

5-16-1999

## Orlando Magic

Richard C. Crepeau  
University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)  
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>  
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Orlando Magic" (1999). *On Sport and Society*. 116.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/116>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
MAY 16, 1999

This past week has been a difficult one for Orlando Magic fans. After going through a short season in reasonably good style the Magic went out of the playoffs in short shrift. This was not only a sign that the Magic have major problems they must face in the weeks ahead, but it also was one of many indications that in the post-Michael NBA major changes are taking place.

A little over a week ago I sat in the Orlando Arena and watched Allen Iverson nearly single-handedly destroy a slow and aging Magic team. This was my first look at Iverson in person and he is more than impressive. His speed, defense, and court sense raised complete and total havoc for the Magic who had no idea how to respond. Magic defenders were running hither and yon to no avail and when they caught the little guy he simply hit one of several open men with a precision pass. If he didn't pass and happened to miss a shot the '76ers were free to rebound as no one was in position to block-out on the boards.

In Philadelphia on Thursday and Saturday Iverson and the Sixers replicated their performance. Only the second game in Orlando on Tuesday saw the Magic show even minimal signs of life.

The story of the Magic collapse is troubling. Their superstar, Penny Hardaway, vanished for long periods of the game and was unable to provide any kind of answer to The Answer. The remainder of the team, with the possible exception of Nick Anderson, was always a step short or a step behind on defense and on the boards. All those who once talked of the Hardaway for Webber trade as brilliant are reassessing. However to single out the disappointment that is Penny Hardaway is to miss a larger point.

The Orlando Magic is one of the oldest teams by average age in the NBA. Despite having two promising rookies in Doleac and Harpring the Magic players are essentially on the downside of their best years. The genius of GM John Gabriel is no longer apparent as he has put together a team without a future.

Part of this problem goes back to the departure of Shaq. When the big guy left everyone whistled in the dark insisting that with Hardaway the Magic still had a superstar to build around. What they didn't realize is that Hardaway was only a potential superstar, and without Shaq on the floor Penny would be less formidable a force, as would everyone else. This team missed

Shaq, which should have surprised no one, but the organization refused to recognize the full implications of that fact and tinkered rather than making an immediate overhaul to rebuild the franchise. Instead they brought in Chuck Daly as head coach, and he has done well, refusing to face the facts that without Shaq they needed to rethink the shape of the team from the ground up.

As Leo Durocher used to say, it is time to back up the truck. In fact it was time quite some time ago.

What we see happening throughout the NBA this season is the emergence of new teams with young players on the rise. In the Eastern Division Boston and Philadelphia are moving up by rebuilding their teams with young players.

Orlando has gone with the past and has an aging team that failed in the playoffs. They were unable to take their game to the next level and were run off the floor by young legs and a new star with a good supporting cast.

The departure of Michael Jordan has made everyone realize they too can win this league, and although some of the older teams are still able to compete they are clearly moving downward. The Houston Rockets are the Magic of the West, while the Utah Jazz may still have enough left for this season, but they too are nearing the end of their run. The rising teams are those with young players who can run and shoot.

Portland has a young deep team that runs, shoots and scores. The Kings are the same. The Lakers may be coming into their own and Phil Jackson may get them to the next level soon. We are at a changing of the guard in the NBA, and if the league executives are wise they too will make some adjustments in rules and officiating to bring back speed and scoring.

The New York Knicks and Miami Heat playing Pat Riley mugging ball must be stopped, and the Heat's failure in the first round again can only be welcomed. Basketball is not football and it is not rugby. It is a game of speed and grace and skill that, like hockey, flows beautifully when it is played as it should be played.

So in the post-Michael era let the prize go to the swift, open the game up again, bring back the offense. It will help bring back the fans as well.

As for the Magic they need to finally realize that not only is the post-Michael era here, but more importantly the post-Shaq era is here. The team built around Shaq, the team that coulda, woulda, shoulda, will never make it. It's time to think young and get something for their Penny.

A major sea change in thought is needed at One Magic Place. It is the dawning of a new age in the NBA.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 1999 by Richard C. Crepeau