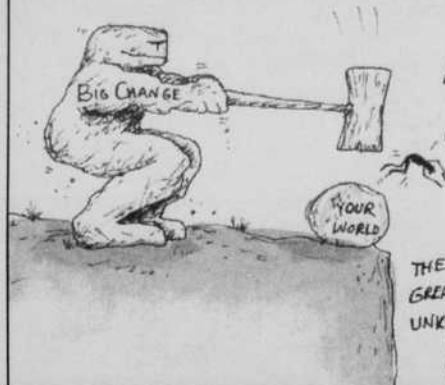


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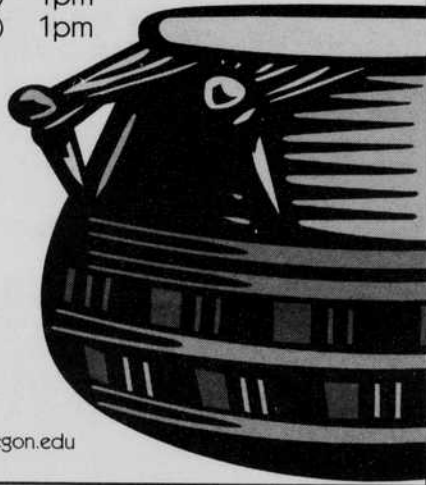
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Johnson's return revitalizes Phoenix on the edge of loss

BY JAIME ARON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Nobody would've blamed Joe Johnson if he sat out the rest of the playoffs.

After all, it was only a few weeks ago that four metal plates were attached to his skull, held down by 18 screws, all because of a shattered bone near his left eye that left him looking like someone who'd fought a young Mike Tyson.

Yet Johnson never wavered. No matter how many times friends and family told him to call it a season — most fearing for his safety, but some also mindful of his pending free agency — Johnson insisted on returning to the Phoenix Suns as soon as possible.

He made it just in time.

Just in time to keep the San Antonio Spurs from sweeping the Suns out of the Western Conference finals. And, while it's still a long shot, perhaps just in time to make the Suns the first NBA team to rally from a 3-0 deficit and advance.

All he's done so far is help force Game 5 tonight in Phoenix. But after seeing Johnson's scoring and defense, and the trickle-down effect his presence had on his teammates, Suns coach Mike D'Antoni believes this could become an entirely

different series now that his team is back at full strength.

"Without him, we didn't have enough," D'Antoni said Tuesday. "With him, we have enough."

Johnson actually came back in Game 3, which was amazing to anyone who saw his mangled face after he fell from the rim and landed on his face during a second-round game against Dallas on May 11. Yet any emotional lift provided by Johnson and his mask were erased by how dominant the Spurs were that night.

In Game 4, the Suns were like a different team. Or, rather, they looked like the Phoenix club that won the most games and scored the most points this season, not the one San Antonio had taken advantage of for three straight games. The stats prove it: After scoring 28 fastbreak points over the first three games, Phoenix had 26 last game.

"Transition D is a particular concern because we're playing against the best transition team in the league," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said. "That's a priority and they just drubbed us in that area."

Johnson scored 26 points on 10-of-15 shooting. That included a 16-foot jumper against tight coverage by Bruce Bowen, the Spurs' best perimeter defender, which stretched Phoenix's lead to three points with 2:03 left.

IN BRIEF

Mariners call up 23-year-old shortstop

SEATTLE — Hoping to spark their offense, the Seattle Mariners called up 23-year-old Mike Morse from Triple-A Tacoma on Tuesday and designated Wilson Valdez for assignment.

Morse, acquired in the Freddy Garcia trade with the Chicago White Sox last June 27, was hitting .253 with four home runs and 23 RBIs in 49 games in the Pacific Coast League this season.

Valdez was claimed on waivers from the New York Mets and added to the Mariners' major league roster April 1. In 42 games, he was hitting .198 with no homers and eight RBIs.

Manager Mike Hargrove said Morse will go into the starting lineup tonight against Toronto, giving him a day off after he flew to Seattle from Fresno, Calif., where the Tacoma Rainiers were playing Tuesday.

"We didn't bring him here not to play," Hargrove said. "He'll play the majority of the time."

Hargrove watched the 6-foot-4, 220-pound Morse in spring training and liked what he saw.

"I liked the way he swung the bat," he said. "He's not bashful. And I understand he's made a lot of strides defensively in Tacoma this season."

— The Associated Press

Smith: Columnist's curtain is about to close

Continued from page 9

It isn't a matter of regret, just a bit of hindsight.

What I have written is exactly that, and good or not, I relish the chance that I got.

But as I am writing about going out on top, I certainly don't want to go the other way and hang around.

After all, I wouldn't want to be known as the Jerry Rice of the Oregon Daily Emerald sports section, or the aforementioned Henderson.

Please, retire already.

There will be only one quick curtain call for the space taken up by a certain lefty specialist.

Now, that curtain is about to close.

So before I sound way too full of

myself and my writing, I just want to say thanks for the opportunity to have 13 to 18 inches nearly every week to put down my thoughts and feelings about the great world of sports.

Even though it may have left many people shaking their heads most of the time.

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Horoscope by Holiday Mathis

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (June 1). Your creativity blossoms, and your environment transforms along with it. This process makes you more attractive. All sorts of people want to get close now. Be judicious. A long awaited check arrives in July. A business that starts in August will bring in assets that will be handed down through generations! Love signs are Capricorn and Pisces. Your lucky numbers are: 5, 23, 41, 9 and 43.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Acting on impulse results in bizarre but interesting outcomes. Friends are baffled by your desire to do the unconventional. Those who choose not to join you obviously don't know what they're missing.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Say "thank you" for even the smallest of favors. Showing appreciation for their efforts is a terrific incentive for employees (and kids) to do a good job. Your heartfelt words can have a major impact.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Energy and initiative are high, so get cracking on those half-finished projects you've been neglecting. After a long day of productivity, you'll have the stamina to celebrate your efforts, even without the help of a Red Bull.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Your workplace is demanding. People want you to make decisions now. Think quickly, but speak carefully. Well-chosen words are key. Your thoughtfulness goes a long way toward impressing the right people.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). The phone is your nemesis, but only because you've made it so. Being a hermit has its advantages, none of which outweigh the fun you'll miss. So lay the groundwork for your next outing by making some long overdue calls tonight.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Sure, overtime

may pay financially, but think about what you might be missing on home and social fronts. Finish up current projects, and make a conscious effort to streamline and simplify. Your sanity is at stake.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). A colleague continues to rub you the wrong way. You are tempted to tell the world what this person is like, but it is best to keep your opinion private. Remember: You're the great conciliator.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). The consensus lately has been: Love stinks. But today's breakthrough gives you hope. Maybe love can also take a shower and put on deodorant. Give love that clean, fresh feeling by reenacting a first date.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). The grass appears greener on the other side of the fence, but that's only because your sprinkler system is broken. You're experiencing a creative rut, but soon the spirit of competition will reenergize you.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Being driven means different things to different people. For you it is the insatiable desire to conquer challenges and rise to the top. To do that, fire would be like extinguishing part of your soul. Embrace your ambition.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Motivation is a challenge, especially if your office has windows with a view of the gorgeous weather you're missing. Escape on your own, if only for an hour. Your renewed energy will help you focus on tasks this afternoon.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Your ability to read people leads some to believe you have psychic powers. Neptune helps you give guidance to a person without direction seeking your advice. Consider if your good deed for the day.

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