



80s Era NBA + 40: Part Three

The 1979-80 Playoffs – April/May 1980

By Michael Hamel

As the NBA trading deadline approached on February 15, the Los Angeles Lakers were looking to refine their roster. Several impactful moves had already been made.

The Indiana Pacers had reacquired an aging George McGinnis from the Denver Nuggets, surrendering a young Alex English and a 1980 first-round pick that had originally belonged to the Boston Celtics. The Detroit Pistons, who were spiraling toward a league-worst 16-66 record – delighting the Celtics, who owned their first-round pick – shipped Bob Lanier to Milwaukee, providing the 29-27 Bucks with an inside presence they had sorely lacked. Immediately after the trade, Milwaukee won six in a row and 11 out of 13, and ended the season in first place in the Midwest Division at 49-33, looking like a force to be reckoned with in the playoffs. And the Philadelphia 76ers, desperate for guard help with Doug Collins on the shelf with ankle and foot injuries, traded a 1981 first-round pick to Portland for Lionel Hollins after Pete Maravich spurned them and signed with the Celtics.

Lakers General Manager Bill Sharman chose to make two smaller moves designed to upgrade the team's rebounding. First, he picked up banger Mark Landsberger from the Chicago Bulls for little-used guard Ollie Mack, then sent forward Don Ford, whose role had diminished, to the Cleveland Cavaliers for injured point guard Butch Lee and an exchange of first-round draft choices. "We hated to give up a solid, young player like Ollie," Lakers coach Paul Westhead said, "but for practical reasons, it's an outstanding trade. It gives us that added rebounding punch we've so sorely needed. If you look back into the games we've lost, if there's a recurring reason, it's that we got beat on the boards. Here's a guy who can certainly put a dent in that problem."¹ Landsberger would average seven rebounds a game for the rest of the season; his presence allowed Westhead to de-emphasize a fading, drug-addled Spencer Haywood. (Lee would play just 37 minutes for the Lakers before being released that summer, but the draft pick acquired in that transaction would turn into future Hall of Famer James Worthy.)

These transactions occurred just as the Lakers were beginning a seven-game winning streak, which would be punctuated by a 131-108 victory over the Seattle SuperSonics that gave the Lakers their first lead in the Pacific Division since January 3. The two teams continued to battle for the top spot until Los Angeles clinched the division, and a first-round bye in the playoffs, with a 101-96 win over the Utah Jazz on March 23. Los Angeles's 13-3 record in March represented their best month of the season.

On March 28, the Celtics defeated the Cavaliers to clinch the Atlantic Division, rendering their final game of the regular season against the 76ers meaningless.² Four days later, the Celtics claimed another prize when Red Auerbach won a coin flip with Frank Layden of the Utah Jazz for the right to select first in the upcoming 1980 draft.³

While the Lakers, Celtics, and the rest of the division champs rested, the Phoenix Suns and Houston Rockets won their respective first round mini-series. The Suns defeated the Kansas City Kings 2-1 but lost their best rebounder, forward Truck Robinson, to a left knee injury that would sideline him for all but nine minutes of their upcoming series against the Lakers. Houston also won 2-1 despite the efforts of San Antonio's George Gervin, who scored 100 points during the three games.

Phoenix had won 55 games during the regular season, and split six games with Los Angeles. Both teams were unbeatable against the other at home: the Suns had won seven in a row against the Lakers in Phoenix and 17 of 18, but had not won at the Forum since October 1977. Accordingly, the Lakers took the first game easily, as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar put up 30 points and 12 rebounds despite leaving the game (to an adoring ovation) with five minutes

left and the Lakers up by 20. In Game 2, Los Angeles needed overtime to win 131-128, overcoming a game-high 37 points by Paul Westphal. But as the series shifted to Phoenix for Game 3, the Suns melted down the stretch after having led for much of the second half, losing 108-105. The contrasting coaching styles of Paul Westhead and John MacLeod were on full display. Westhead continued to lean on his starters, playing them 38-40 minutes a game (except for Jim Chones), while no one on the Suns averaged more than 32. Phoenix salvaged the fourth game before being closed out in five. The Lakers' stars had led the way, as Abdul-Jabbar averaged 31 points and 11 rebounds while Magic Johnson averaged a triple-double.⁴

There was even less drama in the Celtics-Rockets series. Boston had swept Houston during the regular season by an average of seven points a game. Their playoff series was not nearly as close, as the Celtics swept the Rockets by a cumulative score of 452-378 and led for all but 10 minutes and 30 seconds.⁵ After the opener, a 119-101 Celtics victory in which the Rockets needed a 16-2 second quarter run just to close within five points, Houston's Moses Malone was defiant, telling reporters: "There won't be a sweep. The only way the Celtics can sweep is go home and dream about it. One victory doesn't win a series. ... Oh yeah. This one's going seven. You can count on it."⁶

The Celtics were unperturbed. Two days later, the Rockets shot 7-for-21 in the first quarter, Malone was held to 17 points and 7 rebounds by the tag team of Dave Cowens and Rick Robey, and Boston won 95-75. Even the horn at the scorer's table at The Summit failed to cooperate. It stayed on for several minutes at the start of the fourth quarter, leading coach Bill Fitch to quip afterwards: "That happened to me on a date once."⁷ A Celtics' victory in the series seemed inevitable, despite the news that Cowens had to ask his chiropractor Kirt Josefak to fly to Houston to treat his ailing back after sitting out the final period.⁸ Monday night, April 14, the Celtics put the Rockets away with a 138-121 thumping in front of about 3,000 empty seats.⁹ (Perhaps they, along with Rockets owner George Maloof – also a no-show – were at home watching Johnny Carson host the Oscars.¹⁰) The next day, *The Sporting News* announced that Larry Bird was their selection as Rookie of the Year; Magic Johnson placed second.¹¹

The word "inevitable" also applied to two other sports-related items on that second weekend in April. On Saturday, the United States Olympic Committee agreed to boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics due to the Soviet Union's ongoing invasion of Afghanistan, a bitter disappointment to American athletes who had hoped to follow in the footsteps of the U.S. hockey team that had scored a dramatic and inspiring victory at the Winter Games two months earlier. Then on Sunday, Seve Ballesteros nearly squandered a ten-shot lead at The Masters before holding on for his second major championship.¹²

Boston had two days off before starting their eagerly anticipated Eastern Conference Finals series against Philadelphia. The 76ers had swept the Washington Bullets and then cruised past the Atlanta Hawks in five games. It would be the first playoff meeting between the long-time rivals since the 1977 East Finals. Since then, the core of the 76ers roster had remained mostly intact, while only Dave Cowens was still with the Celtics. The result was a wide disparity in playoff experience as the 1980 postseason began. Cowens had played in 83 playoff games and had won two championships. The rest of the Celtics roster had played just 46 playoff games *combined*, and with the exception of a miniseries victory by Chris Ford's Pistons in 1976, were 0-9 in playoff series. Meanwhile, the 76ers still had five players left over from their 1976-77 team, and three players on their roster had won either an NBA or ABA title (Erving, Hollins, and Henry Bibby); overall, Philadelphia's roster had played in a total of 353 postseason games.¹³

The series began on April 18. Boston dominated the first half, building a 52-44 lead behind the play of Cedric Maxwell, who scored 14 points and used a variety of moves and up-fakes to get Darryl Dawkins and Caldwell Jones into foul trouble. Philadelphia was lucky to be that close, getting 10 unexpected points in the second quarter by

Bibby, including two on a questionable foul call on Maxwell at the halftime buzzer. But the 76ers could have been three points closer if Boston's Jeff Judkins had not made a remarkable play 10 seconds earlier. After pouncing on a loose ball (created by a Cheeks poke check on Archibald) Judkins heaved it toward the basket from just inside half court with the shot clock about to expire; the shot inexplicably found the bottom of the net.

However, the second half belonged to Erving and Dawkins. Dr. J scored 10 points in a row to tie the game at 58-58 in the third. Then in the fourth, after a pair of flamboyant blocks, Dawkins hit three straight shots over Robey to break an 88-88 tie and give the 76ers the lead for good. The wunderkind with a penchant for thunderous dunks finished with 23 points and 10 rebounds, nearly matching his combined rebounding total for the Sixers' three games in Boston during the regular season (11).¹⁴

Two days later, with the Rockets' Rick Barry joining CBS's Gary Bender on the sidelines for a national broadcast on Sunday afternoon, the Celtics panicked.¹⁵ Fearful of their inability to win in Philadelphia that season, Bill Fitch ran his starters into the ground, using his bench for a paltry 28 minutes, and was unapologetic after the Celtics won 96-90. "If I run into a carbon copy of this game anywhere along the line, I'll do it again," Fitch said. "I think this team is as well-conditioned as any in the league."¹⁶ Larry Bird, who had to be reminded by Fitch to shoot more during Game 1, scored 31 points in 46 minutes, making 13 of 15 shots in one stretch before missing seven in a row in the second half. Erving praised the rookie's performance but wondered aloud if the Celtics would be better served relying on their entire team, as they had done all season, instead of one star: "Playing key people 45 and 46 minutes will hurt in the long run."¹⁷ Still, the Celtics had the advantage of a two-day break before Game 3 in Philadelphia to help them recover.

Meanwhile, the West Finals began in Los Angeles on April 22. The defending champion Seattle SuperSonics had rallied from a 3-2 deficit to defeat the Milwaukee Bucks, and had just one day to regroup before facing the Lakers. Seattle won Game 1 anyway, 108-107, on a free throw by Jack Sikma with two seconds remaining. "Sure we were tired," SuperSonics coach Lenny Wilkens said afterwards, "But we recovered. I didn't think we would be as tired as everybody else seemed to think. We kept our poise at the end of the game, and I feel very good about it."¹⁸ Wilkens substituted more liberally in the second quarter than usual, and Gus Williams credited that strategy after the game, telling Wayne Cody and Hot Rod Hundley on Seattle television, "the guys were a little tired... but [Wilkins's strategy] had us somewhat fresh down the stretch."¹⁹

Both series resumed the next day, providing little additional rest for the SuperSonics. The evening began in Philadelphia, where the Celtics lost 99-97 as their furious comeback from a 90-76 deficit with 6:09 left fell short. Boston had only themselves to blame after committing 25 turnovers. "We were guilty of careless ball-handling," Fitch explained to reporters afterwards. "We got back in the game a little on fast breaks, but we had killed ourselves earlier on them. The key to our demise was our ball-handling on the break, because the break is supposed to give you your easy points."²⁰ The Celtics still had a chance to tie the game in the final seconds until Maurice Cheeks knocked the ball out of M.L. Carr's hands to disrupt what could have been a potential game-tying layup. The disappointing result was compounded by the news that heralded University of Virginia center Ralph Sampson had turned down another appeal from Red Auerbach to turn pro early; Auerbach had hoped to use the number one selection on him.²¹

Out in Los Angeles, the Lakers tied their series with a 108-99 victory in Game 2. Seattle had rallied from a 95-82 deficit in the fourth quarter to draw within 3, but after Gus Williams blocked a shot by Norm Nixon and saved the ball from going out of bounds along the sideline, former Celtic Paul Silas lobbed a pass from beyond half court over Williams' head as he ran down the court to the right of the Sonics basket. The pass led Williams into the crowd, where he collided with a Laker cheerleader. Both ended up on the floor and the game was delayed for nearly two minutes.²² Los Angeles then reasserted control, despite receiving just four points – including a late dunk with the game already decided – from Abdul-Jabbar in the fourth quarter.²³

After three relatively close games, the 76ers made a statement in Game 4, or more accurately, a defensive statement, beginning with 15 blocked shots. Larry Bird scored 19 points but shot just 6-for-15 from the floor. As Bobby Jones explained: "I tried to deny him the ball and we had some guys popping out on Bird, cutting off the pass. Lionel Hollins would help deny him the ball and Darryl Dawkins was helping on the cuts off the high post. They seemed confused by what we were doing..."²⁴

At the start of the third quarter Boston closed to within 59-56, but Philadelphia then clamped down and went on a 17-5 run that put them ahead to stay, despite a wretched 2-for-23 shooting performance in the fourth quarter. "We had every opportunity to blow that game open," head coach Billy Cunningham said after the Sixers' 102-90 victory, "but every time we tried to convert and do it, there was Boston. With these two teams, I don't know if a scoreboard is necessary."²⁵ The 76ers' struggles allowed the Celtics to get back within five with 3:12 remaining, but Philadelphia rallied to close out the game. Afterwards, a locker room mirror fell on M.L. Carr, producing a fourteen-inch gash in his right shoulder.²⁶ It was a fitting postscript to a horrendous trip to Philadelphia for the Celtics, who now trailed 3-1.

Later that evening, the Lakers took a 2-1 lead in their series with a 104-100 victory in an odd setting. With the Mariners using the Kingdome (and the SuperSonics unwilling to ask them to change their schedule, after having been rebuffed in the past) and the Ice Follies booked at the Seattle Coliseum, Games 3 and 4 of the West Finals were held at the University of Washington's Hec Edmundson Pavilion. The building held fewer than 9,000 people; Kareem Abdul-Jabbar barely had enough headroom to walk in the corridors without stooping. Despite having hosted six Sonics games in 1971, the only 24-second clocks were on the floor on two opposite corners of the court (instead of above the baskets), and one of them malfunctioned early in the game, forcing a short delay.²⁷ Even the arena's purple color scheme – the color of the University's Huskies – seemed destined to work against Seattle, who squandered a 56-50 lead in the third period and never led again.²⁸ Jabbar's triple-double (33/13/10) was the difference, but Sonics' forward John Johnson pointed some of the blame at the lack of a home court advantage: "You're damn right it was a factor. We've been trying to ignore it and play it down – but it hurt. No doubt about it."²⁹ Prior to the game, there was a moment of silence for the eight soldiers who had died the previous day during a failed rescue attempt of the hostages in Iran; two days later, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who had opposed the operation, would submit his resignation.³⁰

On Sunday, the Celtics season came to an end with a 105-94 loss at Boston Garden. Larry Bird shot 5-for-19, and, symbolic of the Celtics' shooting woes, missed six layups while also having a defensive rebound of a Dawkins miss slip through his fingers and bounce off the backboard for a 76ers basket. Bird's disgust was evident after the game: "We had the best record in the NBA and they put us away like nothing. We never played one good game, not even the one we won."³¹ Bird shrugged off discussion about whether the starters were tired after logging extra minutes during the series, but fatigue did seem to be a factor.

Bird's feelings aside, this game was over by late in the third quarter, mainly because the 76ers supporting cast bailed out an unusually quiet Erving. "The Celtics did hold Julius to 14 points," Cunningham said after the game, "but they couldn't stop the other guys. Lionel Hollins, Bobby [Jones], Steve [Mix]. They got the points [52]. But everybody contributed. We've played eight players all year along, and they've all made contributions."³² Dave Cowens (who, like Maravich, would report to training camp the following fall but then retire before the start of the season) summed up the frustrating finish to the season: "I don't think we were a polished team," Cowens said. "We didn't make the adjustments on the floor that a polished team makes. We didn't see the things that needed to be seen. We always were kind of behind, a half-beat behind, in recognizing things we had to do."³³

A few hours later, the defending champion SuperSonics hardly looked polished either, blowing a 21-point lead midway through the third quarter and losing 98-93 to fall into a 3-1 hole. Los Angeles did most of their damage in that third period, holding Seattle to 38 percent shooting while slicing their deficit to 75-72. Then in the fourth,

the Sonics still led 88-84 before surrendering an 11-0 run that gave the Lakers a seven-point lead with 29 seconds left.³⁴

Back in Los Angeles for Game 5, Seattle used a 14-2 run in the second quarter to build an eight-point halftime lead, but could not put the Lakers away. Their last lead, at 98-97 with 3:36 remaining, was followed by a 14-7 stretch by Los Angeles to end the game and Seattle's reign as NBA Champions.

Larry Bird had fallen short of the Finals, but Magic Johnson was going to have a chance to cap off his rookie year with a title.

Game 1 belonged to Magic and Lakers, but it was not easy. The visiting 76ers led for most of the first half, including 41-34 at one point in the second quarter. But Philadelphia went scoreless during the first 4:21 of the third, fell behind 65-53, and proceeded to shoot 3-for-20 during the period overall. Los Angeles would lead by as many as 16 points, and held Julius Erving to just nine points on nine shots over the first three quarters, a victim of consistent double-teaming by the Lakers. "We ran two people at him," said Michael Cooper, who drew the primary defensive responsibility. "That was the game plan. We made him pick up his dribble and pass off."³⁵

Magic nearly posted a triple-double in his first NBA Finals game (16/9/10), and Abdul-Jabbar badly outplayed Darryl Dawkins, who scored just 12 points while spending much of the afternoon in foul trouble. The colorful Dawkins later remarked, "I ain't afraid to go to the hoop on Kareem, but when the refs are callin' 'em that way, it's a waste of time. I lost my funk."³⁶

Two days before the series opener, Spencer Haywood had fallen asleep during practice after an all-night drug binge. Westhead buried the veteran on the bench, playing him just five minutes in the first two games of the series combined. After Game 2, a 107-104 thriller in which the Lakers nearly rallied from a 23-point deficit before the 76ers' Bobby Jones made the game-clinching jumper in the final seconds as the shot clock expired, Haywood engaged in a screaming match with teammate Brad Holland. Westhead and team owner Jerry Buss sent Haywood home for the remainder of the series.³⁷

The two teams then headed to Philadelphia for back-to-back games over the weekend, at the request of CBS. In Game 3, Los Angeles out-worked Philadelphia on the glass, scoring 25 points off 22 offensive rebounds while the Sixers scored just eight second-chance points. Abdul-Jabbar was a major force, as the Sixers were only able to get the better of the play while the Lakers center was on the bench. "His presence just makes everybody on the court for LA so much better," 76ers coach Billy Cunningham said later. "You can see a distinct difference when he is out of the game. The funny thing is, I thought we did by far our best defensive job of the series on him."³⁸ In the second quarter the Lakers saw their 31-18 lead nearly melt away in the face of an 18-7 run by the 76ers with Kareem on the sidelines, but Philadelphia got no closer than two points. By early in the fourth the Lakers led by 21 and were able to hold off a 76ers rally to win 111-101.

The 76ers tied the series again with a 105-102 victory that featured another game-clinching play by Bobby Jones, who stole a cross-court pass by Norm Nixon intended for Michael Cooper, then dribbled out the clock. Philadelphia had used an 18-5 run in the third quarter to wipe out a six-point Laker lead, then held off Los Angeles down the stretch. This game also featured one of Julius Erving's most memorable highlights, a swooping drive that took him around Mark Landsberger on the right side of the court, and then, with Abdul-Jabbar blocking a direct assault on the rim and Erving still in midair, the "Doctor" went behind the backboard before he reverse-banked the ball off the glass and into the basket with his right hand.³⁹

Before the series resumed in Los Angeles, Jerry Buss announced that Jack McKinney would not be returning to the Lakers for the 1980-81 season. Westhead's success with the team, and McKinney's slow recovery from his injuries,

were both factors in the decision. (McKinney would return to coaching that fall and win Coach of the Year honors with the Indiana Pacers, but he continued to have occasional memory lapses attributed to the accident.⁴⁰)

The first half of Game 5 was extremely tight. There were 19 lead changes and seven ties, and neither side was able to pull ahead by more than four points. Abdul-Jabbar scored 12 of the Lakers first 15 points while his teammates began the game shooting 1-for-13 from the floor; Jabbar had 20 by halftime. However, the 76ers led by three at that point courtesy of a jumper by Steve Mix and a Hollins-to-Bibby outlet pass and layup in the final seconds.

The Lakers were leading 67-65 with 4:35 remaining in the third quarter when Abdul-Jabbar sprained his left ankle and missed the rest of the period. "I have never seen Kareem injured before, but when I saw how he was leaning on [Laker trainer] Jack Curran when he went out," Westhead later told reporters, "I knew he was in trouble."⁴¹ Surprisingly, the Sixers failed to take advantage of Abdul-Jabbar's absence – with Magic Johnson filling in for a while at center – and fell further behind. Philadelphia trailed 81-73 at the end of the quarter.

Abdul-Jabbar returned to add 14 points in the fourth, but Erving scored 16 and made two free throws with 43 seconds left to tie the game at 103-103. Following a timeout, Magic found a driving Abdul-Jabbar, who dunked home what proved to be the deciding points while being fouled by Erving. Jabbar's free throw was followed by a pair of turnovers as Magic overthrew Jamaal Wilkes on a break, then Henry Bibby stepped out of bounds while attempting a game-tying three-pointer. Norm Nixon's two free throws closed out the scoring.⁴²

Afterwards, the condition of Kareem's ankle became the lead story. He woke up the next morning unable to walk, and Lakers team doctor Dr. Robert Kerlan concluded that Abdul-Jabbar's only hope for playing in a Game 7 – if necessary – was to get as much treatment as possible and not make the trip to Philadelphia for Game 6.

Westhead inserted Michael Cooper into the starting lineup and moved Magic Johnson to center as he had done in the third quarter of Game 5. But the bulkier Jim Chones and Mark Landsberger (10 rebounds each) would guard Darryl Dawkins (just 4) and do most of the banging down low under the boards. For the most part, Magic matched up with Caldwell Jones, who had a four-inch height advantage but was limited offensively and had a more slender build.⁴³

By halftime, with the game tied at 60-60, Magic and Jamaal Wilkes had combined for 34 points while Norm Nixon, nursing a dislocated finger on his left hand, was scoreless.⁴⁴ Remarkably, Los Angeles had a 22-19 edge on the boards. The Lakers came out rolling in the third quarter, scoring 14 unanswered points. The Sixers missed their first six shots of the quarter while the Lakers made seven of nine; restless Philadelphia fans began booing the home team, and threw in a Bronx cheer when Cooper missed a jumper for one of Los Angeles's rare misfires. Jamaal Wilkes scored 16 of his 37 points in the quarter on 8-for-11 shooting as the Lakers lead fluctuated between 8 and 12 points. Billy Cunningham later labeled the quarter as the most impressive part of "perhaps the best game anybody played against us all year."⁴⁵

In the fourth, the 76ers rallied as the Lakers seemed unwilling, or unable, to maintain their break-neck pace. Bobby Jones twice pulled Philadelphia within two, the last time at 103-101, but then Los Angeles scored ten points in a row to regain a comfortable lead. Magic hit four free throws in the final moments to put the finishing touches as his masterpiece, ending the game with 42 points, 15 rebounds, and 7 assists. "I'm just stunned, I can't even talk," Magic said afterwards. "I feel good about it, it's unreal. It was just a great team effort. Kareem brought us here. Without the Big Fella, we wouldn't be here. We won it for him and for ourselves."⁴⁶

The rookie also earned the Finals MVP award that likely would have gone to Abdul-Jabbar had he not been injured. "The thing that amazed me was that [Magic] kept getting better and better as the playoffs went on," a bewildered Cunningham said after the game. "If you asked me now whether Bird or Magic is better, it would be a tough one to answer."⁴⁷

That debate would continue for another decade; in some circles, it has never stopped. Magic's performance in Game 6 likely made some Rookie of the Year voters doubt their choice. When the official NBA award was announced on May 29, Larry Bird won by a 63-3 vote.⁴⁸ Earlier in the playoffs, Jerry West had already conceded that Bird "probably deserved to be Rookie of the Year because he had more of a dramatic impact on the Celtics than Johnson did on the Lakers," a claim that made sense given that Magic's teammate Kareem Abdul-Jabbar claimed his fifth MVP award that season.⁴⁹

The NBA could not have hoped for a better conclusion to the 1979-80 season. Both of their high-profile rookies had carried their teams deep into the playoffs, and Magic Johnson, the man with the dazzling smile and a personality to match, had been the star of the final game. The NBA's future had never looked so bright.

Next Time: 1979-80 Season Review

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¹ Scott Ostler, "Lakers Get Some Help on the Boards," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1980.

² Philadelphia won 116-110 despite resting Julius Erving and Maurice Cheeks with injuries; Boston held out Dave Cowens and Cedric Maxwell with equally minor ailments.

³ Tim Horgan, "Coin flip keeps Red's parlay alive," *Boston Herald American*, April 2, 1980.

⁴ Games 1 and 3 of the Phoenix-Los Angeles series are available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nnbS1tILXs&list=PL6CE10B64308DC47B> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gsTUHRyLuo&list=PL02E738B85AF487A4>.

⁵ Bob Ryan, "Celtics complete the sweep," *Boston Globe*, April 15, 1980.

⁶ Gerry Finn, "Rockets 'crying' out loud," *Springfield Union*, April 11, 1980.

⁷ Buck Harvey, "Uninspired Rockets fail to sell out against Celts," *Boston Herald American*, April 14, 1980.

⁸ Bob Ryan and Steve Marantz, "Celtics Notebook: Cowens Flies in his Chiropractor," *Boston Globe*, April 15, 1980.

⁹ Buck Harvey, "Celtics make it a clean sweep, 138-121," *Boston Herald American*, April 15, 1980. About 10,000 fans were actually present, despite an announced attendance of 13,106.

¹⁰ Bob Ryan and Steve Marantz, "Celtics Notebook: Cowens Flies in his Chiropractor," *Boston Globe*, April 15, 1980. The 1980 Oscars telecast is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxjnAfUmVMw>.

¹¹ Wire story, "Celts forward rookie of year," *Springfield Union*, April 16, 1980. Bird received 85 votes from players while Magic got 53.5; Bill Cartwright finished third with 38.5 votes.

¹² Steven R. Weisman, "U.S. Olympic Group Votes to Boycott The Moscow Games," *New York Times*, April 13, 1980. Dan Jenkins, "The Reign of Spain," *Sports Illustrated*, April 21, 1980, available at:

<https://www.si.com/vault/1980/04/21/824591/the-reign-of-spain-except-for-one-jittery-hour-23-year-old-severiano-ballesteros-ruled-the-masters-with-an-iron-hand-humblng-our-finest>.

¹³ The Celtics lack of playoff experience was highlighted in Steve Harris, "Stopping Malone key to beating Rockets," *Boston Herald American*, April 10, 1980, though some of the details in that article were incorrect, based on data from the <https://www.basketball-reference.com> site.

¹⁴ Bob Ryan, "The First Epic Goes To Sixers, 96-93," *Boston Globe*, April 19, 1980; Bob Ryan, "Celtics Notebook: 76ers Made Right Moves," *Boston Globe*, April 19, 1980.

¹⁵ Game 2 of the 76ers-Celtics series is available on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rGG0eYWYEM>

¹⁶ Bob Ryan, "Celtics Put up a Great Front, Catch Sixers," *Boston Globe*, April 21, 1980.

¹⁷ Buck Harvey, "The starters never stopped," *Boston Herald American*, April 21, 1980.

¹⁸ Wire story, "Brown's bombs key Sonic Triumph," *Bellingham Herald*, April 23, 1980. Game 1 is available on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70jJroKTEMY>.

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- ¹⁹ Game 1 (Part 12/12) on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UqflPPzRPQ> .
- ²⁰ Bob Ryan, "Celtics Notebook: Carr Stands Ground, Jams with Dr. J," *Boston Globe*, April 24, 1980.
- ²¹ Michael Madden, "Sampson Issues Final No," *Boston Globe*, April 24, 1980. After being rebuffed by Sampson's representatives on April 8, Auerbach had made a personal plea – during an interview on CBS at halftime of Game 2 – to meet with Sampson directly. That meeting took place on April 23, two days before the deadline for college players to turn pro that year. See Buck Harvey, "The starters never stopped," *Boston Herald American*, April 21, 1980.
- ²² Video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GD4T6TMWdc&index=10&list=PL36B06C88F0027DDC> . The collision occurs at the 5:13 mark.
- ²³ Sherry Stripling, "Los Angeles rebounds to tie series," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 24, 1980.
- ²⁴ Michael Madden, "Defense Did It for Sixers," *Boston Globe*, 4/26/1980.
- ²⁵ Buck Harvey, "76ers dump Celts, 102-90," *Boston Herald American*, April 26, 1980.
- ²⁶ Bob Ryan, "Celtics Notebook: Sixers Deserved Breaks," *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1980.
- ²⁷ Game 3 of the Lakers-Sonics series is available at YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg_9uHILC2w&list=PL549CE6CDF3FE5F04 .
- ²⁸ Sherry Stripling, "Lakers win, take 2-1 lead in series," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 26, 1980.
- ²⁹ Robert Walden, "Edmundson Pavilion: No place for Sonics," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 28, 1980. Walden was an actor who played Joe Rossi, a reporter for the fictional "Los Angeles Tribune" on the television series *Lou Grant*. The *Times* gave him an opportunity to cover Game 4 of the series.
- ³⁰ Jack Nelson and Oswald Johnston (Los Angeles Times), "Vance resigns over Iran mission," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1980.
- ³¹ Ray Fitzgerald, "A Sour End to A Super Debut," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1980.
- ³² Larry Whiteside, "76ers Put Celtics—and Series—Away, 105-94," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1980.
- ³³ Leigh Montville, "Those Weren't the Real Celtics," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1980.
- ³⁴ Sherry Stripling, "Sonic collapse: Loud, clear & fast," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 28, 1980.
- ³⁵ Bob Ryan, "76ers' Freeze Opens Door for Lakers," *Boston Globe*, May 5, 1980.
- ³⁶ Lazenby, Roland. *The Lakers: A Basketball Journey*. New York: St. Martin's, 1993, p229.
- ³⁷ Pearlman, Jeff. *Showtime: Magic, Kareem, Riley, and the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty of the 1980s*. New York: Gotham, 2013, p87-89.
- ³⁸ Bob Ryan, "Jabbar and Lakers Sparkle, 111-101," *Boston Globe*, May 11, 1980.
- ³⁹ Highlights available on YouTube, including Jones's clinching steal: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ov0P0s6KYWI> and Erving's highlight move: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjdEP7I2fRA> .
- ⁴⁰ Pearlman, Jeff. *Showtime: Magic, Kareem, Riley, and the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty of the 1980s*. New York: Gotham, 2013, p93-94 and pXII-XIII. In an interesting twist, Gene Shue had resigned as head coach of the San Diego Clippers on May 1 and would be hired by the Washington Bullets later that month. Therefore, neither coach from Magic's first NBA game would be back with the same team the following season.
- ⁴¹ Bob Ryan, "Lakers Are Up ... But Kareem Is Out," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1980.
- ⁴² Game 5 of the Lakers-76ers series is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyJZwRSq2sl> .
- ⁴³ Game 6 of the Lakers-76ers series is available on YouTube but also on the DVD collection *NBA Dynasty Series: Los Angeles Lakers, The Complete History*.
- ⁴⁴ For Nixon's injury, see Scott Ostler, "It's Magic!" *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1980, and Pearlman, p97. Ostler says that Nixon's ring finger was dislocated. Pearlman says Nixon's index finger was injured.
- ⁴⁵ Bob Ryan, "Lakers Champs in Six, 123-107," *Boston Globe*, May 17, 1980.
- ⁴⁶ Scott Ostler, "It's Magic!" *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1980.
- ⁴⁷ Bob Ryan, "Lakers Champs in Six, 123-107," *Boston Globe*, May 17, 1980.
- ⁴⁸ Wire story, "Jabbar Cops MVP," *Springfield Union*, May 30, 1980. Bill Fitch beat out Paul Westhead for Coach of the Year.
- ⁴⁹ Gerry Finn, "After hours show," *Springfield Union*, May 20, 1980. West's comments were made while he was in Springfield, MA to be inducted into the Hall of Fame on April 28, which was before Magic's Game 6 performance.