

Trail Blazers win fourth straight

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) - The best edge the Portland Trail Blazers might have had over the Charlotte Hornets on Sunday was experience.

Standing up to the rigors of a road trip that has them playing five games in seven days, Clyde Drexler and Terry Porter got a pair of key fourth-quarter baskets as the Trail Blazers won 121-114.

"Experience is everything at this point," Drexler said. "Experience and confidence is more than 50 percent of it. Everybody has quality players. So when the players all know what to do at different times in the game, that's how you win games."

Drexler struggled from the field, making six of 17 shots, but sank all 13 free throws he tried and led Portland with 25 points. Porter scored 20, and Cliff Robinson got 19.

After Kendall Gill's short jumper brought Charlotte to 108-107 with 3:28 left, Porter fought off the Hornets' big men for a follow shot. Cliff Robinson scored on a running jumper, and after Dell Curry got a jumper for Charlotte, Drexler scored on a driving lay-up to extend Portland's lead to 114-109 with 1:26 left.

"We did a better job in the second half of controlling these guys," Drexler said. "As a team, we are learning to play positive, even with our mistakes."

Charlotte, trying to maintain a spot in the playoffs, lost its fourth consecutive game.

"They pretty much haven't played with each other long enough to get a good feel for each other," Drexler said of the Hornets, now in their fifth season. "That will come in time."

Portland, trying to gain home-court advantage in the playoffs, won its fourth consecutive game and their fifth in the last six outings.

Larry Johnson led Charlotte with 27 points, and Alonzo Mourning had 25. The Hornets, who made 20 of 24 free throws in the first half, never attempted a free throw in the second half. Coach Allan Bristow said the problems went beyond statistics.

'As a team, we are learning to play positive, even with our mistakes.'

— Clyde Drexler,
Portland guard

"We are not playing with a lot of confidence throughout the game," Bristow said. "And down the stretch, we start to worry about it. We are missing a lot of fast-break opportunities throughout the game."

The Blazers put together a pair of scoring runs to take a lead at the half. The Hornets then fell behind 94-87 as Cliff Robinson scored 10 of his team's last 13 points in the third period.

Curry made a three-pointer to get the Hornets to 94-90 at the end of the period, and Charlotte opened the fourth period with a 9-2 run to gain a 99-96 lead at the 9:01 mark.

Consecutive baskets by Mario Elie led Portland to a 100-99 lead with 7:09 left. Curry came back with a jumper, but Mark Bryant scored two baskets in a row to give Portland the lead for good.

The Hornets came back from Portland's 14-2 run early in the first quarter and took a 32-28 lead at the end of the period.

Portland went on a 10-2 spurt sparked by successive three-pointers by Porter and Tracy Murray for a 55-48 lead with 4:24 left. Johnson's fade-away jumper from the right wing helped Charlotte tie the score at 60 with 1:36 to go, but the Blazers got two baskets in the final 3.2 seconds, each from Kersey and Porter, and took a 68-63 halftime lead.

Bristow said the Hornets need to get back to the tempo which got them into playoff contention — and it might involve changes, if necessary.

"I'm not opposed to shaking up some things just to get a new look," he said.

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