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SPORTS

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK



HAILEY O'BRIEN
Astoria

Vicki O'Brien

Competing in the Les Schwab South Coast Holiday Basketball Tournament in Coos Bay, the Astoria girls basketball team won two of three games, and O'Brien led the Lady Fish in scoring all three games. In a 60-13 win over Crook County, the senior guard scored 18 points (13 in the first quarter, equalling Crook County's total for the entire game) and she poured in another 18 in a 60-22 victory over Marshfield. In the finale (and probable state championship preview) against Philomath, O'Brien led Astoria with 15 points in a 51-50 loss to the Warriors. She made the all-tournament team, along with teammate Kelsey Fausett.



JORDAN POYER
Buffalo Bills

Buffalo Bills

On Dec. 15, Poyer had a fumble recovery and a late-game interception in the end zone that helped lock up a 17-10, playoff-clinching win at Pittsburgh. In a 24-17 loss at New England Dec. 21, Poyer had a team-high 10 tackles, with one forced fumble. Poyer currently leads the Bills in total tackles (69). The 2009 Astoria graduate has 105 combined tackles, which ranks 30th out of all defensive players (sixth among defensive backs) in the league. Poyer has three forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries. The Bills have the third-best defense in the league, behind New England and San Francisco.

Late comeback falls short as Trail Blazers lose to Utah Jazz

By **JAMIE GOLDBERG**
The Oregonian

SALT LAKE CITY — The Portland Trail Blazers nearly completed a remarkable comeback Thursday night.

The Blazers trailed the Utah Jazz by as many as 23 points in the third quarter, but Portland finally woke up in the final 12 minutes of the game, going on a 17-4 run to open the fourth quarter and pull within seven of the Jazz.

After scoring just eight points in the first three quarters, Blazers guard CJ McCollum unloaded for 17 points in the fourth quarter, driving to the basket and scoring with 4:39 left to help Portland pull within one of Utah.

But it was as close as Portland would get.

Carmelo Anthony's three-pointer with 22 seconds left fell way short. Anthony begged the referee to call a foul on the play to no avail. With the Blazers trailing by three, McCollum committed a foul to send Donovan Mitchell to the line. Mitchell made both free throws to give Utah an all but insurmountable 117-112 lead.

Utah (19-12) went on to eke out a 121-115 win over the Blazers (14-18) at Vivint Smart Home Arena, handing Portland its second straight loss. Despite the late comeback, the Blazers never led in Thursday's game.

"It was just a tough game," Blazers guard Damian Lillard said. "I thought they were the better team tonight, but I was really proud of how we fought. Having adversity in pretty much every quarter, we just kept fighting, we didn't separate, we stayed together and we gave ourselves a chance."

Portland is now 1-11 this season against teams with winning records.

The Blazers looked over-matched against the Jazz until the fourth quarter. Utah got off to a strong start behind an impressive offensive outing from Joe Ingles. Ingles scored seven of Utah's first 12 points. With just over eight minutes left in the first quarter, he faked a pass as he drove to the basket to send Blazers center Hassan Whiteside in the wrong direction before placing the ball into the net to give Utah a 12-2 lead. Portland trailed by 15 by the end of the first quarter.

The Blazers went on a 9-0 run to open the second quarter and pull within six points of the Jazz, but Portland, who trailed by 10 points



Jeff Swinger/AP Photo

Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard (0) drives past Utah Jazz forward Royce O'Neale (23) during the second quarter of the game in Salt Lake City on Thursday.

UP NEXT: BLAZERS

- Los Angeles Lakers (24-7) at Portland Trail Blazers (14-18)
- Saturday, 7 p.m. **TV:** NSNW

at halftime, came out flat in the third quarter as the Jazz extended their lead to 23, appearing to be well on their way to a rout.

Portland struggled to contain Utah's active offense throughout the first third quarters, consistently allowing the Jazz to take wide open threes. Ingles caused Portland problems all night, going 6 for 10 from three-point range and 10 for 15 from the field to finish with 26 points, while Mitchell scored 28 points in the second half, including 12 in the fourth quarter, to finish with a game-leading 35 points.

"We hadn't defended very much at all for the first three quarters and they got a lot of great looks," Lillard said. "You give an NBA team wide open shots from three, they get in the paint, they're getting offensive rebounds. You let a team have their way to start a game and they get confident and feeling good about themselves. It's hard to stop that."

Two nights after going a career-worst 0 for 10 from beyond the arc, Lillard led Portland's offense for the majority of the night, finishing

with a team-leading 34 points and eight assists. Lillard was the only Blazer with more than 10 points heading into the fourth quarter.

But the Blazers found a new gear in the fourth quarter. After struggling to contain Utah all night, Portland put in a much better defensive performance in the fourth quarter, holding the Jazz to just four points over the first four and a half minutes. After shooting 58.5 percent from the field and 44.4 percent from three-point range over the first three quarters, Utah shot just 22.2 percent from beyond the arc in the fourth quarter.

"The first three quarters were pretty discouraging," Blazers coach Terry Stotts said. "Utah did a nice job of making their shots, scoring in the paint. We didn't have a lot of answers for them early, but we made some shots and got competitive defensively and put ourselves in a position to win."

Whiteside, who recorded just eight points and six rebounds to snap his 15-game double-double streak, and Kent Bazemore, who finished with just six points and five rebounds, both remained on the bench in the fourth quarter as Stotts opted to ride substitutes Anfernee Simons and Skal Labissiere. Simons had a big game, breaking out of his shooting slump

to record 15 points, 10 rebounds and finish with a plus-22 in plus/minus, while Labissiere finished with 10 points, seven rebounds and a plus/minus of plus-19.

"It may have been one of (Anfernee's) best games of the season," Stotts said. "He had a tough defensive assignment, he was able to score. He shot efficiently. Gary (Trent Jr.) gave us good minutes. Skal was terrific. He was able to score his opportunities. He competed against (Rudy) Gobert. You look at the plus/minus of those guys and obviously, they had an impact on the game."

Portland forced Utah to take a timeout after pulling within seven of the Jazz four and a half minutes into the fourth quarter. In the huddle during the timeout, Lillard told his teammates to go out and steal the game. Portland came close, but their late-game outburst came just a little too late.

"We came out of the huddle saying, 'All right, the game is normal now, let's be solid, execute, keep competing, try to put the pressure on them and steal the game,'" Lillard said. "I thought we did that. We just came up short."

The Blazers will face another big challenge Saturday when they return home to take on the first-place Los Angeles Lakers at 7 p.m. at the Moda Center in the first game of a two-game homestand.

BOYS BASKETBALL

Astoria picks up first win, 51-34 over Elma

The Astorian

A short-handed Astoria boys basketball team picked up its first win of the season Thursday night, in the last game of day one in the Vince Dulcich Memorial tournament at the Brick House.

With players out of town for the holidays — or on the bench with injuries — the Fishermen responded by building a 28-16 halftime lead over Elma, on their way to a 51-34 victory.

Xander Marincovich poured in 19 points and Isaac Brockman added 16 for the Fishermen, who improved to 1-7. (The Fishermen were scheduled to play Friday night vs. Redmond in a semifinal game).

"We only had five varsity players, so we knew we had to have some guys step up tonight," said Astoria coach Kevin Goin. "And I was really proud of everybody. We were patient on offense and we did a nice job with our press break, which gave us some easy baskets."

"Niko (Boudreau, a freshman post) did a good job on the boards, and Judd (Field, a freshman guard) attacked the hole really well," he said. "We had four junior varsity kids playing, and two of them scored, so I was real pleased with how we competed."

In other first round boys' games of the tournament, Tillamook defeated Centennial, 54-52; Marshfield edged Mark Morris, 67-66 and Redmond topped Rainier, 63-39.

SCOREBOARD

BOYS BASKETBALL				
Astoria 51, Elma 34				
ELM (34): Nick Church 11, Witt 9, Moore 6, Edenstrom 2, Jones-Wyeth 2, Aho 2, Elliott 2.				
AST (51): Xander Marincovich 19, Brockman 16, Williams 5, Matthews 4, Field 3, Altheide-Nielson 2, Boudreau 2, Tumbarello, B.Stenblom.				
Elma	9	7	8	10—34
Astoria	12	16	9	14—51