

## House catches fire in Game 2

By Ian Thompson  
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BOSTON -- When a shooter is feeling it, how does "it" feel? "It just feels good," said Celtics eighth man [Eddie House](#) after he had clobbered the Orlando Magic with 31 points on 14 attempts. "You just want to keep on getting shots every chance you get, but at the same time you don't want to force anything."

Clearly, "feeling it" is one of those experiences that is hard to describe. Unless, of course, you happen to be its victim. "Eddie House was unbelievable," said Magic coach Stan Van Gundy while dealing with the consequences of a 112-94 loss (RECAP | BOX) Wednesday in Game 2 of the Eastern semifinals. I've seen some great shooting shows in my life, but that was incredible. He had an unbelievable day and the game was just too fast for us."

This is quickly becoming a series that eludes blanket

statements. The Magic have played horribly for the worst part of six quarters running, yet they return to Orlando for Game 3 Friday holding homecourt advantage after barely holding onto the 28-point lead they earned in the opening 27 minutes of Game 1. Since then they've been outscored 165-124.

"You have to be very happy right now," said Van Gundy about splitting the games in Boston. "I mean, maybe not `very' happy, the way the day went. `Very happy' is not even anything I think I've ever felt." He thought about that some more and added, "I've felt it before, but not in terms of coaching."

The short of it is that Boston has been tying up the Magic in circles of their own making. From the opening minute of Game 2 Orlando chased Ray Allen (22 points, 4 assists) around and around the court, and by Van Gundy's own account never quite caught up. Celtics point guard Rajon Rondo (15 points, 18 assists, 11 rebounds) upped the pace so effectively that before the fourth quarter he had himself a triple-double -- his third of this postseason, tying the Celtics record set in 1986 by Larry Bird over 18 playoff games; Rondo has played half as many.

The only victory achieved by Orlando was to limit Paul Pierce to 16 minutes with fewer points (3) than fouls (4), which turned into a joke so cruel that Van Gundy saw its irony. "In a funny way you think you get a huge advantage with Paul Pierce being in foul trouble," Van Gundy said. But then the Celtics went small as Pierce was replaced by House, who was 11-of-14 while converting all four of his threes. "The change in the game -- the difference -- was Eddie House's speed and quickness."



In addition to scoring 31 points, Eddie House (right) got under Rafer Alston's skin.

House's shots fell through the net one after another like silver dollars from a slot machine with all of the lights flashing and the sirens blaring. Time after time he would run a half lap at full speed around a screen, receiving the pass as he came to a quarter-turn stop: A two-footed hop that launched him and then the ball no sooner than he had caught it. The best forensic cop could search every pebbled wrinkle of the basketball and not find residue of House's DNA, so little contact does he make with the ball even as he applies it to the destruction of opponents.

"He gets under everybody's skin when he gets us going," said Celtics coach Doc Rivers. "It's the shots that get you mad."

The Celtics were up 83-60 in the third after another three-run homer by House, whose adulation got the best of Orlando guard Rafer Alston. There is a scene in *Bull Durham* when Kevin Costner pulls off his catcher's mask and yells at the batter for admiring a home run and showing up his pitcher. There was something of that here when Alston slapped House in the back of the head before referee Bennett Salvatore stepped in between to issue technicals to each.

Alston accused House of elbowing him in the stomach first. "Everybody seen what happened," replied House. "I don't play that type of basketball. I think he was just trying to do anything to try to stop me."

If so, his best intentions may be applied against him should Alston be suspended for Game 3. "Yeah, I'm concerned," Alston admitted. "The NBA is cool, they'll look at the play (in) its entirety and they'll see that he threw the elbow first."

The Magic interior was surprisingly unfurnished. Defensive player of the year Dwight Howard (12 points, 12 rebounds, 5 turnovers) was outplayed by Celtics center Kendrick Perkins (16 points, 9 rebounds, 2 blocks), leading Howard to claim personal responsibility for the loss while promising better leadership in Game 3. Not only did Boston shoot better from the three-point line (9-of-20 for 45 percent) than the Magic overall (44.3 percent from the floor), but over the opening half the visitors were outscored 32-14 in the paint to fall behind decisively, 61-46, at intermission. Which is to say they were awful everywhere.

"There's some big adjustments we have to make," said Van Gundy. "No. 1, we have to rise to the intensity level that they've had over the last game and a half. We are going to have to keep our composure better ... I'm talking about holding our composure when we're frustrated, to just gather ourselves and be able to execute on both ends of the floor, to execute our offense and stay with our defensive rules and schemes. And it's not an easy thing to both raise your intensity level and keep your composure and your emotions under control, but it's going to take both of those for us to win this series."

Has the homecourt advantage ever felt so inhospitable?