

NBA DRAFT REPORT

Pistons Choose JSU Guard in 10th Pick of Draft

The day before the NBA draft, Jackson State guard Lindsey Hunter got a piece of advice from a long-time idol.

Detroit Pistons all-star guard Isiah Thomas told Hunter not to be surprised if the Pistons took him with either the team's 10th or 11th pick in the first round.

Detroit used its 10th pick of the draft on Hunter in hopes he can step in and run the team when Isiah Thomas retires.

"I'm a young Isiah," said Hunter, who wears the same number (11) as Thomas. "I love to play defense, I can shoot, and I'm a little cocky."

"I just met him, and I almost fainted. He's the guy I've always looked up to. I've tried to play like Isiah since I was small. He's the greatest point guard to ever play the game. I want to be just like Isiah Thomas."

Said Thomas: "When I saw him on film, I thought, 'This is our guy.'"

Hunter was one of four players from the Southwestern Athletic Conference to get picked by a NBA team. In addition to Hunter, Mississippi Valley had two second-round picks. Al Ford, a high-scoring guard, was the 32nd overall pick by the Philadelphia 76ers, and center mark Buford was the 49th pick by the Phoenix Suns.

Southern forward Leonard White was the 53rd pick of the Los Angeles Clippers.

The Pistons tried their best to disguise their interest in Hunter. Bill McKinney, the team's director of player personnel, didn't bring Hunter in for a visit. He then told reporters that the Pistons wouldn't draft any player who didn't make a visit.

"Maybe I concealed the truth a little bit," said McKinney, who was afraid that the Los Angeles Lakers or another team would jump ahead of the Pistons and select Hunter. "But there was a lot of interest in Lindsey Hunter, and I had to protect my interest."

One of those teams interested in the 6-foot-2 Jackson, Miss. native was the Charlotte Hornets and Houston Rockets.

But after a strong showing at the Chicago pre-draft camp, Hunter became a high commodity.

"Every year, somebody stands out in the draft (tournament in Chicago), and Lindsey Hunter really stepped up in Chicago," said Houston coach Ruby Tom-

janovich. "He moved up from a second-round pick to a first-round pick, and maybe even a high first-round pick. We thought he'd be there for us for the 24th pick, but now we're not sure."

While Hunter's performance may have reinforced how Hornets director of player personnel Dave Twardzik already felt about him, it didn't help the Hornets' chances of landing him in the 17th pick in the first round.

"The camp hurt us because the guy I liked all year (Hunter) played well and may have moved up to the point where he won't be there when we pick," Twardzik said prior to the draft. "It was definitely counterproductive for us."

"Before this weekend, I thought we had a very good chance of getting him. Now we just have a chance. It makes you think of other options."

Hunter became the first Jackson State first-round pick since Purvis Short was taken fifth by the Golden State Warriors in 1978. He set 14 school records in three seasons after transferring from Alcorn State.

Even Isiah Thomas and Joe Dumars, the incumbent backcourt, praised the selection of Hunter. Thomas watched Hunter work out and was stunned with what he saw.

"I couldn't believe my eyes," Thomas said.

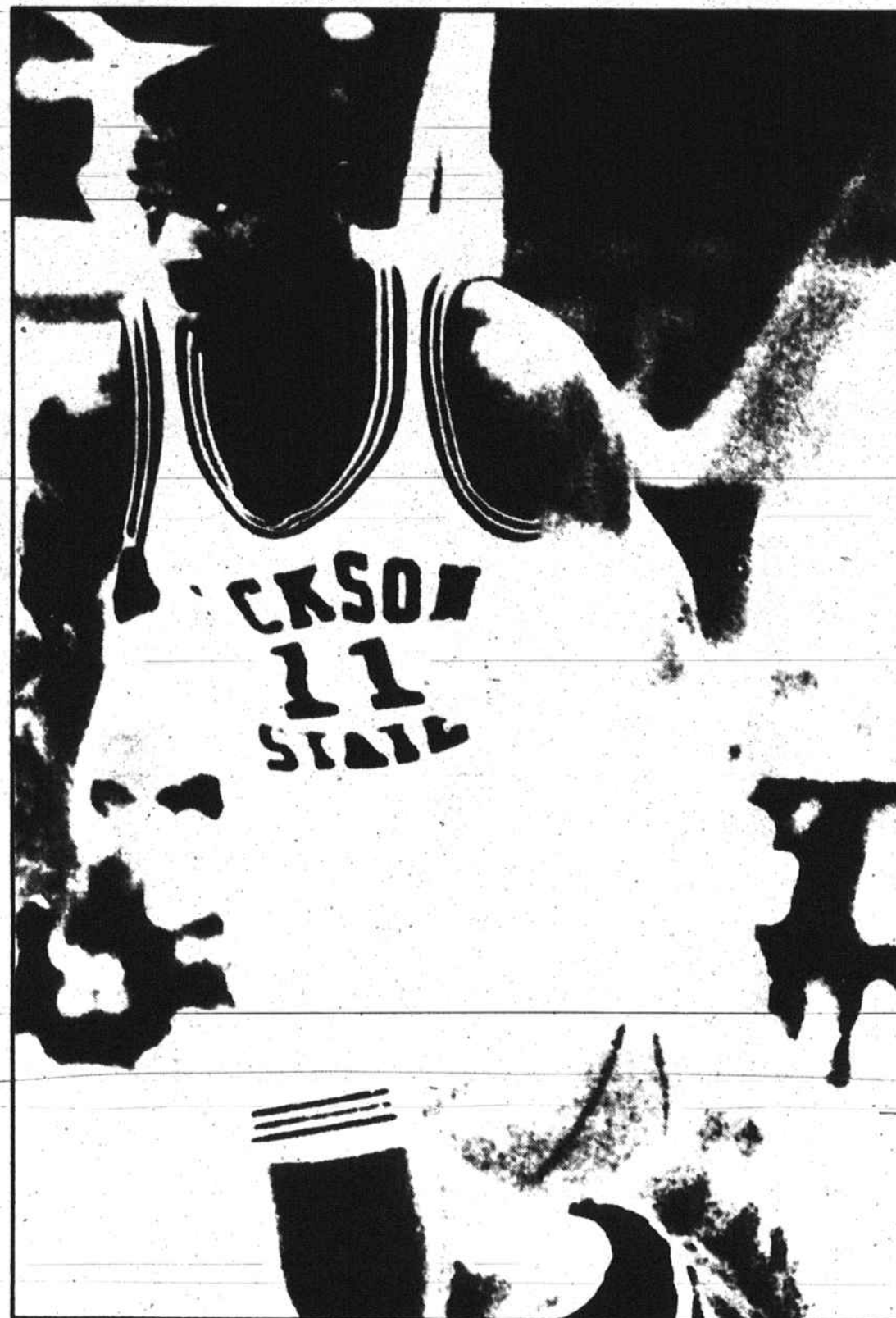
"I look at the NBA and since I've been in the league, he's the only one to come in — aside from Tim Hardaway — who can do the things with the ball that I can do."

"I can't wait to play with him. I can't tell you how excited I am, and I'm not usually at a loss for words. We've got two basketball players. The thing we lacked last year was we didn't have depth. I can't wait until next year."

Said Dumars: "I think we've helped ourselves tremendously."

The Pistons came away from the draft feeling they grabbed the sleeper of the draft in Hunter, a 6-2, 170-pounder who played shooting guard in college but is projected to play both guard positions in the NBA. Hunter averaged 26.7 points on 41.2 percent shooting and scored a school-record 48 points against Kansas.

"I saw a lot of similarities between him and Isiah," McKinney said. "Because



Lindsey Hunter

he played at a small school, he didn't get the recognition. But when you can play that well against a good defensive program like Kansas, then you're something special."

McKinney was sold on Hunter, who then was projected as a second-rounder, back in April when he excelled at one of the pre-draft camps in Phoenix.

"Detroit is definitely the place for me," said Hunter. "Behind Thomas and Joe Dumars, the best two guards on the planet."

Hunter realizes that he has to make some adjustments to play in the NBA.

"Basically, I'll just learn behind Joe

and Isiah," Hunter said. "It's great because I'll be learning behind two All-Star guards, and that can make me better. I've tried to play like Isiah since I was small. I wear No. 11. He's the greatest point guard to ever play the game."

"This is a guard-oriented team, so they're probably looking for someone to carry on the tradition. It's a tremendous leap. It'll be an adjustment, but physically I think I'm ready. The mental part will come as I learn more, but I'm prepared to learn all I can. I think I can play a strong role coming off the bench and do a little bit of everything. I'm just ready to go out there and work."

— By DERRICK MAHONE