

Raymond Lewis' 'Last Chance'

NBA Snubs Playground Legend Again

By SCOTT HARRIS

Raymond Lewis had said he was going to give the National Basketball Assn. just one more chance — Just one *last* chance to realize his greatness and pay him millions of dollars. And if the NBA screws up this time, he said . . . well, then, just forget it. It's their loss.

Last month, as far as Lewis is concerned, the NBA blew it again. The former Verbum Dei High and Cal State Los Angeles star — considered one of the best collegians ever and still a playground legend — made his umpteenth comeback attempt, this time with the San Antonio Spurs. For the umpteenth time, it didn't work out.

But despite his bravado, Lewis knows it's his loss as well.

'Seems Like Foul Play'

"Oh man, I don't know what to think about all this," Lewis, a Long Beach resident, said. "It seems like some foul play to me. I belong in the NBA. I think I proved that. I should have been in there long ago . . ."

"I'm getting a raw deal, a bum deal. It's a shame I have to take this kind of torture . . ."

"It just seems somebody is trying to take my career away from me," he continued. "It's like I'm being blackballed. Or it's a conspiracy or whatever to keep me out of the league."

Officials with the San Antonio Spurs, of course, have a different version of what happened. "Lewis played two (exhibition) games, then he went home," team spokesman Wayne Witt recalled. "He said there were some personal problems,



Raymond Lewis

and it was *adios*."

Lewis said he didn't get that much playing time. Lewis also said he left only after Coach Stan Albeck told him he probably wasn't going to make the team.

Lewis, who is black, said he thought he might be a victim of racism. Acknowledging the predominance of black players in the NBA, he added, "Well, they can't blackball everybody, y'know."

Before leaving for San Antonio, Lewis had said if he didn't make the

team, he would give up his basketball career and find a regular job. Lewis, 28, has concentrated on basketball full time over the past eight years, his wife working to support him and their two children.

What now? "I'm just going to live my life the best way I can," Lewis said. "I'm not going to go jump off a bridge or anything like that."

Will Stay in Shape

He did not indicate any plans to find a job. "I'm going to keep my body in condition," he said. "I'm not going to let anybody look at me and say I can't play, because I can play. *I can play* . . ."

"I try to keep a level head about this. And a lot of times I can't . . . They're taking bread and food and everything away from my family . . ."

"Something's going to be done about this. It's not over, man."