

scarlet Sports

Stories by Bill Glovin

An Act of Wizardry

Former Rutgers star Eddie Jordan has found a home—and is back home—as the head coach of the Washington Wizards, after years of being an assistant coach.

There must have been times when Eddie Jordan scratched his head and wondered if his ship was ever going to come in. All he wanted to be was a head coach in the NBA. Yeah, lots of guys want to be a head coach. But Jordan LC'77—a key player known for his quick hands and defense on the 1975–76 Rutgers basketball team that went to the Final Four—had done his time. After a six-year NBA career spent mostly with the Los Angeles Lakers as a backup point guard, ending in 1984, he took up Rutgers coach Tom Young's invitation to volunteer as an assistant coach for the Scarlet Knights. Young, the coach of that memorable Final Four team, which included the legendary forward Phil Sellers LC'76, thought that Jordan was a natural: he knew the game cold and had that knack as a player to raise the games of those around him.

After following Young when the coach moved to Old Dominion University, Jordan did assistant coaching stints at Boston College and Rutgers again (under coach Bob Wenzel) before breaking into the big time with the NBA's Sacramento Kings as an assistant coach, his role for five years. He rubbed elbows with fellow assistant coach Pete Carrill, the famous Princeton University head coach known for his "motion offense." Then Jordan's moment came: he got the nod to coach the Kings for the final 15 games of the



1997–98 season, but was dismissed at the end of the following year after the team’s dreary season. Next stop? Back to being an assistant coach with the New Jersey Nets, apprenticing under Byron Scott (after considering the head coaching job at Rutgers) and helping to deploy the motion offense, which led to two straight Nets’ appearances in the NBA finals, in 2002 and 2003.

Impressed, the brass of the Washington Wizards—a team of chronic losers that managed only a dismal 37–45 record in 2002–03, despite the presence of another Jordan, Michael—hired Jordan, 52. He was coming home to Washington, D.C., having grown up in the city’s rough-and-tumble southeast section where he had known close to nothing about a place called Rutgers. In his second season, 2004–05, Jordan improved the Wizards, who hadn’t been in the playoffs since 1996–97 (then known as the Baltimore Bullets), by 20 games—tying a record for a most-improved team. More surprising was their first-round rally to knock out the Chicago Bulls. He relied on the help of his former Rutgers coach, Tom Young, who, in a change of roles, served as an assistant coach. (Young retired last summer.) During the past three seasons, the Wizards have again made the playoffs, and the ownership awarded Jordan in the summer of 2006 with a three-year, \$12 million contract extension.

As expectations mount and the workload grows, Jordan knows that, for now, it comes at the expense of not seeing his family as much as he would like. Wife Charrisse Jackson-Jordan and he steal away to their summer home in Belle Mead, New Jersey, with their daughter and son, Skylar, 6, and Jackson, 8. (Jordan has three other sons from a previous marriage and relationship; Eddie Jr. RC’04 played football for the Scarlet Knights.) But, hey, Jordan isn’t complaining. His team is winning. He coached the Eastern

When he was introduced at the 2004 Rutgers Hall of Distinguished Alumni induction ceremony as Edward M. Jordan, fans did a double take. They knew Jordan during his playing days at Rutgers as “Fast Eddie” because of his ability to steal the ball from opponents and for his quick feet. One of four players from the 1976 Rutgers team to play in the NBA, he led the league in steals during the 1978–79 season and was a member of the 1982 Los Angeles Lakers championship team.

Conference All-Stars during the NBA All-Star Game in February. And Jordan is the longest-tenured head coach in the Eastern Conference. Not bad for a journeyman assistant coach who had patiently awaited his chance in The Show.