

Orlando Sentinel

ORLANDO MAGIC PLAYOFF PREVIEW

#7 MAGIC VS #2 RAPTORS | MORE COVERAGE C2, C9-10 | SPORTS SECTION BEGINS INSIDE ON C3



BACK TO THE PROMISED LAND

Vooch made a vow to help turn a flailing franchise into a winner. As the Magic return to the playoffs, here's hoping the inspirational center becomes our Dirk or D-Wade.

RICARDO RAMIREZ BUXEDA/ORLANDO SENTINEL

After enduring six years of losing, Magic center Nikola Vucevic finally has a reason to smile as he leads the team into the playoffs against the Raptors. Game 1 is Saturday in Toronto.

You did it, Vooch. Just like you said you would. You told us before the season that if it was the last thing you ever did in the NBA, you wanted to lead this franchise — this down-and-out, distressed, depressed franchise — out of abyss of irrelevance and back into the postseason promised land.

"The Magic are the franchise that gave me an opportunity to show what I can do and to help my career explode," Magic center Nikola Vucevic, a.k.a. Vooch, told us before the season. "It's not always been easy because we've been losing for a long time, but it would really make me proud if I could be here when we achieve the next step and make the playoffs. That would really mean a lot to me — maybe more than anybody — because I've been here since the beginning of the rebuild."

COMMENTARY



MIKE BIANCHI
Sentinel Columnist

I'm not usually a sports columnist who types while wearing pom-poms (it makes hitting the space bar extremely difficult), but how can you *not* root for Vooch during these NBA playoffs? When the Magic open up their first-round series on Saturday against the Toronto Raptors — their first playoff series in seven years — it will be a testament and confirmation to Vooch's dedication, perseverance and professionalism.

"He's the anchor and the rock; he's character carved in stone — that's Vooch," says Magic founder and senior vice president Pat Williams.

"He's our leader; he's our all-star," says back-up point guard Michael Carter-Williams.

Please turn to **BIANCHI, C10**