Clyde Drexler (1962-)

When many people think of the Portland Trail Blazers, they find it difficult not to envision Clyde Drexler gliding through the air time and again. He is a permanent fixture in Oregon sports history.

Born on June 22, 1962, in New Orleans, Drexler was a first-round draft pick out of the University of Houston and the fourteenth overall selection in the 1983 National Basketball Association (NBA) draft. He was a smooth, six-foot-seven shooting guard who played with flair on the hardwood. “The Glide,” as he became known, is remembered as one of the most decorated athletes in Oregon sports history thanks to his career with the Trail Blazers from 1983 to 1995.

After a slow rookie year, Drexler rattled off ten straight seasons as one of the top scorers in the NBA. He averaged 17.2 points per game in his second year in the league and became an All-Star by his third season, with 18.5 points per game.

A ten-time All-Star during his fifteen-year career, Drexler ignited “Blazermania” with two trips to the NBA Finals in the early 1990s. Portland lost to the “Bad Boy” Detroit Pistons in 1990 and Michael Jordan’s Chicago Bulls in 1992. Drexler gained glory that summer, however, representing Portland and the United States by winning an Olympic gold medal with the original Dream Team.

Drexler won an NBA championship with the Houston Rockets in 1995, the season after he left Portland. The following year, the NBA named Drexler one of the fifty Greatest Players of All-Time. The award was well deserved. While Drexler scored his ten thousandth career point on December 26, 1989—marking his feat as the Blazers’ all-time leading scorer at the time—he finished his career in 1998 with 22,195 points, 6,125 assists, and 2,207 steals. Known for his head-down fast breaks and defensive prowess, Drexler was also a member of the All-NBA First Team (1992), All-NBA Second Team (1988, '91), and All-NBA Third Team (1990, 1995).

In the company of NBA All Stars Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird, “Clyde the Glide” was one of best players of his era and one of the all-time great guards of basketball. Drexler was enshrined in the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame in 2001 and was a first ballot inductee into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2004.

Combining speed with athleticism and elegance, Drexler embodied the word “professional” in sports, both on the floor and in the community. His game was airtight: he could score and play defense, and he was a natural leader. As his moniker suggests, “The Glide” knew how to finish at the rim.

Portland retired Drexler’s number, 22, on March 7, 2001, at the Rose Garden, recognizing his eleven seasons of play for the Trail Blazers. Additionally, the City of Portland named "Drexler Drive" near the arena in his honor. After a short stint coaching men’s basketball at the University of Houston, Drexler was enlisted to call home radio games as a color commentator for the Houston Rockets.

Written by Wendell Maxey

Further Reading:

Drexler, Clyde. *Clyde The Glide*. With Kerry Eggers. Champaign, Ill.: Sports Publishing L.L.C, 2004.

Eggers, Kerry and Dwight Jaynes. *Against The World: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Portland Trail Blazers’ Chase for the NBA Championship*. Champagne, Ill.: Sagamore Publishing Inc., 1993.

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