

NBA

Lillard highlights big night for Trail Blazers

Portland hits 19 three-pointers to quiet Thunder

By MALIKA ANDREWS
Associated Press

PORTLAND — After hitting his third consecutive 3-pointer, Damian Lillard flapped his arms above his head and motioned to the crowd while screaming, “Come on man, let’s go!”

“I got some good looks at the rim and let them fly,” Lillard said. The star guard scored 31 points, including five 3-pointers in the last 3:07, and the Portland Trail Blazers rallied to beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 115-110 on Sunday night.

Portland coach Terry Stotts said calling Lillard’s performance “big” would be an understatement.

“You don’t see that very often,” Stotts said.

CJ McCollum added 22 points for Portland, which hit a season-high 19 3-pointers to snap a three-game losing

streak. Lillard finished with eight 3s, matching his career high.

Thunder guard Russell Westbrook nearly had his fourth triple-double of the season, but fell just short with 25 points, 15 assists and nine rebounds. Last season, Westbrook led the NBA with 11 triple-doubles.

Kevin Durant had 28 points for Oklahoma City and has scored 20 or more in 23 consecutive games.

With 3:19 remaining, Andre Roberson hit a buzzer-beating 3 to put Oklahoma City up 103-95. That started a 3-point shootout. Lillard hit three straight 3s and Allen Crabbe drained another to cut the Thunder’s lead to 108-107 with 2 minutes left.

Lillard wasn’t done.

He hit two more 3s to give Portland a three-point lead, and an offensive foul on Oklahoma City with a minute left brought fans to their feet. But it was Mason Plumlee’s block for the Blazers with 30.9 seconds left, Lillard said, that made all the difference.



Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard gestures after making a three point basket during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Portland, Ore., Sunday.

AP Photo/Craig Mitchelldyer

“Changed the game completely,” Lillard said. “That was the game-winner right there.”

Lillard finished with 17 points in the final quarter. Durant went scoreless in the fourth.

“They played well in the fourth and we didn’t,” Durant said. “All those made shots kind of broke our backs.”

The loss ended a four-game winning streak on the road for the Thunder.

The Blazers and Thunder

kept it close in a sloppy first quarter. Steven Adams slammed down a one-handed dunk for Oklahoma City, and Maurice Harkless answered with a 3.

Portland led 52-46 at halftime. Westbrook had just two points heading into the break.

Lillard’s eight points in 2 minutes allowed the Blazers to open up their lead to 65-55 in the third quarter. Quick points from the Thunder, including a 3-pointer and a free throw by Adams and a

running jumper from Durant, trimmed Portland’s lead to two.

The Thunder rallied to take the lead, but McCollum’s 3 at the buzzer to end the third brought the Blazers to 85-80.

TIP-INS

Thunder: Durant has scored 20 or more points against the Trail Blazers in the last five meetings. ... It was the second of four matchups between the teams this season. Oklahoma City won 106-90 on Dec. 16.

Trail Blazers: Former Oregon running back LaMichael James was among the fans in courtside seats. James is currently a free agent in the NFL. ... Portland’s bench outscored Oklahoma City’s 35-16. ... Portland’s 44 3-point attempts were a franchise record.

DURANT ON THE RALLY

“They were coming off pick-and-rolls, shooting fall-away 3s, step-back 3s. You’ve got to give them credit. That’s what they do. They have two guards that make shots,” Durant said.

ABOUT ALL THOSE 3s

All of Lillard’s field goals in the final quarter were from 3-point range. He was 5 of 8 from beyond the arc in the period. ... Lillard’s seventh 3-pointer of the game was the 700th of his career. He and Golden State’s Klay Thompson are the only active players with 700-plus 3s in their first four seasons. ... Lillard has made eight 3-pointers in a game three times.

UP NEXT

The Thunder continue their road trip at Minnesota on Tuesday.

The Trail Blazers host Utah on Wednesday.

CHAMPIONSHIP: Henry scores three touchdowns for Alabama

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won its three previous championship game appearances in runaway fashion. This game was an instant classic — a welcome relief for fans who sat through the blowouts that turned the New Year’s Six lineup into a dud. It finally turned on maybe the boldest call of Saban’s career.

“This was a great challenge for us,” Saban said.

With 10:34 left in the fourth quarter and Alabama having just tied the game with a short field goal, Saban took a gamble to try to keep the ball away from Watson and the Tigers. He called for a popup outside kick that Alabama defensive back Marlon Humphrey caught over the shoulder at midfield.

Tide ball.

“I think that changed the momentum of the game, and our guys finished it,” Saban said.

Moments later, Alabama took back the lead. For the second time, Clemson (14-1) lost track of the tight end Howard in coverage and Jake Coker hit him in stride deep for a 51-yard touchdown to make it 31-24 with 9:45 left.

Clemson and Watson proved to be every bit Alabama’s equal. The Tigers just kept coming.

Watson led Clemson to a field goal to make it 31-27, and boom! Another Alabama big play. Drake broke free and streaked down the sideline for a 95-yard kickoff return touchdown, diving the last 5 yards to the pylon.

Watson threw his third touchdown pass to make

it 38-33 with 4:40 left, and then Alabama went back to its workhorse Heisman Trophy winner. Derrick Henry plunged into the end zone for his third touchdown of the game to make it 45-33 with 1:07 left.

Watson threw another touchdown pass, but would not get another chance. Clemson’s inside kick went out of bounds. Coker took a knee and after a two-year drought that felt like eternity in Tuscaloosa, Alabama was back on top.

The Crimson Tide became the second team in college football’s poll era, dating back to 1936, to win four titles in seven seasons.

Alabama joins Notre Dame, which won four titles from 1943-49. For Saban, it is his fifth national championship — four in his

nine seasons at Alabama — leaving him only one short of former Tide coach Bear Bryant for the most titles in history.

Watson gave the Tide all it could handle, throwing for 405 yards and four touchdowns, and conjuring up memories of Vince Young’s miraculous performance for Texas in the 2006 Rose Bowl that derailed Southern California’s dynasty.

The sophomore, who finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting, had 478 total yards against a loaded Tide defense that was the toughest in the country and bested Young’s 467 yards against the Trojans. But Watson couldn’t finish the job the way Young did in Pasadena, California.

Instead, Saban and the Tide raised another trophy,

its first in this new playoff system, and got another confetti shower. It is the Tide’s 10th national title in the poll era, more than any other school.

The Tide hit Clemson early with Henry, who scored the game’s first touchdown on a 50-yard burst through the middle. He finished with 158 yards on 36 carries. Howard was the offensive player of the game with five catches for 208 yards, including a 63-yarder that set up Alabama’s final score.

After Watson and walk-on Hunter Renfrow hooked up for two touchdown passes to give Clemson a 14-7 lead at the end of the first quarter, Henry tied it up with a 1-yard plunge.

Back and forth it went. Throughout Alabama’s

unprecedented run under Saban, the Tide was hardly challenged in a championship game. Alabama pulled away from Texas for Saban’s first Tide title. Alabama blanked LSU for No. 2 and crushed Notre Dame to repeat.

Trying to become the first FBS team to go 15-0, Clemson did not crumble under the force of Alabama’s might. But all those five-star recruits and future NFL players that dot the Alabama roster showed they also have plenty of resiliency and toughness. And Saban, the quintessential CEO coach, showed he had a little riverboat gambler in him.

That onside kicked stunned the stadium and Clemson, and brought a big grin to the face of the country’s most serious coach.

EOU WRESTLING: One coach to lead both teams

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\$300,000 from State Rep. Greg Smith from the Oregon Legislature to make it happen, and the Mountaineer athletic department will aim for 20 to 25 wrestling student-athletes by the fall of 2016.

Weissenfluh said the immediate priorities include hiring one coach to lead both programs, assembling a competitive schedule, and recruiting.

“We will be competing in the NAIA and the Women’s [Collegiate] Wrestling Association as an independent,” said Weissenfluh.

Although Quinn Coliseum will be the home for EOU wrestling meets, the university is looking to pinpoint a designated practice site. Weissenfluh ensured that the

department has “multiple” options for a practice facility and that it is in the final stages of narrowing it down.

In addition to the \$300,000 startup fund, EOU President Tom Insko stated that the university received commitments of up to \$200,000 from alumni and the Restore College Wrestling group in support of the program.

Insko said adding men’s and women’s wrestling would not only help enrollment, but also improve the energy on campus.

“I’m extremely excited about the energy that this program will bring and the opportunity to reconnect with alumni that we’ve lost connection with,” said Insko.

Both Insko and Weissenfluh are hopeful that

EOU will become a hub for high schoolers originating from successful wrestling programs in the area, such as Hermiston and Culver, which have combined for eight state championships since 2007.

“It opens up that we can be a part of the conversation,” said Weissenfluh. “When these students are exploring their opportunities of where they want to further their education and their athletic careers, EOU is now a viable option.”

Insko also commented that EOU would be the only women’s wrestling program in the inland northwest.

While women’s wrestling is making its inaugural appearance in La Grande, the EOU men’s wrestling team is making a comeback since its days as a storied program in

the 1960s and 1970s.

The Mountaineer men’s wrestling team notched three NAIA individual championships in 1967, 1969, and 1974. As a team, EOU mustered four top-10 finishes in 1967-69 and 1971. Perhaps the most decorated wrestler in EOU history, Hall of Famer Rollin Schimmel registered an individual title in 1967 after taking home runner-up honors in 1964 and 1966. He compiled an overall record of 94-9-1 as a Mountaineer.

“We as a university and as an athletic department are really looking forward to the addition of men’s and women’s wrestling and what it will bring to our campus, our community, and our region,” concluded Weissenfluh.



Staff photo by Sam Barbee

Hermiston coaches Dave Ego (center) and Dennis Stefani greet their players after the Bulldogs clinched their 56-53 win Saturday over Summit.

BULLDOGS: Summit trap gives HHS problems

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cut the lead in half again at 54-51.

Summit began trapping everything, and Hermiston was allowing it by dribbling into the corners just past the timeline to make the traps easier for Summit.

“I think part of that is — and the next game we’ll probably be better at that — because they haven’t played in that situation very much, this group of kids,” Ego said. “You have to learn to play under pressure and I thought that by and large we did that most of the night.”

Then things got interesting.

“If we made our free throws, it wouldn’t have been an issue,” Ego said.

Neal again made one of two, then Andy Jones made a layup through a foul to get Summit within two a 55-53. On the free throw, Neal fouled Jason Garcia, sending the senior to line

for one-and-one. Just after the foul, Hurley putback the missed attempt creating confusion that took nearly five minutes to figure out. Garcia missed his free throw, Neal was fouled, again made one of two, and Jones’ desperation 3 at the buzzer went begging, giving Hermiston its best win of the season.

“The kids are coming around with attitudes and coming around with the work ethic we think they have to have,” he said. “If we can transpose that into practice as well as games, we’ll be a better team every week.”

Hermiston visits Sunny-side (WA) on Tuesday for a 7:30 p.m. tip.

SHS (8-2) 16 14 11 12 — 53
HHS (8-6) 14 13 14 15 — 56
SUMMIT — J. Hurley 13, N. Mason 13, K. Corneit 10, C. Collins 4, C. Baker 4, R. Wells 3, J. Garcia 2, S. Kent 2, A. Jones 2, E. Wasserman, C. Mason.
HERMISTON — A. Naillon 20, D. Neal 17, C. Flores 15, A. James 2, P. Peterson 2, P. Wicks, H. Walls, J. Garcia, C. Ortiz, B. Palmer.
3-pointers — SHS 4, HHS 5. Free throws — SHS 10-18, HHS 3-13. Fouls — SHS 21, HHS 16.

SEAHAWKS: Lynch will be evaluated on daily basis

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moving forward on Monday after one of the more memorable playoff games in their history.

Instead of speaking about all the turmoil of the season, Carroll was getting his players prepared for a trip to Carolina on Sunday in the divisional round of the NFC playoffs.

It seemed so unlikely when Walsh lined up for his potential winning kick with 26 seconds left, only to see the Minnesota kicker rush his attempt and badly pull it to the left, leaving the Seahawks in a state of stunned euphoria.

Richard Sherman had nearly blocked one of Walsh’s made attempts earlier in the game and Carroll said re-watching the game it was obvious that Walsh was quicker in his approach and kick than his previous attempts.

“The final kick was kicked

much faster than their other kicks. I don’t need to give you the times but it was considerably faster,” Carroll said. “For whatever reason they sped up their mechanism. (Sherman) couldn’t have been closer. We can’t figure out how he didn’t get it. So they went quite a bit faster.”

Seattle’s unlikely victory was the result largely of its defense that kept Adrian Peterson wrapped up twice this season and forced a critical fumble by Peterson early in the fourth quarter.

In two games against Seattle this season, Peterson had 31 carries for 63 yards. The Vikings managed only 58 yards rushing and became the seventh team in the past eight games Seattle has held under 100 yards rushing.

“I thought it was a tremendous illustration of what it takes to play great run defense against a really excellent foot-

ball player,” Carroll said. “It was play after play after play of continuing to do the right thing. That’s how it goes. It’s not just how tough you are or how fast you run, you’ve got to do things right. The guys are doing a great job of that.”

Seattle’s victory means another week of pondering the status of running back Marshawn Lynch, who did not make the trip to Minnesota after deciding on Friday he was not going to be able to play.

Carroll said there was no setback, simply Lynch telling the Seahawks staff he didn’t have the confidence he needed to run with his style in a playoff game.

Carroll said the plan will remain the same with Lynch this week and he’ll be evaluated daily. But there is no projection on whether he’ll play against the Panthers. Lynch had 54 yards on 17 carries and a touchdown

when Seattle faced Carolina in the regular season.

“This is his first surgery and it happens to be right in his core and you all know having watched him, you all know what kind of runner he is and the lateral things he does with his body they’re so abrupt and so sudden he needs to feel he can do those things,” Carroll said.

“Even though he can run fast and look like he’s moving, he didn’t have the confidence he could go out there and react to guys and do that. There’s nothing we can do about that.”

NOTES: Carroll said he expected TE Luke Willson to return this week. Willson missed the past two games after suffering a concussion in Week 16 against St. Louis. ... The only significant injury coming out of Sunday’s game was a hamstring injury for FB Will Tukuafu, Carroll said.