

Smith Adds Strength To Blazers Arsenal

All he ever wanted to be was a basketball coach...

Mick Smith of the Portland Trail Blazers realized there was another profession. One that would keep him close to the sport he loved, but challenging enough to make it to the professional ranks.

Some of his predecessors are Bob King of Dallas, Sol Bradys in Minnesota, Tony Marino in Indiana and Al Vermeil at Chicago. Mick Smith becomes the 18th full-time strength & conditioning (S&C) coach in the National Basketball Association.

"I think in the area of sports, like a lot of other businesses, there has been an increasing amount of specialization," said Geoff Petrie, the Blazers' senior vice-president of operations.

"In our business—with players," Petrie said, "the whole field of strength and conditioning and its relationship to athletic performance has grown. And it has demonstrated that it could be a beneficial aspect to your team."

But what about Mick Smith? How did this likable individual, who prefers a warm-up suit to a business suit, come to the Trail Blazers?

Born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska, Smith stayed at home. He received his bachelor's degree in physical education and health and a master's in exercise science from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. His undergraduate work included nutrition and relaxation.

He continued his education with a strength and conditioning program at Creighton University in Omaha, where there was an emphasis on basketball. Just prior to that, he was realizing his dream of coach-

ing by being the head coach at Holy Name High in Omaha.

A 13-month contract with the Royal Air Defense Corps of Saudi Arabia provided more experience. He was the Olympic weightlifting coach and also the coordinator of fitness and an assistant basketball coach.

Returning to the United States, Smith found himself heading for Miami, Florida, where he would become strength and conditioning coach for Christopher Columbus High School.

Almost simultaneously, he was an assistant S&C coach at the University of Miami.

That's where he met Bill Foran, who begins his fifth season as S&C coach with the Miami Heat.

"After Bill left the university, I stayed on but really wanted to get to the professional level," Smith said. "In order to do that, I volunteered my time the last two off-seasons with the Heat."

The initial trainer of the Blazers, Ron Culp, who has been the trainer with the Heat for the past five years, mentioned the Blazers were going to open a strength and conditioning coach position.

"I immediately sent my resume and all the other information," Smith said of applying.

The Blazers had sent trainer Mike Shimensky to the National Strength and Conditioning Association convention in Las Vegas to proceed



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with the process of interviewing prospective candidates. Of seven interviewed, three were selected to go to Salt Lake City, where the Blazers had a summer team playing last year.

Petrie and coach Rick Adelman continued the process. "They put us through a routine where we were to put the team through some exercises," Smith said. "I wanted to show them that I could relate to people...and have a good concept of a program."

It worked for Smith.

"Besides the interview, we gave them (the candidates) a chance to show us their program," Petrie said. "It was kind of superficial but at least we got a feel for their personality and how they would relate to the players."

In Smith's favor was his experience with the Heat and the fact he had been a basketball player and coach.

Smith's procedure is compli-

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cated...at least to those outside the realm of an intensive exercise and conditioning program. Broken down it amounts to Olympic movements. Such as the clean and jerk and the snatch in weightlifting.

"An athlete in any sport generates power from the hips," he said. "I learned how to design a scientific program to work with percentages of a person's strength level. Working movements into the next phase so you can get the right movement of them."

When Smith arrived prior to the season, he worked with a handful of players who were eager to be in top physical shape prior to the opening of camp.

Sprint sessions and weight training were on the agenda. "Now that we are into the season," he said, "it will be a luxury to train twice a week, unless some guys really want to do it."

"Clifford Robinson is a good example," he added. "He still wants to train pretty hard, but we have to be smart and not overtrain him."

Through the warmups, stretching and other physical endeavors that Smith puts the Blazers through each day, he said the end result is injury prevention. "By having order of movement you are going to be sure you are not going to create a muscle imbalance," Smith said. "Therefore, you are going to prevent an injury from happening. At the same time we stretched twice a day."

"We are going to lift and then stretch again...sometimes we stretch three or four times a day," he added of the improving flexibility.

He said the team is very receptive to the program and he's hoping to have more off-season participants next year.

Besides Petrie's gratification with the program, coach

Rick Adelman is extremely pleased.

"Mick has worked out very well and done a very good job," Adelman said. "We've had someone on a part-time basis in the past. With our young guys, it was a good time to bring someone in and see how it was going to work out (on a full-time basis)."

"The younger players have been very receptive to him and the older guys that came like him too," Adelman continued. "He's very professional and hard working. I couldn't have asked for anything more."

"He was a coach at one point in high school...that shows his intelligence because he quit coaching and got out of that field," Adelman said with a laugh. □

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