

Like, chill, Laker fan — Sixers are like, tough

Philadelphia might not be a pretty team, but they are a match for Shaq, Kobe and overrated Los Angeles

Column by: Michael Balhoff

The Philadelphia 76ers have served notice that the Los Angeles Lakers will have to earn their second consecutive championship. This is a shock to the media and fans who hopped on the Laker bandwagon and expected the team to stroll through the playoffs undefeated.

Considering the hype surrounding the "mastery" of coach Phil Jackson, the "sheer dominance" of center Shaquille O'Neal and the "brilliance" of guard Kobe Bryant, some people wonder why the Finals are being played.

Forgive the 76ers if they do not believe the Laker hype. The Sixers ended all the sweep talking with a Game 1 win in Los Angeles, postponing the celebration for at least a few days and relegating all the brooms in the Staples Center to post-game cleanup.

Despite losing the next two games, Philadelphia has defied the odds-makers by taking Los Angeles to the wire in every game, making for the most entertaining NBA Finals matchup in recent years. It has become a series that pits two teams that epitomize completely different styles: the warrior mantra of the Philadelphia 76ers against the glamour of the Hollywood hunks from Los Angeles.

The Western conference has claimed superiority over the East for the last two years, but Philadelphia has been a tougher foe than in past years. The West may have the more talented teams from top to bottom, but Philadelphia has shown

it can hold its own with the big boys.

The Lakers take the court with the biggest guy of all. O'Neal, all 7-foot-1-inch and 315 pounds of him, is a behemoth compared to the 6-foot, 165 pound stature of Sixers star and league MVP Allen Iverson. This Allen vs. Goliath mismatch gives some credence to the selection of the Lakers as an overwhelming favorite in the series. When you factor in Bryant, it is hard to find fault with

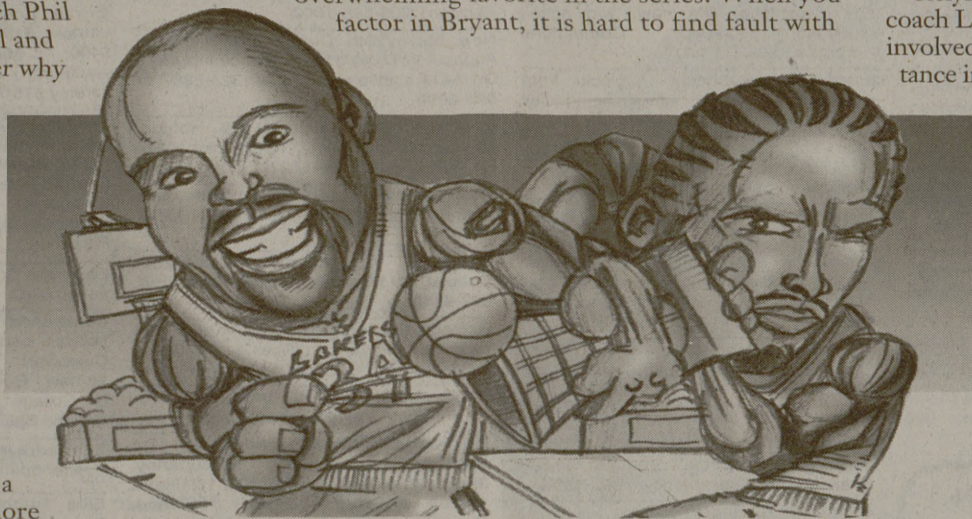
fans who prematurely scheduled a Los Angeles ticker tape parade on their calendars.

The Sixers, however, are not a team completely inferior in talent. Philadelphia boasts of the league MVP, the sixth man of the year (Aaron McKie) and the defensive player of the year (Dikembe Mutombo).

Relying on these strengths and a team concept preached by coach Larry Brown, which stresses defense and getting everyone involved, Philadelphia has managed to keep itself in striking distance in their two losses. They also hope to increase their depth with the return of injured power forward George Lynch.

The Lakers rely on Shaq and Kobe for the bulk of their scoring, and their supporting cast feeds off of the crumbs the two stars leave. Veterans like Ron Harper and Brian Shaw may be old and wise, but their eroded skills will not win many games.

The two teams are better matched than many believed and Philadelphia has shown that the Lakers are not the invincible machine they were made out to be. The Sixers have proven they belong on this postseason stage as much as the Lakers, but gaining the respect of their opponent is not their only goal. The Sixers are doing their best to change the expected venue of the victory parade from Los Angeles to Philadelphia.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Michael Balhoff is a senior journalism major.

Teresa Earnhardt defends her reasoning for lawsuit

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Dale Earnhardt's widow testified Tuesday that she has tried to stop the public release of her husband's autopsy photos to spare her family "painful emotional distress."

"The photographs are humiliating, disgusting and negative," Teresa Earnhardt said. "That could be nothing but harmful and painful to anyone involved with my family, my company, our fans, anyone."

Appearing slightly irritated under questioning from opposing lawyers, Earnhardt said she filed a lawsuit blocking the release of the photos to spare her family from "humiliation and harm." She said NASCAR did not influence her decision.

She also said the decision had nothing to do with her interest in protecting her company, Dale Earnhardt Inc., and Earnhardt's image as a revenue source.

"I don't think it has anything

to do with sales. I think it has to do with personal feelings and privacy," Earnhardt said. "It would affect our state of minds because we would be personally harmed."

A student newspaper at the University of Florida and a DeLand-based Web site are seeking access to the autopsy photos. An attorney for the newspaper, *The Independent Florida Alligator*, argued the images should be made public to show whether investi-

gators did an adequate job of determining what killed him.

"We don't know if the photographs are consistent with the autopsy report or inconsistent with the autopsy report," said attorney Tom Julin. "It's an important check on the medical examiner's office and an important check on the police department."

The *Alligator* and Website.com were rebuffed in their first attempt to gain access to the photos.

On Monday, Volusia Circuit Judge Joseph Will upheld the constitutionality of a new law forbidding the release of post-mortem photos unless allowed by a judge. Florida lawmakers passed the legislation following Earnhardt's death in a last-lap crash in the Daytona 500 on Feb. 18.

Will had ordered the photos sealed four days after Earnhardt's death. Teresa Earnhardt sought the order saying her fam-

ily's privacy would be violated.

Monday's ruling left the *Alligator* and Website.com to argue that the law violates the state's public-records statutes.

Website.com owner Michael Uribe said he wants to view the photos to prove the Volusia County medical examiner's office did a poor job of Earnhardt's autopsy. Uribe already has posted autopsy photos of drivers Rodney Orr and Neil Bonnett on his Website.

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