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# Rockets faltering as season winds down

## Club loses five straight; Chaney seeks consistency in team play

HOUSTON (AP) — The veneer is starting to come off of Coach Don Chaney's smile as his Houston Rockets continue their lurch toward the NBA playoffs.

"At this time of the year you usually don't feel the need to make adjustments, but we're still making adjustments," Chaney said. "I thought maybe we'd be more consistent as far as rotation, substitution and play."

The Rockets limped home Monday night after a 1-4 road trip that was supposed to show the team's progress as the playoffs draw nearer.

The Rockets won the road opener against the Dallas Mavericks, who were still adjusting to the loss of Mark Aguirre.

Then came four straight losses, ending in a 121-105 drubbing Sunday night at Milwaukee.

Chaney had hoped playing in the Summit Monday night against Washington would give the Rockets a much-needed new start.

Instead, the Rockets scored a season-low 15 first-quarter points and allowed the Bullets a 104-98 victory without injured leading scorer Jeff Malone.

Chaney was upbeat before the game, distraught afterward.

"The game speaks for itself, we came out in the first half in another world," Chaney said. "When you're

at home you have to play to win. We didn't play to win."

The normally affable Chaney has reached the testy stage as the Rockets prepare to go back on the road for three of their next four games.

Asked what he told the team after the Bullets loss, Chaney snapped, "What I told the team after the game is between the team and myself."

The Rockets were flat from the start and despite a fourth quarter spurt, led only briefly in the game.

"Just because you're at home, nobody is going to give you the game," Rockets center Akeem Olajuwon said. "You have to earn it."

Only five Rockets from last year's roster remain with the team.

The Rockets have been adjusting

all season, trying to fit off-season acquisitions into the rotation, the most recent being Walter Berry.

The adjustments are distracting, but necessary, Chaney said.

"We've had a 'positive wrench' thrown in with the addition of Walter," Chaney said. "Now we have to work him into the rotation."

The Rockets' 9-17 road record isn't the only problem, Chaney said. Only three teams in the league have winning road records.

"Everybody has problems, we had our problems on the road," Chaney said. "I feel we are still a competitive team. We have to become a better road team in the playoffs."

The Rockets' road woes were magnified by a 114-111 loss to the Los Angeles Clippers Feb. 8, snapping a 19-game Clipper losing streak.

"We're hurting ourselves in some areas," Chaney said. "It wasn't as if we were blown out every game on the road and that showed me something."

Then the Rockets came home and showed him something else.

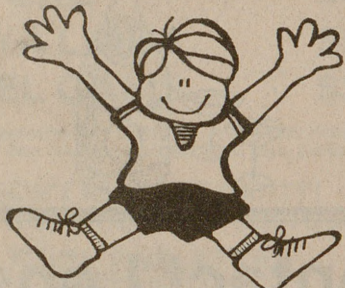
"The game was lost in the first quarter," Chaney said of Monday night's loss. "I put a lot of emphasis on the first quarter and the effort was just not there."

The Rockets play at Denver Thursday, at Seattle Friday and at the Los Angeles Lakers Sunday. The Lakers have a 14-14 road record.

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



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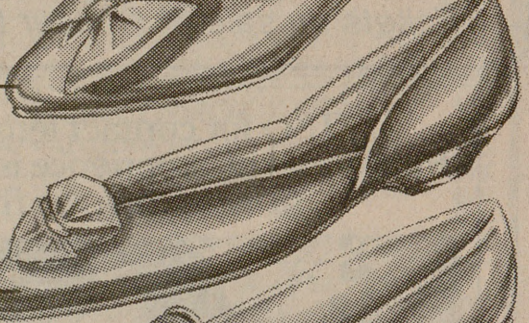
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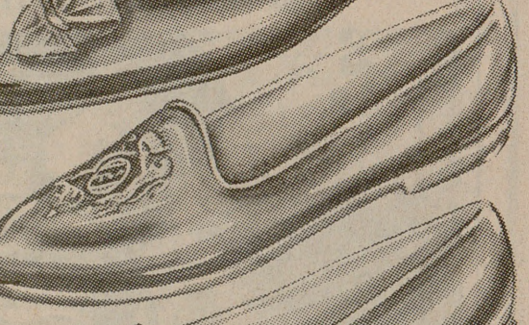
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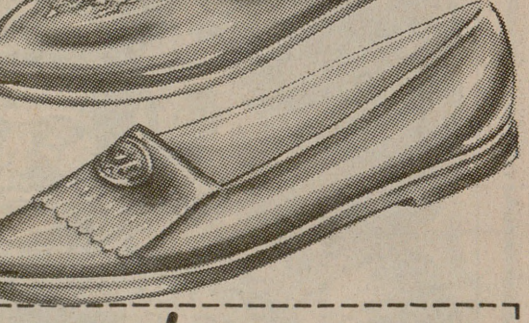
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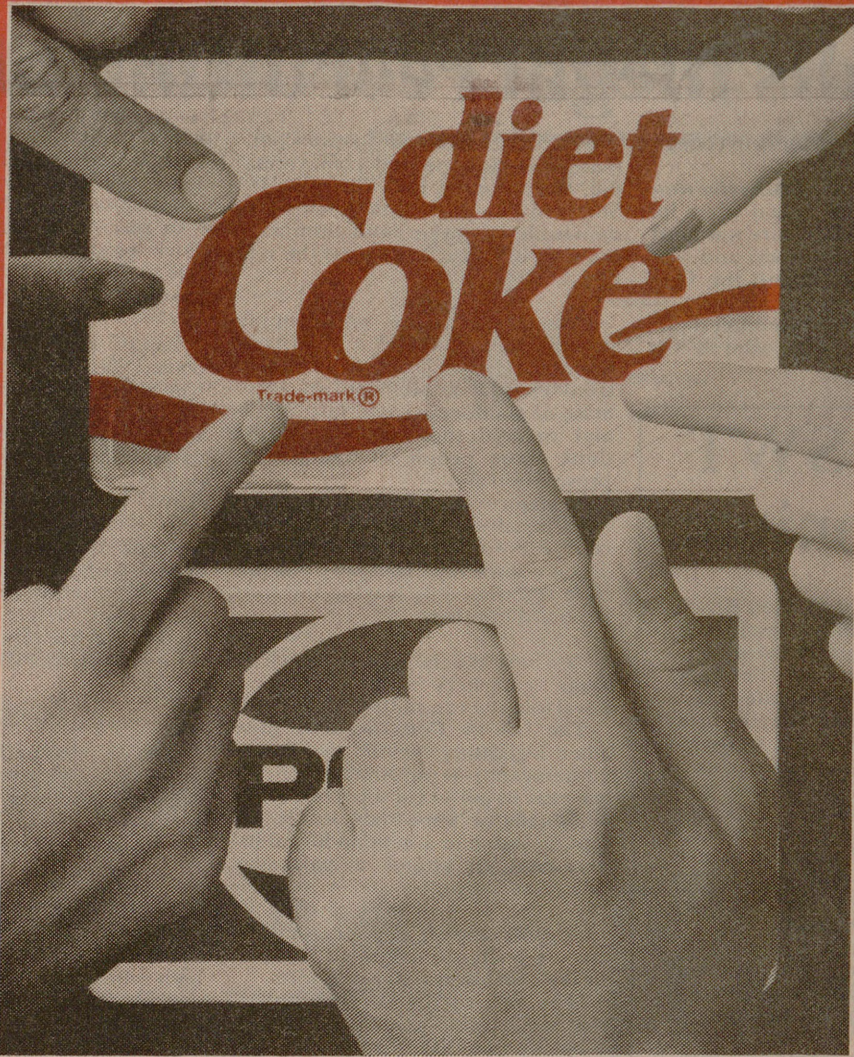
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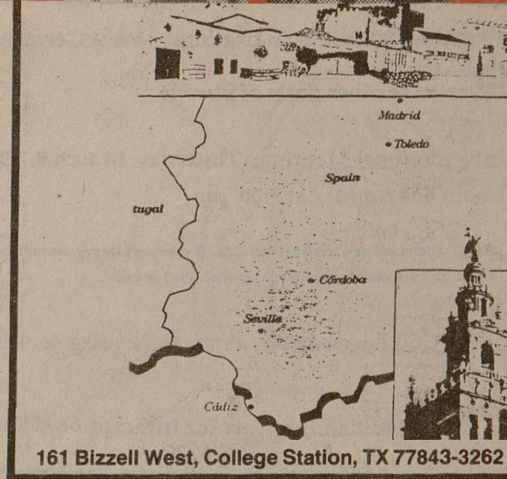
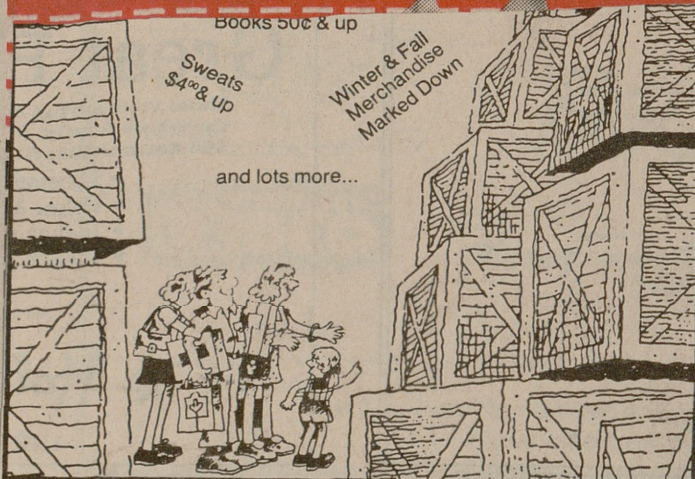


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