



Fitz Dixon spent nearly as much to acquire Dr. J as he did to buy the team.

The Doctor Is In

ON OCTOBER 22, 1976, A NEW ERA OF BASKETBALL BEGAN IN PHILLY AS JULIUS ERVING MADE HIS DEBUT AS A 76ER. FORMER SIXERS GENERAL MANAGER PAT WILLIAMS GIVES US THE PLAY-BY-PLAY. AS TOLD TO ALEXANDRA LESHNER

“When [the Sixers] acquired Julius Erving in 1976, he was engaged in a contract dispute with the New York Nets. The Nets let it be known that they wanted \$3 million to sell Julius, and it would take another \$3 million to get him signed for five years. We had a new owner, Fitz Dixon, and I remember driving out to his farm on the edge of Philadelphia to tell him what was going on. ‘Tell me, Pat, who is Julius Erving?’ Fitz asked. He wasn’t a rabid basketball fan but had bought the team that summer. I told him Julius was the Babe Ruth of basketball and it would take \$6 million to get him—which I said rather hurriedly. [With Fitz’s blessing] we took off for New York. We worked all night [to close the deal], and the following evening we had a huge press conference in Philadelphia. That was Thursday [October 21], and 24 hours later we opened the season at home. There was a wonderful fan we had, Steve Solms, who was a longtime season-ticket holder. When Julius was introduced, Steve came running onto the floor holding a doctor’s bag to present to Julius—to welcome ‘Dr. J’ to Philadelphia. It was a highly unusual moment, and [although] we lost that game to San Antonio, we did get to the finals in Julius’s first year. Julius was blessed with enormous talent; he was a charismatic performer. But more than that, he was a great teammate, leader, and ambassador for the game.” **PS**