

Pippen leads Portland to easy win

By Landon Hall
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — The Utah Jazz were exhausted. Then Karl Malone was tired of hearing about Scottie Pippen.

Pippen scored nine of his 20 points over the final nine minutes as the Portland Trail Blazers pulled away for an easy 94-75 victory Sunday in Game 1 of their best-of-seven Western Conference semifinals.

"It took us three quarters before we could really get a good feel for this team, but in the fourth quarter our defense took over," said Pippen, who averaged 6.8 points in four regular-season games against the Jazz.

Pippen may once again keep Malone from getting a championship ring. Pippen and Michael Jordan helped the Chicago Bulls beat the Jazz in the NBA Finals in 1997 and 1998.

When asked whether these kinds of games were the reason Pippen was acquired by the Blazers from Houston, Malone

snapped: "I don't want to hear that," followed by an expletive. "I don't care about that. End of interview. I'm done here."

The Jazz were playing on less than two days' rest after struggling past Seattle in Game 5 of their first-round series Friday night. The Blazers had four days off, and Utah's exhaustion showed.

The Jazz missed nine of their first 10 shots in the fourth quarter and shot 33 percent for the period — slightly worse than the 37 percent they shot for the game. But Jazz coach Jerry Sloan dismissed that the lack of rest had anything to do with his team's dismal performance.

"Our guys didn't come to play," he said. "I'll tell you right now, we didn't come to play, and this series will be over real quick if they're going to accept that."

"They had 24 hours to sleep. That's their own fault if they can't get the rest and get ready to play. We had too many days off last week. Now we get a little rest. Who cares? I don't care, because

they get paid to play, and they're supposed to."

The Blazers led 65-61 to start the fourth quarter, but Pippen's aggressiveness helped put the game away.

His short turnaround jumper
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with 8:36 remaining, Pippen hit a 3-pointer to make it 80-67, and Greg Anthony sealed it with two free throws, a layup and 3-pointer for an 87-71 lead with 3:48 to go.

"This is just one game. We don't want to read too much into it," Pippen said. "We have to do the job that we have to do in this series, and that is defend the home court in all games."

Utah has lost its last 12 playoff games in Portland dating to the 1991 conference finals.

Malone scored 22 points despite straining a ligament in his left knee on a freak play late in the

second quarter. Malone was sitting on the bench when teammate Armen Gilliam dived for a rebound and crashed into Malone's chair. Malone came out limping slightly in the third quarter, but played the rest of the way.

Damon Stoudamire added 14 points, 10 in the first quarter, as six Blazers scored in double figures. Arvydas Sabonis had 14 rebounds and Brian Grant added 10.

The Blazers had a tremendous advantage at the line, hitting 26 of 27 free throws after making just eight of their first 14. Utah got to the line just 23 times, hitting 16.

The Blazers pulled away from a 12-all tie with a 10-0 run as Utah missed nine straight shots over a nearly six-minute span. The Blazers didn't make a shot over the final 3:50, and managed a 23-15 lead after one quarter.

"Our guys came out with the right intensity, the right defensive mindset, and we got off early," Portland coach Mike Dunleavy said.

Shaq, Lakers coast

LOS ANGELES — Just about every member of the Phoenix Suns, or so it seemed, took a turn guarding Shaquille O'Neal on Sunday.

After the first quarter, no one had much luck.

O'Neal overcame a slow start to score 37 points, grab 14 rebounds and block four shots as the Los Angeles Lakers trounced the Suns 105-77 in the opener of their Western Conference semifinals.

Game 2 will be played Wednesday night at the Staples Center.

Kobe Bryant added 25 points for the Lakers. Anfernee Hardaway led the Suns with 25 points, while Cliff Robinson, who battled foul problems, added 13.

Jason Kidd, playing just his second game since breaking his left ankle March 22, was held to three points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

O'Neal made the game's first shot before missing his final six attempts in the first quarter, when he scored four points.

After that, with the likes of Luc Longley, Robinson, Corie Blount, Oliver Miller, Rogers, and occasionally others, trying to defend him, the Suns had minimal success.

O'Neal's dominance was never more evident than one sequence early in the third quarter. He missed from close range, got the rebound over Longley, missed again, got the rebound again, and scored.

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Heat wins Game 1

MIAMI — The start of the Miami Heat-New York Knicks series was worth the wait.

After a week of hype, the bitter rivals lived up to the buildup in Game 1 Sunday, when Miami won a thriller 87-83 thanks to two baskets by Alonzo Mourning in the final 42 seconds.

The lead changed hands seven times in a five-minute stretch during the fourth quarter, and the score was tied at 79, 81 and 83 before Mourning came through.

He got position inside on Patrick Ewing, took a feed from Dan Majerle and scored for an 85-83 lead with 41.8 seconds to go. Miami regained possession when P.J. Brown tipped a pass by Allan Houston, and Mourning swished a 17-footer with 5.6 seconds left.

Miami, eliminated in the opening round of the playoffs by New York each of the past two years, will try for a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven matchup Tuesday night.

"It was just the beginning of the series," Mourning said. "We've got to come back in the second game with the same intensity."

Ewing boasted earlier this week that he's the best center in the Eastern Conference, but the best center Sunday was Mourning, who had 26 points and six rebounds.

Ewing also played well, with 17 points and nine rebounds in 40 minutes.

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