

# Rocker's suspension reduced to 14 days

■ After being subjected to John Rocker's derogatory comments, his teammates are ready to move on

By Ronald Blum  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — John Rocker's suspension was cut in half to the first 14 days of the regular season, and he can report to the Atlanta's spring training camp Thursday, The Associated Press learned today.

The reliever, punished for disparaging foreigners, homosexuals and minorities in a magazine interview, could arrive in Kissimmee, Fla., in time for workouts Thursday, baseball sources familiar with the arbitrator's decision told the AP on the condition they not be identified.

Shyam Das, making his first decision as baseball's independent arbitrator, also cut Rocker's \$20,000 fine. The amount of the fine will be reduced to \$500, one

of the sources said.

There was no immediate announcement by Atlanta, but a news conference was expected at 3 p.m. EST.

"I think it's fair," Atlanta pitcher Tom Glavine said. "It allows him some of spring training to get ready for the season. ... If not, you run the risk of John ruining his career. No one wants that. That would be unfair."

Rocker originally was suspended for all 45 days of spring training and the first 28 days of the regular season by commissioner Bud Selig.

"I think this is good all the way around," Atlanta reliever Rudy Seanez said. "Everybody is ready to get past it and move on."

Atlanta city councilor Derrick Boazman, leader of a coalition of minority groups that has called for the Atlanta to release Rocker, was unhappy with the decision.

"Hate and bigotry and homophobia and racism have a place, evidently, and that place is in major league baseball," he said.

In his Jan. 31 decision, Selig said Rocker's comments in a December issue of Sports Illustrated "offended practically every element of society."

Rocker will wind up missing the first 13 days of spring training and, if no games are postponed by weather, the first 12 games of the regular season. Atlanta's first game after the suspension is against Philadelphia at Turner Field on April 18.

Rocker told the magazine he would never play for a New York team because he didn't want to ride a subway train "next to some queer with AIDS." He also mocked foreigners and called a Latin teammate a "fat monkey."

Randall Simon, who believes he was the target of Rocker's "fat monkey" comment, said today he is ready to forgive.

"If he comes to me and apologizes, everything will be all right," Simon said. "He's one of my teammates. Everybody makes mistakes."

Simon said he hopes Rocker

will address the team as a whole, as well as offer him a personal apology.

"I think he should because of what happened and what he said about me," Simon said. "He should give me some respect. I think I deserve an apology so we can move on."

Brian Jordan, another of Rocker's harshest critics, said Rocker has to change his ways. Many team members thought the reliever was out of line in seeking the limelight last October.

"He has to be more mature dealing with certain situations and dealing with his teammates," Jordan said. "He has to learn to control his anger. I think that's a big reason he said what he said."

The players' association filed a grievance against Selig, arguing the penalty was too great when compared with past discipline by the commissioner's office. The union repeatedly has succeeded in convincing arbitrators to overturn or reduce suspensions.

Selig's original penalty was be-

lieved to be the longest against a baseball player for an action not related to drug use since Lenny Randle of Texas got 30 days in March 1977 for punching his manager, Frank Lucchesi.

The 25-year-old reliever was heavily criticized by Atlanta civic officials and even teammates. But since training camp opened, some team members have said they would be willing to forgive Rocker if he showed remorse through his words and actions. Atlanta owner Ted Turner said he deserved a second chance.

"My feeling is I would rather deal with it now, when the outcome of the games doesn't matter, than have it drop on us right dab in the middle of the season," Glavine said. "We still have to exercise some patience. It's already getting old, and even if he gets here tomorrow or Friday, it's not going to go away for a while."

"John should have a chance to explain himself and show that the way he was portrayed in the article was not his real mindset," said Glavine.

## L.A. Lakers have shown who is the best in NBA

By Landon Hall  
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — The Los Angeles Lakers again have the NBA's longest winning streak all to themselves. And, more than ever, they look like championship material.

The Lakers showed plenty of grit Tuesday night in a 90-87 victory over the Portland Blazers, the team that could stand between the Lakers and the NBA finals this season.

"We think we're a great defensive team, though people seem to overlook us," the Lakers' Glen Rice said.

The Lakers have won 12 straight games, including six victories on an Eastern Conference trip. They have held Utah to 67 points, Minnesota to 81, Charlotte to 85 and Philadelphia to 84.

Kobe Bryant has been playing particularly well, shutting down the 76ers' Allen Iverson and Houston's Steve Francis in the second half.

Los Angeles is 46-11, one game better than Portland in the Pacific Division. The Lakers and Trail Blazers were both on 11-game winning streaks entering their showdown.

The Lakers are positioned to gain homecourt advantage through the playoffs. But the Blazers have two more home games than the Lakers, and Portland had won 16 straight at the Rose Garden before Tuesday night.

"Even after last night's game, we feel good that we have a great chance of being there at the end in June," Portland's Steve Smith said.

The teams are 2-2 head-to-head, the first tiebreaker should they finish the season with the same record. Portland leads by a game in the next tiebreaker, conference record (27-8).

Both teams have easy opponents coming up: Portland's next six games are against teams that have a combined .471 winning percentage. Aside from Indiana and Miami, L.A. plays Vancouver, the Los Angeles Clippers, Golden State and Denver in the next two weeks.

"Win or lose, it wasn't going to break our season," Shaquille O'Neal said after scoring 23

points against the Blazers. "Now that we did win, we can't have any more slippage. The reason we had identical records is we had slippage, we lost six out of nine" after winning 16 straight from Dec. 11 to Jan. 12.

On Tuesday night, Los Angeles harassed the Blazers into missing six straight shots after Scottie Pippen's 3-pointer gave Portland an 85-84 lead with 3:07 to play. The Blazers, who lead the NBA in field-goal shooting at 47 percent, shot just 40 percent.

Los Angeles also shot holes in the notion that Portland has the league's best reserves. The Blazers' bench usually averages about 30 points a game, but the reserves were outscored 25-18 by their Lakers counterparts.

Brian Shaw played 23 minutes, getting nine points and seven rebounds. Robert Horry added five rebounds, and Derek Fisher, mired in a 30 percent shooting slump during the streak, had five points and two assists.

"Our bench is tired of hearing about how great Portland's bench is," Rice said.

The Blazers rallied from 11 points behind in the fourth period. When Pippen hit a 27-footer, Portland appeared headed to victory. But the Lakers clamped down, and the Blazers' familiar problem of having no established leader resulted in confusion on the potential tying possession. Pippen launched a tough 3-pointer and Smith flung a desperation shot over the backboard.

"That one play didn't lose the game for us," Smith said. "Before that, there were so many unforced turnovers."

O'Neal hit two of four free throws in the fourth quarter and was 9-of-13 for the game. More important, coach Phil Jackson has the confidence to leave him on the floor late, when the Hack-a-Shaq strategy is in effect.

"That never worked," said O'Neal, who was ejected from a November loss in Portland for fighting back after the Blazers' hard fouls. "Whenever I concentrate, I shoot them like Jerry West. When I don't concentrate, I shoot them like Wilt [Chamberlain]."



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