

Lakers roll in Game 5 to take 3-1 series lead

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — On his first dunk, Shaquille O'Neal caught Dikembe Mutombo in the face with an elbow. On his last dunk, O'Neal put an emphatic end to the 76ers' final run.

It wasn't just dunks, though, that made it a great night for O'Neal and the Los Angeles Lakers. He also threw timely passes when double-teamed, outrebounded everybody and cut off drives into the paint, leading the Lakers to a 100-86 victory over Philadelphia on Wednesday night and a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals.

"I told y'all I was going to come back with a vengeance," said O'Neal, who had 34 points and 14 rebounds as the Lakers played their best game of the series and looked all but unbeatable.

Los Angeles held a double-digit lead for almost the entire second half and tied the NBA record with its seventh consecutive playoff road victory.

If the Lakers can close out the series Friday night in Game 5, they will finish with the best postseason run in NBA history — 15-1.

"I had an inkling we were going to play a game like that," Lakers coach Phil Jackson said. "I felt we had a better game in us than we played the other night."

Did they ever. O'Neal had 20 points and 11 rebounds by halftime as the Lakers opened a 14-point lead, and Kobe Bryant came within one assist of a triple-double. The role players helped out, too, as Robert Horry, Derek Fisher and Tyrone Lue combined for seven of the Lakers' 10 3-pointers.

Three of those 3-pointers deflated the Sixers after they used an 11-0 run to pull to 77-70 early in the fourth.

After O'Neal ended the run with a powerful dunk over Mutombo, he

found Brian Shaw for a wide-open 3-pointer. Lue and Horry followed with 3s to get the lead back to 17 with 6 1/2 minutes left, and from there it was only a matter of running out the clock.

"I'd say with the way we're playing and the way we are focused right now, it's up to us. It's really not up to them," said Lue, who again helped contain Allen Iverson by playing such tight defense that the Sixers often had difficulty just getting him the ball.

Iverson left the game with a minute-and-a-half left after scoring 35 points on 12-for-30 shooting.

Mutombo added 19 points and nine rebounds.

Tyrone Hill had another subpar game, Jumaine Jones was scoreless and Aaron McKie shot just 1-for-9. The Sixers had just 15 assists on their 33 field goals — a telling sign that they were not playing good team ball.

"When you consider the fact that we did make a run and they didn't panic but made good plays, that's why they're a championship team," Philadelphia coach Larry Brown said.

The Lakers now have the 76ers in dire straits, as no team has ever come back from a 3-1 deficit in the finals.

"We still haven't put together a great game like we did in the first three series, but we're doing enough to win. And that's what it's all about — winning," O'Neal said. "In a perfect world, we'd be talking about winning the whole thing right now, but we let Game 1 slip away."

The 76ers hurt themselves by missing 11 free throws, which was an even bigger factor considering Los Angeles missed 14.

But aside from that statistic, the Lakers dominated this game much like they did during the first three rounds of

the postseason when they went 11-0 against Portland, Sacramento and San Antonio.

Game 5 is Friday night. "We have to be very, very prepared, emotionally poised and set," Jackson said. "We have to have the same determination we had tonight because it will be a totally different ballgame."

O'Neal grabbed five offensive rebounds in the first quarter and the Lakers had nine second-chance points in taking a 22-14 lead.

The Sixers opened the second quarter with a full-court press that gave the Lakers trouble and allowed Philadelphia to close to 26-22, but they switched their defensive attention to double-teaming O'Neal, and the results were not good.

Harper hit a backdoor layup off a pass from O'Neal and then hit a 3-pointer, and Horry and Lue also hit 3-

in a 20-7 run that gave Los Angeles a 46-29 lead.

O'Neal missed two from the line with 5.3 seconds left in the second quarter, but rebounded his own miss and scored for a 51-37 halftime lead.

Early in the third quarter, O'Neal grabbed three offensive rebounds on one possession and converted two foul shots for a 58-42 lead. Bryant went around Raja Bell for a three-point play with 3:47 left in the third to give the Lakers their first 20-point lead, 68-48, and Fisher followed with a steal leading to a wide-open dunk by Bryant just seconds later.

O'Neal scored six points on pretty moves in the lane in the rest of the quarter to help the Lakers take a 77-59 lead into the fourth.

"We knew they were going to give us one last run, and we held our composure," O'Neal said.

Royals win second straight

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — All of a sudden, the Kansas City Royals are playing well.

Good pitching, timely hitting, aggressive baserunning and consistently solid defense have led to two straight interleague victories over the St. Louis Cardinals.

They've been scrapping along at the bottom of the AL Central so long, there hardly seemed reason to get overly excited after Kris Wilson went seven strong innings in a 4-1 victory over the Cardinals on Wednesday night.

Nevertheless, the prospect of a three-game sweep over their state rivals and the several thousand loud, red-clad St. Louis fans who've been squeezing into Kauffman Stadium did a world of good for everyone's mood.

"A lot of red shirts kinda makes you mad," Royals manager Tony Muser said.

"Maybe it's the crowd. Maybe St. Louis, putting a lot of the stuff we've gone through behind us and starting

fresh."

The Cardinals' only run came on Mark McGwire's 425-foot homer in the second. The defense turned four double plays as Wilson won his first major league game in his first major league start. In 11 relief appearances, he had been shaky.

"To be honest, I wasn't really thinking I'd go seven innings," said Wilson, who gave up eight hits, struck out three and walked one.

"I was just trying to go right at them and not walk guys. When you start giving a lineup like that extra baserunners, it can be deadly," Wilson said. "I just felt real comfortable."

Wilson admitted he made a mistake to McGwire.

Rey Sanchez and Mike Sweeney each had three hits for the Royals. Jason Grimsley pitched a hitless eighth, and Roberto Hernandez worked the ninth for his 10th save.

St. Louis, 1-7 on a nine-game road trip, has lost 11 of 15.

Matt Morris (8-4), was charged with four runs and 12 hits in six-plus innings.

McGwire sent a 3-2 pitch soaring into the left-field bleachers in the second inning for his 557th career homer and 194th with the Cardinals.

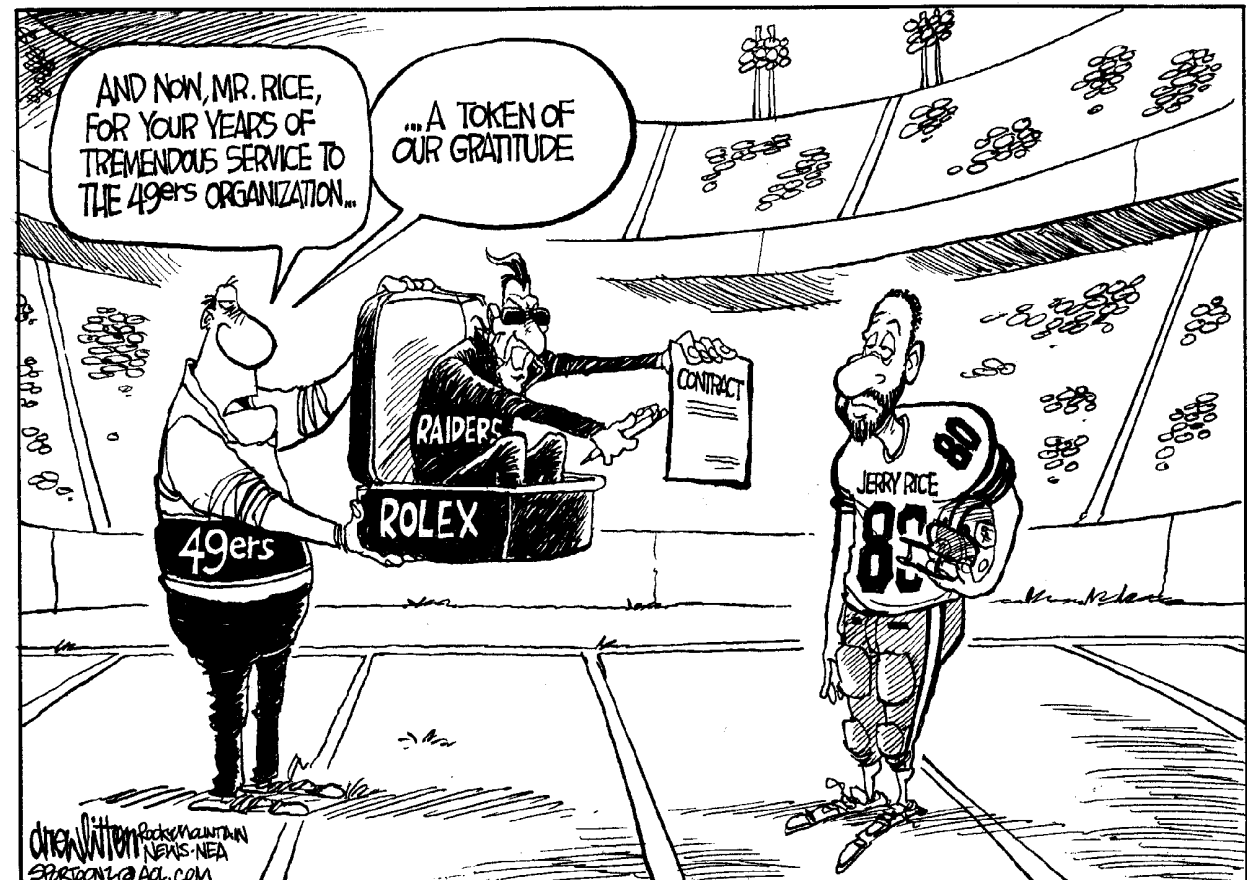
Still looking for his hitting stroke after missing 36 games with an injury, McGwire moved ahead of Rogers Hornsby for fourth place on the team list.

Sanchez, who also had three hits Tuesday, singled with one out in the first.

Morris then hit Carlos Beltran in the back of the helmet with a soft breaking pitch.

Sweeney drove in a run with his major league-leading 31st double, and Jermaine Dye followed with an RBI single and Joe Randa with a sacrifice fly.

In the third, Sweeney scored on a throwing error by second baseman Fernando Vina.



sports briefs

New Bronco wide receiver pulls hamstring

DENVER (AP) — Two days after joining the Denver Broncos, wide receiver Keith Poole limped off the practice field after pulling a hamstring during a team workout Wednesday.

Poole, who caught 21 passes for the New Orleans Saints last year, was injured while running a deep route. He is expected to be ready for training camp July 26.

"Hamstrings pull when guys aren't used to sprinting enough and they come in here and go through a minicamp and find out they exerted a little too much," coach Mike Shanahan said.

If healthy, Poole will compete

with Eddie Kennison for time as Denver's third receiver. Ed McCaffrey and Rod Smith, who each caught more than 100 passes last year, are the starters.

About 10 minutes after Poole left the field, wide receiver Scottie Montgomery hurt his right ankle while making a nice catch. The injury was not considered serious.

Kennison also was shaken up briefly, but dismissed it after practice.

"I'm still standing," he said. "Sometimes you get little things that really no one has to know about. You might get kicked in the knee, poked in the eye or something like that."

Driver's photos won't be released to public

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — A judge refused to release Dale Earnhardt's autopsy photos, agreeing with the NASCAR great's widow that making the pictures public would cause the family pain.

"In this particular case, the release constitutes a serious invasion of the highest degree. There is no question it's harmful, it's unspeakable," said

Circuit Judge Joseph Will.

Will's decision was the latest victory for Teresa Earnhardt in her four-month battle to keep the autopsy photos out of the public realm.

The Independent Florida Alligator, a student-run newspaper at the University of Florida, and a DeLand-based Web site had sought access to the autopsy photos.

Neagle on disabled list; Rockies delay second game

DENVER (AP) — Just as left-hander Denny Neagle was making progress with his strained right hamstring, he turned up sore and stiff and was placed on the 15-day disabled list Wednesday by the Colorado Rockies.

Neagle pulled up lame Friday while running the bases.

After Tuesday night's 10-9 loss to the Seattle Mariners, the Rockies announced that Neagle would start on Friday in Cincinnati, just one day later than his scheduled next start.

But Neagle, who went through an intensified workout on Tuesday to test the injury, reported a setback when he woke up Wednesday morning.

"We pushed it pretty hard (Tuesday) just to see where it was at," Neagle said. "It was the only way to tell if I was going to be ready for Friday. It got a little bit sore toward the last of the exercises I did. When I woke up (Wednesday), it was pretty stiff and sore again."

Manager Buddy Bell and the Rockies medical staff decided to take

the cautious approach.

"We just thought it was the wise thing to do, put him on the DL and not take any chances," Bell said.

Because of persistent pregame rain and a wet forecast, Wednesday night's game against Seattle was postponed about 30 minutes after its scheduled start.

It will be made up as part of a day-night doubleheader on Thursday, with the regularly scheduled first game at 1 p.m. to be followed by the makeup game at 7 p.m.

In the opener, Seattle's Jamie Moyer (8-1) will oppose Colorado's Shawn Chacon (3-3). In the nightcap, Paul Abbott (5-2) will go against Pedro Astacio (5-6).

Neagle said Bell "wanted to make sure I was 100 percent ready to go. This is my first time pulling a hamstring. All the doctors said if you do it a second time, it's that much easier to do it a third and fourth time. It will keep going on you."

Royal's boss to be all-star

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Being picked as an American League coach for the All-Star Game is "quite an honor," said an obviously happy Tony Muser.

The manager of the Kansas City Royals was chosen by New York skipper Joe Torre along with Seattle manager Lou Piniella to join Torre for the game in Seattle on July 10.

Muser has never been to an All-Star Game as a player, coach or manager.

"I'm very proud," he said. "It's the epitome of a career to be asked to coach in the All-Star Game. It's just as much an honor to represent the Kansas City Royals."

"I talked to Joe a little bit in spring training and he always said that he ad-

mired our club and the way the ball club responded and competed," Muser said. "I think it made an impression on him."

Despite a disappointing 23-40 record going into their game Wednesday night that had them in last place in the AL Central, the Royals players have maintained a strong loyalty to their fourth-year manager.

"We're all excited for him to get the opportunity," said third baseman Joe Randa.

"Maybe he'll get a chance to just relax a little bit and be a coach instead of a manager."

Randa sees Muser's selection as a payback for his lifelong loyalty to the game.



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