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Monday, June 3, 2002

Lakers edge Kings in OT, 112-106

Los Angeles to meet Nets in NBA Finals on Wednesday

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The two-time defending NBA champion, the Los Angeles Lakers, were pushed further than they have been pushed in the playoffs in three years — into overtime on the road in Game 7 of the conference finals.

Did they flinch? Not at all. Shaquille O'Neal and Derek Fisher came through in the clutch for the Lakers on a night when Kobe Bryant did not make a basket in either the fourth quarter or overtime, sending the Lakers back to the championship round with a 112-106 victory over the Sacramento Kings on Sunday.

In a Game 7 every bit as good as the series it concluded, the Lakers were the team with more poise when money time arrived. O'Neal, Fisher and Bryant combined to go 8-for-8 from the foul line in overtime, while Sacramento could not put a point on the board in the final two minutes.

Bad shots, bad passes, bad decisions — those were about the only things the Kings did well in an extra session that went the Lakers' way and gave coach Phil Jackson his 27th consecutive playoff series victory.

The Lakers will defend their title beginning Wednesday night and will be heavy favorites against the New Jersey Nets, a team with little experience in the spotlight.

O'Neal, Bryant and their cohorts have shown they can thrive when the pressure is at its highest, and Sunday's overtime was another example. O'Neal fin-

ished with 35 points, 13 rebounds and four blocks, while Bryant had a quiet 30 as he scored only four points in the final 17 minutes — all on free throws.

Bryant's final two from the line gave the Lakers a six-point lead with 6.4 seconds left. The game ended with Webber bobbling an inbounds pass.

Bryant went over and hugged Sacramento's Mike Bibby, O'Neal threw a white towel into the stands and Jackson went over to shake hands with Kings coach Rick Adelman.

Bibby had 29 and Webber 20 for the Kings, who worked all season to gain the homecourt advantage with this very moment in mind.

But the Lakers are a team that laughs at pressure, and they confidently insisted all along that they liked their chances if it ever came down to a Game 7 at Arco Arena.

That confidence made all the difference.

Webber hit the first shot of overtime, a 20-footer over O'Neal, but even that did not instill any faith in the fans.

The crowd went into a collective hush every time Webber got his hands in the ball, wondering whether the big-salary player with the reputation for failing at crunch time would get it done.

Webber missed a jumper with 1:38 left and O'Neal hit a pair from the line for a 108-106 lead. After Bibby missed a jumper, O'Neal got the ball in the low post, spun around Webber and — surprise — missed a dunk.



Lakers' guard Kobe Bryant goes to the basket over Sacramento's Mike Divac in game seven of the Western Conference Finals. LA won, 112-106.

Hedo Turkoglu ruined that chance by firing a pass at Webber's feet, but the Kings got another break when O'Neal missed again inside. This time, though, Doug Christie had his foot on the 3-point line as he was long on a jumper.

Fisher made two from the line for a 110-106 lead with 14.6 seconds left, and Webber then missed a 3-pointer. Bryant wrapped up the game from the line, pumping his fist in defiant delight.

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World Cup

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"It wasn't easy, there are a lot of surprises and all games are very close at this level," Raul said. "There is more to come."

England must hope there are no more meetings with Sweden ahead. A second-half goal by Niclas Alexandersson gave the Swedes a 1-1 tie and stretched their unbeaten streak against the English to 10 games — 3-0-7 — since 1968. FIFA does not recognize all of those matches.

"It didn't look good in the first half," Alexandersson said of Sweden's one-goal deficit at Saitama, Japan. "We showed a lot of fighting spirit in the second half, when we came back into the game. We could have won the match."

Also Sunday, Argentina, the pretournament favorite, edged Nigeria 1-0 at Ibaraki, Japan, while Paraguay and South Africa tied 2-2 at Busan, South Korea.

Gabriel Batistuta, a fixture in the Argentina lineup but questionable to start after a poor, injury-

plagued season in Italy, sent an angled header into the net off Juan Sebastian Veron's swinging corner kick in the 63rd minute.

Batistuta moved into a tie for sixth place in career World Cup goals with 10.

"I am not thinking of any records, I don't care about that," he said. "But if I score goals, it means that Argentina gets closer every time to our goal, to win the World Cup."

At Busan, in a half-empty 53,926-seat stadium, South Africa rallied from two goals down against Paraguay.

Quinton Fortune scored on a last-minute penalty kick after a controversial call. Fortune drove his kick into the top right corner after the referee judged that Paraguay goalie Ricardo Tavarrelli pulled down Sibusiso Zuma. Replays indicated the goalie barely touched Zuma when the South African already was on the way down.

Referee Lubos Michel of Slovakia handed out eight yellow cards, four to each team.

2002 WORLD CUP STANDINGS

Next games - Monday, June 3
Brazil vs. Turkey, South Korea
Croatia vs. Mexico, Japan
Italy vs. Ecuador, Japan

Group A	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts	Group E	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts
Denmark	1	0	0	2	1	3	Germany	1	0	0	8	0	3
Senegal	1	0	0	1	0	3	Cameroon	0	0	1	1	1	1
Uruguay	0	1	0	1	2	0	Ireland	0	0	1	1	1	1
France	0	1	0	0	1	0	Saudi Arabia	0	1	0	0	8	0
Group B	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts	Group F	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts
Slovenia	0	1	0	1	3	0	Argentina	1	0	0	1	0	3
South Africa	0	0	1	2	2	1	England	0	0	1	1	1	1
Spain	1	0	0	3	1	3	Nigeria	0	1	0	0	1	0
Paraguay	0	0	1	2	2	1	Sweden	0	0	1	1	1	1
Group C	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts	Group G	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts
Brazil	0	0	0	0	0	0	Croatia	0	0	0	0	0	0
China	0	0	0	0	0	0	Ecuador	0	0	0	0	0	0
Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	0	0	Italy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	0	Mexico	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group D	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts	Group H	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pts
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	0	Belgium	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	0	0	0	0	0	0	Japan	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Korea	0	0	0	0	0	0	Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0
United States	0	0	0	0	0	0	Tunisia	0	0	0	0	0	0

SOURCE: Associated Press

Baseball

Continued from page 3

earned one of the 16 regional host site bids.

Nebraska and Texas were the lone league schools to emerge from its regional to advance in the tournament. UT upended Baylor 2-0 on Sunday to claim the Austin regional, and the Cornhuskers defeated Southwest Missouri State to advance to a Super Regional.

Softball makes regional final: The A&M softball team used an upset of No. 10 Texas to advance to the NCAA Region 5 final hosted by Oklahoma on May 18.

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Sophomore Jessica Slataper threw a complete-game four hit to help the Aggies to their 40th win of the season. The 2-1 win was the first for A&M in four tries this season against the Longhorns. None of the four games between the two schools was decided by more than two runs.

In the regional final against hosting OU, A&M lost 8-1 and missed a shot at advancing to the Women's College World Series. The Aggies' 40-18 record was their best in eight years.

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