

NBA Playoffs decided by clutch players

by Jesse Sowa
Sports Editor

All of the coaches in the NBA playoffs are all asking themselves the same question right about now: What will it take to be successful in the post-season this year?

Yet it seems that it takes the same things every year: a strong defense and a balanced attack. And you ask which team has this arsenal waiting for the test?

In the Eastern Conference, Orlando (57-25) will get by Boston (35-47) in the first round because of a man called Shaq, but they won't go much farther due to a slight problem at the free throw line that O'Neal and his friends seem to have. Orlando also has lost seven in a row on the road.

Indiana (52-30) will only be successful if Reggie Miller and Rik Smits are on. Without these two, the Pacers' playoff chances are very suspect.

New York (55-27) has the rebounding and the defense that it takes to reach the top, but only their offense could hold them back. A trip back to the Finals will ride solely on the shoulders of one John Starks.

Without a healthy Muggsy Bogues, Charlotte (50-32) will have their hands full with Chicago (47-35). The Hornets will only go as far as Larry Johnson and Alonzo Mourning can carry them. The Bulls will at least reach

the conference finals as Michael Jordan will do his thing once again. Pippen will come through, but Toni Kukoc will have to play well.

Atlanta (42-40), Cleveland (43-39) and Boston might as well stay home.

In the West, San Antonio (62-20) is the NBA's hottest team and the clear favorite to reach the

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Finals. Dennis Rodman will make or break this team that has played so hard to reach the point where they are now. David Robinson will give his regular all-star performances, but only Rodman can lead, yes lead, the Spurs to new heights.

Phoenix (59-23) will have to depend on Charles Barkley and Dan Majerle down the stretch, but they could be hurt by sub-par play from Kevin Johnson and the Suns' bench. With Danny Manning, Phoenix was a favorite. Without him, they're average at best.

Easily the best matchup in the first round, Utah (60-22) and Houston (47-35) will battle it out to see who moves on. The Jazz set a franchise season record for wins, but without a hot Karl Malone and John Stockton, Utah could be singing the blues. Houston comes into the series with

three straight losses and will only prevail if Clyde Drexler plays like he did three years ago. Hakeem Olajuwon won't be able to carry the whole load without Otis Thorpe to help him.

Seattle (57-25) is destined to go far as Gary Payton continues his assault on the NBA. The L.A. Lakers (48-34), the Sonics first round opponent, can't be overlooked if Elden Campbell and Nick Van Exel play up to their potential.

The only people that believe Portland (44-38) can take three games from Phoenix are the Blazers themselves.

Not only does Portland lack in the number of quality players, they lack the heart and the desire to return to their previous level of success and stardom.

Also, the players don't even like the coach. The only time they have had any level of prosperity was when they disregarded what Carlesimo said and played like the Blazers of the past.

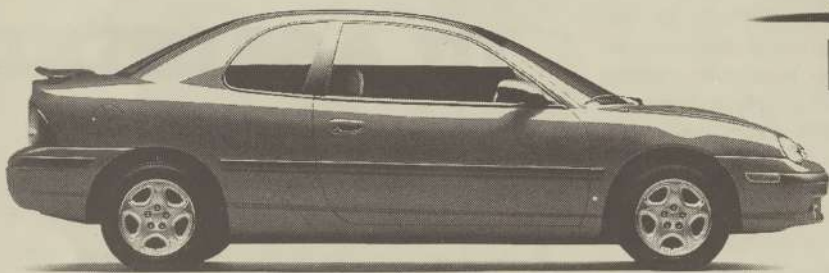
Denver will wish it hadn't made the playoffs after a matchup with the Spurs.

And, of course, you want to know my picks. Seattle will defeat Utah to reach the Finals. Jordan will go cold and the Knicks will meet the Sonics in the NBA's Big Dance. Seattle will win it all with a huge effort from Payton and Detlef Schrempf. The Pacific Northwest will finally win another title.

Cougar
1994-95
Calendar

BASEBALL	
Home	Away
4/29 Lane @ 1 p.m.*	5/6 Linn-Benton @ 1 p.m. *
4/30 Linfield @ 12 p.m.*	5/9 Lane @ 3 p.m.
5/2 Linn-Benton @ 3 p.m.	5/16 Mt. Hood @ 3 p.m.
5/13 Chemeketa @ 1 p.m.*	5/18 SWOCC @ 1 p.m. *
*-doubleheader	*-doubleheader
SOFTBALL	
4/28 SWOCC @ 3 p.m. *	5/13 SWOCC @ 3 p.m. *
5/2 Green River @ 3 p.m. *	
5/5 S. Puget Sound @ 3 p.m. *	
*-doubleheader	*-doubleheader
TRACK	
5/6 Clackamas Invite @ 10 a.m.	4/29 Western Oregon Open @ WOSC @ 10 a.m.
	5/1-2 NWAACC multi-event championships @ Mt. Hood CC @ 10 a.m.

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