

SPORTING GREEN

Air Jordan Lands in Oakland

Bulls' Spunk and Dunk

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Local Heroes

For basketball superstars such as you, what would Michael Jordan's look like? Would it be marked with a cluster of stars? Would it be a special shade of platinum?

Those who have played with the Chicago Bulls' shining light would say no. Instead, they would see the greatest construction worker put on a metal hard hat, and fasten it on the head of the working-class superstar.

Jordan, the NBA's leading scorer at 37.3 points per game, will make his only appearance in the Bay Area this season in tonight's 8 p.m. game against the Warriors. He already has achieved feats on which legends are built: 60 points in the season opener against New York; an NBA record 63-point performance to close out another victory against the Knicks;

JORDAN'S 12-GAME STATS

Game	Points	Rebounds	Assists	Steals	Blocks
1	60				
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					

and leading a team of role players to a 75-

These are accomplishments that give many stars a reprieve from the mundane aspects of basketball. But Jordan's willingness to practice with a magical fury and to play as hard as his teammates seldom is in most of the Bulls.

"Jordan's a beautiful spirit about the man," said former Warriors coach John Bach, now a Bulls assistant. "That's why he Air Jordan. It's a nice airline to be aboard."

Just days ago, the Warriors' Chris Mullin was relaxing after practice, relishing the rare day off he would receive on Thanksgiving Day. When several reporters wandered over asking how he would guard Jordan tonight, and Mullin tried his best to change the subject.

He's the type of guy who could



Michael Jordan makes his only local ap

JORDAN: BULLS' SPIRITUAL LEADER AND LEADING SCORER

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rain your day," Mullin said.

Yet, Mullin couldn't resist telling a few nostalgic tales about Jordan, who was Mullin's roommate when they both played on the 1984 Olympic team.

"We used to practice three times a day for about two months," Mullin recalled. "After the first month, guys were tired and sore, and we'd come to the night practice and be sitting down until the coach got there."

Jordan would entertain himself on the court — whirling through the air for 360-degree dunks. Michael Jordan — tired of basketball? No way.

"I'm thinking I've got to guard this guy for two hours, and I can't get out of my seat," Mullin said. "This is not correct."

Many players lose the enthusiasm for practice when they must survive the 82-game NBA grind, and Jordan has the added mental pressure of performing to a star's level every night and handling media demands.

His basketball fervor has never wavered.

"It's something rare when a star plays as hard at practice as at the game," Bulls forward Earl Cureton said. "He works as hard as the last guy on the roster. He's a guy who just loves to play basketball."

"I like to work hard in practice," Jordan said before last night's game against the Los Angeles Lakers. "There's a saying: you always practice like you play."

So when his teammates' spirits are lagging, Jordan said he likes to churn up their competitive nature in practice.

In a scrimmage, he said he might declare that the red team's going to get their butts kicked. Because of the natural instinct of a basketball player, he's going to try to retaliate and work harder.

Wednesday in Denver, the Bulls suffered an emotionally draining, two-point loss. The next day it was time for Jordan the motivator to take over.

"He's like a basketball junkie," coach Doug Collins said. "Yesterday, Earl Cureton was yelling 'Get him his daily fix! Get him his daily fix!' On fastbreak drills, the guy was just unbelievable."

Then Collins made darting jabs with his hands, like someone trying to describe the path of a overactive bumble bee.

"He knew we were coming off a downer," Collins continued. "This team is an emotional team, and there was pain on their faces when they lost the other night. Michael realized it and said, 'I'm going to get these guys jacked up in practice today.'"

That night the Bulls had Thanksgiving dinner together at the team hotel. It's not the best way to spend a holiday, but Jordan added a little family spirit by buying two \$100 bottles of Dom Perignon champagne for his teammates.

It often is said that superstars are gifted with the rare ability to make their teammates better players, and Jordan definitely has done

that this season.

In almost every preseason forecast, the Bulls were picked to finish last in the Central Division. Through trades, injuries or free agent castoffs, Jordan was the only returning player among last year's top six scorers. Gone were Grande Woolridge, Sidney Green, Grantley Daffey and George Gervin, and versatile Gene Banks broke his foot late in the exhibition season.

With these players, Chicago had won just 30 games and barely squeezed into the playoffs after Jordan returned from a 64-game absence caused by a broken foot.

The history of the new herd of Bulls could have been depressing. Except for Jordan, no other Bull on the active roster has a career scoring average of more than 16 points per game, and starting center Granville Waiters averaged 10 minutes and 2.7 points in three previous NBA seasons.

Yet, they have become a winning team, despite the fact that nine of their first 11 games were decided in the last 30 seconds. Credit Jordan's impact and humility.

Guard John Paxson ranks sixth in the NBA in shooting accuracy, shooting 57.7 percent from the field. "Michael has a lot to do with it," Paxson said. "Teams are double- or triple-teaming him, and that leaves the rest of us wide open for baskets. Even though he goes up for a shot, he's still able to find the open man."

But, Jordan openly admits that his teammates have made him better, too, by setting picks for him,

leaving almost all of the ball-handling he can't be double-teamed and becoming the NBA's third-best defensive team.

"They have relieved a lot of pressure off me, because they have stepped up and gotten some of the respect that they deserve," he said. "They haven't sat back and said, 'This is Michael Jordan. Let him do all.'"

He probably could do it all if necessary, but tonight may be the first time Warrior fans see Jordan at his best. In his rookie year, they loudly booed former coach Kevin Loughery for playing Jordan only 10 minutes in Oakland. And during October's visit, he broke his left foot early in the first half of the game.

"I remember it, but it's in the past and I hate to think about it," Jordan said. "It was just a freak accident. I went up for a long pass, I miscalculated my landing and hurt my foot. I'm not even thinking about going into Oakland."

"This is a whole new year. We've got a different team, and we're on a roll."

