



Hawks still can't solve Magic's Howard

By [Michael Cunningham](#)
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ORLANDO -- There was so much out there for the Hawks to take.

With a win against the Magic on Saturday night, they would increase their Southeast Division lead over Orlando and their lead over Boston for No. 2 in the Eastern Conference. Coach Mike Woodson would coach the East All-Stars, and a 3-1 record in a tough week would further establish the Hawks among the East elite.

Instead, Dwight Howard took it all away. The Hawks couldn't stop the Magic's All-Star center in the decisive third quarter and lost 104-86 at Amway Arena.

It was the Hawks' third loss in three games against the Magic this season and sixth consecutive overall. Orlando (31-16) regained the Southeast lead by one-half game over the Hawks (30-16).

"They just have our number right now," said Hawks center Al Horford. "We have to figure them out. We have to do a better job inside in the post, starting with me."

Joe Johnson and Jamal Crawford scored 19 points each for the Hawks, but that wasn't enough to offset Howard. He scored 10 of his 31 points in the third quarter as the Magic opened a 77-63 lead.

After completing a sweep of the season series with the Celtics on Friday night, the Hawks couldn't solve Howard and the Magic. Two of the Hawks' losses to the Magic came in the second of back-to-back games.

"This game is all about matchups, and I think we match up well with everyone but them," Johnson said. "They pretty much have their way with us."

That's mostly because the Hawks so far have found no answer for Howard. The Hawks tried everything to slow him, but Howard made 10 of 16 shots and 11 of 18 at the line.

Al Horford couldn't slow Howard. Jason Collins tried early and lasted two minutes before getting called for three fouls, and Zaza Pachulia fouled out. Howard had 19 rebounds to nearly match the 20 combined for the Hawks' five frontcourt players

"We've got to figure it out," Woodson said. "We'll go back and look at the tapes and see how we can do a better job against him at our place [for the final meeting on March 24]. He's a load down there."

The Hawks felt the officials didn't help matters. They were called for 25 fouls to 15 for Orlando, and Howard attempted 18 free throws compared to 20 for the Hawks.

“It’s tough to beat a great team like Orlando when you can’t get to the line,” said Hawks forward Josh Smith. “We were aggressive like they were aggressive.”

The Hawks started fast despite a physical game in defeating the Celtics on Friday night. They made seven of their first 12 field-goal attempts, with Mike Bibby and Marvin Williams scoring five points each, and raced to a 16-6 lead.

The Hawks went cold from there, missing 14 of their next 17 shots, and trailed 49-44 at the half. They closed the lead to 57-54 on Bibby’s 3-pointer, but Howard had seven points during a 20-9 Magic run to close the third quarter.

“They picked it up defensively, and I don’t want to say fatigue set in, but we looked very sluggish in the third quarter,” Woodson said.

The Hawks got as close as 81-72 in the fourth quarter before Orlando closed them out.

“We’ve got to keep pushing each other and win games to stay at the top,” Woodson said. “We’ve got to keep pushing these Magic.”

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