



AP Photo/Kathy Willens

Portland Trail Blazers center Enes Kanter (00) works against Brooklyn Nets forward Ed Davis (17) during the first half of an NBA basketball game on Thursday in New York.

## Center duo of Nurkic, Kanter leads Blazers over Nets, 113-99

By BRIAN MAHONEY  
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — Jusuf Nurkic had 27 points and 12 rebounds, new backup Enes Kanter added 18 points and nine boards in his Portland debut, and the Trail Blazers beat the Brooklyn Nets 113-99 on Thursday night.

The center tandem was so good that the Trail Blazers didn't even need a big night from All-Star guard Damian Lillard, who was just 5 for 21 from the field. He finished with 13 points, eight rebounds and eight assists.

Kanter, who signed last week with the Blazers after losing his job with the Knicks, made his first seven shots and finished 8 for 9, missing only a 3-pointer.

CJ McCollum added 21 points in a good return from the break for the Blazers after going into it with a 129-107 victory over Golden State. They opened a seven-game road trip and don't play their first home game after the All-Star break until March 7 against Oklahoma City.

Allen Crabbe had 17 points for the Nets, who came out of the All-Star break above .500 for the first time since 2013. All-Star guard D'Angelo Russell shot only 4 for 16, finishing with 14 points and eight assists.

Lillard's 3-pointer midway through the third — his only one through three quarters — gave Portland a 69-63 lead that the Blazers would extend largely through Kanter's work inside. He followed with



AP Photo/Kathy Willens

Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard (0) looks to pass with Brooklyn Nets center Jarrett Allen (31) defending during the first half of an NBA basketball game on Thursday in New York.

four baskets in the period, including one that gave Portland its largest lead at 82-67.

The lead was 14 after his free throws with 10:40 to play before Ed Davis, Shabazz Napier and Crabbe — all former Blazers — fueled a 15-2 surge that trimmed it to 90-89. But Portland pushed the lead back into double digits, with Lillard contributing a 3-pointer with a little over 3 minutes to go and Nurkic getting a three-point play when he was fouled on a powerful dunk.

### Tip-ins

Trail Blazers: Portland has won four straight in Brooklyn. ... Al-Farouq Aminu had 11 points and 10 rebounds.

Nets: F Jared Dudley returned after missing 16

games with a strained left hamstring. That leaves just sixth man Spencer Dinwiddie on the Nets' injured list, and coach Kenny Atkinson said he is doing plenty of things on the court as he recovers from surgery to repair torn ligaments in his right thumb.

### Brooklyn's broadcaster

The Nets honored YES Network announcer Ian Eagle for his 25 years calling the team's games. ... Eagle was presented with a No. 25 Nets jersey with his name on it, and a video tribute featuring former Nets players was played on the video screen.

### LeVert in the lineup

Caris LeVert had 12 points on 4-for-11 shoot-

ing. He was just 13 for 36 in his first three games since returning from a lengthy absence with a dislocated right foot, but Atkinson kept him in the starting lineup. ... Atkinson said he still trusted LeVert and thought he was looking good even with his shot not falling yet.

"Obviously we have a long relationship now. He's been here from the beginning and so I'm not thinking of just the past three games, three or four games," Atkinson said. "I'm thinking of preseason and last season and how well he started the season and listen, I think from a physical standpoint he's looked pretty sharp."

### Up next

Trail Blazers: At Philadelphia on Saturday.

## COLUMN



AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File

In this Oct. 5, 2018, file photo, then-Los Angeles Dodgers' Manny Machado celebrates his two-run home run against the Atlanta Braves during the first inning of Game 2 of a baseball National League Division Series, in Los Angeles.

## Players finding payoffs are changing in baseball

By TIM DAHLBERG  
AP Sports Columnist

Manny Machado's new \$300 million contract put a stop — at least temporarily — to a growing chorus of player complaints that major league teams were conspiring to do deep damage to the free agent market.

It did nothing, however, to change the new reality of baseball. And that's something players should be worrying about between now and 2021, when the current collective bargaining agreement expires and the threat of labor action looms.

No longer do major league executives reflexively chase the latest bubble on the market. Analytics that have changed the field of play have changed the front office, too.

"Markets change," commissioner Rob Manfred said the other day before Machado signed with the San Diego Padres. "We've had a lot of change in the game. People think about players differently. They analyze players differently. They negotiate differently."

Indeed they do. But things have changed so quickly that the players' union seems to have been taken off guard.

When players last negotiated a contract in 2016 the most pressing issues were more days off and private chefs in every clubhouse. With salaries rising every year, their attention was on work life issues.

After a second straight season where owners expressed little interest in some free agents, though, the trends have set off some alarms among players and the players' union.

There's increasing chatter about the possibility of trying to reopen the collective bargaining agreement to make some adjustments.

Sure, Machado got a 10-year contract and Bryce Harper will get something similar. But those contracts are just for a few elite players, while others will remain unsigned or settle for far less.

It's one reason baseball salaries were down slightly last season for the first time since 2010.

From the standpoint of owners the equation is simple: Why take the risk on long-term contracts for millions of dollars when there are replacement players available for the major league minimum of \$555,000?

"I don't understand the point of it," Cousins said of the one-and-done rule. "What's the difference between 18 and 19 and 18? You're immature, you're young, you're ignorant to life in general. So what's really the difference? You've still got a lot of growing to do as a man."

The one-and-done rule has been in place since the 2006 draft. Silver, who was once a proponent of raising the draft minimum age to 20 before changing his mind, said last year that he believes the league and the players "can create a better system."

Use two of them in a platoon and the numbers might be close enough to a Machado or Harper. Or load the bullpen with minimum wage arms and have them throw as hard as they can for as long as they can, and then bring in a new bunch.

"All veteran players of a certain age are being affected by this analysis, which is not just widespread but fairly consistent across most clubs," said former New York Mets general manager Sandy Alderson, now an Oakland Athletics senior adviser. "The math is the math."

That math is unsparing in baseball these days. A sport that always valued numbers has embraced new metrics like WAR (Wins Above Replacement) even more and front offices are using them to evaluate risk and reward in the free agent market.

Add in the higher luxury tax imposed in the latest collective bargaining agreement and high payroll clubs like the Red Sox, Dodgers and Yankees are watching every dollar they spend.

Still, it's hard not to laugh when Chicago Cubs owner Tom Ricketts — whose team is valued at \$2.9 billion by Forbes — opens spring training by saying his team didn't pursue any high priced free agents because there is no money to spend.

Even more laughable was the suggestion by Pirates owner Bob Nutting that it doesn't make sense to add a big free agent because it could cause an imbalanced payroll that might make other players unhappy.

No one — at least outside the union — is saying that major league ballplayers are underpaid either. At an average salary of \$4 million a year they're well compensated for what they do.

They're also not going to be walking picket lines any time in the future. But even the possibility of labor trouble — at a time attendance is already declining — should scare baseball enough to at least have a discussion about where the game is going.

Expand that discussion to include issues like a pitch clock, the use of relievers and the shift and there's plenty of potential for owners and players to come together for the good of the game.

Or wait three years until owners have a full blown revolt on their hands.

## NBA, union forward talks on ending 'one-and-done'

By TIM REYNOLDS  
AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI — The NBA and its players are continuing to move forward on plans to eliminate the "one-and-done" rule in college basketball, something that the sides have been working toward for months.

The league has sent a proposal to the National Basketball Players Association on lowering the minimum age for entering the NBA Draft from 19 to 18, and the union discussed the contents at a meeting in the Bahamas earlier this week, a person with knowledge of the matter told The Associated Press on Thursday. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because neither side released the proposal publicly.

USA Today Sports first reported the proposal being sent.

The proposal changed hands before All-Star weekend and long before Duke star Zion Williamson, quite possibly the No. 1 pick in



AP Photo/Gerry Broome, File

In this Feb. 16, 2019, file photo, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver speaks during NBA All-Star festivities in Charlotte, N.C.

this year's draft, got hurt Wednesday night. Williamson was diagnosed Thursday with a Grade 1, or minor, sprain of his right knee. Williamson, a freshman, is widely expected to be in the NBA next season and forgo his final three seasons of collegiate eligibility.

Neither the league nor the players' union has hidden the fact that both sides want the current system changed. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said

last July that it was time to revert back to the policy that will allow players to go into the league right out of high school, something that will have to be collectively bargained with the players.

The NBPA has had previous talks with the NBA on the idea, which is likely to be in place by the 2022 draft.

"I think it's a good idea," Boston's Jayson Tatum, who went to the NBA after one season at Duke, said at All-

## Rain, rain, go away! 1st MLB spring training game washed out

By CARRIE MUSKAT  
Associated Press

MESA, Ariz. — The spring training season started with a splash. Just not the kind fans hoped for.

In the first major league exhibition game of the year, the Seattle Mariners and Oakland Athletics were rained out Thursday. The Mariners roughed up Jerry Blevins and led 5-0

in the middle of the second inning when it was called — so in a game where the stats don't count, they really won't count.

"We have our feet wet now, literally," Athletics manager Bob Melvin said.

The Cactus League opener was rained out after Major League Baseball had 54 regular-season postponements last year, the most since 1989.