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## Grant Contract - New Coach? - Baseball HOF

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For the Orlando Magic it looked like the biggest development since the signing of the Shaq. To be able to pick up Horace Grant as a free agent without giving up Dennis Scott on waivers, and only losing Scott Skiles and a first round pick in 1996 is truly amazing. John Gabriel, or whoever engineered this deal, seemed on the way to canonization, having performed a certifiable miracle.

The Magic seemed well on the road to getting themselves out from under the burden of the long-term contracts to several stiffes which Pat Williams gave away blithely in the first years of the franchise. More importantly the Magic are clearly on the road to playoff respectability and title contention. The starting five would be as good as any in the NBA.

But now the NBA has voided the contract with Grant and everything is up in the air. Pat Williams is saying that everything is fine, and maybe it will be, but the fact is that Grant is now a free agent again and others may try to lure him with something better than the Orlando offer. The miracle workers in the Magic front office have yet more work to do, but if it gets done it is a major step forward.

The acquisition of Horace Grant does not make the Magic a championship team, but it does take them to a new height, and puts them within range of title contention. What they lack of course is a bench, which must be skillfully built out of second round picks, trades, and proper use of personnel. Finding the right role players to give bench depth is one of the finer arts of NBA management and there are many franchises that never quite manage it.

Then there is coaching which involves motivation, developing a system that makes maximum use of personnel, the ability to keep everyone happy, and the identification and development of chemistry. After a year the jury is still out on Brian Hill. The complete collapse of the Magic in the playoffs was not encouraging, but the important thing at this point is whether Hill and the players learned anything from this failure. Experience is clearly a significant element for any successful team. The young Magic team has been acquiring experience, and it is another extremely important component that Horace Grant adds to the mix.

The departure of Scott Skiles is an important development. Many fans in Orlando forget that Skiles came here in the expansion draft, not because he was a premier NBA player. He has performed very well for the Magic, but he is no NBA all-star. He was a special favorite because he is a tough fighter, a person who gets more out of himself than his talent would indicate possible. His departure is not a loss. It is an indication that this team is ready to move up to the highest levels of competition in the NBA.

It also means that there will be tremendous pressure on this team in the year ahead. Expectations will be extremely high and the resulting pressure will be a new burden for the young players to carry. Horace Grant should lead the way in this process, having played under extremely high expectations in Chicago and under the glare of a much more critical media than is present in Orlando. And if the pressure increases for the players, so too for Brian Hill, the coaches and the front office.

There will also be an increased demand for tickets and increased pressure for a new arena. This is still the only major league sport in town and the demand for tickets that comes with success builds geometrically. As it does the city must resist the temptation to become the welfare agent for the Orlando Magic, building them a new home at taxpayer expense.

In the end what we have is a potentially great moment in the history of the Orlando Magic. What we will now wait to see is if the deal remains in tact, and how the Magic players and coaches deal with the opportunities that history has afforded them.

Finally a quick note on the newest inductees into the Baseball Hall of Fame. All are worthy and somewhat controversial choices. Steve Carlton just on the basis of his 27 win season in 1972 for the lowly Phillies, nearly half their victories, deserved the honor, as did Phil Rizzuto who anchored those great Yankee teams of the Stengel years, and Leo Durocher for his role as player with the Gas House Gang and his managerial skills displayed at many stops. Leo was best known for the phrase "nice guys finish last," but my favorite Durocher line was his pre-season claim in the mid-60s that the Cubs were not an eighth place ball club. He was right, they finished tenth.

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.

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