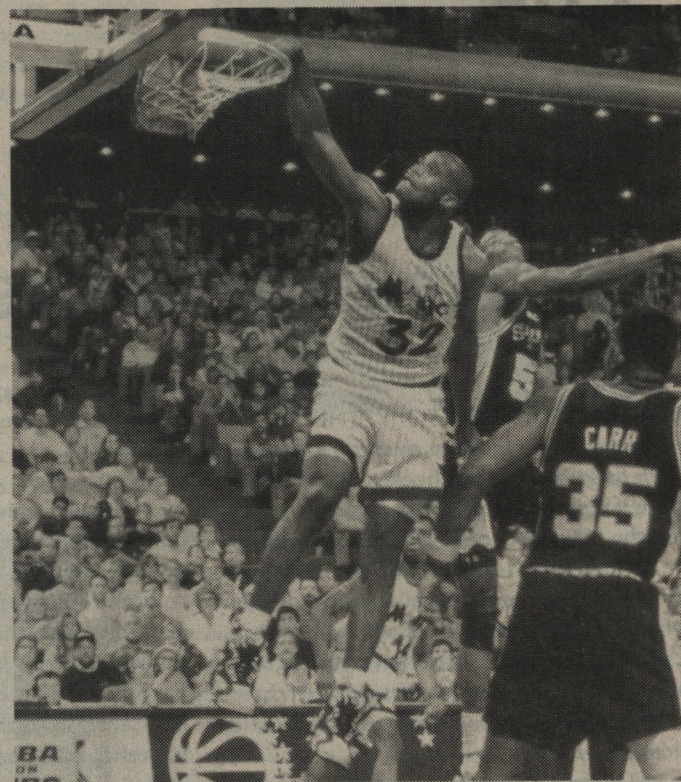


# CHRISTMAS IN FEBRUARY

*Scott MacDonald previews every hoops fan's favourite time of the year: All-Star Weekend*



**E**VERY YEAR AROUND MID-February the NBA All-Star game allows fans to witness the greatest basketball players in the world plying their trade on the court, in a game where the main goal is to inject some razzle-dazzle into 48 minutes of show-time action. The All-star game is traditionally a showcase for players to play the game the way they grew up playing it, with a sense of flair.

Defense plays second fiddle to a playground style of offense where slowing it down means working the 24 second clock down to 18 seconds. The game allows the stars of the game to achieve the national recognition that they deserve, which they may not get playing in a smaller market. Being an all-star is one of a player's crowning achievements, and shows him that if just for one day, that he is one of the 24 best players in the world.

This year's game, to be played in Minnesota, will be lacking certain elements that it had in



*If at first you don't succeed... Perennial bridesmaid Shawn Kemp hopes to finally come out on top in the Slam-Dunk Contest.*

the past, namely Jordan and Isiah, two of the premier entertainers who made this showcase breathtaking. But with a new year comes a new harvest of blossoming stars, ready to show their skills off to the world. First time All-Stars include New Jersey's Kenny Anderson and Derrick Coleman, and Charlotte's Alonzo Mourning.

The Eastern Conference will feature as starters: Anderson\* and Chicago's B.J. Armstrong\* at guard, and Coleman\*, the league's leading scorer, Orlando's Shaquille O'Neal, and Chicago's Scottie Pippen up front. The reserves filling out the Eastern side are; Horace Grant-Chicago  
Dominique Wilkins-Atlanta  
Patrick Ewing-New York  
Alonzo Mourning-Charlotte\*  
Mark Price-Cleveland  
Mookie Blaylock-Atlanta\*  
John Starks-New York\*

The West will counter with last year's NBA MVP Charles Barkley of Phoenix, Shawn Kemp of Seattle, and Houston's Hakeem Olajuwon, this year's bet for MVP comprising the front-line. In the backcourt Clyde Drexler of Portland and first-timer Mitch Richmond\* will push the tempo of the game. The remainder of the Western squad includes;  
Danny Manning-LA Clippers  
Karl Malone-Utah  
Cliff Robinson-Portland\*  
David Robinson-San Antonio  
John Stockton-Utah  
Latrell Sprewell-Golden State\*  
Kevin Johnson-Phoenix  
(\* denotes a first time all-star)

## ALL-STAR WEEKEND

The real treat of the All-star weekend is the skills competitions which occur the day before

the game. This allows many of the game's top stars to showboat and give the fans an indication of their athletic ability, along with showing who is the best shooter and top creative dunker in the league. Since this is much like a horse race, I will try to breakdown the field in each of the different events.

## ROOKIE GAME

This year sees a new addition to the All-Star weekend festivities, the NBA Legends game has been replaced with a collection of the brightest rookies in the league. The old-timers game had a habit of seeing many of the greats of the past get injured. Some of the players in this year's game include Golden State's Chris Webber, who spent his college days at Michigan; the Croatian-imported duo of Boston's Dino Radja and Chicago's Toni Kukoc; Orlando's Anfernee 'Penny' Hardaway; Philadelphia's 7'6 Shawn Bradley; Dallas' Jamal Mashburn; Isiah 'J.R.' Rider of Minnesota; and Cleveland's Chris Mills.

## SHOOTAROUND

I read on Internet that another new addition to the weekend would consist of a shootaround of some the league's top marksmen. Four players will race against the clock trying to make as many shots as they can from eight different spots on the court. Players competing include Minnesota's Chuck Person, Detroit's Joe Dumars, Philly's Jeff Hornacek, and New York's John Starks.

## THREE-POINT SHOOTOUT

As usual the three-point contest will see some great streak shooting done by some of the

NBA's top outside snipers. Beginning with a field of eight, each player gets 60 seconds to shoot five balls a rack, on five racks outside the three-point arc. This contest has produced such memorable moments as Craig Hodge's 19 shots made in a row, and Larry Bird's dramatic finish in '89 where he had to make his last 3 attempts in order to capture the win.

**WIN:** Dale Ellis-San Antonio  
**PLACE:** Mark Price-Cleveland  
**SHOW:** Steve Kerr-Chicago  
**SLEEPER:** Dana Barros-Philadelphia  
**OTHERS:** B.J. Armstrong-Chicago  
Mitch Richmond-Sacramento  
Dan Majerle-Phoenix  
Eric Murdock-Milwaukee

## SLAM-DUNK CONTEST

In what is generally the most anticipated event of All-Star Weekend, some of the top leapers in the league show that man in fact can fly, if only for a short time. Winning the dunk contest can create a household name out of a young talent and give a young career a launchpad to All-Star status. Being in the dunk contest requires timing, grace, jumping ability, style, and a certain amount of flair/showmanship. Another good trait to have is a flashy nickname, of which this group has several.

**WIN:** Harold Miner-Heat  
"baby Jordan"  
**PLACE:** Isiah Rider-Minnesota  
"J.R."  
**SHOW:** Shawn Kemp-Seattle  
"the Rainman"  
**SLEEPER:** Robert Pack-Denver  
**OTHERS:** James Robinson-Portland  
"Hollywood"  
Doug Christie-LA Lakers  
Robert Horry-Houston  
Latrell Sprewell-Golden State