

## The 1996 NBA Draft

# Drafting underclassmen killing collegiate and professional hoops

As the 1996 NBA Draft commences today in New Jersey, a glaring problem plaguing the world of basketball will stick out once again amidst all the festivities and hoopla.



**TOM DAY**  
SPORTS EDITOR

If you've kept up with the sport of late, chances are you've seen this pestilence rear its ugly head already.

I'm talking about college underclassmen leaving the NCAA and their schools early for the much greener pastures of the NBA. This practice is rampant and out of control and something must be done to stop it.

To put this trend in perspective, only six underclassmen declared themselves eligible for the draft in 1992. Conversely, this year's draft features 33 underclassmen and three aspiring high school graduates who just decided to skip college all together.

This disturbing phenomenon is killing the quality of play at both the collegiate and professional levels.

On the college scene, basketball has become nothing more than a rest stop for talented players on the road to the NBA. Longevity and fulfilling the terms of a full, four-year athletic scholarship are becoming a thing of the past as the NCAA contin-

ues to lose its showcase players prematurely to the pros.

As a result, fans who had grown attached to the game by following these players and their team's progress are alienated. Consequently, the NCAA and its schools are hurt by a drop in television ratings and attendance at games.

But more importantly, individual teams suffer when their top players leave for the NBA two years early.

It takes a lot of time on the court in practice and in games for teams to develop a chemistry and unified goal. If a star player leaves his team early for the pros in the middle of this process, he's hurting his teammates, his school and the fans.

Basically gutted, any championship potential his team had is lost, and the program must completely start over.

A perfect example is last year's North Carolina basketball season.

A potential championship year for the Tar Heels in 1995-1996 turned out average when star players Jerry Stackhouse and Rasheed Wallace left for the NBA following their sophomore year.

Prior to last season, only eight freshmen had ever started the first game of a season for the Heels. In 1996, two freshmen were in the opening game lineup, as Dean Smith managed to put together a 20-win season.

But the Heels' shot at greatness was lost with the departures of Stackhouse and Wallace.

It is evident that the quality of play suffers when collegiate

basketball's premier players bid an early farewell, and the NCAA is hurt as a whole.

Things are no different on the professional front, as the level of play suffers just as much when underclassmen enter the league. Underdeveloped and immature in comparison to their established NBA peers, it takes these wet-behind-the-ears rookies three or four extra years to reach their potential.

Last year, John Wallace showed that staying the full four years in college can be beneficial. The senior center led Syracuse to the national title game and at the same time improved his stock in this year's draft.

Following his lead next season are Kansas guard Jacques Vaughn and Wake Forest center Tim Duncan.

But there aren't enough players following in their foot steps. Basketball is hurting at both the collegiate and pro levels because of this underclassmen trend, and something must be done to curb it.

If a player agrees to a four-year athletic scholarship, then the NCAA must force him to honor it. Special exemptions could be made in hardship cases where a player can come out early to help support his family in crisis.

But the NBA could take some measures as well.

Just like a business in the real world, the NBA is a professional organization. And like any other company, the league should hire only those who have the most experience and are qualified for the job.

College underclassmen and high school kids are not

# Confusion abounds as NBA teams weigh their draft options

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — Allen Iverson said the No. 1 pick is a toss-up, Stephon Marbury disagreed and Isaiah Thomas considered neither player as he wondered what to do with the No. 2 pick.

Much remained unsettled Tuesday on the eve of the NBA draft, even among the teams picking near the very top. On Wednesday, trades and surprises were expected all day.

A record 36 underclassmen and high school players have declared themselves eligible, and general managers and scouts will choose from a mixed bag of prospects who are certainly the youngest — and possibly the least polished — the league has ever seen.

"It's one of the most puzzling, confusing and exhilarating drafts because nobody has a clue," said Marty Blake, director of the league's scouting service.

The Philadelphia 76ers are expected to take a point guard with the first pick, and the choice is between Iverson of Georgetown and Marbury of Georgia Tech.

"To me, it's still 50-50," Iverson said Tuesday.

"I think they'll take Allen," Marbury disagreed.

Both Iverson and Marbury have listed Philadelphia as their first choice, and both have refused to work out for other teams. Iverson is leaving school after two years and Marbury is leaving after one.

"Allen is the best point guard in college basketball — I'm second," Marbury said. "If both of us were sophomores, it might be different."

The second pick belongs to the Toronto Raptors, who want the best big man and don't need a point

guard. Thomas, the general manager of the Raptors, was trying to decide between Marcus Camby of Massachusetts and Shareef Abdur-Rahim of California.

"A week ago, this draft was pretty dull for us. Now that Shareef is in, it's become pretty interesting," Thomas said Tuesday. "There are more cards to play, I've had some pretty good trade offers and there are a lot of different scenarios."

Abdur-Rahim worked out for the Raptors on Monday. Camby, who heard Thomas commit to him before Abdur-Rahim changed his mind for a second time and re-entered the draft, has been left wondering whether he could drop to third or lower.

"When a guy says on television he's taking me at No. 2, you can take his word for it," Camby said. "But I wouldn't hold it against him if he went back on his word. It's only been a one-month relationship."

Vancouver might end up trading the third pick if Iverson and Abdur-Rahim are taken first and second. The Grizzlies want Marbury, not Camby, but Marbury doesn't want to play in Vancouver. That could entice the Grizzlies to trade down in the top 10 and pick up a quality player and a good draft pick at the same time.

Following Philadelphia, Toronto and Vancouver, the draft order is Milwaukee, Minnesota, Boston, the Los Angeles Clippers, New Jersey,

Dallas and Indiana. The picture gets murkier in the middle and late first round. The draft is loaded with forwards, short on shooting guards and younger than ever.

Kobe Bryant, Jermaine O'Neal and Taj McDavid are the three high schoolers available. The foreign-born contingent features 6-foot-10 Vitaly Potapenko of Ukraine, whose performance at the pre-draft camp in Chicago has elevated him into the top 15; 6-11 Efthimis Retzias of Greece; 7-1 Zydrunas Ilgauskas of Lithuania; and 6-9 Predrag Stojakovic, an 18-year-old naturalized Greek citizen from Yugoslavia.

"We're talking about Kobe Bryant and Predrag Stojakovic, let's not even talk about them in the same breath," Blake said. "Predrag is much better and shouldn't even be on the same court with Bryant."

Antoine Walker (Kentucky), Ray Allen (Connecticut), Erick Dampier (Mississippi State), John Wallace (Syracuse), Kerry Kittles (Villanova) and Steve Nash (Santa Clara) will be drafted high in the first round.

Lorenzen Wright (Memphis), Samaki Walker (Louisville), Todd Fuller (North Carolina State) and Moochie Norris (West Florida) will be gone by No. 20.

The No. 11 pick belongs to Golden State followed by Cleveland, Charlotte, Sacramento, Phoenix, Charlotte, Portland and New York (Nos. 19 and 20).

The final nine first-round choices go to Cleveland, New York, Vancouver, Denver, the Los Angeles Lakers, Utah, Detroit, Orlando, Seattle and Chicago.



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