

SPORTS

Bulls will top NBA beasts of the East

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series.

By DOUG MCCURRY

Staff Writer

Can the Pistons three-peat? Will this finally be the year for Michael and the Bulls? Can the Lakers and Celtics relive their past glory?

These questions dominate talk of the 1990-91 NBA season. Because there are at least six other teams — Cleveland, Utah, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Phoenix and Portland — with a legitimate shot at the NBA title, there are no easy answers.

Despite death threats from other staff writers, I have come to a pretty solid solution to these questions: Michael Jordan. Chicago has finally assembled a talented enough supporting cast to give the game's dominant force an excellent chance to capture his first title. With the emergence of Scottie Pippen, the improvement of second-year players Stacey King and B.J. Armstrong, and the acquisition of Dennis Hopson, Jordan has enough talent with him to bring a title back to the Windy City.

The Bulls certainly will not have an easy path to the title. Many teams, notably the Jazz by trading for Jeff Malone and the Lakers by signing Sam Perkins and Terry Teagle, have greatly increased their talent pools.

Here's a team-by-team look at the Eastern Conference.

ATLANTIC DIVISION

1. Philadelphia 76ers. The Sixers have four solid starters — Hershey Hawkins, Johnny Dawkins, Rick Mahorn, and Mike Gminski — to complement superstar Charles Barkley. Barkley will once again be called on to take care of the majority of the scoring and rebounding. They are lacking in depth at the post. Manute Bol, although a shot-blocking menace at 7-7, is not a reliable backup center. Ron Anderson and Derek Smith provide excellent scoring and defense in their backcourt reserve roles.

2. Boston Celtics. They still have the best frontcourt in basketball — Robert Parish, Kevin McHale, and Larry Bird. All three are legitimate NBA all-stars. However, the team needs this trio to stay healthy for the entire season to have a chance at the title. Good Luck. Brian Shaw and Reggie Lewis provide a quality backcourt, although both are inconsistent perimeter shooters. The drafting of super-quick Dee Brown may revive a missing fast break.

3. New York Knicks. They have rebounding machines in Charles Oakley and Patrick Ewing. Add Ewing's excellent low-post scoring and tenacious defense, and the Knicks are rock solid in the middle. The only position in which New York is lacking is small forward. Johnny Newman took the free-agent route to Charlotte, leaving New York with only Kelly Tripucka clone Kiki Vandeweghe and Gerald Wilkins (he of the 12-foot shooting range). If Maurice Cheeks has an excellent year and they do SOMETHING with Mark Jackson, the Knicks have a chance.

4. Washington Bullets. The Bullets have a lot of players who could play quality minutes for most NBA teams, but no stars. Their front line is deep but not good. Pervis Ellison, Harvey Grant, Tom Hammonds, John Williams, and Bernard King are all O.K. Ellison is too much of a finesse player to be the franchise center the Kings wanted him to be. Grant and Hammonds will always be role players. The overweight Williams will never be the "next Michael Jordan" as some have said and King's knee problems are a huge question mark. The unsung hero is guard Darrell Walker, who racked up nine triple-doubles last year.

5. Miami Heat. Although the Heat have a young starter at every position, Rony Seikaly, Glen Rice, and maybe Sherman Douglas are the only ones who will be quality players in the future. Kevin Edwards just can't shoot well enough to be a shooting guard. Alec Kessler should be a competent power forward, and top pick Willie Burton will provide some scoring and athletic play. It might take a while for the Heat's young talent to gel, so they might fare better later in the season.

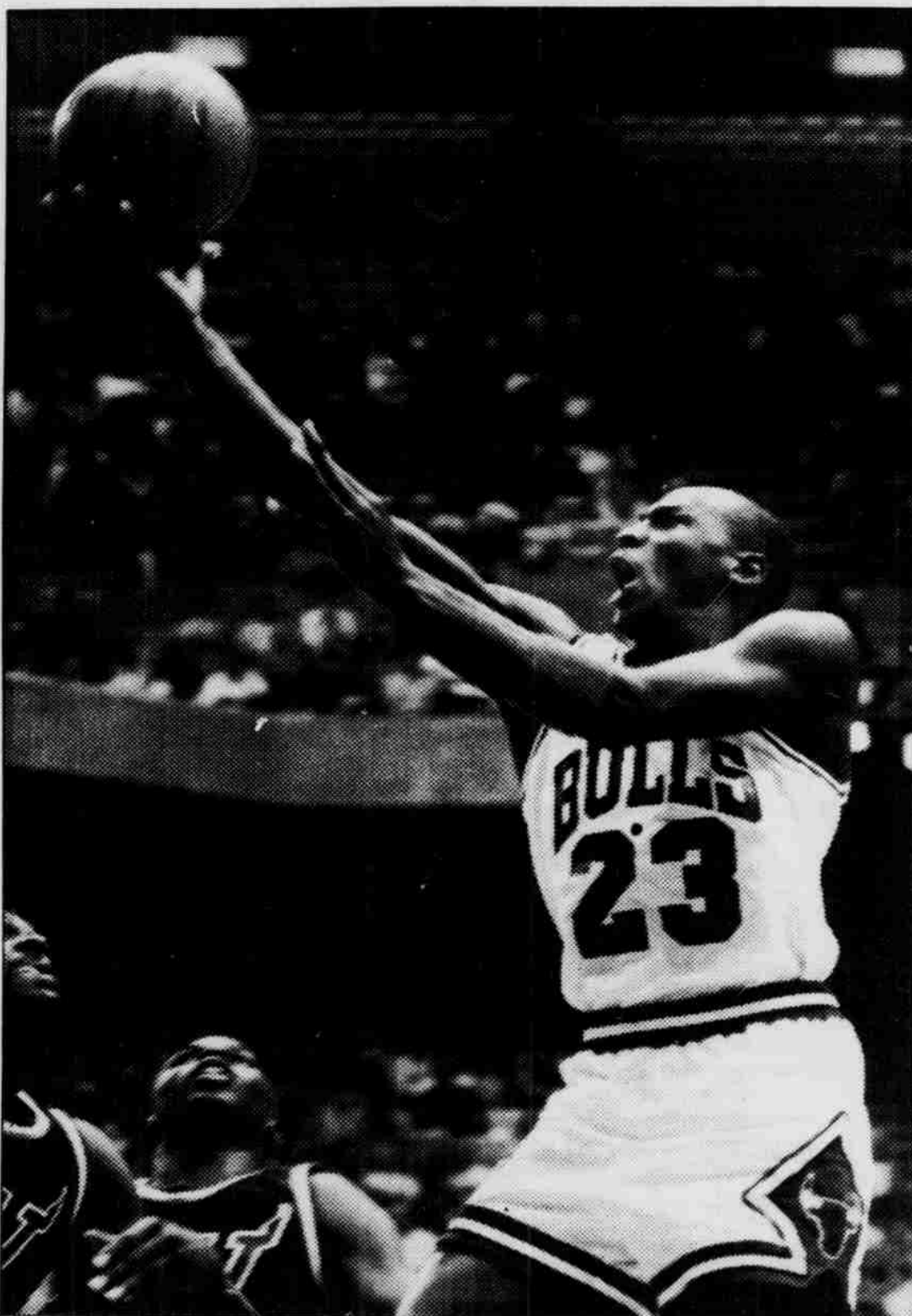
6. New Jersey Nets. Believe it or not, the Nets actually have (dare I say it) talent. Sam Bowie never lived up to the promise of being taken before Michael Jordan in the draft, but he is now a solid center. Top overall pick Derrick Coleman will provide scoring and rebounding in bunches. The back court is a bit shaky, but Reggie Theus, Chris Morris and Mookie Blaylock all are decent, unusual for Nets' starters. The Nets still have more CBA-caliber players in reserve roles than any other NBA team.

CENTRAL DIVISION:

1. Chicago Bulls. Michael Jordan finally has good enough teammates. Small forward Scottie Pippen looks more Jordanesque every day. Power forward Horace Grant provides excellent scoring and rebounding. Second-year star Stacey King continues to improve his McHale-like low-post moves. Guards John Paxson, B.J. Armstrong, Craig Hodges, and the newly acquired Dennis Hopson should all complement Jordan well. The big question mark is at center. Can Bill Cartwright solidify the point so that Jordan can dominate?

2. Detroit Pistons. This is a team without a true weakness. They have a great back court that has patented the three guard — Isiah Thomas, Joe Dumars, and Vinnie Johnson — offense. Johnson's scoring is unstoppable when he's in the groove. Dumars is a master at defending scoring guards (i.e. Jordan) and Thomas runs the show. The Pistons are strong up front as well. Bill Laimbeer and James Edwards can both score and rebound. Don't leave out defensive MVP Dennis Rodman or supersubs Mark Aguirre and John Salley. The Pistons main problem is that they are trying to win their third straight title, a nearly impossible task.

3. Cleveland Cavaliers. The Cavs' starting lineup is incredible. All-Stars Brad Daugherty and Mark Price solidify the center and point guard positions. Danny Ferry, a Renaissance player — he does everything well — should



DTH file photo

Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls are hungry to dethrone the Pistons

start at small forward. Cleveland has to choose between the off-injured Larry Nance and \$28-million man John "Hot Rod" Williams, both excellent players, at the power forward slot. If Craig Ehlo can play solid at the shooting guard and the team can avoid the injuries that decimated them last year, watch out.

4. Indiana Pacers. The Pacers boast a young and talented front court and bunches of scoring from the perimeter. Shooting guard Reggie Miller and small forward Chuck Person combined for 45 ppg last year. Center Rik Smits is quietly moving upward becoming one of the league's top big men. However, beyond Smits and reserve forward LaSalle Thompson, the Pacers have no real defensive stoppers. The Pacers also ranked 23rd in turnover ratio.

5. Atlanta Hawks. Dominique Wilkins continues to be one of the most overrated players in the league. The Hawks will always have trouble until he accepts his role as a team player and leader. Atlanta is loaded at the guard position. Spud Webb, Rumeal Robinson, Doc Rivers, and John Battle will all contribute heavily. The Hawks have no power forward, unless you are counting Jon Koncak, the NBA's most overpaid player. Unless Moses Malone and Wilkins start passing the ball, the

Hawks will disappoint again.

6. Charlotte Hornets. Although they are bad, the Hornets are realistically only two players — a center and a point guard — away from being good. They have incredible depth at power forward, with the ambidextrous scoring monster Armon Gilliam and second-year banger J.R. Reid. The problem is that the 6-9 Reid must play center. Charlotte has two young, athletic scorers in Rex Chapman and Kendall Gill at shooting guard. Add Dell Curry — a consistent scorer with the league's prettiest jump shot — and 5-3 Muggsy Bogues, and the back court is solid. Former Knick Johnny Newman will add defense and scoring at small forward.

7. Milwaukee Bucks. Their best player, Ricky Pierce, doesn't even start. The NBA's top sixth-man knows how to score. Alvin Robertson, a perennial All-Defensive Team selection, provides excellent ball-handling and passing. The Bucks have big problems up front. Jack Sikma is no longer a quality center, preferring to launch three-pointers instead of battling for rebounds. Forward Greg "Cadillac" Anderson had only 24 assists in 1,291 minutes, a strong indication of poor team play.

UNC's Hollier earns ACC weekly honors

From staff and wire reports

North Carolina linebacker Dwight Hollier was named ACC defensive lineman of the week Monday for his performance in the Tar Heels' 24-10 loss to Virginia.

Hollier, a 6-foot-3, 240-pound junior from Hampton, Va., had 11 total tackles, including nine primary hits.

Saturday's performance marked the fourth straight double-figure tackling game for Hollier, who was in on 15 hits the previous week in a 20-3 loss to Clemson.

A preseason All-ACC selection, Hollier led the conference in total tackles entering Saturday's game with 118. He also led the league in total hits in 1989 with 159 for the year.

UNC still in postseason bowl picture, Swofford says

North Carolina remains in the running for a spot in at least four postseason bowl games, UNC Athletic Director John Swofford said Monday.

The Peach, Liberty, Aloha and Fiesta bowls have all contacted Swofford and are still considering the Tar Heels, he said.

But with UNC on "the fringe" of the bowl picture, the 5-4-1 Tar Heels must win against Duke Saturday and may also have to depend on results from other games across the nation to land them in postseason play.

"Much of it is kind of murky right now, and there's nothing very definitive at all in terms of our own situation," Swofford said. "Obviously, to have any chance we need to win Saturday. If we can do that, we'll just have to wait and see what the circumstances are."

"Any time you have to go to the last week of the season to get your sixth win, it's not an easy call from a bowl standpoint. You have to have some good fortune, but maybe we can."

AP Football Top 25

	Record	Pvs
1. Notre Dame (55)	8-1-0	1
2. Colorado (5)	9-1-1	4
3. Miami, Fla.	6-2-0	5
4. Georgia Tech	8-0-1	7
5. Brigham Young	8-1-0	8
6. Florida	8-1-0	10
7. Texas	7-1-0	14
8. Virginia	8-1-0	11
9. Florida St.	7-2-0	12
10. Washington	8-2-0	2
11. Nebraska	9-1-0	13
12. Houston	8-1-0	3
13. Iowa	7-2-0	6
14. Tennessee	5-2-2	9
15. Mississippi	8-1-0	16
16. Michigan	6-3-0	19
17. Clemson	8-2-0	18
18. Penn St.	7-2-0	21
19. Southern Cal	7-2-1	23
20. Louisville	9-1-1	22
21. Ohio St.	6-2-1	—
22. Illinois	6-3-0	17
23. Michigan St.	5-3-1	24
24. Auburn	6-2-1	15
25. Southern Miss.	8-3-0	—

Others receiving votes: California 82, Oklahoma 69, Texas A&M 58, Oregon 21, San Jose St. 16, Colorado St. 15, Wyoming 6, Alabama 5, Baylor 2, Central Michigan 2, UCLA 1.

Swofford said that a bowl representative on hand in Durham Saturday could conceivably extend UNC a bid on the spot following a Tar Heel victory.

"The last bid we accepted was to the Aloha Bowl (in 1986), and that was after a win at Duke," Swofford said. "But we didn't really accept that until late that evening."

"This year it's such that if we have an opportunity, it may come later in the evening Saturday or even the next day or so."

Sports daily experiencing personnel shakeups

NEW YORK — The president and publisher of The National has been relieved of day-to-day duties at the sports daily and three other top executives have been dismissed, a company spokesman confirmed Monday.

An executive associated with the Mexican media and entertainment concern that is the paper's biggest shareholder has been brought in to take greater control of operations at the 9-month-old newspaper.

The moves come as the paper continues to absorb heavy losses in its bid to become the United States' first national sports daily.

Backers of the newspaper have run into a depressed advertising climate and skepticism about the potential audience for a daily sports publication.

AP Basketball Top 25

	Record	Pvs
1. UNLV (50)	35-5	2
2. Arkansas (5)	30-5	7
3. Arizona (5)	25-7	14
4. Michigan St. (1)	28-6	4
5. North Carolina	21-13	—
6. Duke (2)	29-9	15
7. Alabama	26-9	23
8. Indiana	18-11	—
9. Georgetown (2)	24-7	8
10. Ohio St.	17-13	—
11. UCLA	22-11	—
12. Pittsburgh	12-17	—
13. Syracuse	26-7	6
14. LSU	23-9	19
15. Oklahoma	27-5	1
16. Georgia Tech	28-7	9
17. Connecticut	31-6	3
18. Virginia	20-12	—
19. Temple	20-11	—
20. Missouri	26-6	—
21. Georgia	20-9	11
22. Texas	24-9	—
23. Louisville	27-8	16
24. Southern Miss.	20-12	—
25. St. John's	24-10	—

Others receiving votes: Kansas 137, New Mexico 129, North Carolina St. 66, Houston 63, East Tennessee St. 62, Memphis St. 55, DePaul 45, James Madison 44, Kentucky 42, Purdue 39, Minnesota 37, Oklahoma St. 36, New Mexico St. 31, Brigham Young 30, Notre Dame 25, Xavier, Ohio 23, Illinois 22, Cincinnati 20, Stanford, 20, Clemson 18, Rutgers 18, Michigan 16, Wyoming 13, South Alabama 12, California 11, SW Louisiana 11, Marquette 10, Murray St. 10, Seton Hall 10, UC Santa Barbara 8, Utah 8, Creighton 7, New Orleans 7, Princeton 7, Tennessee 7, Ala.-Birmingham 6, Wake Forest 6, Long Beach St. 5, South Florida 5, La Salle 4, Massachusetts 4, Colorado St. 3, Iowa St. 3, Florida St. 2, Villanova 2, Mississippi St. 1, St. Louis 1, Texas-El Paso 1.

Tourney pairings released for weekend

Women's soccer hosts Final Four; men travel to Virginia for second round

It's NCAA Tournament time, and UNC's calendar this weekend is booked solid. The women's soccer and field hockey teams are looking to defend their national titles in Final Four action, while the mens soccer squad competes in an NCAA second-round match. The volleyball team will also be taking part in the postseason hoopla; it competes in the ACC Tournament.

UNC's Fetzer Field to host women's soccer Final Four

Fetzer Field will be host to the women's soccer Final Four, and the top-seeded Tar Heels (18-1-1) will face Colorado Saturday at 11 a.m. in the first semifinal contest. Top-ranked Santa Clara meets Connecticut at 2 p.m. in the other semifinal, and the national championship will be decided Sunday at 1 p.m.

North Carolina has to be considered the odds-on favorite after its 4-3 overtime win over N.C. State Sunday in the second round. The Tar Heels have captured the last four NCAA titles and

have never lost a game at home. But UNC can't take an unprecedented eighth national championship for granted. The Wolfpack very nearly upset the Tar Heels Sunday, and UNC has to be weary of Connecticut, the team that ended UNC's 103-game unbeaten streak earlier this season with a 3-2 upset.

Field hockey opens title defense against Penn State

The field hockey squad will be going after its second straight national championship this weekend. Coming off a 3-1 quarterfinal win against Northeastern Sunday, the Tar Heels (19-3) now travel to Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., to square off against some familiar Final Four competition.

UNC, Old Dominion, and Iowa return from last year's Final Four, and they are joined by Penn State. The Tar Heels will meet the Nittany Lions Saturday at noon for a spot in the finals, while Iowa and ODU battle in the other semifinal at 2:30 p.m. The NCAA Championship game is set for Sunday at 2:30 p.m.

UNC downed both ODU and Iowa earlier this season, and the Tar Heels topped Penn State in the teams' last meeting, a 1986 Final Four consolation matchup. The Tar Heels have faced at least one of the three Final Four opponents in postseason play in each of the past four years.

Men to face nemesis Virginia in NCAA second round

The men's soccer team will be looking to break its jinx against Virginia when the two square off Sunday at 2 p.m. for a trip to the NCAA quarterfinals. The game will be played at Scott Stadium in Charlottesville, Va.

The Tar Heels (13-6) have come away with a win only once in their last 13 meetings with the Cavs, and they fell to UVA, twice this season, including a 3-0 loss in the first round of the ACC Tournament.

North Carolina rebounded from that loss with a surprising 2-1 win over Wake Forest Saturday night in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. A win Sunday would send the injury-plagued

UNC squad to the NCAA quarterfinals for the second time in team history. The only other time UNC advanced past the second round was in 1987, when the Tar Heels advanced to the Final Four.

Volleyball opens ACC tourney against Clemson

The Tar Heel volleyball team will travel to Hilton Head, S.C. this weekend to meet some old conference foes in the ACC Tournament. The third-seeded squad faces sixth-seeded Clemson Friday at 7 p.m.

UNC (12-17, 4-2) downed the Tigers in three games when they met earlier this year, but the Tar Heels have slumped since that meeting. Heading into this weekend, UNC has lost nine of its last 10 matches.

A win Friday would put the Tar Heels into Saturday's semifinals and pit UNC against the winner of Friday's Duke-Georgia Tech matchup.

The championship will be decided Sunday at 3 p.m.

— Compiled by Robert B rown

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