

Sonics hope to even series

■ The Jazz went back to Utah between Games 3 and 4, and they want to avoid a Game 5

By Jim Cour
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — Gary Payton and the Seattle SuperSonics needed that first victory. Now, they think they can get two more against the Utah Jazz.

"I'm all right, and we're OK now," Payton said after Tuesday's practice. "You can't think about next year. We don't have 82 more games. If we lose, we're out."

"It's always exciting if you keep playing," he added. "I don't want to go home."

After winning Game 3 of their first-round playoff series with Utah, the Sonics can tie the series at 2-2 Wednesday night at Key Arena. Game 5, if necessary, will be played Friday in Salt Lake City.

The Sonics prevailed 89-78 Saturday in Seattle as coach Paul Westphal utilized a big lineup of Vin Baker, Horace Grant, Rashard Lewis, Ruben Patterson and Payton at key stretches in the second half. The 6-foot-10 Lewis played with Payton in the backcourt as Seattle's shooting guard.

Utah and Seattle split four games during the regular season, with each team going 1-1 on its homecourt. The Jazz won 98-95 on March 24 in Seattle.

Faced with playoff elimination and a painful summer of criticism, second-year coach Westphal did not play Lazaro Borrell in Game 3 after starting him in Game 1 and playing him off the bench in Game 2. And Westphal used Shammond Williams for 15 minutes after starting him in the first two games, when he averaged 35 minutes.

"I like any lineup if you hustle," said Payton, who led the Sonics' win with 23 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds. "A big lineup isn't going to help you if you

don't hustle. If it hustles, it helps you. Any lineup that gets in there when we play together and play right, it's always going to help you."

While Karl Malone had 30 points for the Jazz in Game 3, John Stockton was limited to four points on 1-for-8 shooting. Stockton had 21 points in Game 2.

Payton led the Sonics into the NBA Finals in 1996 and has played in the playoffs in nine of his 10 years in the league. He averaged a career-best 24.2 points during the regular season and is averaging 22.3 points, while shooting 41.5 percent in the playoffs.

As Payton goes, so go the Sonics. Even when he's shooting poorly. Payton shot 44.8 during the regular season.

"I'm not worried about 30s and 40s," the All-Star point guard said. "I'm still scoring. It doesn't make a difference. If I'm missing shots, I'm missing shots. I don't care about my shots."

Payton did his best to carry the Sonics this season. But sometimes even he wasn't enough. The Sonics were woeful in losing Games 1 and 2 104-93 and 101-87.

"I don't know anything about being unpredictable," Payton said. "I just know we're going to play basketball, and we're going to be straight."

The Jazz returned to Salt Lake City between Games 3 and 4. After Tuesday's practice there, they said they were hoping to avoid playing a Game 5.

"Hopefully I can bring a lot of energy to the game," said Malone, a 15-year veteran who exploded for 50 points in Game 1. "I think the worst thing that can happen is for me to think, 'It's Game 4 I have to take it all on myself.' I need to stay within what we are trying to do and get everybody involved."

"I just want to win. I want to win Game 4 and not worry about anything else."

Bird faces his final game

■ The ultimate player's coach hopes to get the same effort from his team that made him one of the best ever

By Steve Wilstein
The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Swish after swish, the net snapping like a whip, Larry Bird sinks five shots in row from different spots on the 3-point arc to wipe out rookie Jonathan Bender in a game of H-O-R-S-E.

Again. "I kill him all the time," Bird says with a grin as he walks off the court.

Some coaches might scream at their players after a listless loss in a playoff game. Bird calmly takes his men through a couple of hours of easy drills and a shootaround that ends with him sinking a few more shots for good luck.

In his last days on a job he never intended to keep past this season, Bird still is the ultimate player's coach, one of the guys.

He's sensitive to what gets under the skin of players when they've been embarrassed, as his Indiana Pacers were at home in Game 2 of the opening-round playoff series against the Milwaukee Bucks and again in Game 4. Although he believes he's not a good coach, he knows not to push them too much.

Here he is close to the end of his three-year tenure on the sidelines, unsure of what he will do next, and he looks neither edgy nor resigned. The situation is tight, but he wants his players to stay loose. He just hopes they will respond with the same intensity he demanded of himself when he wore a Boston Celtics uniform.

They did exactly that in Game 3, beating the Bucks 109-96 Saturday night in Milwaukee to move ahead 2-1 in the best-of-five series despite the absence of suspended center Rik Smits.

Then Monday night in Milwaukee, the

Pacers once again lost to the hot-shooting Bucks, 100-87, tying the series 2-2 and sending it back to Indianapolis on Thursday.

Bird didn't rant on the bench or in the locker room this time, either, as his team stood one loss from elimination, and he moved one game closer to retirement. Hands clasped like a schoolboy, his expression as stoic as ever, Bird knew his players would respond to wounded pride more than any exhortation he could deliver.

Bird never asked his players to shoot like him, to have his touch or vision, to score and rebound and pass like him, or to come up with the big plays night after night the way he did in leading the Celtics to three titles. All he ever expected of them was to play like professionals, with the kind of passion he felt the game deserved.

So he looked puzzled and offended, rather than openly angry, when asked why a veteran team should be lackadaisical in the playoffs.

"I never could understand that," he said.

It was a rare lapse of intensity in the Bird era of the Pacers. In his quiet, dignified way, Bird brought the best out of his players by giving them a balance of guidance, freedom and respect that they appreciated.

"You don't want to let Larry down," Jalen Rose said.

The 43-year-old Bird will walk away from coaching with no regrets, only a deep disappointment about failing to achieve his goal the first two years: a berth in the NBA Finals and a shot at the title.

"I enjoy coaching, and it's been very interesting, but I'm not very good at it. I don't like to do things that I'm not very good at," Bird said without a hint of false modesty.

"I'd liked to have won one once here. But even more than winning a championship, if I thought I was a good coach maybe I would have wanted to stay."

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Buzz Bargain

Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (May 3). This year you're achieving new levels of self-confidence and competence. Take care of others, too, and you'll make wise choices. Finish your considerations in May so you can take action by June. Launch a new inquiry in July. Full speed ahead through the summer and autumn. New information could be upsetting in December. Learn from it. In February take on a challenge just for the fun of it. More income could be your reward.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is a 4 — Sort, file and put your assets into rows. Do this in private. It's nobody's business but your own. This is good practice, in case you win the lottery. Even if you don't, you can become fabulously wealthy. And, why not? You'd do good things with the money.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 10 — You have the world on a string. You are incredibly powerful; you can have almost whatever you want. You are the 800 pound gorilla. But, you will have to live with your actions now, forever. So be kind and gentle. Think of others.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 3 — You'll get stronger in a couple of days. Meanwhile, stay secluded as much as possible. Consult your most trusted spiritual advisers and rest. The conditions in effect today won't happen again. Make the most of this rare opportunity.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 10 — Everybody wants your time, attention and enthusiasm. You're the spark that gets them going. If you don't keep them motivated, they may forget to take action. Keep those engines stoked, or your train will never get out of the station!

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 5 — Just about everything is in Taurus today, in your Solar 10th House of success. If you take a job today, you'll keep it for years. Negotiate a deal you can live with — even if it's difficult to do.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 9 — Foreigners are playing a more important part in your life all the time. That will be true for a while, so get used to it. You may decide to get another credential, too. It couldn't hurt, and if you have to travel to get it, so much the better.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) — Today is a 4 — Your lesson for today — and the rest of this year — is about money. Can you make sure you have enough, always and forever? That's what you need to learn. If you're just a kid, so much the better. You'll be a multimillionaire by the time you retire.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21) — Today is a 9 — Your partner has taken control. You generally don't like to hand over the reins, but if you've chosen wisely, it'll be OK. If you're hooked up with a person you don't trust, make a choice. Learn to trust or boogie on out of there.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 5 — Don't avoid the work. This is the chance of a lifetime. Figure out ways to streamline your procedures. Be efficient and do things in batches. Make it fun, and you'll make your fortune.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 10 — You could be the luckiest person in the world today with romance, games and children. This may not increase your financial holdings; in fact, it may cost you money. You couldn't make a wiser investment, however, than in your own happiness. Just do it.


AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 5 — You may want to stay home and think things over. Do that as much as possible. As conditions change, you'll feel like talking with others. Meanwhile, put down roots. Settle into an environment that's supportive.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 10 — Study, study, study. Don't worry about the money; that will come later. For now, you just need to learn the material and understand it. Go over it until you do. Ask questions; none are foolish. You're learning quickly. Keep at it.

090 BIRTHDAYS
Happy Birthday Robyn!
Love, Colin

095 PERSONALS
If Jesus was a love child, Joseph was the best of stepfathers. Put law school on T.V.! Tax churches!

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE LIVING THIS SUMMER?



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