



80s Era NBA + 40: Part Eight

Lakers defeat 76ers in the 1982 Finals

By Michael Hamel

May 27, 1982

NBA Finals Game 1

Los Angeles 124, Philadelphia 117

For two-and-a-half quarters, the fans at the Spectrum were dreaming of the Sixers' first championship in fifteen years. The Lakers fast break was occasionally spectacular, even scoring off made baskets by the Sixers, but Philadelphia was holding their own on the boards and showed off a remarkably efficient fast break themselves. Philadelphia led 83-68 with 6:10 left in the third, but Los Angeles then scored 40 of the game's next 49 points, beginning with an 11-0 run. Defense, specifically a 1-3-1 matchup zone trap, fueled their transition offense and allowed the Lakers to score those 40 points while making just three outside shots.¹ "We really stuck with our trap tonight," said head coach Pat Riley. "If you let Philadelphia get to their spots and run their offense for Doc [Julius Erving] and [Andrew] Toney, they are tough to guard. If we trap, they go to a freelance game instead of a set offense, and while they are a good freelance team, so are we."²

Lineup Analysis³

The Lakers trailed by 11 points at halftime on the road in Philadelphia, and turned around the game in the third quarter despite falling behind by 15 five minutes into the period.

Third Quarter Game 1 1982 Finals (Part one)

Lakers ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	B. Jones
	B. Jones	B. Jones	B. Jones	Bantom
	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Toney	Richardson	Toney	Hollins
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks
Los Angeles	Rambis	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes
	Wilkes	McAdoo	McAdoo	McAdoo
	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar
	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic
	Nixon	Nixon	Nixon	Nixon
76ers ball	B. Jones	Erving	Erving	B. Jones
	Erving	B. Jones	B. Jones	Bantom
	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones	C. Jones
	Toney	Cheeks	Toney	Hollins
	Cheeks	Richardson	Cheeks	Cheeks
Time left	12:00	7:00	5:46	4:00
Score	61-50	79-64	83-70	83-75

The 79-64 edge, courtesy of a three-pointer by Andrew Toney, was the 76ers' largest lead of the game. Toney had been hit in the left knee on the previous possession and would leave the game shortly after picking up his third foul in a scuffle with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Toney briefly returned, but then missed most of the rest of the period, which deprived the 76ers of their most feared outside shooting threat. The Sixers would lead by fifteen points again at 83-68, before the tide turned.

Third Quarter Game 1 1982 Finals (Part two)

Lakers ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	
	Bantom	Bantom	Bantom	Dawkins	
	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Bantom	
	Hollins	Hollins	Cheeks	Hollins	
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Hollins	Cheeks	
Los Angeles	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	Wilkes	
	McAdoo	McAdoo	McAdoo	Rambis	
	Jabbar	Jabbar	Jabbar	McAdoo	
	Magic	Magic	Magic	Magic	
	Nixon	Nixon	Cooper	Cooper	
76ers ball	Erving	Erving	Erving	Erving	
	Bantom	Bantom	Bantom	Dawkins	
	C. Jones	Dawkins	Dawkins	Bantom	
	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	Hollins	
	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	Cheeks	
Time left	2:47	1:55	1:25	0:48	0:00
Score	85-81	87-85	87-87	89-87	91-89

The final four minutes were decisive. The Lakers lead at 87-85 was their first since 10-8, and Los Angeles closed the period on a 16-6 run. Jamaal Wilkes scored 16 of his 24 points during this quarter, and he and Magic Johnson played the entire twelve minutes.

The Lakers continued to pour it on in the fourth quarter, sprinting to a 12-1 start with Abdul-Jabbar on the bench, and their peaked at 108-92. The Sixers rallied to get within eight at 120-112 with forty-six seconds left, but a pair of costly Steve Mix turnovers ended their comeback hopes. Los Angeles closed out their Game 1 victory, their ninth consecutive playoff win of the 1982 postseason.

May 30, 1982

NBA Finals Game 2

Philadelphia 110, Los Angeles 94

Hard work on the boards paid off for the 76ers, who outrebounded the Lakers despite horrendous foul trouble; Darryl Dawkins and Caldwell Jones had each been charged with three fouls with over five minutes left in the second quarter. While Earl Cureton and Mike Bantom were forced to play significant minutes, the 76ers were able

to extend their lead to thirteen while Dawkins and Jones were on the bench. Philadelphia earned a 12-0 edge in second-chance points in the period, which was fortunate as Andrew Toney was struggling through a 1 for 8 shooting stretch. “There is no secret to offensive rebounding,” Pat Riley explained to reporters. “It’s a matter of who wants the ball. If you want it, go get it. They went after it harder than we did.”⁴

The Lakers closed to within 98-90 late in the fourth quarter, but Bobby Jones, who had suffered a left hip pointer in the first half when Cooper accidentally kned him, tapped in a missed jumper by Toney to stem a Los Angeles rally. Sixers head coach Billy Cunningham had successfully tutored his players on ways to beat the Laker trap, and claimed after the game that his team “did a good job” but could do better. “[The Lakers] want to force the tempo. If you show some patience, you can get a good shot.”⁵

June 1, 1982

NBA Finals Game 3

Los Angeles 129, Philadelphia 108

Now it was the Lakers turn to win a blowout. Los Angeles led from start from finish, 42-22 early in the second quarter, and if not for a late rally in the period—sparked by 15 points from Andrew Toney—that sliced their advantage to nine before the half, this game might have over at the break. “Anything and everything we did tonight was a step slow,” Billy Cunningham said afterwards. “Everything we did, reacting to whatever they did, was much slower than we’d like it to be. Our timing was just off tonight.”⁶ Norm Nixon felt that the Lakers fast start was critical: “This was the first game where we’ve taken command from the very beginning. We made a concentrated effort to go out and take the game away from Philly right away, and I thought it was very important that I got off well.”⁷ The Lakers even weathered a fourteen minute stretch at the end of the half without Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who was forced to the bench with foul trouble.

With Kurt Rambis and Magic Johnson physically dominating Julius Erving, the Lakers began the second half on a 17-4 run. Nixon scored 21 of his points in the second half as Los Angeles pulled away. Toney was the lone bright spot for the Sixers, who capped off his 36-point night with a four-point play (the first in NBA playoff history) when he was fouled by Michael Cooper while making a three-pointer from the left corner. Bobby Jones played 26 minutes, and though he claimed that his hip was not bothering him, Jones took just one shot and was held scoreless for the first time since the opener of the Eastern Conference Finals and for just the third time in his career.

June 3, 1982

NBA Finals Game 4

Los Angeles 111, Philadelphia 101

The Sixers shot poorly in the early going (32 percent in the first quarter) and made a pair of critical turnovers down the stretch that denied their hopes of a comeback. Los Angeles led 29-16 in the first and 41-27 in the second, before their lead peaked at 63-44 in the third quarter. “To start the game,” lamented Billy Cunningham, “we weren’t reacting the way we wanted to. We set out to do one thing—I can’t tell you what that is—and we just didn’t respond.”⁸

The Lakers lead had been cut to 105-98 with 2:41 left in the game when Caldwell Jones was inserted in place of an ineffective Darryl Dawkins. On Philadelphia’s subsequent possession, Jones threw a pass intended for Maurice Cheeks, but Cheeks had reversed direction, and the ball sailed helplessly into the backcourt, causing a violation that gave possession back to the Lakers. Bob McAdoo missed a jumper, and Jones atoned for his mistake by grabbing the rebound. But then Julius Erving threw the ball away under the basket as the 24-second clock

wound down. “Those two plays could have turned the game around for us if we’d have converted them to hoops, but we didn’t,” Cheeks said later.⁹

June 6, 1982

NBA Finals Game 5

Philadelphia 135, Los Angeles 102

The 76ers scored a playoff record 81 points in the second half and held Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to single digits in points for the first time in 420 games to keep their season alive.¹⁰ After a tight first half, Philadelphia pulled ahead 72-70 early in the third, and when Abdul-Jabbar and Magic Johnson missed potential game-tying free throws, the 76ers dialed up their defense. “They got a second wind that was incredible,” Lakers assistant Bill Bertka said later. “Their defensive intensity was outstanding. We didn’t execute, and the next thing we knew, we were being buried under an avalanche.”¹¹ By the end of the third quarter the 76ers were up by 10, then kept up the pressure in the final stanza. “When we got behind in the second half, we lost our poise,” Abdul-Jabbar said afterwards. “I doubt there will be any carryover effect [to Game 6]. We beat them the last two games, and it didn’t seem to bother them. They played me the way everybody plays me. They pushed and shoved, and today they got away with it.”¹²

Magic posted a pedestrian double-double, still feeling some effects of jammed knuckles on his right hand suffered in the Western Conference Semifinals against the Suns. It was the sixth time in the playoffs that he was held below his regular season average of 18.6 points per game. “[The injury] affects me in all areas because it’s weak,” Magic told reporters during the Finals. “It’s so weak that I can’t handle, pass, shoot or rebound the way I want to. But I’m icing it in order to get some feel, and I’m gonna be ready, whether it wants to be or not.”¹³

June 8, 1982

NBA Finals Game 6

Los Angeles 114, Philadelphia 104

Los Angeles clinched their second championship in three years, once again leading from start-to-finish against Philadelphia. The Lakers fast break bogged down in the second quarter, but Jamaal Wilkes and Michael Cooper repeatedly made big shots from outside. Meanwhile, the Lakers defense continued to be a key to the series. “I read a lot about Boston’s defensive intensity in the clutch,” Pat Riley said. “Well, for a running team, we played it pretty well too.”¹⁴

Philadelphia’s best chance came in the third, when they twice had the ball while trailing by a point. In both cases, the Lakers defense held firm: Bob McAdoo broke up an alley-oop from Maurice Cheeks to Julius Erving, then, during a later possession, Cooper stole the ball from Andrew Toney. After extending their lead to 100-89 in the fourth, the Lakers weathered another Sixers run, clinging to a 103-100 advantage with 3:55 left. But the Lakers got three offensive rebounds on their next possession, which concluded with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar drawing a foul on a leaner that took a fortunate bounce or two before dropping in.¹⁵ He added a free throw to make it 106-100 and the Sixers never seriously challenged again. “We were more disappointed this time than in any other year,” said a downcast Erving after the game. “I don’t know why. . . . It hurts more than any other year. It’s very painful.”¹⁶ Magic Johnson collected his second Finals’ triple-double and earned another Finals MVP award.

Next Time: 1981-82 Season Review

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¹ Three outside shots: Bob Ryan, “Lakers Spring Their Trap on Unsuspecting 76ers,” *Boston Globe*, May 29, 1982. “They were a Norm Nixon drifter at 85- 81, Philly, a Jamaal Wilkes 17-footer at 91-87, LA, and a 12-foot Bob McAdoo baseline jumper at 101-90.”

² Bob Ryan, “Lakers Spring Their Trap On Unsuspecting 76ers.” Other sources for this game: Bob Ryan, “Lakers’ Blitzkrieg Rips 76ers, 124-117; Wilkes Sparks Second-Half 40-9 Run,” *Boston Globe*, May 28, 1982. George Shirk, “Lakers’ Guns Open Fire On 76ers—L.A. Rally Seals Win, 124-117,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 28, 1982.

³ Game 1: Lineup analysis, and much of the rest of this section is drawn from watching Game 1 on the DVD collection *NBA Dynasty Series: Los Angeles Lakers, The Complete History*.

⁴ Bob Ryan, “Sixers Rebound, Flatten LA,” *Boston Globe*, May 31, 1982.

⁵ Bob Ryan, “Lakers’ Dream Swept By Boards; 76ers Do Homework, Then Tie Series,” *Boston Globe*, June 1, 1982. For more on this game, see: George Shirk, “76ers Put Skids on L.A. Sweep,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 31, 1982.

⁶ George Shirk, “Safe At Home, Lakers Rip Sixers; Take Lead After Win, 129-108,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 2, 1982. Other sources for this game: Bob Ryan, “Lakers Slam 76ers, 129-108,” *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1982.

⁷ George Shirk, “Safe At Home, Lakers Rip Sixers; Take Lead After Win, 129-108.”

⁸ Bob Ryan, “Lakers One From Title; 76ers Fall, 111-101,” *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1982.

⁹ George Shirk, “Lakers Put 76ers Near The Edge; L.A. Takes 3-1 Lead, 111-101,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 4, 1982.

¹⁰ First time in 420 games: The last time Abdul-Jabbar failed to score 10 points in a game was the 1977-78 season opener when he was ejected for fighting with Kent Benson.

¹¹ Bob Ryan, “Not So Fast, LA: Sixers Still Alive,” *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1982.

¹² Bill Livingston, “Abdul-Jabbar At Ebb As Sixers Go With Flow,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 7, 1982.

¹³ Bob Ryan, “Lakers Figure They’re Right On Schedule,” *Boston Globe*, June 8, 1982.

¹⁴ Bill Livingston, “When It’s Winning Time, Magic Is a True Champion,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 9, 1982.

¹⁵ The sequence where the Lakers controlled three offensive rebounds on a single possession is an example of why the 76ers would acquire center Moses Malone in the summer of 1982.

¹⁶ George Shirk, “Lakers Are Kings of The NBA; 76ers Fall, 114-104, In Game 6,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 9, 1982. Other sources for this game: Bob Ryan, “Lakers Crown 76ers For Title,” *Boston Globe*, June 9, 1982.