

Sports

PAC-12 MEN'S BASKETBALL

UCLA turns back Beavers' rally

By Beth Harris
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES — UCLA won its first three games under interim coach Murry Bartow with Chris Smith in the starting lineup. Having lost four of its last five, Bartow decided to put Smith back in the rotation.

The move paid off. Smith scored the go-ahead basket with 21 seconds left on a desperate bank shot after UCLA blew a 12-point second-half lead, and the Bruins hung on for a 68-67 victory over Oregon State on Thursday night.

"We wanted a more skilled guy at the 4," Bartow said. "We just thought we needed a little bit of a change, not just in the starting lineup but who we were playing."

Tres Tinkle airballed a potential game-winning

3-pointer with 1.8 seconds to go for the Beavers, who didn't take their first lead until 1:26 remaining in the game.

"We were just kind of out of sorts," Stephen Thompson Jr. said of Oregon State's last play. "We weren't in the right positions."

Moses Brown had 14 points and 11 rebounds for the Bruins (14-13, 7-7 Pac-12), who got back to .500 in league play with a handful of regular-season games remaining.

"This season has been like a war of attrition," Smith said. "We've been down more than we've been up. It really feels good to get a win. Everybody knows in the back of their head we've got a lot to do. We got to get better."

Jaylen Hands added 12 points, but missed a pair of free throws in the final second with UCLA clinging to

a one-point lead.

Thompson scored 21 points and Tinkle added 19 for Oregon State (16-9, 8-5), which fell into a second-place tie with idle Arizona State and Utah in the league standings. The Beavers' two-game winning streak ended.

"We outscored them 40-26 in the paint yet it's a 28-3 advantage at the free throw line," Beavers coach Wayne Tinkle said. "Maybe it's our fault not going to the rim enough."

After UCLA led by 12 early in the second half it became a back-and-forth game over the final 4:19. The Bruins' shooting dipped to 35 percent from the field in the final 20 minutes after they shot 50 percent in the first half.

"We didn't really play that well in the second half and we've got to fix all those

things," Smith said. "We know we can do better than what we just did."

The Beavers twice got within one point before they tied it 65-all on a 3-pointer by Antoine Vernon, his first basket of the game.

Thompson's layup gave Oregon State its first lead of the game, 67-65.

Hands made 1 of 2 free throws to get UCLA to 67-66.

After Tinkle missed a 3-pointer, Smith put up an out-of-control shot that banked in with Thompson guarding him closely. Smith got fouled and missed the free throw. The Bruins were 1 of 4 from the line in the final 1:13.

"I looked up and it was just me and Thompson and I figured just attack," Smith said.

Oregon State closed to 61-60 on Thompson's basket, capping a 16-6 spurt.

Center duo leads Blazers past Brooklyn

■ Enes Kanter scores 18 points in his debut with the Trail Blazers

By Brian Mahoney
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — When Jusuf Nurkic went to the bench, the Portland Trail Blazers inserted a player who barely knew their offense.

Imagine how good Portland's center combination can be once Enes Kanter gets up to speed.

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

"Obviously, our two big guys really dominated inside," Blazers coach Terry Stotts said.

The 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.

"They're going to change the dynamic for a lot of teams, how they guard us obviously," Blazers guard CJ McCollum said.

Kanter signed last week with the Blazers after losing his job with the Knicks and then getting his release after they couldn't find a deal before the trade deadline. He made his first seven shots and finished 8 for 9, missing only a 3-pointer, as the Blazers relied on a steady diet of pick-and-rolls when he was in to compensate for his unfamiliarity with their sets.

Languishing on the bench during much of what became an 18-game losing streak for the Knicks, Kanter was excited to be on the floor in meaningful situations.

"Last time I got a win I think it was like almost two months," he said.

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.

"We didn't have great rhythm tonight, didn't play well. I think that's across the board. Didn't coach well, didn't play well," Nets coach Kenny Atkinson said. "It was just one of those games where I think Portland was simply the better team. There's just no way around it."

Trojans dominate Ducks in second half

By Steve Dilbeck
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — It was a rare sighting Thursday, snow falling along the Los Angeles foothills. In downtown there was a much more common occurrence — Bennie Boatwright knocking down 3s.

The USC senior scored 20 points, all but two coming from beyond the 3-point line, to lead the Trojans to a 66-49 victory over Oregon.

"Bennie really killed us," Oregon coach Dana Altman said. "Him shooting the ball was the difference. Those six 3s really gave them separation."

Boatwright has been particularly hot of late from beyond the arc. In his last five games, he has made 24 of 39 3-pointers (61.5 percent).

"Bennie is shooting as well as he has in his career," USC coach Andy Enfield said. "His all-around game is good. He's feeling it. To beat Oregon, you need players to step up like that. It was fun to watch."

Center Nick Rakocevic added 17 points on 8-of-11 shooting, and like Boatwright, had six rebounds.

The Trojans (15-12, 8-6 Pac-12) held the Ducks (15-11, 6-7) to 33.3 percent shooting.

The Ducks never could

crack USC's zone defense, going long stretches where they struggled to find the basket. Oregon went 1 for 12 in one stretch in the second half when the Trojans pushed their lead to 16 points (60-44).

The Ducks went just 4 of 21 from the 3-point line.

"The ball movement wasn't there," Altman said. "We did have a lot of good looks, but we missed them and then started pressing."

USC, meanwhile, shot 62.5 percent in the second half.

The victory reversed an 81-60 USC loss at Oregon last month.

"They beat us pretty bad

when we played up there, so it was a good game for us to get our revenge here and take care of business," Rakocevic said. "We had something to prove tonight. This was a statement game. We played really well, defended really well."

While the Ducks struggled to shoot from outside, they did not have any more success under the basket. USC outscored Oregon 30-18 in the paint and 14-7 on second-chance points.

Oregon is having particular problems shooting on the road. The Ducks shot 31.0 percent at Colorado, and in that one, the Buffaloes primarily played man defense.

"We just have to play better," Altman said. "Offensively we have to finish plays. Defensively we're still not connected. I thought we gave up some easy looks."

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LeBron, Lakers down Rockets

By Joe Reedy
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James knows that he needs to turn up his intensity if the Los Angeles Lakers are going to make the playoffs. He certainly did that on Thursday night against the Houston Rockets when his team needed it the most.

James scored 16 of his 29 points in the second half as the Lakers rallied from a 19-point deficit midway through the third quarter to defeat the Rockets 111-106.

It was Los Angeles' largest comeback win of the season and its sixth when trailing by 15 or more at any point.

"I need to be in that level right now. Knowing the circumstances we are in and kick starting something," said James, who also had 11 rebounds and six assists. "I like where I am at and will continue to get better. Tonight was a step in the right direction."

The Lakers were down 95-88 with 7:49 remaining when they went on a 17-4 run over a six-minute span to take control. James, who scored eight points during the run, gave Los Angeles a 99-97 lead with 4:15 remaining. They would lead by as many as eight in the final minute.

After struggling from the field the first three quarters, the Lakers were 8 of 13 from the field and 10 of 11 from the foul line in the final 12 minutes. Houston, which made close to half its shots the first 36 minutes, was just 7 of 19 from the field and 2 of 12 on 3-pointers.