

SPORTS

GRUNWALD'S ERRORS AND OMISSIONS: Raptors Ex-GM Victim Of What He Did And Did Not Do

By Kurt Wildman
Pride Sports Writer

Last year, around this time, when Lenny Wilkens met his demise as the Raptors' head coach, yours truly wrote that his ultimate legacy as a Hall of Fame player and coach would remain secure despite his difficulties in Toronto.

I also suggested that "the book" on the remaining members of Canada's only NBA basketball club, like then General Manager Glen Grunwald, was still being written and that, given his own role in the team's failure, he would be lucky to attain the overall basketball success Wilkens had.

I had serious doubts about Grunwald's prospects.

Now that Grunwald has been fired and my apparent clairvoyance confirmed, I am not about to brag.

How can self-congratulation exist when a man who is universally reported to be ethical, genial and sincere, one whose intellect garnered Rhodes Scholar consideration at the University of Indiana and whose body let him down when he tried to make it as an NBA

player, loses his place in the organization for which he toiled for a decade?

Clearly, only the pathological critic could delight in the cold and dirty business of sports terminations.

A rational analyst, however, can't be criticized for acknowledging that Grunwald's dismissal was warranted and probably overdue, or for noting that the front office's gentle giant made poor choices when he did act and demonstrated poor judgment when he failed to.

Grunwald made a critical tactical error when he tried to keep Tracy McGrady in a Toronto uniform with positive vibes and public displays of affection. He let the extremely self-interested McGrady, who wanted an opportunity to be "the Man" on an NBA team, string the organization along instead of trading him for something tangible and valuable when the opportunity existed.

He brought in disabled Hakeem Olajuwon despite clear indications that "The Dream" was over. An icon in Houston and a savior of Mosaic proportions having led his team to twin championships in the Jordan-less era, the Rockets were not prepared to offer him more than some bus fare in a contract and were

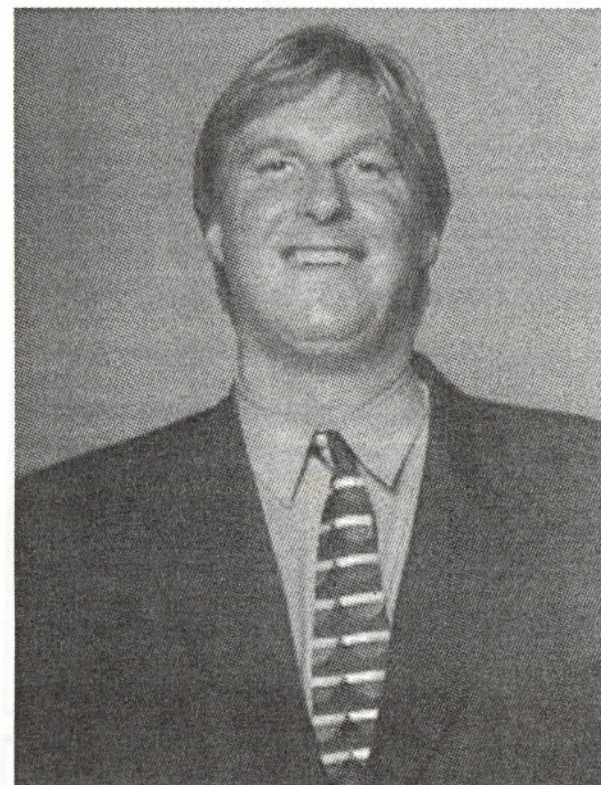
curiously apathetic in letting the Lagos, Nigeria native leave for T.O.

He gave Antonio Davis a monster contract in complete disproportion to his career statistics and reasonable projections of his future performance, and in willful blindness to the tough rebounder's age and his (or his wife's) yearning to return to the U.S.

His draft day results started well with Vince Carter in 1998 and seem to have ended well with mature rookie Chris Bosh. It's just that everything in between ended up south of mediocre.

Despite Morris Peterson's streakiness, an irksome trait when he winds up playing the role of a three-point specialist, he has shown that he can defend opposing teams' better perimeter players and can bust out

Continued on next page...



Glen Grunwald

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... Continued from previous page.



Glen Grundwald with Michael Bradley

for big points intermittently. You can't criticize Grunwald for getting Mo Pete late in the first round.

But Chris Jeffreys did nothing and showed the potential to do about the same. Ditto for Alex Radojevic whose lack of talent was further discounted by injury.

Although Michael Bradley looked like he could give significantly more than Jeffreys, Grunwald waived his former first-round pick, allowing Atlanta to effectively pick him up for free. By cutting Bradley loose, Grunwald's decision to pass over worthwhile big men like Brendan Haywood, the Collins twins, Mehmet Okur (Detroit picked him in the 2nd round of the 2001 draft), and Zach Randolph, in favour of the former DePaul University forward, stands out even more as a glaring mistake.

The former GM never found a sleeper or a diamond-in-the-

rough in the second round. More damning, he and his scouting staff failed to recognize the solution to their point guard issues lay at the bottom of the first round where over the last five years they could have obtained Denver's Andre Miller, Indiana's Jamaal Tinsley, or Tony Parker, the All-Star point guard and second best player on the NBA champion San Antonio Spurs, who was the 27th pick in the 2001 draft.

In signing Nate Huffman in 2002 out of the FIBA Superleague, GM Glen acquired yet another big man with pre-existing injury problems, then still had to pay him after losing an arbitration hearing on the issue. Mengke Bateer this season's international big-man project basically never played, got waived, and will be returning to China.

The rich contracts he doled out, especially Olajuwon's, made it impossible to hang on to Keon Clark, an emerging and dynamic post player.

He let Rafer Alston and Voshon Lenard, respectively a helpful point guard and a savvy veteran guard who could post-up and shoot the three effectively, fly away. He never gave Carlos Arroyo, a slightly wild but exciting and hungry rookie point guard the chance that his play in Utah proves he deserved. Brian Skinner, the big Milwaukee Bucks centre/forward, who touched up the Raptors for 19 points and 14 rebounds on April 4th, would have looked good in a Raptors uniform if only Grunwald had kept him around. And wouldn't Del Curry, grey hair and all, have looked better as the resident three-point doctor than anyone in the Raptors current bench mob?

Yes, he did manage to upgrade the starting five's skill level and productivity by acquiring Jalen Rose and Donyell Marshall. It was probably the best trade of his career. Picking up a real point guard in Rod Strickland without giving up anything was a nice move, even if Strickland is a geriatric veteran with past issues, as was acquiring Dion Glover, a more athletic player with who can score.

And like Lenny last season, Grunwald had injuries to contend with: Alvin's ankle, Jalen's wrist, Bosh's and Bradley's knees and Montross' career-stopping foot.

But the positive transactions were too little and way too

late. The injuries don't explain away a record filled with miscalculations and missed chances. The coaching instability, starting with Butch Carter's dismissal and ending with the barely concealed dysfunctional relationship between Grunwald and his second, hand-picked coach Kevin O'Neill, began to overshadow the image of the accountable manager willing to take centre court, apologize for his club's poor performance and promise better days.

Ultimately, Grunwald could not keep that promise.

And for that, he could not keep his job. **PRIDE**



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