

PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS BEGIN NBA PLAYOFFS TONIGHT

Carmelo faces his former team in playoffs

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND — Carmelo Anthony has been around the NBA for quite some time but he's never faced the team that launched his career in the playoffs.

Until now. Anthony's current team, the Portland Trail Blazers, faces the Denver Nuggets in a first-round best-of-seven series starting Saturday.

Anthony said he hadn't realized that he'd never faced the Nuggets in the postseason. But so much has changed since he wore a Denver jersey.

"It's a lot different now. My mindset is different. My goals are different. We're going in there trying to win," he said. "So, it's a different type of mentality, but deep down inside I know that Denver will always hold a special place for me."

A 10-time All-Star, Anthony is ready for another chance at an NBA title, something that has so far eluded him in his 18-year career and 12 trips to



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian

Trail Blazers forward Carmelo Anthony looks to pass as the Portland Trail Blazers face the Oklahoma City Thunder at Moda Center on Saturday, April 3, 2021.

the postseason. Last season, Portland was eliminated in five games by the Los Angeles Lakers.

"This is where I should be. I should be in the postseason. That's just me speaking from the heart and genuinely. If I'm not in the postseason, then it should be a problem," he said.

Anthony was drafted by the Nuggets with the third overall pick in the 2003 NBA draft. He

played in Denver for seven-plus seasons, helping the team reach the Western Conference Finals following the 2008-09 season.

He was traded in 2011 to the New York Knicks, where he spent more than six seasons. Anthony also had stops in Oklahoma and Houston, but in early 2019 he was traded to Chicago and the Bulls cut him before he played a game.

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—Carmelo Anthony

Anthony hadn't played for a year when he was signed by the Trail Blazers in November 2019. He instantly sparked the team and developed a chemistry with his teammates while also providing veteran leadership.

This season he's come off the bench, leading the Blazers' second unit with an average of 13.4 points per game.

"What he's done for us in a year and a half has been what we needed. This year, the role that he's had off the bench has been a big part of the reason why we are where we are," Blazers coach Terry Stotts said.

Anthony wasn't with the Blazers yet when they last faced the Nuggets in the playoffs in 2019. Portland won in seven games to

advance to the Western Conference Finals, but fell in four games to Golden State.

Likewise, the personnel in Denver has turned over since Anthony left. But the Nuggets are still very aware of the danger Anthony poses.

"You have arguably one of the greatest one-on-one scorers in NBA history in Carmelo Anthony, who's still doing it at a high level at this stage of his career, which is really impressive," Denver coach Michael Malone said.

The Blazers are riding momentum into the playoffs, having won 10 of their final 12 regular-season games.

"Mentally, when we're in a good space as a unit, as a team, we're in a good space. Confidence-wise we're in a good space. These are all things that you want to have clicking for you going into the postseason," Anthony said. "I think right now we have a lot of those things working in our favor heading into this postseason. So

Portland vs. Denver

GAME ONE

• Portland at Denver, Saturday, May 22, 7:30 p.m., TV on ESPN

GAME TWO

• Portland at Denver, Monday, May 24, 7 p.m., TV on TNT

GAME THREE

• Denver at Portland, Thursday, May 27, 7:30 p.m., TV on NBATV

GAME FOUR

• Denver at Portland, Saturday, May 29, 1 p.m., TV on TNT

we've got to stay with that, continue to believe in ourselves, understand what we are up against, understand how hard we worked to get to this point."

Major League Baseball needs to keep emotion in the game

Nearly a decade ago, sitting in a movie theater with my brothers, I remember being unable to contain my excitement. Growing up an Oakland A's fan, I was anxious to watch the movie "Moneyball" starring Brad Pitt and Jonah Hill. Sitting inside the depths of the coliseum, each of their characters began to talk over the video about values they see in the game of baseball. One line has resonated in that dialogue that has changed my perception of the game since that day. Pitt, playing the A's general manager Billy Beane, looked at Hill (playing fictional character Peter Brand) and said this:

"It's hard to not be romantic about baseball. This kind of thing is fun for fans."

It's simple to say that what fuels



COREY KIRK

any sport is the emotion behind the big moments. But Major League Baseball seems to have forgotten the importance of emotion. Whether it's a pitcher pumping his fist after getting out of a bases-loaded jam, or a player rounding third and heading home to be mobbed after hitting a game-winning home run, emotion is what fans crave. But if the players are being caught up in the excitement, the league is quick to try and snuff it with the issuing of fines or suspensions.

The perfect scenario that shows improper discipline happened nearly a month ago. In a game between the Cincinnati Reds and the St. Louis Cardinals, Reds' outfielder Nick Castellanos was hit by a pitch in the fourth inning. Castellanos was able to score later in the inning, and the chaos ensued. Colliding with Cardinals' pitcher Jake Woodford, Castellanos slid in safely, stood up, flexed, yelled and walked away. The benches and bullpens cleared soon after, resulting in numerous ejections, including Castellanos.

Later, Castellanos was issued a two-game suspension. Michael Hill, MLB senior vice president of on-field operations, said the suspension was for Castellanos' "aggressive actions and for instigating."

The eight-year MLB veteran defended his actions at his appeal, and he told MLB.com that it was an emotional moment.

"That was pretty much our case. I don't really know how else to describe it, just that I wasn't out (there) trying to provoke anybody to fight," Castellanos said. "It was just the emotions that can sometimes naturally come out when, I guess, you really want to win, you know? If I'm playing kickball or something with my friends and brother or something in my neighborhood, similar things would happen, you know?"

Let me preface this by saying that even though I oppose MLB trying to rid the game of emotion, immediate ejection is an option to avoid a situation in which a player could be hurt.

But the two-game suspension to me was completely unnecessary.

A league that claims to love the enthusiasm players show is displaying tone deafness here.

If MLB officials felt the need to make an example of Castellanos, an undisclosed fine would have been more suitable than taking the player from the Reds for two games.

As a fan, I hope Castellano's suspension is an isolated incident. Because if this is a sign of what's to come, MLB is going to leave a sour taste in the mouths of players and, most importantly, the fans. Emotion should be encouraged. At the end of the day, these athletes are human, and whatever emotion that courses through their veins, they should be able to display it.

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