

Ball is Life: A look at the young NBA season

By Zach Silva
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The Portland Trail Blazers are many things: frustrating, dramatic, turnover-prone and exciting. But above all else, so far in this young season this team seems to excel at being average. But before we explore how the Blazers fit into the league hierarchy, we should first look at the NBA landscape. There are currently three tiers of teams in the league right now:

Tier One: Golden State.

Tier Two: Nearly everyone else.

Tier Three: The Dallas Mavericks. (Okay, and the Kings, Hawks and Bulls. And the Tier Three Hawks already have a win over the once great Cleveland Cavaliers this season. Sure that means nothing, but hey good for them.)

And those are the divisions of the teams: we have the Unattainable, the Maybe Good and the Bad.

Golden State is Golden State and as a society we shouldn't trust anyone who thinks there is a current NBA roster out there that can beat them in a seven-game series. The end. But then we have that group of 25 teams that are seemingly a mystery. How good are these Rockets and what happens to their success when Chris Paul returns? How long can this Celtics winning streak go? How did the Clippers get so bad so fast (they are an abysmal 1-7 since Blake Griffin's game winner against the Blazers with that one win being against the two-win Mavericks)? What in the world Clippers)? And that is all without addressing the fact that Cleveland is currently ninth in the East and four games behind the Pistons which is all just astonishing.

Even though we are working with a somewhat small sample size, the parity of the NBA is a wonderful thing. As of this writing, there are three games separating teams number three to 13 in the East and 4.5 games separating number one to 10 in the West. That's it. Every team is a brief win streak or quick slide away from flipping where they are in the rankings.

While we may know the ending to the book that is the 2017-18 NBA season – the Warriors claiming their third title in four years – the road there is full of exciting subplots (LeBron and Eric Bledsoe already at midseason form), unicorns (Kristaps and Giannis are forever), the post-Process 76ers and future Wizard DeMarcus Cousins becoming everything we have ever hoped.

It is in this busy NBA landscape that we then have the Portland Trail Blazers. As they embark on their journey to not get bounced in the playoffs by the Warriors for the third consecutive year (I mean, they could take maybe a game or two? Is that in the realm of possibility??), they are still working out who they are as a team.

Instead of being granted clarity on early season questions about this team, the (as of this writing) 6-6 Blazers have grown more enigmatic. Can they finish games? Can Nurkic stay on the floor in the fourth quarter? Do they know how to run a fast break?

From the outside looking in, the Blazers are not confusing: they are an average team performing in an average way. It seems quite simplistic, really. But this team should seemingly be...better. And maybe even good?

In this early season, the Blazers have not yet been able to

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Lions prevail past Gladiators and into semis



Cottage Grove's Hayden Glenn comes up with a game-sealing interception in the fourth quarter.

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Cottage Grove football defeats Gladstone in a rare "close" game

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In a year where their number one offense has impressed, outperformed and overwhelmed opponents, it was Cottage Grove's defense that guided the top ranked Lions past Gladstone last Friday and into the state football semifinals.

In their final home game of the season, it was the Lions earning a 27-10 quarterfinal victory in their closest game they have played since a mid-September 35-20 win over number two-ranked Scappoose.

"We haven't played a ball game in seven weeks. We haven't been in a ballgame since Scappoose. A true ballgame," said Cottage Grove head coach Gary Roberts. "And you wonder how kids are going to react when they haven't been in situations like that in seven weeks now. And our kids did a really good job of continuing to play and continuing to battle and understand that it's a four-quarter game."

In the first quarter it felt like a familiar script for the Lions. Chad Bottorff had a 38-yard run that put the Lions up early. Following the score, it was Jacob Woods with two highlight reel touchdown grabs. On the first he out jumped a defender and came down with the ball

and on the second he laid out for a diving grab to put Cottage Grove up 20-0.

"I feel like I started out well," said Woods. "Just run for the ball and catch it."

While this is normally when the Lions surge past opponents with a high scoring second quarter and put the mercy rule into effect in the second half, it was not the same against the Gladiators.

After a Bottorff fumble and a roughing the passer call on 3rd down, Gladstone was inside the Lions 20 but were

held to a field goal.

Cottage Grove was then forced to punt on the next possession, which was just the third time that the Lions have punted in the first half this season. One play later, a Gladiators' fake reverse found Ben Hill open downfield for a 45-yard reception after a Lions defender fell down on the coverage.

"He kind of got shoved down but, you know, regardless, he got burnt," said Roberts about the lone touchdown the team gave up.

In the second half, as Cottage Grove's offense stalled, the defense continued to stop the Gladiators from ever getting into any sort of rhythm. After a Woods interception, his second of the game, was returned to the Gladstone 10-yard line, the Lions were in position to score. Graves found Giffen through the air for a six-yard score. Graves finished the game six-of-thirteen with three touchdowns and two interceptions.

As Gladstone began to drive in the fourth quarter, it was Giffen who came up with an interception that sealed the victory for the Lions.

"[Tonight's game] shows that our defense is strong. You know we made a ton of mistakes tonight which we're going to clean up and our defense is going to be stronger than ever," said Woods.

With the win, the Lions secured a spot in the semifinals for the second year in a row. They will face Mazama on Saturday at 4 p.m. at Grants Pass High School.

The Vikings were the winners of the Skyline Conference and are 9-1 on the season. Their one loss came to Henley who they defeated last week in the quarterfinals 50-0.

"They're a physical team and they're going to come after us and it will be up to us to see where we stand. We'll find out next week," said Roberts.

"I know they're a power running team and that they are well coached and that they are going to get after us."



Cottage Grove's Chad Bottorff evades a Gladstone defender.

How to watch the Portland Trail Blazers in Cottage Grove

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Watching the Portland Trail Blazers in Cottage Grove has not been an easy task.

This has nothing to do with their middling .500 record but because 71 of their regular season games are only broadcast via Comcast which is not available to Cottage Grove consumers.

"Comcast has never been down here," said Cottage Grove City Manager Richard Meyers.

"There's no market here. The market is so small, the take rate is small because we have great over the air service from South Lane TV."

The take rate is the "amount of people that actually subscribe. So if you go by 10 houses, how many actually subscribe and join up. And so it's grown and improved over the last couple years as a result of their expansion and fiber and data services that they are providing now," said Meyers.

The current cable and satellite options for Cottage Grove residents include Charter Spectrum Cable, Dish TV and DirecTV. This means that except for the 11 nationally televised games this season, Blazers fans are not able to view regular season games. This has been the case since the CSN became the sole broadcaster of games in 2007. During the summer the partnership was renewed until the 2020-21 NBA season. This partnership especially impacts small towns around the state where Comcast does not reach.

But as TV viewing habits continue to shift from cable to a streaming-based service model, the Blazers have gotten on board. Last spring, Blazers broadcasts started streaming with Playstation VUE. This streaming service, which can be accessed through PlayStation consoles, AppleTV, Google Chromecast and a host of other platforms, can give viewers over 90 channels and runs from \$39.99 a month up to \$74.99.

This season, fans can also get games through similarly priced Hulu TV, Fubo Premier or NBC's Blazers Pass which lets the viewer pick 15 games they would like to watch. The YouTube TV service that also provides games is not yet available in Cottage Grove.

Due to NBA blackout restrictions, which take place when a game is "televised locally in your area via a regional sports network or an over-the-air station" according to NBA.com, fans are unable to use the NBA's streaming service NBA League Pass to watch the Blazers, Sacramento Kings and Golden State Warriors.

Streaming Options:

Hulu TV: \$39.99 per month (first week free)

Playstation Vue: \$39.99 per month + \$10.00 a month for Sports Package

Fubo Premier: \$39.99 a month (first two months at \$19.99 a month)

Blazers Pass via NBC Sports Northwest: \$34.99 for 15 games of your choice

Athletes of the Week



This week's athletes of the week are the Cottage Grove fall sports teams not because of their play on the field but because of their work in the classroom. Each year the OSAA grants Academic All-State honors to all teams that finish with an average GPA of 3.0 or higher and this fall all of Cottage Grove's teams achieved this distinction with the volleyball team leading the way with a 3.7 average.

Team GPAs:
Volleyball: 3.7 (4th in 4A)
Girls Soccer: 3.6
Girls Cross Country: 3.57
Boys Cross Country: 3.2
Boys Soccer: 3.12
Football: 3.0