

Spurs can close out Blazers in San Antonio

Written by Administrator
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SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Tony Parker has long been Nicolas Batum's friend and mentor, both on the French national team and in their NBA careers.

So it was understandable after Batum's dominance in Game 4 of the playoff series between the Spurs and Portland Trail Blazers that San Antonio's veteran point guard cracked a smile when asked if he had a part in his pal's success.

"I'm happy for him. He's doing great," Parker said. "He's doing everything he can to help his team out there. You have to give him credit."

Batum had 14 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists in the Trail Blazers' 103-92 victory Monday night. Portland avoided elimination and narrowed the series to 3-1, sending it back to San Antonio for Game 5 on Wednesday.

No NBA team has ever rallied from a 3-0 deficit to win a playoff series.

Trail Blazers coach Terry Stotts, well aware that he had to do something, switched things up heading into Game 4 and gave Batum the task of stopping his countryman.

The combination seemed to work: Parker scored 14 points in Game 4 after averaging 26 points and more than eight assists in the first three games of the series.

"I just did my job," Batum said. "My job was to slow him down. He's had a great series so far. He's a great champion. So I just tried to do my job and slow him down."

Parker, who had just one assist and three turnovers, was the top scorer for the Spurs, who as a whole scored far fewer than the 116 points they averaged in the first three.

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"You have to give a lot of credit to Portland," Parker said. "They played great, they came out of the gates. Batum was great, he gave them a big boost. He got on the boards and was everywhere."

Parker scored 29 points in San Antonio's 118-103 Game 3 victory on Saturday night. The Spurs had routed the Blazers 116-92 in the series opener after their grueling seven-game first-round series against the Dallas Mavericks, then built a 20-point lead and handily won Game 2 114-97.

The Spurs are looking to advance to the Western Conference finals for the third straight season. The winner of their series with the Blazers will face the winner of the other semifinal between the Los Angeles Clippers and Oklahoma City Thunder.

San Antonio, which has won four NBA titles, has reached the playoffs 17 straight seasons.

Portland made it to the second round for the first time in 14 years by defeating the Houston Rockets in six games, clinching the series with Damian Lillard's amazing 3-pointer at the buzzer for a 99-98 victory at home in the deciding game.

Monday night's victory over the Spurs was their first in a second round since beating Utah in the 2000 conference semifinals.

"We had nothing to lose," Batum said. "We had no pressure. If we lose, we're on vacation. So we just went out there and played our game the way we're used to playing."

No matter how hopeful the win made the Blazers, the fact remains that they are one loss from elimination. Batum tried to spur his teammate along by asking "Why not us?"

The Blazers were the last team to take a series to seven games after dropping the first three.

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Portland rebounded in the first round against Dallas in 2003 but ultimately lost the first-round series' deciding game.

"We are confident," Blazers guard Wesley Matthews said. "Someone has to make history at some time. Might as well be us."