

Rockets face must-win situation

■ **NBA:** The McDonald's Championship has never hosted an NBA team that ended up losing in the competition

LONDON (AP) — With or without Hakeem Olajuwon, the NBA champion Houston Rockets have a reputation to uphold at the McDonald's Championship.

"No NBA team has ever come out here and lost," said backup guard Sam Cassell. "We don't want to be the first. Let somebody else be the first."

Yes, NBA teams haven't lost in previous McDonald's tournaments, but this year's format is different and the competition is tougher.

In the past, the tourney field has been made up of invited European club teams and a selected NBA team. This year for the first time, five league or national champions square off with the NBA champion in the event's seventh edition.

NBA teams have come close to defeat before in the McDonald's tournament. In 1990, the New York Knicks prevailed in overtime, 119-115, against Scavolini Pesaro of Italy. In 1991, the Los Angeles Lakers won by only two points, 116-114, against the Spanish club Joventut Badalona of Spain.

With that and the championship field in mind, coach Rudy Tomjanovich said there will be no letdown by his players.

"Enough has been made of the U.S. team not ever losing," he said. "Our guys have already talked about that. So there's a pride factor."

The six-team field also

includes league champions from Australia (Perth Wildcats), Italy (Buckler Bologna), Europe (Spain's Real Madrid), Israel (Maccabi Tel Aviv) and England (Sheffield Sharks).

The tournament starts Thursday night with Buckler facing Maccabi, and Real Madrid playing Sheffield. The Rockets play Friday against the Wildcats. The winners of Thursday's games will meet for the right to face the Rockets or the Wildcats in Saturday's championship game.

"It's more than a glorified pre-season game," Olajuwon said. "It's a world championship. You can't play it down. The NBA is supposed to be the best league. We should win. This is going to be a real big bonus. To win a title before the season ever starts, that would make our season."

But Olajuwon, the MVP of the NBA finals and the marquee attraction of the tournament, confirmed Wednesday that he almost certainly won't be playing. He has missed the entire preseason with back and elbow injuries.

"I can't take any contact," he said. "But this is a minor injury that won't keep me out of the regular season."

Olajuwon shot around by himself at one end of the floor as the rest of the Rockets practiced for two hours at the London Arena. The players continued to feel the effects of their eight-hour transatlantic flight.

"We're very rusty and still have a little bit of jet lag," Tomjanovich said. "It was ugly out there for a while, but we got the kinks smoothed out, and it ended on a pretty good note."

The Rockets are expecting to face some zone defenses, outlawed in the NBA but legal in

international competition.

"It's an unknown," Tomjanovich said. "But it could be a positive because we have such a good three-point shooting team."

Tomjanovich said the Rockets know virtually nothing about the Perth Wildcats, who won the Australian league title last Sunday with a 3-2 series win over the North Melbourne Giants.

The Australian players were rejoicing at the prospect of facing the NBA champions.

"Talk about icing on the cake," said star forward Andrew Vlahov, a former Stanford player who averaged 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Wildcats this season. "We worked hard all year to win our championship in Australia, and now to come over here and play the Rockets — what a bonus. You can't get any better than that."

But Vlahov had no illusions about his team's chances against the Rockets.

"Slim and none," he said. "But we're not going to roll over for them. Our nation is a fighting-spirit sort of nation. We're going to have a crack at 'em and make sure we are competitive."

As for Olajuwon's absence, Vlahov said, "Maybe we won't get as many shots blocked now."

Wildcats coach Adrian Hurley said the Rockets have more to lose.

"The NBA teams are always under a bit of pressure," he said. "They have to come over here and perform. If they don't win well and comfortably, then people back home wonder what's going on."

But he, too, was realistic about his team's prospects against Houston.

"They certainly have nothing to fear from us."

WEDNESDAY'S TRANSACTIONS

AUTO RACING

■ **CHAMPIONSHIP DRIVERS ASSOCIATION**—Named Jon Potter general manager.

BASEBALL

■ **NEW YORK YANKEES**—Announced Gene Michael has stepped down as general manager to become director of major league scouting.

BASKETBALL

■ **GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS**—Signed Jerome Kersey, forward, to a one-year contract.
■ **INDIANA PACERS**—Signed Dwayne Schintzius, center.
■ **NEW JERSEY NETS**—Signed Chris Childs, guard, to a one-year contract. Waived Corey Beard, guard.

FOOTBALL

■ **NFL PROPERTIES EUROPE**—Named Paul Kayayan director of sales and marketing.
■ **GREEN BAY PACKERS**—Signed Roderick Mullen, defensive back.
■ **SAN DIEGO CHARGERS**—Signed Sebastian Barrie, defensive tackle. Released Michael Watkins, wide receiver, from the practice squad.
■ **SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS**—Signed Tony Zendejas, kicker.
■ **CANADIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE**
■ **SASKATCHEWAN ROUGHRIDERS**—Signed Paul McCallum, kicker.

HOCKEY

■ **CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS**—Recalled Jimmy Waite, goaltender, from Indianapolis of the IHL.
■ **DALLAS STARS**—Placed Guy Carbonneau, forward, on the injured reserved list. Recalled Dan Kesa and Jamie Langenbrunner, forwards, from Michigan of the IHL.

AHL

■ **BINGHAMTON RANGERS**—Acquired Peter Ferraro, left wing, on loan from the New York Rangers.
■ **PORTLAND PIRATES**—Released Justin Duberman, center, and Mike McLaughlin, left wing.
■ **PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND SENATORS**—Acquired Michel Picard, left wing, and Rob Gaudreau, right wing, on loan from the Ottawa Senators.
■ **ROCHESTER AMERICANS**—Acquired Grant Jennings, defenseman, on loan from the Buffalo Sabres.
■ **WORCESTER ICE CATS**—Acquired Steve Staios, defenseman, on loan from the St. Louis Blues.
INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE
■ **CHICAGO WOLVES**—Released Jason Hughes, defenseman, from a 25-game tryout.
■ **CINCINNATI CYCLONES**—Signed Bob Wilkie, defenseman, to a one-year contract.
■ **UTAH GRIZZLIES**—Signed Robert Dome, right wing.
EAST COAST HOCKEY LEAGUE
■ **ECHL**—Named Corey Chandler director of marketing.

SOCCER

NATIONAL PRO SOCCER LEAGUE
■ **BALTIMORE SPIRIT**—Signed Ronald Simmons, defender.

COLLEGE

■ **ATLANTIC 10 CONFERENCE**—Signed a three-year contract to hold its men's basketball championship at CoreStates Spectrum, effective in 1997.
■ **FORDHAM**—Named Karen Robinson-Keyes women's assistant basketball coach.
■ **MANHATTANVILLE**—Named Dann Hannon and Rob Barrett men's assistant basketball coach.
■ **WAKE FOREST**—Named Chris Reed and B.J. Faulk assistant strength-training coaches.

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Horoscope by Frances Drake

For Thursday, Oct. 19, 1995

ARIES
(March 21 to April 19)
You're a bit of a workaholic, but you should avoid pushing yourself too hard. A co-worker's suggestion takes you by surprise; explore it. The evening is best for catching up on rest.

TAURUS
(April 20 to May 20)
You dig right in on that special project. However, you realize soon enough that it's a lot more difficult than you'd anticipated. Be patient.

GEMINI
(May 21 to June 20)
The morning hours find you stuck on how to proceed with an assignment. As the day wears on, you find the solution. On the home front, it's not a good time to insist on having your own way.

CANCER
(June 21 to July 22)
You are tempted to tell off a friend, but should avoid doing so. What your friend did is really a minor thing, and it's best to let it go. Instead, the accent should be on harmony.

LEO
(July 23 to Aug. 22)
Some find that they're in over their heads with credit-card debts. A restructuring of that debt is in order. Extra expenditures are on the way in connection with family.

VIRGO
(Aug. 23 to Sept. 22)
You are so determined to get things done that you don't realize you're being abrasive. It's OK to be assertive, but you don't have to be pushy. A child seeks you out.

LIBRA
(Sept. 23 to Oct. 22)
Your feelings are roiling around, and that could lead to an uncharacteristic display of temper. Try to get to the heart of what's bothering you. Evening hours are favored for relaxation.

SCORPIO

(Oct. 23 to Nov. 21)
The watchword is "persistence." You make several starts on a project until you finally achieve the right approach. Although tempted to give up, you ultimately are successful.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov. 22 to Dec. 21)
You're not getting your wishes across to others clearly. That could cause you to lose enthusiasm for your ideas. Think about how you can be better at communicating.

CAPRICORN
(Dec. 22 to Jan. 19)
Those out shopping could make an impulsive purchase that results only in a return trip to the store. Your judgment is off, so avoid temptation.

AQUARIUS
(Jan. 20 to Feb. 18)
The morning hours find you suspicious of someone you think is hiding something from you. You spend most of your time on a home-improvement project. At night, accent peace with family.

PISCES
(Feb. 19 to March 20)
You're not afraid to speak out on just about every subject. However, be careful in your choice of words. Intellectual projects are most favored, and you accomplish much.

YOU BORN TODAY always look to find the good in everyone around you and in every situation that occurs. You reject those whose pessimism drags you down. Thus, you are always surrounded by can-do people with great attitudes. You are happy in just about any field you choose, but you particularly enjoy working with children. Teaching is heavily favored. Your relationships are fulfilling, but you value your family above all and are a faithful spouse and devoted parent.

Birthdate of Jack Anderson, syndicated columnist; Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women; John Lithgow, actor.

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