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'93-94 Knicks In Review, Pt. 2

Ex-players, coaches and others close to the '93-'94 Knicks remember the postseason journey.

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This is the second in a two-part series on the 1993-94 New York Knicks. [Part one](#) ran November 2.

by Kyle Stack / [@KyleStack](#)

The New York Knicks' 1993-94 regular season didn't lack intrigue, as [MSG Network](#) has shown in its 1994: *March To The Finals* series. The team entered the campaign with title-or-bust aspirations. Patrick Ewing became the franchise's all-time leading scorer. Doc Rivers went down with a knee injury and was eventually replaced by Derek Harper, acquired from the Dallas Mavericks. A losing streak in late February was remedied by an off-day trip to Reno, which prompted newfound team unity that sparked a 15-game winning streak. Whatever drama existed during the regular season would eventually pale in comparison to what happened to the Knicks in the playoffs.

First Round: New Jersey Nets

First up for the them in the '94 postseason was the New Jersey Nets, a 45-win team led by the dynamic, yet somewhat forgotten, duo of Derrick Coleman and Kenny Anderson. Ironically, the Nets were coached by Chuck Daly, the former coach of the late '80s/early '90s Bad Boy Pistons. It was the style with which those Pistons teams played that served as the inspiration for how Pat Riley shaped the '90s Knicks.

The Knicks easily took Game 1 at the Garden, 91-80, but ran into a hardship in Game 2. Ewing, who had been assigned a double technical foul with the Nets' Benoit Benjamin in the first quarter, was ejected with 5:21 left in the second quarter after getting into an altercation with Coleman. Ewing was gone and the Knicks were fighting

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to avoid a 1-1 series tie heading back to the Meadowlands. That's when Charles Oakley took over.

Oak scored 14 of his game-high 25 points in the last six minutes of the second quarter and grabbed 24 rebounds in the contest to help the Knicks win, 90-81. The Knicks fell 93-92 in Game 3 before finishing off the Nets, 102-92, in Game 4. Oakley's Game 2 performance was a turning point in the series, but he wouldn't acknowledge the significance of the performance when asked about it.

"I don't go by numbers because I'm not a numbers man," Oakley said. "I could have 8 points and 12 rebounds. I had games like that [25/24]. But people never looked at me as a scorer, so I didn't try to let numbers get into my head."

It had been Ewing who led the way in that Game 4, scoring 36 points and grabbing 14 rebounds, following up on his 27 and 14 from Game 3. For Ewing, advancing past the Nets was insignificant in relation to how his career was perceived.

He hadn't been the kind of winner in the NBA that he was in college, when he won a national title at Georgetown in 1984. He, as much as any Knick, had been tasked with the responsibility of finally pushing past the Bulls. For the fifth time in six seasons, the Knicks and Bulls would clash in the playoffs. Herb Williams, who served as Ewing's backup from '92-93 through '98-99 (he had a one-game stop with the Raptors in '95-96) admitted during a phone interview that Ewing's focus did sharpen when going against the Bulls.

"His mindset was always the same regardless of who we played," said Williams, now an assistant coach for the Knicks. "Whether we played in Cleveland, whether we played in Chicago. And I'm sure he was a little more intense when we played Chicago because Chicago was a much better team. But it was always a warriors' mentality. Go out, play as hard as you can and leave it out there on the court."

Eastern Conference Semifinals: Chicago Bulls

As in '93, the Knicks held home court advantage versus the Bulls. Of course, the '94 Bulls didn't have Michael Jordan. They were the three-time defending NBA champs, but they didn't have Alpha Dog of all Alpha Dogs who had pushed them to win those titles. However, you talk with folks from both sides of that Knicks-Bulls rivalry now, and they maintain it didn't matter to the Knicks that the Bulls were Jordan-less.

"I don't remember that team thinking in terms of the Bulls playing without Michael," said Dennis D'Agostino, the Knicks' team historian. "The Bulls were still a pretty darn good team without Michael. They were still a championship-caliber team without him."

Oakley backed up that statement by maintaining the Knicks had bigger goals than just beating the Bulls.

"We were on a mission. We played who they had on the court. We didn't think about who they didn't have," Oakley said. "It was simply to get a bear off our back to beat them. When you're playing basketball, you got to think about who you're playing on the court. A win's a win. Whether you win by one or 20, as long as you win."

Clarence Gaines, who served as a scout and assistant to the vice president of basketball operations for the Bulls at the time, remembered the Bulls' '93-94 season holding a sense of accomplishment. Their 55 regular season wins were just two fewer than the year before, when Jordan had still been leading the team.

"It validated the system," Gaines said, via phone, of that '93-94 campaign. "It validated the coaching staff that they were able to achieve that without Michael being around. And you also have to give credit to Michael's ghost - I'll just say it like that. Because Michael taught that team how to win, and he taught them how to compete."

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