

# Riley and the Heat await that finishing touch

By Steven Wine  
The Associated Press

MIAMI — The play is a geometric marvel, with a series of quick moves and crisp passes at sharp angles leading to an easy layup that, alas, falls meekly off the rim.

"Finish!" Pat Riley hollers from the perimeter of the Miami Heat's practice court. "Finish strong!"

Riley is shouting at the shooter, but all of his players hear the admonition, as well they should. In five seasons the Heat have yet to muster a finish worthy of their esteemed coach.

Miami was swept by the Chicago Bulls in the first round of the 1996 playoffs, and routed again by Chicago the following year in the Eastern Conference finals. Then came even more dismal defeats — opening-round meltdowns against Riley's former team, the New York Knicks, in 1998 and 1999.

No wonder Riley's coiffed hair is turning gray. He spent four seasons trying unsuccessfully to win

a title in New York, then fled to Miami amid much acrimony. Now, as he braces for another clash with the Knicks beginning Sunday, Riley is reluctant to acknowledge the toll the bitter rivalry has taken.

"Do we have to beat them to get over a mental hump?" Riley asks. "Or to make my life better? Or to ensure my peace of mind so when I'm 65, I won't have any nightmares?"

"No. I'm past that now." Yes, Riley has already accomplished enough for a place in the Basketball Hall of Fame. He won four NBA titles in his first seven seasons with Magic Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and the Los Angeles Lakers. But it has been a long time since Showtime, and Riley won his most recent ring in 1988.

"He wants to get back to that level, and we want to get him back," Heat forward P.J. Brown says. "He talks about it a lot. He

shows us old films with him and Magic and those guys."

Riley, 55, hasn't forgotten how to win since leaving Los Angeles. His 999 regular-season victories rank second only to Lenny Wilkens, and his 152 playoff victories rank first. He has won 16 division titles in 18 years, including four in a row in Miami.

But he knows that winning the final game is what matters most. And since Riley arrived in Miami, touting his dream of a championship parade down Biscayne Boulevard, each season has ended painfully shy of the last round.

Forgive Riley for declining to reminisce. "We all know the history," he says. "Let's get ourselves ready to play. All the other stuff just drains everybody. ..."

"We're in the second round, and we're interested in advancing. I know all the stuff that's going to be written and brought up from the past. While you have to look back

to get a bead on the future, the important thing is to look at the present."

The present looks daunting. The Knicks are cocky as ever, and the Heat may be without their best clutch player, hobbled point guard Tim Hardaway.

When asked if the Heat are determined, Riley looks at the floor.

"They're highly determined," he says. "But my wife is highly determined when she goes to Saks Fifth Avenue, too. Determination is one thing. Doing it is another thing. You've got to do it. I think there was a commercial about doing it."

Everyone acknowledges this is probably the last chance for this group of Heat players. After last year's stunning loss to the Knicks, Riley decided against shaking up the roster, which prompted critics to label him stand-pat Riley.

Detractors say the Heat are mired among the second tier of NBA teams because their coach

has been too reluctant to part with Hardaway, Brown or Jamal Mashburn. Miami's last major trade was more than three years ago.

"We're all very thankful that coach kept the team together," Brown says. "I've always thought we had enough here to get the job done."

Beginning Sunday, they get one more chance to show it. With meticulous preparation and psychological ploys, Riley will do what he can to help. But Hardaway is not healthy, Mashburn is not Magic Johnson, and Alonzo Mourning is not Abdul-Jabbar.

The decline of the Miami Dolphins makes Riley the most celebrated sports figure in South Florida. Recently, he said he's at the beginning of the end of his career, and an agreement last year on a contract extension means he'll probably finish with the Heat.

But finish strong? First Riley has to figure out how to beat the Knicks.

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### Horoscope by Linda C. Black

**TODAY'S BIRTHDAY** (May 4). You're coming into your own this year. You're increasingly sure of yourself, and it shows. Stand up to authority figures in May, and they'll treat you with greater respect. Spend money on yourself in June and tune up your image. Learn what you need to do next and how to do it in July. Things should go your way through the summer and fall. Around mid-December you could have a setback, but you're strong and smart enough to handle it. Accept new responsibilities around February.

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 5 — By now you should know how to be thrifty. Don't take risks. Tell people who want your money that you're still thinking about it. Read the fine print and do the homework. Don't be ashamed to make a deal that works for you. It's OK to do that.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 10 — Move quickly. That's not easy for you, but it's time. Take action on something you've thought about for a long time. You have an incredible advantage now, but conditions are changing. Grab this chance and make a difference.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 4 — You'll come out of hiding by tomorrow. You're almost finished with whatever you've been working on. You're about to have a breakthrough, and then you'll want to take action. Don't rush things; trust your instincts.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 9 — Groups and organizations are important in your life now. You're coming out of your shell, and sometimes that's difficult. You may have to deal with some things you've been avoiding! Don't worry; you're strong enough now. Get tough!

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 5 — A lid has been kept on your enthusiasm. You've been playing to a critical audience. That's about to change. By tomorrow you'll be the star of the show. And, you'll be better for the lesson you've recently learned.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 9 — You've had some lucky breaks over the past few days. Don't get overconfident, though. Expect a quiz tomorrow. You may be asked to prove you know what you're talking about. Go over your notes one more time.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) — Today is a 6 — You may have recently discovered that you enjoy budgeting! Putting those numbers into rows is kind of fun. A task that was once drudgery could become a fun game. If this is happening, you're learning how to win! Keep at it.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 24-Nov. 21) — Today is an 8 — You and your partner need to get together to talk about money. How much do you have and how are you going to spend it? This could be a delicate subject, but don't put it off. Concede a point or two and get the agreement so you can go shopping.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 5 — If you can't help everyone who wants what you have, you could hire somebody to help. Think about it tonight and call a few people tomorrow. An argumentative person could be perfect. So, don't take the first 'no' for an answer.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 10 — You're still lucky, but don't procrastinate. Make the decision you've contemplated for the past few days. You'll have to get back to work tomorrow so you can't afford to wait any longer. Don't spend too much, either.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 6 — A lot of activity is going on at home. If you recently moved, you almost should be settled by now. You'll have more time for romance and games tomorrow and the next day. Meanwhile, do whatever needs to be done to get things right.

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 10 — Focus on the subject you're learning. This is the way to make your dreams come true. Your friends may want you to come out and play, but turn them down. Right now the most important thing for you to do is practice, practice, practice!

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