

Pacers squeak by Blazers

By Landon Hall
The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — One night after coach Larry Bird criticized his starters' effort, the Indiana Pacers responded with a hard-fought win over one of the NBA's best teams.

"There's no secret in this game: If you play hard and play with some desire, you're going to win a lot of games," Bird said after Monday night's 93-91 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers.

Still, Bird didn't sound satisfied.

Asked if his players were listening when he told them he'd start younger players if the veterans didn't improve after Sunday's 102-91 loss to Seattle, Bird said: "They better be, because I've had enough of it. I really have. Guys get paid a lot of money to play hard, and they should come out here and respect the game, and go after it like they want to win."

Indiana shot miserably from the field for the second straight game, but the effort was there. Jalen Rose scored 22 points, and Dale Davis had 15 points and 12 rebounds as the Pacers held off a late Blazers charge.

"We stayed aggressive," Rose said. "Anytime you play against a team like Portland, they are going to make runs. You can't get discouraged."

Scottie Pippen had a chance to tie in the frantic final seconds, but his jumper went off the back of the rim with about 8 seconds left.

The Blazers had one more chance, but Pippen's inbound pass toward Steve Smith was knocked away and picked up by Indiana's Reggie Miller.

Miller scored 15 points but shot just 2-of-11 from the field. The previous night, he was 1-of-9 with a season-low six points.

"I'm still the go-to guy on this team," Miller said. "I don't care if I go 0-for-20. The ball better be in my hands at the end of the game. If the ball is not going to be in my hand, I shouldn't be around here."

Miller missed seven of his first eight shots and seemed to get into a shooting match with Rose early on. But Miller hit one of the biggest shots of the night, a 3-pointer after he stole a pass by Brian Grant, that put the Pacers ahead 84-79 with 6:16 to go.

"He's our bread and butter," Bird said of Miller, who has made just 30 percent of his shots in the last 10 games. "He hasn't been shooting the ball well at all ... What it comes down to, no matter how many shots he misses in a row or what his shooting percentage is, if the game is close he's going to get the ball."

Rasheed Wallace had 20 points and 11 rebounds for Portland.

Pippen, who had 20 points and 10 rebounds, hit a 3-pointer to bring the Blazers within 90-89 with 42.7 seconds left. Indiana's Travis Best was fouled and made both free throws with 19.3 seconds left for a 92-89 lead.

Damon Stoudamire hit a short baseline jumper to make it 92-91 with 14.7 seconds left. Rose was fouled immediately, but made just one of two at the line for a 93-91 lead.

Pippen inbounded the ball and got it back, but couldn't drive into the lane and his fallaway jumper wasn't close.

"We've been sort of stumbling for the last couple of weeks, and it's something we felt was going to catch up on us," Pippen said. "We're not getting out and running and scoring right now."

The Blazers fell to 13-3 overall and 5-1 at home. Still fatigued from a recent six-game road trip, the Blazers now face an eight-game stretch against teams with winning records.

"We haven't been together, and our schedule hasn't helped us," Smith said. "We've done a pretty good job. We're happy with what our record is, because it could have been worse."

Trailing 90-84 with 3:48 left, the Blazers couldn't score on three straight possessions. Pippen's two free throws pulled Portland within 90-86 with 1:13 to go.

Indiana didn't make a field goal in the last 3:48, but they held on.

Both teams struggled from the perimeter. Portland shot 40 percent, while Indiana shot 38 percent after shooting a season-low 35 percent in Seattle.

49ers dealt their seventh straight loss

By Dennis Georgatos
The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — There was no miracle finish this time for San Francisco, not even the hope of one. Instead, it was just one more bad performance for the 49ers, while the Green Bay Packers stayed close in the tough NFC Central race.

Brett Favre passed for two touchdowns and Green Bay's defense held San Francisco's struggling offense without a touchdown as the Packers sent the 49ers to their seventh straight loss, 20-3, Monday night.

"Brett carried the football team," Packers coach Ray Rhodes said. "He was putting the ball in guys' hands who were making plays. I feel like we're starting to come together."

Not so for the 49ers (3-8), in the midst of their longest skid since losing eight in a row in 1980. It ensured the 49ers will finish with their first non-winning campaign since going 3-6 in the strike-shortened 1982 season.

And a crowd used to seeing the 49ers win turned on the home team, showering them with boos even as the players were pelted by rain late in the game.

"Our offense is terrible. There's no other way to say it," San Francisco tight end Greg Clark said of an off-

fense that has produced just one touchdown in the last five games.

Green Bay (6-5) pulled within a game of Detroit, Tampa Bay and Minnesota in the NFC Central with five remaining and ran its record to 6-1 against the 49ers since 1995, including four playoff encounters.

San Francisco's lone victory in that span came in last January's Wild Card playoff when Steve Young threaded a 25-yard touchdown pass to Terrell Owens through three defenders in the final seconds.

But this time, Young watched from the sidelines, probably out for the rest of the season with a concussion suffered Sept. 27.

"It's obvious it's not the team that it has been," Favre said. "But I'm not here to knock them. Steve Young is the heart and soul of this team. They'll be back. When you've been on top so long, you've got to be knocked down sometime."

Rhodes, a former 49ers assistant, got his first win in eight Monday night games. The 49ers saw one more streak end when San Francisco coach Steve Mariucci, a former Packers assistant, lost for the first time in eight Monday night games.

Steve Stenstrom, who began the year as the team's third-string quarterback, threw an end zone interception to end one promising

drive. On another occasion, he had the ball slip out of his hands trying to pass, and the 49ers had to scramble to recover the fumble.

Basketball

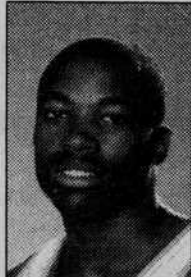
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high 17 points on eight-of-12 shooting in the Pilots' 69-55 win over Rice on Sunday.

Oregon and Portland haven't met since the 1990-91 season, when the Ducks recorded their 18th-straight win over the Pilots. Oregon leads the all-time series 38-10, and Portland hasn't defeated the Ducks since 1964.

History, however, might as well be damned because Oregon realizes

that the Pilots could present big problems should the Ducks overlook them and not match their intensity.



JONES

"This is one of their biggest games of the year," Jones said. "So they're gonna come at us with a lot of intensity."

"It's gonna be a lot of excitement out there."

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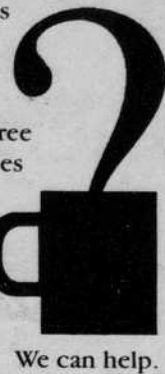
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