

Sunday, May 11, 2008

Refereeing and Game 4 of the Lakers-Jazz series

I am sick to goddamn death of the referees in the NBA. Yes, I'm emotional about the fact that the Lakers got robbed of this game, that they got called for six more fouls (20 more Utah free throws) despite playing their entire offensive game at the Utah rim. The referees didn't entirely lose the game for L.A. (eleven missed free throws, Kobe's back, and the disappearing Jordan Farmar did that), but they sure as hell helped. Let's review the bad calls on both sides this game.

DJ Mbenga's completely clean block in the third quarter that was called a foul. This one wasn't even close, there was no body contact, no arm contact, nothing. It was utterly inexplicable. The Kyle Korver phantom elbow on Sasha in overtime -- Sasha sold it, but there was zero contact on the play. The overtime play where Fisher put his shoulder sideways into Deron Williams's chest, and yet Williams got hit with a foul. (I'm more ok with that call as a "quit flopping" foul on Williams, because it wasn't an offensive foul -- but it should have just been a no-call.) The most egregious one of all, Ronny's "flagrant 2." What on earth did the refs see? There was body contact and a swipe across the arms. Ronny's a big guy, so Price took a hard fall to the floor that looked worse than it was because he bounced his head. There was no head contact by Ronny, he was going for the block so it wasn't unnecessary, and it certainly wasn't excessive. Where on earth do they get calling any flagrant, much less a flagrant 2? I demand an apology to Ronny, to the team, to Lakers fans, and to NBA fans everywhere for this atrocious call. The referees were intimidated by the Utah crowd and the Utah players, especially Matt Harpring, who swarmed them, demanding a call. Rule change request: that's a technical foul. Players don't get to ask for flagrants, and they certainly don't get to run up on the refs like that.

Oh, and how about Ronnie Price's "block" of Luke Walton's breakaway. He got the ball cleanly, in terms of not getting arm, but his body just flew right through Walton's. That's the definition of a foul. He knocked Walton to the floor by flying into him. How do you not call that? Oh, and the Kyle Korver travel in the fourth quarter when he switched his pivot foot out on the wing, Phil Jackson flew up off the bench (the play was right in front of him), but no call. Carlos Boozer's shove (not tiny push, not subtle; Carlos Boozer doesn't do subtle; he gets away with full-on pushes and shoves the entire game) on Derek Fisher on a screen late in the game.

This was just atrocious, and it's nothing new. Half the flagrants this postseason (and I've seen almost every playoff game so far) weren't flagrants in February. Double technicals are handed out like candy instead of the referees actually making an effort to determine if one player doesn't really deserve one. Blatant travels are missed (and not just the hop-step style, or the LeBron to the bucket style, but switched pivot feet). Offensive fouls abound when guys are running in under the driver after he's already started off the ground. And the clock! Forget about the atrocious rule that resulted in an unjustified three for the Pistons the other night. What about the numerous clock problems and technical malfunctions? We're in the 21st century! This stuff doesn't happen anymore!

One last word on the Jazz -- I said it after Friday's game, and I say it now. They hit their jumpers, they got the benefit of every doubt from the referees, they got L.A.'s backup center and hit man tossed, Kobe was visibly weakened (the Kirilenko block from behind in overtime doesn't happen if Kobe's 100% because he stuffs that ball instead of trying to lay it up), Fisher got hit with early fouls again ... and it still took overtime to win the game! It still took the Lakers forgetting team offense and going to a guy playing at 60% on every possession in overtime for the Jazz to pull it out!

A word on Pau: he does complain too much, but at this point, the refereeing on him is getting downright bizarre. He's a skilled post player who spends the entire game in the paint. He took sixteen shots and grabbed ten rebounds. And he only shot two foul shots! He shot zero on Friday! What is the deal? Okur, who spends the entire game 20 feet from the basket, shot six. Kirilenko shot nine. Kobe took 33 shots, with at least half of those coming in the lane, maybe more, and he shot only ten. How on earth does Andrei Kirilenko shoot as many free throws as Kobe, when Kirilenko is the one who plays on the team that fouls more than anyone in the league? How does this happen?

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in L.A. Lakers at 21:21