

MARK EATON: THE RESULT

by Dr. Greg Shepard
Strength Coach, Utah Jazz

In the past five issues beginning in January of 1983, we began a series of articles on Mark Eaton. I would like to quote from last January's issue. "I feel like a missionary spreading the gospel of weight training for basketball players and coaches. Our main objective is to help Mark become a better basketball player and win. We are absolutely confident that in developing Mark's functional strength in the proper way, he will see dramatic results on the court."

I just would not believe Mark couldn't succeed. He was like the "Mother Lode." All we had to do was dig in, work hard and pure gold would be found. He was like a "diamond in the rough." All we had to do was polish him up and he would shine. I could not believe he sat on the end of the bench in high school and played less than one minute a game at U.C.L.A. a year earlier. It was unbelievable because not only is Mark 7'4", but he is clean cut, humble and willing to work very hard. To me it was like betting on a sure thing. It was money in the bank.

In subsequent issues, we told about Mark's great progress in the weight room as he broke 400 personal records. He came from the weakest player in the N.B.A. to perhaps the strongest in just one year. We also reported that Mark worked and made progress on his jumping, running agility and technique. These are all main components of the BFS program. But remember our main objective. It really isn't becoming stronger but to WIN!

At this writing, the Utah Jazz are in first place. This is quite remarkable when you consider they were picked unanimously to finish in last place. The "experts" said the Utah Jazz could not even match last year's miserable record. Houston lost six games last year to the Jazz but this year the Rockets have Ralph Sampson. For financial reasons, the Jazz management decided to play "home games" in Las Vegas. Imagine flying 500 miles for a home game. Besides that, the "experts" said the Utah Jazz have never made the playoffs!

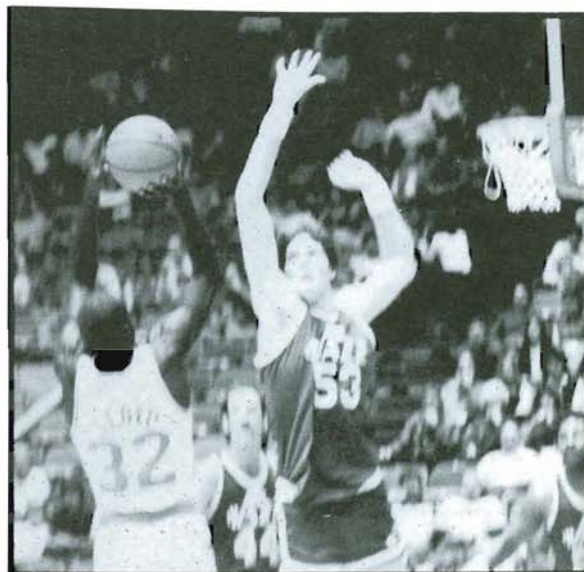
A few years ago, as a high school football coach, I used to think that pro basketball was terrible. I refused to watch it on TV. I thought at that level, you just buy the talent, throw out the ball and let them play. I thought you can't really coach for enjoyment in professional ball. The rules of motivation, commitment, teamwork and coaching just aren't the same at the pro level. Well, I was wrong.

There are five main reasons the Utah Jazz are in first place. Take away any one of the five reasons and the experts would probably be right. First, John Drew had to be rehabilitated from his heavy cocaine habit. Coach Layden is a great coach who has compassion for all people and players. Layden and trainer Sparky Anderson helped John when he needed it the most.

I was so impressed with Drew's rehabilitation that we did an article on him in last May's issue. John Drew is a new man. He is a joy to be around. He speaks to youth groups all the time in order to help anyone avoid the traps that befell him. John Drew leads the league in scoring off the bench.

Second, was the successful operation of Adrian Dantley (A.D.), the NBA's leading scorer. Dantley severely injured his wrist and missed most of last season. His physician did a marvelous job and A.D. worked hard to stay in shape to be ready for this season.

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"That ball ain't going to make it." Eaton leads the NBA in number of blocked shots! (Note: #44 in the middle is 7-0 feet tall.)



Mark Eaton is definitely a force to be reckoned with!!

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The fact that the Jazz successfully drafted and signed Thurl Bailey from North Carolina State is reason number three. The Jazz sometimes will make decisions based on money. Last year, they sold Dominique Wilkins, their number one draft choice to Atlanta for money and a "drugged out, over the hill" John Drew. The trade now seems like a stroke of genius but back then the management nearly got tarred and feathered. Anyway, Thurl has added a lot and is improving every game. He is also going to push Mark Eaton during this season for being the strongest man on the team.

Fourth is unselfishness and team togetherness. Every player seems excited and motivated to fill their designed role. Each player is genuinely happy when a teammate does well. John Drew will hug a teammate after a super play and cheer great plays constantly. That is remarkable for a veteran of 10 years. The experts said scoring machines like Adrian Dantley and John Drew could never play together. Coach Frank Layden should be everyone's choice for NBA coach of the year. His positive philosophy is contagious.

The fifth reason is Mark Eaton. His great desire to fulfill his potential is paying great dividends. We gave him the BFS program but Mark had to use it and go after it. Mark leads the Utah Jazz in rebounds, blocked shots and suprisingly, in field goal percentage! I talked to an N.B.A. head coach this summer. He said "Eaton has made amazing progress but coaches will now prepare for Mark. He will not be able to do as well as last year when he started the last 32 games." When the Jazz played that team a couple of weeks ago, I was pleased to note that Eaton blocked 7 shots, scored 14 points and grabbed 13 rebounds in a game-winning effort.

San Antonio's coach after being overwhelmed by Mark stated "Eaton's got to be the most improved player in the NBA!" At San Diego, Bill Walton decided to play back to back games because they thought the Jazz could be beaten. Eaton responded with 15 points, 10 blocked shots and 9 rebounds as the Jazz crushed San Diego.

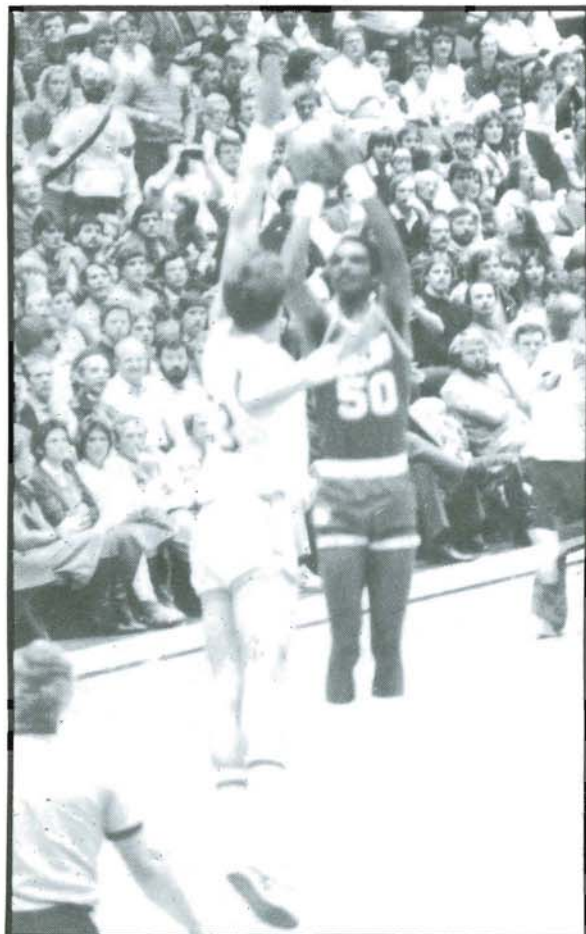
Perhaps Eaton's biggest game came against the Boston Celtics last month. With less than 3 minutes to go, the game was tight. Then Eaton went crazy. He blocked a shot by Larry Bird and came back down and scored. Then he blocked McHale's shot and again came back down and scored. He was fouled, made the extra point and the game was over. Coach Layden exclaimed "It's the biggest win in my time in the franchise and Celtic coach K.C. Jones shook his head and confessed "Eaton's the reason the Jazz won."

I don't believe Eaton's the whole reason for the Jazz success but he is part of it. It takes a total team and coaching effort. It takes hard work, dedication and total commitment. It takes enthusiasm, teamwork and positive mental attitude at all levels. This year the Jazz

front office adopted an advertising slogan "Bigger and Better." I think that's appropriate for everyone because we can all emulate the valuable relearned lessons of the Utah Jazz.



Compare #53 Mark Eaton's size with Houston's Rookie Sensation Ralph Sampson # 50



The match-up between Eaton and Sampson.