you check into a motel and need to win the tournament to pay the bill," quipped Elder in SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. "man, THAT'S pressure."

At the same time, Frank Robinson will be managing baseball's Cleveland Indians, becoming the first black manager in the history of the major leagues. Like Elder, Robinson is calmly confronting the responsibility and publicity that his job entails.

"When we lose this year," Robinson said in an Associated Press interview, "I don't want my players to come into the clubhouse with their heads down. I don't want them doing flips, either."

"But they should hold their heads up, talk among themselves and try to figure out what went wrong out there while it's freshly in mind."