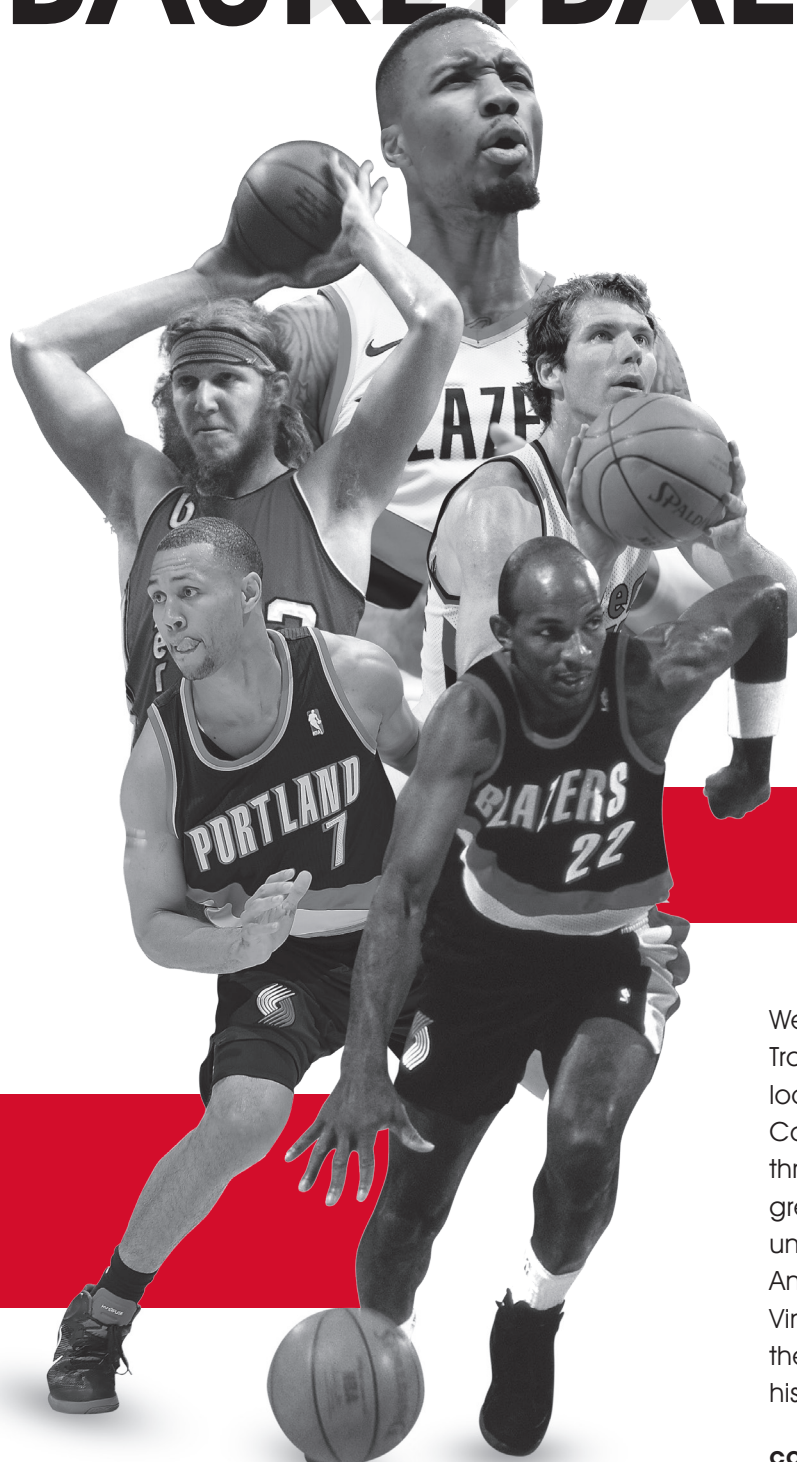


1970

CELEBRATING 50 Years *of* Trail Blazers BASKETBALL

2020

When you start to uncover five decades of history, it's easy to be overwhelmed by the impact of a basketball team in the Pacific Northwest on its players, fans, culture and community. We've witnessed more than 4,000 games, 400,000 points, and countless plays that made Rip City stand up and shout. All the while, a sports franchise has managed to bounce into our lives and shoot into our hearts. From a man with a vision and his trusty raincoat to the champs red hot and rollin' down Broadway. From the beloved Blazers of the 90s who were best in the West to this point in Dame Time. From the memories of our very first game to our very last buzzer beater, this franchise makes up the fabric of who we are and everything our city has become.



We look forward to celebrating 50 years of Trail Blazers basketball, presented by your local Toyota dealers and Spirit Mountain Casino, with five Decade Night celebrations throughout the season featuring Trail Blazers greats, a special 50th logo, court and uniforms, Trail Blazers commemorative 50th Anniversary wine produced by Adelsheim Vineyard, and more. We hope you enjoy these personal stories of Trail Blazers through history. Cheers to 50 Years, Rip City!

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By Kent Hartman

At about ten minutes after 2:00 PM on Sunday, June 5, 1977, I was breathing rarefied air. We all were. The Portland Trail Blazers had just won the NBA championship. The city, the state, and pretty much the entire region, for that matter, were euphoric, me included. I'd had the good fortune of not only attending the game, but also being in the locker room during the trophy presentation afterward (a well-meaning but surely misguided security guard had waved my friend and me inside). Not bad for a couple of high school juniors.

Our drive home up SW Broadway was even more surreal: a swirling sea of utterly ecstatic humans running everywhere. Hundreds of people had spontaneously gathered from Burnside Street all the way up to Portland State University, blocking traffic while deliriously shouting their lungs out. Joining in, I actually honked the horn in my dad's car so much that it eventually ceased to make a sound. Of course, the team's official victory parade, held the next day and coincidentally on the same route, proved to be exponentially larger and remains the stuff of lore around these parts.

From that point on, the Blazers' home games were completely sold out, which included several hundred hastily-added standing-room-only spots that ringed all around the main walkway inside the Memorial Coliseum (Note: the "Veterans" part of the name wasn't in use during the 1970s). 12,666 frenzied faithful could be counted on at every tip-off — a much-envied homecourt advantage in a pre-Magic Johnson/Larry Bird NBA where some teams struggled to fill

even half their seats.

Tickets were like gold. Scalping entered the Stumptown lexicon. In response to the insatiable demand in those pre-cable/satellite/streaming days, the team began simulcasting games over closed-circuit TV on a giant screen at the Paramount Theatre downtown. Those 2,500 seats usually went in a hurry too.

Portland's post-championship atmosphere was positively electric. The newly-coined phrase, "Red, Hot & Rollin'," became a rallying cry. Had Bill Walton run for governor he would

have won in a landslide. Amazingly, the team had never even put together a winning season, let alone made the playoffs, until that golden run during 1976-77. Suddenly, our once under-the-radar little burg had hit the bigtime. The whole thing was as improbable as it was unimaginable, especially when viewed through the decidedly provincial lens

of the team's first six years.

When the Trail Blazers' esteemed founder, Harry Glickman, along with his financial partners Herman Sarkowsky, Robert Schmertz and Larry Weinberg, landed the Trail Blazers franchise in 1970, Portland was a very different place, sleepy even. The metro population was less than half of what it is today. The Marquam Bridge over the Willamette River and, correspondingly, a completed Interstate 5, were but four years old. There were also only five television stations to pick

from, each with its own reception challenges, depending on where you lived. It often required adjusting a pair of set-top rabbit ears (antennas) to successfully watch the handful of Blazers road games being broadcast back here at home.

Sports-wise, many locals weren't sure at first what to think of the new team. Portland had long been a hockey (Buckaroos) and baseball (Beavers) town, if only minor-league. The "Bucks," in particular, founded and owned by Mr. Glickman, were a perennial powerhouse, winning the Western Hockey League's Lester Patrick Cup championship several times. Year-in and year-out, they were the best non-National Hockey League club in the country. Which was saying something, given that the NHL had only six teams during much of that era. The Buckaroos, who frequently drew sell-out crowds, were also the Memorial Coliseum's longtime primary tenant, now required to share the facility with a bunch of basketball players.

But the Blazers grew on people. Chalking up twenty-nine wins (a then-record for an expansion team) and walloping the defending world champion New York Knicks that initial season

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Guys Like Us



A rare, still-existing Trail Blazers pocket schedule from the team's first season of 1970-71 (left).

An extraordinarily rare poster from the Trail Blazers' first season (1970-71) featuring the signatures of every player (below).



PHOTOS: THE KENT HARTMAN COLLECTION

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About Dame Time

By Casey Holdahl

As the team embarks on their 50th year of existence, there's a fair amount of evidence to support the notion that suffering simply comes with the territory of being a fan of the Portland Trail Blazers. Granted, it isn't the kind of suffering which really matters in the grand scheme, and fans of every team invariably end up cursing the stars at some point, but the quality and regularity of gut punches those devoted to Rip City have endured over the last half century certainly qualify as hard luck.

So when you work for a team with such a profile long enough, most either learn to roll with those punches or eventually come to the conclusion that perhaps sports are better left to leisure. That's not to say that people who work for teams aren't fans on some level — almost all of us are — but if you can't, at least on some level, compartmentalize the swings of emotion that inevitably occur throughout the course of one and/or multiple NBA seasons, it

makes the work, and eventually every other part of your life, miserable. Sure, working for a team during the good times often doesn't feel like work at all, but during the bad times, it can be brutal.

And a three-year series of events, culminating with the 2011-12 lock-out-shortened season, certainly qualifies as one of those bad times. After a brief moment in which it seemed as though the team might be on the verge of contending, Greg Oden's knee gave out, Brandon Roy's did the same, two general managers were fired within a span of 10 months and Nate McMillan lost the locker room and, eventually, his job. And on the business side, rumors of wholesale changes had a significant number of employees wondering if perhaps it was time to start making preparations.

But there was a glimmer. The day after parting ways with McMillan, Chad Buchanan, a holdover from the two previous front offices tasked with leading the team during the lockout season, officially pulled the cord on the season by sending Gerald Wal-

lace, then Portland's starting small forward, to the New Jersey Nets in exchange for two players — Mehmet Okur and Shawne Williams — who would never suit up for the Blazers and a first-round pick in the upcoming 2012 Draft.

Despite the Nets having the fifth-worst record in the NBA at the time, they only asked for Top 3 protection, a peculiarity of the deal that is nearly impossible to fathom less than a decade later. The Nets would finish the season tied with the Kings for the fifth-worst record, and after the Draft Lottery, were awarded the sixth overall pick, which would be conveyed to Portland. After a multi-season run of misfortune, we finally had one go our way. It wasn't necessarily a fix, but at least there was cause for optimism.

The season ended with the team losing seven straight and nine of their last 10 to finish 10 games under .500. Roughly a month later, Neil Olshey was hired to take over as General Manager, with the first order of business being to figure out how to best maximize the Trail Blazers' draft assets.



Lillard and Olshey with 2012-13 Rookie of the Year trophy. (Copyright 2013 NBAE)

And since the team had been looking for their Point Guard of the Future for close to a decade, a senior from Weber State named Damian Lillard seemed to make sense, both in terms of talent and fit.

After participating in the full battery of events at the Draft Combine, which basically doesn't happen in today's NBA for players whose selec-

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PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

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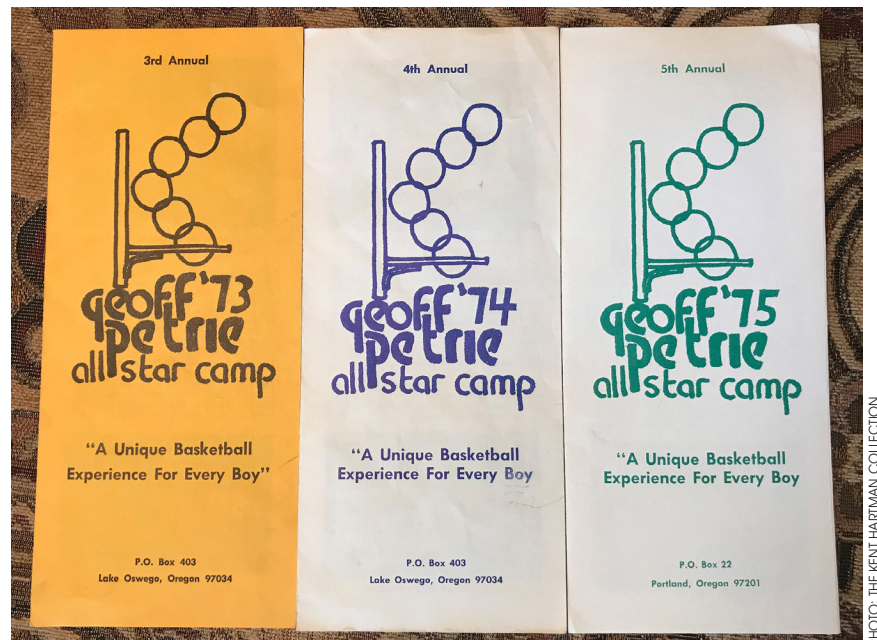
didn't hurt. Not to mention that the team's first draftee and first star, Geoff Petrie, was like a matinee idol with his good looks, hip clothes (a full-length leather coat among them) and major-league swagger. He was also a heck of a talent. Petrie averaged over twenty-four points a game during 1970-71, became an all-star, and ended up earning co-rookie-of-the-year honors alongside Boston's Dave Cowens. Naturally, I had an extra rooting interest since my dad was one of the small number of folks who submitted the winning entry of "Trail Blazers" in the big statewide contest to name the team. It's hard to beat that for getting a fifth-grader on board.

In short order, my friends and I became enthralled. Over the next several seasons we managed to talk our parents into annually sending us to the weeklong Geoff Petrie All-Star Basketball Camp held each summer at Pacific University in nearby Forest Grove. Let me tell you, that was basketball nirvana for any boy with hoops on the brain. Aside from the fantastic learning experience, Petrie and the other Blazers/NBA players working there were remarkably accessible. It was common to play H-O-R-S-E or eat meals with them. They were just regular guys, like a normal low-key Portlander — albeit incredibly cool ones

with pro skills.

There were no entourages, no fancy cars, no multi-million-dollar homes in those days either. Some players even had summer jobs in order to make ends meet. In terms of wheels, the Blazers mostly drove variations of whatever everyone else had: Datsuns, Pontiacs, Fords. I remember that Walton proudly piloted a bare-bones, dinged-up Toyota Landcruiser for a time. Though there were exceptions. A lightly-used rookie backup guard named Bernie Fryer conspicuously tooled around town in a big, shiny-new Cadillac Coupe de Ville sporting a specialized license plate that read, "Mr. Fryer." While it probably had nothing to do with his car choice, Bernie was out of the league within two seasons and subsequently became an NBA referee.

In terms of small-town-style proximity, it was the same later on in the decade when I started to play ball at a higher level. I (and a number of others) participated in countless noon-ball pickup games with various Blazers during the offseason from 1975 through 1978. Pretty heady stuff for a high schooler. Something that would never happen now. The players were looking to stay in shape and often needed a few extra non-NBA bodies to make it a full-court run. I can proudly say that I have been personally dunked on by several former Trail Blazers.



The Geoff Petrie All-Star (Basketball) Camp was the only place to be in the early-to-mid 1970s for any basketball-crazy, school-aged boy who also idolized the Portland Trail Blazers. Petrie, the team's first draftee, was one of the best players in the NBA.

Looking back, it's all so hard to fathom. Today's NBA is a sprawling, wildly popular, multi-billion-dollar worldwide phenomenon. In the early-to-mid-seventies, the league, and especially the franchise here in Portland, were downright mom-and-pop shops by comparison. Yet, wondrously so. The thrill of having been a firsthand part of those early years is something I

will forever carry close. It was certainly a time that will never be duplicated. But it can be cherished. ■

Kent Hartman is a bestselling author, radio show producer, and music business entrepreneur. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

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tion in the Top 10 is unquestioned, Lillard had workouts set up with the Kings, Raptors, Warriors and Trail Blazers. And while I'm sure the front office considered all of their options, it always felt like Lillard was going to be a Trail Blazer. From being at a position of need to the underdog mentality with which he carried himself, it just made too much sense.

I recall interviewing Lillard the day of his predraft workout in Portland, and while what I wrote from that conversation has been lost, I remember coming away from the interaction feeling like this was someone I could work with, someone who could take us somewhere.

Covering players during the predraft process can feel a bit like wasted effort, as everyone tends to have their answers canned after their first few workouts and going deep on a subject who very likely won't end up playing for the team you cover has limited utility, but with Dame, there



Lillard shakes hands with former NBA Commissioner David Stern after being selected by Portland with the sixth pick of the 2012 NBA Draft. (Copyright 2012 NBAE)

was just a sense that this was a real beginning.

And with rumors that his workout in front of Paul Allen (who loved the

draft process, especially when it included talented guards) was one of most impressive in recent memory, it felt like there was good reason

to pay attention. And obviously, there was. Since being selected with the sixth pick, Lillard has been the stabilizing force for a franchise that, at the time, seemed like it might be on the precipice of something ugly. Set in motion by clear-eyed decision-making and a bit of good fortune, Lillard's success in Portland (from winning Rookie of the Year by way of unanimous vote to leading the team to their first conference finals in nearly two decades) goes back to that workout over seven years ago. We've taken plenty of lumps since then, and I get the sense we feel those failures in our bones more than most devotees of other teams, but that makes it all the more important to remember the instances in which we've made our own breaks. ■

Casey Holdahl is a reporter and multimedia journalist for the Portland Trail Blazers. A long-time Oregonian, he resides in North Portland.