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Sports

PORTLAND CLINCHES THIRD SEED IN WESTERN CONFERENCE PLAYOFFS

Blazers' bench rallies for win in regular season finale

Starters got the night off as Portland used just 6 players

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND — It was a heck of a first start for rookie Anfernee Simons.

Simons scored a career-high 37 points and the Portland Trail Blazers locked up the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference with a dramatic 136-131 victory over the Sacramento Kings using just six players on Wednesday night.

Simons, who had seven 3-pointers, played all 48 minutes as the Blazers rested their starters for the regular season finale.

"To have all the young guys come in and secure the third seed, it felt good," he said. "All of us felt good about that."

The Blazers have won 14 of 17 games en route to their sixth straight trip to the playoffs. Portland will open the postseason Sunday against the Oklahoma City Thunder, who finished in sixth.

Portland had already clinched homecourt advantage in the opening round with a 104-101 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers the night before.

Denver beat the Timberwolves 99-95 Wednesday night, locking the Nuggets into the No. 2 seed and a first-round series against San Antonio, and giving Portland the opening to claim the third seed. The Jazz wound up as a No. 5 seed and will play fourth-seeded Hous-

ton. The West's top finisher, Golden State, will face the No. 8 Clippers.

Portland trailed by 28 points but made it interesting in the fourth quarter by closing within 117-116 with 7:53 left on Simon's 3-pointer. Simons found Jake Layman for an alley-oop dunk to pull the Blazers in front.

Portland pushed the lead to 128-119 on Layman's basket with 2:49 left. Simons hit his seventh 3-pointer to make it 131-123 with just over two minutes left and Sacramento couldn't catch up.

"That was fun. That was probably the best time I've had all season," Simons said. "Just winning by coming back from down 28. We all stuck together and our teammates all helping us out the whole way. That was fun."

Marvin Bagley III had 20 points to lead the Kings, who lost their 11th straight game in Portland.

"It was a hell of a game. I was really proud of those six guys who played," Blazers coach Terry Stotts said. "The NBA is a funny game and obviously at halftime, it didn't look like we had much going, defensively in particular."

Stotts said before the game that guard CJ McCollum would rest because it was the second of a back-to-back. McCollum missed 10 games with a left knee injury and had just been back for Portland's last two games.

As for his other players, Stotts said going in that it was "fluid." Damian Lillard was available but did not play. Neither did any of the team's other regular starters, as Stotts went with Skal Labissiere, Layman, Meyers Leonard, Gary Trent Jr. and Simons. Trent, Simons and Labissiere were making their first starts of the

Blazers start playoffs Sunday in Portland

Portland, the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference, plays host to No. 6 seed Oklahoma City Sunday, April 14 at 12:30 p.m. The game will be televised on ABC. The best of 7 series schedule:

- Tuesday, April 16, Oklahoma City at Portland, 7:30 p.m. (TNT)
- Friday, April 19, Portland at Oklahoma City, 6:30 p.m. (ESPN)
- Sunday, April 21, Portland at Oklahoma City, 6:30 p.m. (TNT)
- Tuesday, April 23 (if necessary), Oklahoma City at Portland (time TBA)
- Thursday, April 25 (if necessary), Portland at Oklahoma City (time TBA)
- Saturday, April 27 (if necessary), Oklahoma City at Portland (time TBA)

season.

The Kings stayed with their regular starters and went up by 11 points in the opening quarter. They extended the lead to 28 points during the second and were up 87-62 at the break. Da'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 17 points and nine assists at halftime.

Joerger went to his reserves in the second half.

"Being a top-three seed in the West is an accomplishment," Lillard said. "We should be proud of ourselves but obviously our business is just beginning."

BAKER TENNIS

Bulldogs sweep

ONTARIO — Baker's boys and girls tennis teams completed a three-match sweep Wednesday by defeating Ontario 5-0 in both halves of a Greater Oregon League match.

In boys singles, Zach Schwin, Shane Cunningham and Alex Davila lost just one game in sweeping in straight sets.

In boys doubles, Isaac Nemece and Luke Barnes, and Anthony Cowan and Eli Lien also swept in straight

sets. In girls singles, Hannah Johnson, Gabbie Trebilcock and Andrea Pettit all won in two sets.

In girls doubles Emma Finley and Kaylee Dalke won the No. 1 match. Lupita Macias and Naomi Woodward won the No. 2 doubles in straight sets.

Baker has three road matches next week. The Bulldogs travel to La Grande Monday, to Weiser Tuesday and to Homedale Saturday.

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