

'Big L' leads Knicks to a convincing victory

By Chris Sheridan
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — So well were they playing and so easy were the points coming, that the New York Knicks got a two-minute standing ovation at the end of the first half.

The game got closer and a 17-point lead shrank to one, but the Knicks never stopped playing at a high level as they defeated the Indiana Pacers 91-89 Monday to even the Eastern Conference finals at two games apiece.

"I don't know if we made a statement, but we did come out with an edge to us, a good mental determination, intensity and energy," coach Jeff Van Gundy said. "Indiana is so good offensively that leads are not as safe as they'd be against defensive-oriented teams, and thankfully the clock ran out on them."

No player came up bigger than Larry Johnson, who was flashing his "Big L" gesture and spinning gleefully in circles after hitting a 3-pointer with 4:25 left to swing the momentum back New York's way after the Pacers had pulled within one.

Charlie Ward added a 3-pointer two minutes later for an eight-point lead that helped the Knicks wrap it up after they dropped 33

points on the Pacers in the first quarter for their highest-scoring quarter of the postseason.

New York played again without center Patrick Ewing, who sat out his second straight game with acute tendinitis in his right foot, but their other injured players — Latrell Sprewell and Marcus Camby — suited up.

Sprewell, who broke a bone in his left foot at the end of Game 3, jumped so high for a thunderous dunk in the first quarter that he nearly hit his forehead on the rim. He finished with 12 points and held Jalen Rose to 18, while Camby played on a sprained knee and had eight rebounds, five points and three blocks.

"I'm not surprised," said Kurt Thomas, who filled in admirably for Ewing. "I know the character of this team."

Another of the injured Knicks was Johnson, whose chronically sore back stiffened up Sunday and forced him to miss the second half of practice. Repeatedly scoring on isolation plays in the low post against Dale Davis and passing to open teammates when he was double-teamed, Johnson shot 10-for-16 from the field, making five 3-point-

ers, with seven rebounds and four assists.

His 3-pointer with 4:25 left led to the longest-lasting "Big L" gesture of his career, Johnson cocking his right arm into a right angle and pointing at his elbow with his left fist for almost 10 seconds.

The shot gave New York an 85-76 lead, and the Knicks hung on from there to ensure that the series will return to Madison Square Garden for Game 6 Friday night.

"This game was the most I've been open during the series," Johnson said. "They went to double-team and I found myself wide open."

Game 5 is Wednesday night at Indianapolis, where the Pacers looked so confident just a few days ago after winning the first two games of the series. But it was the Knicks who had that look over the weekend, even as the injuries kept piling up.

Allan Houston scored 17 points for the Knicks, Thomas added 16 and Ward had 16 points, seven assists and six rebounds. New York was 10-for-14 from 3-point range and outrebounded Indiana 41-32.

Reggie Miller had 24 points for the Pacers, who could never come

all the way back after allowing the Knicks to open a 14-point lead at the end of the first quarter and the 17-point lead at halftime.

"I still feel like we're going to win this series," Rose said. "I feel like we're the better team. We're disappointed, because any time you get a 2-0 lead and you're the No. 1 seed in the conference you expect to find ways to win on the other team's floor."

After trailing for nearly the entire game, the Pacers got back into it with a 22-10 run bridging the third and fourth quarters. Miller made a 3-pointer in front of Spike Lee's courtside seat with 6:50 left — a large portion of the crowd of 19,763 groaned as the ball was in mid-air — to make it 77-76.

Johnson answered with a 3-pointer after a scramble for a loose ball under the basket.

"That was the biggest shot of the game right there," Miller said.

Miller missed a 3 from the same spot as before and then threw the ball away on an entry pass, and Thomas converted a 15-foot jumper to make it 82-76 with 5:12 left. Rose missed a hook shot and Johnson buried his 3-pointer from the corner.

Indiana pulled within three on a 3-pointer by Travis Best with 10.5 seconds left, but Sprewell iced the victory by making the second of two foul shots with 4.1 seconds to go. Sprewell actually missed his second attempt, but Rose was called for a blatant lane violation to give Sprewell another chance.

Best scored a meaningless tip-in at the buzzer.

The Knicks improved to 5-1 against Indiana in the playoffs when playing without Ewing.

"Look at the percentage with or without him," Indiana center Rik Smits said. "I hope he comes back."

Chris Dudley started in Ewing's place and picked up two quick fouls, bringing Thomas into the game earlier than expected. Thomas started looking to score right away, hitting a jumper the first time he touched the ball.

Sprewell wasn't looking hobbled at all by the broken bone in his foot, soaring through the lane for an emphatic two-handed slam that started the Knicks on an 8-0 run for a 22-12 lead. The Knicks hit 10 of their first 12 shots and finished 14-for-18 in the first quarter to take a 33-19 lead into the second.

NCAA golf

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in," said Oregon junior Jerilyn White, who looked exhausted after the conditions caused her fourth-round 77, five strokes over par. "The wind got to me the last couple of holes."

"This is the worst weather I've coached in 13 years," Oregon head coach Renee Baumgartner added.

For five team members, including Baumgartner, the NCAA Championships marked their last tournament as Ducks.

Baumgartner will take over as associate athletic director full-time next year, while seniors Pam Sowden, Kylie Wilson, Anika Heuser and Angie Rizzo will graduate this spring.

White, the lone underclassman on the team, had the Ducks' best score, and finished in a tie for 13th place.

Sowden was the best senior

finisher, ending up 50th. Rizzo and Heuser tied for 59th of 125 golfers.

Arizona dominated the individual title as well as the team title. Top-ranked senior Jenna Daniels overtook freshman teammate Julia Kraschinski on the final day to win the individual title by three strokes. Kraschinski finished second, while sophomore Cristina Baena finished 10th overall.

"I can't describe the feeling," Daniels said of her first national championship and the Wildcats' second in the last five years. "The individual was just a bonus."

Fourteenth-ranked Texas took third at the tournament, while No. 3 Southern California and No. 21 Tennessee rounded out the top five. Oregon's White thought the wind might have helped some of those teams, or at least it didn't hinder them.

"It's no fun playing in the rain," White said. "But the Ari-

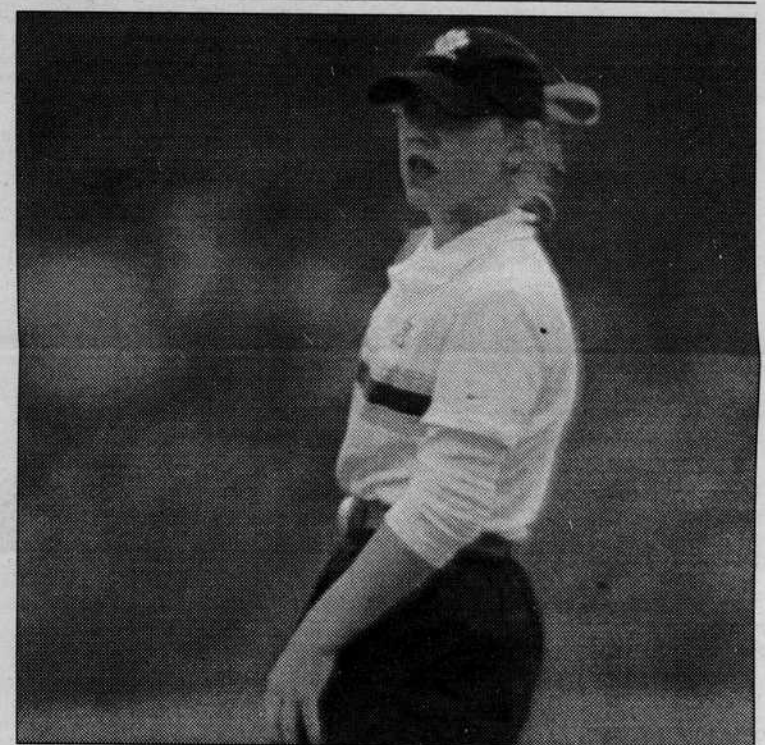
zona schools and Texas, they play in the wind all the time."

The other Arizona school, fourth-ranked Arizona State, didn't fare as well as the Wildcats at the championships. The Sun Devils finished without a player in the top 25 and ended up tied with the Ducks in 11th place.

Second-ranked Duke, one of only three eastern teams ranked in the top-10 nationally, finished 14th at the championships. That placing ended their five-tournament win streak, and disappointed golf fans who expected the Blue Devils to duel with Arizona for the title.

The Pacific-10 Conference did well at the NAAs. All five Pac-10 teams finished in the top 13, with USC only one stroke from making the championships a one-two-three Pac-10 finish.

Arizona's win marked the sixth championship in eight years that either the Wildcats or the Sun Devils have won.



John Hedden for the Emerald
Arizona's Jenna Daniels finishes her season by winning the individual and team titles.

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