

Sunday, February 24, 2008

### Lakers win again; Bulls have the belt; West roundup

L.A. destroyed another team last night, beating the Clippers in a "road" game by 18. The theme of the AP story was that Kobe Bryant was just "one of the guys", and the box score backs it up: six different Lakers took either 11 or 12 shots (Kobe and Pau among them), and Luke Walton had nine. Nobody took more than 12 shots. The assist numbers also back up the general ball-sharing theme: 27 assists on 39 field goals.

Sasha Vujacic went nuts again, hitting 5 of 9 from three and 6 of 11 overall for 17 points.

Other Western powers in the last few nights have done this: Houston beat Miami by 12 on Thursday as Tracy McGrady and Rafer Alston each had points-assists double-doubles and Yao Ming shot 10/11. San Antonio edged Minnesota by one behind Manu Ginobili's 44 points on 7/9 three-point shooting. (But don't the Spurs have to beat teams like the Wolves by more than a single point?)

On Friday, Houston won again, clobbering New Orleans by twenty, as Yao Ming had 28 and 14, Tracy McGrady dropped 34, and the Hornets shot just 40%. Chicago beat Denver at Denver's own game, winning 135-121 despite J.R. Smith's 43 points in 33 minutes off the bench (8/14 from three); Ben Gordon had 37 points of his own off the bench and Jo Noah and Ty Thomas each had double-doubles, proving the Bulls probably won't miss Ben Wallace's sulking about not getting to wear a headband at all. Dallas beat Memphis by 15, which is what Dallas is supposed to do: Dirk had 27 points on just nine shots and Jason Kidd had 2 points and 15 assists. Golden State lost to Atlanta by seven, despite Baron Davis and Monta Ellis combining for 61 points. Utah lost to the Clippers by ten as the Jazz apparently lost the ability to guard small forwards: Al Thornton and Corey Maggette had 27 points apiece. Phoenix beat Boston in a Celtics-style game, 85-77. It was sloppy, with 44 turnovers combined, but the Suns won by dominating the glass, 50-32. Shaq had 14 of those rebounds despite getting just five shots (making one), proving that the new, improved, motivated Shaq has actually quit the "if the big dog don't get fed, maybe he won't guard the house" nonsense he was spouting a few years ago with the Lakers.

Finally, last night, Denver lost again, this time to Milwaukee, as Michael Redd went off for 42 points and Andrew Bogut grabbed 20 rebounds, including seven offensive. It's not every day a guy gets seven offensive boards against Marcus Camby. San Antonio sent New Orleans to another L behind Manu Ginobili's continued offensive dominance: 30 points and 12 assists. Tim Duncan showed again why he might be the best player of his generation: 25 points, 11 rebounds, six assists, four blocks, a steal, and just one turnover. Bonzi Wells shot 1-7 off the bench for his new team. Utah beat Atlanta as seven Jazz scored in double figures.

The result of all these wins and losses? The Lakers and Phoenix are now tied for first. New Orleans has dropped to fifth (albeit with a better record than the division-leading Jazz), in a tie for third with San Antonio, just a half game back of the leaders. Dallas, Houston, and Golden State round out the top eight, but the Warriors are tied for that last spot with Denver. The Lakers hold the tiebreaker against Phoenix, having beat them 3-1 in the season series. San Antonio currently holds the tiebreaker over New Orleans, leading them 2-1, but they have one game left in New Orleans. Denver and Golden State have split their first two games with each other, and each have a home game left in the series. Golden State's in-conference record is one game better than Denver's.

On the Heavyweight front, my guess about Denver soundly beating Chicago missed pretty badly, so the Bulls are the new Heavyweight champions. The Bulls defend their title tonight against the red-hot Houston Rockets in a nationally televised bout!

2007-08 Current beltholder: Chicago Bulls

2007-08 Title Bout Records:

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Cleveland52  
Milwaukee52  
San Antonio73

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Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Basketball, L.A. Lakers at 10:39