

SPORTS

BULLS AND JAZZ BEGIN NBA FINALS WEDNESDAY NIGHT IN UTAH

The Chicago Bulls will have a few days to catch their breath before beginning the NBA Finals against the Utah Jazz, a team that has already had more than enough rest.

Michael Jordan, playing what could have been the final game of his career, scored 28 points as the Bulls vanquished the Indiana Pacers, 88-83, Sunday night in Game Seven of the Eastern Conference finals. He made just 11-of-25 shots, and only a 22-4 edge on the offensive glass and a stellar third-quarter effort by Toni Kukoc kept alive Chicago's chances for its third straight championship — and Jordan's brilliant career.

The two-time defending champions advanced to an NBA Finals rematch against the Jazz, starting Wednesday night in Utah. The

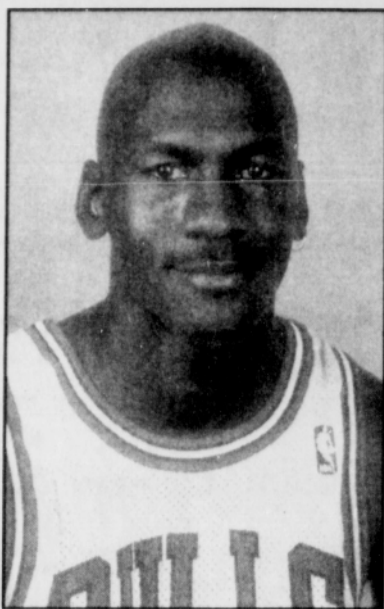
Bulls have never lost in the championship round and defeated the Jazz in six games last season.

The Jazz completed a four-game sweep of the Los Angeles Lakers in the West finals way back on May 24th to earn their second straight trip to the NBA Finals. Utah, which will be playing at home for the first time in 16 days, has never won an NBA title.

"Not having home court is going to definitely be to Utah's advantage," Jordan said. "But nobody has taken anything away from us yet. We're still the champions and that's how we're going to think when we go into this series."

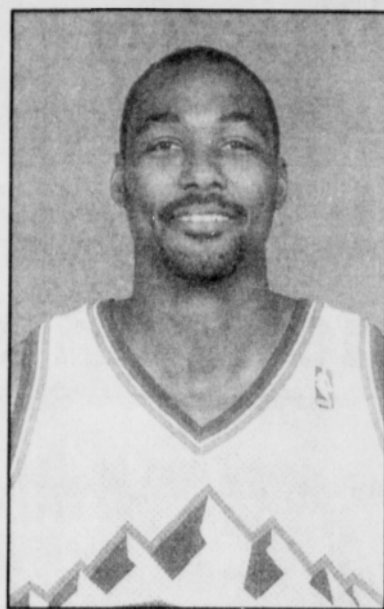
The Bulls and Jazz will compete in the first NBA Finals rematch since the Lakers beat the Boston Celtics in 1985.

Although he has left the door



Michael Jordan

open, Jordan repeatedly has said he would retire at the end of this sea-



Karl Malone

son if Phil Jackson is not back as coach of the Bulls, which seems to

be a certainty. Facing perhaps his last game, Jordan responded, although not in his usual spectacular fashion.

The Bulls had not played a Game Seven since losing the 1994 conference semifinals at New York. Jordan was retired at the time and had not played a Game Seven since the conference semifinals in 1992, a home win over New York at Chicago Stadium.

Chicago repeatedly turned missed shots into second chances and crucial points. In a game that saw Jordan and Scottie Pippen misfire on a combined 28 shots, the Bulls scored 24 points after misses.

Jordan failed to score from the field for the last 7 1/2 minutes. Pippen added 17 points on 6-of-18 shooting. But it did not matter how many shots they missed, because

the Pacers could not get the rebounds that would have put them in the Finals for the first time.

Even with league rebound leader Dennis Rodman limited to six boards, the Bulls held a 50-34 edge on the glass. Pippen pulled down 12 and Jordan and Luc Longley grabbed nine apiece. Pippen and Jordan combined for 11 offensive rebounds.

Kukoc scorched the Pacers for 14 of his 21 points in the third quarter for Chicago, which shot 38 percent (29-of-76) but overcame an early 13-point deficit with a boost from its bench. Reserve guard Steve Kerr contributed 11 points.

Jordan moved past Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the all-time leading playoff scorer with a basket with 7:44 left in the second quarter. Jordan has 5,786 points, 24 more than Abdul-Jabbar.

Couples Finds His Game at Memorial

By RON SIRAK

There must be times when Fred Couples looks at Ernie Els, Tiger Woods, David Duval and Justin Leonard and thinks back to those days when he was considered the best golfer in the world.

It wasn't all that long ago, but it must seem like a different lifetime.

In the first five years of this decade - 1990-94 - Couples finished in the top three 25 times in only 99 starts, with eight victories, including the 1992 Masters.

Then it seemed like nothing could go right.

From 1995 through '97, Couples had only two top-three finishes in 48 tournaments and won just once.

At times during that stretch it seemed as if life was conspiring against

Couples. A series of personal tragedies made his chronic back pain seem almost an afterthought.

Soon after his Masters victory he went through a very public and very expensive divorce with his wife of 11 years, Deborah.

"I go to sleep thinking about it and I wake up thinking about it," Couples, an affable and private person, admitted before the 1993 Masters.

The next year, his mother Violet died of cancer. And last year, on Thanksgiving Day, his father Tom died after eight years of treatment for leukemia.

In between, there was an engagement that didn't work out and then last year his girlfriend, Thais Bren, was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Through it all - or because of it all - Couples emerged as a man more at

peace with himself, and perhaps has emerged as a better golfer than he was even back then when he was the No. 1 ranked player in the world.

"It's given me a kind of peace," Couples said. "I feel comfortable with my father. He had a long life and I realize how lucky I am to be doing what I'm doing. And I have the best girl in the world."

His golf this year has been as impressive as it was in 1991-92 when he was twice voted the PGA Tour player of the year by his fellow players.

In 11 tournaments in 1998, Couples has finished first twice, second twice - including the Masters - and third once. In his last five tournaments he has finished second, third, second, 18th and first, playing 17 of 20 rounds under par.

"I think I'm very capable of playing

at 38, 39, 40 as well as I did when I was 32," Couples, 38, said after winning the Memorial Tournament over the weekend.

Clearly, Couples is pleased with what he has achieved this year, but just as clearly he wants to roll up numbers as good - or better - than those he once achieved.

"I've had a great month, two months, but two months does not create a whole year of good golf," Couples said at Muirfield Village, where he shot four consecutive rounds in the 60s and hit 32 of 36 greens in the weekend rounds.

"I just had one great year," Couples said perhaps too modestly about his early success. "And people keep trying to get me back to that year, and it's not easy to do."

French Open: Hingis Ousts Williams

By ROB GLOSTER

Martina Hingis was right. For now, at least on clay, Venus Williams is not her rival.

In a swirling wind that tamed Williams' terrifying serve, Hingis used precision and poise to counteract the American's power in a 6-3, 6-4 victory Tuesday in the French Open quarterfinals.

Hingis will face three-time champion Monica Seles in one of Thursday's semifinals. No. 2 seed Lindsay Davenport will play two-time champion Arantxa Sanchez Vicario in the other.

With Davenport and Seles advancing, there are two American women in the French Open semifinals for the first time since Martina Navratilova

and Chris Evert reached the final four in 1987.

In the men's quarterfinals, No. 3 seed Marcelo Rios blew his chance to overtake Pete Sampras as the No. 1 player in the world when he lost 6-1, 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 to Carlos Moya.

Rios could have reclaimed the No. 1 spot, which he held for four weeks earlier this spring, if he had beaten 12th-seeded Moya and advanced to the semifinals.

Moya, who celebrated his win by tossing his white bandana into the stands, is the top seed left in the men's draw. Also advancing to the semifinals was No. 15 Felix Mantilla, his Spanish compatriot, who ousted 1995 champion Thomas Muster in four sets.

Raiders Mourn Loss of Bender

By ANNE M. PETERSON

There was a sense of disbelief when Oakland Raiders receiver Tim Brown first heard that promising young teammate Leon Bender had died.

"That's a guy we were patting on the back three weeks ago (in minicamp) when he broke up a pass play," Brown said. "Now we're looking at going to his funeral."

On Friday, Brown said, he discussed Bender with quarterback Ryan Leaf - who played with Bender last season at Washington State - during a golf tournament. On Saturday, Brown learned the 22-year-old defensive tackle had died in Georgia.

"It's just one of those things that make you step back and take a hard look at your life and see if there's anything you can improve on," Brown

said.

Bender, the 31st overall pick in the NFL draft in April, was found dead in the bathroom of his agent's home in Marietta, Ga. He suffered from epilepsy, but the cause of his death was not known.

Bender had been in Georgia for two weeks to work out with agent Terry Bolar and a few other players. He was scheduled to join the Raiders this week for another mini-camp.

"He was a guy that we figured on being a big part of this season and seasons beyond," Raiders coach Jon Gruden said. "It's a tragic loss for us. I think you all know that."

Gruden said the NFL and the Raiders were aware of Bender's epilepsy, but it was apparent he had it under control at Washington State.

At a team meeting Monday morning, Gruden addressed Bender's death. He said the team's main focus right now is helping Bender's family.

Gruden said a number of players would attend Bender's funeral, but arrangements were still pending. A memorial service for family and friends was scheduled Monday in Pullman, Wash., home of Washington State.

The 6-foot-5, 300-pound Bender signed a five-year, \$3.45 million contract with the Raiders on May 12.

With Bender, Washington State won the Pacific-10 Conference title and went on the Rose Bowl for the first time in 67 years. Bender started in all but one game in 1996 and 1997 with the Cougars.

Bender, Bolar and Cincinnati

Bengals offensive tackle Willie Anderson planned to workout Saturday afternoon, Bolar said.

"When he didn't come down, I pounded on the door, and Leon didn't answer," Bolar told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "I thought he was joking. Then I found him naked, on the floor, as if he had been ready to get into the shower."

The autopsy was not conclusive and further tests were not expected to be complete for two to three months, according to Cobb County police spokesman Robert Quigley.

Bolar's agency, Fort Wayne, Ind.-based Parker and Associates, released a statement saying those close to Bender said the autopsy "rules out foul play, drugs or alcohol as factors."

Athletics-Double wins for Greene, Jones at Prefontaine Classic

Gusting winds stole some of their thunder, but American world champion sprinters Maurice Greene and Marion Jones provided plenty of lightning in the Prefontaine Classic Grand Prix

athletics meet on Sunday.

Greene won the 100 meters in a blazing 9.79 seconds — one of the fastest clockings in history — but the trailing wind of 2.9 meters per second was well over the allow-

able limit of 2.0 for the time to be official.

Greene's training partner, Ato Boldon of Trinidad, was second in 9.89.

Greene later came back and de-

feated world record-holder Michael Johnson in the 200 meters, clocking a wind-aided 19.88 seconds. This time the wind was recorded at 2.1 meters per second.

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