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Business-like Bulls demolish Pacers in Game 4

Chicago opened up a 13-point lead after the first quarter and cruised to an easy victory

By Chris Sheridan
The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Swiftly and decisively, the Chicago Bulls responded like the champions they are.

After being called whiners instead of winners and having their dynasty threatened, Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen and the rest of the Bulls were efficient, ruthless and just plain devastating in a 106-87 victory over Indiana. It gave them a 3-2 lead in the Eastern Conference finals.

"Tonight was unexpected dominance," Jordan said. "We didn't expect that. We took it to them and wanted to see how they would respond, and they didn't respond like we expected. We just dominated them."

These were not the cruise control Bulls of Games 1 and 2, nor the Upsetabulls of Games 3 and 4.

These were the serious Bulls, just like the 1996 and 1997 versions. And right from the get-go Wednesday night, it was clear

they meant business.

Jordan and Pippen led a first-half onslaught that left the Pacers reeling, and there was no let-up in the second half.

"Deep down I thought they were going to come in and lay it all on the line," Pacers head coach Larry Bird said of his team. "But tonight they just didn't play. For what reason I have no idea."

"It was a dynamic first half in terms of aggression," Chicago head coach Phil Jackson said. "Friday's game is going to be a different matter. We're going to have to perfect our game, bring it up to another level. That is the goal and aspiration of this team right now."

"We haven't been in this position for a while," Jordan said of the 2-2 standoff heading into Wednesday night. "Everybody came out focused. We won this one in Chicago and now we have to win one in Indianapolis."

Jordan scored 29 points with seven rebounds and four assists as he led the team in scoring for the 13th time in 13 playoff games.

Pippen finished with 20 points, eight rebounds and seven assists and Toni Kukoc added 19 points as the Bulls avoided their first three-game losing streak with Jordan on the team since the fall of 1990.

Jordan reached 35,000 career points, including regular season and playoffs, third behind Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Wilt Chamberlain.

Game 6 is Friday night, and the Bulls will be looking to clinch their third straight trip to the NBA Finals and a possible repeat threepeat for their sixth championship this decade. Game 7, if necessary, is Sunday night.

"Chicago comes out and plays strong all the time, that's why they're champions," Bird said. As for his own team, he added: "I'm sure they'll bounce back. Knowing this team they bounce back pretty well. They won't want their season to end on a note like this."

Chicago opened a 29-16 lead after one quarter, held Indiana without a field goal for more than 14 minutes en route to a 25-point halftime lead and went ahead by as many as 33 for the most decisive win of the series.

"We were just anxious to get back out on the court," Pippen said. "We felt we should have won at least one of the games there."

The Bulls held the Pacers to 34 percent shooting and allowed Indiana to make only 23 field goals — two more than the playoff-record low of 21 set on four occasions.

Pippen, averaging 15 in the first four games of the series, surpassed that by halftime as he and Jordan had 17 points apiece.

Indiana had only eight baskets in the first half.

The Bulls took control midway through the first quarter with a 14-0 run, turning a 10-7 deficit into a 21-10 lead.

Gone were the smug smiles the Bulls wore through the first four games, replaced by the cold stares of fierce competitors. Even when the referees slapped Pippen and Dennis Rodman with quick-trigger technical fouls, nothing could take away from the Bulls' focus.

Pippen, Jordan and Kukoc scored all the points in the early 14-0 run, and Chicago led 29-16 after one quarter.

Exchange: Molde to leave UO after term

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"I was contacted by schools with varsity soccer teams but chose to come here for academic reasons," he says. "Also, I have a lot of friends here from high school."

Molde adds that he isn't looking to play professionally, and so playing for an NCAA Division I-A team is not a priority.

"It's not that important because I'm going back to Europe anyway," he says. "It's not like I'm going to go for a career here."

Although he isn't banking on making it professionally, if Molde were to make money playing soccer, he'd have a better chance in the United States, he says.

"If I were to play professionally, it would be here in the States," he says. "In Europe it would be really difficult. I couldn't hack practice. There's no way I could do it."

Molde says there are some aspects of his game that need work — namely speed.

"I could work on everything," he says. "I'm basically slow now — not that I've ever been fast."

Eight months ago, Molde had surgery to repair a torn ACL, which he says slowed him down even more.

Nevertheless, Oregon midfielder Matt Krovitz says Molde is the best player on the squad.

"Jay's pretty persistent and has a good work ethic," Krovitz says. "He is a skilled player who can create goals from anything. He's always just scoring on people at will. He's unstoppable."

Molde says his most memorable game came against Maryland in the National Club Sports Championships in Georgia last year.

He scored four goals in a 6-1 Oregon win in pool

play, but the Ducks weren't able to make it past North Carolina in the first round of the tournament's playoffs.

"Just the fact that we won by such a big [margin] in the nationals was great," Molde says. "Plus, I was also coaching the team at the time."

As with many Northern Europeans, Molde tears up the slopes cross-country skiing and snowboarding when not in his soccer uniform. He also enjoys speed skating and track.

Molde says he is looking forward to rejoining his old soccer teammates when he heads back to Norway later this year.

"Hopefully, I'll be able to play on my old team," he says. "It'll be a rough time because I'm not in as good shape as I was when I first came over here."

This is Molde's last term at Oregon, as he will go on exchange to Australia for completion of his last undergraduate term. If possible, Molde says he would like to continue playing "Down Under."

"I don't know what it's going to be like down there," he says. "But I'll be looking for a team, no less."

Molde's plans for the summer are similar to those of many soccer fans worldwide, as he says he will just be "kickin' it" — this time figuratively.

"I will relax and enjoy watching the World Cup," he says.

In a soccer career that spans almost 20 years — from starting off as a four-year-old prodigy to coaching a team that went on to the National Club Sports Championships — Molde says he will soon cap off a stellar two-year career with the Ducks by, he hopes, packing another city league title in his suitcase.

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