

Rockets scrapping for spot in playoffs as time runs out

United Press International
HOUSTON — With 17 games remaining and several teams hovering around the fifth and sixth playoff spots in the NBA's Western Conference, Houston Rockets Coach Del Harris says it will take a recommitment, night after night, to still be in uniform after the regular season ends.

And so far, Harris observes, his players are showing him the attitude it's going to take.

"We have improved our defense greatly and this team has been able to make a recommitment each night to tough team defense," Harris said Wednesday.

The two big keys (to the Rockets playoff hopes) are the play of

Calvin Murphy coming off the bench, and defense. Murphy is unselfish and will be able to add years to his career in coming off the bench. It's provided us necessary offensive spark," he added.

With Wednesday's 101-100 victory over the playoff bound Indiana Pacers, Houston is riding a four-game winning streak — the team's first this year — and is in the thick of the playoff race.

The Phoenix Suns, San Antonio Spurs and Los Angeles Lakers are virtually assured three of the Western Conference's six playoff spots with only 17 regular season games remaining.

The other three positions are likely to go either Portland, with a

record of 33-33, or Golden State and Houston at 32-33, or Kansas City at 32-34.

Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Milwaukee and Indiana already are virtually assured the playoffs in the Eastern Conference, and Chicago and Washington are fighting it out for the sixth spot.

Houston's Billy Paultz, who has never been on anything less than a playoff team in his NBA career, continues to be a top team leader in the Rockets drive.

His philosophy is simple: keep control in the final minutes.

Against the Pacers, the lead changed hands four times in the final minute but with five seconds left, Bobby Joe Reid got hacked as he drove to the basket and connected on two free throws to put the game away.

"We got the drive to the basket at the end, drew the foul, converted our free throws and they weren't able to get the ball underneath at the end," said Paultz.

Harris echoed Paultz's observations.

"What's good for you on offense can't be good for you on defense," he said. "We wanted to go to the hoop at the end and we wanted to make them take the outside shot to beat us."

Leading scorers for the Pacers were James Edwards with 25 and McGuinness with 19.

Reid and Murphy led Houston with 18 each. Allen Leavell had 14, all in the fourth quarter.



Photo by Jon Heltzer

Lord, you know it ain't easy

Texas A&M women's basketball coach Cherri Rapp intently watches the Aggie women practice earlier this week. The Aggie Ladies, who have endured a difficult 7-20 record this season, will finish the schedule this weekend when they play

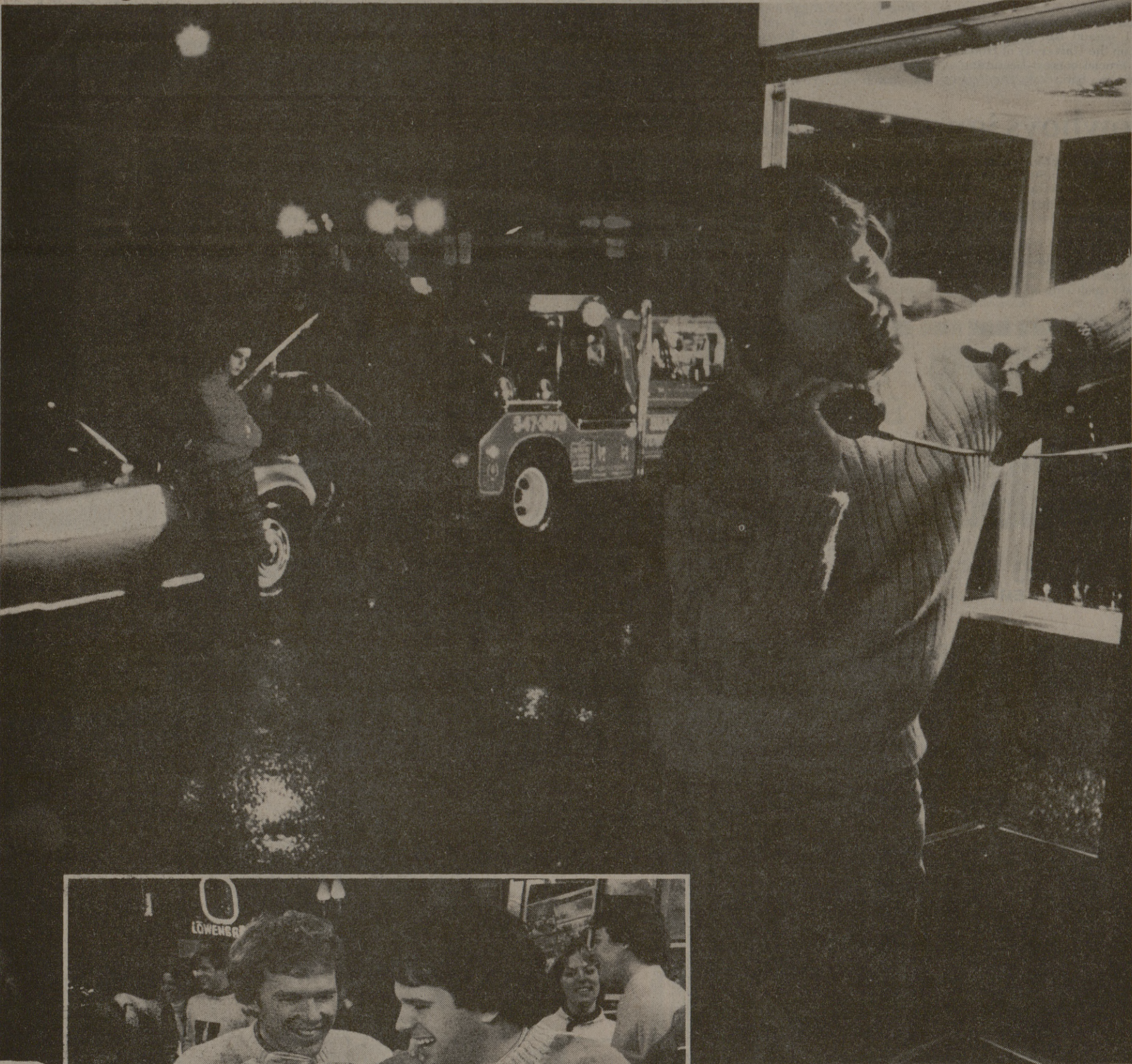
Nebraska at 7:30 p.m. tonight and Houston at approximately 4:30 p.m. Saturday. Both games will be played in C. Rolfe White Coliseum, with Saturday's game immediately following the men's contest against the Cougar men.

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Spurs defeat Sonics ...

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — George Gervin scored 35 points Thursday night and Mark Olberding added 30 to lead the San Antonio Spurs to a 123-113 victory over the Seattle Super Sonics in a foul-plagued game.

Gervin, who scored 14 points in the first period, put San Antonio up 24-22 with a jumper late in that period and the Spurs never trailed. Referees Darell Garretson and Hugh Evans called 61 personal fouls and two technicals and Sonics James Bailey, John Johnson and Armond Hill fouled out.

The Spurs pulled away to an 82-69 lead midway through the third period by running out 10 straight points.

The Sonics closed to 93-90 on a three-point play by James Bailey early in the fourth period before San Antonio ran an 18-8 spurt to take a 111-98 edge and ice the game.

San Antonio led 61-57 at the half as Gervin scored 21 points on 10 of 13 shooting from the field and 13 points from Olberding.

... while Mavs lose again

United Press International
KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Scott Wedman and Otis Birdsong combined for 56 points to carry the Kansas City Kings to a 105-102 victory Thursday night over the Dallas Mavericks.

Wedman scored 30 and Birdsong 26 to help the Kings run their record to 5-0 against the Mavericks despite the absence of point guard Phil Ford. Ford suffered a fractured left eye socket Sunday against Golden State and will be lost for at least seven more days.

Wedman scored 13 points to stake Kansas City at a 26-20 first quarter lead, and Birdsong chipped in seven second quarter points to help the Kings widen the margin to as many as 12 points.

Wedman scored 13 more points in the third quarter as Kansas City took an 83-69 lead, but the Mavericks got back into the game in the final period behind the 13 points of rookie Clarence Kea and pulled within three points in the closing minute.

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