

Sports

Off the Wall

By Frank L. Christlieb



Rockets after Spurs now

The latest episode of the once-a-year NBA playoff saga has introduced a new character who seems determined to steal the show. And the annual event has ushered out a group of old villains whom, it would seem, should have lost their stage fright after several years of playoff experience.

However, as a result of a stunning victory by some show-stealing veterans who have seen many games come and go with little or no glory, the villainous defending NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers have left the stage after a brief performance.

After several years of mediocre to downright bad performances in the playoffs (and the regular season), the Houston Rockets surprised NBA fans and followers by knocking off the Lakers, a team which has been too successful for too long.

This time around, Kareem and his cocky cronies just couldn't muster up the strength to put away Moses and his mischievous misfits. And as a result, the Lakers will watch the rest of the playoffs from front row television seats.

But don't think Houston had an easy time of it.

The up-and-down Rockets had to use every offensive weapon and defensive tactic available to beat the Lakers, who held on to their crown until the last possible moment. It wasn't until the last 15 seconds of the first-round series that the Lakers woke up from their year-long championship dream.

Dream to nightmare was a harsh transition for the Lakers, who just didn't seem to have the Magic they used to roll over the 76ers and the rest of the league en route to last year's title.

Those who think that a Rocket named Moses Malone was totally responsible for the surprising win had better think again. It took everyone from 5-foot-10 Calvin "Murf" Murphy (listed that way, but closer to 5-foot-8) to 6-foot-11 Billy "Whopper" Paultz (a formidable mauler of 250 pounds), for the Rockets to beat the Lakers.

The series featured a team of well-known names vs. one of unknown names. And the "I'm the best center in the league" contest between the two men who may be tied for that honor, mighty Kareem and just-as-mighty Moses, was one of the finer in recent years' playoffs.

Each team shattered the conventional wisdom of home-court advantage by winning on the other's home floor, with Houston doing it twice. But the Rockets, with their never-say-die-even-against-the-world-champions attitude, also showed that they don't think much about the term "underdog" either.

Now Houston faces state rival San Antonio. Although the Rockets are confident after winning the Laker series, they need more than memories to upend the Spurs and to end their history of playoff success.

However, if the once-again-underdog Rockets can freeze "Ice" and the rest of SA's speedy lineup, they will have an excellent chance of knocking off Stan Albeck's Spurs.

The Rockets and Spurs have played some close games and some not-so-close games in the past few years, and this is the second consecutive year they have met in the playoffs. Houston won two of three games in last year's first round, and the two teams split six games this season.

And one thing's for sure — Bobby Joe, Mighty Mo, Murf, Dooms and the other Rockets don't want their playoff journey to end before they have a chance to do some more giant-killing.

Netters defeated by Trinity in SA

By RICK STOLLE

Battalion Staff

Despite the beautiful day, potheads were beaten by the Aggies. Fernandez was beaten by Louise Allen 6-1, 6-0; Hill lost to Deanna; Maylyn Hooton lost to Kim Wilson 6-1, 6-2; Sonja Hutcherson was defeated by Lee Elliot 6-4, 6-3 and Laura Hanna was beaten by Kathy Kuhn 6-4, 6-3.

Cannon said Fernandez typified the Aggies against Trinity.

"Liliana just was not able to concentrate," she said. "She seemed a little lost out there and that's not like her."

In doubles: Hill-Hutcherson lost to Denman-Richtiro 6-1, 6-3; Hanna-Closs were beaten by Elliot-Allen 6-4, 7-5 and Fernandez-Willard had the only win for the Aggs.

The loss brings the Aggies spring record to 12-8 with four matches left on the schedule. And Cannon said the matches will be only slightly less challenging than the Trinity match.

The Ags will travel to Dallas to take on SMU Saturday and to Denton to play North Texas State University Sunday.

"Denman was a big hitter with a powerful serve and forehand," Cannon said. "When Denman got wound up, it was all Pam could do to just get out of the way of the ball."

In singles: Amy Closs had her

Rockets beat SA behind Murphy

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — Nobody has been able to convince the Houston Rockets they are supposed to be through for the season.

The Los Angeles Lakers didn't get through to the Rockets last week and the San Antonio Spurs failed to get their attention Tuesday night.

Despite having finished their emotional mini-series with Los Angeles only two days earlier, the Rockets went out Tuesday evening and convincingly manhandled the Midwest Division champion Spurs, 107-98, in the opening game of their best of seven Western Conference semifinal series.

"What was the difference? I'll tell you the difference," said Houston center Moses Malone. "We wanted to win. That's the difference."

Tiny Calvin Murphy came off the bench to take Houston to a first-half lead and Robert Reid hit the key shots down the stretch that helped the steamrolling Rockets hold off the Spurs.

The series resumes at the HemisFair arena Wednesday night before the series moves on to Houston for games Friday night and Sunday afternoon.

Houston, which came into the playoffs with a losing record, owned a 13-point lead with six minutes to play.

A brief San Antonio spurt narrowed the deficit to 10 points, but Reid hit a jumper to slow down that rally. And after the Spurs ran off six straight points to cut their

deficit to six at 96-90 with four minutes remaining, Reid coolly hit another jumper that ended San Antonio's hopes for good.

Malone, who averaged 31 points in the three-game series with the Lakers, scored 27 Tuesday night — but it was Murphy, the 5-9 guard, whose 15 points in the second quarter proved the deciding factor.

Murphy finished with 21 while Billy Paultz added 18.

George Gervin paced the Spurs with 30 points, while Ron Brewer tossed in another 18.

Houston built a 62-53 halftime lead thanks to spurts at the end of each of the first two periods.

San Antonio had built a nine-point advantage of its own with 2:21 left in the first quarter only to see Houston score the last eight points of the period — Paultz scoring four and Dunleavy hitting four.

Murphy scored only two points in the opening quarter, but he erupted with 15 in the second period to ignite the Rockets to their advantage at intermission.

The game was tied at 47-47 when Houston ran off 11 straight points. Paultz started the streak with a three-point play, Mike Dunleavy added a basket and Murphy scored on a long jumper before Dunleavy scored again.

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