

NBA teams prepare for biggest gamble: the draft

No consensus No. 1 for Jordan, Wizards

NEW YORK (AP) — If Michael Jordan and the Washington Wizards decide to keep the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft, Jamaal Tinsley won't be too happy.

If the Wizards decide to trade down so they can choose the Iowa State point guard in the middle of the first round, Tinsley will be more than pleased to suit up for a team that won only 19 games last season.

"Just seeing him looking at me, it made me go even harder," said Tinsley, who held a private workout for Jordan late last month along with a few other draft prospects. "Him teaching me things like squaring up and how to come off screens, somebody I'll tell my kids about it."

Jordan is still an icon to the youngsters heading into Wednesday night's NBA draft, even if some of the youngsters aren't so young compared to the other draft-eligibles.

Tinsley is a relative old man in this year's draft. At 23, he is five years older than several of the big men who are expected to be chosen with the first few picks.

Among them are teen-agers Eddy Curry (18), Kwame Brown (19) and Tyson Chandler (18), who are jumping directly from high school to the NBA, and Seton Hall freshman forward Eddie Griffin (19).

"I look at it like this: There are a lot of 7-footers and 6-11 guys, and big guys are always going to be picked first," said Tinsley, the top-rated point guard. "Teams are going to take a chance."

That statement couldn't be any more true than it is this year, with 75 underclassmen eligible to be drafted. Last year, a record 18 underclassmen were chosen in the first round.

The Wizards hold the first pick and could become the first team to select a high-schooler as the overall No. 1 pick, but Washington also could end up trading the pick to a team more eager to take a chance on a teen-ager.

"The one thing you can never get enough of in this league is talent," incoming Wizards coach Doug Collins said. "Getting quality big men is critical if you're going to have success. When you've won 19 games, you've got a lot of holes. We've got to try to fill those, and we're going to do that by maximizing the No. 1 pick."

Not too long ago, a tough player considered the best point guard in the draft wouldn't drop below the eighth or ninth pick.

Five years ago, guards Allen Iverson, Stephon Marbury, Ray Allen and Kerry Kittles all went in the top 10. A year later, point guards Chauncey Billups and Antonio Daniels went third and fourth. In 1999, Steve Francis and Baron Davis went second and third.

This year, only Jason Richardson of Michigan State, Tinsley, Joe Johnson of Arkansas and Joseph Forte of North Carolina are considered sure things to be chosen somewhere in the first round. Only Richardson is certain to be among the top 10.

Among small forwards,

Duke's Shane Battier will undoubtedly be the first four-year college senior selected, but Seton Hall's Griffin could leapfrog him in the order of selection.

The top-rated centers include high schoolers Brown, of Glynn Academy (Ga.) and DeSagana Diop of Oak Hill (Va.) Academy. The top power forward prospects include Chandler, of Dominguez H.S. (Calif.), and Curry, of Thornwood, Ill.

"The depth in this year's draft will be at the power positions, center and power forward," said Marty Blake, NBA director of scouting. "The power forward position in particular is unusually strong, with the depth of good players at that position extending into the second round."

Following Washington in the draft order are the Los Angeles Clippers, Atlanta Hawks, Chicago Bulls, Golden State Warriors, Vancouver Grizzlies, New Jersey Nets, Cleveland Cavaliers and Detroit Pistons.

The Boston Celtics hold the 10th, 11th and 21st picks, while Houston also has three picks in the first round: Nos. 13, 18 and 23. Golden State has the fifth and 14th picks; Orlando holds the 15th and 22nd selections.

New York, Indiana, Milwaukee, Minnesota, Denver and Dallas do not have first-round picks, and the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers do not have any picks in the first or second rounds.

The Milwaukee Bucks are not scheduled to have a selection until late in the second round.

It is the time of year when NBA executives and coaches will gather in their war rooms and take part in the 2001 NBA Draft, their version of pin the tail on the donkey. This year may be more difficult to pinpoint than usual, considering the large contingent of underclassmen and the lack of a consensus No. 1 pick.

Teams will have the option of selecting from a group of 18-year-old high school prospects or selecting 31-year-old Gulf War veteran George Evans. With a record 58 underclassmen on the early entry list, trying to get a handle on this year's draft can be overwhelming.

If the past has taught us anything, it is that the Clippers will draft someone who is vastly overrated, the Mavericks will surprise everyone by passing up a known commodity for a European player, and Hubie Brown will have the vital statistics of every player drafted — no matter how obscure. In addition to these eternal truths, there are other intriguing aspects of this year's draft to keep in mind.

Recently, college underclassmen have made a habit of grabbing the spotlight and pushing the more polished four-year seniors to the background.

The 2001 NBA Draft offers a new twist to this phenomenon.

Six high school seniors have crashed the party, garnering all the headlines and hoopla. Wary of missing a future Kobe Bryant or Kevin Garnett, NBA teams are content to nurse the likes of Eddy Curry, Tyson Chandler and Kwame Brown until they are ready to make an impact.

Seton Hall forward Eddie Griffin and UNC-Charlotte forward Rodney White also fall into this young and untested



MICHAEL BALHOFF

group. After trying college for a year, they now figure to be chosen in the top five.

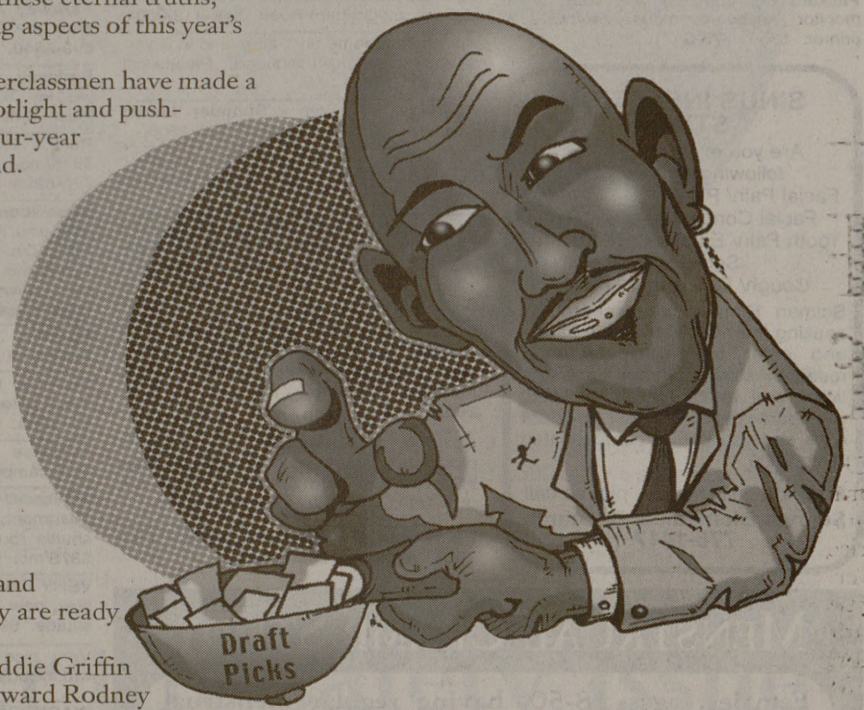
Teams are searching Europe for potential talent to uncover the next Dirk Nowitzki or Peja Stojakovic. Pau Gasol and Vladimir Radmanovic are foreigners expected to be lottery selections.

For those not counting, that is eight players expected to go in the first 13 selections that lack either United States citizenship or the legal right to drink. They are players that were not even on the average fan's radar screen a year ago. Of course, Duke senior Shane Battier, with PR director Dick Vitale in tow, is also a safe bet to be a high pick.

What does the infiltration of younger players say for the prospects of well-known entrants like Troy Murphy and Joseph Forte? In today's NBA, teams will pass on these types of solid players now for a chance to obtain a player who may be great several years from now.

At least they can rest assured that their names will be called on draft night. The early entry list

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