



## The Jordan Rules

By Sam Smith

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### A SUPER TEAM...A SUPERSTAR...A SUPER EGO

The most gifted athlete ever to play the game, Michael Jordan rose to heights no basketball player had ever reached before. What drove Michael Jordan? The pursuit of team success...or of his own personal glory? The pursuit of excellence...or of his next multimillion-dollar endorsement? The flight of the man they call Air Jordan had been rocked by controversy. In *The Jordan Rules*, which chronicles the Chicago Bulls' first championship season, Sam Smith takes the #1 Bull by the horns to reveal the team behind the man...and the man behind the Madison Avenue smile. Here is the inside game, both on and off the court, including:

1. Jordan's power struggles with management, from verbal attacks on the general manager to tantrums against his coach
2. Behind-the-scenes feuds, as Jordan punches a teammate in practice and refuses to pass the ball in the crucial minutes of big games
3. The players who competed with His Airness for Air Time -- Scottie Pippen, Horace Grant, Bill Cartwright -- telling their sides of the story
4. A penetrating look at coach Phil Jackson, the former flower child who blossomed into one of the NBA's top motivators and who finally found a way to coax "Michael and the Jordanaires" to the their first title

A provocative eyewitness account, *The Jordan Rules* delivers all the nonstop excitement, tension, and thrills of a championship season -- and an intense, fascinating portrait of the incomparable Michael Jordan.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

*New York Newsday* An engaging, sometimes cruelly funny behind-the-scenes look at the Bulls' tantrum-and-doubt-filled but finally triumphant journey to the NBA title.

*Chicago Sun-Times* *The Jordan Rules*...might be the best sports book since *Season on the Brink* about Bob Knight.

*Newsweek* Jordan boasts a wicked tongue, and not just when it's hanging out as he dunks....[He] manages to blurt out enough in Smith's book to reveal his own narcissistic, trash-talking, obsessively competitive side.

*Associated Press* *The Jordan Rules* entertains throughout, but the most fun comes from just hanging out with the players. Smith takes us into the locker room, aboard the team plane and team bus, and seats us on the bench during games. Sometimes, books reflecting on a team's success don't reach the personal level with the people who made it happen: *The Jordan Rules* does.

Fred Barnes (The McLaughlin Group) *The American Spectator* A riveting account...what you want in a sports book: the behind-the-scenes stuff, a peek at the private side of the players, their hobbies and politics and religion, the way they get along or don't...It's fair to compare *The Jordan Rules* with the campaign books that appear after every presidential race....The difference is not only that *The Jordan Rules* explains more persuasively than most of the campaign chronicles how the winner was decided -- it's that it does so more interestingly and with more understanding of the human heart.

#### About the Author

**Sam Smith** was a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* during the Chicago Bulls' 1991 championship season. He is a Brooklyn, New York, native with degrees in accounting from Pace University and in journalism from Ball State University. He has worked for Arthur Young and Co., the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*, and States News Service in Washington, D.C. This is his first book.

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#### Chapter One: Spring 1990

Michael Jordan surveyed his crew and got that sinking feeling.

It was just before 11:00 A.M. on May 24, 1990, two days after the Bulls had fallen behind the Detroit Pistons two games to none in the Eastern Conference finals. The city of was awash in spring -- all two hours of it, as the old-time residents like to say -- but Jordan wasn't feeling very sunny. He didn't even feel like playing golf, which friends would say meant he was near death.

The Bulls had gathered for practice at the Deerfield Multiplex, a tony health club about thirty-five miles north of Chicago, to try to get themselves back into the series. Jordan's back hurt, as did his hip, shoulder, wrist, and thigh, thanks to a two-on-one body slam in Game 1 courtesy of Dennis Rodman and John Salley. But his back didn't hurt nearly as much as his pride or his competitiveness, for the Bulls were being soundly whipped by the Pistons, and Jordan was growing desperately angry and frustrated.

"I looked over and saw Horace [Grant] and Scottie [Pippen] screwing around, joking and messing up," Jordan told an acquaintance later. "They've got the talent, but they don't take it seriously. And the rookies were together, as usual. They've got no idea what it's all about. The white guys [John Paxson and Ed Nealy], they work hard, but they don't have the talent. And the rest of them? Who knows what to expect? They're not good for much of anything."

It was a burden Michael Jordan felt he had to bear. The weight of the entire team was on his tired shoulders. The Pistons had taken the first two games by 86-77 and 102-93, and Detroit's defense had put the Bulls' fast break in neutral: The Bulls had failed to shoot better than 41 percent in either game. Jordan himself had averaged only 27 points, stubbornly going 17 for 43. No team defended Jordan better than the Pistons, yet he refused to admit that they gave him a hard time, so he played into their hands by attacking the basket right where their collapsing defensive schemes were expecting him. The coaches would look on in exasperation as Jordan drove toward the basket -- "the citadel," assistant coach John Bach liked to call it -- like a lone infantryman attacking a fortified bunker. Too often there was no escape.

Although Detroit's so-called Jordan rules of defense were effective, the Bulls coaches also believed the Pistons had succeeded in pulling a great psychological scam on the referees. It had been a two-part plan. The first step was a series of selectively edited tapes, sent to the league a few years earlier, which purported to show bad fouls being called on defenders despite little contact with Jordan. The Pistons said they weren't even being allowed to defend him. "Ever since then, the foul calls started decreasing," Jordan noted, "and not only those against Detroit."

Step two was the public campaign. The Pistons advertised their "Jordan rules" as some secret defense that only they could deploy to stop Jordan. These secrets were merely a series of funneling defenses that channeled Jordan toward the crowded middle, but Detroit players and coaches talked about them as if they had been devised by the Pentagon. "You hear about them often enough -- and the referees bear it, too -- and you start to think they have something different," said Bach. "It has an effect and suddenly people think they aren't fouling Michael even when they are."

It only added to Jordan's frustration with Detroit.

At halftime of Game 2, with the Bulls trailing 53-38, Jordan walked into the quiet locker room, kicked over a chair, and yelled, "We're playing like a bunch of pussies!" Afterward, he refused to speak to reporters, boarded the bus, and sat in stony silence all the way home. He continued his silence -- other than a few sharp postgame statements -- for the next week. He would not comment on his teammates. "I'll let them stand up and take responsibility for themselves," he told a friend.

Jordan had really believed that the Bulls could defeat Detroit this time. Of course, there was no evidence to suggest it could happen, since the Pistons had knocked the Bulls out of the playoffs the previous two seasons and had taken fourteen of the last seventeen regular-season games between them. But hadn't there been similar odds in 1989 when the Bulls had faced Cleveland in the playoffs? The Cavaliers had won fifty-seven games that season to the Bulls' forty-seven, and they were 6-0 against the Bulls, even winning the last game of the regular season despite resting their starters while the Bulls played theirs. The Bulls' chances were as bleak as Chicago in February.

Jordan promised that the Bulls would win the Cleveland series anyway.

Playing point guard, Jordan averaged 39.8 points, 8.2 assists, and 5.8 rebounds in the five games. And with time expiring in Game 5, he hit a hanging jumper to give the Bulls a 1-point victory. The moment became known in Chicago sports history as "the shot," ranking with Jordan's other "shot" in the 1982 NCAA tournament, a twenty-foot jumper that gave North Carolina a last-second victory over Georgetown. It also sent the Cavaliers plummeting; over the next two seasons, they would not defeat the Bulls once.

The playoffs had become Jordan's stage. He was Bob Hope and Michael Jackson, Mick Jagger and Frank Sinatra. His play transcended the game. It was a sweet melody received with a grand ovation. Others jumped as high and almost everyone slammed the ball, but Jordan did it with a style and a smile and a flash and a wink, and he did it best in the postseason.

"There's always been the feeling on this team," Bach had said after that Cavaliers series, "that if we got to the Finals, Michael would figure out some way to win it. He's the greatest competitor I've ever seen and then he goes to still another level in the big games."

It was true: Jordan's playoff performances had been Shakespearean sonnets, beautiful and timeless. And like Shakespeare, he was the best even though everyone said so. In just his second season in the league, after missing sixty-four games with a broken foot, Jordan demanded to return to the court despite warnings by

doctors that he might exacerbate the injury to his foot. The Bulls, and even Jordan's advisers, said he should sit out the rest of the season. Jordan angrily accused the team of not wanting to make the playoffs so it could get a better draft pick. He was reluctantly allowed to return with only fifteen games remaining in the regular schedule. The Bulls made the playoffs, and in Game 2 against the Boston Celtics (who would go on to win the NBA title) Jordan scored 63 points. Larry Bird put it this way: "It must be God disguised as Michael Jordan."

In the 1988 playoffs against the Cavaliers, Jordan opened the series with 50- and 55-point games, the first time anyone had ever scored back-to-back 50s in the playoffs, to lead the team to victory and establish an all-time five-game-playoff-series scoring record of 45.2 points per game. Jordan had become perhaps the greatest scorer in the game's history. He would never equal Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game or his hundred-plus 50-point games, but by the end of 1990-91 season, Jordan had become the all-time NBA scoring average leader in the regular season, the playoffs, and the All-Star game. And he'd won his fifth straight scoring title, putting him behind only Chamberlain's seven.

And now, facing the Pistons in 1990, he was coming off a series against the 76ers in the second round of the playoffs that was unbelievable even by his own amazing standards. The Bulls won in five games as Jordan averaged 43 points, 7.4 assists, and 6.6 rebounds. He shot nearly 55 percent in 42.5 minutes per game. He drove and he dunked. He posted up and buried jumpers. He blocked shots and defended everyone from Charles Barkley to Johnny Dawkins.

"I never played four consecutive games like I did against Philly," he said of the first four, in which he led the team in scoring in thirteen of sixteen quarters.

And then the Bulls, storming and snorting, headed for Detroit to take on the Pistons. The two teams hailed from hard-edged, blue-collar towns, Chicago with its broad shoulders and meat-packing history, Detroit with its recession-prone auto industry. For some reason, though, Detroit's sports teams seemed to have a perpetual edge over Chicago's. In 1984 the Cubs finally won a piece of a baseball tide, but it was the Detroit Tigers who won the World Series, just as they had in 1945, the year of the Cubs' last World Series appearance. Many times Gordie Howe's Detroit Red Wings had come into the Stadium and ruined the dreams of Bobby Hull's Black Hawks. And now there were the Pistons. Detroit had made a habit of beating Chicago. It was a habit Michael Jordan was determined to break.

But no matter how hard he tried against the Pistons, he couldn't beat these guys. In earlier seasons, Jordan had some of his biggest scoring games against the Pistons: a 61-point mosaic in an overtime win in March 1987, an Easter Sunday mural on national TV in 1988 in which he'd scored 59 points. And Jordan *was* an artist, the ninety-four-by-fifty-foot basketball court being the canvas for his originals, signed with a flashing smile, a hanging tongue, and a powerful, twisting slam. Pistons coach Chuck Daly, a man who appreciated the arts, was not particularly enamored of Jordan's work, and after the 1988 game the Pistons instituted "the Jordan rules" and the campaign to allow what the Bulls believed was legalized assault on Michael Jordan. The Pistons had two of the league's best man-to-man defenders, Joe Dumars and Dennis Rodman, to carry out those assignments. Jordan grudgingly respected Dumars, with whom he'd become somewhat friendly at the 1990 All-Star game; Dumars was quiet and resolute, a gentlemanly professional. But Jordan didn't care much for Rodman's play. "He's a flopper," Jordan would say disdainfully. "He just falls down and tries to get the calls. That's not good defense." Rodman once "flopped" so effectively back in the 1988-89 season that Jordan drew six fouls in the fourth quarter to foul out in the last minute of a close loss to the Pistons.

But Jordan's frustration against the Pistons was much larger than his dislike for Rodman, his team's lack of success against Detroit, or even his failure to score effectively since that Easter Sunday game. Detroit simply beat up Jordan, battering him through picks and screens whenever he tried to move. For Jordan, it was like trying to navigate a minefield of bullies. First he'd take a forearm shiver from Dumars when he tried to get past, then perhaps a bump from Bill Laimbeer and a bang from Rodman or Isiah Thomas. The Bulls were so concerned about some of these tactics a few years ago that they focused a camera on Laimbeer throughout the playoffs to see what he was doing and found that he was grabbing players at their pressure points to deaden their arms. They complained to the league but got no action. And while Thomas is not considered a

good defender because he doesn't like to play a helping game, whenever the Bulls play Detroit he is quick to double-team Jordan. He knows Jordan despises him and doesn't care much for Jordan being the hero in Chicago, Isiah's hometown.

Jordan's resentment toward the angelic-looking Thomas is deep. Much of it stems from an alleged freeze-out of Jordan in the 1985 All-Star game, when Thomas and other players apparently conspired to keep Jordan from getting the ball -- and their paths have continued to cross along with their swords. During the 1989-90 season, Johnson suggested a one-on-one match between himself Jordan. Jordan wasn't too interested, but Johnson was looking at a big pay-per-view payoff and had already worked out a deal with a cable TV company. When word surfaced though, the NBA voiced its disapproval, and Thomas, head of the Players' Association, said it was not in the best interests of the players to have such unsanctioned off-season games. Suddenly Jordan was very interested. He said he always thought the Players' Association "was supposed to be for the players." And anyway, Jordan said, Thomas was just jealous. "He wasn't asked," snarled Jordan. "And do you want to know why? It's because if he were in it no one would be interested enough to watch." But the Pistons get their shots back at Jordan. They love to taunt Jordan during games about his selfish play, his baldness (that's a specialty of John Salley), and how he enjoys being a loser. Salley, a bad stand-up comic who has earned a stage because he is seven feet tall and looks like Arsenio Hall, is a particularly bitter antagonist.

"There's not one guy who sets the tone on our team," Salley liked to tell reporters during the 1990 playoffs. "That's what makes us a team. If one guy did everything, we wouldn't be a team. We'd be the Chicago Bulls." And this, too, from Salley: "We don't care who scores the points as long as we win. It would be hard for Michael Jordan to play on this team because he's got to score all the points. I don't think he'd fit in here." Jordan burned over comments like that, but he seemed helpless to pay back the Pistons. Jordan was perhaps the league's best when angered, dunking over seven-footers after they'd blocked his shot, scoring wildly against boastful rookies, and surging to great heights when opponents scored on him regularly or tried to show him up. But Jordan couldn't make it happen against the Pistons, and his teammates were unable to ease the burden he felt.

In Game 1, John Paxson and Craig Hodges missed all 8 of their field-goal attempts and Scottie Pippen was thwarted by Rodman. "I seem to spend too much time worrying about how he's going to play me," Pippen would say later. Among Detroit starters, only Joe Dumars would score in double 27 points, but it would be enough.

In Game 2, Jordan limped on his injured hip and leg, and the Bulls fell. Pippen and Horace Grant scored 17 each, but it was hardly enough to make up for the ailing Jordan, who scored only 20. Dumars scored 31. And so Jordan left the game without speaking to anyone, leaving the media scrambling for reasons and teammates searching for answers. It was not a happy group that headed back to Chicago for Game 3. Jordan believed his team had let him down when he was hurt. The team believed he'd let them down by failing to face the media after such a critical loss. Sure, several noted, he was there long into the night after he scored 50 points, but where was he when he scored only 20? And his man, Dumars, burned him in two straight games, and had clearly been the difference in Detroit's taking a 2-0 lead. The players agreed: We hear it from him when we don't play well, but when *he* doesn't play well it's still our fault?

Center Dave Corzine, a former Bull, had once explained it well: "It's hard playing on a team with Michael because you're always the reason the team lost." It certainly couldn't be Jordan's fault, everyone usually agreed; he was the best, wasn't he? There was not much anyone on the team could say publicly.

But Jordan would be ready for Game 3 back in the Stadium. He was angry and chastened, a little contrite perhaps, but also demanding payment for assorted sins.

Phil Jackson did the talking for the next few days following Tuesday's Game 2. Jordan, usually playful during practice, wasn't saying much. After practice Wednesday, with the media waiting and watching, most of the players skipped out the back door directly to the parking lot, which is what they always did when they wanted to avoid the press. But after complaints from the media, Jackson told Jordan he would have to go out

the front door on Thursday -- to run the gauntlet, as the coaches liked to say, although the demands on Jordan from the local media (and the national media, too, for that matter) were never threatening. Jordan carefully cultivated his image, maintaining an air of affability while the media fed a Jordan-crazed public well-crafted clichés. It was a formula that played in Peoria, with sponsors like Wheaties, McDonald's, Chevrolet and Nike lining up to quadruple his \$3-million-a-year basketball salary in outside income. He was annually selected to the national basketball writers' all-interview team, and local TV reporters liked to put their arms around him during interviews. "But I don't have to talk to anybody?" Jordan said.

"No, you don't have to talk to anybody," Jackson agreed.

So following Thursday's practice Jordan did as he was told, exiting through the front door but ignoring the waiting media. Even his teammates wondered what was going on. "Did the General have anything to say?" Craig Hodges wondered when he came out afterward. Hodges liked to call Jordan "the General," explaining that Jordan gave the commands, ordering players around and out of his way, determining whether the play called by the coaches should be run, and jawing with officials. It was up to his teammates to carry his orders out, which they rarely seemed to do to his satisfaction these days.

"What'd he say?" asked John Paxson when he left the floor of the glass-enclosed Multiplex gym.

"Did he say anything to you guys?" a reporter asked.

"No," Paxson said. "He talked generally, like calling plays or positions, but he didn't say anything else."

"Did he say what was bothering him?" asked another reporter.

"No, he didn't say much of anything," Paxson repeated.

But Jackson had. He read Jordan's actions as a demand for his teammates to step up and be held accountable for their poor play. He agreed with the sentiment, but didn't want to see it in the papers. (Actually, Jackson rarely read the sports pages, but his family and his assistants had summarized the reports of Jordan's fit and the team's sense of betrayal.) He told the team that what happened in their locker room was their business and no one else's. He talked of character and "owning up," and said that if a little adversity could destroy the team, they weren't the team they believed themselves to be. It was a desperate time, Jackson said, a time to be angry and emotional. It was a time to be held accountable. It was up to them.

As for tactics, the team had to stop its headlong charge into Detroit's interior defense. The Pistons played a zone simple and effective, Jackson noted. And the Bulls had to get good shots and take them rather than crash in where they had no room to maneuver. They had to retreat better on defense, and they had to rebound.

In Game 3, they did. And it was a series again.

"Tonight," Jackson offered after the victory, "we showed that it wasn't the rules against Jordan, but that Jordan rules."

Jordan scored 16 points in the first half, but the Bulls trailed 51-43 after a typically withering Detroit second quarter in which the Bulls were outscored 32-19. Jordan fumed in the locker room and made a decision. "If we're going down," he thought to himself, "we're going down my way."

By the time the third quarter was over, a roaring cascade of cheers was tumbling down on the Bulls from the overcrowded Chicago Stadium. The result was no longer in doubt, as the third quarter turned into a Jordanfest. Jordan drove and tipped in his own miss to open the quarter, and blew a pass inside to Pippen for a lay-up for the second Bulls basket of the quarter. He hit a ten-footer for the third. He sliced inside for the fifth, and later added a driving basket for a three-point play and a pair of free throws to close quarter as the Bulls outscored Detroit 17-6 in the last three and a half minutes to gain control of the game. The fourth quarter saw Detroit push back, but Jordan pushed harder. He scored 18 points and found himself smashed to the floor by Rodman. He got up, drove again, and was fouled. Then he hit a three-point field goal with time running out the twenty-four-second clock. The Stadium was shaking in pandemonium.

Jordan had scored 31 points in the second half to finish with 47 points and 10 rebounds. Pippen had added 29 and 11 rebounds while Grant had climbed on the boards for another 11 rebounds, 6 of them offensive. The Bulls had gotten another big assist from Ed Nealy, who had played 22 minutes and scored 8 points. He was slow and couldn't jump much, but Jackson labeled him "his favorite player, smartest player on the team."

Jordan was curt afterward. He didn't smile or joke, as he usually does in postgame sessions. He went to the podium and said he wouldn't talk about the locker-room incident in Game 2. He said he never criticized his teammates. He said he only spoke as "we," not "they."

"He said that?" Grant exclaimed later when told about his comments. "Really, no, he really said that?" Cartwright, sitting next to Grant, shook his head. "Crazy," he said with a wry smile.

Jordan said he would not talk to the media again until the next game.

The Bulls would do again in Game 4 what they couldn't do in Detroit. They shot well and scrambled the game. The Bulls' play was to get the game above 100 points, so they trapped Thomas and Dumars into 12 turnovers and Jordan was brilliant in scoring 42 more in a 108-101 win. Bill Laimbeer was 1 of 7 and now just 1 of 13 in the two games in Chicago after shooting 8 for 10 in Detroit.

The Pistons were now 24-5 in the playoffs over the past two seasons, with the Bulls having defeated them four times. The Pistons had lost two straight in the playoffs for the first time in two years. But the Bulls hadn't defeated Detroit in the Palace of Auburn Hills yet.

After Game 5, the Bulls still hadn't. It was a classic Pistons win over the Bulls. Dumars scored 20, holding to 7 of 19 and 22 points. The Pistons outrebounded the Bulls 45-36, the Pistons' bench outscored Chicago's 35-13, and the Bulls hit just a third of their shots. And it was rough: Thomas slammed Pippen to the floor midway through the third quarter. The Bulls trailed 72-64 to open the fourth quarter, but after scoring a basket, Jordan signaled that he wanted to come out for a rest. He was out two minutes, and in that time Detroit outscored the Bulls 11-2 and the Bulls never got close again. The Bulls had begun to ignore Laimbeer, and he scored 16 points while Pippen labored through a 5-for-20 game. Grant was off the boards, with 8 offensive rebounds, compared with 9 for the entire Detroit team. Mostly, though, Detroit was tougher and more aggressive.

In a play that summed up the problems Chicago faced in Detroit, with 10.4 seconds to go in the first quarter Jordan took the ball after a Pistons turnover and tossed up a shot from midcourt. The ball swished through to give the Bulls a 25-25 tie. Vinnie Johnson then missed a drive to end the quarter.

As Jordan went to the bench, he explained to Jackson, "I thought [the clock] said one point four seconds." Trainer Mark Pfeil pulled Jordan aside. "We'll go over the numbers later," Pfeil joked.

The only number that mattered for the Bulls now was one. One loss and their summer began. One win and they would get a chance to start over.

Pistons players talked about being mentally tough, saying that now the games would go to whoever played the hardest, whoever was a champion.

In Game 6, the Bulls looked like the champions. The Bulls bolted from a narrow 57-54 lead midway through the quarter with a 23-9 run to close the quarter and close out Detroit; the final margin was 18. The Bulls grabbed loose balls as if they had Velcro on their fingers. Craig Hodges and Jordan ignited the crowd with long three-pointers. Even Will Perdue was banging around after Bill Cartwright picked up his fourth foul. Everybody was talking about the chance of a lifetime after the game. John Paxson, sidelined with a sprained ankle, said he'd tape his ankle and try to play. Hodges said the sixth didn't mean anything with the seventh. There was a lot of talk about a one-game season and about how the momentum was now theirs.

Jordan still wasn't granting mass interviews by his locker after the game. Since Game 3, he'd chosen to come out, on a podium next to Jackson, answer a few questions from the dozens of assembled reporters, and then leave. Jordan would then go to his locker, dress, and be ignored as if had an infectious disease. Reporters made a wide arc avoid even getting close to him as they squeezed into cramped locker room in the old Chicago Stadium.

As Jordan slipped on a sheer, brown floral shirt, his father, James, leaned over. "Son," he said, "we're there. Now's our chance and we're gonna do it."

"Right, Dad," Jordan agreed.

Michael Jordan returned to his team. The dam of silence was swept away by a flood of hope. Jordan was joking on the team bus as it traveled to the Palace, and in the locker room, as if nothing had happened the last

two weeks. He made fun of Pippen's shoes and Grant's after-shave lotion. It smelled like a lawn, Jordan said, one just fertilized. They asked Jordan where he'd left his comb. The scene seemed to relax everyone, and it was a calm, outwardly confident Bulls team that readied for the game. This was all Jordan had asked for, a chance. This was a chance to get to the Finals. Let the better team win. Throw it all out there and go on or go home. It was the farthest one of his teams ever had gone.

But the Bulls would go no farther. As Jordan feared, even suspected, his teammates disappeared. Paxson tried, but couldn't go. His ankle was too sore and swollen, and he would need surgery in a week. Hodges, rusty from months of virtual inactivity, couldn't sustain his effort for two games and shot 3 for 13, 2 for 12 on three-pointers. His big, toothy smile was gone and he'd soon be contemplating his feet.

It wasn't much of a game. The Pistons hit 9 straight shots in the second quarter while the Bulls went 2 of 12. The score was 48-33 at halftime and the game was over. The score was 61-39 in the third quarter, and even though the Bulls closed the gap to 10 after three quarters, they never had a chance.

Scottie Pippen was 1 of 10 for 2 points. Stricken by a migraine headache, he was blinking his eyes madly before the game and putting an ice pack on his head during time-outs. He played forty-two minutes, but could barely distinguish his teammates from the Pistons. He broke down and drowned himself in tears in the locker room afterward. Grant was ferocious on the boards, pulling down more rebounds than the entire Detroit team and grabbing a game-high 14 overall, but he shot 3 of 17. Cartwright had worn down and would need knee surgery, and Hodge also would go under the knife. The rookies were deadly -- B. J. Armstrong flew out of control in front of the crowd and was 1 of 8. The Pistons' bench outscored the Bulls 33-21, as Mark Aguirre had 15 points and 10 rebounds and John Salley had 14 points. Thomas was brilliant in orchestrating the Pistons' break with 21 points and 11 assists. "They may have the best player, but we have the better team," noted Laimbeer, the mockery in his voice scratching at Chicagoans like fingernails on a chalkboard.

Jordan was left to consider the 93-74 loss. He agreed Detroit was better. The Bulls had to get better. He wasn't general manager, but if he were...It was obvious the team needed veterans. But he wasn't just slapping at the rookies. Where was Pippen? This was the second straight year he'd vanished in the last game against the Pistons; he'd received a concussion in the first minute of the final conference playoff game in 1989. Were he and his buddy, Grant, serious enough? Paxson had broken down and the other guys hadn't done much. Jordan had scored 31 points, 21 more than anyone else, but he'd also attempted 27 shots. And many were wondering how the Bulls were ever going to win if he was to continue to shoot at that pace.

As for Jordan, he believed he *had* to continue at that pace. Otherwise, who would?

Just before he stepped from the postgame podium onto the golf courses of America, Jordan offered one thought: "We have to do some things. We need to make some changes."

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