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## Blazers

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pounding the paint with its three big-gun powerful forwards.

And when L.A. seemingly left the Blazers crippled with a 109-94 win in Game 1?

Portland beats them by twice as much in Game 2!

No way the Lakers could have seen it coming. I don't think anyone saw it coming. I definitely

didn't see it coming. It's not often that after you rout a team in the playoffs, and in your own house, that the team you thought you'd knocked down jumps up and slaps you silly before you can cry "uncle."

Yet there is was, in the faces of the silenced Staples Center spectators and on the screens of televisions nationwide.

Put simply, the Blazers made them eat it.

It will be interesting to see if the Lakers can get back into the ring as easily as Portland did. History ultimately goes against O'Neal. Losses like Monday night's have caused his teams to spiral out of the playoffs, resulting in sweeps in all but one season.

But beware, Blazer fans.

Don't get cocky and assume that Portland is a lock to win this series, despite now holding the home court advantage against L.A. Don't forget that "The Big Fella" pretty much sucked in Game 2, missing even close shots. Remember that Kobe Bryant has been a non-factor in the series, so far.

There's no way to predict a situation like this, because as easy as the Lakers could fold in Portland, they could steal one on the road and regain home-court advantage, which, make no mistake, they won't win without.

Safer predictions can be made after Game 4. If the Lakers win either Game 3 or 4, then it could go all the way to Game 7 in L.A., and in that situation, it's hard to pass over the Lakers as the favorites.

But if the Blazers defend their home court and win the next two, it's done. Because there's no way any team in the league can beat the Blazers three games in a row.

"So, Mr. Columnist, what do you think?"

Well, one loss is only a loss, and past a certain point spread, a rout is a rout. If the Lakers can just manage to hang with the Blazers early in Game 3, it should be a close contest.

But that's all it will be.

This is a Portland team that was shaken awake by a tough Minnesota team, then blew out Utah three consecutive games to start the second round. One of those harsh whippings happened at the Delta Center, arguably the toughest place to play in the NBA.

Now, they've been rudely awakened — again — this time by a loud Staples Center crowd and a 7-foot-1 Taco Bell sales rep.

The Blazers are a reactive team. They're not very good at creating motivation for themselves, so they need outside forces to motivate them. Getting their tails kicked by L.A. in Game 1 provided the needed inspiration. Just look what happened in Game 2.

So Portland goes home and defends its home, winning games 3 and 4. Then, with a trip to the NBA Finals all but a sure thing, the Blazers loosen their grip and the Lakers rip them apart in Game 5.

But that's the last wake-up call Portland needs. The series goes back to the Rose Garden and the Blazers unleash 23 years of waiting, and L.A. is defeated in one of the most intense games this season.

If that doesn't work out, the Blazers just need to keep doing what they've been doing.

If the Lakers do something well, the Blazers need to counter it two-fold.

That's the Portland way — and that's how you beat L.A.

Scott Pesznecker is a sports editor for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily reflect those of the paper. He can be reached at JFLAK1@aol.com.



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## Lakers

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Mike Dunleavy's troops — or "the best team money can buy" according to Lakers' coach Phil Jackson — not only doubled the Lakers' Game 1 effort, but they obliterated the Lakers' front of invincibility.

You're like: Take that Phil (owner of six NBA Championship rings), who is, according to Dunleavy, "the best coach money can buy."

You're like: Take that Shaq, who you happily watched get victimized by Dunleavy's effective-but-sad Hack-a-Shaq strategy.

(Yo, Mike, that plan is wrong. Bor-ing. Weak.)

You're like: Take that Kobe, who even a certain segment of the Lakers-rooting demographic is a bit upset with, in light of his recently announced engagement.

And you're totally expecting Portland to take Games 3 and 4 here in the Northwest.

Your heart is set on it. You're counting on it.

Don't.

L.A. is gonna be fine.

For sure.

Don't get cocky, Blazer fans. Just 'cause your team won by a lot (OK, a whole helluva lot). It's just one game. One win. It's rout-for-rout.

We're even, 1-1.

Oh, no doubt, Portland was inspired by its Game 1 loss. And it showed. Your Blazers were motivated. So motivated that Rasheed Wallace found it within himself to stay composed.

But wait until you see L.A. inspired.

True, it doesn't happen often. That's just part of the Lakers' charm. They're so damn cool. But if these L.A. cats were ever to get juiced, it's now. All your Rose Garden energy might actually

help them in that department. Intensity breeds intensity, so bring it Portland. Make it loud.

It's guaranteed; they won't play as poorly, as statically, as drowsily or as badly as they did Monday.

Phil won't let 'em. Kobe won't let them. Nor will Shaq.

There won't be any future 20-0 Blazers' runs. There won't be any additional eight-point Lakers' quarters. Shaq is gonna stop messing around. Kobe will be ready. Monday was nothing but another learning experience for the young man.

And Damon Stoudamire won't likely get into foul trouble so soon, so he'll probably be getting more floor time — which is A-OK with L.A.

Portland, even Blazer fans admit, is better with Greg Anthony, Stoudamire's backup, on the floor. So, welcome back Mighty Mouse.

Rice ought to eventually show — he needs to. Fox and Horry (owner of two NBA Championship rings) figure to reappear. And Portland-native A.C. Green (owner of two NBA Championship rings) wears a green pro-abstinence beanie baby bear on his head. So ... yeah.

OK, 'Sheed's got him beat — if 'Sheed can stick around long enough, that is.

Besides, it would be impossible for the Lakers to play worse than they did Monday. They played that bad.

But we'll see. Enjoy your blowout, Pez. You have three more days to cherish your team's grit, Scottie's leadership and your Blazers-in-six apparition.

Put on a headband, kid.

But your team is, no doubt, touchable.

Mirjam Swanson is the sports editor for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily reflect those of the paper. She can be reached via e-mail at mswan@gladstone.uoregon.edu