

NBA Finals main men: Rondo and Kobe

By MATT SUGAM

After renewing the rivalry two years ago following an over two-decade hiatus, a Celtics-Lakers finals is back. Both teams have something to prove and so does each team's top player.

Point guard Rajon Rondo wants to show that Boston no longer revolves around the Big Three. Shooting guard Kobe Bryant and Los Angeles are hungry for revenge.

The 24-year-old Rondo is trying to be known as the best point guard in the game today. The 32-year-old Bryant is wading through uncharted territory, embracing the challenge to go down as the greatest player of all time.

Rondo is a budding superstar going for his second title. Bryant is the aging Hall-of-Famer going for back-to-back titles and fifth overall.

RONDO

When Boston won the title in 2008, Rondo was known as the weak link. Two seasons later and Boston is Rondo's team.

The Big Three of Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, and Ray Allen are old. (Garnett and Allen are 34 while Pierce is 32.)

With the inability of the entire Big Three to bring it every night, it's Rondo's job to do so. Rondo's the coach on the floor as he calls most of the plays, something he didn't do in '08. He does an excellent job of distributing the ball to who's hot that night.

Rondo can also carry the load when needed. He's got three 20-plus point and 10-plus assist games in the playoffs. During the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Cleveland Cavaliers, Rondo had a career high 29 points and 18 rebounds along with 13 assists in Game 4.

In the past two years, Rondo has elevated his game to new heights. He can break down defenses by driving the lane and forcing them to collapse. Rondo has mastered the floater and if he could hit it over Dwight



IMMORTALITY BECKONS: Los Angeles Lakers shooting guard Kobe Bryant seeks to avenge his team's loss to Boston in 2008. CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Howard—the game's best shot-blocker—there's no reason he can't do the same against Pau Gasol, Andrew Bynum, and Lamar Odom.

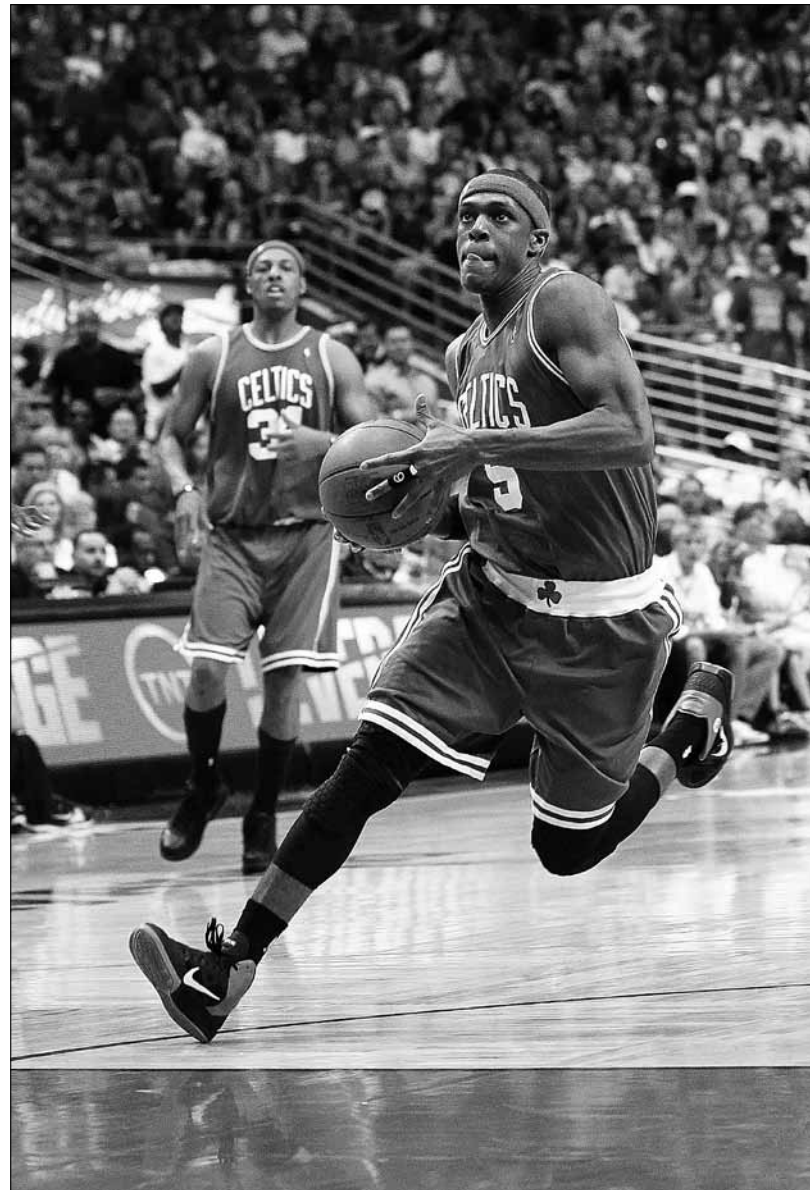
Then there's Rondo's defense. He's a great on and off the ball defender and led the league in steals averaging 2.33 a game.

If Rondo continues his high level

of play and leads the Celtics to another title, he'll enter next season as the game's top point guard.

KOBE

As much as there is in these finals for Rondo, there is even more for Bryant. Bryant is playing for basketball immortality.



YOUNG LEADER: Boston's Rajon Rondo has grown by leaps and bounds since his first finals appearance two years ago. KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

Since entering the league as a 17-year-old fresh out of high school Bryant has been compared to Michael Jordan. Kobe has been on a quest to top Jordan, and to do so, he'll need the titles to back it. With four rings Bryant can get ever so close with five, and would be on track to go for a second three-peat, just like Jordan.

In an era of sports where winning championships equates to greatness, Bryant needs another title. Jordan is regarded as the greatest player of all time, and for Bryant to even have a chance at taking that title from his Airness, he'll need at least six titles. (Although if championships measure greatness, you can't forget

Bill Russell's 11 titles with the Celtics—an untouchable feat.)

If the Lakers win the championship this season, Bryant will have five before the age of 32. Jordan won his sixth at 34.

What will drive Kobe in this series is the fact that he could have been going for his sixth title now—and second straight three-peat—if it weren't for the Celtics. Needless to say, Bryant wants revenge.

Having gone through the season beaten and battered (broken index finger on his shooting hand, bad knee, bum ankle, and lower back problems) Bryant has played through pain to get to this moment. Now it is his time to capitalize on the opportunity.

Even as he ages, Bryant's offensive repertoire is the best the game has to offer—and arguably better than Jordan's.

There's a reason for his 30-point performances in 10 of his last 11 playoff games. His range is where he parks his car at the Staples Center. He'll catch and shoot or take you off the dribble. He can take it to the bucket and he can post you up, all while getting his teammates involved.

Then add the fact that he's the best closer in the game.

COMPELLING STORIES

They're two players at different junctures of their careers. One's sun is starting to set while the others sun is beginning to rise.

They're two players trying to prove different things. One pursuing all-time greatness while the other seeks to be the greatest at his position today.

As many contrasts as there are between them, there are two main components that tie them together—their importance to their respective teams and what winning another title could do for their legacies.

Matt Sugam also writes for The Daily Targum at Rutgers University.

Baseball makes for memorable Memorial Day weekend

By SUSAN SHAN

Epoch Times Staff

It has been a memorable Memorial Day weekend for America's pastime (understatement of the year). Roy Halladay's perfect game obviously grabbed the biggest headlines.

The Philadelphia Phillies ace pitched the 20th perfect game in MLB history. Combined with Dallas Braden's perfect game on May 9, the duo represent the first time since 1880 that two perfect games have been pitched in one season.

"It's never something that you think is possible," Halladay said in his postgame press conference.

Two perfect games in three weeks is absolutely unheard of.

BREAK A LEG

There was more excitement in the air after Kendry Morales's walk-off homer in the bottom of the 10th inning against the Seattle Mariners in a 5-1 Los Angeles Angels victory.

Except that as Morales was nearing home plate, he jumped up amid his jubilant teammates and landed

awkwardly, breaking his left leg. Can we say, "Oops?"

Disabled or not, Morales apparently set a precedent. The next day, the Angels overcame a 7-3 deficit to win 9-7 off Howie Kendrick's three-run walk-off homer in the bottom of the ninth inning, the first in his career.

The Angels had consecutive game-winning home runs for the first time since Aug. 29-30, 1986. "To have two walk offs two days in a row was phenomenal. I think that says a lot about our team and how we play the game," Kendrick said after the game.

As for the celebration at home plate? Kendrick managed to steer clear of danger by not jumping on the plate while his subdued teammates patted him on the back instead of mobbing him.

The New York Yankees were not so lucky. In fact, they held a six-run lead over the Cleveland Indians and somehow managed to cough it up, the third time in the last two weeks that they have lost leads of five or more runs.



BE CAREFUL: Kendry Morales (right) landed awkwardly in his game-winning home run celebration, breaking his leg. HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

Joba Chamberlain only pitched one-third of an inning but allowed four runs and four hits in that span. The Indians ended up scoring seven runs in the seventh inning by way of

four Yankees pitchers en route to a 13-11 victory.

Last Saturday's win marked the first time the Indians have scored in double figures this season.

However, like Morales and the Angels, the Indians suffered their own injury. Pitcher David Huff got hit in the head right above the left ear by Alex Rodriguez's line drive. Huff was carted off the field but the CT scan was negative.

Last Sunday, he showed no signs of a concussion. "I feel good," Huff said to the New York Daily News. "Scary experience. It's one of those things, it could have been an inch this way and I wouldn't be here talking to you."

TOUGH TIMES

Remember Zack Greinke, last year's AL Cy Young Award winner? He's 1-6 after a 1-0 loss to the Boston Red Sox last Saturday.

Although the Kansas City Royals rank second in batting average, they only bat well when a starter not named Greinke is pitching. In six of Greinke's 11 starts, the Royals have scored two runs or less.

With a 3.39 ERA and 1.17 WHIP, Greinke clearly ought to have more than one win under his belt. Can I once again reiterate how useless win-loss records are for pitchers?

Things are not all bleak though. St. Louis Cardinals slugger Albert Pujols had three home runs against the Chicago Cubs last Sunday afternoon. The last time that happened was in September 2006 against the Pittsburgh Pirates.

In addition, a Midwest pitcher put himself on the radar with 14 strikeouts and 0 earned runs in 5.2 innings against the Oakland Athletics.

Detroit Tigers pitcher Max Scherzer certainly lowered his 7.29 ERA to 6.42 with his great outing. I've never seen Scherzer play but I'm told by people who watch him on a daily basis that he has different colored eyes and "filthy stuff."

So much has happened this past weekend that the only thing missing is the debut of Stephen Strasburg. But alas, we will have to wait until next week for a peek at the most anticipated pitcher in MLB since... ever?

And we still have five more months left of baseball.

Follow Susan on Twitter at www.twitter.com/susan_shan

Capello names England's World Cup squad

Arsenal's Theo Walcott left out

By JAMES POULTER

Epoch Times Staff

England manager Fabio Capello named on Tuesday his final 23-man World Cup squad for South Africa.

The shock omission from the squad was Arsenal winger Theo Walcott. A hat trick against Croatia in Zagreb during England's qualifying campaign was not enough to cement his position in the squad, after a season beset by injury, which saw his form dip.

Walcott was surprisingly named to England's squad for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, in which he didn't see a single minute of action.

Manchester City's Shaun Wright-Phillips gets the nod ahead of Walcott, with Tottenham's Aaron Lennon already established on the right wing.

Walcott's official statement reads:

"I am very disappointed not to be included in the squad going out to South Africa, but completely respect Mr. Capello's decision. I would like to wish the team the best of luck and hope they have a really successful tournament."

After lackluster displays against Mexico and Japan, England fans will be delighted to hear that defensive midfielder Gareth Barry has passed a last minute fitness test. Although the Manchester City player will be unavailable for England's opening game against the United States on June 12, he should be fit for the last two group matches. Operating as a holding player, Barry allows fellow midfielders Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard to play more attacking roles.

Perhaps the only other surprise was Stephen Warnock's inclusion at left back over Leighton Baines. It has been suggested that the Everton

player recently admitted to being prone to homesickness, not a good asset for what England hopes will be a lengthy campaign.

Other players left at home are: Tottenham's Michael Dawson and Tom Huddlestone, Sunderland's Darren Bent, Manchester City's Adam Johnson, and West Ham's Scott Parker.

On the whole, Capello has selected his tried and tested players. The complete squad traveling to South Africa is as follows:

Goalkeepers: Joe Hart, David James, Robert Green.

Defenders: Jamie Carragher, Ashley Cole, Rio Ferdinand, Glen Johnson, Ledley King, John Terry, Matthew Upson, Stephen Warnock.

Midfielders: Gareth Barry, Michael Carrick, Joe Cole, Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard, Aaron Lennon, James Milner, Shaun Wright-Phillips.

Forwards: Peter Crouch, Jermain Defoe, Emile Heskey, Wayne Rooney



CAPELLO CHOOSES: England's Italian manager Fabio Capello went for experience over speed by leaving out Theo Walcott. PAUL ELLIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Michael Bradley autographed soccer jersey raffle

Hey soccer fans, with the World Cup upon us, The Epoch Times wants to hear from you!

We want to know who you think is going to win the World Cup and who is going to win the golden boot as the tournament's top scorer.



final on July 11 has been set.

The random draw for the jersey will be on July 11 during the World Cup final. The result will be posted on the web at the conclusion of the game with the jersey to be mailed to the winner immediately thereafter.

Be sure to follow the World Cup along with us at The Epoch Times and RV_ETSports on Twitter.

Please e-mail us at response@epochtimes.com with the subject World Cup: your name, age, answers to both questions, and mailing address (U.S. & Canada only) so that if you are chosen, we can send you the autographed Borussia Mönchengladbach jersey of American midfielder Michael Bradley.

Deadline for your responses is July 7 when the matchup for the