

HATFIELD SPORTS DAILY DIARIES:

BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

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Can you believe it? After writing the book, after Shaq signed with Miami, and after all he had to put up with in 2003-04, Phil Jackson will be the Head Coach of the Los Angeles Lakers for 2005-06. Not only that, but he has inked a contract to be there for the next three years. As Peter Boyle's character Frank Boron on *Everybody Loves Raymond* would say, "Holy crap!"

Lets not fool ourselves. Phil's relationship with Lakers Owner Jerry Buss' daughter, Jeannie, played a major part in his decision to return and return to the city of Los Angeles. What'll happen, though if Jeannie and Phil decide it's time to move on and breakup? It'll then be uh-oh time for Dr. Buss and Mitch Kupchak for sure.

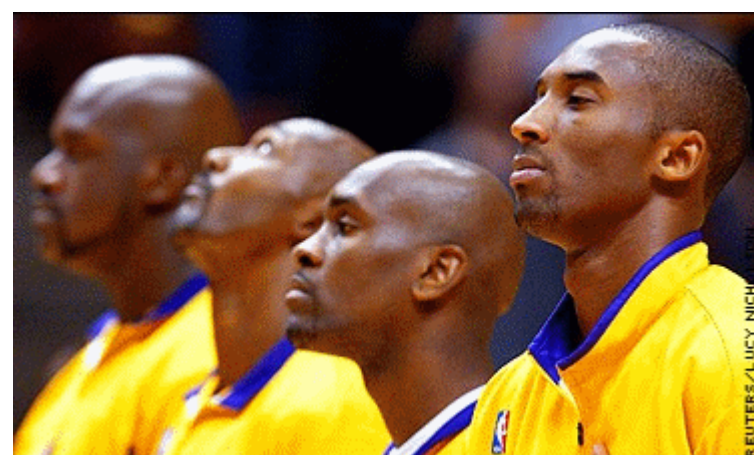
Jackson, 60, has won nine NBA Championships - tied with former legendary Boston Celtics Head Coach Red Auerbach for the most in league history. Losing to Detroit last June left a sour taste in his mouth which is why a.) he is coming back here in June to take some of the attention off the Pistons in this year's Finals and b.) coming back to try and get ring #10.

As far as the stuff on the court goes, it's all going to come down to whether or not he and Lakers star Kobe Bryant can co-exist (or in their case, stomach one another). I wonder if Phil still believes everything he said about Bryant in his book and if Kobe still hates "this bleeping [triangle] offense."

LA has talented players, no question. What's interesting about this development is that unless the team adds another star quality player alongside Kobe, then all you Jackson doubters will find out what kind of a coach he truly is. Some say the only reason he won in Chicago was because of Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. Only reason he won in LA was because of Shaq and Kobe. Really? How did the quartet of Bryant-O'Neal-Malone-Payton work out a year ago? Okay, I'll buy that Larry Brown out-coached Phil in the title series of 2004. Though, with all he had to put up with, it was something to be proud of that the team out-last-ed everyone else in the Western Conference Finals to reach the NBA Finals.

My question to Phil would be the following: why did you ever let it happen? Why contribute to the team's breakup a year ago? You should've told Kobe and Shaq to shut up and play ball with one another. Then again, Kobe was tired of being the 'sidekick' and Shaquille just plain cannot stand his younger former star teammate. Most people will never fully realize how big the injuries to Karl Malone and Derek Fisher were at the end. Gary Payton never got acclimated to the system, but couldn't you have dealt him for another shooter and kept the rest of group from last season in tact? Shouldn't you have given it one more shot last season with Fisher, Malone, Bryant, O'Neal and the rest of the bunch?

This new Lakers team can make a return trip to the postseason. That said, a title run is far out of reach at this point unless Tim Duncan or Kevin Garnett walks through that door. Or unless an all-world supporting cast is there by #8. **Plus, aren't we all forgetting this Phil-LA reunion may not take place next season? The league could be destined for a lock-out if things aren't straightened out between the players and the rest of the NBA people.**



Only one of the four pictured future NBA Hall-of-Famers remains from the 2003-04 Lakers team that came together to try and achieve one goal of winning a Championship. That man - Kobe Bryant, whose been most criticized for the team's demise during and after last year's NBA Finals.