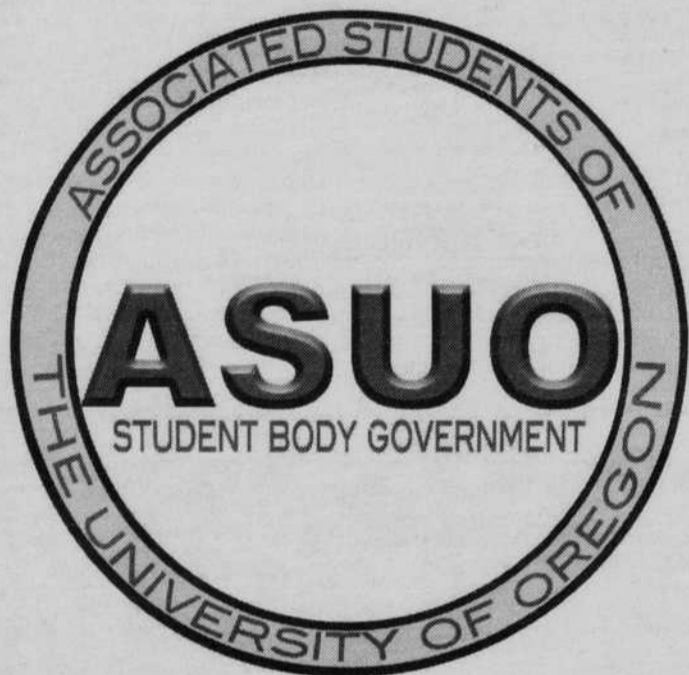


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Active Utah Jazz outplays inexperienced Trail Blazers

Point guard Jarrett Jack has a solid fourth quarter, but the team struggles as a whole to overcome the Jazz

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

The Portland Trail Blazers team at McArthur Court Thursday night had several similarities with the college team that typically uses the arena.

Whether it was scoring 44 points during the first three quarters, playing a mix of young players or having an off night shooting, the rebuilding Trail Blazers lost 92-73 to the Utah Jazz.

Afterward, the struggling Trail Blazers, losers of three of their last four games, tried to make sense of what appears to be a difficult season with less than two weeks before its Nov. 2 opener against the Minnesota Timberwolves.

"It's still preseason, but I think once the regular season starts and we're still losing like this, it's going to hurt me," said Ruben Patterson, a seven-year NBA veteran and one of few experienced players on the Portland roster.

Trailing at one point by 33 points, Portland, following the calming presence of point guard Jarrett Jack, trimmed the lead to within 20 early in the fourth quarter. Jack led several efficient plays on offense, running a fast break and feeding teammate Viktor Khryapa for a layup and a three-point play during the fourth quarter.

All this from a guy Portland Coach Nate McMillan said he didn't expect to play today. Jack played in three previous games, averaging 18.6 minutes per game. McMillan wanted to give the other point guards competing for the starting position, Steve Blake and Sebastian Telfair, some extra playing time during the preseason.

Blake and Telfair had so-so performances; the latter scored four points and making three turnovers in 18 minutes.

Jack came in and matched up against Utah point guard Deron

Williams, and Jack had six points and four assists in his fourth-quarter appearance. Just last spring, Jack and Williams were standouts at the college level. The 6-foot-3 Jack guided Georgia Tech, and Williams ran last season's No. 1 Illinois.

"Me and Deron have been playing against each other for a long time," Jack said. "To go up against somebody you grew up playing against, it was just great for me."

Rookies take time to adjust to the rigors of NBA life, and McMillan was happy with Jack's performance, McMillan said.

"Tonight, he came and played very aggressive," McMillan said. Williams first came into the game six minutes into the second quarter. During his first play on offense, Williams split two Trail Blazer defenders, stopping at the free-throw line and hitting a jumper. He finished with 12 points and two assists, showing a deft shooting touch alongside his standout passing ability.

For many of the Trail Blazers, playing before a smaller crowd in McArthur Court was an adjustment from playing in front of NBA crowds of more than 15,000 people.

"You have to take the same approach like if it was a sold-out arena," Jack said. "If you really enjoy this game and love this game, you (are) going to go out there and play hard whether there's 100 people in the stands or zero."

The Trail Blazers initially struggled to start the game, falling behind early to a shorthanded Jazz team. Power forward Carlos Boozer, who averaged 17 points and nine rebounds per game last season, sat out with a strained left hamstring. Matt Harpring did not play for personal reasons.

The Utah Jazz players who did participate made the difference with efficient play and strong performances from Andrei Kirilenko, Mehmet

Okur and Williams. Kirilenko missed 41 games last season after averaging 16 points and eight rebounds a game in 2003-04.

He showed little rust, playing with a face mask and taking advantage of the playmaking of Milt Palacio and Keith McLeod, who had five assists and four assists, respectively.

The Jazz opened the first quarter 10-2 with layups by Kirilenko and Brown before McMillan called his first timeout. Utah capped the first quarter with a Kris Humphries dunk for a three-point play.

Meanwhile, the Trail Blazers struggled as Darius Miles shot 1-for-10 in the first quarter. He finished 2-for-17 with seven points.

McMillan said Miles didn't disappoint him.

"He has to find his rhythm," McMillan said. "We are going to need him and Zach (Randolph) to create some points for us. That's part of those guys getting into the gym and working on their game and us getting those guys the shots they need."

Randolph is recovering from off-season knee surgery and only played 10 minutes, scoring four points. Last season, Randolph led the Trail Blazers with 19 points and 10 rebounds per game before a knee injury cut his season to 46 games. McMillan said a trainer told him in the second half that Randolph's knee was bothering him.

In the second quarter, the Jazz extended its lead to 47-29 by halftime. It boosted its lead to 75-44 at the end of the third quarter.

The experience of playing in a losing situation, although discouraging, can help this young Trail Blazers team, McMillan said.

"We are getting drilled here in preseason," McMillan said. "We're not close but ... what we're trying to do is make sure that we continue to compete and not throw in the towel or quit regardless of the situation."

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Horoscope by Holiday Mathis

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (October 24). The financial realm of your life blossoms over the next three months. Fortunes smile on you when you're completely committed to a project. Involve yourself in something bigger than you right away! Singles find new relationships this way, and couples infuse their love with fantastic energy. The connection between you and Pisces or Scorpio is intense. Your lucky numbers are: 2, 5, 7, 3 and 22.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Progress doesn't always seem like progress. In fact, you feel like you're going in circles -- probably because you are. But don't worry about it -- it's the way of the cosmos. You are still growing in awareness.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Be mindful of and sensitive to how others are relating to you. Listening helps you learn fast without having to go through the pitfalls that other people must experience. Tonight, you harvest what you have sown.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). There's an area of work out there that would really resonate with you, so don't waste your time in a job you hate. People who don't actively promote your well-being are actually allowing you to stay stuck.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Expecting something is a powerful mood lifter. Something that's coming by mail or by phone gives you a charge. You'll also get the chance to prove that you learned something from yesterday.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Decide what song you're going to sing -- metaphorically or actually -- and sing it loud and proud. It's so much more important to express your heart than it is to be acceptable to others.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). The obstacle you encounter, perhaps in the form of a Gemini or a fellow Virgo, is your greatest asset. In the long run, something good comes of this challenge, even if it takes awhile to see it.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). It's silly to avoid work. By doing so, you ensure that you will have much more work than you can do. Instead, approach work with a playful attitude. You'll be well-paid and possibly promoted.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Use your talents -- however big, small, important or trivial you believe them to be. Your contribution is much more significant and far-reaching than you can comprehend from where you stand today.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You are consistent in your efforts to make someone feel for you. Eventually, you can win over absolutely anyone with your personality, but at some point, you have to ask yourself if it's really worth it.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You come to a chasm in your life. There are several ways to get across: taking a hot air balloon, building a bridge or leaping. If you're going to leap, go full force -- you can't cross the divide in two small jumps.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You feel as though you're in some kind of space opera today. The forces of good and evil battle it out against a strange backdrop, like in front of your office vending machine. Stay out of the conflict, lest you get lasered.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). The costume of your life doesn't reflect your fine character nearly as well as it should. Take care of your clothes -- get the hems stitched, the holes sewn, and the dry cleaning and pressing done. Afterward, you'll feel like a star.

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