

SPORTS

'Diss' of Michael Jordan teaches a few lessons

By Marvin Wamble
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Emotions ran high after Abe Pollin, the owner of the Washington Wizards, did not rehire Michael Jordan as the team's president of basketball operations. It was universally characterized in the neighborhood as a diss of superstar proportions.

"He was screwed," one angry brother said.

"They just used the brother," another lamented.

"They just pimped him, man. Used him up and threw him away."

I talked with scores of brothers in and around the Washington, D.C., area and none agreed with Pollin's move. After all, Jordan left the front office two years ago believing that after his playing time was over, he would once again elevate to the front office and resume his duties running the team's operations. But that didn't happen. Despite playing for a measly

\$1 million per season and being the sole reason the Wizards sold out 82 home games over two seasons, Jordan was not given a second chance.

I was a bit surprised that it happened so fast, but I really wasn't shocked. Getting fired or not hired happens to brothers numerous times every day. Jordan now understands that pain and anger suffered by many Black men with real jobs across the country. Now even the best basketball player in the world has an understanding of the headache caused by slamming against the glass ceiling.

In reality, Pollin had every right not to rehire Jordan. Pollin owns the team; he controls the purse strings. He was not swayed by public opinion or the tremendous love and affection fans have for Jordan. Pollin made the move he thought was best for his team. Jordan learned what most of us already knew, he

who holds the checkbooks holds the power.

One must admit that Jordan wasn't an instant success in the front office; it was on-the-job training. He hired Leonard Hamilton, who coached the team to a sterling 19-63 record. In the three years Jordan was in charge (even while playing), the team he put together accumulated a dismal 93-153 mark. In addition, he drafted high schooler Kwame Brown with the first pick of the 2001 draft, a move that has yet to work out. As a player for two

seasons, Jordan averaged 20 points a game, but alienated many of his teammates with constant demands of hard work and dedication to the game.

But the team wasn't any good before Jordan arrived. It hovered at or below the .500 mark since winning the NBA title in 1978. Certainly Pollin didn't expect Jordan to turn this team around in three years. No, the problem is deeper than that. Things get ugly when egos collide. Rumors had it that people in the Wizards organization

didn't like Jordan's arrogance. Many didn't appreciate his work ethic.

Brothers, how many times have we heard that?

This should be a lesson for not only those aspiring to be professional athletes, but those looking to rise in business, too. Unless you own it, no matter what your position or the number of zeros on your paycheck, you are nothing more than a hired hand. That is why having a plan and getting an education is important, even if you can take off from the free-throw

line and slam a basketball ball.

I do believe that Pollin will live to regret dissing Jordan. Michael is not one who takes defeat easily. He will get another front office job in the league—if he wants one. And he will use the mistakes he made in Washington to become better at whatever job he accepts. Let's hope others will learn lessons from Jordan's dismissal, too.

Marvin Wamble has covered sports in California, Texas and Washington, D.C., and Dallas sports radio.

Red Auerbach defends Boston Celtics faithful

BOSTON (AP) - Red Auerbach, who hired the NBA's first black coach and fielded its first all-black starting five, defended Boston last week after Nets coach Byron Scott said the city is unwelcoming to minorities.

Responding to Scott's comments on a New York radio show calling some Boston fans "cruel" and implying they're racist, the longtime Celtics leader said, "What the hell does he know?"

"It's just a stupid remark," Auerbach said. "It's as simple as that."

Anticipating a return of the animosity from last year's Eastern Conference finals, Scott told WFAN earlier in the week that Celtics fans were "very cruel and they can be crazy."

"They've had their share of beers already before the game has started," Scott said. "They're not very good fans. You can have a great tradition and have a great fan without being crazy and hostile." Scott also revived the complaint that Boston is hostile to black players.

"I don't think we're way past that," he said. "I don't think you are out of line for saying that. A lot of black players feel that way. We did in the '80s. And I know in the '80s, at least some of their black players still couldn't go to certain places. And that was their own players. Some cities or organizations or whatever you want to say haven't caught up to the year 2000 yet."

Former Celtics such as Bill Russell and Dee Brown did complain during their playing days that Boston was not the most welcoming city. When he played for Boston in the 1990s, Brown was manhandled by suburban police looking for a bank robber. "But I don't think any of them were unhappy they played here," Auerbach said. "They were never sorry they played here."

Although Nets star Jason Kidd was booed in Friday night's game, the crowd booed loudest in the introductions for Scott. Still, there was no sign of the tastelessness prevalent on both sides in last year's playoffs, when Kidd was heckled as a "wife-beater" and a fan in New Jersey held up a sign that said, "Will someone please stab Paul Pierce."

Kidd was charged with striking his wife in 2001; the charges were dropped when Kidd underwent anger counseling and paid a fine. Pierce was stabbed multiple times in his face, neck and back at a nightclub in 2000.

As he did last year in Game 6, Kidd decided not to bring his wife and their 3-year-old son, T.J. to the game.

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