

Blazers expect defense will decide final series

First game against Detroit is Tuesday

By Bob Baum
Associated Press

PORTLAND (AP) — The Portland Trail Blazers left for Detroit on Sunday insisting they won't be intimidated by the Pistons in the NBA Finals.

"We have to play them at their place but we match up well with them," coach Rick Adelman said. "We know that they're good but we know we can play with them."

The Blazers worked out at a suburban high school, then

went home to watch the second half of Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals between Detroit and Chicago. The Pistons won 93-74.

Adelman had expected the Pistons to win all along.

"When you're going for the championship, it's nice to be playing the defending champions," he said.

The finals will feature two teams that often struggle with their shooting but win with defense and rebounding.

"We're just as physical as

they are," Portland forward Buck Williams said. "It all depends on which team can make the adjustments and control the tempo of the basketball game. Both teams are real good defensively. It's going to be a good defensive series."

"To have a championship team, you have to build on your defensive ability versus the offensive ability. All season long I think Detroit has been thriving on playing well defensively. It's similar to the situation we've been in."

Adelman said the Blazers don't mind being considered as the "Pistons West," in terms of playing style.

"Both teams defend well and they both rebound well," he said. "They have been able to win with their defense. That's a proven point. And I think in these playoffs we've done that too. I think we're very similar in the way we play."

The Pistons and Blazers each won 59 regular-season games, tied for the second-best record in the league behind the Los Angeles Lakers. They split their regular season series. The Blazers won in Portland 102-82

on Nov. 26, and the Pistons won in Detroit 111-106 on Jan. 13.

"We had a great game against them here and we lost there by five," Portland center Kevin Duckworth said. "We feel we can play with them, no matter what."

Duckworth said he knows what to expect from Pistons' center Bill Laimbeer.

"He doesn't intimidate anybody. He's just dirty," Duckworth said. "I don't think that in a series against us he can get away with anything because our guys have a quick temper."

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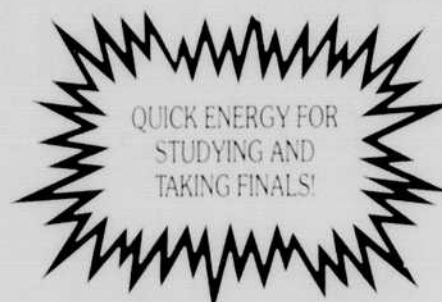
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