

Sonics surprise in S-O-M

Seattle upsets Lakers, 76ers en route to tournament triumph

Defense, rebounding...and the luck of the draw, especially in the final minutes - they're all reasons why the lightly regarded Seattle SuperSonics won a 23-team NBA basketball tournament conducted by Rick Guzman, Phoenix, AZ.

Seattle, in fact, was figured to be eliminated early, such as in the first round when it met the highly regarded Los Angeles Lakers. Instead the Sonics stunned the Lakers, winning a best two-of-three series, 2-1. From there, the Sonics took off and eventually finished with a 15-3 tournament record, capped by destroying the real-life champion Philadelphia 76ers, 4-1.

Ability to win the close games, concedes Guzman, was another key reason Seattle won it all. The last couple of minutes of any game, as any NBA fan is well aware, are all-important as to deciding the outcome.

How did the Sonics do it? "They shot .502 from the field (ranking second among the eight teams that played more than one opponent) and .771 (ranking third) from the line," explains Guzman.

"They ranked No. 1 in rebounding, taking .531 of all rebounds in their games (1003-887). They scored 109.8 points (third) and allowed only 98.5 (first) - a whopping 11.3 differential - and their 28.2 assists per game was first."

Holding opponents to .431 field goal percentage accuracy didn't hurt the cause, either.

LAKERS FIRST TO FALL

The tournament consisted of five rounds with series matchups of three, five or seven games, depending what stage the tourney was in.

Seattle served notice that it was going to be a contender for honors by shocking L.A. in the first round. Seattle won game one, 115-112, lost the second, and then broke a 109 tie with a minute to go by scoring the last six points in game three.

David Thompson pumped in 24.3 points per game - in only 28 minutes per game - to lead Seattle, which also got 20.7 and 14.3 points from Gus Williams and Greg Kelser, respectively. Jack Sikma, although held to only 10 points a game, had a team-high 12.3 rebounds. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar averaged 23.3 points and 8.7 rebounds and Magic Johnson had 22.3 points and 11.3 assists per contest for the Lakers.

Seattle next disposed of Portland, 2-0, in the second round, took out Golden State in round three, 3-0, and then ousted Kansas City in round four, 4-1, setting up a collision with Philadelphia.

The 76ers won the opener 113-110 after leading most of the way. But game two was to be typical of the remainder of the series as the Sonics broke up a close game late and claimed a 103-98 victory.

Game three belonged to Seattle, 103-100, and No. 4 also, 120-95, as the Sonics shot out to a 71-46 halftime advantage.

Ahead 3-1 in games, Seattle wrapped it up when Kelser, inserted in the starting lineup by Guzman to give the team more rebounding punch, grabbed a rebound of a missed shot by Julius Erving, passed to Williams who then returned the favor, with Kelser scoring on the last play of the game.

Seattle 105, Philadelphia 103 - it was all over!

Again, Seattle won the close games, while the defense made it possible by holding the 76ers to .410 floor shooting (Moses Malone was only .378). Thompson averaged over 21 points in the five-game series and Williams averaged 18 and Sikma led all rebounders with 4.

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Dr. J. averaged 24 points and Malone over 22 for Philly, with Malone also pulling down 13 rebounds a game.

'DOWNTOWN BROWN' HELPS TOO

Fred Brown was Seattle's "secret weapon" as he came off the bench to average 12.2 points and 3.7 assists. Brown, of "Downtown" fame, also put up 37 3-point field goal attempts, and clicked on 16 for 43.2 percent accuracy. Brown gave the Sonics an invaluable boost off the bench.

Thompson was the leading scorer for the 18 games, averaging 19.2 points for 28 minutes per game. Sikma finished with 17.2 points and 11.4 rebounds, while Gus Williams had 15.6-point and 9.2-assist averages.

BOSTON GOES BYE-BYE EARLY

Boston went the way of the Lakers as it also was ousted in the first round. The New York Knicks knocked off the Celtics, winning the first game, 107-88, despite taking only 68 shots from the field, losing the second, 103-99, and then capturing game three, 111-108.

The Knicks took a torrid 54.4 percent in the first game but, more importantly, took 48 free throws to Boston's 18. Bernard King had 25 for the winners, while Larry Bird was held to 16. Boston won game two as Bird poured in 33, a total matched by Sly Williams of the Knicks. An 18-0 New York spurt at the start of the second half didn't rattle the Celtics.

In game three, New York connected on 18 of its first 22 field goal attempts to open the game. But Boston never let the Knicks get out of sight and lost by only three points. Williams had 22 points and six steals for the winners, King 20 points and Bird led Boston with 28, nine rebounds and eight assists.

Tournament results:

Round 1 - Golden State d. San Diego, 2-1; Seattle d. Los Angeles, 2-1; San Antonio d. Dallas, 2-1; Kansas City d. Utah, 2-0; Chicago d. Indiana, 2-0; Milwaukee d. Detroit, 2-1; Philadelphia d. New Jersey, 2-0.

Round 2 - Golden State d. Phoenix, 2-0; Seattle d. Portland, 2-0; San Antonio d. Denver, 2-0; Kansas City d. Houston, 2-1; Chicago d. Atlanta, 2-1; Milwaukee d. Cleveland, 2-0; New York d. Boston, 2-1; Philadelphia d. Washington, 2-0.

Round 3 - Seattle d. Golden State, 3-0; Kansas City d. San Antonio 3-2; Milwaukee d. Chicago, 3-0 Philadelphia d. New York, 3-1.

Round 4 - Seattle d. Kansas City, 4-1; Philadelphia d. Milwaukee, 4-2.

Round 5 - Seattle d. Philadelphia, 4-1.

No home court advantage in NERF