

Doucette adds class instead of cliches

By JOHN LOWRY
Special to the Argus

There's no doubt that the Trail Blazers' best off-season move was the signing of Rod Strickland. The free agent with the bad-guy reputation has been a model citizen and the penetrating point-guard Portland has so badly needed.

As play-by-play announcer Eddie Doucette says, Strickland's "got the hands of a Fagin pickpocket."

A what?

That's Fagin—the character from the Charles Dickens novel "Oliver Twist."

Which brings us to the Blazers' second best off-season acquisition—the irrepressible Doucette.

How good is Doucette? Well, let's just say that Bill Schonely never made reference to a Dickens novel.

But if the reference to Fagin probably was a bit over the hands of most Trail Blazer listeners, give Doucette his just due—he's one of the best play-by-play announcers in the business.

The suspicion was that when Schonely left the Blazers' radio side after 22 seasons to switch to television, it would be impossible for anyone to fill the Schonz's very large shoes.

Now, it seems as if the fit may be a little on the snug side for Doucette, who is so colorful and so humorous

and so on target in analyzing the game in addition to his detailed play-by-play that he would do just fine without color commentator Mike Rice.

But even Rice, who never meshed especially well in two seasons teaming with Schonely, is blossoming as a solid analyst. Rice-Doucette calls him "Wild Rice"—and Doucette have developed a rhythm that plays extremely well.

Still, the star of the show is Doucette, who has a wealth of NBA experience from his days with the Milwaukee Bucks and various cable jobs. He's a refreshing change after two decades of Schonely cliches.

If you had the good sense to turn down the television sound and turn on the radio during Sunday's Blazer win at Utah against the Jazz, you heard Doucette and Rice at their best. They were several cuts above the NBA announcing team of Tom Hammond, Magic Johnson and Steve Jones.

Doucette, able to pick one liners out of thin air, came up with the funniest comment of the season late in the first half when he noticed Kevin Duckworth's fashion failure.

"Duck forget to pull up his knee pads—kind of the way Mrs. Krushchev used to wear her socks," he said, referring to the not-so-fashionable wife of the former



leader of the former Soviet Union. "Boy, was that pretty."

Doucette has come up with his own set of Blazer nicknames—"Crash" for Jerome Kersey and "the Big Bear" for Mark Bryant. But the best one is "the Angel"—as in "the Angel is wearing the black halo this half."

Of course, Cliff Robinson is hardly angelic, which makes the moniker even better.

Doucette can succinctly convey the excitement of a big play. In the second half against the Jazz, when Clyde Drexler went "down the boulevard" for a one-handed slam dunk, Doucette, his voice rising several decibels, exclaimed: "Bring me out of my seat, baby."

Maybe best of all, he isn't a homer. He isn't afraid to criticize the Blazers.

Early in the second quarter against the Jazz, with the Blazers struggling to do anything but shoot perimeter jumpers, Rice noted that the Blazers had yet to shoot a free throw. Doucette quickly jumped in with the reason.

"We've said it so many times, and we don't want to belabor the point, but the Blazers aren't really effective unless they take the ball to the rack," Doucette said.

Shortly thereafter, with Strickland in the game and the Blazers suddenly breaking down the Jazz defense, he quickly gave Strickland credit, saying "everything changed for the best."

In fact, if Doucette were coaching the Blazers we might very well see a starting lineup of Strickland at point guard, Terry Porter at off guard and Clyde Drexler at small forward.

My guess is that Doucette has been around long enough and is knowledgeable enough, as civilians go, that he might make a pretty good coach.

Not to worry, Rick Adelman, this guy is too good behind the mike to even think of putting him on the bench.

John Lowry is an Oregon writer who writes a weekly column for the Argus.