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Blazers overcome Van Exel, Dallas to force Game Six

John Miller
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

DALLAS — If they gave a Sixth Man of the Playoffs award, Mavericks guard Nick Van Exel would have put himself among the frontrunners with his performance against Portland, if not for the fourth quarter.

Van Exel, who averaged 13 points and six assists in the first four games of the series, had his best game Wednesday with 25 points and five assists but struggled from the field in the final quarter, hitting only one of six shots in the 103-99 Mavericks loss.

"(The first three quarters) didn't really matter," Van Exel said. "The bottom line, I didn't shoot well in the fourth quarter. We didn't get the plays we needed in the fourth quarter, and they got a big win."

Van Exel hit his only basket of the fourth quarter with 7:23 left, giving the Mavericks a 90-81 lead, the biggest lead for Dallas in the second half.

But the rest of the quarter did not go well for Van Exel, who finished fourth in the Sixth Man of the Year voting. With the Mavericks still leading by nine, Van Exel took three of the next four Dallas shots and missed them all, as the Dallas lead was whittled to three points.

With Dallas leading 98-96 with 1:33 left, Van Exel missed again,

this time on an eight-foot hook shot. The Trail Blazers took the lead on the ensuing possession with Rasheed Wallace hitting a 3-pointer.

And in the final seconds, with Portland up by four, Van Exel kept the dribble and passed to Steve Nash instead of putting up a quick 3-pointer.

The Mavericks needed Van Exel's offense in the first three quarters, especially with the struggles of Nash, who was held to five points in the first three quarters on 1-of-9 shooting in 20 minutes. Van Exel played 21 minutes in the first three quarters and hit 8-of-13 shots for 22 points.

The Mavericks held a 50-43 halftime lead in large part thanks to Van Exel, who scored 14 points in the half including 12 in the second quarter.

The Trail Blazers went on a 6-0 run late in the half to cut the Mavericks' lead to 45-41. But with 1:02 left in the half, Van Exel hit his first 3-pointer to extend the lead to seven. Portland cut the deficit to five and had a chance to pull even closer late in the half, but Van Exel came up with a steal, led the break the other way and fed Dirk Nowitzki for an alley-oop dunk to give Dallas the 7-point halftime lead.

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Golf

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Wednesday's final round.

Freshman Gregg LaVoie carded a 4-over 76 in the finale to conclude the tournament in a two-way tie for 21st overall. Junior Jimmy White finished the tournament tied for 30th overall with a 302, followed by senior Chris Carnahan, who finished tied for 32nd overall. Redshirt freshman Kyle Johnson finished in a tie for 46th overall after a final round 6-over par. Junior Mike Sica had his best round of the tournament Wednesday, scoring a 4-over and finishing 56th overall.

Host and No. 11 UCLA easily surpassed everyone in the field as it won the Pac-10 title by 27 strokes

over nearest competitor No. 6 Arizona. No. 16 Arizona State finished third overall, followed by Stanford and No. 20 Washington.

Defending individual Pac-10 champion Jim Seki of Stanford was unable to repeat as UCLA's John Merrick outshot Seki by 12 strokes in the final round. Merrick shot an impressive 12-under par to lay claim to his first Pac-10 title. Seki shared the second place title with Arizona State's Brady Stockton.

Oregon has the next two weeks off as it awaits word from the NCAA West Regional announcements. The NCAA West Regional will be held at Washington National Golf Course in Auburn, Wash., May 15 through 17.

Scott Archer is a freelance writer for the Emerald.

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