

Dallas takes season opener against Sacramento

Dirk Nowitzki led the Mavericks in a 107-98 win over the Kings, tallying 33 points and 10 rebounds

BY JAIME ARON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS, Texas — While the Dallas Mavericks have an overhauled roster, a more conventional rotation and a new commitment to defense, they also still have Dirk Nowitzki.

Nowitzki scored 29 of his 33 points

over the first three quarters — helping Dallas to a steady lead — then came through by making two free throws with 15.5 seconds left to seal a 107-98 victory over the Sacramento Kings Tuesday night.

The Mavericks scored the game's first seven points and led by at least

that many from the end of the first quarter until Chris Webber hit a long jumper with 3:12 that made it 99-93. The Kings got within 103-98 on a three-point play by Brad Miller with just under a minute left.

Nowitzki kept them from getting any closer by rebounding a missed 16-footer by Peja Stojakovic and cashing in at the foul line. He came through on the other end, too, forcing Bobby Jackson to heave up a wild 3-pointer that clanged off the

backboard with about six seconds left. Josh Howard rebounded and made two more free throws to pad the lead.

The tight finish was no surprise considering these were the NBA's two top-scoring teams last season. Sacramento ended Dallas' season in the first round of the playoffs, a five-game beating that led to major changes — including rookie Devin Harris running the offense instead of Steve Nash and the addition of Erick Dampier to give the Mavericks a true center for the first time in years.

But it was Nowitzki who wasted no time making his presence felt.

He had an assist on the game's first basket and scored the second one on a pick-and-roll with Harris, marking the No. 5 pick's first career assist. In between, Dampier brought fans to their feet with a blocked shot that forced the Kings into a shot-clock violation.

Dallas' lead peaked at 19 early in the second half. Sacramento got within 10 until Nowitzki hit a high-arching 3-pointer over Miller as the third quarter ended. Nowitzki celebrated by backpedaling all the way to the bench at the other end of the court as the sellout crowd of 20,041 stood and cheered.

Nowitzki scored 10 points in the first and second quarters, and the buzzer-beater gave him nine in the third. He took only one shot in the fourth, finishing 12-of-19. He made both of his 3-point attempts and had 10 rebounds and five assists.

Harris had eight points, six assists and five rebounds. He showed his poise by making a nice pass to Michael Finley for a dunk that made the score 103-93, but was replaced by veteran Jason Terry with 58 seconds left after making a potentially costly rookie mistake.

Dampier scored nine points in the first quarter, but just two more after that. He also had three of his first five rebounds in the first period. Finley scored 18, and Harris finished with eight points and seven assists.

Miller led Sacramento with 24 points, and Webber added 21 points and 10 rebounds. Stojakovic was just 3-of-15 for 12 points.

Mike Bibby, who has had huge games against Nash in the past, was held to just eight points. Maurice Evans started in place of the injured Doug Christie and scored just two points. Matt Barnes had 17 off the bench and Jackson scored 11.

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Volleyball: Katie O'Neil tallied 43 digs against WSU

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reach its third consecutive 20-win season. The Huskies have recorded the most league wins since 1997, when they finished 13-5 in the Pac-10.

O'Neil digs into history

Oregon's Katie O'Neil posted the third-highest dig total in Pac-10 history with 43 against Washington State at McArthur Court. The senior libero has 266 digs this season, which equals her 2003 season total. O'Neil needs 116 digs to break into Oregon's top five list for digs in a season. She is fourth in the league in digs, averaging 4.93 per game, and has recorded 94 in her last four matches.

The Ducks (9-12, 1-10) recorded 242 attack attempts against the Cougars, which is the most this season by a Pac-10 team. In the match, Oregon's Kelly Russell took 80 swings, the most taken by a Pac-10 player this year.

California dreamin'

California faces off against a team it has not defeated in 37 tries — UCLA — after it plays No. 4 USC. Coming into the second contest of the season

against the Bruins, the Golden Bears hold an advantage in terms of national rank. California (12-7, 7-3) is No. 11 in the country, while UCLA (14-7, 7-4) has slipped to its lowest position of the season at No. 16.

Cal outside hitter Angie Pressey is only the second freshman to earn Pac-10 Player of the Week honors. The Heathrow, Fla., native contributed to the Golden Bears' second five-game match and first victory against Stanford this season with 25 kills. She hit at a .327 clip against the Cardinal, took 52 attempts and committed eight errors. She collected 13 digs and three blocks as well.

Pressey leads the team with 4.09 kills per game, ranking fourth in the conference. Her 225 kills are second-best for Cal behind senior Gabrielle Abernathy's 236.

On a negative note, Cal lost sophomore libero Jillian Davis after she suffered an ACL injury to her left knee during practice. The injury is expected to be season-ending. Davis' average of 5.43 digs per game led the conference going into last weekend.

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Jones: Character players better than wins for some Blazer fans

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than 40 points per game, and with these three on the floor, the basketball may never get inside the three-point line before it's shot.

Other than Allen and Lewis, Seattle doesn't have any proven scorers and figures to struggle against teams with strong low-post games all season.

Then there is Portland.

The Blazers missed the playoffs for the first time in 22 years last season, but fans have the addition of the good natured Theo Ratliff, which apparently means more to them than increasing their win total.

The Blazers signed Zach Randolph to a huge contract. I think he only deserved half of the nearly \$84 million they gave him, seeing that he doesn't show up half the time on defense.

Randolph and Ratliff, combined

with the less-than-spectacular defense of Shareef Abdur-Rahim will have to block about 500 shots this season to keep Portland in games. Neither Randolph nor Abdur-Rahim play very much defense, which isn't a good sign when the likes of Tim Duncan, Garnett, Martin and other great forwards are in the same conference.

But at least they will be nice to each other, right Portland fans?

This division realignment is a great thing for the NBA and the fans, who now have a better chance of their favorite team winning a division title.

Not so fast, Portland fans.

You'll have to live with the memories of Bill Walton, Rip City and other fond moments because this year isn't your time.

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