

# BULLS CAST MAGIC SPELL RODMAN REAL, MAGIC JUST AN ILLUSION

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**INGLEWOOD** You wanted to see Magic vs. Michael live, but you didn't want to pay an arm and a leg or blow your kid's inheritance. Forget it.

"If you want a center-court seat, five rows back, I can get you one for \$1,200," said Harris Rosner, owner of V.I.P. Tickets, a local brokerage. "I've been in the ticket business 15 years in L.A., 20 years overall, and I can't ever remember seeing a regular-season game this big. It's like a "Series D" game.

Series D, as in NBA Finals. They still use that lingo here, even though the Lakers haven't advanced past a Series B game a conference semifinal since Magic Johnson's first career as a Laker. As soon as Magic announced his comeback, the calls to Rosner for tickets came from New York, Chicago and as far away as Japan.

"The market had already kind of dried up, with Michael coming here for his only time this season (and first appearance in L.A. since November, 1992)," Rosner said. "Then once Magic said he was coming back, it took that ticket to the next dimension. Everybody wants to see Magic versus Michael."

Except for one small problem: Magic and Michael didn't go head-to-head very much in the Forum. It was a good thing, too, because it might have been as much of a mismatch as, well, the Bulls vs. the Lakers. Early in the third, the Bulls built a 20-point lead and the only question was whether they'd fade in their second game in two nights.

Not a chance. On this night, Magic needed Kareem and Worthy and some of his other former teammates.

Winnin' time again belonged to the Bulls, as it has in 41 of their first 44 games. Another ridiculously easy win, 99-84.

Magic vs. Air was on the marquee, but the most intriguing matchup was Magic vs. Satan. Satan, of course, being Dennis Rodman. "Just another game," Rodman said earlier.

Don't believe it. This was not just one of 82 regular-season nights for Rodman. You could tell that just from the first half, when he outrebounded the Lakers by himself (15-12) and held Magic assist-less in 16 minutes.

All night, Rodman had way too much energy for Johnson or any of the other Lakers, sweeping the boards for a season-high 23 rebounds. Typical Rodman, that is true. But earlier this week, he was unjustifiably snubbed by the Eastern Conference coaches for the All-Star Game.

"The best way to stick it up somebody's you-know-what is to go out there and show that you are deserving to be on the All-Star team," Rodman said. "That's what I did. Magic's got to understand something. When he's playing against guys like me, he's got to work his butt off. He just can't hold and grab and reach like was doing.

"He doesn't have the legs right now to play me."

So last night was the perfect time for Rodman to state his case. The nation watched. "Captivated," is the way Johnson put it. Did Rodman relish the chance to shut down Johnson? Well, Madonna could have been sitting in one of those \$1,200 seats and he wouldn't have acknowledged her.

"Put it this way," Rodman said. "Magic has not played a strong defensive team yet. He hasn't had guys coming at him. He has to come out and prove to the Chicago Bulls that Magic Johnson is Magic Johnson. He hasn't proved anything yet."

Johnson did prove that he isn't ready to take on the best team in the league. In the first half, the Lakers were outscored 39-21 in the 16 minutes he was on the floor and trailed by 13. The second half was more of the same as the showdown did not live up to the hype.

This was quite a difference from Magic's first game, when he nearly compiled a triple-double in just 27 minutes. But he wasn't challenged at all by Golden State, which last played defense when Nate Thurmond patrolled the lane.

Rodman, giving up a good 40 pounds, fought Johnson for position every time the Lakers went inside to Magic. Whenever Johnson made his moves across the lane for his junior skyhooks, the Bulls quickly converged. But he also moved in super slo-mo, which is a definite no-no when playing the quickest defenders on earth. Two of his first six shots were blocked.

'MICHAEL WAS yelling at Dennis at one point, keep pounding him, don't let up," said Johnson, who had as many assists as turnovers (three of each) in 32 minutes of torture. "But that's going to make me better in the long run. I need this game to get better. And so does this team. Hey, they gave us a good old whipping."

The emphasis here is on old. The Bulls made the Lakers and their 36-year-old star look very old last night.