

Sports

PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS

Blazers defeat Brooklyn in double OT

Portland clinches post-season berth; loses Jusuf Nurkic to severe leg injury

By Erik Garcia Gunderson
Associated Press

PORTLAND — They had just clinched a playoff spot, though there were no cheers or celebrations from the Portland Trail Blazers. Instead, just silence and prayers for Jusuf Nurkic.

The gruesome injury suffered by their center overshadowed everything else Monday night.

“Devastating,” Blazers coach Terry Stotts said.

Nurkic had 32 points and 16 rebounds before suffering his left leg injury in the second overtime, and the Blazers outlasted the Brooklyn Nets 148-144.

“It made me sick to my stomach,” Blazers guard Damian Lillard said of Nurkic’s injury. “As I was walking over there, I saw everyone else turn around real quick and walk away, and then I look and I saw his leg.”

Nurkic was hurt when his leg bent awkwardly as he battled for an offensive rebound. His leg was immobilized and he was removed on a stretcher while surrounded by members of both teams. Nurkic was then transferred to a local hospital and the team said he sustained compound fractures to his left tibia and fibula.

After the injury, Blazers made enough plays to get the win, but then reality hit.

“He wouldn’t want us to say, ‘All right, let’s feel sorry for ourselves and feel sorry for Nurk and not care as much,’” Lillard said. “So we’re going to finish the job, try to get the game, but I think after the game, that’s when it kicks in.”

The Blazers held a collective moment of silence and prayer for Nurkic in the locker room following the game.

“I’m just going to go home and pray for him,” Blazers center Enes Kanter said. “This is bigger than basketball. We clinched the playoff spot but we can’t even celebrate. He was a big part of our family. Not our team, our family.”

The Nets, who watched guard Caris LeVert wheeled off the court after an injury earlier this season, had the same concern for Nurkic.

“That’s what our guys are talking about in the locker room,” Nets coach Kenny Atkinson said. “Not the game or the loss. They’re talking about a player who was having a great game and a heck of a player so you just pray it’s not a long-term thing and he can bounce back. It just takes the wind out of your sails.”

The Blazers are already without starting shooting guard CJ McCollum.

“You never want to see that with your friend or your teammate, and then especially as a player, you don’t want to see anyone have to go through that and it’s also going to be hard on our team,” Lillard said. “CJ’s already out, now (Nurkic) having a tough injury, so every way you look at it, it was a blow.”

Numerous NBA players, as would be expected, quickly expressed sorrow and sent messages of support on social media after seeing the extent of the injury.

“Hate this part of the game. Prayers up for Nurkic!,” Miami’s Dwyane Wade tweeted.

“Never, never give up, my man Jusuf Nurkic ... I know it’s hard ... but you’ll come back to play ... I’ll wait for you !!!” offered Danilo Gallinari of the Los Angeles Clippers.

Lillard finished with 31 points and 12 assists for Portland, while D’Angelo Russell had 39 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for Brooklyn.

Nurkic’s basket made it 134-132 with 3:40 to go into the second overtime. With center Jarrett Allen and Ed Davis having fouled out and the Nets left without a big man, Nurkic had a huge advantage inside whenever he posted up or went for rebounds.

But he was hurt while doing so. After he was taken off the court, Anfernee Simons made two free throws for Port-

land to put them up 136-132.

A 3-pointer by Rodney Hood extended the lead to 139-132 and forced the Nets to start fouling.

There were 12 lead changes and 15 ties over the course of the game, with Portland leading 95-90 after three.

The Nets, however, would storm back in the fourth thanks to the play of their bench. Brooklyn took multiple leads in the final period, with their biggest coming at 112-102 with 6:07 left after a jumper by LeVert.

Portland fought back and with the Nets up one with the ball, Seth Curry stole Russell’s dribble and was fouled. He missed the first free throw but made the second to tie the game at 120 with 3.5 seconds left.

Russell missed a deep 3-pointer to force overtime.

Russell scored five early points in the extra period, but Portland took a 128-125 lead on Nurkic’s basket before a 3-pointer by Spencer Dinwiddie tied the game again.

It went to a second OT tied at 132 after Russell made a layup and Lillard missed a long final attempt.

TIP-INS

Nets: Brooklyn had its two-game winning streak snapped and has one game left on its seven-game road trip, at Philadelphia on Thursday. ... The Nets were just 31 of 44 on free throws.

Trail Blazers: Stotts said McCollum is doing well in his recovery from a knee strain he suffered on March 16, but that he will not join them for their four-game road trip. “He’s progressing fine,” Stotts said. “He will not go on the road trip. He will stay back and rehab and get some court work back here.” The Blazers start the trip Wednesday at Chicago before coming back on April 3.

UP NEXT

Nets: Thursday at Philadelphia 76ers.

Trail Blazers: Wednesday at Chicago Bulls.

NCAA WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

Oregon State defeats Gonzaga

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

CORVALLIS — Katie McWilliams is going to the Sweet 16 for the fourth straight year.

The senior guard for Oregon State marveled at the four-peat after the fourth-seeded Beavers secured a trip to Albany with a 76-70 victory over fifth-seeded Gonzaga on Monday night in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Next up is top-seeded Louisville, which defeated No. 8 Michigan 71-50 on Sunday.

“It’s pretty amazing. These teams that I’ve played with have been nothing but competitors and great groups of people,” said McWilliams, a local kid from nearby Salem. “I am just so proud of this team and what we’ve been able to accomplish. And we’re not done yet.”

Mikayla Pivec led the way with 19 points, 11 rebounds and six assists, while Destiny Slocum, Taya Corosdale, Maddie Washington and Aleah Goodman each added 12 points for the Beavers (26-7).

Zykera Rice finished with 20 points for Gonzaga (29-5). Chandler Smith added 13.

Trailing 50-49 going into the final quarter, Gonzaga took a 55-53 lead on Rice’s layup, but Goodman got one on the other end for the Beavers to tie it with just over six minutes left. The teams traded baskets until Washington’s layup put Oregon State in front 59-57 with 3:46 to go.

After Rice tied it up again with a pair of free throws, Pivec made a layup and a free throw to give the Beavers a 62-59 lead. Chandler Smith scored for the Zags before Corosdale’s 3-pointer made it 65-61 for Oregon State with under two minutes left.

Rice made things interesting with a 3-pointer that cut the gap to 74-70 with 4.6 seconds on the clock but ultimately the Bulldogs couldn’t catch up.

“Against teams like Oregon State, the really good teams, you just have a limited number of mistakes you can make and tonight we unfortunately made a few too many,” Gonzaga coach Lisa Fortier said.

The Zags, ranked No. 16 in the AP’s final Top 25 of the season, were making their 11th NCAA Tournament appearance, and third straight. The Bulldogs’ best finish was an Elite Eight appearance in 2011. They’ve made the round of 16 four times.

Gonzaga downed No. 12 seed Little Rock 68-51 in the opening round on Saturday. Katie Campbell had 15 points, hitting five 3-pointers while Rice added 18 points and six rebounds.

Milwaukee stops Rockets

By Rich Rovito
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Eric Bledsoe stole the show in a marquee matchup between the Milwaukee Bucks and Houston Rockets on Tuesday.

With top-billing going to MVP front-runners Giannis Antetokounmpo and James Harden, the feisty Bucks’ guard turned in one of his best all-around performances of the season as the Bucks pulled away for a 108-94 victory on Tuesday night.

Bledsoe poured in 23 points, including 16 in a decisive third quarter, and tightly guarded Harden for most of the game.

“I just try to play to my

strengths,” Bledsoe said.

Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer praised Bledsoe’s all-around performance.

“To do what he did on both ends of the court, pretty special,” Budenholzer said. “I think he loves that challenge. I think he’s an incredible defender.”

Antetokounmpo had 19 points and 14 rebounds for Milwaukee, which improved to an NBA-best 56-19.

Harden scored 23 points and Chris Paul had 19 for Houston, which lost for just the third time in 17 games. Harden shot just 9 of 26, including 1 for 9 from 3-point

range with Bledsoe closely guarding him throughout most of the game.

“We had our open shots. We couldn’t know them down,” Harden said. “We competed but they went on a run in that third quarter and that was it.”

After a tightly contested first half the Bucks grabbed control in the third, sparked by Bledsoe’s clutch shooting. Leading by five at halftime, Milwaukee built a 19-point lead in the third. Bledsoe went 4 of 5 on 3-pointers in the period after missing his only two attempts in the first half.

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