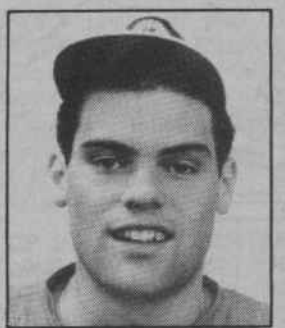


Pep Talk

By Jeff Nichols



Michael Jordan best in NBA because of all-around play

With Larry Bird and Magic Johnson both sidelined with injuries, it's the perfect time in this year's NBA season to talk about the man who's dethroned these two perennial All-Stars as the greatest in the game.

This way, I don't have to worry about Bird scoring 100 points tomorrow or Magic dishing off 50 assists.

And who is the greatest? Do you know, do you know, do you know?

It's like that universally known Nike spokesman Mars Blackmon says... Air Jordan, Air Jordan, Air Jordan.

It's been a hot topic of discussion among pro basketball followers for years. And this year, *Street and Smith* formally asked the question on the cover of their inaugural NBA preview issue - "Who's the Greatest?" The three consensus candidates were the Celtics' Larry Bird, the Lakers' Magic Johnson and the Bulls' Michael Jordan.

It's the junior member of this dazzling trio that can lay claim to this title, at least in my estimation.

Keep in mind, I'm saying only that Jordan is today's most individually talented player.

Granted, basketball is a team game, and Bird and Magic have a better understanding of what teamwork is about than anyone in the history of the game.

But I don't take a lot of stock in arguments like "Jordan is just a one-man team" or "he doesn't have the ability to increase his teammates' level of play," along with the favorite "where are his championship rings?"

I've heard them all. And I remain unconvinced that pondering over whether Bird or Magic would do more for the Bulls or whether the Celtics or Lakers would be as good with Jordan is really meaningful, yet

hypothetical situations like these always surface when this topic is discussed — and around me, it often is.

In backing Jordan, I've always tried to keep the discussion in line with reality and look at what he does as a member of the Chicago Bulls.

In the end, it's not his soaring moves to the basket or his electrifying, high-flying slams that put him on top. It's these things that pack NBA arenas, and along with a marketable personality, bring him lucrative endorsements.

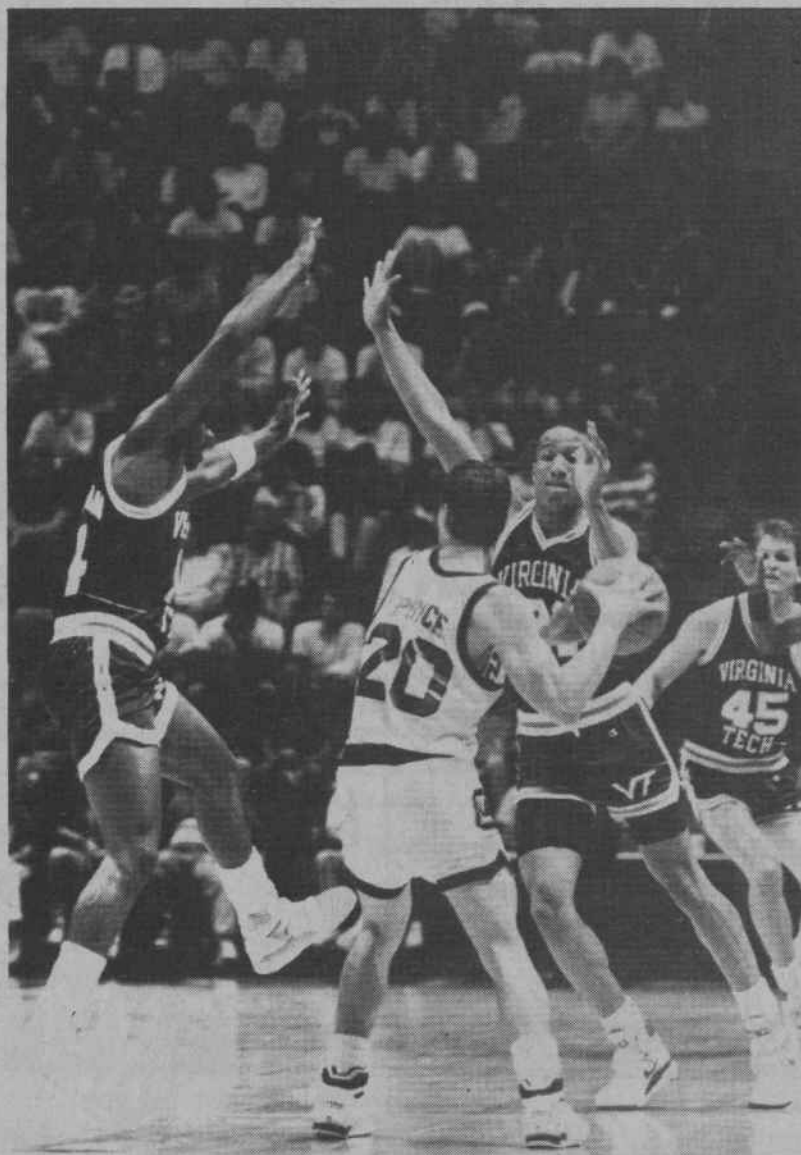
But what makes Jordan "the greatest" involves something more than his much-heralded scoring prowess. It's called defense. While shouldering incredible scoring responsibilities night in and night out, Jordan also plays defense better than anyone in the league. He's the complete package.

Bird, in a nutshell, is the consummate team player. He definitely has the ability to increase the level of play from his teammates. For a decade, he has out-hustled and out-thought everybody en route to three Most Valuable Player awards and three World Championships.

Simply put, Magic Johnson is a winner. From baseline to baseline, nobody does it better. Because he combines incredible size with brilliant passing ability, Magic is unquestionably the best point guard ever.

Both superstars have felt Michael Jordan's presence ever since he was voted Rookie of the Year in 1985. Johnson was runner-up to Bird that year for the league MVP award.

Jordan missed 64 games his second year with a foot injury, yet he came



KENT BROOME/The Gamecock

USC guard Brent Price looks for help in a game against Virginia Tech earlier this season at Carolina Coliseum. Price scored 21 points Monday night in Blacksburg, Va., to lead USC to a 86-79 win over the Hokies, the Gamecocks' second win against Virginia Tech this year.

Reserves spark win over Virginia Tech

By KEVIN ADAMS
Sports editor

The USC men's basketball team clinched its first-ever winning record in the Metro Conference Monday night with a convincing 86-79 victory over Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va.

The win over the Hokies was the fourth straight Metro victory for George Felton's Gamecocks and marked the first time USC has had more than three consecutive conference victories since joining the Metro prior to the 1983-84 season. It was also USC's first win at Blacksburg since joining the Metro.

All that may not have been accomplished, however, if it wasn't for a message sent by Felton to the USC starters early in the second half.

Leading 47-45 at halftime, the Gamecocks gave up the first six points of the second half to give the Hokies a 51-47 lead. After a rushed shot by guard Brent Price, Felton yanked his starting five and replaced them with reserves Jo Jo English, Troy McKoy, Joe Rhett, Jeff Roulston and Bill Vernau.

The reserves stayed in for more than seven minutes, and led by the shooting of Rhett and McKoy, took the lead at 59-56. When the starting five came back in with just under 11 minutes remaining, USC led 61-60. After trading baskets for the next few minutes, the Gamecock starters went on a 7-0 run to take a 78-70 lead and seal the victory.

Price led the Gamecocks with 21 points, hitting five of six shots from 3-point range. John Hudson scored

18 points, Terry Dozier had 16, and Barry Manning added 10. Dozier led USC with seven rebounds, while Hudson and Manning grabbed six each.

Guards Wally Lancaster and Bimbo Coles scored 23 and 21 points, respectively, to lead Virginia Tech.

USC is now 17-9 overall and 7-4 in the Metro, while the Hokies fell to 10-16 and 1-9.

The Gamecocks play their final game of the regular season Saturday afternoon at Cincinnati, before returning home to play host to the Metro Conference Tournament March 10-12 at Carolina Coliseum.

USC (86)

Hudson 7-11 4-7 18, Dozier 5-13 6-8 16, Breckenridge 0-0 0-0 0, Manning 4-12 2-3 10, Price 7-13 2-2 21, Rhett 3-4 2-2 8, Roulston 0-1 1-2 1, English 0-3 0-0, Vernau 2-3 0-0 6, Glover 0-0 0-0 0, McKoy 3-4 0-2 6. Totals 31-64 17-26 86.

VIRGINIA TECH (79)

Moses 2-7 2-2 6, Rivers 0-0 4-4 4, Herbster 1-1 0-1 2, Lancaster 8-17 5-6 23, Coles 8-21 0-1 18, Nottingham 5-9 0-0 12, Sanders 3-6 1-3 7, Caesar 1-4 2-2 5, Cannon 1-3 0-0 2, Holland 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 29-69 14-19 79.

Halftime — USC 47, Virginia Tech 45. 3-point goals — USC 7-10 (Price 5-6, Manning 0-1, English 0-1, Vernau 2-2), Virginia Tech 7-23 (Lancaster 2-5, Coles 2-8, Nottingham 2-6, Caesar 1-4). Rebounds — USC 40 (Dozier 7), Virginia Tech 41 (Moses, Rivers, Lancaster, Nottingham, Sanders 6). Assists — USC 19 (Manning 7), Virginia Tech 14 (Coles 7). Total fouls — USC 19, Virginia Tech 21. Attendance — 4,911.

Tribute to Parker tonight at Coliseum

From staff reports

Tonight at Carolina Coliseum, USC will pay tribute to a deserving member of the Lady Gamecock basketball team.

Senior Martha Parker will be playing her last regular-season game in a Lady Gamecock uniform, and tonight's 7:00 contest with DePaul could be the team captain's last home appearance in Carolina Coliseum, even though 17th ranked USC is expected to be a host to at least one NCAA playoff game.

To honor Parker, tonight has been declared "Pack It For Parker Night," and anyone bringing a sign saying "We love you, Martha," or something similar will be admitted free of charge.

Parker is averaging 13.7 points a game this season and is currently in third place on the all-time USC scoring list with 1,667 points. She has a career average of 13.9 points a game and will finish in the top 10 in every career statistical category in Lady Gamecock history. Parker was last year's Metro Conference Player of the Year and also the Metro Conference Tournament's Most Valuable Player, in addition to being two-time GTE Academic All-American. During her four-year career, USC has a record of 80-40, including a 20-6 mark this season.

"She's been outstanding both on and off the court during her four years here and has really meant a lot to our program," USC coach Nancy Wilson said of Parker. "Not only has she been the

perfect role model for fans and the other players, she's just been great on the public relations side — she's helped put South Carolina women's basketball on the map.

"All of the other players on the team like Martha," Wilson added. "She goes out of her way to help other people and has been a great example for the younger players by offering them help and encouragement."

Wilson said Parker would be missed, but that Parker's presence has laid the groundwork for future Lady Gamecock squads to be successful.

"You don't replace a Martha Parker, but she has helped to build the base for an excellent program here," Wilson said.

See JORDAN page 11



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