



80s Era NBA + 40: Part Five

Celtics Rally to Win 1981 East Finals – April/May 1981

By Michael Hamel

The calendar said 1981 but it sure felt like 1980 all over again. For the second straight season, the Boston Celtics entered the Eastern Conference Finals against the Philadelphia 76ers holding the home-court advantage, only to drop the first game at Boston Garden. Both teams held serve after the opener, just like the year before, resulting in a 3-1 lead for the 76ers as they headed back to Boston for Game 5. Philadelphia had eliminated the Celtics in five games in 1980, and the 76ers were confident that history would repeat itself. But history gave both teams reason for hope.

Game 4 of the 1981 East Finals had been held on Sunday, April 26 in Philadelphia. The day before, 76ers head coach Billy Cunningham had told reporters that if the Celtics lost, “I’d say they’re in trouble. I don’t see how they could expect to defeat us three straight times.”¹ The comment smacked of hubris, especially since the 76ers had been title contenders since 1977 and had fallen short every spring, but Boston had not won at the Spectrum since January 20, 1979. After the 76ers nearly blew a 17-point halftime lead before holding on for a 107-105 victory, Cunningham wisely backed off his earlier statement. “Well, nobody knows better than I that 3-1 is not insurmountable,” Cunningham said. “I sat on the bench here one year [in 1968 as a player for the 76ers] with a broken hand and saw it all turn around with us leading 3-1.”² (In 1968 the Celtics had rallied to win the East Finals, the first time an NBA team had overcome a 3-1 deficit in a best-of-seven series, and just two teams had done it since: the 1970 Lakers and 1979 Bullets.)

Bill Livingston of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* proclaimed that while the series was not over, Bill Fitch’s job might be on the line because he had been “outcoached” by Cunningham.³ Former Celtic Bob Cousy, visiting the Ovations Club at the Spectrum for a press conference on Tuesday to award the “Seagram’s Seven Crowns of Sports Award” for basketball to Julius Erving, declared that “Philly is too good a team to lose three games in a row, despite the home-court advantage [for Boston].”⁴

A different kind of comeback was in the news on the morning of Game 5. President Ronald Reagan had appeared before a joint session of Congress on Tuesday evening to deliver his first public speech since surviving an assassination attempt a month earlier. Reagan was welcomed to the chamber by thunderous bi-partisan applause, and his 20-minute speech was interrupted 12 times by cheers (sometimes more enthusiastically by his Republican colleagues than by the Democrats) as he thanked everyone who had offered prayers and notes of support, then turned his attention to his administration’s economic recovery plans.⁵

Meanwhile, in Boston, a local economic crisis threatened to close the city’s school system, which had run out of money as of the close of business on Tuesday. Mayor Kevin White claimed that the city itself would go into bankruptcy by the summer without help from the state, but a court ruling forced him to keep the schools open and send layoff notices to 2259 teachers.⁶ Three weeks earlier, the city had laid off 400 police officers and firemen, and closed seven police stations and 13 fire companies; the morning after Game 5, protesters opposed to the cutbacks would begin blocking highways and other major roads around the city.⁷

As the Game 5 began, Philadelphia fans who chose to watch Phillies ace Steve Carlton try to reach 3000 career strikeouts at Veterans Stadium against the Montreal Expos only had to stay tuned through the first inning. Carlton struck out the side on 16 pitches, allowing those watching at home to switch over from PRISM to WCAU (CBS) for the rest of the basketball game.⁸

By then, the 76ers had run off 12 straight points to take a 12-4 lead. The Celtics led 24-22 at the end of the first quarter, but had shot just 9-for-24 from the floor. Philadelphia pulled ahead in the second quarter, despite losing Maurice Cheeks 45 seconds into the period due to a severe headache. Cheeks, who had similar issues during the 1979 and 1980 playoffs, had first felt symptoms during the shoot-around before the game and took some aspirin after returning to the Sixers hotel.⁹ “But it really didn’t feel any better at all,” Cheeks said. “I tried to play but during the first quarter I went on the dead run after a loose ball with one of their guards, Gerald Henderson, and that really set it off. I got dizzy afterwards.”¹⁰ Cunningham was forced to go with a three-guard rotation of Lionel Hollins, Andrew Toney, and Clint Richardson the rest of the way. By halftime, Richardson had contributed seven points off the bench, and Philadelphia led 59-49.¹¹

In the third, Fitch left the Celtics starters on the floor for the first nine minutes, and Boston pulled ahead, 82-77. “That first half was leaving a sour taste in our mouths,” said Celtics guard Chris Ford, who scored nine third-quarter points. “We couldn’t let it end that way. That would have been disgraceful.”¹² A late rally by the 76ers earned them a one-point lead heading to the fourth.

Boston sent the series back to Philadelphia by scoring the final eight points of the game to erase a six-point deficit in a hectic two minutes. Bobby Jones, the hero of the final seconds of Game 4, had a final minute to forget: he fumbled away a sure layup, failed to handle a low pass from Erving, then, with the 76ers trailing, 110-109, missed a potential go-ahead jumper. After M.L. Carr’s free throw extended Boston’s lead to 111-109 with one second remaining, he missed his next two attempts intentionally to try to run out the clock.¹³ But Darryl Dawkins grabbed the rebound and the 76ers called timeout. Jones then capped off his evening with an errant inbounds pass that was intercepted by Parish. Bird finished with 32 points despite struggling with his outside shooting; Fitch was even forced to rest him for over two-and-a-half minutes in the middle of the fourth quarter. “Tonight it was so hot, I was tired from the beginning,” Bird said afterwards (the non-air-conditioned Garden could be a bit warm even on a 74-degree day in Boston). “I played as hard as I can, but it was the tiringest I’ve ever been in my life. I’d rather play when it’s cold outside.”¹⁴

The series resumed in Philadelphia on Friday night. “Well, I think we should approach [tonight] like a seventh game.” Julius Erving told reporters. “We should block out anything past this game ... concentrate on the job at hand. That’s no admission of weakness on our part, it’s just a matter of preference. We’re not afraid of the Boston Garden, we’ve won up there before. But we’d rather not go back if we can help it.”¹⁵ Sixers fans who did not make the trip to the Spectrum were forced to watch the game on tape delay while WCAU broadcasted the annual season-ending cliffhanger episode of “Dallas” and the rest of CBS’s regular Friday night lineup. (In Boston, WNEV chose to carry the game live.)¹⁶

After the first quarter, with the 76ers leading by 13 and the Celtics reeling, it looked like Philadelphia’s home winning streak against Boston was secure. The 76ers lead swelled to 17 at 37-20 in the second, but the Celtics assembled an 18-6 run to get back in the game. In the third quarter, with the Sixers back up by 10, Dawkins and Cedric Maxwell accidentally got tangled up while battling for a rebound. Maxwell fell out of bounds, then ran into the stands and lunged at a fan – Ray Kohl – who had been abusive towards him.¹⁷ Dawkins attempted to play peacemaker during the skirmish. “I thought it

was a dumb move [by Maxwell],” the colorful Dawkins said afterwards. “He don’t know what the fan has in his pockets. He could have his throat cut and wouldn’t know it until his head fell off.”¹⁸

Then Bird heated up, shaking off a 2-for-10 first half by scoring 11 in the third; he would finish with 25 points and a game-high 16 rebounds. Boston was within three, 73-70, as the period ended.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Erving was expending so much energy against Bird on defense that his own shooting touch left him, and he missed 12 of 17 shots. Cheeks returned to play 20 minutes in spite of his continued headaches, but Parish was the star supporting actor for Boston, shaking off back trouble to score 21 with 10 big rebounds. When Parish fouled out with 1:44 left and the Celtics leading by one, Kevin McHale replaced him. The rookie held his ground as Dawkins missed a layup, then bailed out Bird – who had lost the ball to Toney along the end line – by blocking a shot by Hollins. Boston then ran the clock down to two seconds before Maxwell was fouled and made two foul shots to put the Celtics ahead 100-97. Erving added a free throw (after being intentionally fouled by Tiny Archibald) to close out the scoring.

Game 7 was set for Sunday afternoon at the Garden.

For Celtics fans, this game ranks as one of the best non-Finals playoff games in team history, an “instant classic.” The opening six minutes were played at a frenetic pace before the tempo settled down. There were no offensive superstars in this game, but plenty of solid performances, as nine players finished in double digits in the face of outstanding defense by both sides. Fitch singled out Maxwell after the game, saying “if I had to give out a game ball today, it would go to Maxwell for his job on The Doctor. Someone had to be the defensive expert and nobody is going to stop Julius completely. But Maxwell did a great job in containing him, thanks to a little help from his teammates.”²⁰ Still, with the Sixers leading 69-58 in the third, the Garden crowd was restless, but the Celtics began to energize them with a 13-2 run to close the quarter.²¹

It took just over a minute in the fourth for them to be brought to their feet again, as Parish made two baskets to tie the game at 75-75, followed by an Archibald jumper to give the Celtics their largest lead of the game. When Carr beat the 24-second clock from just inside the three-point line, Boston led by four. But the Sixers held the Celtics without a basket for nearly seven minutes during a 14-3 run (including ten points from a resurgent Erving) that produced an 89-82 Philadelphia lead and a much quieter Garden.

The Celtics began double-teaming Erving on every trip down the floor, and the 76ers offense collapsed while the officials permitted the physical play. “I understand that in a playoff game like this one,” said Cunningham afterwards, smoldering over a 27-18 foul disadvantage, “that you have to let the players play. And what we were trying to do is go inside with the ball to get some fouls. Then I see bodies flying all over the place and no calls. I don’t understand ...”²² After Maxwell made one of three free throws, Philadelphia turned the ball over on three of four consecutive possessions, each resulting in two points for Boston. The last two were free throws by Bird, who had been held without a basket up to that point in the quarter. With 2:45 remaining, the game was tied, 89-89. Following an exchange of missed shots, Bird grabbed the rebound off a wild shot by Dawkins and proceeded to dribble nearly the length of the court before pulling up for a leaning jumper that he banked in off the glass with 1:03 left to give Boston a 91-89 lead.

On the 76ers’ subsequent possession, Carr picked off an ill-advised cross-court pass by Erving, but Hollins kept Philadelphia alive by stealing the ball back. Then Cheeks ran into Carr and was awarded two free throws, giving the 76ers a chance to tie. But Cheeks missed the first free throw, made the second, and the Celtics got the ball back with a one-point lead with 29 seconds remaining. Boston worked the 24-second clock; Carr missed a jumper just

before it expired, and Parish lost the rebound to Bobby Jones during a scramble for the ball. Jones called timeout with one second left, allowing the 76ers to inbound the ball at half court, but his attempt to lob an inbounds pass towards the hoop sailed uselessly off the top of the backboard, sending Celtics fans rushing onto the court in delirium as Bird jumped up and down in jubilation.

The Celtics had overcome double-digit deficits in three straight games, outscoring the 76ers 86-70 in the third quarters of Games 5 through 7 (and 77-64 in the fourth). “I don’t know what it is,” Larry Bird said afterwards, “I guess we just buckle down on ourselves when we have to. I really don’t understand why Philly lets us back in games. Well, I don’t know if they ‘let us’ come back in this one. But it sure didn’t look too good today [in the third quarter]. I guess we made our own destiny. I guess it shows the character of this team.”²³ Boston had won the final three games by a total of five points.

Eleven days later, Bird and the Celtics finished off the Houston Rockets in the Finals, claiming the franchise’s first title since 1976.

Next Time: 1980-81 Season Review

Appendix: Lineup Charts

Researching the 80s Era involves watching a lot of games, either on YouTube or on videos released by the NBA. To get some insight into the matchups on the floor and the substitution patterns employed by the coaches in important games, I charted the lineups and defensive assignments used by each team as the game progressed. This is more challenging than it sounds. During the 1980’s, and especially during the first few years, television broadcasts did not continuously display the time remaining. Shots of the clock were shown infrequently, and the time was periodically mentioned by the announcers. Listing every defensive switch or tracking how each individual fast break was defended would be impossible based on television footage, and would not be very enlightening, since defensive coverage on a fast break can be more happenstance than by design. My goal was to understand the *planned* matchups, and to see how the score changed while a particular grouping was on the floor.

A few other notes on these charts:

1. The center row shows the Celtics lineup as the quarter progressed. The top row, labeled “Celtics ball” shows how the 76ers matched up against the Celtics while Boston had possession. Conversely, the bottom row, labeled “76ers ball” shows how the Celtics matched up against the 76ers when the 76ers had the ball. For example, at the start of Game 5, Cedric Maxwell was guarding Julius Erving, but Erving was responsible for defending Larry Bird.
2. “Time left” and “Score” reflects the time remaining in the quarter, and the score, when this particular combination of players *began* playing on the floor. The score is color coded to match the team that is holding the lead (**Boston** or **Philadelphia**).
3. Any “Time left” figure that is shown in *italics* is approximate, based on my unofficial accounting of the time remaining in the quarter.
4. A name listed in **bold** has just entered the game; this highlighting is omitted at the start of the first quarter but is used at the beginning of subsequent quarters.
5. If a substitution is made while a player is shooting free throws, any made attempts are counted as having been scored before the substitution.

6. If no lineup is listed for Philadelphia during a particular sequence, it means only one team had possession of the ball while that combination of players were on the floor.

First Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 5

Boston ball	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	
	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Toney	Toney	Toney	
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	McHale
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Carr	Carr
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones
	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	Toney
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Cheeks
Time left	12:00	4:00	3:32	2:29	1:40	0:17
Score	0-0	14-12	14-12	16-16	18-18	22-20

Bobby Jones entered the game with about four minutes remaining, which was typical; he would do the same in Games 6 and 7, though in the deciding game he replaced Dawkins instead of Caldwell Jones. In contrast, Fitch preferred to keep his five starters on the floor as long as possible.

Second Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 5

Boston ball	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Dawkins	
	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	Mix	
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	
	Cheeks	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	
Boston	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Maxwell	Maxwell	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey
	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford
	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving
	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving	Mix	Mix
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	B. Jones
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins
	Cheeks	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson
Time left	12:00	11:15	9:00	8:00	6:30	5:00		3:33	0:26
Score	24-22	25-24	29-29	31-29	37-35	43-39	46-41	46-43	56-49

Cheeks left the game with a severe headache and would not return. Foul trouble began affecting both teams. Parish sat out the quarter after committing three fouls in the opening period. Toney was pulled from the floor after picking up his third foul, as was Caldwell Jones later in the quarter.

Third Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 5

Boston ball	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Mix	Mix	Mix	B. Jones
	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving
	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson
	Richardson	Richardson	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	McHale	McHale
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving
	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Mix	Mix	Mix	B. Jones
	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson
	Richardson	Richardson	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins
Time left	12:00	8:32	7:00	5:00	4:09	3:10	2:00
Score	59-49	63-58	67-62	73-68	75-74	78-77	82-77

McHale had not played in the second half of Game 4, but re-entered the game with 3:10 remaining in the quarter – and would continue to play well into the fourth. Boston held a five point edge when Hollins and Bobby Jones returned to the lineup, but Philadelphia led by one at the end of the period. Bird continued to guard the 76ers' weaker offensive forward, leaving Maxwell and McHale to defend Erving. Cunningham pulled Dawkins after his fourth foul, but Fitch left Maxwell in the game for several minutes after he picked up his fourth with seven minutes remaining.

Fourth Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 5

Boston ball	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones		C. Jones	C. Jones		C. Jones	C. Jones	
	Erving	Erving	C. Jones	C. Jones	Erving	Erving		B. Jones	B. Jones		B. Jones	B. Jones	
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones		Dawkins	Dawkins		Dawkins	Dawkins	
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins		Hollins	Hollins		Hollins	Hollins	
	Richardson	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney		Toney	Toney		Richardson	Toney	
Boston	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell
	Bird	Bird	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Robey	Robey	Parish	Parish	Parish	McHale	McHale	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Carr	Ford	Ford	Carr	Ford	Carr	Carr
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson	Henderson	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving		Erving	Erving
	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones		B. Jones	B. Jones
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	B. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins		Dawkins	Dawkins
	Richardson	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins		Toney	Toney
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney		Hollins	Hollins
Time left	12:00	10:00	7:54	7:00	6:30	5:18	2:45	2:29	1:51	1:20	0:55	0:39	0:20
Score	85-84	87-86	91-88	93-88	93-90	99-95	105-103	107-103	109-103	109-106	109-106	109-108	110-109

At the 5:18 mark Bill Fitch used a 20-second timeout to get Bird back in the game. Over the final three minutes Fitch alternated Ford and Carr in a series of offense-for-defense substitutions. Dawkins briefly sat down after picking up his fifth foul, but returned for the stretch.

First Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 6

Boston ball	C. Jones		B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	
	Erving		Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	
	Dawkins		Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	
	Hollins		Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	
	Cheeks		Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	McHale	McHale	McHale
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Parish	Parish	Parish	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Carr	Carr	Carr
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Mix
	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Hollins	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney
	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins
Time left	12:00	4:22	4:10	3:30	2:29	2:03	0:30
Score	0-0	15-13	17-13	19-13	23-13	25-16	29-18

Cheeks, still recovering from his headache troubles, picked up three quick fouls and did not return until after halftime.

Second Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 6

Boston ball	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	B. Jones	B. Jones		B. Jones	B. Jones	
	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving		Erving	Erving	
	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins		C. Jones	C. Jones	
	Hollins	Richardson	Richardson	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins		Hollins	Hollins	
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Richardson	Richardson	Toney		Toney	Richardson	
Boston	McHale	McHale	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Carr	Carr	Carr	Bird
	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish
	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Carr
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	Mix	Mix	B. Jones	Erving	Erving		B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving
	B. Jones	B. Jones	Mix	Mix	B. Jones		Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones
	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins		Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins		Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins
	Hollins	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson		Hollins	Hollins	Richardson	Richardson
Time left	12:00	10:00	8:44	7:00	6:30	5:30	4:25	4:15	2:35	1:00
Score	31-18	33-18	37-20	37-24	37-26	41-30	43-32	43-34	45-40	49-40

When Bird was pulled from the lineup, he had scored just 5 points on 1-8 shooting. After he returned, he shot 9-for-14 from the floor the rest of the way. McHale's third foul ended his first half.

Third Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 6

Boston ball	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Erving	
	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Mix	
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	
	Cheeks	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Richardson	Richardson	Cheeks	Richardson	
	Hollins	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Toney	Toney	Richardson	Toney	
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	
	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	McHale	
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Carr	
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving	
	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	
	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	
	Hollins	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Richardson	Toney	
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Richardson	Richardson	Cheeks	Richardson	
Time left	12:00	9:00	8:20	6:00	5:00	4:25	4:00	2:45	1:15	1:00
Score	51-42	57-45	57-47	59-52	59-54	63-56	63-57	66-61	70-68	71-68

Cheeks returned... and picked up two more fouls during the period, causing Cunningham to pull him again (twice). Parish also earned his fifth foul, giving McHale his first opportunity since early in the second quarter. Archibald was forced to the bench after Dawkins stepped on his left ankle.

Fourth Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 6

Boston ball	Mix	Mix	Mix	B. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones		Erving
	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving		C. Jones
	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins		Dawkins
	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	Toney		Hollins
	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins		Toney
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	McHale	Maxwell
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	Parish	Parish	Parish	McHale	Robey	McHale
	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Maxwell	Carr
	Henderson	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving	C. Jones	
	Mix	Mix	Mix	B. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	
	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	
	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	Toney	B. Jones	
	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Richardson	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	
Time left	12:00	11:00	10:00	9:45	8:00	7:15	5:45	4:22	1:44	0:01	0:01
Score	73-70	76-70	78-75	78-75	83-82	85-84	87-87	91-89	96-95	100-97	100-98

Archibald returned and made his first shot, a jumper to cut the Sixers lead to 76-72. Cheeks and Parish both fouled out during the quarter. With one second left, extra big men were inserted after Archibald fouled Erving to put him on the line before Philadelphia could attempt a potential game-tying 3-pointer. The expectation was that Erving would make the first and miss the second intentionally; both teams wanted good rebounders on the floor. However, Erving missed the first and then made the second. Robey inexplicitly called timeout instead of quickly inbounding the ball, allowing Philadelphia to set their defense. As Maxwell prepared to inbound the ball at midcourt, Dawkins and Caldwell Jones both jumped up and down in front of him to try to force a bad pass (the Celtics still had timeouts remaining, so a 5-second violation was not an immediate concern). But Maxwell found Archibald in the corner to run out the clock; Archibald also managed to sink a long hook shot after time expired.

First Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 7

Boston ball	C. Jones	Erving	Erving	C. Jones
	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones
	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins
	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins
	Hollins	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Parish	Parish	Robey	Robey
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones
	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones
	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks
Time left	12:00	4:15	2:09	0:19
Score	0-0	17-13	25-19	31-24

Both teams went with their iron. Bobby Jones made his customary appearance with four minutes left, Robey subbed for Parish, then Cunningham took advantage of a stoppage in play to give Erving a head start on the end of quarter break.

Second Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 7

Boston ball		C. Jones	Mix	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	
		B. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Erving	
		Mix	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	
		Hollins	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	
		Toney	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Bird	Bird	Bird	Maxwell	Maxwell
	Bird	Bird	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	Bird	Fernsten
	Robey	Robey	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish
	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson
Phila ball	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Erving	Erving
	C. Jones	Mix	Mix	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones
	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins
	Hollins	Hollins	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks
Time left	12:00	11:30	9:12	6:41	5:15	3:00	1:03	0:10
Score	31-26	31-26	37-30	41-34	46-35	47-40	51-44	53-48

Dawkins tangled with Robey on the 76ers' first possession, clearing him out of the way with his left arm/elbow while dunking, drawing his second foul and a seat on the bench. Fernsten made a rare appearance; the Celtics had a foul to give and Fitch did not want one of his regulars to commit one. Fernsten obliged, fouling Erving with two seconds left. Hollins's subsequent inbounds lob pass was batted down by Maxwell, and the clock ran out on the half.

Third Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 7

Boston ball	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones	Erving	C. Jones	B. Jones
	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Mix
	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	Dawkins	C. Jones	Mix	C. Jones
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	Toney	Toney
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins	Cheeks
Boston	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Bird
	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	McHale
	Parish	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey	Robey
	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Ford	Carr
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson
Phila ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	Erving	B. Jones	Mix
	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	Mix	B. Jones
	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney	Toney	Toney
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins	Cheeks
Time left	12:00	8:00	7:31	5:58	4:40	3:18	1:45
Score	53-48	61-54	63-56	69-62	69-66	71-68	73-68

Foul trouble again played a role: Parish's fourth opened the door for Robey to play eight minutes; Cunningham pulled both Dawkins and Erving after their fourth fouls.

Fourth Quarter 1981 Eastern Conference Finals Game 7

Boston ball	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	B. Jones	Erving	B. Jones	Erving	
	Mix	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	Erving	C. Jones	Erving	B. Jones	
	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Cheeks	Cheeks	
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins	Hollins	
Boston	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Maxwell	Maxwell	Carr	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell	Maxwell
	McHale	McHale	McHale	McHale	Bird	Bird	Maxwell	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird	Bird
	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	McHale	McHale	McHale	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish	Parish
	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Carr	Henderson	Henderson	Henderson	Carr	Carr	Carr
	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson	Archibald	Archibald	Archibald	Henderson	Archibald	Archibald
Phila ball	Mix	C. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving
	B. Jones	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	C. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones
	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins	Dawkins
	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Toney	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Toney
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins
Time left	12:00	11:00	10:45	9:20	8:50	8:16	7:00	4:34	3:41	1:03	0:29	0:01
Score	75-71	75-75	77-75	79-77	80-79	81-80	85-80	89-83	89-87	91-89	91-90	91-90

Two baskets by Parish tied the game at 75-75, the first tie since 13-13. Ford, struggling from the field, sat out the fourth for the second straight game.

¹ Bob Ryan, "Celtics Must Shake Philly Jinx," *Boston Globe*, April 26, 1981.

² Larry Whiteside, "For Celtics, It's Almost Unthinkable; Must Beat Sixers 3 Times in a Row," *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1981. The Celtics comeback in 1968 included two wins on the road, in Games 5 and 7.

³ Bill Livingston, "Sixers sitting pretty because of good bench," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 28, 1981.

⁴ Bill Livingston, "Erving gets honor, but 'wants it all,'" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 29, 1981. Dick Weiss, "Darryl Just Catches Plane in 'Sixergate'", *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 29, 1981. The Seagram's award (which was also given out for other sports such as hockey) was based on computer analysis of stats to derive a "Productive Efficiency Rating." Erving was presented a trophy and \$10,000 that Erving said would be used for a down payment on a new house. Adrian Dantley, Moses Malone, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar rounded out the top four finishers. Erving had also won the award in 1980.

⁵ Robert Healy, "Reagan lobbies for budget," *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1981. Speech available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ_G111N1NY (accessed December 28, 2019).

⁶ R.S. Kindleberger, "They'll be school today; the case is still in court," *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1981. Mike Barnicle, "'From Camelot to Cleveland,'" *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1981. Marvin Pave, "Layoff notice sent to 2259 Hub teachers," *Boston Globe*, May 2, 1981. The headline of Barnicle's column was based on Mayor White's comparison of Boston's financial condition to Cleveland's; White's comment drew an angry retort from Cleveland's Mayor George Voinovich two days later; see Jerry Taylor, "'Camelot to Cleveland' quote draws an offended harrumph," *Boston Globe*, May 1, 1981.

⁷ Joseph M. Harvey and Charles E. Claffey, "2 courts refuse to halt 400 police-fire layoffs," *Boston Globe*, April 11, 1981. Hank Klibanoff and Curt Gilliatt, "Empty lockers, boxed-up files: 7 Hub police stations are shut," *Boston Globe*, April 11, 1981. Ray Richard, "A day of protests and huddles: The Protesters," *Boston Globe*, April 30, 1981. Affected routes on the 29th included the Southeast Expressway, the Mystic-Tobin Bridge, and the Sumner Tunnel connecting Logan Airport and East Boston with downtown Boston.

⁸ Bill Conlin, "Lefty Makes Short Work of a Record," *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 30, 1981. TV listings in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 29, 1981. Game 5 of the Boston-Philadelphia series was broadcast live in the two home cities but was on tape delay elsewhere; memorably, the halftime show during the delayed broadcast, hosted by Brent Musberger, was produced live at 1am. This was made obvious when Musberger plugged the fact that the two teams would play again "tomorrow night," which gave away the result of the game. Jack Craig, "SporTVView," *Boston Globe*, May 3, 1981.

⁹ Bob Ryan, "Celtics Notebook: Their Guard Was Up When It Counted Most," *Boston Globe*, April 30, 1981.

¹⁰ Dick Weiss, "Cheeks Aching to Play," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 1, 1981.

¹¹ General info on Game 5: Bob Ryan, "Celtics Win, 111-109; Gap Closes to 3-2," *Boston Globe*, April 30, 1981. Bill Livingston, "Celtics rally past Sixers, 111-109," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 30, 1981. Video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwvuFukAQ8A> (accessed October 2019 but since removed).

¹² Stan Hochman, "Revved-Up Carr Celtics' Gallant Defender," *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 30, 1981.

¹³ The 76ers were in the penalty, so Carr had three free throws to make two. The three-to-make-two (or two-to-make-one) rule was introduced along with the 24-second clock in 1954-55; the extra penalty free throw was awarded after a team's sixth foul in a quarter in order to discourage teams from fouling at the end of a game to get the ball back. Originally the penalty free throw was only awarded for backcourt fouls, but was later expanded to include flagrant fouls and fouls on missed field goals. The rule was eliminated completely after the 1980-81 season. See http://www.nba.com/analysis/rules_history.html and <http://www.apbr.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=4035>.

¹⁴ Stan Hochman, "Revved-Up Carr Celtics' Gallant Defender," *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 30, 1981. Weather report in *Boston Globe*, April 30, 1981.

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- ¹⁵ Ray Didinger, "Celtics Pride vs. Sixer Style," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 1, 1981.
- ¹⁶ TV listings in *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Boston Globe*, May 1, 1981. WNAC in Boston displayed a ticker-style banner at the start of the first and third quarters which read "Stay tuned for 'Dallas' immediately following the game" – see video available on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw1biWOt02s> (accessed December 31, 2019). Two weeks earlier, WCAU had agreed to broadcast Game 6 of the Sixers Eastern Conference Semifinals series on a Friday night, but that game was played in Milwaukee, not at home in Philadelphia.
- ¹⁷ Kohl initially threatened to press charges against Maxwell, but later relented. See Phil Jasner, "Fan Finds Cornbread Distasteful," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 2, 1981, and Phil Jasner, "Revenge Unwarranted for Kohl," *Philadelphia Daily News*, December 18, 1981.
- ¹⁸ Bill Livingston, "Sixers squander lead, lose to Boston," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 2, 1981.
- ¹⁹ General info for Game 6: Bob Ryan, "Revived Celtics Seek Sixer KO," *Boston Globe*, May 3, 1981; Bob Ryan, "Celtics Bring It Back To Boston," *Boston Globe*, May 2, 1981. Dick Weiss, "Mayday for Sixers," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 2, 1981. Stan Hochman, "76ers Can't Find KO Punch," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 2, 1981.
- ²⁰ Larry Whiteside, "... Thanks to Maxwell," *Boston Globe*, May 4, 1981.
- ²¹ Much of the rest of this section is drawn from watching Game 7 on the DVD collection *NBA Dynasty Series: Boston Celtics, The Complete History*. Other sources for this game include: Bob Ryan, "The Improbable Dream: Celtics' Third Straight Win Makes It Complete, 91-90," *Boston Globe*, May 4, 1981.
- ²² Michael Madden, "The Final 5:23—The Sixers Ask: Why?" *Boston Globe*, May 4, 1981.
- ²³ Ray Didinger, "The Boston V Party," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 4, 1981.