

SPORTS

Atlanta Hawks' Wilkens resigns

ATLANTA (AP) — Lenny Wilkens resigned Monday from the Atlanta Hawks after the worst season of a 27-year career in which he won more games than any coach in NBA history.

Wilkens' resignation was announced at Philips Arena by team president Stan Kasten and general manager Pete Babcock.

The coach did not attend the news conference.

"Atlanta will always hold a special place in my heart," Wilkens said in a statement. "I have so many wonderful memories, both personally and professionally, but it is time to explore new challenges and new opportunities."

The 62-year-old Wilkens, who coached the Hawks for seven years, had two years left on his contract, paying \$10.4 million. The team said it would honor it until he finds a new job.

The decision was not

unexpected after the Hawks struggled to a 28-54 record, their worst mark since moving to Atlanta in 1968. The team missed the playoffs for the first time since 1992, losing 25 of its final 31 games.

"We all concluded mutually that this was a good time to give everybody a chance to start from scratch, start a new chapter in their lives," Kasten said.

Before coming to Atlanta, Wilkens had stints in Cleveland, Seattle and Portland. His career record is 1,179-981 and his lone NBA championship came with the Sonics in 1979.

Wilkens, an All-American guard at Providence and a nine-time NBA All Star, was the second person elected to the Hall of Fame as a player and coach.

In 1997, Wilkens was honored as one of the 50 greatest players in NBA history and one of the 10 greatest coaches, the only

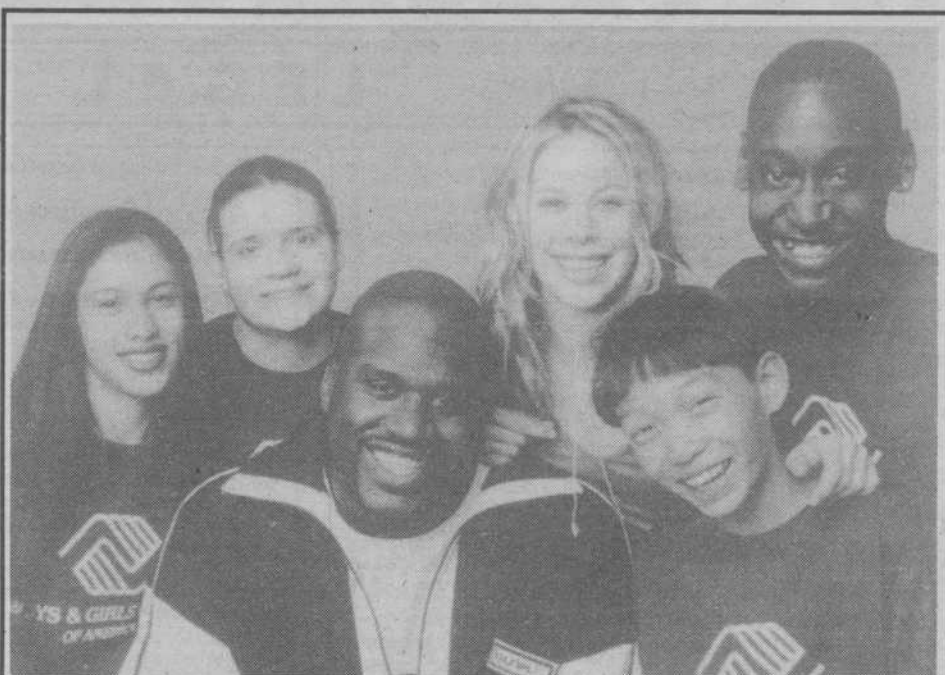
person on both lists.

He got his 939th victory in early 1995, passing former Boston Celtics coach Red Auerbach. In 1996, Wilkens coached the U.S. Olympic team to a gold medal in Atlanta after serving as an assistant in the 1992 Games.

The Hawks had at least 50 victories in three of Wilkens' first five years, then finished second in the Central after battling with Indiana until the final week of the strike-shortened 1999 season. Wilkens signed a four-year, \$20 million contract extension in 1997.

But in a bid to shake up a stale franchise and get past the second round of the playoffs for the first time since moving from St. Louis, Babcock engineered a deal that sent leading scorer Steve Smith to the Portland Trail Blazers for Isaiah Rider and Jim Jackson.

Rider's discipline problems were well



COME ON HOME

Shaquille O'Neal and Tara Lipinski join more than 3 million youth nationwide to celebrate National Boys & Girls Club Week, April 9-15. The two superstars are kicking off a year-long campaign called "Come on Home," to invite former Boys & Girls Club members to visit their local Club. An estimated 6 million Club alumni live in the U.S. and can register by calling 1-800-854-CLUB or by visiting the organization's web site (www.bgca.org).

Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

documented, but the Hawks were in need of a makeover as they moved into the new 19,445-seat Philips Arena.

They wanted to dump

Smith's long-term contract and switch to an up-tempo offense with younger, faster players.

There's a perception that

Wilkens would prefer an older, defense-oriented team, while the organization favors a more exciting style of play focusing on younger players.

Chamberlain's 100-point ball to be sold at auction

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — In 1962, 14-year-old Kerry Ryman sneaked onto the floor just after Wilt Chamberlain's legendary 100-point game with one thing on his mind: "How can I get that ball?"

Amid all the excitement, gaining possession wasn't hard for the lanky teen-ager. He easily weaved through the players and fans, stole the ball and made a fast break,

outrunning a security guard.

Thirty-eight years later, Ryman is putting the basketball up for auction.

"It has been a burden in some ways," Ryman, now 52, said from his home in Annville, near Hershey, where the famous game was played.

"Every anniversary of the game, people call wanting pictures and interviews. I'm

tired of it. I want to put it to rest."

On Thursday, bidding on the ball will start at \$25,000 at Leland's auction house in New York.

Chamberlain, the mighty 7-foot-1 center who died in October at 63, scored 100 points playing for the NBA's Philadelphia Warriors in a game against the New York

Knicks. No one has ever come close to breaking the record.

Owning Wilt the Stilt's ball has brought Ryman loads of criticism over the years.

Collectors and fans are irritated that Wilt's ball was never lent to a museum to be displayed for Chamberlain fans.

They say the ball should have been put on a podium,

encased in glass, under soft white lights.

Instead, it has sat in a plastic bag in the corner of a closet. Ryman and his friends even played basketball with it for several years. But police did have their chance to reclaim the ball back in 1962.

Gabe Basti, who was working as an arena security officer that night, said the

sports legend didn't want it back. "I chased the kid over a fence and through the park but never caught up with him," Basti said. "But we knew it was Kerry, and we knew where he lived. We could have gone to his house and gotten the ball back. But (Chamberlain) didn't want it. He said, 'Let the kid have it.'"

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Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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