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Adventure In Brazil

By Philip A. Maness

"Hey, how was Brazil?"
"I dunno, who went?"
"You did, man!"
"I did? I say. I must have forgotten
what happened."

I've used that excuse since returning from Brazil with the Howard University basketball team, which played 11 exhibition games in 7 cities during 16 hectic days in August and September last year.

The tour, coordinated by Jan Rus, and sponsored by the American Council on International Sports and the Organization of American States, also included a second team, that of DeMatha High School in Hyattsville, Md.—one of the nation's top high school basketball teams.

The adventure in Brazil took the team to different cities, where mobs of autograph seekers, speeding Volkswagens and steak and french fries provided the first impressions of the South American country.

"Hey, how was Brazil?"

The Flight

Upon seeing the DC-10, the plane that would fly both teams to Brazil and upon being told of the long flight, our eagerness to go south almost faded inside the huge terminal at Kennedy Airport in New York.

"A nine and one-half hour flight!" exclaimed junior guard Gerald Gaskins, echoing the sentiments of everyone. He then began looking over the heap of luggage as if he were about to grab his suitcase and take the bus back to Washington.

As our party proceeded toward the departure gate, we were told the flight would be over water for the most part ("I can't swim," added Gaskins) and the sight of

gers—stirred up ideas. "If we remove a few seats from one section, we can start a disco," someone said.

The next morning—still in flight—the view from the plane's window seemed to be a good omen welcoming both teams to South America. The lower half of the sky was a bright yellow as the sun began creeping over the perimeter of the earth. The upper half was filled with stars and a glowing shade of blue that would not ordinarily be seen from the ground. A maroonish gold band formed at the middle as the two colors blended, stretching along the horizon as far as the eyes could see.

"Hey, how was Brazil?"

First Stop: Sao Paulo

The world's 11th largest city, with a population of six million, Sao Paulo was our first stop. The first impression of Brazil was a speeding Volkswagen, which dominates the auto market in Brazil. Brazilian drivers must be among the world's fiercest—ignoring traffic signals and racing down crowded streets forcing pedestrians to spring to safety.

At the Noblis Hotel, we were surprised to see the Flintstones on television, with the characters speaking in Portuguese, of course. Old American movies and game shows were also shown.

Our first meal was a cream cheese soup, Mike Pressley took the initial sample, with waiters and the rest of us watching for any reaction.

"How is it Mike?" "Sip, sip—slurp."
"What's it like Pres?" "Sluurp!"

After a third "slurp," everyone else took heed. Next, tender and appetizing steaks were served. The most popular items were Guarana and Brahma, two spicy ginger flavored drinks.

While sightseeing in the city, the team

ventured into various shops and attempted to converse with street vendors and store merchants. A favorite gesture of the Brazilians was a clenched-fist with the thumb pointed up.

The Bison won the first contest in the Tournament of the Americas by defeating the Tamoyo Athletic Club, 80-76.

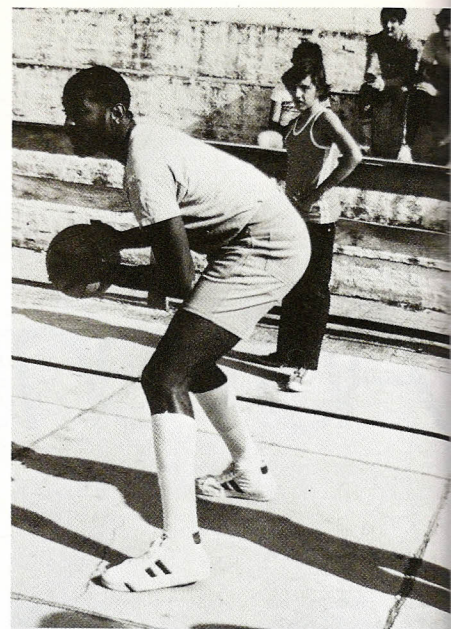
"I wasn't too pleased by the victory," said coach A.B. Williamson after the game. "We played too sluggishly and made too many mistakes. But the Brazilians are a lot better than I suspected."

There was an entire Saturday of sightseeing and window-shopping at an outdoor mall which covered approximately 10 blocks of shops. Exotic and spicy smell of food cooking in nearby restaurants filled the air. The mall area was the favorite spot for the residents of the city, which is one of Brazil's leading industrial centers.

Dorian Dent, a 6' 10" junior, and Mike Pressley, a 6' 8" sophomore, fascinated the crowd with their height. Several persons attempted to converse in Portuguese with them but were unable to overcome the communication barrier—not to mention their height.

The Portuguese language was especially baffling, with some words resembling Spanish in spelling and pronunciation. Being without a translator made things even more difficult. But the language problem was solved after we ran into one by the name of Claudio Peppe, a native of Sao Paulo who had previously visited the States.

Peppe was the first Black person that we had come into direct contact with, except upon arriving at the Sao Paulo airport and seeing a Black man sweeping the streets, which caused Pressley to comment: "Well, we're not only sweeping





streets in America." It was clear everyone was anxious to find out: "Where are the brothers at?"

Peppe eventually began spending more time with the team, picking up the latest slang, eating with the team, conducting sightseeing tours and acting as an interpreter.

After Howard defeated Monte Libano, 98-87, some members of the team went to an outdoor Saturday night festival that attracted mostly Black Brazilians, "Man, you know, I was expecting more people to show up here," said Peppe. "But as cold as it is, I think that's why too many people didn't show up."

The following day was Sunday and most of us ventured to a club owned by Peppe's brother-in-law. Inside the club, the sound of rock music and the presence of beautiful women made the visit a rewarding experience.

The ground level of the club was mostly for relaxing and socializing. There were attractive wooden tables and chairs and colorful murals. The dance floor on the upper level was crowded most of the time and one could hear old James Brown tunes and early disco music from the States. And the most popular artists were Bootsie Collins and Funkadelic.

"Oh, we really love to hear funk," said Peppe as a cut from the disc, "The Clones of Dr. Funkenstein" started the club rocking.

On Monday, Howard faced Sirio, its toughest opponent in the tournament. Sirio took a 29-11 lead in the first 12 minutes; the Bison rallied within 13 points, 70-57, with 8:14 remaining in the game. An 8-2 scoring burst ended the rally as the more experienced Sirio team won, 80-66.

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Presidente Prudente

The bus ride to the next stop, Presidente Prudente, a town named after a former Brazilian president, was quiet and uneventful. The loss to Sirio and the all-night ride gave the team more reason to pout.

Sunlight filtered through the interior of the bus as it approached the town. Situated among hills and rolling countryside, it looked like a small, quiet farming town. Suddenly a barrage of motorcycles and cars passed the bus and formed an escort. At the Pepletti Hotel, the third floor provided a panoramic view of the town and surrounding countryside. The small town atmosphere and the warm reception quickly lifted spirits.

A basketball clinic by Williamson at a local school proved very popular with youngsters who besieged the players for autographs. After the clinic, we were treated to a motorized parade around town in a Volkswagen bus escorted by students on motorcycles. And after five days of steaks and french fries in Sao Paulo, the team enjoyed a feast at an open-air restaurant with a menu that included black-eye peas, mashed potatoes, lamb, and string beans. "This is the kind of place I could retire in," said Coach Williamson after the meal.

A crowd of about 8,000 watched Howard against the Brazilian National Team. With 35 seconds remaining in the first half, the Brazilians took the lead for the first time and the spectators erupted in a roar that shook the arena. After swapping the lead four more times, a 14-4 scoring spree resulted in a 96-90 Howard win. Then Howard was presented with a trophy as spectators swarmed onto the floor hounding the players for autographs.

"I've never seen anything like this," said Nathaniel Speight, who was surrounded by about 50 children waving paper and pen and pulling on his warm-up jacket.

Senior forward and co-captain of the team, Mike Nettles, was also surrounded by youngsters but was enjoying himself as he headed towards the locker room only to find the path blocked by enthusiastic fans.

Oswaldo Cruz

A drizzle proliferated the skies the next day as the team was bused to Oswaldo Cruz. The weather prevented any sightseeing, confining the team in the Adaespando Hotel. A railroad track ran behind the hotel and the building shook whenever a train rolled by.

Game time: A doubleheader contest, which also featured De Matha playing a preliminary game, drew about 4,000 with another 500 or so fans unable to get inside.

Howard fought off several rallies and defeated the Brazilian National Team 85-77 for the second consecutive night. "I didn't want them to take the lead and everyone go off as they did last night," said Gaskins. "That place was a lot smaller, and the spectators just as noisy."

Aracatuba

In Aracatuba, the team was housed at the Grande Hotel. A warm and sunny day allowed the players to relax at a palm tree shaded park across from the hotel. Speight and teammate Jeff Beard made friends with a group of youngsters on bicycles and were cycling around town, as shoppers walked down the sidewalk browsing.

"Tonight is a crucial game," said the coach, sermonizing in the locker room be-





fore the third consecutive game against the Brazilian National Team. "Because you've beaten this team twice before is no reason to take them lightly." But the light-hearted atmosphere remained, as Gaskins muffled a chuckle and John Smith amused his teammates by making funny faces.

The Brazilian team was also determined to win, with some players bending the rim of the basket during warm-up, yelling and slapping palms.

The overflow crowd of about 6,000 saw a physical contest replete with pushing and shoving at both ends of the court. The contest turned into one of swapping punches and deliberate fouling, with no technical fouls or reprimands called by the officials. However, Howard rose to the occasion, setting crushing picks, knocking players to the floor and racing to a 53-42 halftime lead.

With 17 minutes remaining, Speight converted a layup and was pushed under the basket by a player on the Brazilian team. Speight, who had been previously pushed under the basket during the first half—barely avoiding serious injury—this time jumped up and ran over to the guilty player and shoved him back. Pandemonium broke loose as the entire Brazilian team charged Speight. At the same instance, Howard's players on the bench rallied to defend their teammate. But the fight was eventually stopped and the game called by the referee. A few spectators began to hurl rocks and bottles at the visitors.

After the game, military police escorted us from the arena, and provided protection for the bus all the way to the hotel. Similar precaution was taken in the next city.

The incident at Aracatuba brought the team closer together, but by now the novelty and excitement had died down

and everyone agreed it was time to go home.

Cantaduva

Despite apologies from officials of the Brazilian Basketball Federation and the city of Aracatuba, there was a lot of uneasiness upon arriving in Cantaduva at dawn, after an all-night trip. As in other towns, we were viewed suspiciously, but had used it to our advantage to convince people that we had no plans of an invasion and were there only to play basketball.

Playing five games in five cities in five days had taken its toll. "This is worse than NBA schedule," said John Smith as he struggled to his room with baggage. The temperature had soared into the 90's by noon and as we were being served lunch a waiter told us, "it gets a lot hotter than this!"

A record shop in a mall up the street from the hotel provided entertainment for the afternoon. The store was stocked with old American albums and we spent the afternoon listening to old tunes: Black Ivory (Don't Turn Around), Santana (Black Magic Woman) and the Chakakas (Jungle Fever). Some of the players remained inside the hotel and played cards, rather than go outside in the 95-degree heat of mid-afternoon.

Howard easily won 96-69, over the Cantaduva All Stars. The gymnasium was not crowded and the atmosphere felt more at ease by just playing a different team. At halftime, instead of adjourning to the locker room, the players signed autographs and shot baskets with fans.

After dinner, everyone returned to pack for another day of travel.

Sorocaba

The winter season in Brazil—June through August—is mild compared to the average

winter weather in the United States. But the constant travel and changing climate made it difficult to make an easy adjustment. Dodging the cold proved fruitless. During cool nights, there was no heat at the hotels in the smaller towns. One merchant explained: "The winter season here is so short, there is no need for heat." Also, no hot water.

The ride to Sorocaba was through mountains overlooking sugarcane plantations and small villages.

In Sorocaba, the team was housed on the 10th floor of the Hotel Sorocaba, which gave a dazzling view of the city. One balcony provided the view of a colorful plaza, while on the other side one saw the slanting rooftops of homes—all clustered closely together. Narrow cobblestone streets ran parallel to the buildings, which featured stucco construction and red-colored roofs resembling clay.

Although the city seemed to be friendlier and more sociable than the others we visited, everyone was too tired to do any exploring.

The Sorocaba All Star Team was outmanned and outgunned by the Bison, 100-45. Afterwards, most team members retreated to the hotel.

A quiet, slumber-like town during the day, Sorocaba came to life that night. A club directly across from the hotel began booming rock-music, which lifted a few spirits as the night weather turned chilly.

Back to Sao Paulo

The mid-morning return to Sao Paulo brought a sigh of relief. We were scheduled to depart for Rio de Janeiro, but a mixup in communications created an unexpected delay. But we were able to catch the flea market in a nearby park—paintings, hand-crafted jewelry, leather goods

and clothing.

The market was one of the most enjoyable sights witnessed during the stay.

That night everyone returned to favorite night spots in Sao Paulo; a majority of us headed back to the club owned by Peppe's brother-in-law.

The women were still there.

"Oh man, did you see that?"

"Whew!"

"Hey, I want you to know, I might return to the States married."

"No lie."

Last Stop: Rio de Janeiro

Rio was like waiting for Christmas to come. We'd heard so much about the city's beauty while back in the States.

As the plane approached the airport, one could see Flamengo Beach, which instantly conjured up visions of bikini-clad beauties lounging under beach umbrellas or tanning on the sand.

At the Novo Mundo Hotel, the dining room offered a magnificent view of the beachfront. Getting across the street to the beach was a big challenge in itself as Rio drivers proved more relentless than the speedsters of Sao Paulo.

As dazzling as the Rio sights were, the only disappointment was the sun failing to break through the clouds.

The Bison defeated the Municipal Club, 81-75, in a come-from-behind effort, but we were tired of being treated like celebrities, signing autographs and being stared at. The steak and french fry diet also drew scowls during meals, and we'd run short of conversation among ourselves. So we began spending our last cruzeiros in Rio. A few players went out on the town, but a majority remained at the hotel for a good rest before heading back home. It was apparent that the hectic schedule of the previous eight days

had taken its toll.

The following day, which was Tuesday, Peppe—who had taken the bus to Rio to join us ("I'll just hang with ya'll now, man")—took us sightseeing and shopping in downtown Rio. The downtown area seemed to spread in every direction with stores and restaurants.

Later, at the Copacabana Beach, there was the magnificent view of the Atlantic Ocean, as the mouth of the beach was headed by two iceberg-shaped rock formations. One could watch cargo ships pass by even on a cloudy day. We were anxious for some bright sunny weather.

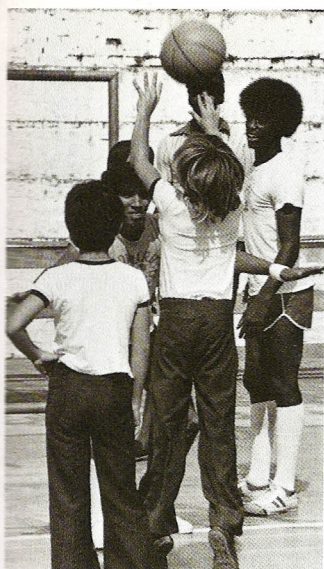
At the Vasco Athletic Club, a small crowd jammed the outdoor basketball court to watch Howard and the Vasco All Stars tussle for the game's first 34 minutes. It seemed as if the contest would never end and every malady seemed to be befalling us. Dorian Dent had become ill earlier in the tour and was forced to miss the remaining games. Mike Nettles was also suffering from a mild case of the flu, and others had either head or chest colds and were feeling weaker. During the game, Tommy Boykins, the trainer, fell ill and was taken to a hospital. To top it all off, officials of the Brazilian Basketball Federation were talking about taking us to Bahia (Salvador).

The game ended 91-88 in favor of Howard, after Speight, Glover and Smith took charge. Speight was spit in the face by an opposing player, causing the team to rush to the floor. Everyone was apprehensive of another brawl, but Speight managed to pull himself together and walk away without throwing a punch.

"He (Speight) deserved the game's accolade," said Williamson after receiving apologies from the host team and the Brazilian Basketball Federation.

The sun failed to break through the





clouds for the third day in a row, but even better news was the fact that we were scheduled to leave Brazil on Thursday night. This news led to the spending of more cruzeiros on gifts and souvenirs for family members and friends.

During the tournament in Rio, Howard lost once (77-67) to the Flamengo All Stars, led by former American Basketball Association star George Thompson.

On Thursday night there was a lot of enthusiasm at the airport and when the plane was finally airborne some of the happiest smiles since we'd left Washington emerged.

In New York, we breezed through customs. On to Washington, where a small welcoming party of parents and friends waited inside the terminal. And as the bus proceeded up Georgia Avenue and through the campus towards the gym, the excitement of returning home intensified.

"Who-woo! Hey, did you see that?"

"Hey—she looks good!"

"Duck, man—there Mr. Smith. He might stop the bus and give us makeup work."

"Who-woo—that's a good looking woman right there!"

"Hey, and you can bet she speaks English, too." □

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