Blazers Future Bright after Playoff Run

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"Riiiipppp Ciiiitttyyyy!"

The hometown fans went wild.

The Blazers were considered an iffy pick to even get to the playoffs, let alone make it past the first round. But a couple of key acquisitions and maturation in its star players made Portland one of the most promising teams in the NBA.

"A lot of people had us ninth or 10th in the West, they didn't think we would be able to compete the way that we did. We worked hard, we believed in ourselves," Lillard said.

Portland's season got off to a fast start. The team opened 24-5 to rise to the top of the Western Conference standings, boosted by the offseason acquisition of center Robin Lopez and a seasoned point guard in Mo Williams, who backed up Lillard and sparked the Blazers' bench.

Lillard and forward LaMarcus Aldridge went on to be All-Stars. Aldridge was making his third straight trip to the annual showcase, while Lillard became the first player to participate in all five events staged during All-Star weekend.

The team slumped slightly in March, going 4-9. The slide was capped by a 95-85 loss at Orlando on March 25. But Portland rebounded by winning nine of their final 10 games, wrapping up the regular season with a five-game winning streak.

The March swoon coincided in part with the absence of Aldridge, who missed seven games because of a lower back contusion. His return steadied the team for the push toward the playoffs.

The Blazers finished the regular season with 54 wins, the team's most since the 2008-09 season, and bettered their record by 21 wins over last season for the biggest turnaround in franchise history.

Aldridge finished the regular season with career highs in points (23.2) and rebounds (11.1), his success augmented by the play of Lopez in the middle. He is the only Blazer besides Sidney Wicks (1971-72) to average more than 23 points and 11 rebounds in a season.

Aldridge averaged 26.2 points and 10.6 rebounds in the playoffs. His 46 points in the postseason opener against the Rockets set a franchise record for most points in the playoff game.

Lillard averaged 20.7 points and 5.6 assists in the regular season while Lopez averaged 11.1 points and 8.5 rebounds. Lopez has made 326 offensive rebounds this season, setting a new franchise record, and he had a career-high 29 double-doubles.

The Blazers defeated the Rockets in six games — capped by Lillard's stunning 3-pointer — but fell in the Western Conference semifinals in five games to the San Antonio Spurs.

The Blazers returned to the playoffs this season for the first time since 2011. After getting bounced in the first round their previous six tries, the series against Houston advanced the Blazers to the second round for the first time since 2000.

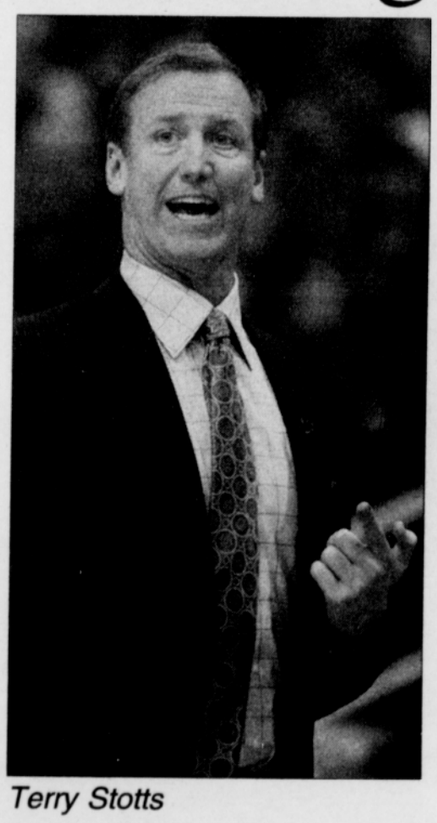
Spurs coach Gregg Popovich had nothing but compliments for the Blazers.

"I congratulate those guys for playing as hard as they did," the coach said. "They have got a bright future. They have a bunch of young guys who play their butts off."

Stotts said there were many positives about this season.

"It's important that we look back at what we were able to accomplish this year," Stotts said. "We got a taste of the playoffs. We got a taste of success. It is something we can build on going into next season."

Coaching Contract Extended



Terry Stotts

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zation," said Blazers General Manager Neil Olshey. "This extension illustrates our confidence in him as our head coach as well as the Portland Trail Blazers' continued commitment to building a model of consistency and stability."

Stotts led the Trail Blazers to a 54-win season, marking the largest improvement in franchise history and the sixth-best record all-time after the team went 33-49 the previous year. Portland won its first playoff series in 14 seasons, defeating the Houston Rockets in six games and setting up a Western Conference Semifinal matchup with the San Antonio Spurs. The postseason berth was the team's first since 2010-11.

"Portland is a unique and special place and I'm very proud to be the head coach of the Trail Blazers," said Stotts. "We started the process two seasons ago and laid the foundation for success. I look forward to the possibilities of the upcoming seasons."

49ers Draft Former Grant Star

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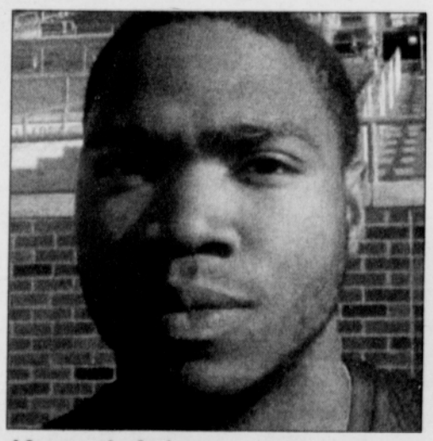
land, has been drafted by the San Francisco 49ers.

Acker was the No. 4 pick in the sixth round (180th overall) of last week's NFL Draft.

He was a three-year starter at SMU and earned second-team All Conference USA honors. The football star also boasts a 36-inch vertical leap.



Kenneth Acker

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