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Ewing shoots down the Blazers

■ Patrick Ewing dispels recent criticism, scoring a season-high 20 points to lead New York to the 98-88 win

NEW YORK — Patrick Ewing showed his critics that his career in New York is not quite done yet.

Ewing, the subject of criticism and trade rumors this week, energized the Knicks by matching his season-high with 20 points as New York cooled off the streaking Portland Trail Blazers 98-88 Thursday night.

"He's a warrior," teammate Larry Johnson said. "Patrick's been around a long time. It was just a matter of time until he heated up. His shot was falling and he got into a good groove tonight."

Ewing, 37, has battled injuries the past three years and missed the first 20 games this season with tendinitis in his Achilles. He missed New York's trip to the NBA Finals last year and came back to find his role diminished as Allan Houston and Latrell Sprewell took over.

Ewing's ego hasn't diminished, however, and his relationship with coach Jeff Van Gundy has deteriorated this season as his minutes have decreased.

"I'm not going to complain

about minutes," Ewing said. "When my number is called, I do the best I can. I knew I'd be a significant contributor. I don't need other people to motivate me. I motivate myself."

This hasn't been the best week for Ewing. Benched for the final 17 minutes in Tuesday night's loss to Orlando, he woke up Wednesday to a story in the newspaper that said the Knicks discussed a trade with the Wizards that would have sent him to Washington.

"Whatever happens, happens," Ewing said of his future in New York. "Greater players than me have been traded. It's a business."

If he plays like he did Thursday, the Knicks surely won't trade him. He helped New York take control in the third quarter with seven points, four rebounds and two blocks.

After Bonzi Wells nearly brought Portland back in the fourth quarter, Ewing reentered the game and helped end the Blazers' six-game winning streak.

Ewing hit a high-arching jumper

over Rasheed Wallace to give New York an 85-77 lead with 4:55 left to play. After Wells scored, Ewing hit a baseline jumper and set up Marcus Camby underneath. Camby was fouled by Wallace and hit two free throws.

"He went on a very good sequence that I thought really spurred us on," Van Gundy said. "He made a couple of spot up shots that have been his signature on penetration for a long time."

Ewing then hit a spin move in the lane to make it 91-79, the Knicks' biggest lead of the game.

"He looked like the Patrick of old," Portland's Steve Smith said. "Give him credit, he still has it."

Houston led New York with 22 points, Sprewell had 14, Camby 13 and Charlie Ward 12. Ewing added nine rebounds and three blocks in 36 minutes.

Wells scored all 18 of his points in the fourth quarter, including Portland's first 15 of the period. Steve Smith had 18, Damon Stoudamire 16 and Scottie Pippen scored 11 in his first game against the Knicks since leaving Chicago last year.

Wallace got ejected with 1:08

left and threw his wristband at referee Joey Crawford. It was Wallace's fourth ejection of the season.

The Knicks broke open a tight game in the third quarter, frustrating the Blazers with their aggressiveness, drawing fouls and grabbing offensive rebounds. New York used an 8-0 run to break a 56-56 tie and led 73-64 after three.

"Against a really good team, we can't afford to play like that," said Portland coach Mike Dunleavy, whose team beat San Antonio twice, Utah and the Lakers during its winning streak.

The Knicks, coming off their worst home loss of the year, came out firing, hitting five 3-pointers in a high-scoring first quarter. Portland led 29-28 before two of the stingiest defensive teams tightened up in the second quarter.

New York, playing without backup point guard Chris Childs, went to the big backcourt of Sprewell and Houston and scored one basket in 11 possessions. But Portland also struggled from the field, hitting 6 of 22 shots in the quarter and the Trail Blazers led 46-45 at halftime.

The Associated Press

Wrestling

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Another key match Kearney pointed to was the 4-3 decision by freshman Jason Harless in the 125 pound weight class. Harless was able to get a take down of BYU's Trent Rollins with two seconds left in the match to secure the win.

"The win by Jason started us off on the right foot," Kearney said. "We noticed a trend with their first three wrestlers that they couldn't wrestle hard in the third round.

We tried to use that to our advantage."

Two of the Cougars came into the night's competition with national rankings. Senior Rangi Smart was ranked No. 20 and sophomore Aaron Holker was No. 16 in their respective weight classes. Holker lost to Brian Watson, while Smart lived up to his ranking when he beat Leif Williams.

"Rangi Smart is a very good wrestler at 165, I think that he showed his ranking," Kearney said. "It's not that Holker didn't live up to his ranking, as much as it shows that maybe Brian should

be ranked."

The win for the Ducks gives them confidence as they head into two matches against ranked Pacific-10 Conference foes. Tonight, the Oregon grapplers will head to Boise, Idaho, to take on the No. 22-ranked team in the nation.

The Broncos (6-3) are lead by a trio of ranked wrestlers. Larry Quisel (No. 9), Rusty Cook (No. 7) and last year's national champion at the 165-pound weight class senior Kirk White will be the big tests for the Ducks.

According to Kearney, those three matches will more than likely be

the determining factor.

"Those guys are as good as anyone in the country," Kearney said. "We'll have to beat one of them to win that match."

Other than defeating one of the Broncos' "big three", the Ducks will have to have a fundamentally-sound match for them to compete.

"We need to get better with some of our technical moves," Kearney said. "What we need to do most is take it one match at a time. Right now, we are learning to do the little things that will make us a great team."

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