

LAS VEGAS SENTINEL

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SPORTS, GAMING

December 28, 1989



## Lakers Named Sports Franchise Of The Decade

Two months before the 1980s began, Jack McKinney, the new coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, went out for his morning bicycle ride. It turned out to be the start of a one-way trip to the top of a NBA for the most successful franchise in sports over the last decade.

McKinney's ride ended in a crash landing, a frightening accident in which the coach suffered a fractured elbow and serious head injuries. He was replaced by his assistant, Paul Westhead, who took the Lakers to the NBA championship -- the first five titles and eight trips to the finals in 10 years. No team in any sport won as many titles during the decade.

Including playoffs -- and the Lakers made it to the postseason every year with nine division titles, including the last eight in a row -- Los Angeles posted a record of 702-277, a .721 winning percentage going into this season. That's better than seven victories in every 10 games, a remarkable record of consistency in a sport whose teams sometimes seem to be riding a see-saw.

All of this was accomplished with only occasional help from the draft -- LA never has had a rookie of the year -- or trades -- the Lakers rarely made significant deals during the decade.

So how did LA do it?

Magic.

Earvin Johnson -- Magic to



Earvin "Magic" Johnson

his pals -- led Michigan State to the NCAA title as a sophomore in 1979 and then declared for the NBA draft. The Lakers, owners of the No. 1 pick as the result of losing free agent Gail Goodrich to the Jazz three years earlier, grabbed the Magic man. Wouldn't you?

The payoff was immediate. Johnson set a fistful of club records as a rookie and then punctuated the performance when, in the final game of the playoffs against Philadelphia, the game that would make the Lakers champions, he replaced injured Kareem Abdul-Jabbar at center and produced 42 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists. Basketball people still talk with awe about the MVP show.

The next year, with Johnson sidelined for 45 games by torn cartilage in his left knee, the Lakers finished second to Phoenix and were

eliminated in the first round of the playoffs by Houston. It was a rare and bitter disappointment for the defending world champs.

The following summer, the Lakers signed Johnson to a lifetime \$25 million contract, but in the early weeks of the 1981-82 season, trouble was brewing. Magic found himself on a collision course with Westhead, and when owner Jerry Buss was forced to make a choice, the coach exited and Pat Riley inherited his seat on the bench. Again, the payoff came fast -- 17 wins in the next 20 games. The Lakers won 57 games, became the first team in NBA HISTORY TO SWEEP CONSECUTIVE PLAYOFF SERIES AND DEFEATED Philadelphia for their second world championship in three years.

And then the best got better

Thanks to a two-year-old trade with Cleveland, LA inherited the first pick in the 1982 draft and chose James Worthy, fresh off North Carolina's NCAA champs. Johnson led the league in assists and Abdul-Jabbar passed career milestones of 14,000 rebounds and 29,000 points. But when Worthy broke his leg in the last week of the season, the playoffs became a struggle and Philadelphia gained some revenge with a 4-0 championship series sweep.

For 15 magnificent seasons, Abdul-Jabbar had distinguished himself as the NBA's quintessential center, a tower of power under the basket. Then, 10 days before the end of the 1984 season, he became the highest scorer in league history, lofting one of his patented sky hooks to break Wilt Chamberlain's record. The basket -- appropriately on a feed from Magic Johnson -- pushed Abdul-Jabbar's total to 31,421 points, a total that would stretch to 38,387 before he retired at decade's end.

Johnson set playoff assist records for a single game (24) and the championship round (21), but the Lakers

came up short, losing the total in seven games to Boston.

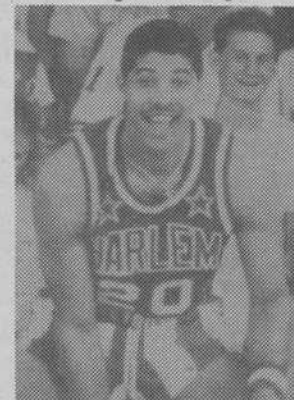
The next year, the Lakers launched a four-year siege that would deliver three world championships. Three times, they would win 62 games and the other year (1986-87), they won 65. LA won the Pacific Division by a league-record 20 games in 1985 and beat Boston in the championship series.

In 1985-86, Abdul-Jabbar soared past 35,000 points for his career and LA raised its division-winning margin to 22 games. But Houston stunned the Lakers in the Western Conference finals and that as much as anything seemed to stiffen the resolve of the team. The next year, LA won 65 games and capped the season with its fourth championship of the decade, defeating the Celtics in six games.

As soon as the Lakers won that title, Riley guaranteed a repeat, something no NBA team had managed since 1968-69. Another 62-win season set the stage for another championship, this time in seven games against Detroit.

## The Harlem Globetrotters Are Coming To Las Vegas

Those mischievous and miraculous Houdinis of the Hardcourt, the internationally famous Harlem Globetrotters are coming to Las Vegas.



Once again facing their longtime rivals, the Washington Generals, the game is set for 7:30 p.m. at the Thomas & Mack Center on January 20.

## NFL Playoff Schedule

The NFL announced its playoff schedule Tuesday for the wild-card games and divisional round of games.

On Sunday, the wild-card doubleheader opens at 9:30 a.m. PST with the NFC game as the Los Angeles Rams (11-5), play at Philadelphia (11-5). That will be followed by the AFC game at 1 p.m. with Pittsburgh (9-7) playing at Houston (9-7).

The divisional playoffs are set for the weekend of Jan. 6-7. On Saturday Jan. 6, AFC East champ Buffalo (9-7), plays at AFC Central champ Cleveland (9-6-1), starting at 9:30 a.m. If Philadelphia wins the NFC wild card-game, it would then play NFC West champ San Francisco (14-2) at 1 p.m. If Los Angeles wins the wild card, the 49ers' first playoff opponent would be NFC Central champ Minnesota (10-6).

The lineup for Sunday, Jan. 7, has either Los Angeles or Minnesota playing the NFC East champion New York Giants (12-4) at 9:30 a.m., followed by the AFC wild-card winner, either Houston or Pittsburgh, at AFC West champion Denver (11-5).

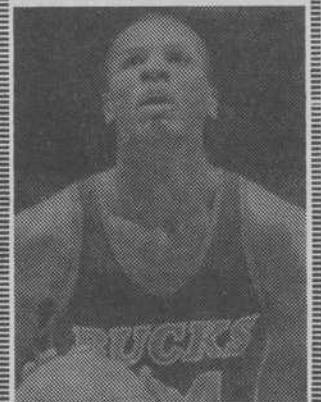
## SPORTS REVIEW

## UNLV Moves Up Notch; Lady Rebels No. 9

UNLV's basketball team moved up from 13th to 12th in the latest Associated Press poll following its defeat of Iowa on Saturday in the Duel in the Desert. Meanwhile, the Lady Rebels, coming off wins over Auburn and Houston, moved up to ninth from 13th.

## Spurs' Cummings Named Player Of The Week

Terry Cummings, who averaged 27.6 points, 6.7 rebounds and three steals to lead San Antonio to three victories last week, was selected on Tuesday the NBA Player of the Week for the period ending Dec. 24.



Terry Cummings

## Lakers Pick Up Vicent For Front Line

Forward Jay Vincent signed a contract Sunday with the Los Angeles Lakers and thus will be reunited with his former college teammate, Magic Johnson.

Vincent was waived by the Philadelphia 76ers on Dec. 14.

ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE

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