

Trail Blazers closing in on finals Phoenix hoping for home court win Friday

PHOENIX (AP) — The Portland Trail Blazers are halfway to their first NBA finals berth in 13 years, while the Phoenix Suns might be down to their final two games, just like last year.

The Trail Blazers overcame a 22-point deficit to beat Phoenix 108-107 Wednesday night in Portland for a 2-0 lead in the best-of-7 series for the Western Conference championship.

"I've never been involved in a comeback like this, either as a player or a coach," said Portland's second-year head coach

of 57-35 in the second quarter, 59-41 at halftime and 70-50 in the third quarter.

The Blazers' 18-point half-time comeback equaled the second-biggest in NBA playoff history.

"It was very strange," said forward Tom Chambers, who paced Phoenix with 28 points and 14 rebounds. "We tried to protect the lead instead of playing aggressively and attacking like we did in the first half. We got passive. Maybe we thought we could coast through, but you should never do that to a

not going to jail for it," said Portland forward Jerome Kersey, who had 29 points and 11 rebounds. "Now their backs are to the wall and we're able to breathe a little easier."

The Trail Blazers have dropped both previous playoff series against Phoenix, losing 2-1 in 1979 and 3-2 in 1984.

The Suns' 117-105 victory in Game 5 of that first-round series on April 26, 1984 was their last win at Portland's Memorial Coliseum. The losing streak now stands at 19 games.

"We still feel very good about our chances to win there," said Suns guard Kevin Johnson. "But first, we have to worry about winning in Phoenix."

"We hope to go home and get ourselves on a roll like we had going in the first half," Chambers said. "Hopefully this time we'll maintain it."

"Two things did us in," Fitzsimmons said. "We turned the ball over (22 times, resulting in 19 Portland points) and we let them have too many offensive rebounds (18 for 24 second-chance points). We couldn't stop them. That's the story. It's a tough loss for us, but it's not the end of the world."

It was Portland's 14th win in the last 18 games against Phoenix, however, and may signal the beginning of the end for the Suns' season.

"This doesn't bury them because they're a very good ball club, and I'm sure they'll come back strong at home," Porter said. "We know they've been playing well on the other team's court and they always seem to split. We really wanted to keep the homecourt advantage and put some doubt in their minds going back to Phoenix."

team of that caliber."

"We let them come back and make it close and that's all they wanted," Suns guard Jeff Hornacek said. "They were scrambling all over the place, and you've got to destroy a team that's doing that. We didn't rotate the ball to take advantage of that. We played right into their hands by taking long shots."

Portland guard Terry Porter scored 23 of his 28 points in the second half, including a 3-point goal to tie the score at 106 with 28.4 seconds remaining and a decisive 13-foot jumper with 12.7 seconds left.

"I think we got kind of a wake-up call at halftime," Porter said. "Our worst enemy was our first-half offense. We were really taking a lot of long shots. We turned things around in the second half. It's got to affect Phoenix a little bit to give up such a big lead. This will definitely leave a bad taste in their mouths."

"We stole this one and we're

'I've never been involved in a comeback like this, either as a player or a coach.'
— Rick Adelman

Rick Adelman, who played for the Blazers from 1970-73. "I keep saying it about this team — they don't quit. I don't care what the circumstance is."

Portland, eliminated from the playoffs in the first round the past four years, last won a conference crown in 1977 by sweeping the Los Angeles Lakers 4-0, then taking the NBA title by beating Philadelphia in six games.

Phoenix was swept 4-0 by the Lakers in last year's conference finals and hopes to avoid a repeat.

The series shifts to the Arizona Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix for Game 3 Friday night and Game 4 Sunday afternoon.

"We haven't lost three games in a row all season, and we're not going to let it happen Friday, either," Suns coach Cotton Fitzsimmons said. "I am confident that we will bounce back."

His team's confidence has to be shaken after blowing leads



Discus thrower Stephanie Smith threw a personal record 171-9 at the Long Beach Invitational which almost assures her an NCAA qualifying berth.

Smith PRs in discus; Cullen suffers injury

Of the four Oregon track athletes sent south for two Thursday meets with NCAA qualifying hopes, one virtually assured an NCAA bid, two failed to improve on previous season bests and one came away with a season-ending injury.

Senior Stephanie Smith supplied the sure bid at the Long Beach Invitational with a throw of 171-9 in the discus. The toss, the sixth best collegiate mark this year, surpasses her former best of 163-4 set at the Oregon Invitational April 28.

"Stephanie is a sure bet for the NCAAs," Oregon women's coach Tom Heinonen said. "She's sixth now, and that scores in the NCAA meet."

Smith has made a case for herself as a candidate for Oregon's most improved track athlete this season. She improved in the event by more than 16 feet this year.

"She's made huge improvements this year," Heinonen said. "She's more confident than she's ever been. She's thrown more consistently than ever and a lot farther."

On the men's side, pole vaulter Brian Cullen looked to be on his way over the 18-foot barrier at Fresno State. Having already cleared a PR height of 17-9½, Cullen reportedly suffered a dislocated knee during an attempt at 18-0½ (the NCAA automatic qualifying standard).

The Pacific-10 Conference champion was looking to return to the NCAAs after no-heightening there last year. Cullen made the trip to Fresno with school record holder Kory Tarpinning.

Junior sprinter Rosie Williams and sophomore high jumper Laurel Roberts failed to improve on previous season bests at Long Beach. Williams won the 200 in a time of 24.14 and grabbed second in the 100 with a wind-aided 11.91 clocking.

Williams is 14th in the NCAAs in the 200 — a mark good enough to get her into the top 18 taken for the NCAAs.

The decision process for athletes on the NCAA provisional list will be made Saturday evening.

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