

## SPORTS

# Scottie Pippen returns to Chicago Bulls

CHICAGO (AP) - Scottie Pippen returned to the Chicago Bulls, re-signing with the team he helped lead to six NBA championships.

Terms of the deal were not released, but a source in the NBA, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it was a \$10 million, two-year deal.

Pippen was a seven-time All-Star in his 11 seasons with the Bulls, before leaving for the Houston Rockets before the 1999 season. Pippen has spent the last four seasons with the Portland Trail Blaz-

ers.

"We are aware that Chicago had a lot of interest in Scottie," Trail Blazers general manager John Nash said. "I talked to him on Thursday and told him we weren't prepared to move forward at this point. We thank him for his contributions. He is a true professional."

Three weeks ago, Bulls general manager John Paxson, a former teammate of Pippen, raised the possibility that he would like Pippen to return to the Chi-

cago to finish his NBA career where it began.

The Bulls coveted the 37-year-old Pippen, an unrestricted free agent, as both a defensive-minded small forward, and mentor to young players such as Tyson Chandler and Eddy Curry.

"More than anything, I want to make him feel welcome," Paxson said when he discussed the possibility of re-signing Pippen. "To me, he would be the perfect veteran leader."

He averaged 10.8 points

and a team-high 4.4 assists last season with the Trail Blazers.

But Pippen missed three games in the playoffs because of pain and swelling in his left knee, operated on in March.

Pippen didn't leave Chicago on the best of terms. When Coach Phil Jackson left and Michael Jordan retired before the 1999 season, Pippen was shipped off in a sign-and-trade deal to Houston by former general manager Jerry Krause.



## HOLDING COURT

Tennis superstar Serena Williams accepts Best Female Athlete award during the 11th Annual ESPY Awards, sponsored by ESPN, last week in Los Angeles.

## Sapp not concerned about contract status

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (AP) - As usual, Warren Sapp was frank.

The All-Pro defensive tackle said Saturday that he's not concerned about the prospect of this being his last season with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He is entering the final year of the \$36 million contract he signed in 1998 and is not pressing the team for a new deal.

"There are 32 teams in this league," Sapp said. "You don't think I'll find a job?"

The Bucs have yet to make an offer to the six-time Pro Bowl selection, who along with linebacker Derrick Brooks and safety John Lynch, has been the foundation of a defense that played a major role in Tampa Bay's transformation into a Super Bowl team.

With 72 career sacks, Sapp is seven shy of replacing Hall of Famer Lee Roy Selmon as the franchise's all-time leader. He wants to finish his career with the Bucs, but emphasized the situation is beyond his control.

"They dictate who they want, when they want, how they want. It's not my team," Sapp said.

"They say it's mine. They say I'm the mouthpiece, the face of it or whatever you want it to be. It's Malcolm Glazer's team, and probably his wife's a little more than it's his because we all know who runs the house at everybody's house, right? So that's how it works."

Sapp isn't the only Tampa Bay player whose contract situation could become sticky. Nose tackle Anthony McFarland could become a free agent after this season and is looking for a lucrative deal, too.

At \$6.6 million, Sapp will be the highest-paid defensive tackle in the league this season. McFarland, five years younger than Sapp at 25, is scheduled to earn about \$2.25 million.

General manager Rich McKay said the team will deal with Sapp and McFarland's status "at the appropriate time."

Sapp reiterated that he won't force the issue.

"The thing I think you guys are missing is I'm not in there banging on Rich's door. I signed a six-year, \$36 million contract. I got \$36 million out of the deal," Sapp said.

"I'm not hiding from this. There are 32 teams in this league. If they say no, then OK. I've got to go somewhere else. I'll be fine."

Sapp said a more immediate concern is trying to help the Bucs repeat as Super Bowl champions.

The Bucs had the NFL's top-ranked defense a year ago and think they can be even better this season.

"The thing we talked about last night was defining ourselves as something different than the 2000 Ravens and the '85 Bears because they won a championship, but the following year they didn't. We have a chance to do something that those two teams didn't," Sapp said.

## ASSOCIATED PRESS

From the moment he joined the NBA as a baby-faced teen, flirtatious women hit on Kobe Bryant in hotel lobbies and shopping malls.

"Sure, the groupies come after you," Bryant said during his rookie season in 1996-1997, when he was one of the youngest players in the league.

"Living in LA, how could you not be approached by women like that? They tend to be older, but some are younger. You have to handle it in a professional manner. There are those women who want to go out with every player, and you've got to worry about disease, about having someone say they're having your baby. I've learned all about that growing up."

Bryant, raised in Italy as the son of former NBA player Joe Bryant, tuned out the world with headphones, checked into hotels under aliases and cultivated a sparkling image, free of even the scent of scandal. He was effervescent, blessed with good looks, wealth and talent - a winner on the court and in life.

When he became engaged to an 18-year-old high school student, Vanessa Laine, three years ago, his parents objected to his marrying so young and did not attend the wedding in April 2001. But the birth of Natalia Bryant in January brought the family back together.

Now a felony charge filed Friday alleging that Bryant, 24, sexually assaulted a 19-year-old woman in Colorado threatens to send him to prison and link him with the likes of Mike Tyson, America's most reviled athlete, who was convicted and jailed for rape.

Blinking back tears at a

*"I didn't force her to do anything against her will. I'm innocent. I sit here in front of you guys furious at myself, disgusted at myself for making a mistake of adultery."*

— Kobe Bryant

news conference in Los Angeles, Bryant denied the charge.

"I didn't force her to do anything against her will. I'm innocent," he said, his wife at his side. "I sit here in front of you guys furious at myself, disgusted at myself for making a mistake of adultery."

He spoke of how he loves his wife, how she's his "backbone," telling her, "You're a blessing, you're the air I breathe. You're the strongest person I know and I'm so sorry for having to put you through this, and having to put our family through this."

"Image consultants" and various other spin doctors have been opining the past week about how Bryant's commercial value will be affected by this case, as if that were the crux of the matter. The money Bryant could lose is merely a petty side issue.

This is a story that looms both larger and smaller, challenging anew the way the public views its heroes. It is a reminder once more that behind their smiles and skills, they are as imperfect as the rest of us - even a president of the United States.

The larger issue is whether the woman is telling the truth, whether she was indeed sexually assaulted at a resort in Colorado and subjected to physical, mental or emotional pain. All of Bryant's dramatic denials and proclamations of love toward his wife, all the good will he built up and the championships he won,

would not diminish the magnitude of such a crime. Her suffering, not Bryant's, should be paramount.

Yet there is no shortage of skeptics, people who have seen Bryant grow into a polished, worldly man with a sweet disposition, and refuse to believe he would assault anyone. There are suspicions that money is the alleged victim's motivation, that a civil suit isn't far behind the criminal case.

If Bryant is telling the truth, he would hardly be the first NBA star to be embroiled in what would amount to an embarrassing extramarital affair.

Just last month, a judge in Chicago threw out a lawsuit against Michael Jordan, ruling he did not have to pay a woman who wanted \$5 million to keep their relationship quiet. Magic Johnson acknowledged numerous sexual liaisons that he said led to him getting the AIDS virus. Julius "Dr. J" Erving admitted a few years ago he had fathered tennis player Alexandra Stevenson with a woman sports writer.

NBA players have been

notorious for fathering children out of wedlock. But there is a huge difference between a sexual escapade and sexual assault.

In Bryant's case, that may be for a jury to decide and it would be no easy task. "He said, she said" cases are tough to prosecute unless there are witnesses and physical evidence, such as bruises, scratches or other injuries.

In Colorado, the district attorney has refused to disclose details about evidence or make the woman available for comment. A man at her home said there would be no statement. Though residents of the area praised her character and honesty, her anonymity in the public sphere has shifted all the attention to Bryant.

Jurors might feel a personal bond to Bryant, just as they did in the O.J. Simpson murder trial when he was acquitted on criminal charges. Yet attitudes among small-town jurors in Colorado may be different from those in Los Angeles, and the woman may be seen as more credible.

In the panorama of human follies, Bryant's travails are of little consequence. Sexual assault allegations involving athletes are a sickening, almost daily occurrence. Some, no doubt, are false.

Many turn out to be true. We watch heroes rise and fall and hope that somewhere along the way lessons are learned.

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