



Associated Press Laser Photo
Magic Johnson, the all-purpose performer for the LA Lakers, receives this season's NBA MVP Award from league commissioner David Stern.

Lakers playing at a high level, but take things one at a time

By JOHN NADEL
 Associated Press Sports Writer

PHOENIX --The Los Angeles Lakers say they play one game at a time.

Four more times the way they've been going in the playoffs and they'll be NBA champions for the third straight year.

"It's not really a big concern of mine," Magic Johnson said of the winning streak. "It doesn't matter to me. We really don't even talk about it."

"We just did what we had to do, and we'll go out and do it again Sunday. We'll keep taking it one game at a time and keep working for our goal."

The Lakers will enter the NBA finals against either Detroit or Chicago. Even if the Lakers had lost to the Suns, it would only have delayed the inevitable. No NBA team has never come back to win a best-of-7 series after being down 0-3.

"We could be the first," said Suns rookie Dan Majerle, who missed a pair of 3-point shots in the final seconds and had another shot blocked by Mychal Thompson which would have given his team the lead with a half-minute to play had it been successful. "Nobody quits on this team. If anybody can do it, it's us. We're not giving up. I know that."

Johnson had a simple explanation for the Lakers' success in the late going.

"We always keep our poise," he said. "We always feel if it's a close game, we're going to win it."

The Lakers, who last June became the first NBA team to win consecutive titles in 19 years, have now won 15 straight games, counting the regular season, and 12 consecutive

Fans feel Rose should be suspended if found guilty of wrongdoing

CINCINNATI (AP) -- The fans who have cheered Pete Rose's greatest moments as a player think he should be suspended if there's evidence he bet on baseball games.

Although fans of the Cincinnati Reds manager say there's still hope he could be cleared of gambling allegations, they're in strong agreement that his status as baseball record-maker shouldn't earn him special consideration if he is guilty.

An informal survey of two dozen fans at Reds' game last week found near-unanimous agreement on two things: baseball's investigation of Rose has gone on too long, and any proof of betting on Reds' games should bring a harsh punishment.

playoff games, dating back to last year.

"The Lakers know how to win," said the Suns' Eddie Johnson. "They've been there a lot of times. They've taught us a valuable lesson." We've had opportunities to win every game. That's what's most disappointing."

The Suns certainly had a chance to win Friday night. They trailed 93-83 with 7:14 remaining in the game after James Worthy scored eight of his 29 points in a span of 2:18, but surged back and held a 105-102 lead when Armon Gilliam put in a missed shot with 1:27 left.

Worthy made a pair of free throws with 1:04 to go and Thompson, a 68 percent foul shooter, made two with 33 seconds left to put the Lakers ahead for good.

Thompson then blocked the shot by Majerle, was fouled by Majerle and made another pair of free throws with 22 seconds left. Majerle missed two 3-point shots before Michael Cooper made two more free throws with eight seconds remaining to make it 110-105.

Kevin Johnson's dunk with four seconds to go completed the scoring.

"I knew I was going to make them," Thompson said of his foul shots. "My teammates were pumping me up when I was on the line. I just relaxed and told myself, 'Make these 11 years in the league pay off.'"

Although just a rookie, Majerle didn't second-guess himself for putting up the three big misses in the late going.

"The first one I thought was going in," he said of his 3-point attempt with 18 seconds left and the Suns trailing by three. "I was surprised it didn't go. The second one (with 10

seconds left and the Suns still trailing by three) was right on line. It was just short.

"You've got to have confidence you can make those shots or you shouldn't be on the floor."

Worthy scored 14 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter and also had 12 rebounds and three assists. Magic Johnson had 20 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds, and Michael Cooper came off the bench to add 16 points for the Lakers, including four 3-pointers.

"This is a special group of guys. It's simply a great team," said Lakers coach Pat Riley as his club tries for its sixth NBA title this decade. "They're addicted to winning. They know if we can get one more Sunday, we can move on."

Tom Chambers led the Suns with 26 points and eight rebounds. Kevin Johnson had 22 points and 13 assists, and Jeff Hornacek had 21 points and 11 rebounds for Phoenix.

"We don't want to go down in four. We're coming back strong Sunday," said Phoenix coach Cotton Fitzsimmons. "But you got to give the Lakers credit. They've won three games and they've done what they needed to do to win."

The Lakers led 25-19 after one quarter of play, but the Suns outscored them 35-25 in the second period to go ahead 54-50 at halftime. Los Angeles then outscored Phoenix 32-21 in the third quarter to take an 82-75 lead entering the final 12 minutes.

"We just kept our poise, continued to play tough," Worthy said. "I just think we executed properly down the stretch."

And, in all likelihood, executed the Phoenix Suns.

"If the rule says so, I think he should get it," said Alan Baumgartner, a salesman from Geneva, Ind. "You and I have to live by that. I think he should, too. If he's guilty, he's guilty."

Rose, 48, is being investigated by Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti for gambling. If Rose is found to have bet on baseball games, baseball rules stipulate that he will be suspended for a year. Betting on Reds' games would bring a lifetime ban.

Rose still enjoys strong support in his hometown, where the street that borders Riverfront Stadium is named "Pete Rose Way." The stadium has been the site of some of Rose's most publicized moments: his World Series heroics in 1975-76, his 44-game hitting streak in 1978, his return as player-manager in 1984, and his record-setting base hit No. 4,192 in 1985.



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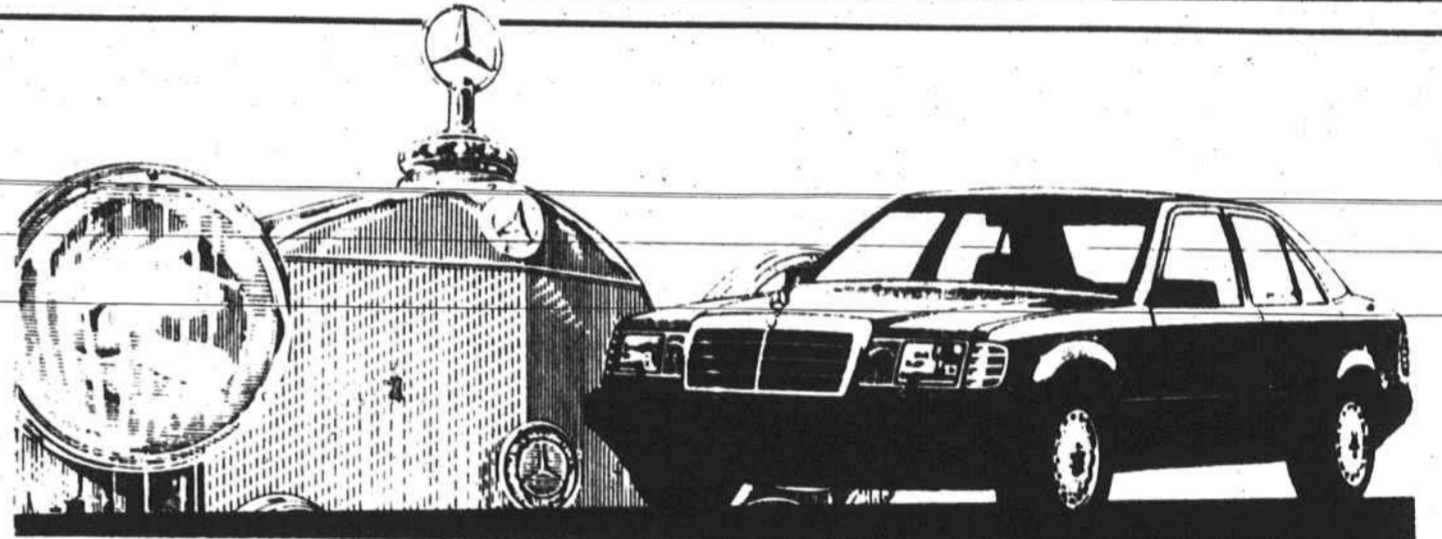
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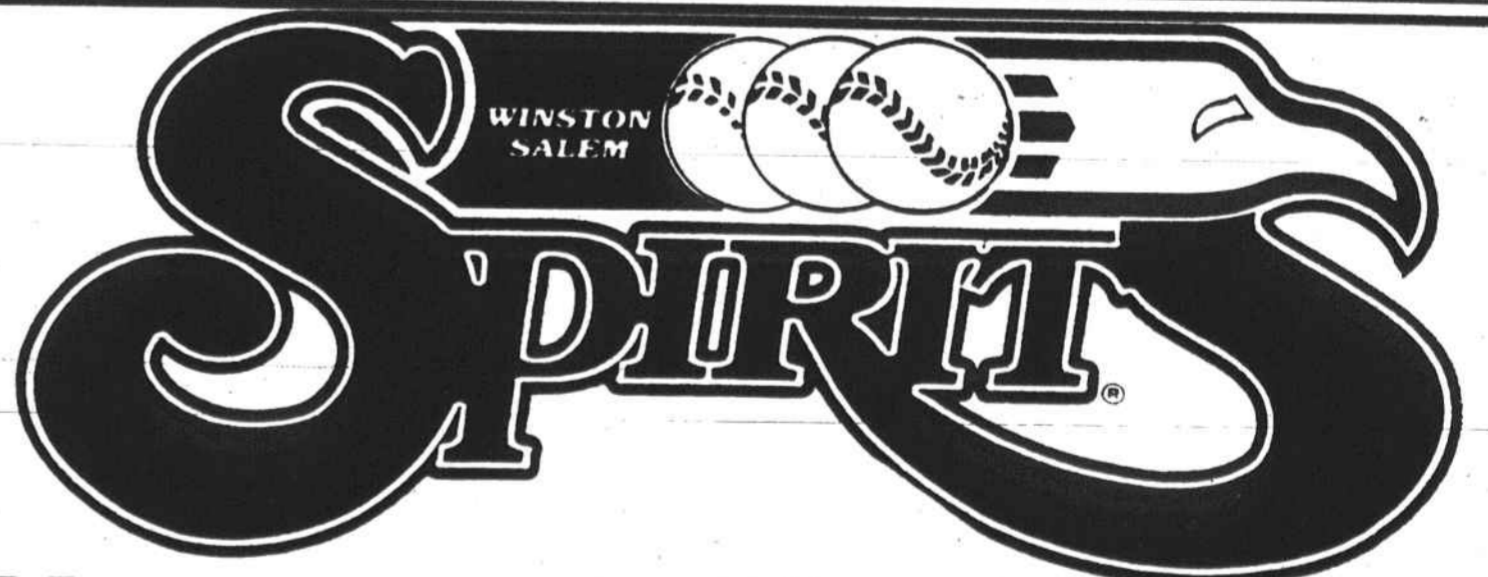
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