

Michael's decision 'a shocker'

Announcer will need to develop a new ending

By Tim Egan

Members of the media covering Tuesday's opening game of the American League Championship Series between the Chicago White Sox and Toronto Blue Jays scattered like cockroaches at the flip of a light switch when the big news leaked.

Somehow, somewhere or somebody let it slip that Michael Jordan was no longer the greatest player in the National Basketball Association. His reign on the courts and in the air of the NBA was over, and he was heading out to work on his golf game, full time.

"It was a shock," said Ray Clay, a former Berwyn resident who is the Chicago Bulls' public-address announcer.

"I wasn't ready for it," added Bulls' radio analyst Tom Boerwinkle, the president of Olympic Oil in Stickney. "It caught me by surprise, as it did everyone else."

The end of Jordan's nine-year career, in which he won seven straight scoring titles and three consecutive Most Valuable Player Finals awards, came as surprising as a three-second call in the NBA.

"Knowing Mike," Boerwinkle said, "I knew that when he decided to go, it would be over quickly."

In a press conference Wednesday morn-

ing, Jordan treated the press like a nagging in-law. He was courteous and understanding, but not forgiving of the actions he deemed as intrusions of his personal life.

Jordan spoke of his past, present and future, adding his decision would have been the same had his deceased father been by his side.

"I think there are a whole lot of people," said Boerwinkle, a former Bull center during the 1970s, "not only nationally, but worldwide who are going to miss him."

"We take his greatness as run-of-the-mill. People will now realize how great it was to see him."

"Michael has reached his goals," Clay said. "In the realm of basketball, there aren't any left. We just have to remember all the good things he's done."

When the Bulls were in the pre-Jordan era, they were average at best. Now it will be life without Jordan and if the Bulls plan to be "four-ocious" this season with another NBA title, they'll have to do it without him.

"The Bulls still have a good nucleus,"



Clay

Clay said. "But they won't have that go-to guy in the end like Michael."

"From a personal standpoint," Boerwinkle said, "it will be different to call a game without him. Michael in a ball game made for some dramatic moments. The big baskets and steals. I'll miss that."

A Jordan return isn't totally out of the question as he said "never" wasn't a word he would use in the same sentence as comeback.

"His greatest assest is his competitiveness," Boerwinkle said. "He may decide to come back, but only if that fire rekindles."

So for now, Jordan is out of the work force and his face won't be seen on commercials, billboards, newspapers and NBA games of the week.

His exit from the league will affect everyone from fans to public address announcers.

"I thought about that this morning in the car," Clay said. "I wondered who I'm going to announce last."

"Starting at a guard, from Croatia, Toni Kukoc," perhaps?

"I don't know," Clay said. "We'll have to talk that one over."