



Metro/Sports

Blazers flirt with disaster... and he show's up

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) - The Portland Trail Blazers have been close to this kind of loss for some time. And the Indiana Pacers were in just the mood to give it to them.

"We are not tough right now," said Brian Grant, the only Blazers player who showed any grit in Monday night's 93-91 loss to Indiana. "We have got to get tough; we have no scrap. Lately we have been struggling, the last four or five games. Just getting by."

The Blazers had won three straight and nine of 10, but since a 36-point win over Atlanta on Nov. 13, Portland has hardly looked like the dominant team everyone expected when owner Paul Allen put together a starting lineup with a salary of about \$53 million.

During that span, the Blazers were pushed to the limit by Orlando, Philadelphia, Charlotte, Minnesota and Houston - which are a combined 32-37, and they lost to Cleveland.

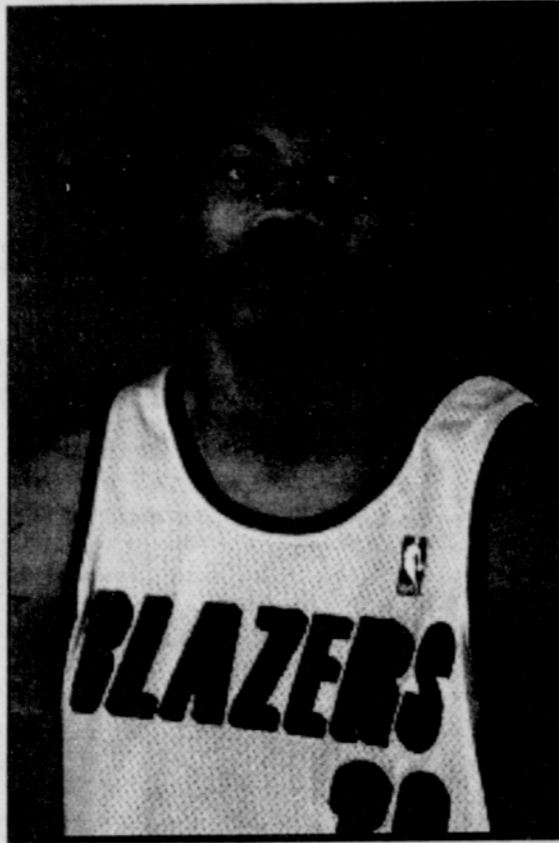
"We have been flirting with disaster for some time now," Blazers coach Mike Dunleavy said after his team fell to 13-3 overall and 5-1 at home. "A lot of things contributed to this loss. We didn't have good shot selection and we didn't get many loose balls. Indiana played a really energetic game. They deserved to win it." The Pacers worked harder, snaring

up-for-grabs rebounds and hitting shots when they had to. After Sunday night's 102-91 loss at Seattle - Indiana's fifth in seven games - coach Larry Bird ripped his veterans, saying if they wouldn't put forth the effort, he would play his younger players.

"There's no secret in this game: If you play hard and play with some desire, you're going to win a lot of games," he said.

Still, he didn't sound satisfied. Asked if his players were listening when he told them he'd shake up the lineup if their play didn't improve, Bird said: "They better be, because I've had enough of it. I really have. Guys get paid a lot of money to play hard, and they should come out here and respect the game, and go after it like they want to win."

"I'm still the go-to guy on this team," Miller said. "I don't care if I go 0-for-20. The ball better be in my hands at



the end of the game. If the ball is not going to be in my hand, I shouldn't be around here."

"We've been stumbling for the last couple of weeks, and it's something we felt was going to catch up on us," Pippen said. "We're not getting out and running and scoring."

Rasheed Wallace had 20 points and 11 rebounds for Portland.

Couples hacks way out of shrub to records, big payday

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fred Couples took a wild trip through the 1999 Skins Game, whacking shots out of rocks, sand and even a flowering shrub.

A model of inconsistency, Couples still managed to rewrite a string of records as he took the tournament title for the third time and won \$635,000 in the 18-hole event. His total take was a Skins Game all-time high, and he won \$410,000 of that on one hole, also a tournament record, with a scrambling birdie on No. 18.

The finishing hole was typical of Couples' play over the two days, when he either was hitting into trouble or knocking in birdie putts.

On No. 18, he did both.

"I had nine birdies, and I bet I still only shot par," said Couples, alluding to the fact that individual scores aren't kept.

Despite already being the Skins Game career-leading money-winner, Couples hadn't planned to play this year. He joined the foursome as a replacement for the late Payne Stewart.

With the \$410,000 and tournament title riding on No. 18, Couples began by pulling his drive off the fairway to the left. The ball sailed into a shrub and wedged in between blooms, 6 inches off the ground.

No problem. Couples poked a recovery shot into the fairway, then sailed a 4-iron shot some 210 yards, stopping the ball 15 feet from the pin. After watching Sergio Garcia



miss a 10-foot try for birdie, Couples then calmly rolled in his putt.

Skins game competitors donate 20 percent of the money they win in the tournament to charity, and Couples chose to donate 30 percent of his earnings to the Payne Stewart Memorial Fund, honoring his friend who died in a plane crash on Oct. 25.

Garcia donated 20 percent of his money to the same fund, and O'Meara split his donation between the Stewart fund and another charity he picked to honor the late Winnie Palmer, Arnold Palmer's wife.

Couples, who won a record 11 skins as he added the 1999 title to his victories in 1995 and 1996, again proved well-suited to the Skins Game format, in which horrible play on some holes can be offset by good shots and big putts at the right time.

Sampras ready to do battle with Agassi in 2000

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pete Sampras made a point by outplaying Andre Agassi in the last match of the decade, setting up an intriguing battle for tennis supremacy next year. After closing a frustrating, injury-dogged season by beating the world number one in straight sets at the ATP Tour world championship final on Sunday, Sampras was elegant enough to admire his long-time rival.

"Andre has played more and been more consistent," he said of Agassi's tremendous run which saw him finish the year in top spot for the first time in his career. "Winning two grand slams and being in the final of another

doesn't happen very often. He deserves it."

But Sampras, who ended the year as the number one player for a record sixth consecutive time in 1998, did not dismiss a suggestion that he remained the best player in the world despite Agassi's achievements.

"We could argue about that all day," he said after equalling Ivan Lendl's record of five triumphs in the year-end event with an impressive 6-1 7-5 6-4 victory. "Maybe it sent him a message but that's not the way I look at it. It's not a personal thing with Andre." Sampras, who has dominated men's tennis in the 1990s, completed only eight tournaments this year but

when free from injury, he was still in a class of his own. "I've never questioned my ability when I play against the best players in the world but to be honest I didn't expect I could play at that level here." Despite competing in so few tournaments this year, Sampras still found time to earn a few more lines in the record books, becoming the only player this century to win six Wimbledon and equalling Australian Roy Emerson's record of 12 grand slam titles.

After winning in Los Angeles in August, he became the man with most weeks number one in the history of the ATP rankings with a total 271 weeks - one more than Lendl.

Trevor Woods is down, but not out as Marshfield prepares for 4A championship

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sometimes, the emotional highs of the football playoffs are tempered with pain. That was the case Friday night at Civic Stadium.

As Marshfield lined up for the finish of its Class 4A quarterfinal game against Central Catholic, its leader lay sedated on morphine in a Portland hospital bed.

Trevor Woods' left leg was in traction. A Central Catholic player hit him low after he completed a 13-yard pass; the bone snapped above the knee. The injury ended the high school career of one of Marshfield football's great leaders.

Later, with 1:12 left, Marshfield trailed 21-17. The Central Catholic fans were celebrating as backup quarterback Luke Morrow took the snap.

On fourth and 28 from the Pirates' 16, the desperate play unfolded as planned. Three receivers raced down the left sideline. Morrow heaved a long pass to a clump of players. The ball, which was tipped twice, floated into the arms of an uncovered Mitch Wade. The Marshfield receiver sprinted untouched for the winning score.

Back at Legacy Emanuel Hospital & Health Center, news of Marshfield's

victory boosted Woods.

Woods, who has a 4.0 grade-point average, is a terrific athlete, but an even better teammate.

"He is the best leader I've had in 29 years of coaching high school football," Marshfield coach Kent Wigle said. "He is pretty special when it comes to that."

This season was the Coos Bay native's first as a varsity starter. Few Pirates quarterbacks, however, were better prepared. Woods' long apprenticeship began in the fourth grade as a Marshfield ball boy.

He played flag football and trained as a gymnast in grade school. In the seventh grade, he began pole vaulting and playing tackle football.

The speed and agility required by the vault made Woods a better quarterback. What helped him most, though, was the mental discipline he developed at national track meets.

Woods' poise was paramount in a season-opening victory over Midwestern League rival Churchill. The powerful Lancers knocked Woods down and harassed him throughout the game. But the lanky senior stood in the pocket and made plays.

In the first round of the playoffs against Glencoe, Woods again

shined. Late in the game, Woods led the trailing Pirates on a 70-yard drive. Marshfield overcame a sack and two 15-yard penalties. On second and 25, Woods completed a 17-yard pass. On third and eight, he ran the option for a first down. With 40 seconds left, the Pirates scored to win 21-17.

Woods is not a rah-rah leader. He is quiet before games. But he doesn't miss a chance to praise his teammates. And he never criticizes them for mistakes.

And so on Friday, when Woods was carried into his father's van in the first quarter, his substitute ran over to speak to him. Morrow, a junior, also grew up with football. Morrow's father, Gene, retired this year after coaching Newport High School for 45 years.

Morrow told Woods not to worry. The Pirates would win for him. They kept their word.

Woods will be on the sideline Saturday at Autzen Stadium for Marshfield's semifinal game against Beaverton. "They won't be able to keep me away from that," he said.

The team won't have Woods' 1,730 yards passing or his 18 touchdowns, but it will have the best part. Even on crutches, Trevor Woods will find some way to contribute.

NBA

Eastern Conference

Team	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10	Stk.	Home	Away	Conf.
Miami	11	3	.786	-	8-2	W-3	7-1	4-2	8-2
New York	8	7	.533	3 1/2	4-6	W-2	4-1	4-6	5-3
Boston	7	7	.500	4	4-6	L-3	6-3	1-4	7-6
Orlando	7	7	.500	4	5-5	W-1	3-3	4-4	5-5
Philadelphia	7	8	.467	4 1/2	6-4	W-2	3-4	4-4	6-2
Washington	4	10	.286	7	3-7	L-2	3-5	1-5	2-9
New Jersey	2	12	.143	9	1-9	L-2	1-5	1-7	1-7
Toronto	9	5	.643	-	6-4	W-2	4-2	5-3	5-3
Charlotte	8	6	.571	1	6-4	L-1	7-1	1-5	6-4
Milwaukee	8	6	.571	1	5-5	L-1	5-2	3-4	4-5
Indiana	8	7	.533	1 1/2	5-5	W-1	4-2	4-5	5-5
Detroit	7	7	.500	2	7-3	L-1	5-3	7-4	6-7
Cleveland	6	6	.500	2	5-5	W-1	5-2	1-4	5-5
Atlanta	5	9	.357	4	4-6	W-1	4-2	1-7	5-4
Chicago	1	12	.077	7 1/2	1-9	L-7	1-3	0-9	1-5

Western Conference

Team	W	L	Pct.	GB	L10	Stk.	Home	Away	Conf.
Sacramento	9	2	.818	1/2	8-2	L-1	7-0	2-2	8-1
Portland	13	3	.813	-	8-2	L-1	5-1	8-2	7-1
Seattle	11	3	.786	1	8-2	W-2	6-0	5-3	7-1
L.A. Lakers	10	4	.714	2	7-3	W-2	6-2	4-2	6-3
Phoenix	9	4	.692	2 1/2	7-3	W-5	7-1	2-3	2-3
L.A. Clippers	4	9	.308	7 1/2	3-7	L-2	2-4	2-5	1-7
Golden State	2	11	.154	9 1/2	2-8	L-6	1-6	1-5	1-8
San Antonio	12	3	.800	-	8-2	W-5	7-0	5-3	6-2
Utah	8	6	.571	3/4	6-4	W-1	6-2	2-4	6-4
Minnesota	6	5	.545	4	6-4	W-1	5-2	1-3	5-4
Denver	6	6	.500	4 1/2	5-5	L-1	6-2	0-4	3-5
Dallas	5	10	.333	7	3-7	L-1	4-2	1-8	3-6
Houston	4	11	.267	8	4-6	W-1	1-6	3-5	4-8
Vancouver	3	11	.214	8 1/2	1-9	L-8	3-5	0-6	2-8

NFL

West

Team	W	L	T	Pct.
Seattle	8	2	0	.800
Kansas City	5	5	0	.500
Oakland	5	5	0	.500
San Diego	4	6	0	.400
Denver	4	7	0	.364

East

Team	W	L	T	Pct.
Indianapolis	8	2	0	.800
Miami	8	3	0	.727
Buffalo	7	4	0	.636
New England	6	4	0	.600
N.Y. Jets	4	6	0	.400

Central

Team	W	L	T	Pct.
Jacksonville	9	1	0	.900
Kennesee	8	2	0	.800
Pittsburgh	5	5	0	.500
Baltimore	4	6	0	.400
Cleveland	2	9	0	.182
Cincinnati	1	10	0	.091

It's a scientific fact - he's fuming inside

After just minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke, his immune system is weakened, blood thickens and his heart beats faster.

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