

Timberwolves stun Sonics, take 2-1 lead

Minnesota used a 15-4 fourth-quarter run to take control of the game and put Seattle on the brink of elimination

The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Timberwolves are growing up quickly, and now they're one game away from knocking the Seattle SuperSonics out of the NBA playoffs.

Playing with all the poise and confidence they're supposed to lack, the seventh-seeded Wolves stunned the playoff-tested Sonics on Tuesday night with a 15-4 fourth-quarter run on the way to a 98-90 victory and a 2-1 lead in the best-of-five series.

Minnesota, which made its first trip to the Western Conference playoffs last season and won its first postseason game at second-seeded Seattle on Sunday, can win its first series Thursday night at home.

Game 5, if necessary, would be Saturday in Seattle, and if the Sonics don't rally, head coach George Karl's seven-year tenure could be over.

But the Pacific Division-champion Sonics have been here before. They trailed Phoenix 2-1 in the first round last year before winning the last two games.

Anthony Peeler led Minnesota with a career playoff-high 20

points, shaking off his seven-for-32 shooting performance in the first two games to go seven for 15, including four of seven from three-point range.

That included a three-pointer for an 83-76 lead with five minutes, fifty-eight seconds to play, matching Minnesota's biggest of the game. But it turned out only to be part of the surge during which Seattle fell apart and the Wolves capitalized on nearly every opportunity.

Gary Payton threw the ball out of bounds on the next possession when Detlef Schrempf cut unexpectedly. Kevin Garnett dunked a rebound at the other end to make it 85-76.

Vin Baker scored to make it 85-78, but Minnesota scored the next eight points, including a long three-pointer by Stephon Marbury, with the help of two Seattle turnovers to take its biggest lead, 93-78 with 3:00 remaining.

Garnett and Sam Mitchell each had 19 points for the Wolves, who lost 15 straight at home to Seattle since a victory Dec. 30, 1990. The win was Minnesota's seventh straight at home, extending the franchise record it set by winning the last six regular-season games at Target Center.

Payton scored 26 points to lead the Sonics, who led by as many as 11 in the first quarter, but wilted against the Wolves' "small-ball" lineup, which routinely keeps three guards on the floor.

FIRST ROUND

TUESDAY:

Portland 99, L.A. Lakers 94 (Lakers lead series 2-1)
Miami 91, New York 85 (Heat leads series 2-1)
Atlanta 96, Charlotte 64 (Hornets lead series 2-1)

TODAY:

Chicago at New Jersey, 4 p.m.
Phoenix at San Antonio, 5 p.m.
Utah at Houston, 6:30 p.m.

Baker had 17 points and 12 rebounds for Seattle, which lost despite outrebounding Minnesota for the first time in the series, 42-29.

Heat 91, Knicks 85

NEW YORK — The Miami Heat overcame everything — foul trouble, a hostile crowd and Alonzo Mourning's lack of offense — to regain control of their first-round series against the New York Knicks.

The Heat took an early lead and held on the rest of the way as it took a 2-1 series lead with a 91-85 victory Tuesday night.

It brought a quick momentum shift to a series that had seemed to turn the Knicks' way when they evened the series Sunday in Miami.

Miami even rubbed it in a little, too, as Eric Murdock made a throat-slashing gesture late in the

fourth quarter — the same one that Chris Childs of New York made late in Game 2 — after making a three-pointer with four minutes, 15 seconds left that put the Heat ahead by nine.

Voshon Lenard scored 28 points, all in the first three quarters, and Tim Hardaway added 27. Murdock scored 11 as Miami had only three double-figure scorers.

Mourning, in foul trouble for the first three quarters, finished with seven points on three-for-13 shooting after leading the Heat with 30 in Game 2.

He made a huge contribution on the defensive end, where he blocked a pair of shots, forced a traveling call and won a jump ball on four consecutive possessions late in the game to kill the Knicks' chances to get close.

Allan Houston scored 27 for the Knicks, but he, too, failed to register a point in the fourth quarter. Larry Johnson added 22 points.

The Knicks, trying to become the first seventh seed from the Eastern Conference ever to beat a No. 2 seed, will need to win at home Thursday and on the road Sunday to keep their season alive.

Hawks 96, Hornets 64

ATLANTA — Once again, Atlanta wasted no time building a double-figure lead over the Charlotte Hornets. This time, the Hawks didn't blow it.

They made history instead.

Playing with energy and emotion that was missing their first two games, the Hawks avoided elimination in the first round and routed Charlotte 96-64. The Hornets matched the lowest-scoring playoff game in NBA history.

Charlotte, now leading the best-of-five series 2-1, tied the record for fewest points set by Portland in a 1996 playoff game at Utah and equaled by Orlando against Miami last year.

The Hawks, led by Mookie Blaylock with 16 points and Steve Smith with 15, had their largest playoff victory since the franchise moved to Atlanta in 1968. The previous mark was a 23-point rout of Indiana in 1994.

Game 4 in the best-of-five series is Friday night at the Georgia Dome. If the Hawks win again, the deciding game would be Sunday at Charlotte.

The Hawks were having fun again after two dismal games in Charlotte.

Tyrone Corbin punched his fist in the air after hitting a three-pointer late in the first half when Atlanta was pulling away. Blaylock had a big grin when Alan Henderson swished a 30-footer that didn't count because the whistle had blown. Pig Miller pointed his finger toward 19,745 screaming fans after finishing off a drive.

All 12 Atlanta players got on the court, and six scored in dou-

Blazers: Wallace comes alive with 9 fourth-quarter points

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After a miserable offensive night, Portland's Rasheed Wallace came alive in the fourth quarter to score nine of his 11 points, but he missed two free throws with 58 seconds left and the Blazers up 94-90.

Derek Fisher made one of two free throws with 15.7 seconds remaining to slice the Blazers' lead to 94-91.

Williams, a 91 percent free-throw shooter in the regular season, made

one of two with 15 seconds left to boost Portland's lead to 95-91.

Eddie Jones threw the ball away trying to get it to O'Neal on the next possession, and Rider put the game away from there. Fisher's three-point bank shot with 15 seconds left was the Lakers' lone field goal in the last three minutes.

Brian Grant had 13 points and 12 rebounds as the Blazers dominated the boards 52-38. Rick Fox

scored 15 for Los Angeles.

Stoudamire, traded to his hometown of Portland from Toronto in February, scored seven consecutive points during a 14-3 run that put the Blazers up 84-77 with 7:55 to play.

With nothing else working, the Lakers kept pounding the ball into O'Neal.

His dunk with 4:29 to play cut Portland's lead to 88-87 with 4:29 remaining.

But Wallace, whose three-pointer tied it 84-84 earlier in the quarter, scored inside, and Arvydas Sabonis followed with a dunk, on a pass from Wallace, to put Portland up 92-87 with 3:20 to play. O'Neal's inside basket with three minutes to go made it 92-89.

The Lakers sputtered from there. Fox scored eight in the third quarter, when the Lakers led by as many as five. They were up 72-69

entering the final quarter.

O'Neal had six dunks while scoring 22 points in the first half. Sixteen of the Lakers' 20 first-half field goals were layups or dunks. Still, Los Angeles led only 50-48 at the half.

Portland, which complained about the officiating after the Lakers shot 31 more free throws than the Blazers in Game 2, were 26 for 34 from the line Tuesday. Los Angeles was 19 for 35.

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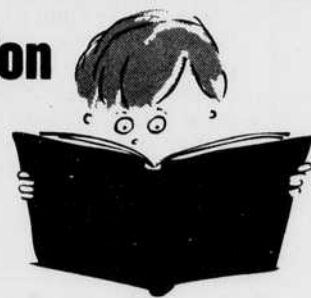
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