

Blazers offseason provides hope for future



**A.M.
SPORTS**

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Sports Editor

The Portland Trail Blazer season that started with such promise in a home win over the hated Lakers in October dissolved into injuries and a 13-game losing streak to end the season. However, there is hope for Blazermaniacs as the Blazers have a solid core group of players and a little wiggle room this offseason with more than \$10 million in salary cap space.

If new General Manager Neal Olshey decides to make a deal for the first time in his short stint at the helm, the Blazers have numerous players that would receive plenty of offers. Let's take a look at the six Blazers that are sure to return.

Damian Lillard, point guard: Lillard had a sensational rookie season, earning every Western Conference Rookie of the Month award and is certain to be named NBA Rookie of the Year later this year. Lillard started all 82 games, leading the league in total minutes played while averaging 18 points and 6.5 assists.

LaMarcus Aldridge, power forward: Aldridge made his second consecutive All-Star game, but he still does not provide a dominant presence on defense. Aldridge is still a very effective scorer with range out to 20 feet.

Nicolas Batum, small forward: Batum showed signs of breaking out and becoming the star that Portland paid \$10 million per season to retain, but a ~~wrist injury and inconsistent play~~ still leave the jury out on Batum.

Wesley Matthews, shooting guard: Matthews is a fiery competitor and has become a team leader on the Blazers, but he lacks the outside shooting consistency (39.8 percent on 3-pointers) to be an elite 2-guard in the NBA.

Meyers Leonard, center: Although completely over-matched at times, Leonard showed the athleticism, grit, determination and hustle that will make him a player someday.

Will Barton, small forward: Barton came on late in the season when injuries took a toll on Batum and Matthews to provide an offensive spark. Barton started the final five games of the season, averaging 15 points, six rebounds and three assists per game.

The Blazers will also try to keep backup point guard Eric Maynor, who provided a steady influence for the second unit after he was acquired from Oklahoma City late last season. Victor Claver probably deserves another year, and guard Elliott Williams is a question mark after being hurt for two straight seasons.

J.J. Hickson proved to be an effective scorer and rebounder while playing out of position at center, but he is probably going to get more money in free agency to sign elsewhere. Luke Babbitt, Joel Freeland, Sasha Pavlovic and Nolan Smith all appear headed out the door too.

While the Blazers probably won't be able to get the likes of Chris Paul or Dwight Howard this offseason, there are many intriguing players out there. The 2013 free agent class includes a long list of solid 3-point threats including: O.J. Mayo, Ray Allen, Monta Ellis, Jodie Meeks, J.R. Smith, Martell Webster, Mike Dunleavy and Carlos Delfino.

The market for a big man in the middle is pretty slim, but Chris Kaman, Andrew Bynum and Al Jefferson all fit Portland's needs.

Much of the Blazers' success next season will depend on the front office's success this off-season. Let's hope that Olshey can seal the deal on someone

BASEBALL: Cougars up and down season continues

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Four players wrapped out two hits apiece for the Cougars as Josh Combs, Thomas Kelly, Skyler Barkdull and Myers all kept the pressure on the Saints.

Kelly kept the Saints off balance with a variety of off-speed pitches and pinpoint control in his first complete game shutout. Kelly, at 6'2 and 165 pounds, is not going to overpower hitters, so he must mix it up with his off speed pitches.

"I just try to get ahead in the count and then try to make them chase," said Kelly. "I throw all three pitches just like my fastball. The curveball was dropping in and the changeup had them off balance."

Robinson was impressed that his team came together, offensively and defensively for the first time in a while.

"We've been pitching well, or we've been hitting well," said Robinson. "We haven't really tied a lot of games together in the total. Today, we pitched well, we defended for him really well and we hit enough to score runs."

Robinson said his young pitcher threw a great game.

"He's got three good pitches and he kept mixing them," said Robinson. "I think a lot of times they were swinging at change-ups not knowing they were change-ups. He did a great job of mixing pitches."

Myers, the Cougars lone returning All-Region honoree, was also impressed with the way his young teammate was pitching.

"His change-up was on, his curveball was on and he was spotting up with his fastball," said



Scott Myers, from Kearns, Utah, takes a cut in a recent game for Clackamas. Myers doubled with one out in the sixth inning and scored the lone run in the Cougars 1-0 win over Mt. Hood on Saturday in Gresham.

Nick Hadley The Clackamas Print

Myers.

Robinson also singled out his catcher, sophomore Thomas Kelly, as playing a great game.

"Our catcher is great. Thomas Kelly is playing great," Robinson repeated. "He calls a great game, he defends, he threw a guy out at first, threw a guy out at second. Between (Michael) Kelly and (Thomas) Kelly, the catcher and pitcher, they had a great game between the two of them."

The mood of the Clackamas team seemed to change after Myers belted a double with one out in the sixth inning. Marks singled him home and the Cougars finally broke through with a run after stranding two runners twice

in the first five innings.

"It seemed like everyone was up after that," said Myers. "Luke came up with a huge hit that we needed to score that run." Myers was ready and waiting for his pitch when he smacked his double.

"It was just a fastball," said Myers. "I knew he'd throw me low. I watched him and then finally I got ahead in the count. He gave me the pitch I wanted and I roped a double in the gap."

The Saints (20-10, 13-5) got back on track in the nightcap, as freshman pitcher Clint Burris held the Cougars to two hits over six innings in a 3-0 victory. The baseball team will be at home for its

next two doubleheaders. First, they play Lane on Saturday at 1 p.m., before hosting Linn-Benton on Tuesday, May 7 at 1 p.m.

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Scott Myers
Designated Hitter



Adeline Florean The Clackamas Print

Warm weather has arrived just in time as the Clackamas Community College baseball team gets a chance to play in front of the home crowd as they host three doubleheaders in the next two weeks. The Cougars host Lane this Saturday at 1 p.m. and then play Linn-Benton on Tuesday, May 7 at 1 p.m. Clackamas travels to Salem to play Chemeketa on Saturday, May 11, before hosting its final home game on Tuesday, May 14, against Mt. Hood at 1 p.m.

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