

Pacers win, shut up angry fans

By Chris Sheridan

PHILADELPHIA — Reggie Miller was too much for the taunters, Travis Best was too quick for Allen Iverson and Sam Perkins was too cool in the clutch.

The Indiana Pacers moved within one victory of sweeping the Philadelphia 76ers out of the playoffs for the second straight season, controlling the game down the stretch Wednesday night for a 97-89 victory and a 3-0 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

Miller scored 29 points, including 13 in the fourth quarter, to silence a sellout crowd that taunted him with derisive chants — and worse — all night. After Miller iced the victory on a breakaway dunk with 22 seconds left, fans tossed debris on the court, including a full can of beer that missed Sixers forward George Lynch by inches.

Miller closed the game by dribbling out the final seconds, bouncing the ball between his legs while staring down a group of fans sitting across from the Philadelphia bench who had been yapping at him all night.

In the end, he and the Pacers had shut up everyone.

Indiana scored 32 of the game's final 48 points, with Best and Perkins contributing several key shots. Best repeatedly used his speed to get to the basket and score while guarded by Iverson, and Perkins hit a running hook shot and two 3-pointers in the final 12 minutes.

Put together, it allowed the Pacers to overcome a sub-par effort from Jalen Rose, who finished with 12 points after scoring 40 and 30 in the first two games.

Best had 19 points, while Perkins and Dale Davis added 10 apiece.

Iverson had 29 points to lead the 76ers, who will try to avoid the sweep Saturday in Game 4.

Miller gave Indiana the lead for good on a 3-pointer with 8:59 left, although the 76ers stayed within reach until the final minute.

Two foul shots by Iverson with 3:20 left made it 87-85 before Perkins hit his running hook shot with 2:46 left. A 24-second violation on the Sixers was followed by a foul shot by Best, and a driving layup by Iverson made it 90-87 with 1:58 left.

Perkins got the lead back to six by answering with a 3-pointer, and Best gave Indiana another six-point lead on a driving layup past Iverson with 1:11 left.

A turnover by Iverson on Philadelphia's next possession ended the Sixers' chances. Beer cups — and that one full can — began flying out of the stands shortly thereafter. Philadelphia coach Larry Brown admonished the crowd over the public address system and play was delayed as ball boys cleaned the court.

The Sixers took their first lead of the entire series 2 1/2 minutes into the first quarter as Iverson scored on a driving layup to make it 6-5. With Aaron McKie hitting four of five shots and Tyrone Hill grabbing seven rebounds, Philadelphia led for most of the quarter and was up 23-22 heading into the second quarter.