

Milliard impressive in AAA

Continued From 8B

hitting .290 through the first four weeks. One of his best games, two weeks ago in a 3-1 victory over Columbus, saw him go 3-for-3, including a game-winning two-run homer.

"I guess it was one of those games," Milliard said. "I just went out and relaxed and I just try to get the job done and I did it tonight and I'm happy about it."

The native of Willemstad, Curacao, made the jump to AAA after just one season with the AA Eastern League regular season champion Portland.

But what a year it was. Milliard hit .267 and scored 104 runs, leading all of AA. His quick success with the Knights has left Milliard pleased but cautious.

"We knew he could play great defense but I think the offense, has been a little bit of a surprise."

Knights manager Sal Rende on Milliard

"Sometimes I get it done and sometimes I don't but I'm not going to let it get me down, because I try to have a positive attitude. I'm just trying to hang in there."

He's done more than just hang in there. Milliard isn't

expected to score 104 runs again this year, but he's brought a special spark to the Knights with his defense and timely hitting. The Knights' major league affiliate, the Florida Marlins, are excited.

"We knew he could play great defense but I think the offense, has been a little bit of a surprise," Rende

said. "He started out slowly, then got real hot for five or six days, then struggled again a little bit."

He seems to be really streaky so far. When he's hot, he seems to hit the ball very well every time up and hopefully he can

continue to do that."

When Milliard's hitting, he's on base and scoring runs, something he takes pride in.

"You got to try and get on base at least twice a game," he said. "Sometimes it isn't going to happen and sometimes you get on base four times. I try to do my best just to score runs. I know if you score runs, you're going to win the game. Defense and score runs, you're going to win games."

Milliard would like to play in the majors someday and if it's with the Marlins, he'll have to unseat promising speedster Quilvio Vera at second base. It's not something Milliard spends a lot of time worrying about. He's happy in Charlotte and his work here comes first.

"I really don't pay attention to what other teams, or other players are doing," he said. "I just make sure that I get my job done and I think if you try to get your job done, good things will happen."

"Charlotte is nice, nice and quiet, not a whole lot of places to go and that keeps you home."

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Playoffs fit Seattle SuperSonics

Continued from 8B

"It's been a hell of a run, all the good things that come with being champion," Rockets coach Rudy Tomjanovich said. "We've been on a treadmill for two years."

The treadmill ground to a halt Sunday when the Sonics won 114-107 in overtime.

"It's disappointing but you also have to look at reality," Tomjanovich said. "I thought we played worse in some games last year and won. We just ran into a great team that did some phenomenal things. Three of those games went right down to the end."

The Rockets amazed their opponents to the very finish.

"I was wondering, 'Why don't you guys just die?'" Sonics guard Gary Payton said. "They really had me going. I couldn't believe it. They were like a vampire. You stab them 18 times and they won't die."

Seattle had to endure failure in order to be successful, according to Sam Perkins.

"All the adversity we went through, it made Shawn grow," Perkins said. "It made Gary grow. It made us all grow."

Gary Payton and Shawn

Kemp, the Sonics' two All-Stars, matured because of back-to-back first-round playoff losses the past two seasons. The embarrassing defeats made Payton and Kemp better.

"You can't win it alone," Perkins said. "The superstars on this team need support from their teammates."

Now, the Sonics, fresh from a 4-0 series victory over Houston, are waiting to play the winner of the Utah-San Antonio series for the right to advance to the NBA Finals.

Payton, Kemp and their teammates felt they had the weapons to beat Houston, the league's two-time defending champion. But who would have imagined a sweep?

"They have a championship team and they can play at every level," the Rockets' Hakeem Olajuwon said after the Sonics won 114-107 in overtime Sunday in Houston.

Going into the playoffs, critics questioned the Sonics' defense. They said it was too gimmicky, that an opposing team could figure it out in a seven-game playoff series.

Well, Seattle's trapping, double-teaming defense stymied

the magnificent Olajuwon. The Rockets never quite figured out how to solve coach George Karl's swarming double teams that Kenny Smith complained were nothing more than a zone in disguise.

So how far can they go now? The Sonics may feel confident, but they're not making any boasts.

"From losing in the first round, we have kept our mouths shut," Karl said.

The Sonics had a well-deserved day off Monday. They planned to begin practicing today for either the Utah Jazz or the San Antonio Spurs. The Jazz lead the series 3-2.

Seattle took three out of four from Utah during the regular season, winning the final meeting in Salt Lake City 100-91 on April 2. Because the Sonics won a franchise-best 64 games this season and Utah was 55-27, Seattle would have a homecourt advantage in a playoff series against the Jazz, a team the Sonics beat 3-2 three years ago, the last time they met in the playoffs.

Utah's Karl Malone and John Stockton present huge obstacles, the Sonics said.

All-Star game showcases talent

Continued From 8B

"I showed up thinking this was going to be an ordinary all star game with a lot of running and dunking," referee Bruce Bell said. "But after the very first drive down the lane, you could tell the North came to play defense. They contested every shot."

The game was witnessed by 1,500 fans, 14 NBA scouts and a TV audience of 40 million who watched the South grab

their only lead of 2-0 on a Malone jumper. Johnson C. Smith guard Melvin Abrams and Hampton's JaFonde Williams blitzed the South for 28 and 24 points respectively. Williams snared nine rebounds and handed out five assists to garner the North's MVP honors.

N.C. Central's Levelle Moton, who scored five points, was pleased with his effort.

"I was sick of listening to Malone and his little sidekick guard and teammate Deartrus

Goodman," Moton said. "I played in the CIAA and scored a lot of points, so I wanted to show the scouts I could play defense. In the Double A, you've got to strap on a chinstrap and get down and dirty and the South wasn't ready for that kind of game."



Abrams

Belle tolls for California pitching

Continued From 8B

tremendous strength."

Percival (0-1), whose perfect record of 11 saves in 11 opportunities wasn't damaged, hadn't allowed a run in 20 1-3 innings dating back to Sept. 19.

He had shaved his head in spring training, but vowed not to get his hair cut while his ERA remained 0.00.

"If you're going to give up runs, they might as well all come in one game," he said. "I guarantee it'll be a different story next time."

Percival had not allowed a hit since a single by Melvin Nieves of Detroit on April 20.

He ran his streak of consecutive batters retired to 24 on Saturday with a perfect ninth inning against the Indians that included striking out Thome.

While the Indians ended the road trip with a 6-4 mark, the loss was the Angels' sixth in seven games. They had won six in a row, and 10 consecutive at home, before being sent reeling by Kansas City and Cleveland.

California starter Jim Abbott equaled his career high with six walks in 5 2-3 innings, but was bailed out by three of the Angels' four double plays.

Only Belle's run-scoring single in the fourth, which

extended his hitting streak to 14 games, hurt Abbott.

Still, the left-hander remained winless in 10 starts at Anaheim Stadium since rejoining the Angels in July in a deal with the Chicago White Sox.

Cleveland's Orel Hershiser went seven innings and allowed five hits, including a homer to Jim Edmonds in the fourth.

Jim Poole (2-0) struck out the side in the eighth and Jose Mesa worked the ninth to pick up his league-leading 14th save. He has converted 22 straight save opportunities since blowing one to the Detroit Tigers last Sept. 3.

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