

*How the presidential contenders work with others could determine the outcome of the 2004 race.*

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Guest columnist



What do politicians and basketball stars have in common? They both need to be able to pivot.

Lately, I have been imagining George W. Bush and Howard Dean as two centers that have the ball down low in critical games. What they do can either propel their team to victory or doom them to defeat.

Last March, President Bush had a chance to pivot his way into almost certain re-election. Instead, he never passed and went for the slam-dunk. Next March, if Howard Dean successfully gyrates, his moves may take him all the way into the White House.

The first six months of Bush's Iraq policy were very successful. He forced the United Nations to stand

to the U.N. and faked out his opponents. By extending the time for the U.N. inspectors to do their work, he may have kept the international community from splitting. He then could have led a unified Security Council toward a new resolution that would have linked forceful diplomacy to a credible use of military force. A nuanced change in the calibration of the troops in the region could have been a key component of the strategy. Instead, he went for the slam-dunk and invaded. His inability to turn at the last minute has produced the mess we now find ourselves in.

Over the last year, Howard Dean has slowly climbed to the top of the

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up to Saddam Hussein. The weapons inspectors that were sent in late 2003 were rattling the Iraqi regime. Bush's strategy of rebuilding the international consensus on Iraq was clearly working.

However, his strategy stalled when key Security Council members balked about setting a specific date for determining if Hussein had complied with the U.N. The strategy turned counterproductive when France began to publicly lobby against the U.S. position. Soon afterwards, the Security Council was so badly split that the U.S. gave up on the U.N. What went wrong?

Bush would not pivot. He could have forcefully passed the ball back

Democratic field. His early opposition to the Iraq War has energized his party's grassroots.

Dean's style of fearlessly taking on Bush's policies has convinced many that he is a strong leader. His campaign structure promotes decentralization, and thus encourages creativity and individualism from his supporters. Dean's use of the Internet has allowed thousands to give small amounts of money. His campaign feels more like a social movement than a traditional political operation.

In March 2004, Howard Dean might also have an opportunity to pivot. If he wins Iowa, New Hampshire and other early states, he could very well be the presumptive nominee. At that

BUSH, DEAN  
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