

Stoudemire hits 50 points against Portland on Sunday

The forward led Phoenix Suns to a 117-98 victory against Blazers on 20 of 27 shooting from the field

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Watching Amare Stoudemire score 50 points against the Portland Trail Blazers reminded teammate Quentin Richardson of one of the NBA's greatest all-time players.

"Amare Stoudemire looked like Wilt Chamberlain," Richardson said after the Suns' 117-98 victory over the Trail Blazers on Sunday night.

With the crowd of 18,166 cheering wildly in the final minutes as Stoudemire approached the 50-point mark, fans got their wish with 43.2 seconds remaining when the young Suns' phenom scored on a 15-foot turnaround jump shot to hit the half-century mark.

"I wasn't thinking about (scoring 50)," Stoudemire said. "I heard one of the fans say 46, and that's when I thought about it, but I wasn't pressing and trying to get 50 points. It just

came to me in the flow of the game.

"It feels great to do it at the young age of 22," he added. "That's the tip of the iceberg."

Stoudemire scored on a variety of shots — dunks, jumpers and power moves to the basket.

"It wasn't all power tonight, because a lot of moves were finesse out there," said Stoudemire, who also had 11 rebounds. "The power moves allow me to finesse it up and catch them off-guard."

The Suns have the NBA's best record at 26-4 and have won 22 of their last 24 games, including eight straight at home.

Richardson added 20 points, capping a key fourth-quarter 12-2 burst with a 3-pointer, and Shawn Marion and Joe Johnson each scored 15.

Darius Miles led Portland with 25 points, Zach Randolph had 22 points and 14 rebounds, and Shareef

Abdur-Rahim finished with 14 points and 10 rebounds.

Stoudemire, who had 20 points in the final period, shot 20 of 27 from the field and 10 of 17 from the foul line to set a new career high and amass the highest point total by a Phoenix player since Tony Delk scored 53 against Sacramento in a 121-117 overtime loss Feb. 2, 2001. Stoudemire's previous high was 38, set against Minnesota during his rookie year and against New Orleans earlier this season.

Only Tom Chambers, with 60 and 56, and Delk have scored more as a Suns player than Stoudemire.

"I told (Stoudemire) that if he starts learning to make free throws, he could score 75," Richardson said, laughing. "You don't see anyone miss seven shots and score 50."

Phoenix led only 83-81 before Stoudemire began the decisive run, scoring the first nine points. By the time he and Richardson finished the Suns' surge, Phoenix was safely ahead 95-83.

Seahawks crowned NFC West champs after win at home

BY TIM KORTE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — Matt Hasselbeck wore a smile on his face and a message on his cap and T-shirt: Seattle Seahawks, NFC West champions.

Hasselbeck threw two touchdown passes and got another TD on a sneak, leading the Seahawks to a 28-26 win over the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday to take the division and earned a first-round playoff game at home.

"You have a better chance at home," Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren said. "You should. It's a 'thank you' to your fans."

When the Seahawks (9-7) set their goals, winning the division ranked second only to making the playoffs. If they could land a home game or two, even better.

The Seahawks barely avoided another late meltdown. Atlanta's Warrick Dunn was stopped on a 2-point conversion attempt that would have forced overtime.

"I knew I wasn't in," Dunn said. "It was just one of those plays that we thought was going to be there, and it wasn't. They played it well."

I was trying to squeeze myself into a small crack and get in."

Reserve quarterback Matt Schaub threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Brian Finneran as time expired.

"To come up short like we did is not acceptable," Atlanta coach Jim Mora said. "But to run for 204 yards and to have drives with a rookie quarterback to win. That was outstanding."

Seattle's Shaun Alexander ran for 80 yards, finishing 1 yard behind Curtis Martin of the New York Jets (1,697) for the NFL's rushing title.

"It's too bad we didn't get the ball back," Holmgren said. "They ate up the clock with their final drive. He had a chance at the rushing title and just missed it."

It was a meaningless game for Atlanta (11-5), which lost its final two after securing the NFC's No. 2 seed in the playoffs two weeks ago.

Atlanta gets a first-round bye, while Seattle will host NFC West rival St. Louis next Saturday.

Schaub almost helped the Falcons win. Atlanta moved 69 yards in the final 4:28 behind Schaub and the running of Dunn.

Three NFL teams find way into playoff slots despite losses Sunday

Close losses and bad performances at the end of the season cause concern for new playoff team entrants

BY DAVE GOLDBERG
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Jets, Vikings and Rams all made it into the NFL playoffs Sunday.

New York and Minnesota backed in, the Vikings losing seven of their last 10 for the second straight season. The Jets lost 32-29 in overtime to the Rams, and the Vikings lost 21-18 to the Redskins.

But the Jets, who went 5-6 after starting 5-0, got in as an AFC wild card. And Minnesota and St. Louis both qualified in the NFC at 8-8 — the second time that's happened; Dallas and Detroit were .500 playoff teams in 1999.

The mess all meant that the NFC's hottest team got left out of the postseason.

That was New Orleans, which won its last four games, three on the road, including a 21-18 victory against the Carolina Panthers on Sunday to finish 8-8. Carolina, which lost to New England in the last Super Bowl, won five straight games after starting 1-7, but finished 7-9 and missed the playoffs after losing two of its last three games.

Buffalo, which had won six straight, blew a chance to make the playoffs by losing 29-24 at home to Pittsburgh, even though the Steelers rested many starters. With the Jets losing, the Bills (9-7) would have made the playoffs with a victory.

The Vikings will play Sunday afternoon at Green Bay (10-6), to

whom they have lost twice by the same score — 34-31 — at Lambeau Field on Nov. 14 and at the Metrodome on Dec. 24.

The Rams will be at Seattle on Saturday to open the wild-card round.

The Seahawks (9-7) clinched the NFC West by holding off Atlanta 28-26 Sunday.

But the Rams won both meetings between them this season.

Then they won in St. Louis 23-12.

The Jets will play at the AFC West champion San Diego Chargers (12-4) next Saturday as the fifth-seeded team. The Chargers beat Kansas City 24-17 on Sunday with backups.

New York beat the Chargers 34-28 in the second week, but that was before San Diego came together to win 10 of the last 12 games. AFC South champion Indianapolis (12-4) will be at home Sunday in a rematch against Denver (10-6).

Wrestling: Barker shines

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Parker showed great effort in his match against Mitch Manstedt but could not muster an escape or takedown late in the third period. Manstedt held on for a 6-3 win by decision.

Though the Ducks lost the dual, much was gained in their favor: Duals against top-ranked teams such as Nebraska should help Oregon prepare for post-season matches.

"As a team, it is crucial we wrestle matches of this caliber," Kearney said. "It keeps the team honest and motivated and will help us in the long run."

The day before the Nebraska dual, the Ducks were in Corvallis in the first of two Civil War duals against Oregon State. Much like most of Oregon's duals this season, the Ducks kept the score close and

wrestled well but lost by a close margin. The Beavers won by a score of 22-13 in front of 1,214 fans at the Gill Coliseum.

The 157-pound match that started the dual pitted true sophomore Cyle Hartzell against Joel Gibson. Hartzell's performance was anything but sophomore as he defeated Gibson 10-4 to improve his season record to an impressive 7-1.

The dual swayed back and forth, featuring many lead changes. The final match came with the 149-pound weight division as true freshman Nick Cautrell began his Duck career on the right foot with a 6-3 decision over Orlando Perez.

"I was really pleased with Nick (Cautrell) and Cyle (Hartzell)," Kearney said. "Both of those guys are going to have excellent careers here at Oregon."

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