

Knicks kick selves again in playoff race

By Ken Berger
The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Allan Houston disappeared in the second half again, and the New York Knicks lost their fourth straight to move closer to vanishing from the playoff race.

Houston was 0-for-4 with no points in the second half, missing a wild 3-point attempt that would have tied it in the last 10 seconds as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Knicks 72-67 Monday night.

The Knicks, in a three-way tie for ninth place in the Eastern Conference, dropped their season-high fourth straight as they once again failed to make clutch plays down the stretch. New York committed eight of its 18 turnovers in the fourth quarter.

The Sixers kept a hold on the seventh spot with a 1 1/2-game lead over New York, Toronto and Charlotte.

Matt Geiger had 22 points, and Allen Iverson had 20 despite another poor shooting performance. He was 6-for-17 a day after going 2-for-17 in a loss to New Jersey.

Theo Ratliff missed two free throws with 21 seconds left, and Aaron McKie outfought Larry Johnson for the rebound, seemingly stealing New York's last chance. But Iverson went 1-for-2 from the line with 17 seconds remaining, giving the Knicks hope

as they trailed 70-67.

Latrell Sprewell missed a driving jumper, got his own rebound and passed to Chris Childs, who couldn't get a 3-pointer off and found Houston across the court. Houston's double-clutch shot bounced over the backboard, and Eric Snow sealed the victory with two free throws.

Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy, looking ever more haggard as the season slips away, took off his sports coat and walked off the court with his head down after the buzzer sounded.

Houston finished with 12 points, all in the first half. Sprewell had 16 and Ewing 11 for the Knicks, who have three days of soul searching ahead of them before their next game.

Ewing, who stripped Geiger leading to a layup by Childs, scored five straight points during an 8-2 run that cut the Sixers' lead to 66-64 with 2:46 left. Ratliff ended the drought by going 1-for-2 at the line after an exhilarating sequence involving Iverson and Sprewell.

Iverson missed a jumper, and Sprewell sprinted out with the long rebound on a breakaway. McKie chased him down, blocked the shot and got the ball ahead to Iverson. After Iverson missed a driving layup, Ratliff got the rebound and was fouled.

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reportedly told him he was ruining his career. Then she hung up on him.

So, imagine what issues started to swirl in the minds of the NFL's owners and management: Gee, that Williams boy, he does have those dreadlocks. And golly, his tongue really is pierced. What about all those tattoos? It could be a problem, his also wanting a pro baseball career. How much weight has he gained, 10 pounds? Or is it 25?

Oh, and his hands, they're kind of small too, aren't they?

And, yes indeed, there's going to be plenty of other great athletes in the draft this year, isn't there?

Williams suddenly found himself going through some things; silly factors that had been eagerly overlooked weeks before became full-fledged issues.

So what was Williams trying to do, hookin' up with the No Limit family? Keep it real? Expand his reach to include kids who he might not be able to influence with just sport?

Undoubtedly, yes.

It wasn't only Williams' associ-

ation with No Limit, and thus Master P, that caused his stock with NFL teams to drop.

There were several other qualified players — like Smith — who were suitable fits for the franchises with the early picks. And William's fluctuating weight was understandably an area of concern.

But it's obvious that P's presence did limit Williams' appeal.

When all is said and done, the draft order won't have a great impact on Williams' career. Considering that he is New Orleans' sole pick of the draft, the Saints will surely pay him as if he were a No. 1 pick.

New Orleans coach Mike Ditka is ecstatic to have him. And the No Limit family — based in Baton Rouge, just up the road from the Saints — should be thrilled to have their brother in pads and helmet so close to home.

Ya heard?

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