

SPORTS

Iverson leads Sixers to victory

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Allen Iverson sat before the worldwide media, the same people who said his team had no chance of beating the Lakers, and grinned the grin of a man who knew the truth all along.

"Big-time underdogs," he said, pausing to relish the thought. "I'm glad nobody bet their life on it because they'd be dead now."

For those who thought the Philadelphia 76ers were out of their league, Iverson changed a lot of minds Wednesday night.

In a thrilling opener to the championship round, Iverson had a mesmerizing first half, a poor second half and a clutch overtime in scoring 48 points to lead Philadelphia to a 107-101 victory over Los Angeles.

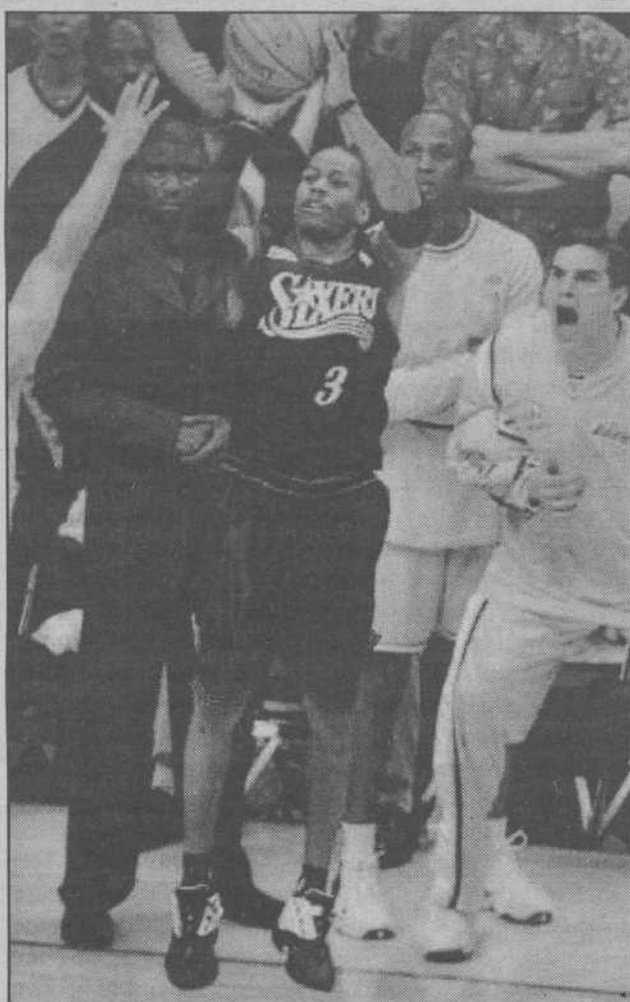
"Everyone said we can't do it, and that drives us," said Iverson, who scored seven straight points in overtime after the clock ticked inside two minutes to give Philadelphia a lead it never relinquished.

The prohibitive underdog 76ers ended the Lakers' 19-game winning streak and handed them their first loss in 67 days, stunning a Staples Center crowd and a worldwide audience that was all set to anoint the Lakers as the NBA's next dynasty.

"You've got so many basketball experts, but the only guys that know are the guys on the floor. We've got heart. We play with that first. We'll play with talent second," Iverson said.

Heart, resiliency and toughness were three of the Sixers' qualities on display in a highly entertaining game that lasted three hours and featured two 40-point performances.

Shaquille O'Neal hit a jump hook for the first points of the overtime, Kobe Bryant spun around Eric the line for



Allen Iverson showed his MVP status as he lead the Philadelphia 76ers to a first-round upset victory over L.A.

a five-point lead with three minutes left.

"You get down five in the finals against the Lakers and everybody's got their brooms out. That drives us," Iverson said.

Raja Bell flung up an underhanded shot with his left hand that fell through, and Iverson hit two foul shots to get the 76ers within 99-98 with 1:46 left. Tyronn Lue then missed a drive and Iverson beat him downcourt and hit a wide-open 3-pointer.

After a turnover by Rick Fox, Iverson buried a corner jumper over Lue for a 103-99 lead. After the ball fell through, Iverson looked down at his sprawled opponent and took two purposeful high steps over him, as if to say "Take that!" as he ran back up the court.

Bryant answered with a

jumper, but Snow hit a runner from the lane with 10.5 seconds left for a four-point lead that all but ended the game — along with all the talk about how the Lakers would become the first team in NBA history to go undefeated through the postseason.

"That's the way we are. We play hard," Iverson said. "We came in here expecting to win. We know we can win. Everybody's been counting us out."

O'Neal finished with 44 points and 20 rebounds, but Bryant scored just 15 points on 7-for-22 shooting.

"I don't think Kobe Bryant had a Kobe kind of day and he will play better Friday," Snow said.

"In OT, we came out slow but gathered the troops, Allen hit a big shot and we got some stops."

Teen hoopers still being exploited

By Saeed Shabazz and J. Coyden Palmer
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Probasketball prognosticators predict June 27 at least four high schoolers stand a good chance of realizing a dream shared by thousands of their peers: the coveted chance to play in the National Basketball Association, after hearing their names called at this year's NBA draft at New York's Madison Square Garden.

And even though three of the league's top players, Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett and Tracy McGrady are "baby ballers" who jumped from high school courts to pro arenas, there is still the debate about whether

"kids" should make such moves.

One voice questioning the high school-to-pro-leap is the man who made it all possible: Spencer Haywood. It was a Supreme Court decision in the 1970s that opened the door to the hardship draft, and knocked out an NBA decision to keep him out of the league before he finished college.

"Although I do understand the need to support families, my intention was not to eventually eliminate players' skill development," said Mr. Haywood, a former NBA star. The debate is a mix of arguments about money, player exploitation, morality, education and opportunity.

King inks Izon as Rahman's opponent

NEW YORK (AP) — If the courts permit it, heavyweight champion Hasim Rahman will fight David Izon this summer in China.

Don King signed Izon to a promotional contract and immediately matched him against the WBC-IBF champion as part of a heavyweight title doubleheader with WBA champion John Ruiz's defense against Evander Holyfield on Aug. 5 at Beijing.

"I like to feel it's a legitimate fight," Rahman said at a news conference last week. "This is a big opportunity for me and I'm not going to let it slip by."

Rahman became champion by knocking out Lennox Lewis in the fifth round April 22 in South Africa.

There was a rematch clause in the contract and Lewis contends Rahman's next fight should be against him. Rahman signed with King on May 18, but Cedrick Kushner claims the champion is still under contract to him.

Lewis and Kushner have filed lawsuits against King and Rahman alleging interference and breach of contract. Both suits are to be heard in the same trial set for June 11 in U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

"Rahman did not win the titles in a courtroom," King said.

"Nobody gave up the titles," Rahman said.

As for fighting Izon instead of a more widely known opponent, he said, "Lewis and (Mike) Tyson are not in the picture

now. They're not the champions right now."

It was announced recently by King that Rahman's first defense would be against Brian Nielsen of Denmark in Beijing. Instead, it will be Izon.

"I want to fight real fighters, not just guys I'm going to blow out in one round or two," Rahman said.

It appeared the reason Nielsen is not fighting Rahman, however, is that Danish promoter Bettina Palle priced him out of the match.

Another problem is that King has yet to make a television deal for the China doubleheader.

At the news conference, King exhibited some items he brought back from a recent trip to Beijing, but he and the two fighters opened the session posing in Uncle Sam top hats.

"Three Yankee Doodle dandies," King bellowed.

Izon is a 33-year-old native of Nigeria, who shortened his name because people find Izonronitei too difficult to spell or pronounce.

He has been fighting out of Pensacola, Fla., for five years, often for light heavyweight champion Roy Jones Jr.'s Square Ring promotional company. Square Ring, however, did not have a contract with him.

"My dream is coming true because Rahman is fighting me," said Izon (27-3, 23 knockouts), who had a fight against Tyson fall through three times.

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