



Tim Floyd's first season as coach of the post-Michael Bulls was marked remarkably by what did not happen.

Enraged fans did not burn Jordan's No. 23 into Floyd's lawn nor leave dead fish in the mailbox of a guy long viewed as General Manager Jerry Krause's fishing buddy. Floyd was not condemned (as I anticipated) as the out-front symbol of why Jordan retired.



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The perception soon faded that this no-name, no-credentials coach from Iowa State had kissed up to Krause, who had stepped up his plot to make ex-coach Phil Jackson miserable and hasten his resignation--which cinched Jordan's retirement.

FEEDBACK

Floyd was not booed at the United Center. Not once did a Bull who played for Jackson challenge Floyd's credibility in front of the team or crowd by saying, "You never played or coached in this league. What do you know?"

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Not once did Floyd--who initially believed he would get to coach Jordan or at least Scottie Pippen--complain about being stuck with a team that some in the organization feared could not win a single game. Almost no training camp. Very little in-season practice time. Welcome to the NBA, Timbo.

Yet Floyd's first season was perfectly uneventful, unless you count winning seven of 16 games in one stretch before his top seven players were lost to injury.

Without kissing up to anybody, including Krause, Tim Floyd was quickly accepted by players, fans and media. The key, perhaps, was that he embraced the past instead of resenting it. Instead of bringing in his college coaching cronies, he rehired three of Jackson's assistants--Frank Hamblen, Tex Winter and Bill Cartwright. Instead of installing the Iowa State Cyclones' offense, Floyd kept the mystical triangle taught by Winter.

Best of all, Floyd sought Jackson's advice and counsel. Just as incredibly, Jackson gave it to the coach once derisively referred to as "Pink" Floyd by Jackson and Jordan. Floyd and Jackson have talked regularly during the season, and Floyd says he has implemented several of Jackson's suggestions.

FEEDBACK

Given several lemons, Floyd began making "Pink" lemonade.

Floyd defused resentment with his humility, patience, class, charm, candor and self-deprecating humor. He settled comfortably into the bench seat as neither a clueless bumpkin nor a know-it-all genius. He knew just enough to win the respect of veteran Bulls and opposing coaches.

With any luck, Bulls fans will someday get the chance to see how Floyd handles a more talented team. With any luck, Floyd won't find that Krause is much better at picking coaches than players.

Does Floyd have any regrets?

"None at all," he said. "Oh, there were nights (he listed the most humiliating losses) when that director of basketball gig (he held in case Jackson returned) looked pretty good to me. But I can genuinely say I've enjoyed it.

"Tex and Frank and Bill have been wonderful and have given me something to lean on in the tough times. This is certainly the greatest challenge I've taken on--arguably one of the greatest taken on in the pro game."

Floyd somehow kept his Bulls from pointing fingers or quitting. Veteran players believe the team has given less than its best only twice. These Bulls just might lead the league in effort--another reason season ticket-holders haven't expressed displeasure.

"Yet," Floyd said, "I also believe that after Michael retired, our fans had a chance to reflect on the journey--the six-year period it took with Michael before the six championships. I've heard on more than one occasion (from fans), 'We knew it had to end, and we knew how special it was.' "

It also helped that fans didn't once hear a Bull criticize Floyd in the media. The key convert was Jordan's buddy, Ron Harper. Floyd sought Harper's input and made it clear to all veteran players that he welcomed their suggestions.

"If there was any rage in the six guys who were here (with Jordan)," Floyd said, "I didn't feel it and our fans didn't feel it."

So during the short season's first half, Floyd sensed the Bulls were better than advertised "because we had so many players who had been here and knew how to win. I didn't attach 'playoffs' to it, but just surprising people."

Before the injuries hit, Floyd and staff were on course for some coach-of-the-year consideration. Floyd, in fact, was too good for his own good. Too many wins (13) have hurt the Bulls' chances in the draft lottery.

But the draft, said Floyd, is definitely Krause's domain.

"Jerry has the final say. A part of what I've given up (to take the job) is the control factor. But Jerry has to recognize that part of what I've done for 21 years is evaluate talent as well. I'm going to voice my opinions strongly.

"Before I took the job, he and I talked about how we anticipate there will be disagreements. I'd be disappointed if we don't disagree, and I hope Jerry would be as well. I don't think you can

have growth if you don't disagree.

"The key is not becoming disagreeable."

That led to the irreparable rift between Krause and Jackson. So what if Krause overrules Floyd and chooses a player the coach doesn't want?

"Then I have to understand I have to coach that guy."

Yes, the saga of the post-Michael Bulls has just begun. But so far, no news has been good news about Tim Floyd.

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