

# Jackie Is Determined

MAY GO TO WORK

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league is "NBA or Bust." Most bust. Robinson, 25, is taking one last shot at the other alternative. Next month he'll be going to training camp with the Detroit Pistons, his third NBA team in three years. He was the last player cut by the Houston Rockets two years ago and the last player cut by the Seattle Supersonics last year.

"It's been really tough to get up mentally (for camp), to come through this again," Robinson says. "I've been through it twice and had the door slammed on me at the end twice. I've gotta keep on pushing. I don't think I could do it another year."

"I'm not the kind of guy to sit there and keep banging my head, banging my head. If I don't make it this time I'll leave the situation alone

and go to work for Jackie Robinson."

There are a thousand players who can't kick the basketball habit yet can't quite make the big time. Robinson, however, has genuine NBA tools, according to a lot of people who should know. And he's been there, if only for a total of 19 games with the Sonics and Pistons.

But a string of injuries and illness and bad timing, have limited his pro basketball career to

less than 100 NBA minutes, mostly in after the games have been decided, and one season in the bush leagues — the now defunct Western Basketball Assn.

It hasn't exactly been the glorious career people foresaw for Jackie when he was twice a first-team All-CIF forward at Morningside. As a senior, in 1972-73, he was the star of the No. 1 rated high school team in the country, a team that was 28-1 (the one loss was in the

CIF playoffs).

INJURED ANKLE

"He was a great, great, great high school player," says Jim Harrick, who coached Morningside then and is now head coach at Pepperdine.

Jackie went to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and was a star there, but not a glamour player, as he shared the spotlight with future NBA players Glen Gondrezick, Sam Smith and Robert Smith.

He sat out his junior season after an ankle injury almost ended his walking days, not to mention his playing days.

Those factors didn't do much for Robinson's NBA prospects, so he wasn't drafted until the fourth round in '78, by Houston. After being cut, he played for the Las Vegas team in the WBA and led the league in scoring, living down the no-offense reputation he had earned in college.

Seattle was impressed enough to sign him for the final month of the season. His chances of sticking with the team last year looked good — he was given a guaranteed contract — until he got the virus infection on the off-season and reported to camp weak and underweight (185). He was cut.

The Pistons signed him to two 10-day contracts near the end of the season and invited him back to camp this year. He'll be battling a strong group of forwards — Bob McAdoo, Greg Keiser, Phil Hubbard, Terry Tyler and Earl Evans.

PLAYED POINT GUARD

"That doesn't scare Jackie and it doesn't scare me," says Detroit Coach Scotty Robinson. "I think he's a player. I liked him two years ago when I was an assistant at Houston. I feel he could have made the Houston team, but he was already signed to go to camp with Seattle. Maybe I'm too high on him. I've got to see him against my (Piston) players, but he's been playing very, very well, extremely well (in the summer league).

Robinson handles the ball well enough to have played point guard at UNLV. And drive?

He has become, in my estimation, a pro player at taking the ball to the

hole," Harrick says. "He really does that superbly, along with defending people and changing ends. And I think he can rebound in that league (the NBA), too."

However, Robinson's height and style of play work against him. In the summer league he is a monster driving the lane, but there is no Abdul-Jabbar or Lanier or Malone there to challenge his scoring forays into their "office."

"He has no outside shot," says one NBA general manager. "How many 6-5 guys are effective inside in the NBA?"

Still, several teams are interested, including the Pistons. After Robinson was cut by the Sonics, Detroit Manager Jack McCloskey phoned him and told him, "We know you belong in the NBA."

Until that call, Jackie says, "I had thought about giving up basketball altogether."

GREAT PERSONALITY

A lot of players who knock around, those who perennially try out for the NBA, do it because they won't have anything else going for them. Robinson is intelligent, gets along well with people and has good job prospects. He has been offered assistant coaching jobs at two universities and plans eventually to open a youth center in Las Vegas.

"He'll survive without (NBA) basketball," Harrick says. "He has great character and personality."

Then why does he keep banging his head against the wall?

"It's the satisfaction," Robinson says. "I look at myself, I've worked with these guys (NBA stars), I've been there. I say, 'I can play in this league.'

"I'm not a quitter. I'm stubborn, and I feel I belong. I'll try again, until my last breath. And this is my last gasp. I've got to give it everything. These memories will stick for life. If I should have made it but didn't try, it'll bother me for life."

"I won't be nervous (at camp). I just tell myself, 'Just play like you play in the park, Jack.' I don't tense myself up. If they like Jackie Robinson, they'll keep me, if they believe I'll be a very good player, a solid player in

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