

Doug Collins — a victim of Bulls' mismanagement

Poor Doug Collins. One of the most successful coaches in the history of the Chicago Bulls, Collins was fired on July 6 — a day, that in Chicago, will live in infamy in just a few short months.

Collins was one of the bright young coaches in the NBA and, in his three years with the Bulls, he directed the team as though he had a greater vision in mind.

It appeared as if he had a vision of a great basketball team in which no one player is any more important than the others. He had a vision of the great Michael Jordan leading his team by averaging just 20 points per game. He had a vision of B.J. Armstrong leading the fastbreak while Stacey King and Jeff Sanders filled the lanes. Now, he has a vision of the pink slip.

To the Bulls and to basketball, Collins has been an All-American success story. He was an All-American at Illinois State, a member of the U.S. Olympic team in 1972 and a four-time All-Star in eight seasons with the Philadelphia 76ers. He had a winning record in three years with the Bulls and led them on a remarkable run in the NBA playoffs this past season. However, with the Bulls, he has had his hands tied.

Collins was the head coach. He was not the general manager, the president or the owner and, because of that, he did not have free reign to build the team he wanted. He had to work with Michael Jordan.

Now, starting a team with Jordan is a great way to begin, but if that's where it ends as well, it becomes tough to win. Collins knew this and it got him fired.

As mentioned before, Collins has the idea that team isn't spelled with an "I," and that it takes five players working together to win consistently in the NBA. However, team owner Jerry Reinsdorf and operations director Jerry Krause seemed to see it differently.

To win in the NBA from an owner's standpoint is to fill the stands and normally, to fill the stands, a team must be successful on the court. However, a phenom named Jordan plays in Chicago. He is the best player in the NBA (though arguments could be made for Magic and a healthy Bird), and his ability to score 40 points a night with such amazing agility draws crowds by itself. Collins tried several times to tamper with the Reinsdorf/Krause model for success, and this time he got the ax.

In Collins' first season, he had a special project named Charles Oakley who loved to rebound. But Oakley couldn't throw the ball in the ocean if he was on the QE 2, so Collins worked with the 6-foot-10 Oakley,

Doug Hoogervorst Staff Writer

After a season and a half, Oakley voiced that it was time for him to get some shots instead of it being the MJ show night after night. Collins satisfied his big guy, working the ball more to Oakley toward the end of the year. The Bulls finished with 50 wins that season and Oakley was given a one-way ticket to the Big Apple for taking some of Michael's shots (or dollars at the gate).

Then, at the draft and with Oakley gone, Collins begged for a scorer to help ease the burden from his superhuman, Jordan. He got Will Perdue. Ugh.

That's enough to get any coach fed up, and rumors circulated that Collins would leave Chicago if he didn't get more input. Krause and Reinsdorf semi-concurred and gave Collins a present, signing free-agent gunner Craig Hodges.

Hodges can play a role on a contending team, but he is not an offensive burden lifter. Thus, Jordan had to continue to shoulder the load on offense.

As this past season ran on, Michael took offense to his having to be the offense. Jordan pointed out, through the press, that there are five players on the floor (he learned that from Dean Smith), and the press hounded Collins for "over-using" Jordan.

Collins, though, had a problem counting on the other four players. It seems that the rest of the Bulls either had Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde complexes

or were Dave Corzine clones. Scottie Pippen looked like George Gervin one night, Curious George the next. The same went for Horace Grant, Charlie Davis, Jim Paxson and Sam Vincent. And as for Brad Sellers, Bill Cartwright and Will Perdue, they seemed to think that gray-haired, outside-shooting big guys who can't run were in demand. So Collins looked bad because he had to rely on Jordan so heavily.

To resolve his problems, Collins convinced Krause to let him draft this year, and he picked three impact players in King, Armstrong and Sanders. Together, in college, the three averaged more than 70 points per game last season, more than twice Jordan's output. Adding Collins' genius draft to his development work with Pippen and Grant, Krause and Reinsdorf realized that they and Collins had "philosophical differences."

"We appreciate the effort Doug Collins has given over the past three years," Reinsdorf said. "However, throughout the years, philosophical differences between management and Doug over the direction of the club grew to a point where the move was required."

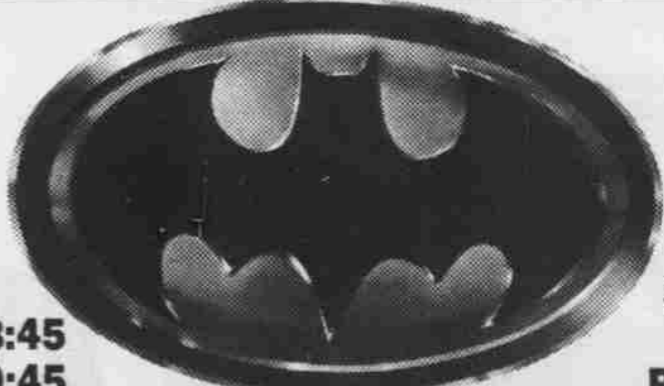
Obviously, the difference Reinsdorf referred to is over winning. Collins believes in winning on the court, and Reinsdorf already knows he's winning at the gate. It's too bad he doesn't realize that a winning team on the court leads to a winning team at the gate.

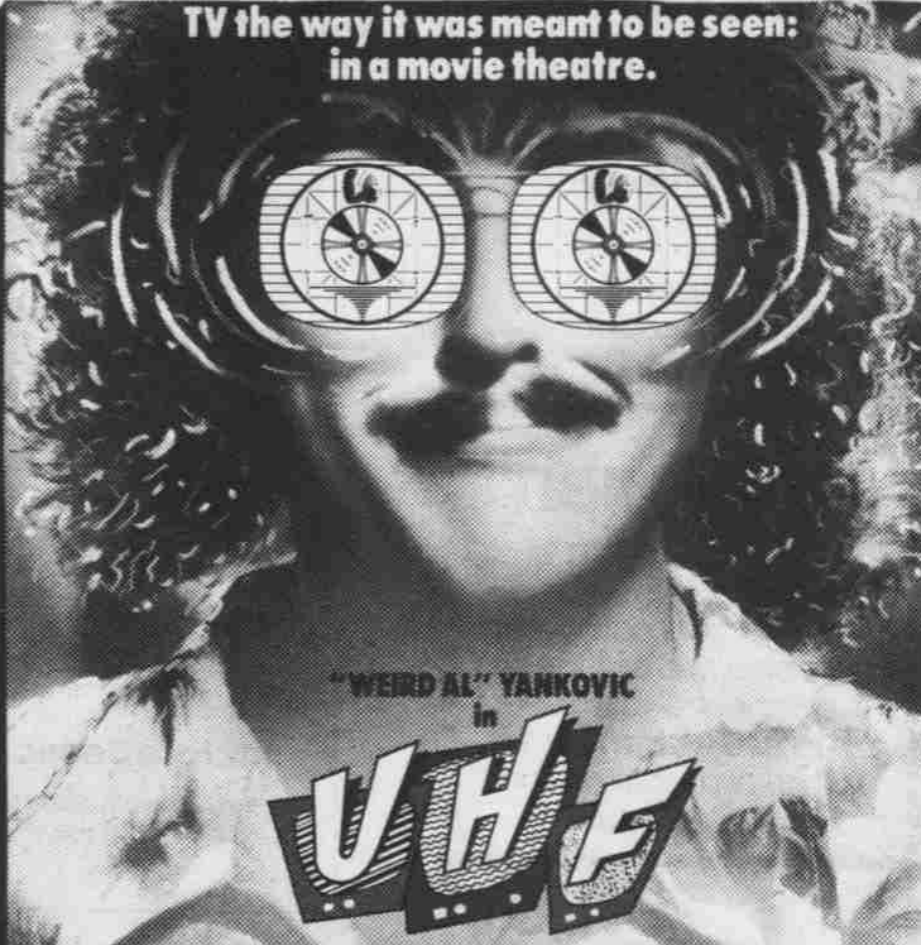
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