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Houston Rockets guard Tracy McGrady

December 18, 2006

"... he was declared out for [Sunday's] game against the Clippers and almost certainly for Wednesday's in Portland. McGrady saw **Dr. Robert Watkins**, the specialist who examined him after his back injury in March, and will see him again Tuesday, hoping to be cleared for more demanding workouts."

The knock used to be that he was too dispassionate, too soft. The Chinese culture of being humble and soft spoken simply didn't mesh well with the trash-talking world of NBA basketball. Could a player who was unwilling to make strong moves or make the opponent look bad by blocking his shot ever be as dominant in the NBA as someone who stands 7'5" is supposed to be? Plenty of people had their doubts - including this writer.

But Yao has been equal to the task. Over the course of the last season and a half we've seen him throwing down with emotion, rejecting anyone who dared shoot in his vicinity, and relentlessly attacking the basket instead of settling for kinder, gentler fall-aways. He's taking guys to the hole, then shooting over them, then using his hook, then back to the middle. In many ways he calls to mind the memory of Hakeem Olajuwon, who never made the same move twice. This season Yao Ming is off to the best start of his career, averaging 27 points, 10 rebounds and better than two blocks per game. He has scored 30 or more points in three straight games and has been in double-figures in rebounds in those games, as well. He is truly dominating the way everyone hoped he would when the Rockets used their first round pick on him in the summer of 2002.

Yao reminds us of Olajuwon in one more way. Hakeem never got the respect from the referees that other players of his stature enjoyed. He was so quick that he drew multiple fouls on every possession, but he was also so quick that he often scored anyway, and thus the refs tended not to call fouls for him. Yao Ming may not be as

quick as Hakeem, but he makes up for it with sheer size. He can score despite being fouled, but very often gets credited with a turnover when in reality he should have been put at the line for some free throws.

"How tough is it?" Yao told the Houston Chronicle following the Rockets' 2OT loss to the Lakers. "I feel that is not fair. I can't only shoot eight free throws yesterday and six free throws today and they just let their big guy keep pushing me. I would say Kwame Brown and Andrew Bynum fouled me 10 times in tonight's game, and yesterday's game also, and they did not call it. That's not fair.

"I know I'm big. That's not my fault. They have two hands pushing on my back and keep pushing while I'm shooting the ball. They're not fouling upstairs, not fouling on my hands. They foul on my body. I shot only six free throws. I know that's not right. I hope the league, somebody can help with this. It's not just one or two games. It's been a couple weeks already."

Considering the way teams swarm Yao - especially now that Tracy McGrady's out - he should be leading the league in free throw attempts. That would be a great thing for the Rockets, as well, since Yao is one of the better free throw shooters in the league. Yao was named the Player of the Month for November after averaging 25.7 points, 10.1 rebounds, and 1.67 blocks - and while attempting only 137 free throws (just over nine a game). He's already averaging better than 27 points, right at ten rebounds, and nearly four blocks per contest in December - while shooting 88% on fewer than eight free throw attempts per game.

In McGrady's absence Yao's touches are up, his scoring is up, and his free throw attempts are down???

What's impressive is not so much the fact that his attempts are down, but the fact that Yao stood up and said something about it. He actually spoke out for himself in a situation where he is clearly being mistreated by the referees - and not just by one team of referees, but as a whole. The league's current view of how to call fouls for Yao has to be reevaluated. They did it for Shaq, who commits an offensive foul almost every time he catches the ball. He's bigger than everyone else, so the way fouls are called around him had to be adjusted. The league had to get together and adjust their method of determining what was and what wasn't a foul as pertaining to Shaq. Now the same thing needs to be done for Yao.

There is no bigger star in the NBA than Yao Ming. It's time for the league to start giving him his due.

Key Newslines

[Houston Chronicle: "Though Rockets guard Tracy McGrady had no setbacks following his workouts Thursday and Friday and no additional problems were found in Saturday's exam, he was declared out for \[Sunday's\] game against the Clippers and almost certainly for Wednesday's in Portland.](#) McGrady saw **Dr. Robert**

Watkins, the specialist who examined him after his back injury in March, and will see him again Tuesday, hoping to be cleared for more demanding workouts."

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By Bill Ingram

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