

Portland **Metro/Sports** Observer

# Lakers Open Finals With 19 Game Win Streak

(AP) — Allen Iverson is glad that most people don't think the Philadelphia 76ers can beat the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA Finals. "Everybody has counted us out, and I feel good about that," Iverson said Monday. "All the pressure is on them. It's like David vs. Goliath. Everybody picks the Lakers because they look like the sure shot. That's fine with us. We like it that way."

The Lakers, who haven't lost in more than two months, take a 19-game winning streak into Game 1 of the finals Wednesday night at the Staples Center. Los Angeles is a 12-point favorite in the opener. Philadelphia, making its first trip to the finals in 18 years, is coming off consecutive seven-game series.

"Anybody who is going to play the Lakers after they won 19 straight would be considered an underdog against them," Sixers coach Larry Brown said. "But I know my team, I believe in them and you never know what these guys can accomplish."

The Sixers have been proving people wrong since they began the season with a



Allen Iverson leads his 76ers into the NBA Finals against the Lakers.

franchise-best 10 straight victories. The team has overcome numerous

injuries, including a broken foot that has kept forward George Lynch out of the last 10 games.

"When things don't look good, people count us out, and that's when we pull together," Aaron McKie said. "We don't want to go out there just to be there. Our focus is to win the series. Whether it's here or there doesn't make a difference."

The series would've opened at the First Union Center if the Sixers had beaten the last-place Chicago Bulls on the final day of the regular season.

Instead, Iverson and Dikembe Mutombo sat out, and Brown rested most of his other starters to prepare for the playoffs. It took a late 10-0 run for the Bulls, who

finished with a league-worst 15-67 record, to beat Philadelphia's reserves 92-86.

The loss tied the Sixers with the Lakers at 56-26. Los Angeles got the homecourt edge on a tiebreaker — better record against the opposite conference.

After the loss to Chicago, Brown said he wasn't looking ahead to the finals, didn't want to risk injury to any of his key players and was more concerned with getting out of the East.

Brown said Monday he doesn't have any regrets about the way he handled the final game.

"I didn't rest the guys just to rest them," Brown said. "They were legitimately hurt. I'm not smart enough to plan that far ahead. If I

had to do it all over again, I'd do it the same way."

Iverson didn't play against the Bulls because he was on the injured list with bursitis in his right elbow, an injury that continues to bother him and forces him to wear a protective sleeve on his arm. Mutombo had a sprained toe and missed his only game since coming to the Sixers in a trade on Feb. 22.

"Them having the homecourt is just another adverse situation, and we're motivated by that," McKie said.

Los Angeles has never lost Game 1 of a playoff series since Phil Jackson became its coach last season, posting double-digit victories in all but one of its seven series-opening games.

## Rice Moves Across Bay to Raiders

ALAMEDA, Calif. (AP) — Jerry Rice officially moved across San Francisco Bay on Tuesday, becoming a member of the Oakland Raiders.

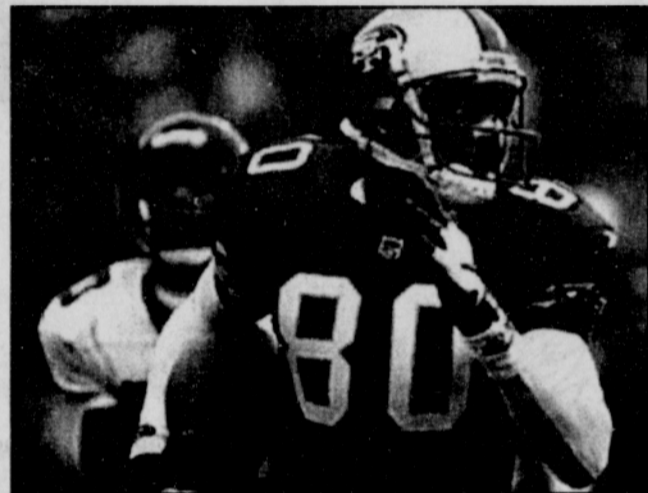
"I'm glad to be here, I'm glad to be a part of this," Rice said, thanking the Raiders for "a chance to continue doing what I've been doing for 16 years."

After a record-setting career with the 49ers, Rice didn't want to stray far from his mansion, his family or his fans after being released by San Francisco on Monday because of salary cap problems.

Rice, who won three Super Bowls with the 49ers, moves from a rebuilding team to a squad that reached the AFC Championship Game last season.

"I'm living a dream right now. A situation like this doesn't happen that often. After 16 years in the

league, to come to a team of this magnitude, I'm excited about the possibilities," Rice said. "It was time to move on, and this is probably a great situation where I can



Jerry Rice

jump-start my career again."

Rice, who holds every significant NFL receiving mark, has said he would like to play at least two more years.

He wore his usual No. 80 — but in Raiders silver and black instead of his familiar 49ers colors — while participating in an informal practice session Tuesday morning.

"Hey, I look good in it, man," Rice joked. "I was saying, 'Hey guys, I look pretty good.'"

## Major League Representative Visits PGE Park

(AP) — A representative from Major League Baseball visited Portland on Thursday to see if the city would be a good place to relocate a struggling franchise.

Some baseball fans think that Portland is ready for a major league team.

They also think the timing is right because the Montreal Expos and the Tampa Bay Devil Rays are suffering financial losses and might want to move.

"We have a long-term strategy to bring major league baseball to Portland, and we're right on course," said Steve Kanter, president of the Oregon Baseball Coalition, who helped arrange Corey Busch's visit.

On Thursday, Busch met business and community leaders and watched the Portland Beavers play at PGE Park.

At the game, he was accompanied by lawmakers, baseball advocates and members of Gov. John Kitzhaber's staff.

He checked out the refurbished PGE Park to see whether it might suit a major league team while a new stadium is built.

Busch told reporters at the game that PGE Park seems a bit small to host a major league team.

The park holds 22,000 spectators, half the size of most big league ballparks.

Baseball supporters and the media encouraged fans to

flood PGE Park, to show Major League Baseball that Portland is ready for a team. But

fewer than 7,000 came to see the Beavers play the Edmonton Trappers.

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