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## Magic in the NBA Finals Disappoint

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For an NBA expansion team to go to the NBA finals in its sixth season is a remarkable feat. For that team to be swept in the finals by a clearly superior team is not surprising. The Magic were outmanned, outgunned, outhustled, outcoached and outclassed by one of the great NBA teams of the last several decades. Clearly Hakeem Olajuwon is one of the best centers in the history of the game, and his supporting cast was nearly flawless.

In Game One the Magic came out smoking going in deep to Shaq and posting up Penny against the smaller guards on the inside exploiting Houston's alleged weaknesses. This allowed the Magic to build a twenty point lead, but they were losing it before the half. With about four minutes left Hakeem got into foul trouble and was removed. This seemed to lead to the Magic relaxing a bit, and Houston sucking it up a bit. Little did we know that the Magic would not have another 20 minutes like this again in the series.

In the third quarter the Magic stopped doing what had worked in the first half, started taking too many threes and poor jump shots. Houston went on a run, they pulled even, and then ahead. Through the fourth quarter the Magic stabilized the situation and seemed to have control of the game. This despite some torrid three point shooting by Smith, Horry and Elie. Drexler also became a factor. But in the end the Magic were in control down the stretch. With about three minutes left I noticed that Nick Anderson was on the bench, and wondered what a clutch player like him was doing there. A few seconds later Brian Hill put Nick back on the floor.

With a three point lead and five seconds remaining Nick Anderson was fouled. A 70% free throw shooter goes to the line. The game is over, the Magic have bagged game one at home. No problem, except he misses them both. But Nick gets his own rebound and is immediately fouled. Thank goodness. Nick will redeem himself. He does not and that is that. The bleeding never stopped.

No matter what happens from that point on you know that the Magic are destined to lose the game and the series. Smith hits a three. Overtime. Despite Dennis Scott's heroics the Magic lose at the buzzer on a tip-in by Hakeem off a drive to the basket by Drexler around, you guessed it, Nick Anderson.

Nick handled all of this with great class and poise, but Anderson and the Magic never recovered. There is such a thing as fate and Nick Anderson now knows what it is.

In Game Two it was clinic time from Hakeem and Clyde the Glide, Phi Slamma Jamma revisited, with a supporting appearance by Sam Cassell. The Magic were never in this one and it appeared the fallout from Game One was massive.

Game Three was back to Houston and again the Magic played well in the first period and into the second. This time they built a nine point lead which disappeared during the second period drought. The third period belonged to the Magic early and the Rockets late. In the end it was too much Clyde Drexler running the floor at will and blowing past the Magic, while Hakeem was simply Hakeem, and Horry inserted the deciding three pointer dagger near the end.

Before game four it was clear that the Magic were a beaten team. Although the interviews were full of talk of never giving up, the undertone was clear. They knew they were done, and were only waiting for the final act.

At the start it looked like Houston would run away and hide. They were blowing the Magic off the floor early, with Clyde the Glide and Hakeem leading the way. As they left the court when the timeout was called they were all smiles and looking like they knew it was already over. This is nearly always a mistake, and indeed the Magic made them pay. After the timeout the Rockets seemed to let up. They slowed down, were late defensively against the three-point shots, and the Magic hit a bunch of threes to pull slightly ahead at the half.

The third quarter was played at a torrid pace and ended with the Rockets up by two. Then came the deluge. The Rockets owned the fourth quarter and once again it was everybody contributing: Olajuwon, Drexler, Smith, Elie, Horry, and Cassell. It was another clinic and the Houston Rockets had repeated as NBA champions. They had defeated the four teams with the best records in the NBA, and did so without home court advantage. This was a great team, led by two great players, Olajuwon and Drexler. They were defending champions and remain so.

For the Magic it was a very good season. But in the end the weaknesses of this team were exposed in the finals. Not enough experience, not enough bench, not enough speed especially from the bench, and a major problem at the line. Clearly there is

still work to be done, but now the Magic have the experience.  
Next year will come soon enough.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you  
don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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