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LAST HOME GAME OF THE SEASON

1998 NBA PLAYOFFS

Knicks KO Heat, force Game 5

Alonzo Mourning and Larry Johnson will miss the series finale after throwing punches in Game 4

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Miami-New York series is going to a Game 5, and this year's deciding game will feature fight-related suspensions, too.

Alonzo Mourning and Larry Johnson became involved in a nasty altercation with only 1.4 seconds left in the Knicks' 90-85 victory in Game 4.

Mourning threw the first punch, and then he and Johnson threw several more. Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy bolted onto the court and grabbed Mourning's leg, holding on even as he was being dragged along the floor.

NBA rules call for an automatic one-game suspension for throwing a punch, so both Mourning and Johnson will be forced to sit out Game 5 on Sunday.

It was an incredible ending to another hard-fought, physical game between the bitter rivals, whose second-round series last year featured a brawl at the end of Game 5 that led to five Knicks being suspended for one game each.

That incident ultimately ended up costing the Knicks their season, but now they have a chance to avenge it in the very same building where it happened.

The winner will move on to face the Indiana Pacers, who won their first-round series earlier Thursday night by defeating Cleveland 80-74 in Game 4.

"I made a big mistake. I let my teammates down," said Mourning, who complained that Johnson had been hitting him all night.

The altercation was broken up after about 30 seconds, and sud-

FIRST ROUND

THURSDAY:

L.A. Lakers 110, Portland 99 (Lakers win series 3-1)
Indiana 90, Cleveland 84 (Pacers win series 3-1)
New York 90, Miami 85 (Series tied 2-2)
Seattle 92, Minnesota 88 (Series tied 2-2)

TODAY:

Charlotte at Atlanta, 4 p.m. (Hornets lead series 2-1)
Utah at Houston, 6:30 p.m. (Rockets lead series 2-1)

denly the whole tenor of the series had changed.

Instead of having a Game 5 with both teams at even strength, Miami will be without its franchise center and New York will be without its only low-post scoring threat.

It was an all-around strong effort from everyone that got the Knicks the victory. After being asked to play intelligently, they did exactly that by limiting their turnovers, finding open shots and withstanding Miami's late charge — not to mention staying on the bench during the fight.

Johnson and Houston led New York with 18 points apiece, John Starks had 17 and Charles Oakley and Chris Childs had 10 each.

Tim Hardaway scored 33 for Miami, shooting 12 for 21 from the field, and Mourning — playing without the face mask he had been wearing since fracturing his cheekbone late in the season — had 29 on 11-for-14 shooting.

Aside from those two players, Miami got little help from anyone else. Jamal Mashburn shot one for nine, and Voshon Lenard was one for six. P.J. Brown fouled out with almost five minutes left, finishing

with six points and nine rebounds.

Pacers 80, Cavaliers 74

CLEVELAND — The Indiana Pacers made head coach Larry Bird a winner in his first playoff series as a coach, surviving a scare from the young Cleveland Cavaliers with an 80-74 victory Thursday night.

Despite having three rookies in the starting lineup, the Cavs cut a 13-point, first-half deficit to 75-73 with 2:15 left. But Reggie Miller corralled two crucial rebounds in the final half-minute to send the Pacers into the second round against either New York or Miami.

Miller led the Pacers with 19 points, and Rik Smits had 17. Chris Mullin, Bird's former Olympic teammate, had 12 points.

SuperSonics 92, Timberwolves 88

MINNEAPOLIS — On the verge of losing in the first round of the playoffs for the third time in five years, the Seattle SuperSonics responded with a 92-88 victory over Minnesota to send the Western Conference series to a deciding Game 5 in Seattle on Saturday.

Gary Payton led the second-seeded Sonics with 24 points and eight assists, and this time Seattle didn't falter in the second half as it did in losing the last two games to the seventh-seeded Wolves.

Trailing 61-58 with 4:24 left in the third quarter after a burst by Minnesota's Kevin Garnett, the Sonics started a 19-6 run when Garnett went to the bench for a rest.

The run ended when Payton hit a three-pointer for a 77-67 lead with 8:42 left in the game. The Wolves scratched back to 91-88 when Garnett scored with seven seconds left, but Greg Anthony hit the second of two free throws to clinch it.

Trail Blazers bow out of playoffs

The Lakers led from nearly start to finish as Portland was bounced from the first round for the sixth-straight season

By Bob Baum

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Shaquille O'Neal got the help he wanted from his teammates Thursday night, and the Los Angeles Lakers eliminated Portland from the playoffs with a near wire-to-wire 110-99 victory over the cold-shooting Trail Blazers.

The series ended exactly as it did last year, with the Lakers ousting the Blazers in four games. Los Angeles advances to the conference semifinals against the winner of the Seattle-Minnesota series.

O'Neal had 31 points and 15 rebounds, but it was his supporting cast that made the difference. O'Neal blasted his teammates after the Lakers' loss in Game 3 for failing to hit the open shots. They hit them this time.

The Lakers shot 58 percent from the field, compared to Portland's 39 percent.

Kobe Bryant had 13 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter, including two soaring dunks and an acrobatic driving layup in the fourth quarter when the Lakers smashed a brief Portland rally.

Rick Fox had 16 points and nine rebounds for the Lakers, and Nick Van Exel added 14 points and seven assists.

Damon Stoudamire had 24 points in 46 minutes for Portland, and Brian Grant added 18 points and 12 rebounds. Rasheed Wallace scored 17, but most came when the game's outcome was determined. Arvydas Sabonis scored 15, but none in the fourth quarter.

For the first time in the series, the Lakers outrebounded Portland, 47-40. The Blazers had a 52-38 advantage on the boards in their 99-94 victory in Game 3 Tuesday night. Los Angeles reserves,

outscored 26-12 in Game 3, outscored the Blazers' backups 48-15 in Game 4.

The Lakers took control early in the first quarter and never relinquished it, leading by as many as 18 in the second quarter, 16 in the third and 20 in the fourth.

Portland, knocked out in the first round for the sixth year in a row, never came closer than seven in the third quarter.

With O'Neal already on the bench anticipating victory, the Blazers cut a 94-74 deficit to 105-99 with 32.9 seconds to go on three-pointers by Wallace, Stoudamire and Walt Williams in a 30-second span.

Van Exel ended any thoughts of a miracle Portland finish with two free throws with 32.7 seconds remaining.

It was the second rally snuffed out by the Lakers in the fourth quarter.

Stoudamire's two free throws with nine minutes, 17 seconds to play cut the lead to 80-70, but Corie Blount scored on a stuff, Fox hit an 18-footer and Bryant soared for a one-handed slam to make it 86-70 with 7:06 to go in the game, and the Blazers were finished.

After an early 12-8 lead that had the big crowd roaring, the Blazers' offense vanished, and the Lakers ran a layup drill.

Portland went 5:52 without a field goal during a 16-1 run that put Los Angeles up 24-13 after O'Neal's basket with 1:45 left in the period. O'Neal had 13 points in the first quarter.

A 12-0 outburst in the second period made it 44-28 after Bryant's inside move 6:05 before halftime.

Grant's inside play helped the Blazers cut the lead to seven twice in the third quarter, but he went to the bench with four fouls with 3:37 left in the period. The Lakers outscored Portland 11-3, rebuilt a 16-point lead, and were up 78-65 entering the final quarter.