



1990-91 Western Conference Finals

68-19 Chamberlain Division Champion Santa Cruz Grizzlies

vs

72-17 West Division Champion Minnesota Muskies

Regular Season: The Western Conference Finals bring together the VBA's two best records, but the defending champion Minnesota Muskies and the Santa Cruz Grizzlies took somewhat different paths to get here. Minnesota finished the regular season with one of the league's most efficient attacks, averaging 112.4 points per game while leading the VBA in field-goal percentage at an outstanding .526 and three-point shooting at .406. The Muskies were also one of the league's best defensive teams, ranking second in points allowed at just 99.3 per game, giving the defending champions a powerful combination of offensive efficiency and defensive strength.

SCG was hardly far behind offensively, finishing 3rd in the league at 113.0 points per game and creating its offense with a much different style. The Grizzlies featured a deep, balanced attack led by Hersey Hawkins at 20.5 points per game and Michael Adams at 19.9, while Armen Gilliam scored 15.8 and Shawn Kemp added 13.2 points and 7.9 rebounds. Adams was the engine of the Santa Cruz attack, averaging 11.6 dimes, while Hawkins established himself as one of the VBA's premier scorers.

Minnesota's stars, however, give the Muskies the kind of championship pedigree few teams can match. Charles Barkley ranked among the league's leading rebounders at 9.9 per game and was one of the VBA's most dominant players at both ends of the floor, while Robert Parish also finished among the league's top rebounders. The contrast between these clubs is particularly interesting: Minnesota combines exceptional shooting efficiency with veteran championship experience, while Santa Cruz relies on athleticism, speed, depth and a relentless offensive attack.



Playoffs: Both Minnesota and Santa Cruz earned first-round byes by winning their respective divisions, sending each directly into the Western Conference Semifinals. For the defending champion Muskies, the road was anything but easy, as Costa Mesa pushed Minnesota all the way to a seventh game. The Condors appeared to have the champions in serious trouble when they roared back to tie the series by demolishing Minnesota 118-92 in Game 6 behind Rolando Blackman's 27 points and a spectacular all-around Costa Mesa attack. But Minnesota survived the pressure of the deciding game and advanced, proving once again that championship experience can be invaluable when a series reaches its most dangerous moment.

For Santa Cruz, this postseason represents something entirely new—the **first playoff appearance in Grizzlies history**—and the club has already made the most of the opportunity. Santa Cruz opened its series against El Paso with a wild 140-124 victory, but the Grizzlies were then crushed 146-117 in Game 2 as the series quickly became a high-scoring battle. The Grizzlies responded with two victories, including a remarkable 116-108 road win in Game 4 after Michael Adams scored 34 points. Santa Cruz then completed the series with perhaps its most dramatic victory yet, edging El Paso 120-119 in Game 5 as Adams earned Game MVP honors and the Grizzlies survived a furious battle against Michael Jordan and one of the conference's most talented teams.

Thus, the Western Finals present a fascinating contrast: Minnesota arrives battle-tested from a grueling seven-game war and carries the burden of defending its championship, while Santa Cruz comes in riding the emotion and confidence of the first playoff series victory in franchise history.

Head-to-head: Minnesota won the regular-season series from Santa Cruz, three games to one, but the four meetings showed that the Grizzlies are fully capable of making this a competitive Western Conference Finals. The Muskies opened the season series with a convincing 122-94 victory at The Barn, overwhelming Santa Cruz with a dominant first half. Santa Cruz immediately showed it would not be intimidated, however, returning home a week later and defeating Minnesota 111-99 behind Michael Adams, who earned Game MVP honors as the Grizzlies ran Minnesota off the floor with 41 fast-break points.

Minnesota regained control in the third meeting, winning 121-105 behind Charles Barkley's 29 points, while Larry Bird added 15 points, 13 rebounds and 12 assists in a remarkable triple-double performance. The final meeting was the closest of the four, with Minnesota taking a hard-fought 121-115 decision at Kaiser Permanente Arena as Barkley exploded for 38 points and Bird added 24. Santa Cruz had its own stars shining in that game, with Adams and Hawkins scoring 26 points apiece, a preview of the offensive firepower the Grizzlies can bring against the defending champions.

Minnesota enters the series with the **3-1 head-to-head advantage**, championship experience and the league's superior defense, but Santa Cruz has already proven it can beat the Muskies and score with them. The Grizzlies are in unfamiliar territory as a franchise, while Minnesota is trying to protect a championship, making this Western Conference Finals a classic matchup between experience and history in the making.