

Wizards guard Gilbert Arenas goes up for a 3-point shot over Suns forward Shawn Marion during the first quarter of their game Dec. 22 in Phoenix.

Gilbert's big prediction

Wizards' star Arenas says he'll score 50 in next game

By JOSEPH WHITE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Perhaps the Washington Wizards are showing the effects of a little too much Gilbertology. Two days before what Gilbert Arenas has proclaimed will be his next 50-point game, no one wanted to say much about it.

"I'm not going to comment on that," coach Eddie Jordan said. "He talked about that. That's for him. I'm concerned about how we should perform as a team."

"We're going to have no distractions," forward Caron Butler said. "We just want to play basketball and win the game. Obviously, he made statements, and it is what it is."

"Hopefully he doesn't get too excited, like he did for the Lakers game," guard DeShawn Stevenson said.

Arenas himself was a no-show for reporters after Friday's prac-

tice. Anyone who wanted to know his latest thoughts had to be content with a new entry on his nba.com blog, posted under the heading "Time to Get my 50 Points vs. Portland."

"Even if you don't watch the game, you're going to look at the box score to see what happened," Arenas wrote. "My last one o'clock game was 51 against Utah. So I'm feeling pretty frisky."

Arenas has vowed to score 50 against the Trail Blazers on Sunday as payback for anyone who might have had anything to do with his not making the U.S. national team for the world championships during the summer.

Phoenix coach Mike D'Antoni and Portland coach Nate McMillan served as assistants on that team, and Arenas unleashed his frustrations against D'Antoni by scoring 54 against the Suns in December.

But Arenas and the Wizards have not played well recently when the Agent Zero hype machine has been running full throttle. When

Phoenix made the return trip last month, Arenas started 1 for 6 from the field in a 22-point loss.

Last week, Arenas admitted to psyching himself out by acting too serious before a rematch with Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers; Arenas missed 20 of 29 shots in a 16-point loss.

Furthermore, the Wizards have lost three of four since forward Antawn Jamison went down with a knee injury, including a 27-point loss to San Antonio on Wednesday in which Arenas struggled again. More than anything, the Wizards need a win to regain the momentum that has put them among the top Eastern Conference teams and earned All-Star nods for Arenas, Butler and Jordan.

"Coach is just saying the main thing is to win games; we're not going to feed into an extra hype," Butler said.

But Arenas has become a bottomless well of quirks and anecdotes, and there always seems to be something new. A quiet Friday

received a mild jolt when Time magazine released an article in which strength and conditioning coach Drew Cleary said of Arenas: "I hope he never goes to a party where there's cocaine dust in the air. If he ever gets the flavor for it, he's so obsessive-compulsive, that will be the end of his career."

The Wizards clarified Cleary's remarks: "Drew used a poor analogy when describing Gilbert's workout routine, but the focus of the article is about what an outstanding player Gilbert is and his incredible drive to be the best," spokesman Zack Bolno said.

Arenas' grudge against D'Antoni and McMillan has been on-again, off-again since he left the national team.

He initially said he was going to score 100 points over two games against their respective teams. He later apologized, saying he had been immature and that Phoenix and Portland had nothing to do with his failure to make the final Team USA roster.

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Spring training looms for pitchers, catchers

By RONALD BLUM
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Detroit pitchers will try to get those infield throws down, Dice-K will make the transition to American-style baseball, and Barry Zito will start justifying the \$126 million that's become attached to his name.

That's right: It's time for pitchers and catchers.

Players start reporting to major-league camps Tuesday, with the first official workouts of the year two days later.

None are likely to be observed more intently than pitcher's fielding practice at Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland, Fla. Detroit pitchers made a record five errors in throwing away the World Series, sparking the mind of manager Jim Leyland.

"I know this sounds crazy, but

I'm going to have the grounds crew sprinkle out in front of home plate and make it wet on a couple of occasions, and have them work it and pick up the ball and work in wet conditions," he said before St. Louis finished off the Tigers in October.

After an offseason filled with the usual tumult of Barry Bonds, steroids, Yankees-Red Sox competition and free-agent switches, it's time for fun in the sun.

Daisuke Matsuzaka will be getting lots of attention as he reports to the Red Sox. Boston paid \$51 million to buy his rights, then signed him to a \$52 million, six-year deal.

"One of the things I was most worried about in coming over here was obviously the food. But to my surprise, I found the vegetables are great, the fish tastes great," he said recently through a translator.

Out in Arizona, Zito will make the switch to Giants' camp in Scottsdale, a short drive from Oakland's complex in Phoenix. After receiving the largest contract for a pitcher, he'll provide a diversion from the daily scrutiny of Bonds.

"To play with Barry Bonds is something I think every guy would want to do," Zito said. "It gave me chills actually. It's great to be mentioned in the same sentence as Barry Bonds. I used to watch Barry growing up."

Bonds starts the year with 734 homers, 21 shy of Hank Aaron's record.

If he doesn't get indicted in the federal investigation into illegal steroids distribution — the Giants inserted a clause in his contract giving them the right to terminate the deal if he is indicted — Bonds could break the record this year.

Former Yankee Hank Bauer dies at 84

By HAL BOCK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

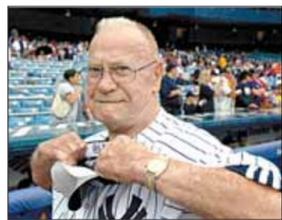
NEW YORK

Hank Bauer, the hard-nosed ex-Marine who returned to baseball after being wounded during World War II and went on to become a cornerstone of the New York Yankees dynasty of the 1950s, died Friday. He was 84.

Bauer died of cancer in Shawnee Mission, Kan., said the Baltimore Orioles. Bauer managed the 1966 Orioles to their first World Series title.

A three-time All-Star outfielder, Bauer played on Yankees teams that won nine American League pennants and seven World Series in 10 years. He set the Series record with a 17-game hitting streak, a mark that still stands.

"Hank Bauer is an emblem of a generation that helped shape the landscape of our country," Yankees owner George Stein-



Former Yankees player Hank Bauer died Friday at age 84.

brenner said in a statement.

Surrounded by sluggers such as Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra, Bauer was a major ingredient in the Yankees' success during his years in New York from 1948-59.

"I am truly heartbroken," Berra said in a statement issued by the Yankees. "Hank was a wonderful teammate and friend for so long. Nobody was more dedicated and proud to be a Yankee; he gave you

everything he had."

Bauer played his final two seasons with the Kansas City Athletics, a team he managed in 1961-62. He also managed Baltimore from 1964-68 and the Athletics again in Oakland in 1969.

Bauer was voted The Associated Press AL Manager of the Year in 1964 and 1966, when his Orioles swept the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series. It was the only time he reached the Series as a manager, but he was a frequent participant in the postseason with the Yankees.

Bauer's World Series hitting streak stretched from 1956-58 when the Yankees dynasty was at its peak.

"Oh, it was a joy," he said in a 1998 interview. "I was there 11 years, and we won nine pennants. And we could have very easily won 10 in a row, because in 1954 we won more games than we ever did. We won 103."

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