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BASKETBALL FOR THOUGHT by Kris Gardner, e-mail: KGardner@TheHRR.com

It's a mad, mad, mad, mad NBA world



love basketball!
(That should not come as any sort of surprise to anyone

because why else would I continue trying to grind out a living with The Houston Roundball Review.) I love the NBA, too; but, in all honesty, for whatever reason, I lost the desire to cover the NBA over the last year or so. Fortunately, the last few weeks of news and activity in the NBA involving trades, draft picks, free agent signings, etc. has rekindled the flame and I am once again looking forward to covering NBA basketball in the next few months. (I didn't say I was looking forward to covering the Houston Rockets. I said NBA basketball. The Rockets players have to prove something to me as well as their fans, the media, and, most importantly, themselves this season.)

Lets get the small thing out of the way first: new Boston Celtics President of Basketball Operations **Danny Ainge**, just acquired a player he truly wanted — forward **Jumaine Jones**, from the Cleveland Cavaliers, in exchange for point guard **J. R. Bremer** and center **Bruno Sundov**. The deal is not much more than a yawner; but, as usual,

both teams placed the "positive spin" on it in order to satisfy the fans. Though Bremer is a Cleveland



will produce solid, and on occasion, spectacular numbers this season. Trust me. Heck, LeBron's rookie season may be

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and area product, besides his friends and family, not many other Cavs' fans will pay attention to this deal. Why? One answer:

LeBron James.

By selecting LeBron with the 2003 number one draft pick, the Cavs returned to the NBA's media scrutiny with one simple move. I know LeBron is skipping college; and, I know he will face many challenges on the court (and off the court); but, he has all the skills to become a truly special NBA player in his career. Will he live up to the hype in his rookie season? Nope. The only way LeBron could live up to all of the hype is if he led the Cavs to the NBA championship; and, we know that is not going to happen! However, LeBron

one of the few reasons any media outlets pay attention to the NBA's Eastern Conference since practically every member of the media refers to the NBA's East as the 'Least' or even worse.

The top teams play in the West; and, each team (except for the Dallas Mavericks) made acquisitions to improve: the Lakers amazed everyone by signing future Hall of Famers **Karl Malone** and **Gary Payton** for a total of \$6.4 M this season! Clearly, Kobe Bryant's legal troubles are a concern for the Lakers; but, LA's major question remains quite simple: what kind of shape will **Shaquille O'Neal** be in at the start of the season? If Shaq is in shape, the rest of

the league is in trouble.

The Minnesota Timberwolves served notice to the league, too. T-wolves' GM **Kevin McHale** has acquired guards **Sam Cassell** and **Latrell Sprewell** via trades and signed free agent center **Michael Olowokandi**. If Minnesota fails to advance past the first round in '03-04, big time changes will take place next summer!

The San Antonio Spurs, the defending NBA champs, improved its team by acquiring sharpshooting forward **Hedo Turkoglu** and swingman **Ron Mercer** in a trade and all the Spurs gave up was **Danny Ferry**. Of course, the Spurs biggest move this summer was resigning the league's best player: **Tim Duncan**.

The Sacramento Kings pulled off a last minute coup and acquired center **Brad Miller** from the Indiana Pacers in a three-team deal.

The biggest surprise thus far has been the spending of noted spendthrift **Donald Sterling**, owner of the LA Clippers. Sterling matched a 6-year, \$82 M offer to keep forward **Elton Brand** 2 weeks ago and then he matched a 6-year, \$42 M offer to keep Corey Maggette. When Donald Sterling spends money, you know the NBA is a mad, mad, mad, mad world!

Oh, I almost forgot: the Knicks got **Keith Van Horn**.