



Friday's game between the Portland Trail Blazers and the Los Angeles Lakers was the first in which fans were allowed to attend at the Moda Center in Portland since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Craig Mitchell/der/AP

Portland Trail Blazers

Fans arrive just in time to see Nurkic hit his stride

BY AARON FENTRESS

The Oregonian

Jusuf Nurkic felt nervous Friday night before the Portland Trail Blazers took the court at the Moda Center for what turned out to be an all-important win over the Los Angeles Lakers.

That night marked the first time Nurkic played in front of fans at the Moda Center since March 2019, when he broke his leg during a home game.

"It was a special feeling," Nurkic said after the team's win Saturday over San Antonio. "I know it's like 10% of capacity, but I know how this place can get loud and you can feel that no matter how many fans are in a building."

Fans being permitted to watch Blazers games at 10% capacity happened just in time for those in attendance to catch Nurkic at his best. He returned to action March 26 after missing 32 games with a broken wrist, but truly returned to playing like his old self on April 23.

Nurkic over the past 10 games has bumped his production up to 15.1 points and 11.9 rebounds per game. In his first 11 games back, he averaged 8.6 points and 7.2 rebounds per outing.

The Blazers are 7-3 over their last 10 games, which began with two losses at home to Memphis. Since, the Blazers have won seven out of eight.

Even more encouraging for the Blazers is that Nurkic, who missed three other games because of knee inflammation and management of that injury, just put together two good performances on back-to-back nights.

In 31 minutes against the Lakers on Friday, Nurkic made 5 of 8 shots for 10 points and also had 13 rebounds and five assists. Against the Spurs on Saturday, Nurkic saw only 21 minutes



Tony Dejak/AP

Portland Trail Blazers' Jusuf Nurkic (27) swats the ball away from Cleveland Cavaliers' Isaac Okoro (35) on Wednesday in Cleveland.

in the 124-102 blowout, but put up 17 points, nine rebounds and five assists.

The season hasn't been easy for Nurkic, nor the team, given the intense schedule that he called "ridiculous." But the Blazers are playing well right now and that's largely because Nurkic is back to performing at a high level at both ends of the court.

"It's a grind," Nurkic said of the season. "Obviously, people just see the success, but the grind, the injuries, the bad days, are all the stuff we go through as a human being, I think, people kind of look at that and just forget that

we're not super-human sometimes."

Not only is Nurkic performing well as an individual, but his chemistry with Damian Lillard is starting to pick up. They form one of the best pick-and-roll tandems in the NBA. That was evident on Saturday, especially in the third quarter.

Lillard had nine points and four assists in the quarter. Nurkic put up 13 points with three assists and five rebounds. Two of Nurkic's assists went to CJ McCollum and the other to Lillard, who made three assists Nurkic's way.

See **Nurkic** / A6

TRACK & FIELD

Oregon sprinter steals spotlight from DK Metcalf

There were more eyes than usual watching the USA Track & Field Golden Games Sunday afternoon with NFL star DK Metcalf entered in the men's 100-meter race.

What they saw was a breakout performance from Cravon Gillespie.

The former Oregon star won in a season-best time of 9.96 seconds, giving Gillespie a boost of confidence with five weeks to go until the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials at Hayward Field.

"I didn't like how I performed a couple weeks ago in Oregon," Gillespie told NBC after his race, referencing his 10.35, sixth-place finish during the Oregon Relays on April 24. "Making those adjustments is what being a professional is all about. I came out here, put it together and got the win."

Gillespie set Oregon school records in the 100 (9.93) and 200 (19.93) in 2019.

He also ran 10.11 to win his semifinal heat Sunday at Hilmer Lodge Stadium in Walnut, Calif. That race included Metcalf, a 6-foot-4, 230-pound wide receiver for the Seattle Seahawks.

Metcalf ran 10.37 in his professional track debut to finish in ninth place and out of contention for the finals.

"These are world-class athletes," Metcalf told NBC. "It's very different from football speed, from what I just realized."

—The Register-Guard

HORSE RACING

Derby champ faces DQ; Churchill bans trainer Baffert

Medina Spirit's victory in the Kentucky Derby is in serious jeopardy because of a failed postrace drug test, one that led Churchill Downs to suspend Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert on Sunday in the latest scandal to plague the sport.

Baffert denied all wrongdoing and promised to be fully transparent with the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission during its investigation. Baffert's barn received word Saturday that Medina Spirit had tested positive for an excessive amount of the steroid betamethasone, which is sometimes used to treat pain and inflammation.

Medina Spirit's win over Mandaloun in the Derby stands — for now.

The track said failure to comply with the rules and medication protocols jeopardizes the safety of horses and jockeys, the sport's integrity and the Derby's reputation.

Medina Spirit is expected to run in the Preakness on Saturday, barring some abrupt change in plans or a decision from officials at Pimlico or Maryland's racing commission that would prevent him from entering the second jewel of the Triple Crown.

Medina Spirit is Baffert's fifth horse known to have failed a drug test in just over a year.

If Medina Spirit is disqualified, his connections will not receive the \$1.86 million winner's share of the Derby purse money. But for bettors, anything that happens next won't matter — those who cashed in on Medina Spirit still win, those who didn't still lose and those who backed Mandaloun missed out on a winning ticket.

—Associated Press

NASCAR | GOODYEAR 400

Martin Truex Jr. dominates at Darlington for 3rd win of year

BY PETE IACOBELLI

Associated Press

DARLINGTON, S.C. — Martin Truex Jr. got nervous in a hurry near the end of his dominating drive at Darlington Raceway.

Barely pushed much of the race, the Joe Gibbs Racing driver suddenly saw Kyle Larson catching up in the closing laps.

Truex, though, called on his steady demeanor and track focus to pull away for his third NASCAR Cup Series victory this season.

Not that it was easy.

When Truex noticed Larson right behind him inside of 30 laps left, he thought, "Oh, man, he's right behind me."

"You're heart rate goes up," he continued, "You're anxiety goes up."

Very quickly, Truex was back to his steady, powerhouse driving at the track "Too Tough To Tame."

"Hopefully, we can keep this rolling," Truex said.

See **NASCAR** / A6

PGA TOUR | WELLS FARGO CHAMPIONSHIP

McIlroy ends 18-month drought with victory at Quail Hollow

BY DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Rory McIlroy finally won when he least expected it, and it was as sweet as he could have imagined.

Only after he hung on for a one-shot victory in the Wells Fargo Championship, his first title in 18 months, did he reveal his neck locked up during his final practice session and if not for a late tee time Thursday, he would have had to withdraw.

And when he seized control Sunday afternoon with back-to-back birdies from the bunker down the stretch, he started to get ahead of himself thinking how cool it would be to see his wife and 8-month-old daughter waiting to celebrate with him on their first Mother's Day.

The finishing stretch at Quail Hollow snapped him back to reality. He hit a 7-iron safely over the water on the 17th, and caddie Harry Diamond wisely talked him into taking a penalty drop from a dangerous lie in a hazard on the closing hole. He



Jacob Kupferman/via AP

Rory McIlroy throws his ball into the crowd on the 18th green after winning the Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow on Sunday in Charlotte, North Carolina.

two-putted from 45 feet for bogey, a 3-under 68 and a one-shot victory.

The moment with Erica and little Poppy was what he imagined. So was that trophy.

"It's tough to get over the line, especially if you haven't done it in a while," McIlroy said, a winner at

Quail Hollow for the third time. "It's such a funny week, knowing my game was pretty good and then having my neck lock up on the range and sitting here Sunday night with the trophy."

"Just glad I got through it."

See **PGA** / A6