

Take third, avoid Bulls

By Paul Newberry
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Chicago will be the top seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs, and there's a spirited race to see which team will get to lose to the Bulls in the first round.

The most significant events, however, are occurring in the middle of the pack, where New York, Detroit and Atlanta are tussling to avoid a tough first-round matchup and put off a possible meeting with the Bulls as long as possible.

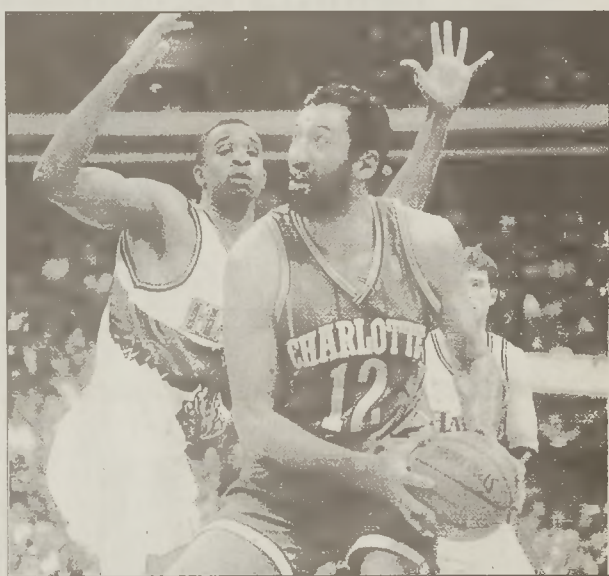
Chicago has locked up another Central Division title and Miami appears headed for the Atlantic Division championship, giving those teams the top seeds in the Eastern playoffs. After that, things get interesting.

New York (53-23) holds the critical No. 3 seed over Atlanta (51-24), which dropped back to fifth behind Detroit. The Pistons (51-24) hold the tie-breaker with two weeks left in the regular season.

What does all this mean? The team that ends up third gets a couple of key advantages in the playoffs: home-court advantage in the first round and the chance to delay a meeting with the Bulls until the conference finals.

The No. 4 seed gets home court in the first round, but faces a meeting against the fifth seed in the best-of-5 series. Right now, that would match the Pistons against the Hawks, meaning one of those teams would be eliminated in the first round — an unfair fate considering they began the week with the sixth- and seventh-best records in the NBA.

Maybe that's why the Hawks were so downcast after losing to the Knicks Saturday, only the fifth Omni defeat for Atlanta this season. With just seven games remaining, the Hawks face an uphill battle to bring the opening two games of the play-



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Allen Henderson and the Atlanta Hawks are battling for the third spot in the NBA playoffs.

offs to their home court.

"I don't know what to say about it," Dikembe Mutombo said. "This was a very big test for us, and we just couldn't get anything done down the stretch."

The Hawks can take some solace in their remaining games. Atlanta clearly has the easier schedule compared to the Knicks and the Pistons, providing a glimmer of hope that No. 3 is still within reach.

"I think there's still a chance," Mutombo said. "We're not going to put our heads down just because we lost to the Knicks. I think the future is still in our favor."

Atlanta's remaining games include two each against New Jersey and Philadelphia, both eliminated from playoff consideration, as well as an April 16 game at New York. But the Hawks have only two contests left at the Omni, where their record is 34-5; Atlanta is 17-19

on the road.

"Nothing is easy," Mutombo said. "All the rest of the games are going to be big for us."

New York appears to have the toughest schedule the rest of the way, if for no other reason than they still have two games left against the Bulls (64-10). The Knicks, who have been maddeningly inconsistent this season, lost to Cleveland and a trip to Miami next Saturday.

"That's a great win against a great team," coach Jeff Van Gundy said after beating the Hawks, "but it doesn't alleviate anything that happened (Friday) night."

He was referring to a 93-84 home loss to an Orlando team that was missing three starters because of injuries. It was the latest in a series of inexplicable losses for the Knicks, who had dropped six of 11 prior to their victory in Atlanta.

SPORTS SHORTS

The Charlotte High School All-Star Basketball Classic has star power.

Saturday's game at Grady Cole Center will feature Wake Forest signee Aron McMillion of Greensboro Day; Virginia Commonwealth signee Scott Lilly of Independence and Miami (Ohio) signee Jay Locklier of Charlotte Christian. One of the area's most sought-after recruits, Darius Coulibaly of Greensboro Day, will also play.

Coaches are Tony Huggins of N.C. 4A champions Independence High and Quinton Toxey, who led Sun Valley to the 3A sectional final. Huggins will coach the West squad; Toxey the East.

Last year's game attracted 40 college coaches, including Maryland's Gary Williams.

Tickets are \$5 in advance, \$7 at the door. For more information, call Bill Shelton at 567-9511.

Johnson C. Smith University's 100 Club will sponsor a cookout Saturday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Bullpit on campus.

Proceeds from the cookout will benefit athletic scholarship programs at JCSU.

The foursome of John Lathan, Jack Richardson, Jesse Massey and Olin Grier won the Par Busters Golf Group Tournament Saturday at Eastwood Golf Course. The quartet won with a round of 59, one shot better than Richard Mitchell, Walt Colson, Johnny Campbell and Alvin Thompson. Donnell Davis, Eddie Chambers, James Talley and Bryon Cooper were third at 60.

Results from the Par Busters Golf Group Tournament at Eastwood Golf Course:

First Place: John Lathan, Jack



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Walt Colson tees off at the Par Busters Golf Tournament last week at Eastwood Golf Course. His foursome finished second.

Richardson, Jesse Massey, Olin Grier (59); Second place: Richard Mitchell, Walt Colson, Johnny Campbell, Alvin Thompson (60); Third place: Donnell Davis, Eddie Chambers, James Talley, Bryon Cooper (60); Fourth place: Otis Worthy, Wayne Carr, Richard Fogle, Vincent Harris (61); Fifth place: Melvin Jackson, James Austin, William Gill, George Ardrey (61).

A basketball festival will pit fathers, sons and friends against each other.

The Basketball Showdown, scheduled for June 14 at Wingate University, will have teams in four age groups: 8-10, 11-13, 14-17 and 18-over. Entry fee is \$20 per team and

can be mailed to Semper Fidelis Ministries, P.O. Box 273, Monroe, N.C. 28111 by May 31.

For more information, call 527-7311.

The Charlotte Pro-am Golf Tour Club is accepting applications for the 1997 season. The tour and match play begins in June and ends in October with three divisions: 10-under handicap; 11-21 handicap and 22-28 handicap.

Applications must be received by June 2. For more information, call Mike DeAngelo or Bill Shelton at 567-9511.

IT'S TIME



When asked to re-new his Black Guide ad for '97-'98, Allstate Agent, Bob White's reply was... Sure,...

“ Your placement was great, can we get more of this year's at the Convention & Visitor's Bureau?...The Black Guide was a tremendous source and reached many due to strategic placement.

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Bob White's Allstate Office is located in Midtown Square

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