

LAS VEGAS

Sentinel Voice Sports

Utah and Cleveland out to prove something

CONFERENCE FINALS MATCHUPS TOUGHER THAN EXPECTED

By W. G. Ramirez

After both the Portland Trailblazers and Chicago Bulls took 2-0 leads in the Western and Eastern Conference Finals, respectively, it looked as though the leagues top two teams would be giving NBA fans their "dream matchup." Two problems have surfaced, however: Utah and Cleveland.

The Bulls, the seemingly invincible team that waltzed through the regular season with the fourth best record in league history, were expected to cruise to their second consecutive NBA title. Even talks of their going 15-0 in the playoffs floated about.

The ride thus far has been extremely bumpy. The Knicks pushed Chicago to seven games in the second round. Hoping they'd learned their lesson, the Bulls now find themselves in a dogfight, against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"Something is missing from last season," said star guard Michael Jordan. "We aren't playing like we're hungry anymore."

While Jordan has spent much of the past two seasons trying to

convince people the Bulls aren't a one-man team, they often have been reduced to just that in these playoffs. The Bulls, plain and simple, aren't playing well. Sure they currently hold a 3-2 edge over Cleveland but their enthusiasm and heart, once a trademark, are only sporadically evident now.

"This team has pride," adds Jordan. "I don't feel I have to hold a gun to their backs or give them a tongue-lashing to get us ready to play."

The Bulls and Cavs head to Cleveland for Game 6 on Friday.

Of course the winner of this series will battle either the quick and overpowering Portland Trailblazers or the spunky and nagging Utah Jazz.

Utah put the 'Blazers in such a state of confusion that Portland had to worry about battling their own frustrations before even thinking of beating the Jazz.

The Trailblazers were hit with five technical fouls for complaining about calls in Utah's 121-112 Game 4 victory.

The chief culprit for Portland turned out to be "Mr. Nice Guy" - Clyde Drexler.

Whatever the reason was, the Western Conference champs lost their composure when it was needed most.

Well the series returned to Portland on Tuesday, as did their poise.

Kevin Duckworth scored four

points during an 8-0 Portland surge in overtime as the 'Blazers won 127-112 to take a 3-2 lead in the Western Conference Finals.

Unlike the two one-sided Portland victories in the first two games of the series, this one was not easy.

Jazz guard John Stockton had to be replaced by Delaney Rudd because Drexler had poked his eye, accidentally, during a lay-up, just before halftime.

Rudd, hit a 3-pointer with 5.5 seconds to play in regulation to tie it 107-107.

The injury caused swelling around the eye and Stockton experienced double-vision. Jazz team doctor Lyle Mason said he did not believe Stockton will have any long-term vision problems.

Game 6 is scheduled for this evening with Stockton listed as

probable.

If both series go to seven games it should be interesting to see which Chicago team or which Portland team shows up for the game.

No Heart/All Jordan or Game Plan Teamwork in Chicago?

Decomposed/Frustrated or Devastation in Portland?

...or maybe just Cleveland and Utah.

NBA FINAL NOTES

- How important is the home-court advantage in the NBA Finals? The team with the (potential) extra game at home has won 33 NBA Finals and lost only 12, a .733 percentage.

- What is the most important game to win in the best-of-7 NBA Finals? Other than the seventh (obviously), statistics show it's Game 3. Teams that have won Game 3 have gone on to win 32 of 45 NBA Finals, a .711 percentage.

- Nearly two-thirds of the NBA Finals played thus far-29 of 45-have gone six or seven games. There have been only five four-game sweeps and 11 five-game series.

- One quarter-of-a-century ago, twenty-five years, the Boston Celtics captured the NBA title over the Los Angeles Lakers. Red Auerbach announced his retirement and Bill Russell would be taking over as player-coach. The Celtics responded with three straight victories, two of them in L.A. In Game 7 Russell scored 25 points and snagged 32 rebounds as the Celtics went on to capture their eighth straight championship.

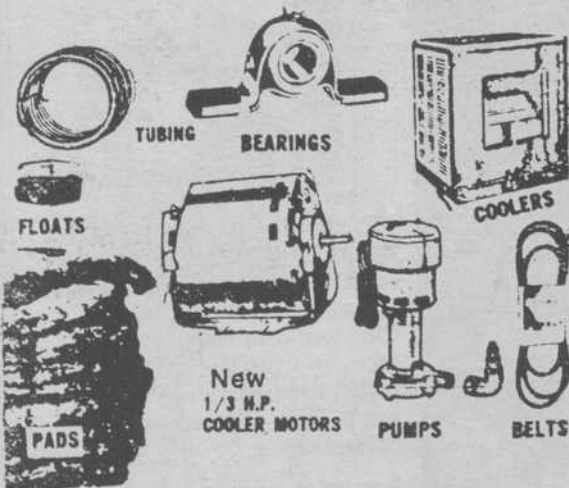


CLYDE DREXLER BATTLES UTAH'S BLUE EDWARDS



Larry Johnson (left) of the Charlotte Hornets, adds a striking, designer-made leather jacket to his wardrobe for being named the 1992 Coca-Cola classic NBA Rookie of the Year. Johnson, the No. 1 overall pick of the 1991 NBA Draft, led the Hornets to their best won-lost record (31-51) in the team's four-year history. The former University of Nevada Las Vegas star also led all NBA rookies in scoring with an average of 19.2 points per game and set a Hornets rookie scoring record with 1,576 total points. Dennis Kelly, vice president, Coca-Cola USA, presented Johnson with the jacket during a recent TNT sports program taping session in Atlanta.

BEAT THE HEAT ..BEAT HIGH PRICES!



PHIL'S SALVAGE
BUILDERS EMPORIUM
1131 So. Main . . . 382-7528

BEAR'S AUTO REPAIR

20 years experience

SPECIALIZING IN ALL MINOR
AND MAJOR AUTO REPAIRS

SENIOR, STUDENT, MILITARY
DISCOUNTS WITH THIS AD

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

8 am to 6 pm

2029 W. Bonanza, Suite #D

Barry Martin (702) 648-2502

Licensed and Insured

VEGAS LANDSCAPING

FREE ESTIMATES

SPRINKLERS

SHRUBS



TREES

CLEAN-UP

TOTAL LAWN CARE

649-6697

BILLY MCKENZIE

Licensed and Bonded #57634