

C. JEMAL HORTON

Black coaches missing from NFL wish lists

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playoffs — it still sort of makes me sick to point to them as a reason to be held up to honor the black race, as if to say, "See, black people can do the job, so hire one."

You'd think we're long past the days where such a thing is necessary.

We're not.

The truth is, too many owners with head-coaching openings this winter will ignore Buffalo defensive coordinator Jerry Gray And New York Jets defensive coordinator Donnie Henderson. And New York Giants defensive coordinator Tim Lewis. And Chicago defensive coordinator Ron Rivera. Or always-a-bridesmaid Ted Cottrell, defensive coordinator for the Minnesota Vikings.

It just gets old after a while or a generation or three.

So instead of letting the talents and successes of black coaches stand on their own merit, it's almost as if there has to be a pity party for them before they get hired. Remember how bad it got in the early 1990s, when Dungy couldn't get a job? What about with Lewis in the late 1990s? Those two men had become downright sympathetic figures after a while.

Instead of journalists such as myself complaining year after year, it finally took a litany of white media members saying, "You know what? It's dead wrong that this man doesn't have a head job" before Dungy and Lewis got top jobs.

But if that's what it takes,

then so be it: Cottrell deserves a job ... see what Dungy and Lewis have done?

I'm only half-kidding.

Look, I'm eternally against a quota system, which is why I hate the NFL's mandate that teams interview a minority candidate before filling a head-coaching vacancy. So, no, there shouldn't be any pity minority hires — although, yes, it would be a travesty if no black men were hired this year.

Teams should always hire the best man for the job. And all I mean to say is this: In many cases, believe or not, the best man might happen to be black.

So, NFL owners, what will you do this time around?

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Five-game stretch may prove crucial to Wizards' season

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ing records, and four of the games are at home.

"We have five winnable games," point guard Gilbert Arenas said. "They're not going to be easy. We've got to go out there and play. January will tell what we're about, what we're made of. We just need to do some soul-searching and come in with some heart."

The stretch started Tuesday night with a loss at home against Houston (11-18), followed by a Friday game at New York (7-21). Then comes Boston (12-17), Utah (15-16) and Atlanta (7-21), all at home.

"We'd like to go into the New Year saying we have a five-game package, that we're going to take it game by game and respect our opponents," coach Eddie Jordan said. "We feel that we are coming together. We are competing. We've competed down to the last second most every game. We just have to continue to believe in each other and believe in the system."

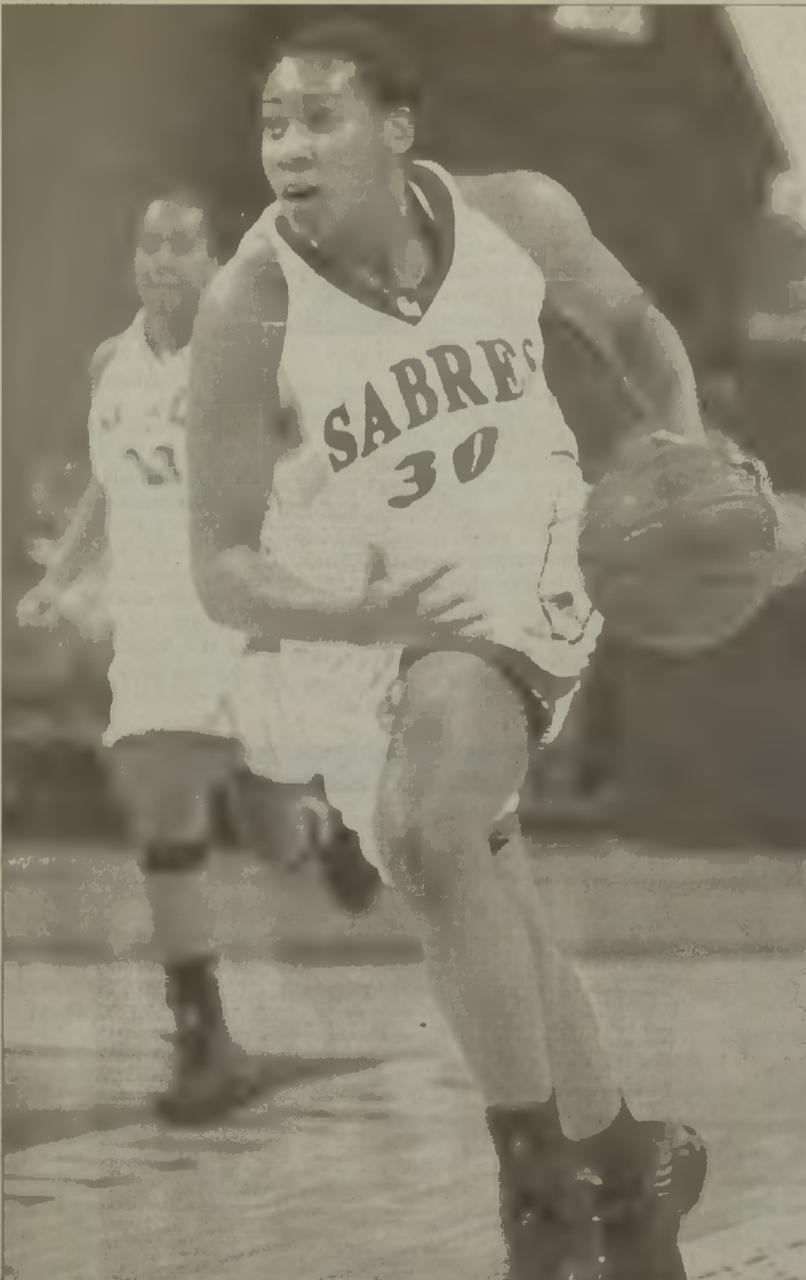
The Wizards appeared to reach a turning point when Caron Butler was inserted into the lineup after an 0-3 start to last month's five-game West Coast road trip. They won the last two games and returned home to

beat the Los Angeles Lakers, but they then dropped a close home game to Phoenix and suffered a dispiriting loss to Miami that ran the Heat's winning streak over Washington to 14 games.

"There's only so many times you can say, 'This is the time to get things rolling,'" forward Antawn Jamison said. "With me, I'm pretty much fed up as far as saying that. Eventually we have to pull it together. It's really no more excuses, the way we've been playing, not finding a way to win games, losing close games. It's pretty much put your money where your mouth is and find a way to do it."

Jamison doesn't take much stock in the records of the upcoming opponents. After all, the Wizards have losses to strugglers Portland and Charlotte, offsetting big wins over San Antonio and Detroit.

"It's pretty much ridiculous to me because we had games against teams like that in past and we didn't find a way to win," Jamison said. "If you ask me, it's the opposite way around. We play well against the best teams in the league and played poorly against the average teams. We just need to get our act together."



PHOTO/WADE NASH

South Mecklenburg High forward and Duke signee Joy Cheek brings the ball upcourt against Providence Day in the first round of the Bojangles' Shootout at Charlotte Bobcats Arena. Providence Day won and advanced to the semifinals.

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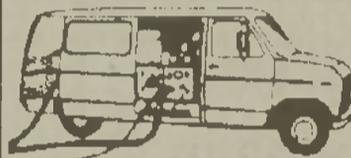


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