

SPORTS

Look to Philly for next NBA champs

By Mark Naison

THIS HAS NOT BEEN ONE OF the better seasons in NBA history. A spate of fights with thinly disguised racial overtones, one of them ending in tragedy; a visible deterioration in the quality of the refereeing; the wholesale dismissal of losing coaches, and an unprecedented—but justified—string of fines and suspensions coming from the Commissioner's office suggest that the league is heading for trouble if it doesn't clean up its act.

Let's hope the playoffs turn out better than the regular season. Here's how I see the teams lining up:

Eastern Division:

Philadelphia is the class of the Division. Coach Billy Cunningham has improved the morale of his talented squad by giving everyone playing time, and the '76ers are playing with a lot more enthusiasm and togetherness than they did last year. But the key to the 'Sixers' success is the strength of their bench. The second team of Darryl Dawkins, Joe Bryant, Steve Mix, Lloyd Free and Ted McLain could beat many NBA starting fives. The 'Sixers have been devastating in the second half of the season and have the depth and talent to wear down any opponent.

The only team that threatens to give them a run is the San Antonio Spurs. The Spurs have two great scorers in Larry Kenon and George Gervin, a solid center in Billy Paulitz, and a physically unimpressive, but effective group of offensive and defensive specialists. Like the 'Sixers, the Spurs play ten men, and when their shooters are on they can run up the score with amazing rapidity. But they lack the physical strength and overall team talent of the 'Sixers, and could probably not beat them in a four-out-of-seven series.

The other teams in the Division all have glaring weaknesses. The Washington Bullets have good shooters and rebounders, but lack the speed or depth to stay with the 'Sixers. The Knicks, led by Bob McAdoo and Earl Monroe, have excellent scoring power but are complete strangers to such niceties of the game as boxing out,

switching on defense, and running back downcourt to stop the fastbreak.

The Cavaliers and the Hawks, though they are well coached squads, lack the overall talent and depth to beat the top teams.

I see the 'Sixers running through the Division with no difficulty if they don't get overconfident.

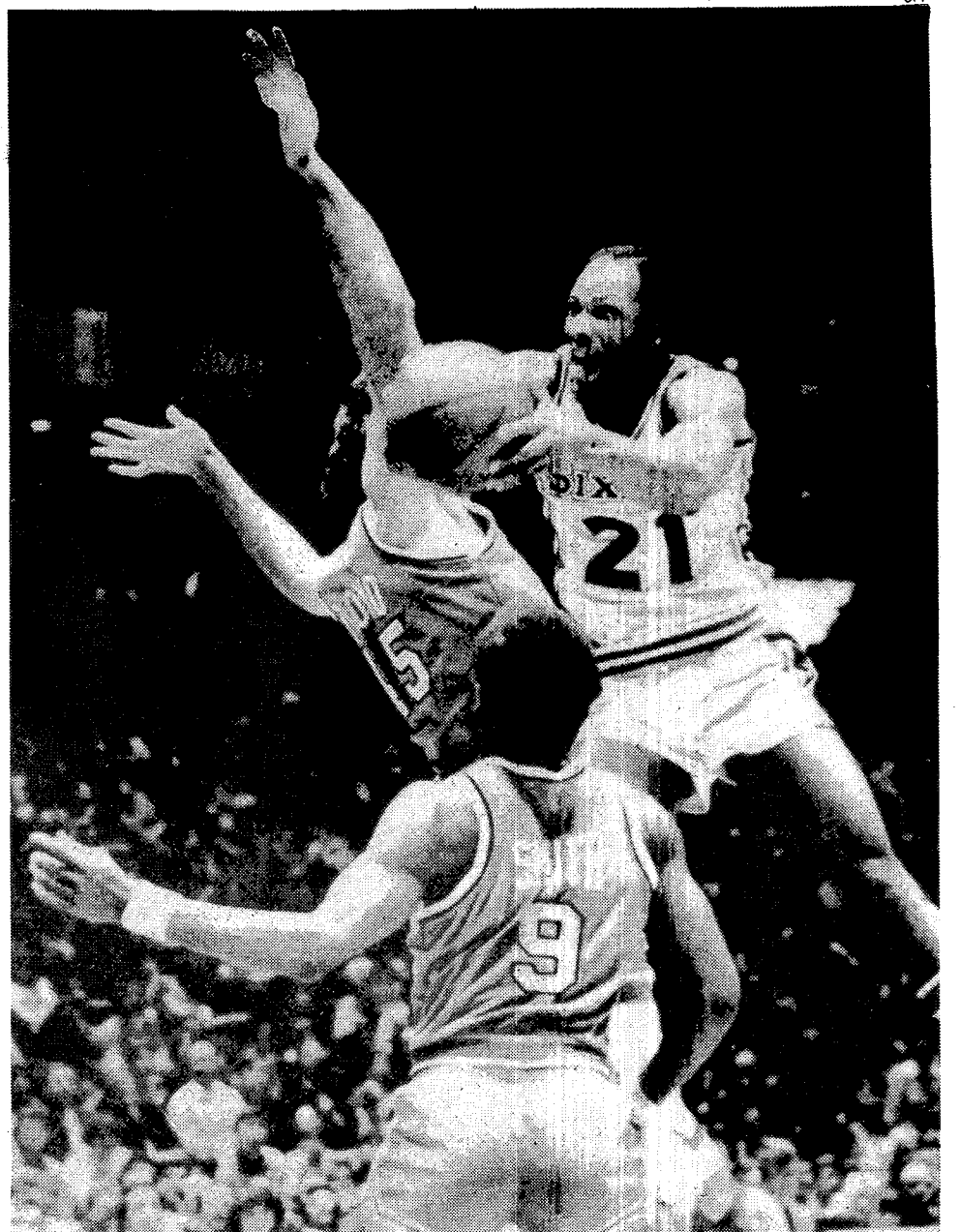
Western Division:

The West is harder to call. Portland would be the obvious favorite if they were healthy, but with injuries to Bill Walton, Lloyd Neal, Larry Steele and Bob Gross (possibly for the season), they are a shadow of the team that won the championship last year. If Walton and Neal (who has been one of the best forwards in the league this year) return in good shape, the Blazers can win the Division, but if not, almost every other team in the Western playoffs has a good chance at beating them.

Los Angeles, on paper, looks to be the strongest of the other teams. With Kareem Jabbar at center, Adrian Dantley at forward, and a backcourt strengthened by the addition of Lou Hudson, Charlie Scott and rookie Norm Nixon, the Lakers have looked like a powerhouse during the latter half of the season.

But in the first round of the playoffs LA has to get by a surprising Seattle team in a two-out-of-three series without a home court advantage and they could easily get knocked out there. Seattle matches up well with L.A. because it has an excellent defensive center in Marvin Webster, a powerful rebounding forward in Jack Sikma, and three superquick high-scoring guards led by Gus Williams and Fred Brown. I don't think they can win the Division, but they could be a spoiler.

Phoenix and Denver, who will probably meet in the second round, each has a shot at winning the Division if Portland is not at full strength. Phoenix is a small, quick team, which features fine shooting, passing and aggressive team defense (they lead the league in steals). They have a good bench and the league's best rookie in Walter Davis. But they lack rebounding strength and an intimidating defensive center and this could cost them in a four-out-of-seven series.



The Philadelphia '76ers' second team, which includes players like Lloyd Free (above), could beat many NBA first teams.

Denver, a similar team in many respects, is a showcase for the talents of David Thompson, possibly the very best player in the NBA this year. Thompson has the quickness, moves and leaping ability of Dr. J, but adds to this the best stop-on-a-dime jump shot since Jerry West. Despite Denver's other weaknesses (a mediocre backcourt, and a center who can score but is weak defensively), the Nuggets are a threat to win any game because of Thompson's unique abilities. They are the only team to beat Portland at home this year when the Trailblazer squad was at full strength, and their bench is much stronger than it was last season.

Where does all this lead? I pick Portland to win the Division if they are healthy. If key Portland players are injured, I pick L.A. to win it, provided they get by their tough first round match with Seattle. If not, I pick Denver! How's that

for clarity?

The Finals:

This is the 'Sixers' year. I know I said this last season (and ended up poorer for it), but I feel confident, almost smug about my prediction. The 'Sixers are a much stronger, more balanced team than they were last season and their opposition is weaker. Portland is the only team who has given them much trouble and the Trailblazers will have a difficult time getting out of their Division unless there are some miraculous recoveries on their injury-riddled squad. Even if they win the West, they will have to meet the 'Sixers without Bob Gross, who was one of the keys to the Portland victory last year. The Blazers are a great ball club, but they need everyone at full strength to meet a revitalized Philadelphia team, and Dr. J and Co. should win the first of what may be a long string of NBA championships. ■

Winter baseball

Continued from page 24.

ishment. He will take a bath this season.)

While Vida Blue was an unwilling victim of pure baseball, some players revel in it, particularly in the winter, when they are allowed to be unrestrainedly egotistical, not bound at all to a team concept. A form of social Darwinism prevails. With no real games in the winter the elements of the cold hustle are more evident. Individualism is held in check only by the ability of a player's agent.

Winter baseball follows a clear progression of events, which begin a month after the World Series. The end of the regular season starts the interior season of baseball with rituals and a rhythm of its own. In November the free agent draft takes place. In December the owners meeting heralds a flurry of trades. And until the commencement of spring training at the end of February the Florida and Caribbean leagues go through mock seasons concluding with the Caribbean World Series.

In these leagues the players know that only their own performances, not that of their teams, are what matter. But, even then, sterling play in the Caribbean often has little value. The most valuable player this year in the Venezuelan league, for example, was Bo Diaz, also of the Boston Red Sox. But stardom in the Venezuelan

league wasn't enough to keep Diaz from being traded as part of a four-player package through which the Red Sox received Cleveland Indian pitching ace Dennis Eckersley. (The Red Sox feel that the Eckersley trade is the trade for the Penant.)

Baseball is the top sport of Caribbean countries. The season there occurs only in the winter. Baseball in the Latin countries is not all one-sided. It may be the only industry in Latin American in which Americans constitute the bulk of the employees. But many Latin players also

prominently appear in these leagues. Scouts for big league teams watch these games closely. They are exploratory engineers seeking the wealth that will benefit the home company. The Caribbean is baseball's new frontier.

(The importance of Latin baseball to Latinos might be indicated by the fact that the only election held while Rafael Trujillo was dictator of the Dominican Republic reportedly hinged on the outcome of a baseball game. Trujillo's opponent fielded the best Dominican team available, prompting El Presidente to pay astronomical sums to stars of the Negro Major

Leagues to play on his side. He won.)

The big sleep of baseball in the winter is over. But baseball remains more than business. And in the end, Reggie Jackson is more than a candy bar promoter. Without his three home runs off three pitches in the final game of the 1977 World Series the Reggie! bar wouldn't have as much cachet. Winter baseball depends on the summer game. Business can't detract from the grace of what happens on the diamond. It can only profit by it. ■

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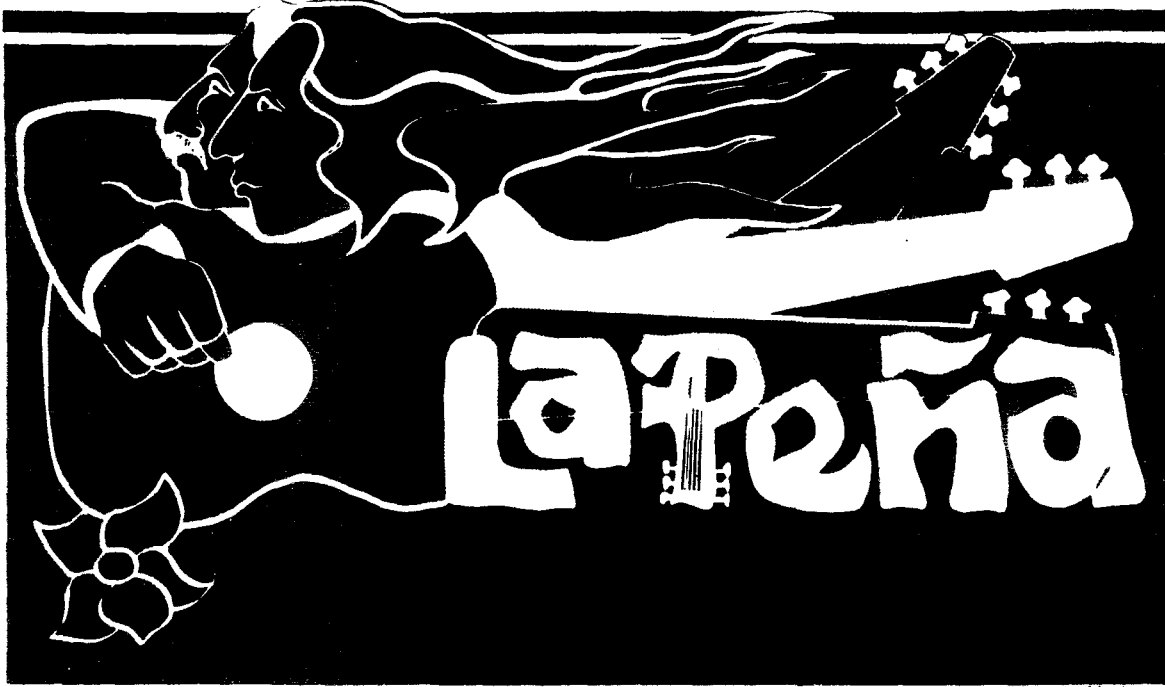
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ART «» ENTERTAINMENT



Graphic from La Peña's calendar of current attractions.

Graphic/Malagras Montoya

Cultural center faces eviction

On Thursday night of a typical week, the stage of La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley may be filled by the famous San Francisco Mime Troupe. The following night the Berkeley Citizens Action may be having a fundraiser with Congressman Ron Dellums. On Saturday, the hottest salsa bands in town may be playing a benefit for the group called Non-Intervention in Chile (NICH).

Few communities have a resource as valuable as this combination of a small tavern, a restaurant that serves excellent Latin American food and a medium-sized hall, useable for every sort of cultural function from dances to political debates. In the three years of its existence, La Peña has become a center for Latin culture and progressive politics in Berkeley and Oakland.

One group to which La Peña has been especially valuable is NICH (cf above). While there are no formal ties between the two organizations, they share common roots in the Chilean government of Salvador Allende and the struggle that followed its overthrow in 1973.

Bob High, staffperson at the national office on NICH, considers La Peña a priceless resource for Latin Americans and those interested in Latin-American struggles. "In addition to providing a place for fundraising and cultural activities for

Few communities have such a place.

NICH," he says, "La Peña has fulfilled a complementary role as a place for Latin Americans to come together and share their culture. It's been a godsend."

In the three years since La Peña opened its doors (on the second anniversary of the coup that plunged Chile into fascism), it has helped all kinds of local groups raise badly needed dollars.

This month La Peña is running benefits for itself.

The collective that manages the enterprise recently learned that the landlord will be selling the building La Peña occupies. So La Peña must raise \$25,000 as a down payment on the purchase of the building or face losing its home.

Collective members feel that the longer it takes to raise the down payment, the greater the chances that another buyer may be found. Their appeal states it bluntly: "We feel certain that if we don't raise the money now, we will be forced out."

The drive so far has consisted of direct appeals for donations, a raffle featuring prizes donated by community merchants, and benefit performances of music, dance, drama, film and political presentations. The breadth of the

political and cultural community served by La Peña is manifest in the diversity of the programs. There has been a concert by the Grupo Moncado, from Cuba; a performance of the San Francisco Mime Troupe's *Hotel Universe* (about the struggle to keep the International Hotel open); and *Moonlighting*, by the feminist theater, Lilith.

Still to come are concerts by steel drummers from the West Indies; classical and flamenco guitarists; a local jazz/blues group, an evening of "new" country folk music, and the popular "Salsa Alacran." There will also be performances of *Sizwe Banze Is Dead* (about apartheid in South Africa), "An Evening with Woody Guthrie," "El Teatro Coco Santo" (Afro-Cuban songs and dances), a film showing of a Bolivian documentary and a celebration of the third anniversary of "Victory in Vietnam," presented by the Association of Vietnamese Patriots.

People in the Bay Area interested in contributing to the fund to save La Peña, or in attending those programs still to be presented may obtain information from La Peña at 3105 Shattuck Ave., in Berkeley, or by calling 849-2568. Or by checking with La Peña's current calendar.

—Tim Reagan
Tim Reagan is an editor of the East Bay Voice, where a version of this article appeared.

RECORDS

Farmworkers issue an album

HUELGA EN GENERAL
El Teatro Campesino, Menyah

El Teatro Campesino was born on the first picket lines thrown up by Cesar Chavez's fellow farm workers 13 years ago. Its creator and guiding spirit, Luis Valdez, has been taking his troupe to the farm workers and the public ever since.

Huelga en General! (General Strike), first recorded in Teatro's home-made studio, is a nicely engineered presentation of 13 of the songs that saw the *chavistas* through a series of advances and setbacks to the relatively secure conditions of today. It is an assortment of Mexico polkas and *corridos* (ballads) that convey the history and the spirit of un-

Latin and Anglo picketline classics sung in Spanish by members of El Teatro Campesino.

ity of the UFW as well as some Anglo movement classics. They lyrics range from poignant laments over squalid conditions to gayly thrust barbs directed at the Teamsters. Like music of struggle from other fronts, the message comes through even if one doesn't understand the language.

The music is of the traditional Mexican folk variety. Instrumen-

tation is simple, with gentle acoustic guitar backgrounding the slower pieces and staccato trumpets and distinct bass lines characterizing the polkas.

Though the UFW is beginning to organize among black and Puerto Rican farm workers in the east, its roots are with the Mexican-Americans of the rural Southwest. *Huelga en General* is a vivid reaffirmation of those roots.

—Bob Datz
Copies of Huelga en General! are sold through United Farm workers of America, AFL-CIO, offices and support groups around the country, or they can be ordered through Menyah Records, El Centro Campesino Cultural, Box 1278, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045.

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