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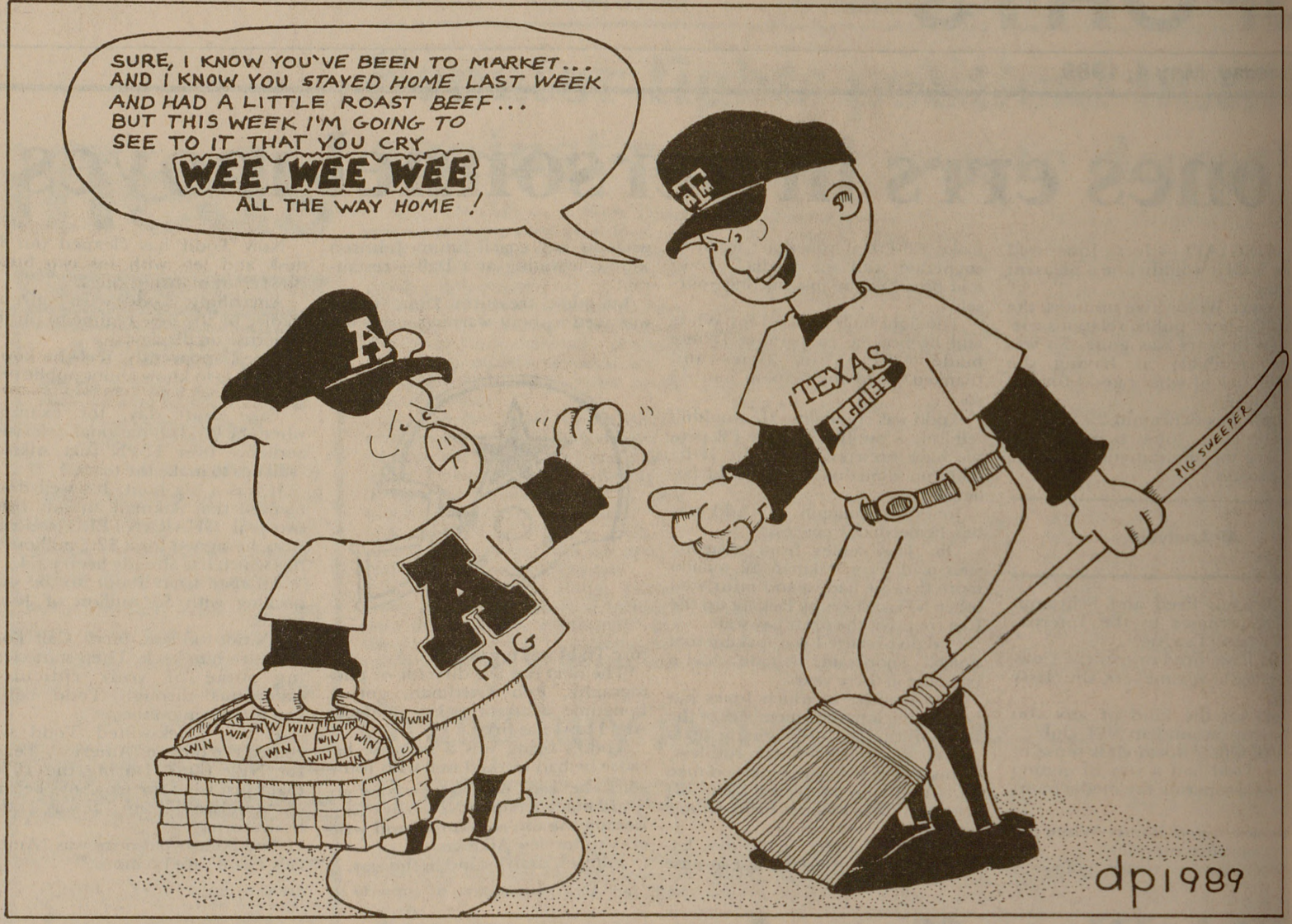
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**Spurs try to account for dismal season**

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — It was supposed to be a turnaround season for the San Antonio Spurs. Optimism was high, what with a new high-profile owner and a new high-dollar coach who would be responsible for transforming the team into an NBA powerhouse.  
 But the old problems lingered. Contract holdouts, inexperienced and temperamental players and injuries all contributed to the Spurs' 21-61 record, their worst season ever.  
 Then team officials raised ticket prices. And now, it's "Wait 'Til Next Year" again.  
 "We certainly expected a better won-loss record and we're surprised we didn't do better," said Spurs owner B.J. "Red" McCombs.

"I still expected toward the end of the season that we would be winning some games, but we didn't win and that was a big surprise," McCombs said.  
 McCombs, a San Antonio car dealer, rancher, gun and art collector, paid \$47 million for majority interest in the Spurs last year.  
 A few weeks after he bought the team, he fired the coach and hired Larry Brown, who had coached the Kansas Jayhawks to the NCAA Championship in 1988.  
 McCombs called Brown the best coach in basketball and offered him a five-year pact worth \$3.5 million.  
 But as much as Brown was being paid, he could not control other factors. Two veterans — Alvin Robertson and Frank Brickowski — held out for better contracts, and then injuries began plaguing the Spurs.

There was conflict among some of the players, and between Brown and between team management when the coach criticized management moves.  
 Then there was talk that McCombs wasn't happy with Brown and that Brown himself might be booted out of the Spurs camp.  
 "There was never any question about replacing Larry Brown. That was never an issue," McCombs said. "I still think he's the best coach in basketball and Larry's goal is to win it all."  
 And throughout the controversies and injuries, the Spurs kept losing.  
 When it was over, Brown was at a loss for words.  
 As the Spurs were playing their final games, team officials raised the

ticket prices, saying they needed to compete with other NBA teams.  
 "No one likes to see ticket prices increase, but I think people recognize that is the nature of the sport we are playing in," McCombs said.  
 "They can stay here and watch teams like Cleveland and Detroit play and they recognize they get a better value for their dollar than if they lived in a city like Houston or Dallas," he said.  
 With the season over, the Spurs are focusing on next year. The Spurs now are contemplating trading their lottery pick this summer in return for a proven veteran.  
 That combination and the addition of David Robinson, the team's No. 1 draft pick two years ago, keeps the Spurs thinking of better results ahead.

**NBA Playoffs continue to roll without Celts**

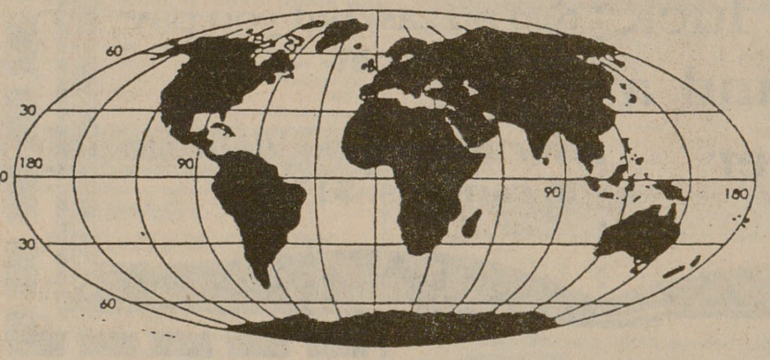
Without Larry Bird, the Boston Celtics were nothing.  
 "You take Michael Jordan away from the Bulls, you take Magic Johnson away from the Lakers, you see where they are," Boston center Joe Kleine said after Detroit beat the Celtics 100-85 to complete a three-game sweep.  
 Boston was 42-40 during the regular season, its worst record since 1978-79. Boston was knocked out in the first round of the playoffs for the first time in 33 years.  
 Three other of the best-of-5 series ended with sweeps Tuesday night when New York beat Philadelphia 116-115 in overtime, Phoenix beat Denver 130-121 and Golden State beat Utah 120-106.  
 Milwaukee beat Atlanta 117-113 in overtime Tuesday night and leads two games to one.  
 The Bucks lost seven straight to the Hawks, including the playoff opener, the Bucks have won two straight.  
 The Knicks will play either Chicago or Cleveland in the second round.

**Federal grand jury hears Rose case; alleged tax evasion under question**

CINCINNATI (AP) — A federal grand jury Wednesday began hearing evidence in an investigation on whether Cincinnati Reds manager Pete Rose may have evaded income taxes, the Cincinnati Post said.  
 A business partner of Rose, a former friend and a racetrack official were scheduled to testify Wednesday before the grand jury in Cincinnati, the Post said, quoting an unidentified source close to the case.  
 The grand jury inquiry follows an Internal Revenue Service investigation last year of Rose. The IRS probe, which began after federal officials infiltrated a gambling and

drug trafficking ring involving acquaintances of Rose, reportedly focused on the possibility that the Reds manager evaded taxes involving alleged gambling winnings. Rose has said he did nothing illegal.  
 Federal marshals escorted Michael Fry, serving an eight-year prison sentence for drug trafficking and tax evasion, into the grand jury room today. He was the first person to testify, the Post reported.  
 The newspaper identified others scheduled to testify as Randy Thyberg, owner of Thyberg Sports Marketing Co., a Los Angeles firm that specializes in baseball memorabilia

shows; Gerald Kramer, director of parimutuel betting at Turfway Park in Florence, Ky., and River Downs in Cincinnati and Michael Bertolini, Rose's business partner from New York.  
 Two weeks ago, Bertolini refused to talk to special investigators of commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti, who is investigating accusations that Rose gambled on baseball.  
 Rose, ailing with the flu, was traveling to Cincinnati from Montreal today to be examined by Reds team doctor Warren Harding. Rose was not available for comment.

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