

Guest Columnist

How To Build Winner In S-O-M Basketball?

BY TOM NELSON
Springfield Garden, NY

Editor's note: Tom Nelson is a member of the Mid-Coastal Basketball Association, comprised of 12 members. It is a play-by-mail league that has completed two seasons. Tom completed a rags-to-riches story by winning it all the second year.

I intend to give you a crash course in survival in a basketball draft league. First, begin with a positive attitude even is Dennis Awtrey is your starting center. The positive approach is: "Well, maybe he'll punch Jabbar in the nose and get him out of the game." This approach will let you have fun with any personnel.

Your first serious step is to size up the players on your team. How old is he? Can he help in the future? Does he have any serious injury that may curb his career? These questions will determine whether or not your players are expendable and/or should you ride out a poor year with them and be perhaps the owner of an All-Star team!

The bible of any draft basketball player will be competent sports magazines. The Sporting News usually tabs a hot NBA prospect as does Basketball Weekly. The true draft coach will be interested in a Bill Walton, Jim Chones, or Keith Wilkes than prime veterans like John Havlicek, Chet Walkers or Lenny Wilkens, whose careers are almost at a close. Unless you are dealing with a maniac, you should forget about wasting time going after players like Jabbar, McAdoo, Lanier, Cowens or Haywood, etc. More often than not, these superstars are enjoying the most productive years of their careers. Any coach would be foolish to deal them away to a building team and would justifiably rip your

(continued on following page)

club's nucleus out in the process if he did.

DON'T BE FOOLED BY HIGH SCORING AVERAGE

Another thing to watch is the player's card. Don't be fooled by a 28.4 scoring average. He may have hit 42.4 per cent getting it. A lot of missed shots can get you killed. The complete scorer shoots and hits from all three areas well. When I rebuilt my team after my initial season, I was rewarded with the best all-around center in Strat-D-Matic in Bob Lanier. Where McAdoo shoots better outside and inside and is slightly better rebounding, Lanier, while very close in the mentioned departments, is a superior defender and passer.

Jabbar defends better and rebounds about even, but, although he outscored Lanier during the season, he is an inside man only, while Bob shoots outside and passes better. All these facts made it easy to build a solid team. In short, the big men are crucial to the success of any basketball team. However, a good productive pivotman is rare. Those who can almost carry a franchise are hard to find. Jabbar, Lanier and Cowens are those who come to mind now.

As an alternative to the center shortage, look for a good rebounding forward. It's even better if he can score, too, but it is secondary if he doesn't. This is where the likes of an Unseld, Silas, or Hairston would suffice in place of an Haywood, Wicks, or Hayes.

Finally there are the guards. Despite their ability, guards like Frazier, Chenier, Scott, or Smith would go very quickly in a deal for one of the big men previously mentioned. The backcourt can be sacrificed for a dominating front line.
