

Bulls lay claim to best ever

Continued From 8B

greatest team of my era, the greatest team I've ever seen."

So what is it that has made these Bulls so special? Why is this team ready to do what no other could?

There's the Jordan factor. Jordan will win an unprecedented eighth NBA scoring title. He's also favored to earn his fourth MVP award. With an explosive first step to the basket and a deadly jump shot, with a combination of power and panache unmatched in

league history, Jordan can't be stopped.

Another reason Michael Jordan is probably the best player ever: He simply refuses to lose.

Of course, Jordan hasn't carried Chicago to the championship every season. After coming out of retirement last year, he even made a number of costly mistakes as Orlando knocked the Bulls out of the playoffs.

More times than not, however, Jordan's will to win lifts the

Bulls to victory. Whether it's the playoffs or the preseason, an obviously important regular-season game or a seemingly meaningless one, "I want to win so badly," Jordan said, "I can feel it in my bones."

"Michael is clearly head and shoulders above everybody else in this league, even the other All-Stars," teammate Steve Kerr said.

"Everybody knows how competitive he is. Most nights, he simply will not let us lose."

Rhodes lifts play with UNCC

Continued From 8B

myself, they were the ones who kept me up and that's the situation I've always been in," Rhodes said.

Left fielder Jimmy Anderson, who played against Rhodes in high school, makes sure his teammate stays focused. They keep a friendly competition going, checking each other stats, a rivalry that's been going on for years.

"When I'd see him on the other team, I'd always be striving to do better than he did, so we always stayed competitive like that," Anderson said.

UNC Charlotte's move into

Conference USA this year means playing in a more competitive league than the Metro Conference. The 49ers shared the Metro Conference regular season title last year but faltered in the conference tournament and were denied an at-large bid to an NCAA tournament. Rhodes knows it will be tougher this year in the new conference.

"It's probably one of the best baseball conferences in the country, top to bottom," he said. "Any team in the conference can beat any other team in the conference, on any given day."

Hibbs expects big things from

the 49ers. They have a potent line-up but have to improve the pitching and defense, if they hope to win a fourth straight conference title.

"The whole deal with our program, it's all about maturing and accepting responsibility on a daily basis," Hibbs said, "and we have not done a real good job of that to this point."

"But I expect it will continue to improve, just as it has with Nick and Jimmy. Those guys have grown up a lot in the last two years and learned to accept responsibility on how they perform, in the classroom and on the field every day."

A guide to the 1996 NFL draft

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Team-by-team capsules for the first round of the 1996 NFL draft, in order of selection (1995 record in parentheses):

1. New York Jets (3-13).
NEEDS: Offensive line; wide receiver; running back; defensive line.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: The fans want Southern California receiver Keyshawn Johnson, the game-breaker the Jets lack. Coach Rich Kotite, who is running the draft, probably will make them happy, and also look for backfield and defensive line help later on.

2. Jacksonville Jaguars (4-12).
NEEDS: Both lines; wide receiver; running back; secondary.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Kevin Hardy of Illinois is the only defender worth taking this high. If Tom Coughlin, a career offensive coach, sticks to his roots, UCLA tackle Jonathan Ogden, Nebraska running back Lawrence Phillips or Ohio State wideout Terry Glenn are possibilities. Coughlin should tend to the lines in later rounds.

3. Arizona Cardinals (4-12).
NEEDS: Offensive line; tight end; safety.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Ogden would make lots of sense if he is available. So would trading down a bit if Ogden is gone, getting extra picks and perhaps taking a tight end (Ohio State's Ricky Dudley).

4. 26, Baltimore Ravens (5-11).
NEEDS: Defensive line; running back; linebacker.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: New coach Ted Marchibroda likes a wide-open passing game and has the tools at quarterback (Eric Zeier) and receiver. He would love to have Dudley to fit in, but also wouldn't mind a Phillips after coaching Marshall Faulk the last two seasons.

5. New York Giants (5-11).
NEEDS: Offensive line; wide receivers; linebackers; kickers.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: They figure to go for defense, unless coach Dan Reeves convinces Young they need a longball threat (Glenn or Marvin Harrison of Syracuse).

6, 13, St. Louis Rams (7-9).
NEEDS: Running back; quarterback; placekickers.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Rams want Phillips, but might need to get higher for him. With no quarterbacks around, they might go for Glenn to put opposite Isaac Bruce.

7. New England Patriots (6-10).
NEEDS: Receiver; safety; defensive line.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Look for Parcells to address the defense, as he always does, although Glenn would be tempting. One of the defensive linemen or Rice, if he's still around, should interest him.

8. Carolina (7-9).
NEEDS: Speed on offense; more blockers; pass-rushing defensive linemen.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: One of the top runners or defensive ends should entice GM Bill Polian. But Glenn or

Harrison also would be appealing.

9. Houston Oilers (7-9).
NEEDS: Offensive and defensive line; linebacker to replace Eddie Robinson.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: They'd love to get a shot at a top defensive lineman, preferably an end (Baylor's Daryl Gardener?), or Rice. Later rounds figure to be used for bulk, too.

10. Cincinnati Bengals (7-9).
NEEDS: Both lines; secondary.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: A tackle or guard should be top priority, and the line might be addressed several times. Options for first round include Willie Anderson of Auburn and Jermaine Mayberry of Texas A&M-Kingsville, or perhaps Jermain Stephens of North Carolina A&T, which could be a reach.

11. New Orleans Saints (7-9).
NEEDS: Playmakers on defense.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Except for cornerbacks, the Saints will be looking for all kinds of defensive help. Any of the top linemen or possibly linebacker Ray Lewis of Miami would fit.

12, 22, Tampa Bay Buccaneers (7-9).
NEEDS: Cornerbacks; defensive linemen.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Despite the second-worst offense in the league (238 points), the Bucs have people in place. New coach Tony Dungy, a defensive wizard, could do worse than taking a pass-rushing type with No. 12 and a defensive back, perhaps Walt Harris of Mississippi State or Deron Jenkins of Tennessee, at No. 22.

14. Seattle Seahawks (8-8).
NEEDS: Defensive line; cornerback; running back depth.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: With only 28 sacks, the Seahawks must do something about the pass rush. If none of the top linemen are around,

15. Denver Broncos (8-8).
NEEDS: Cornerbacks; pass-rushers; young quarterback.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Will devote most of selections to defense, with linemen who can get to quarterback a priority, of course.

16. Minnesota Vikings (8-8).
NEEDS: Bulk inside on defense; linebacker; running back; tight end.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Defensive tackle Marcus Jones of North Carolina or a linebacker likely choice, but runner such as George, Biakabutuka or fullback Mike Alstott of Purdue might be tempting.

17. Oakland Raiders (8-8).
NEEDS: Offensive line, especially tackle; quarterback; defensive depth.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Having done so well in free agency, the Raiders could gamble on a project. That might mean outside linebacker John Mobley of Kutztown (Pa.).

18. Chicago Bears (9-7).
NEEDS: Kickers; tight end; wide receivers; cornerback.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: No receivers were acquired to replace Graham, so Harrison, if still available, is a nice fit. Dudley also would work, as might Mississippi State's Harris at cornerback.

19. Indianapolis Colts (9-7).
NEEDS: Pass-rushing linemen; sec-

ondary; receiving depth; placekicker.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Unlikely to get top defensive lineman, so might look at Harris or Molden, if around. Could go for speedy receiver if one is left (Eric Moulds of Mississippi State or Notre Dame's Derrick Mayes?)

20. Miami Dolphins (9-7).
NEEDS: Linebacker; secondary; speedy running back.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Johnson works the draft as well as anybody, but lacks the ammunition to fire any major shots. With Bryan Cox gone, linebacker Ray Lewis is possible. So is one of the many top runners, perhaps UCLA's Karim Abdul-Jabbar.

21, 23, Detroit Lions (10-6).
NEEDS: Offensive line; linebacker; kick returners.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: They'd love to package these two picks and perhaps a later one to move up and find a starter.

24. Buffalo Bills (10-6).
NEEDS: Wide receiver; tight end; depth in secondary and at linebacker.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: With all the top wideouts, Buffalo should get one. And if Dudley slips this low, he'll be the guy. In later rounds, the Bills will look for depth.

25. Philadelphia Eagles (10-6).
NEEDS: Linebacker; offensive line; tight end; quarterback.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Somewhere, the Eagles will take a quarterback, perhaps Bobby Hoving of Ohio State on the second round.

27. Green Bay Packers (11-5).
NEEDS: Offensive line; backup quarterback; inside linebacker.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: Will look to beef up protection for Brett Favre and try to find a young QB later on. If sleeper Jermain Stephens isn't grabbed, he could go here.

28. Kansas City Chiefs (13-3).
1995 DRAFT: Tamarick Vanover, fresh from the CFL, was a major addition on the third round. A premier kick returner, he should become a prime target at receiver this year.

NEEDS: Quarterback; linebacker; placekicker.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: The old "best player" theory certain to be employed. The Chiefs have many strengths, particularly on both lines, and no glaring weaknesses aside from kicking.

29. Pittsburgh Steelers (11-5).
NEEDS: Quarterback; depth in offensive line; running back.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: With Bam Morris in trouble and Erric Pegram not considered durable, the Steelers figure to shop for a runner. Abdul-Jabbar, Purdue fullback Mike Alstott, Auburn's Stephen Davis and Oklahoma's Jerald Moore have been mentioned.

30. Dallas Cowboys (12-4).
NEEDS: Linebackers; wide receivers; young quarterback to develop.

DRAFT PROSPECTS: It's time to start thinking about grooming a young backup to Troy Aikman. But that will come later in draft. First, a linebacker or two and a pass-catcher. If Mobley slips this far, he'd fit.

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