

NBA: No Magic for Orlando

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Game 1.

Bryant, who added eight rebounds and eight assists, knows the Magic are still dangerous.

"This is a resilient team," he said. "They've been through a lot of adverse situations before. This is nothing new to them. We've got to forget about this and move on."

On the dry-erase board in Orlando's locker room, coach Stan Van Gundy, in handwriting as neat as a schoolteacher's, devoted two sections on how he wanted his team to defend Bryant.

Nothing worked.

The self-proclaimed "Black Mamba" slithered around Magic defenders with ease. Bryant scored an effortless 18 points in the first half and then took over in the third quarter, scoring 18 of L.A.'s 29 points with an assortment of jumpers, fadeaways and layups.

"He was great. He was tremendous," said Van Gundy, who felt his team did a poor job defending the Lakers' pick and roll. "We were giving him too much space on his pull-up jumpers and he did a good job of attacking us. I know this: We are a lot better than we showed."

With the 24-second shot clock running down on one possession, he froze Mickael Pietrus with a head fake and then sliced between Howard and Rashard Lewis, who looked as if they might applaud him, too. Moments later, Bryant whipped a pass to teammate Trevor Ariza, who buried a 3-pointer to make it 80-58.

Bryant pumped both fists and yelled toward Ariza. But this time, Bryant, who can be demanding of those around him, was offering support. Accused of being aloof and selfish, he has become a better teammate and a better leader.

On the eve of Game 1, Bryant said winning his first title since teammate Shaquille O'Neal was traded in 2004 was not that important to him. Bryant bristled at the notion that he wouldn't have any of his three titles — from 2000-02 — without Shaq as nonsense.

He says he wants No. 4 because it's the one in front of him.

And he's three wins from getting it.

"We've just got to keep our foot on the gas and keep our head down and just keep on working," Bryant said.

Nelson sat the first quarter as he has throughout the playoffs, but Van Gundy started him in the second quarter and the healed guard made an immediate impact.



Los Angeles Lakers guard Kobe Bryant (24) shoots over the defense of Orlando Magic guard J.J. Redick (7) during the second half of Game 1 of the NBA basketball finals Thursday, June 4, in Los Angeles.

AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill

Nervously chomping on his black mouthpiece and darting as always, he made a sweet bounce pass to Marcin Gortat for a dunk on Orlando's first possession in the period. Nelson then set up Lewis for a 3 before making his first basket in four months on a short baseline jumper.

Nelson was back and the Magic, who dethroned the champion Celtics and toppled King James, looked as if they'd give the Lakers a run.

Bryant, though, is running his own race.

Notes: Bryant's 40 were a career high in the finals, and it was the 10th time he has scored 40 or more in the playoffs. ... Van Gundy said the toughest part of his decision to play Nelson was telling guard Tyronn Lue he would be inactive. Bryant is ranked as the world's 10th biggest celebrity by Forbes. Bryant was the second highest ranked athlete, trailing only Tiger Woods, who was No. 5. According to the magazine, Bryant made \$45 million in salary and endorsements this year. ... With 206 playoff wins, Jackson trails only Hall of Fame hockey coach Scotty Bowman (223) for the most wins in postseason history.

Van Gundy drew a huge laugh before the game when he was asked if he was frightened by facing Jackson and his fingers full of nine NBA rings. "I guess if one of the NBA players threatened to kick my butt, I'd be intimidated," Van Gundy said. "Phil sitting down there on his chair doesn't intimidate me." (AP)

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