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'93-94 New York Knicks In Review

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

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This is the first in a two-part series on the 1993-94 New York Knicks. Part two will run Friday, November 4.

by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

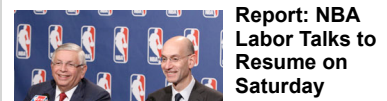
In a city full of championship memories, one sports team stands out as much for what they didn't accomplish as for what they achieved. The 1993-94 [New York Knicks](#), chock full of interesting personalities and a rough-and-tumble style of play, are undoubtedly one of the most revered teams in the city's sports history. Which is despite the fact they lost the NBA Finals that season to the [Houston Rockets](#)—the closest that any Knicks squads from that era came to hoisting the League's Larry O'Brien trophy.

[MSG Network](#) has taken note of the team's everlasting popularity in New York City by launching a 20-part series called *1994: March To The Finals*. Hosted by Spero Dedes, the Knicks' radio play-by-play announcer, and Clyde Frazier, the former Knicks Hall of Fame player and current MSG Network color commentator, the series debuted September 12 and runs through November 14. The 20 games chosen by the network from that '93-94 regular season and postseason illustrate the Knicks' journey. (Only two of the games are Knicks losses.)

SLAMonline spoke with several people connected to that team—players, team executives, a coach, a trainer, even a former Knicks beat writer—to gain insight of how impactful that '93-'94 season was for the franchise.

Setting up 1993-94

The campaign began with title expectations. It was Year Three of Pat Riley's four-year reign as head coach. A



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team that made four consecutive Playoff appearances from 1987-88 to 1990-91 under three head coaches (Rick Pitino, Stu Jackson, John MacLeod), the Knicks were coming off a 39-43 campaign when Riley took over in the Fall of '91.

With a core of Patrick Ewing, John Starks, Charles Oakley, Xavier McDaniel, Gerald Wilkins and Mark Jackson, the '91-92 Knicks churned out 51 wins and reached the Eastern Conference semifinals, the third time in four seasons they had been knocked out in that round. They had fallen victim to the mighty [Chicago Bulls](#), who the year before claimed their first NBA championship of the Michael Jordan Era.

Getting knocked out by the Bulls was nothing new for the Knicks. They were swept out of the first round by the Bulls in the '91 Playoffs. Two postseasons prior to that, in '89, Chicago defeated them 4-2 in the Eastern Semifinals. By the start of the '92-93 season, the Knicks had been eliminated from the Playoffs by the Bulls in three of the previous four years. That theme would continue.

The Knicks refashioned their roster during the '92 offseason, trading Mark Jackson to the [Los Angeles Clippers](#) in a three-team deal with the [Orlando Magic](#) that sent Doc Rivers and Charles Smith from L.A. to the Big Apple. McDaniel, a free agent, signed with the [Boston Celtics](#). Wilkins was released and signed with the [Cleveland Cavaliers](#). Anthony Mason and Greg Anthony would be assigned larger roles. A championship was in their sights.

That season, the Knicks won 60 regular season games, tied for the most in team history with the 1969-70 club, which, incidentally, won the franchise's first NBA title. A postseason showdown with the Bulls awaited them once again. Even though the stage was different, the Eastern Conference Finals, where the Knicks hadn't been since the '74 postseason when they fell to the John Havlicek-Dave Cowens-Jo Jo White Celtics, the result was the same.

The Bulls won the '93 East Finals, 4-2, the fourth time in five seasons they had eliminated the Knicks. Dennis D'Agostino, the Knicks' official team historian, who was Director of Publications and Information during the '93-'94 season, recounted that time.

"That was the one that really hurt, in '93," D'Agostino said by phone from his home in Los Angeles. "Even though [the Bulls] had Michael, we had the better record. We had the better record, we had home court and that's no small accomplishment, to have home court in the playoffs against a Michael Jordan Bulls team. We're up 2-0 [in the series], Starks has the dunk in Game 2 and then we lose four straight."

Indeed, the four consecutive losses, three of which came in Chicago, sting Knicks fans to this day. Perhaps their most enduring memory from that series, aside from Starks throwing it down over Horace Grant in Game 2, is Charles Smith's series of missed opportunities at the end of Game 5, the only one of those losses played at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Down 95-94 with 14 seconds left in the game, Smith received an off-balanced pass from Ewing in the paint, three feet from the basket. Turning around to face the hoop, Smith was met by Grant as he attempted a wild shot that missed the rim. Off his rebound, Smith was stripped by Jordan as he attempted a second shot. After recovering the ball, Smith was then blocked from behind twice by Scottie Pippen before the Bulls recouped possession and ran out the clock, finishing with a buzzer-beating layup by B.J. Armstrong.



The Bulls won Game 6, 96-88, and would go on to beat the [Phoenix Suns](#) in the Finals for their third straight NBA title. The Knicks were stuck with looking to '93-94 as the chance to get their rings.

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