

## SPORTS

# Blazers end pre-season with win

By Ashley Conklin  
Emerald Sports Editor

With the exhibition season now behind them, the Portland Trail Blazers can begin defense of their Western Conference championship.

Portland wrapped up the pre-season at 6-2 with a 133-119 win over the Charlotte Hornets in McArthur Court Sunday night.

The Blazers open the regular season Friday night at home, hosting the Houston Rockets, and Coach Rick Adelman pronounced Portland ready for action.

"With the people we have, I think we're in much better shape than last year," he said. "From the first day of camp we've wanted to continue to get better."

Cliff Robinson and Jerome Kersey led seven Blazers in double figures with 19 and 17 points, respectively, and Danny Ainge made his Eugene homecoming a successful one with 13 points and five assists.

Portland was without starting guard Clyde Drexler, who strained a groin muscle in Saturday's 112-97 win over the Hornets. Drexler stayed in Portland to receive treatment and will be ready to go Friday, Adelman said.

Ainge, who attended North Eugene High School, got his only start of the pre-season in replacing Drexler and responded with a big game, hitting jump shots on the break and finding Kersey open underneath throughout the first half.

Ainge hadn't seen many minutes throughout the eight pre-season games but figures to be a key weapon off the bench for the Blazers, something Portland lacked in last year's NBA Finals against Detroit.

Ainge showed he can still hit the open shot and the open man on the break, and said he was ready for the season to begin.

"I feel very good," he said. "I have much more confidence in my defense, knowing when to double down, and I felt like I'm shooting the ball good."

Portland got out of the gate in a hurry with Kersey scoring eight points and Terry Porter

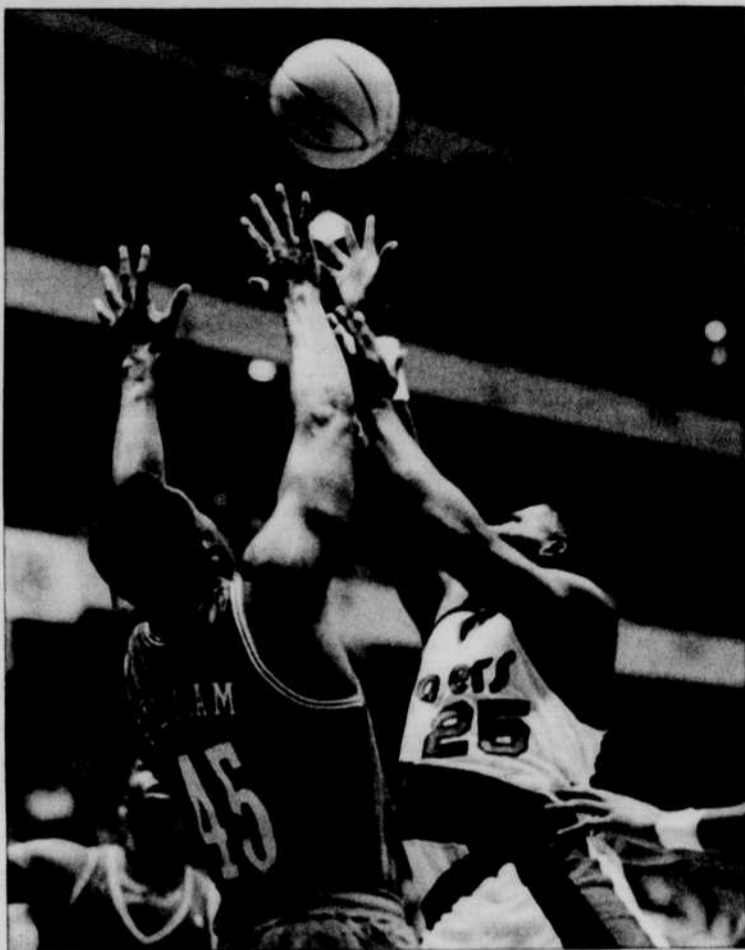


Photo by Sean Poston

**Trail Blazer Jerome Kersey drives the basket for two of his 17 points during an exhibition game against the Charlotte Hornets at McArthur Court Sunday night.**

hitting for four to lead the Blazers to an early 21-16 lead, and it was the crowd of 9,873, Adelman said, that played a key role.

"Everywhere we've gone it's been like this," Adelman said. "I think after the type of season we had last year that we're really a state team. It was a good crowd tonight and they were very loud."

After going on top 26-20, the Blazers closed out the first period with an 8-0 run to lead 34-20 after one quarter.

The Portland big men helped the Blazers dominate the second quarter as Kevin Duckworth, Alaa Abdelnaby and Cliff Robinson combined for 18 points to lead Portland to a 72-53 halftime lead as the Blazers closed out the half on 11-2 run.

That allowed Adelman to use

his bench in the second half, and he got impressive outings from Robinson and Abdelnaby, the first-round rookie draft pick from Duke, who added 13 points.

"We played a lot of people with different combinations in there so we got some new looks and I think what we wanted to accomplish we got," Adelman said.

Adelman was also very pleased with Abdelnaby's play. "He really has such great offensive potential," Adelman said. "He is very quick and he learns really well. He'll be able to do a lot of things for us."

The Blazers were never really threatened in the second half, leading by as many as 26 points early in the third quarter and coasted to an easy win that made Portland look like a defending conference champion.

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