80s Era NBA + 40: Part Eleven
76ers sweep Lakers in the 1983 Finals

By Michael Hamel

May 22, 1983
NBA Finals Game 1
Philadelphia 113, Los Angeles 107

The Lakers, shorthanded and tired less than 48 hours after defeating the San Antonio Spurs in the Western Conference Finals, saw their comeback fall short in the series opener against the 76ers. Bob McAdoo missed the game after suffering a pulled thigh muscle in the clincher against the Spurs. Promising rookie James Worthy was already out for the year after breaking his leg back in April. Most of the Lakers' starters had been forced play extra minutes, and it was starting to show: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was held without a rebound after halftime, prompting him to admit afterwards that "I was more fatigued this afternoon than I remember being at any other time."[1]

In the first quarter, Andrew Toney, already hampered throughout the playoffs by an injured left thigh, violently collided with Norm Nixon. Both remained in the game, though an examination later revealed that Nixon had separated his left shoulder, and Toney, a bit woozy after taking a shot to the head, was held to just ten points after the opening period. Los Angeles got a good performance off the bench from Mark Landsberger, who had not played since Game 3 against the Spurs nine days earlier, and overcame a ten-point deficit to lead by three at the half.

With 6:37 left in the fourth, the Sixers led 100-88 and appeared to be comfortably in front. But the Lakers rallied, and when Cheeks committed the Sixers third straight turnover, throwing the ball away with twenty-one seconds on the clock, Los Angeles had the ball, trailing 111-107. Abdul-Jabbar missed a hook (he shot just 3 for 9 after halftime) and Bobby Jones grabbed the rebound and was fouled. Jones missed both shots (Cunningham admitted later that he was weakened by strep throat) but the Lakers only had time left for a deep three-pointer by Cooper which sailed off the rim.

May 26, 1983
NBA Finals Game 2
Philadelphia 103, Los Angeles 93

The evening began well for the Lakers, who outrebounded the Sixers 26-17 in the first half, including five offensive rebounds by Wilkes, more than the entire Philadelphia team) and led by as many as nine points. But the 76ers responded with a 17-8 streak in the third quarter to take the lead for the first time since 8-6.

In the fourth, with Malone on the bench with five fouls and backup center Earl Cureton doing a credible job guarding Abdul-Jabbar, the Sixers were able to extend an 85-83 lead with an 11-4 run. "Earl just came in and played with a great deal of confidence," said Cunningham. "He battled on the boards, played good defense. He did everything we asked of him."[2] Cureton even managed to make a hook shot over Abdul-Jabbar. (Cureton was playing because Malone's usual backup, Clemon Johnson, was in Temple University Hospital recovering from a urinary tract infection.[3])

McAdoo returned to the Lakers lineup, but Nixon, feeling the effects of his shoulder injury, shot just 4 of 13 from the floor and was held scoreless in the fourth quarter, as were Magic Johnson and Jamaal Wilkes. Los Angeles' primary complaint after the game concerned the officiating, which cost Riley a $3,000 fine;[4] the Lakers set an NBA

playoff record by taking just five free throws in the game and made only three, tying another record. But the 76ers held Abdul-Jabbar without a point over the final four minutes, and in the second half Magic had more turnovers (4) than points (2) or shot attempts (3). These facts led Lakers general manager Jerry West to dismiss the gripes about the officiating. "The truth is, we've been outplayed," West bluntly stated. "They've wanted it more than we have."[5]

May 29, 1983
NBA Finals Game 3
Philadelphia 111, Los Angeles 94

The 76ers withstood the Lakers best punch of the series so far, but fought back by outscoring their hosts 31-12 during a stretch that began in the second quarter and continued into the first three minutes of the third. Then Philadelphia broke the game open with fourteen unanswered points early in the fourth to take an 86-76 lead. "We worked hard on our defense," a confident Moses Malone said afterwards. "And it seemed like we got stronger, too. They're strong. They're the defending world champion. But we're stronger. We feel that, if we play our game, we can beat any team."[6] The Sixers scored 28 of their points off of 25 Lakers turnovers, and out-rebounded the Lakers 22 to 15 on the offensive glass, creating plentiful second chance opportunities. Down the stretch, Malone made a pair of three-point plays to keep the Lakers from mounting a surge.

Nixon, who again struggled from the floor, strained a tendon in his left knee to add to his injury woes. After the game, Cunningham boldly declared that the Sixers were going for the sweep: "We will come out with more intensity on Tuesday, more than we have had all season . . . We want LA in four; we want people to remember this team."[7] And Julius Erving tempted fate by virtually guaranteeing a short series: "If we don't win it Tuesday, we'll win it the next day. We have to work, but we're going to win it."[8]

May 31, 1983
NBA Finals Game 4
Philadelphia 115, Los Angeles 108

The Lakers gave the Sixers all they could handle, but Philadelphia finished off their sweep and collected their first championship since 1967. With Nixon and McAdoo both out with injuries, Magic Johnson played all forty-eight minutes, and Riley was forced to play Mark Landsberger and Mike McGee far more minutes than he would have preferred (thirty-nine combined, versus just five in Game 3). Los Angeles threw the ball away on their first four possessions, underscoring Nixon's absence, but led 26-24 at the end of the quarter when Cooper drained a leaning three-pointer at the buzzer. The second period belonged to the Lakers, who outworked the Sixers all over the floor and built a sixteen point lead just before halftime. During the first three games of the series, the Lakers had quickly squandered halftime leads. The difference tonight was that Los Angeles was also able to hold the lead after three quarters, at 93-82.

But in the fourth quarter the Lakers' lack of depth caught up with them; the 76ers surged back, led by Moses Malone who began grabbing nearly every key rebound while collecting 9 points and 10 boards in the period. "Their fourth quarters were like instant replays," said Riley. "The mark of a great team is to come back, and they came back in style."[9] Magic Johnson agreed: "We tried as hard as we could, but our shots came up short in the fourth, and we ran out of gas."[10]

Lineup Analysis[11]

Philadelphia closed out their sweep of the Lakers by taking control in the fourth quarter. The 76ers trailed throughout the entire second and third periods, and appeared to be content to go back to Philadelphia with a 3-1 series lead.

Fourth Quarter Game 4 1983 Finals (Part one)

Lakers ball					
Wilkes	Wilkes	D. Jones	Rambis	Rambis	
D. Jones	**Rambis**	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	
Landsberger	D. Jones	Rambis	**Jabbar**	Jabbar	
McGee	McGee	McGee	McGee	Magic	
Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	McGee	

Philadelphia					
Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving
Iavaroni	Iavaroni	Iavaroni	**B. Jones**	B. Jones	B. Jones
Malone	Malone	Malone	Malone	Malone	Malone
Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney
Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	**Cheeks**

76ers ball					
Cooper	**Wilkes**	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Magic
D. Jones	D. Jones	**Rambis**	Rambis	**Jabbar**	Rambis
Landsberger	Landsberger	D. Jones	D. Jones	Rambis	Jabbar
McGee	McGee	McGee	McGee	McGee	Wilkes
Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	McGee

Time left	12:00			9:52	*9:00*	7:49
Score	93-82	93-84	95-88	95-90	95-92	100-93

At the nine minute mark, the 76ers had closed to 95-92 and Riley brought Abdul-Jabbar back into the game, restoring the Lakers starting five on the floor. The Lakers built their lead back up to seven, then Cunningham sent Cheeks back in after a four minute break. Iavaroni, the only starter not on the court, had fouled out earlier in the quarter.

Fourth Quarter Game 4 1983 Finals (Part two)

Lakers ball					
Rambis	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes
Wilkes	Rambis	Rambis	Rambis	Rambis	Rambis
Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar
Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic
Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper

Philadelphia					
Erving	B. Jones	**Erving**	Erving	Erving	Erving
B. Jones	**C.Johnson**	C.Johnson	**B. Jones**	B. Jones	B. Jones
Malone	Malone	Malone	Malone	Malone	Malone
Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	**Richardson**	**Toney**
Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks

76ers ball							
	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	
	Rambis	Jabbar	Jabbar	Rambis	Rambis	Rambis	
	Jabbar	Rambis	Rambis	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar	
	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	
	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	Cooper	
Time left	7:15	6:36	5:04	2:24	0:59	0:42	0:00
Score	100-93	100-95	100-99	106-104	109-107	109-108	115-108

The 76ers scored the next three baskets, and Cunningham even sneaked in a brief rest for Erving as Philadelphia cut their deficit to one. Los Angeles got the lead back to three on two occasions, the last at 106-103 when Abdul-Jabbar scored over Malone, but Philadelphia scored six of the next seven points to take their first lead since 24-23. Cunningham then made defense for offense substitutions in the backcourt in the final minute, alternating Richardson and Toney.

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Fittingly, Julius Erving contributed a series of highlights down the stretch. His steal of an Abdul-Jabbar pass intended for Cooper led to a breakaway dunk and a 106-106 tie with two minutes remaining. Magic then made one of two free throws to put the Lakers back in front, and the Lakers got the ball back after a 24-second shot clock violation by the Sixers at the 1:20 mark. But Abdul-Jabbar misfired on a hook, and the Sixers were off and running again; Erving corralled a low pass from Cheeks and dunked home the go-ahead basket and added a free throw as Rambis was called for a foul. Philadelphia led 109-107, their first lead since before Cooper's buzzer-beating three-pointer in the opening stanza.

After Jabbar made one of two free throws, Erving hit a jumper over Magic to extend the 76ers lead to 111-108 with twenty-four seconds to play. "That shot found me and I just let it fly,"[12] Erving said afterwards. Cooper missed a wild three-pointer that could have tied the game, and Los Angeles got another chance when Philadelphia knocked the loose ball out of bounds. Jones then stole the ball, and Cheeks fed Malone for a thunderous dunk that put an exclamation point on the series and closed out a record-setting 12-1 postseason. "Let me tell you, we cried here last year," Erving exclaimed to reporters. "But for us, this is a beginning. This isn't the end of a long, cumbersome journey—this is the beginning."[13]

Next Time: 1982-83 Season Review

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[1] Dan Shaughnessy, "Sixers Run Down Lakers," *Boston Globe*, May 23, 1983. Other sources for this game: George Shirk, "Sixers Get The Jump On Lakers; Toney, Malone Pace Win," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 23, 1983.

[2] George Shirk, "76ers Sink Lakers, Go Up By Two—Cureton Leads Win, 103-93," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 27, 1983.

[3] George Shirk, "'Twirl Time'—Cureton Is Eager To Step In Against Lakers," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 25, 1983.

[4] $3,000 fine: The fine was levied because Riley had continued to criticize Darrell Garretson in the days after Game 2. For example, see Wire Story (UPI), "Criticizing Refs Costs Riley $3000," *Boston Globe*, May 31, 1983: "Riley pointed out that Vanek nearly split his calls—15 against Philadelphia to 14 against the Lakers, while Garretson called 15 fouls against Los

Angeles and one against the Sixers." NBA records noted in Bill Livingston, "Vanishing Act Takes Magic Out Of Lakers," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 27, 1983.

[5] Dan Shaughnessy, "Lakers Overflowing With Excuses About Losses 1 And 2," *Boston Globe*, May 29, 1983.

[6] George Shirk, "Sixers Move To Brink Of A Title—Malone Leads Charge Past Lakers, 111-94," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 30, 1983.

[7] Dan Shaughnessy, "76ers Push Lakers To Edge, 111-94," *Boston Globe*, May 30, 1983.

[8] Jere Longman, "Erving Finally Predicts 'We're Going To Win It'," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 30, 1983.

[9] Dan Shaughnessy, "It's No Gag: Sixers Are Champs," *Boston Globe*, June 1, 1983.

[10] George Shirk, "76ers Are Kings Of NBA At Last," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1983.

[11] Game 4 lineup analysis, and much of the rest of this section is drawn from watching Game 4 on the DVD collection *NBA Dynasty Series: Philadelphia 76ers, The Complete History*. In addition to the articles mentioned below, other articles consulted included: Bill Livingston, "Happy Feet—Dr. J Kicks Up His Heels And Shows Them To The Lakers," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1983; Jere Longman, "Lakers May Suffer Another Loss—Abdul-Jabbar," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1983; and Marc Schogol, "Sixers Take Title," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 1, 1983.

[12] Dan Shaughnessy, "It's No Gag: Sixers Are Champs."

[13] George Shirk, "76ers Are Kings Of NBA At Last."