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Rockets groove Jazz in decisive game 5

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah Jazz coach Jerry Sloan wasn't about to discount the mystique of an NBA champion.

"We knew their toughness," Sloan said of the Houston Rockets. "You don't win the world championship without being tough."

Tough is exactly what the Rockets were in Sunday's decisive fifth game of their playoff series with Utah, which Houston won 95-91 behind Hakeem Olajuwon's 33 points and Clyde Drexler's 31. The victory gave Houston a 3-2 win in the Western Conference playoff and sent the Rockets into Tuesday's second round against the Suns in Phoenix.

"When we play to our strength, it's very difficult for people to beat us," Olajuwon said. "When our backs are to the wall, we play more aggressive. We play on the edge."

The defeat was particularly bitter for Utah, which lost last year's Western Conference final 4-1 to Houston and this year had

a club-record 60-22 record, second-best in the league.

"They have a great post-up player in Olajuwon, and they have a great post-up player in Drexler. If you try to stop them, they have good 3-point shooters," Sloan said. "They deserve to win. They are the world champs."

The Rockets used a staunch defense and free throws to turn the game in the final minutes. Utah, up 82-75, went 4-19 without a point, failing to convert on seven straight possessions. Houston sank 16 of 20 free throws in the final 3:50 and had a single field goal from Olajuwon.

"There in the fourth quarter we just couldn't make a basket," Sloan said. Utah was just 5-for-18 in the period.

Olajuwon and Drexler each made six foul shots during the crucial span. The Rockets made 34 of 48 from the line to 29 of 38 for Utah.

"We know we have some shortcomings," Drexler said, "but we have people to make up

for that."

When Karl Malone sank a 3-pointer to bring Utah within 92-90 with 6.5 seconds remaining, Drexler and Utah's John Stockton traded single foul shots. Drexler put in two more from the line with two seconds left.

"We had the shots. We just didn't make them," Malone said. "We played our butts off."

With Utah up 54-53 in the third quarter, the Jazz went on a 9-2 run. To add to their troubles, the Rockets went more than six minutes without a field goal.

Still, Houston was down only 71-64 beginning the fourth quarter and cut the margin to 77-75 on 3-pointers by Sam Cassell and Mario Elie.

Utah's cold streak late in the game was forced by Houston's shutting down Malone, who had 35 in the game, and an inability to connect on 3-point shots.

Houston took a 19-18 lead behind nine points from Olajuwon. Then Drexler took over at the beginning of the second period, scoring 11 straight points,

including two 3-pointers, to give Houston a 30-22 lead.

Drexler had another 3-pointer, a dunk and foul shot, and Houston was up 42-34 before Utah ignited in the final 1:30 with a pair of jumpers by Malone and, with 2.8 seconds left, two 3-pointers by Jeff Hornacek to make it 44-42 at halftime for Utah.

Hornacek, who finished with 19 points, also closed out the first period with a 3-pointer at the buzzer.

Just like the final game, the series was a see-saw affair. Third-seeded Utah won the opener at home 102-100, but sixth-seeded Houston took Game 2 in Salt Lake 140-126. Utah won Game 3 in Houston 95-82 and Houston blew away Utah 123-106 at home in Game 4.

"I told the guys I believed in them, we've got to believe in ourselves," said Houston coach Rudy Tomjanovich. He called the Rockets' performance in Games 4 and 5 "two of the gutsiest games since last year."

Jordan off in opening 94-91 loss to Orlando

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Michael Jordan walked off the court hanging his head and biting his lip.

The player who had won so many games for the Bulls with last-second shots and clutch defensive plays blew it for them Sunday.

In the final 10 seconds, Jordan lost the ball, passed up a potential winning shot and botched a pass, and the Orlando Magic hung on to beat Chicago 94-91 in their opener of the Eastern Conference semifinals.

"I take the blame just as I would take the credit," Jordan said after a game in which he missed 14-of-22 shots and matched a career high with eight turnovers. "It was just a mistake down the stretch. It happens to the best of us."

Usually, Jordan is the best. This time, he was all too human.

With the Bulls clinging to a 91-90 lead, Jordan had the ball stolen from behind by Nick Anderson, and Anfernee Hardaway fed former Bull Horace Grant for a dunk and a one-point lead with 6.2 seconds left.

Jordan then had an open shot near the foul

line when he whipped a pass to Pippen, who was alone on the left baseline. Pippen couldn't hang on, losing the ball out of bounds with 1.5 seconds remaining.

"I could have shot the ball but Scottie was wide open," Jordan said. "I threw it hard and behind him. I had a pretty good shot, but I just felt the defense was keying on me so much that Scottie was wide open."

As rough a game as Jordan had, Pippen had a worse one, scoring only seven points on 2-of-11 shooting. Jordan finished with 19 points, his low in this year's playoffs.

Game 2 of the best-of-7 series is Wednesday.

"Wednesday night is going to be a war," Anderson said. "MJ is going to have that arm greased up, ready to fire it up."

Shaquille O'Neal led the Magic with 24 points and 12 rebounds, and Anderson scored 20 while guarding Jordan for most of his 40 minutes.

"My job was to keep him in front of me and contest every shot," said Anderson, a

Chicago native who often plays with Jordan in the offseason. "It's just another opportunity for me, a young player who wants to get to the place Jordan has. Playing against someone like that makes you a better player. I'm not scared of him."

Grant, who joined the Magic this season as a free agent, was superb against his old team. Fifteen of his 16 points came after halftime, and his defense on Pippen seemed to throw the rest of the Bulls off stride.

In the final five minutes, the Magic twice had four-point leads erased by Chicago. An alley-oop dunk by Pippen with 40.2 seconds left put the Bulls up 91-90.

Then everything seemed to unravel for Chicago as the noise in Orlando Arena, where the Magic have lost only three times this season, crescendoed.

"That's all part of the game," Chicago coach Phil Jackson said. "That's part of the home-court advantage, to pump it up."

The Bulls struggled early, shooting 35 percent in the first half, then recovered to hit 10-of-20 field goals in the third quarter. But they finished the game at just 44 percent.

MILLER

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he did after his memorable performance a year ago.

Rik Smits scored 34 points, outscoring Patrick Ewing 34-11, and Miller had 31 for the Pacers, who have been eliminated from the playoffs by New York the last two seasons.

Game 2 of the best-of-7 Eastern Conference semifinal will be held Tuesday night at Madison Square Garden.

Starks scored 21 points, Charles Oakley 17 and Anthony Mason 15 for New York, while

Anthony scored 10 of his 15, including two 3-pointers, in the fourth quarter in relief of the ejected Derek Harper. Until Miller's heroics, the game would have been remembered for nine technicals and the ejections of Harper and Indiana's Antonio Davis.

The officials called two double technical fouls, a technical on Ewing and a double foul in the final 3 minutes of the first quarter, serving notice that no belligerent talk or action would be tolerated. Those technicals came into play during Indiana's third-period rally when Harper and

Davis were whistled for a double technical after squaring off when Harper flagrantly fouled Davis.

Harper got into a fight in last year's conference semifinals against Chicago and sat out the next game. The Knicks won that series and advanced to the conference final against the Pacers, who led 3-2 before falling to New York for the third consecutive season.

Smits scored 10 points and Miller nine during a 21-7 rally that turned a 5-point Knicks lead into a 79-70 Indiana advantage with three minutes left in the third quarter. A 3-pointer and

layup by Starks helped New York close to 80-77 going into the final 12 minutes, and the Knicks tied it on Anthony's 3-pointer with 10:07 left in the game.

New York shot 63.2 percent from the field to lead by as many as five in the opening period, but a 9-0 run gave Indiana a 32-27 lead early in the second.

A three-point play by Smits capped a 7-0 burst that extended the Pacers' lead to 43-34, but the Knicks outscored Indiana 25-11 the rest of the half for a 59-54 lead. Mason scored eight points and Harper had two 3-pointers during the burst.

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