

[00:00:00.940] - Danny
Likely story.

[00:00:05.130] - Tara
Hey you what's up Blazer fans, welcome to the Blazers Edge podcast. I am Tara Bowen-Biggs joined as always by Blazers outsider Danny Marang.

[00:00:13.410] - Danny
Please send help.

[00:00:16.890] - Tara
Well we do have help and help is in the form of Mr. Dave Deckard managing editor for Blazers Edge. Thanks for joining us today Dave.

[00:00:25.360] - Dave
Come on. Dan get down on the floor and give me 20 more. There's only four overtimes you can you can analyze that with one hand behind your back.

[00:00:36.920] - Danny
This yes this is true. I am completely and totally exhausted and wiped out but I wouldn't I wouldn't trade it for anything.

[00:00:45.040] - Tara
Well yeah you know my my son this morning was really concerned about like how the Blazers were able to. He was like so he was so tired at the end of the game he was like he'd just want to go to sleep. He didn't want to go home he just wanted like he was at the game. He's like I just want to lay down on my seat and go to sleep and he's really worried about the players and I was like well the players at least slept in and had naps and they're just a whole different completely different kind of tired than we are right now.

[00:01:12.640]
Didn't you hear C.J. McCollum's postgame last night? They have interviews, I'm sorry, they have massages and chefs and you know pedicures and manicures and panda bears waving palms at them and so they're all right.

[00:01:27.550]
I'm going straight for the I.V. bags. Yeah well I did that in the military so I assume these guys probably have that same access.

[00:01:34.740] - Dave
For Denver this is a problem though, we talk about this in my pregame analysis that by the time Game 6 rolls around assuming it does they will have played 13 playoff games in twenty seven nights basically one every other night straight. Yeah. So I mean this quadruple overtime I think does work in Portland's favor especially since Denver's superstar is not known exactly for his endurance. I mean I know he doesn't floor it and get the speedometer to 100. But putting miles on him is not a great idea right now.

[00:02:08.830] - Danny
Let's be honest real quick as far as the minutes that were exerted last night in the game. Not all minutes are created equally. Damian Lillard fifty five fifty eight minutes I think were a bit more taxing as far as the amount of effort expended then Jokic's sixty five minutes. And I'm not saying that because you know Jokic is lazy or out of shape or this that the other he's a monster he's seven foot three pounds. But I don't know about you guys but he was little to--really any kind of effective past halfway through the fourth quarter because he was gassed Yeah.

[00:02:46.390] - Dave
And he's the bigger frame. It's harder to to run around but you could see his his vision tunnel. Again

the big one was I forget--it was the end of the third over time I believe--they all blurred together --where he had the ball at the top of the three point arc and time was running down and the Blazer defender fell--was that Harkless or Aminu? on the sideline?

[00:03:07.270] - Danny
Yeah

[00:03:07.810] - Dave
And Jokic had a teammate wide open for the three point shot and instead of passing it which he'd do in his sleep under normal circumstances, he heaved up kind of a semi fadeaway over a defender's hand and it missed badly and you could just see the fatigue eat away at his ability to process and his ability to move.

[00:03:30.580] - Danny
And again, this isn't a shot at Jokic. Kanter had a layup fall two feet short doing had a layup fell a foot short those guys were running to an absolute fumes but I think the narrative is a little bit weird a little bit goofy when you look at just the minutes played. Don't get me wrong Jokic stayed out there he played like a consecutive like 40 minutes or something insane like that but they weren't the most effective of minutes particularly in the late portion of the game.

[00:03:58.460] - Tara
Well since we didn't get to hear Dave talk about his reaction to the Great Game Five shot, Dave I would love to hear your reaction to just what happened last night in the Blazers one hundred and forty to one hundred thirty seven quadruple overtime victory. What was going through your head as you were watching this game and you can start at any point first quarter or the third overtime?

[00:04:23.260] - Dave
Well let's start before that. If you missed my impressions you can find them on blazersedge.com. I often publish there. And also last night's game was nearly impossible to analyze. First you had to enjoy it. If you're if you're not if you didn't enjoy that if you didn't ride the roller coaster I feel sorry for you and not just on the basis of being a Blazer's fan just the twists and turns. Denver will get ahead and get an advantage I believe it was in three or four overtimes that they actually led in the final minute. And then it was fascinating to watch them, because of fatigue and lack of motion. Or more likely because of their youth and inexperience. Once they got ahead they tightened up and they tried to run their plays or an isolation, more in a typical NBA style where your superstar makes plays for you.

[00:05:20.190] - Dave
And that's not their game. I mean they do have one but he's a multi-purpose--Jokic passes, Jokic shoots. Jokic goes high and he goes low. Almost none of that happened. Everybody tried to turn into Damian Lillard. It just didn't work for them it made Portland's defense easy so that was absolutely one fascinating aspect of it. Another one was how stubborn the Blazers were in valuing their possessions and that that was true no matter who was handling the ball. You usually from Portland get some possessions that are well crafted and somewhere for instance the guards are just taking flyers.

[00:06:03.680] - Dave
In this case even when the guards were going into ISO everybody was moving around them. Everybody was going for the rebounds when the guards themselves got the rebounds. I mean the ultimate play was C.J. McCollum in the fourth overtime, time running down, misses a shot gets the rebound instead of going right back up tosses his out to Rodney Hood who has the open three and hits it. It's like the Blazers were playing in sync, together, and really I think all of that comes down to the Blazers played like an experienced team the Nuggets played like a team that was good maybe even better than the Blazers but hadn't been there before and Portland knew how to win

[00:06:46.010] - Tara
Right on. Now Dan I want to ask you the same question about what your reaction was to the game just last night but put it in context of the other two games because I frankly can't remember that the

first two games. So you know how was it to you in your opinion, in relation to what we've what they had already played.

[00:07:05.960] - Danny

So we had Brendan Vogt on and Adam Mares, friend of the show, a friend of mine he's there in town I mean talking to those guys kind of coming into this game, off of 1-1 series. This is an important game for both teams for Portland to protect home court and to kind of hold that that you know that grasp on it and for Denver they can wrestle it away. And the longer that game went, I mean it got to the point where I looked at Joe and Shain my co-hosts and I said the winner of this game is going to win this series and it wasn't because of you know what what this game meant is in as far as its Game 3, it was how much emotionally and mentally and physically was being sunk into this game.

[00:07:54.200] - Danny

Like, in the context of this series, I think everything else just kind of falls away because this is so it's such a such an investment in this game that I don't think you can rebound from it. Now granted if Denver comes out and wins game 4, I mean, it kind of falls to the wayside but I just don't think it can actually manifest. I think unless you are a team with the strongest mental fortitude you've been there you're battle tested or you've got a leader that just truly believes and can carry you through it. I was going to say that if Portland lost because there were numerous times where we've talked about ending that game where the Nuggets had the lead. And I thought that the point I'm like if If Portland drops this game this is going to mean everything for Denver because of the narrative can become that Denver's has found a way to win no matter what too.

[00:08:51.810] - Danny

And I think that's important to kind of look at as far as when you're talking about like perspective in the playoff experience that that whole process it's--I don't know that game when we were talking about off air Tara, the thing that was kind of funny or crazy as far as like the wild ride part of it is we, in the studio we were trying to capture like our reaction to what would be the game winning shot for either side. And just to have something to kind of remember pull back to you.

[00:09:22.270] - Danny

Yeah we'll know for the show. And the problem was there were so many moments in fourth quarter in the first OT the second OT, the third or the fourth OT, I legitimately have like 25 like 15 to 30 second videos where the emotion the roller coaster the wild ride of that game.

[00:09:44.820] - Danny

That's just for us. Imagine how that must feel for those guys to be in that position mentally and then to feel it physically. I mean I don't know you guys. I can't remember the last time I saw five NBA players you know blatantly horribly disgustingly missed layups by feet.

[00:10:06.680] - Dave

Well I'm going to disagree with them a little bit though. I think there is a serious danger of the drama of this game outweighing the significance of this game to the series. Meaning, the Blazers only won by three points. It was great three points, but it was only three and it took four overtimes to get there. That's how thin the margin was. And the drama of it appears to weigh way towards Portland. But Denver is quite capable of coming out and winning this next game by 15 points. Not saying it's going to happen I'm saying it wouldn't take much for it to happen.

[00:10:42.050] - Dave

It's possible that Denver could have won Game 3. So I think the Blazers have to be a little careful not to presume that they just won the series because they didn't even if the atmosphere and the media and the fans feel like they did. And this is where the veteran thing is tested. Veterans would understand that you got two more games left to win and that the old Blazers, the young blazers would say "Yep we did the thing we were here to do." And guess what. You haven't yet.

[00:11:12.470] - Tara

I agree. I think that this. I agree with the narrative that you know this team needs to keep pushing

forward because in my opinion the people who won the game are just the people who are up when the buzzer rang. Both teams were so good and wanted it so bad. And Portland planned it best and they were able to you know like seasoned guys on the battlefield I guess they were able to plan it and make sure that it worked. But also there was a lot of luck on their side on both sides that even kept the whole thing going for so long.

[00:11:47.930] - Tara

But the thing I think about this team that sets them apart from the Blazers from other years is that they are aware of that. For the most part this whole season it seems like they haven't taken much for granted. And as the playoffs have gone on it seems like they are getting really good at making sure that they like you said are valuing every moment and valuing every possession. I want to move on and find out from you guys who do you think who you think deserve the game ball for last night's game. Danny, do you want to start?

[00:12:18.870] - Danny

Sure I'll go first because everybody is going to not see this one coming. Moe Harkless

[00:12:25.200] - Tara

Oh really.

[00:12:27.630] - Danny

For a guy who rolled his ankle so significantly his ankle touched the floor while his foot remained on the ground. Yeah. To gut it out like that. And to be that effective. He struggled from the field as far as going one of five from three. But the one three he did hit was massive. Defensively, he was phenomenal.

[00:12:54.060] - Danny

Yeah. Jamal Murray had 34 points but guess what folks, it took thirty two shots to get there and a lot of that was Harkless.

[00:13:03.960] - Danny

I mean he was everywhere. Getting back, blowing up pick and rolls. Rebounding incredibly tough. Had a couple blocks, had a couple of steals, got into the passing lanes, converted free throws. And this is all on the heels or all on the back of a lot of people including myself questioning Harkless's toughness throughout a lot of his career where the smallest of nagging injuries seemed to keep him out of lineup at times. And now when I think everybody is willing to cut him a little bit of slack like OK I just saw his ankle turn into a J. You can go ahead and take this night off you need it. He guts it out and not only does he play, he gives you productive play on both ends that I mean you don't win without.

[00:13:50.120] - Tara

Right on. I mean I've been, you know, a big believer in Moe Harkless for this whole second half of the season. So I'm glad. Glad to see that you are seeing it as well. He did. He gutted it out. I mean he, he showed up. Absolutely. We've talked about noticing when Moe is on the floor and I noticed that Moe was on the floor and he did that thing where he took his headband off halfway through again. I don't know if that's like a good luck thing now for him because he did that in game five as well. But even we went through it. But even without the headband I noticed he was on the floor. You know what I mean. Yeah.

[00:14:27.650] - Danny

You feel him and I guarantee the Denver Nuggets feel him right now. Yeah he's taking on the task of picking up Jokic on a switch, picking up Millsap, chasing Jamal Murray around the floor, Gary Harris around the floor. He is he is invested and plugged into this game and not only was he effective last night for a guy who rolled the living hell out of his ankle he was he was good. He could have been a guy who played 30 minutes but didn't you know was kind of the old Moe Harkless, and he kind of he could have kind of wrote it off as "Yeah I've got a bum wheel", but he didn't and that's I think that kind of speaks to the change that we've seen him over the last couple weeks.

[00:15:05.080] - Tara

How about you Dave? Who would you give the game ball to?

[00:15:06.820] - Dave

Well you could pick almost any one for the Blazers but I'm going to go with Jokic. He scored thirty three. He had eighteen rebounds and 14 assists and in two ways he determined the outcome of this game.

[00:15:21.150] - Dave

First, he kept the Nuggets in it and then eventually he kind of took the Nuggets out of it. And he was never awful. But as he went so went the game and so went their play. And they started on pretty sure footing and then eventually lost it. So you know I guess it should be a Blazer should be C.J. McCollum but I want to since I'm only ever going to have one shot at this with you guys probably about this whole series I'm going to say that Jokic remains the player around whom all attention and the fate of this series revolves. And if he can be the best version of himself the Blazers don't have a real good answer for him and it's only because that his gravity ended up less or pointing in a different direction that that door was open for them to edge out a three point win.

[00:16:16.230] - Tara

So I see what you did there being all clever, jumping in with the Jokic. I did want to know about on the Blazers, who do you think would be the . . . Dan do you have any thing to add to what Dave said about Jokic? I mean the thing is I agree that Jokic is you know, he's a fantastic player he's wonderful to watch and he is the person around which everything revolves on Denver. I don't disagree about that at all.

[00:16:49.590] - Dave

It's not just in Denver though it's this series. He's the one thing that the Blazers have to have an answer for and it's he's the one thing. He's the one player their defense bends around. They will literally take shots from anyone else that aren't layups rather than let him free.

[00:17:07.050] - Danny

I mean I mean that's about as spot on as you can get because game two, kind of going back here a little bit, the Blazers defense showing from the short corner and doubling with C.J. McCollum to give him a different look and leaving Gary Harris who's a phenomenal corner three point shooter over and over and over again had me about ready to tear what little hair I have left out. And it proved out over the long haul to work out that they just couldn't hit shots and they're willing to bet the house basically on the Nuggets not being consistent shooters not stepping up in the moment and I mean it's not the same entirely but it's kind of what the Pelicans did to the Blazers last year.

[00:17:55.160] - Danny

Listen. You've got other guys. We don't care about them.

[00:18:00.070] - Dave

Guess who call that strategy before the series started?

[00:18:04.840] - Danny

I mean they've got great shooters. Torry Craig's a 40 percent three point shooter Gary Harris's a forty point three point shooter, Jamaal Harris or Jamal Murray is up 37 percent three point shooter. They have got a stable of guys but under the bright lights and then with a pressure on they just haven't been able to deliver yet.

[00:18:22.530] - Tara

Let me go back to what Dave said about initially before he talked about Jokic, and you said that you could just about any player on the Blazer team and I think that is super significant because we've been talking all season and even longer than all season, "get Dame some help. Have it be somebody besides Dame and C.J. who are scoring in the game and we thought we had it with Nurkic. And that was exciting, but one of the things that I think is so exciting that we have seen about in these playoffs

is other guys have been stepping up. I mean C.J. McCollum is one of them last night.

[00:18:57.190] - Tara

Forty one points eight rebounds sure it took him like 900 minutes to get them but he looked like he could go a whole 'nother game and something about like conditioning with C.J. is like, I think we've all known that C.J. can you know he runs more than anybody else in the NBA but I don't think I fully appreciated that his conditioning and how extraordinary it really is.

[00:19:19.960] - Danny

It was pretty funny in the press conference where he said "I'm six foot three, one hundred eighty nine pounds and I can run for days." I just thought that was kind of funny because he's you know he's listed it like 210.

[00:19:31.460] - Dave

Yeah, professional wrestling weights. Anyway if you're "C.J. the Destroyer" if you're gonna pick a Trail Blazer I think it's gotta be C.J. because not just for the volume of points but the absolute coolness with which he scored it. I mean coolness like Cool Hand Luke Steve McQueen coolness not awesomeness. It wasn't, it was no thang to him. He had the opportunity because they weren't going to let Dame shoot.

[00:20:02.020] - Dave

He took it he put everybody in the washing machine into the spin cycle and hit shot after shot after shot after shot if he misses one of those, this is a whole different game. And he was absolutely fantastic in a much different way than Lillard does but absolutely as deadly and effective.

[00:20:21.790] - Danny

The thing about C.J. reql quick I think that is going to get lost on this night because his night was so big on the box score was how big it could have been from a highlight standpoint and this is a very tiny point but how many times did he absolutely brutally break somebody off that, like, the entire crowd went full "And-1, Oh baby oh baby!"

[00:20:49.030] - Danny

Like it was it was nuts for him to only miss the shot. It was like, "No you can't cook somebody that bad and not hit the shot but

[00:20:58.740] - Dave

Yeah but when it counted he didn't miss.

[00:21:00.900] - Danny

Yeah. No no. That's when it counted.

[00:21:02.880] - Dave

And I think you're astute there. How many. How many open shots did he get? Was he standing on the weak side getting catch and shoot three pointers? He was not he was defended and he absolutely lost people and got enough separation to put the shot up in C.J. fashion which is not enough separation for most other players on this team, but it was for him and again and again those shots went in.

[00:21:30.530] - Tara

I would give one more one want to talk about one more player even though like you said so many of them including Rodney Hood with his three point shot that ended up winning the game, Enes Kanter is just unreal and I don't say that lightly. I try to avoid hyperbole but I feel like with Kanter I don't know if it's him. I don't know if it's the perfect fit. I don't know if it's the system and it's just all clicking but I can't believe that this is the Enes Kanter that the rest of the NBA has been watching for all of these years. This player who is here on Portland is absolutely playing through everything he is just like he's like all heart and that's the only way I can think of to describe it. He is all heart. And he's just shown up every game that we just keep thinking oh no how you know he's done like he can't he how can he keep

playing? And I understand that you know he has a shoulder injury and that they would like if he was unable to play you know because it was gonna make it worse they wouldn't let him play or whatever.

[00:22:35.840] - Tara

But I just can't I can't wrap my mind around how tough he is and how he just keeps coming back for more and he just keeps putting his head down and taking it . And that first half of the game, granted Jokic got a hold of things in the second half, but that first half of the game Kanter was driving Jokic nuts. And he was having a really hard time trying to figure out how to break free and get his points on him so I think if I was gonna give it out I would give it to Kanter does anybody have any problem with that reasoning?

[00:23:10.210] - Danny

I don't have any problem with it. The thing is about this, this playoff run and we were talking about it beforehand is this is the most obscenely ridiculous thing I've ever seen in my life and sports.

[00:23:20.910] - Tara

The whole thing in general?

[00:23:21.490] - Danny

The whole thing in general, like a four overtime -- okay, let's let's rewind this. If I went back in time to the day before Jusef Nurkic broke his leg and I told either one of you the events that were going to transpire with a hundred percent certainty, there is not a chance in hell that neither one of you would laugh at me scold me run me out of the room and just tell me you need to make up a better story than that because it's not believable.

[00:23:50.950] - Dave

We do that anyway.

[00:23:52.210] - Danny

Exactly like it's insane what has transpired from the time that Nurk broke his leg.

[00:23:59.020] - Dave

Well I might support what you said Tara 100 percent, that he is playing at another level and putting in more effort and more targeted effort than we've yet seen. At the same time his assignments in the playoffs have been pretty clear and the help he's gotten and I think this is a key because in both series but especially in this one the Blazers have been willing to commit other defenders to help at the center position which takes the burden off of him slightly although he still has to stand in and he's still giving a great effort, it's not all on him. They don't rise or fall with his defensive ability and that's made all the difference in the world. It also explains why you don't haven't seen this from him before because you just can't do that on a nightly basis for 82 games. Nor would most teams care to. But for Portland it's working

[00:24:52.120] - Tara

Right.

[00:24:53.170] - Danny

The other guy here that I think that is clearly the guy right now outside of the superstars, is Hood. After being non-existent in the first series to come out and be--the level of confidence he is displayed in every single game we haven't even when he has good games in Portland and overall since his acquisition we have not seen this. He has got a middle a literal bounce in his step as he checked in last night. I mean I I don't know if he realized how ridiculous it was what it stood out like he's jumping up and down. Yeah you skipping and bouncing around like the Energizer Bunny and I bet you everybody in the court is like "what a jerk."

[00:25:31.410] - Dave

Don't you think that was a little bit of intimidation. Oh yeah. Warrior style I'm like literally. He's like he's like coming in and saying, "Oh you're tired. Guess what. Here I come." And you know the opponent

goes "oh crap". Well, first I go "Yeah that's B.S. But you know what? It wasn't. And he had a step on them and he could elevate and they couldn't anymore. And he knew it and he might as well have been out there shooting around the world with himself.

[00:25:58.840] - Danny

And that's how it's kind of been this whole series for him. He's had the mismatch he's had Murray or Harris or any of the other smaller guards and wings. Monte Morris tried to pick him up and guess what? He's going old school, he's going barbecued chicken and taking him in the post beatin' them up or hit him with the jab step then blow and buy em for a dunk and then go over the series so far knocking down, stepping into shots confidently and hitting massive massive momentum, game -swinging and game-winning threes. Which I mean hell yes but it was not there last series to be this wildly different is crazy.

[00:26:41.440] - Tara

Another part of that story that you would say, we would be like "no, we don't believe that ."

[00:26:47.050] - Danny

It's like everything that has happened it's to the point of storybook endings. And I have literally thrown away any and all doubts or misbeliefs or anything about this team right now. I had Joe talking to me at the end of the game at the end of the show last night talking about how if they win this series I could see them getting a game from the Warriors. I could see them stealing two games and then wares and then he started talking more and more about well maybe maybe this is a team of destiny maybe this is like what that one team that happens every hundred years. This kind of thing doesn't happen in basketball. You can get this in the NFL in a one game scenario. You can get this in the Olympics and the Miracle on Ice, you don't get these these series wins in the NBA because inevitably even though even with all the good karma on the basketball gods and your side it still needs to go to four games.

[00:27:44.440] - Tara

Yeah yeah a seven game series to play.

[00:27:46.600] - Dave

Yeah I get it. But Kevin Durant's going to take your destiny and put Tabasco on it and eat it.

[00:27:53.770] - Tara

I don't want to talk about Kevin Durant right now. We're doing awesome.

[00:28:00.910] - Dave

Here's a question though, off the board though, if the Blazers end up losing game 4 and go on to lose the series let's say in seven was this playoff run still a success or better put, how much of a success was it?

[00:28:14.450] - Tara

It was a great success.

[00:28:16.040] - Danny

Still significant because literally the second Nurkic broke his leg and Tara can attest to this, I wrote this off. This this season had an asterix and anything they got out of it was gravy.

[00:28:25.640] - Dave

Right but you didn't think they could win one series?

[00:28:29.860] - Tara

Oh no I didn't. I mean yeah I wouldn't. I wanted to believe them and encourage them to try as hard as they could but without Nurkic running the ball through it without that was a major component of their offense that made them so successful the whole second half of the season and then it was just poof gone. And then it was like a great it's just gonna be C.J. and Dame against everybody. But that's not

what happened. What happened was the whole team stepped up and did everything that they were supposed to do.

[00:28:56.700] - Dave

Sure yeah I agree with that. I think I would not have picked them to beat Oklahoma City especially after Nurkic went down didn't the numbers the aggregate numbers looked a little better than 0 4 against OKC going into the series but head to head the Blazers have gotten shredded. I don't think there was a big reason to pick them over OKC. But Denver I thought they had a chance against, the Clippers maybe they they could've probably beat them as well, you know so I thought there were openings to win a series maybe even get to the conference finals if the road was right. I didn't think I didn't think they could make it past the conference finals unless they drew Houston.

[00:29:34.290] - Tara

I underestimated them. I'll just flat out say it I underestimated 'em.

[00:29:40.560] - Dave

Well I think I think everybody would have. I think everybody can lay claim to that. I think it's still a success. Obviously. I think that there might there's still a gray area though and we could talk about after the season.

[00:29:56.160] - Dave

But what does this mean going forward? If they don't make it past the second round obviously they played more promising but they have decisions to make and I don't think those decisions are clearer as clear as they would have been if the Blazers have been able to go all the way or give the Warriors a really good run in the conference finals or if they had simply lost in the first round. So right now I'm hoping actually that they really really succeed and then that will make the path forward and the decisions probably a little bit easier.

[00:30:23.520] - Tara

I'll say what I've said all season and that is all of these decisions are hard. They're always hard. I mean the nothing easy ever happens and that's what makes it exciting and that's what builds the tension that makes it so thrilling and makes us hang on and wonder what's going to happen. It's always hard. The easy thing is never gonna happen. If you want the easy thing to happen go be a fan of Golden State because you don't have to think about anything you just have to hang on for the ride and oh maybe they lose a game here maybe you lose a game there but with the Blazers maybe they lose they have another round with the Blazers it's always hard.

[00:30:59.130] - Dave

Well here's the thing. You can talk about this later. We want to address this here but before this series let's let's pretend that one of their reserve guards would take the taxpayers mid level if the Blazers would pay it. Either Curry or Hood. Before this series, that money was probably on Curry. Now what. No. You know it's like it all it all gets more complicated as they go on that lesson until they really excel. And the history of the Blazers is they will excel just enough to make you think twice and then leave you there. That would be amazing if this were just the most spectacular example of that possible.

[00:31:37.950] - Tara

It's always always hard and I think that's what makes it exciting. Well I want to pivot for just a minute to talk about another person who's a huge fan of Enes Kanter and the Portland Trail Blazers. Senator Ron Wyden was in town to watch the Trail Blazers on Friday night and he's recently come out in support of Enes Kanter and you know Enes Kanter has been embroiled in some just pretty nasty stuff with the Turkish government right now. And so somebody from the U.S. government has come out in support of Kanter and that is Senator Wyden.

[00:32:22.470]

So he called in and I had a nice pretty short conversation with him not just about K1anter but about basketball because it turns out he is a huge basketball fan. I don't know if you guys knew it but he's

been a huge fan of the NBA. He actually wanted to be an NBA player when he was growing up and he grew up to be 6 foot 4. And he said he just never quite got the speed that he was hoping for to become a an NBA player.

[00:32:49.480]

Anyway I had a conversation with him. So I think we should go and play that and then we'll come back and talk about where the Blazers go from here and how they can finish out this seven game series.

[00:33:03.740] - Tara

Welcome to the Blazers edge podcast Senator.

[00:33:05.790] - Senator Ron Wyden

Thank you for having me Tara.

[00:33:09.840] - Tara

Well I hear that you're a lifelong basketball fan so could you start off by telling us how you got started loving basketball and what it is that really attracted you to the game?

[00:33:21.900] - Senator Wyden

I was only about coming up with this dream of playing in the NBA and really pretty much from sixth grade to my sophomore year in college. I said "this is what I really want to do. This is my first love and I just live ball morning, noon and night. I got a college scholarship, Cal Santa Barbara. Towards the end of my freshman year reality began to kind of sink in and I said I'm not sure I can make it in the league because I'm too small at 6' 4" and I'm making up for it by being really slow. So it isn't necessarily going to happen. So I finally started studying and transferred to Stanford. And you know now my wife and I are older parents with small children who just are always [playing] family horse, going to games. It's just something that I think kind of embodies, not only is it my roots but you know when I got out of law school and the Blazers were coming on in the 70s that Larry Weinberg had the club and I was very close to him. Both experiences came together and I also adored my high school coach. So I mean these are kind of the things I really remember.

[00:34:44.430] - Tara

I'm wondering are there things that you learned when you were playing in you know in high school or in college or even as a youth that you still carry with you today?

[00:34:56.600] - Senator Wyden

I think probably more than anything the difference in life is whether you really come into play. Some people have such extraordinary gifts that they really don't have to throw themselves into it to succeed but to the most part for people with sort of modest, you know, talents-- I put myself in that in that arena-- I mean it's all about whether you just really want to focus and lock in and come to play. One of my colleagues in the Senate once said "I don't agree with Ron on everything. But I'll tell you, he always comes to play." And I said he just made my day.

[00:35:34.700] - Tara

That's very cool. Well I hear that there are you know pickup games among Congress members and their staff and sometimes there's even charity games have you ever participated in any of those?

[00:35:46.640] - Senator Wyden

I don't play much in the actual games but among other among other things I hold the House of Representatives free throw shooting record. I scored 47 out of 50 and I wasn't even a particularly great free throw shooter in school. I was in the 70s but nothing like Dame or anything like that. And they had this kind of proctored contest when I was in the House. In the gym I attended. My son walked with me. He said Dad let's do this. So I missed the first one ran off about 15, 20 in a row, missed another one ran off anothe big set 15, something like that, one more 47 out of 50. I now live in fear that somebody is going to get me in another free throw shooting contest and I'll hit a bunch of bricks and they take the award away.

[00:36:39.840] - Tara

How long have you held that championship? How long ago was that?

[00:36:43.890] - Senator Ron Wyden

Well it's been it's it's been a while. I mean like you know 15, 18 years something like that.

[00:36:51.280] - Tara

That is very impressive. I mean obviously you are somebody who is clutch. Good to know.

[00:36:58.170] - Senator Wyden

My wife. When she heard that I'd made 47 out of 50 she said "Well, dear, every once in a while a blind squirrel finds an acorn."

[00:37:09.060] - Tara

I don't know 47 out of 50. That's a lot of data I think. I think you can successfully brag about that.

[00:37:14.160] - Senator Wyden

Tara, I'd never do I'd never do it again. Was one of those rare kind of moments you just savor them.

[00:37:21.540] - Tara

Yeah. Just end on a high note right there. Well on a more serious topic. So Enes Kanter joined the team after the All-Star break he's been awesome as a basketball fan and for the short time that he's been here he's really worked hard to become a part of this community. But he is facing some serious issues in his home country of Turkey. Recently wrote a letter in support of him. Can you explain a little bit about what was in that letter and what you were hoping will come as a result?

[00:37:53.710] - Senator Wyden

Well first first of all this remarkable, courageous young man has really captured the hearts and minds of Rip City. I got stuck in DC last night. The bad weather and everything and I went to bed about 12:15 Friday night, Friday morning in Oregon 3:15 back east. And even as I got off the plane people were asking me about Enes Kanter and you know how it was going and what happens if we play no Toronto in the NBA Finals. And I think it's just remarkable what what he's done to kind kinda be the face of the club and, look, Erduon's a bully, threatening him, and in Rip City when people try to bully us around you know we push push back. And so I'm on the Senate Intelligence Committee I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and I said we need the Trump administration to stand up. You're always talking about you know human rights and taking on these dictators.

[00:39:02.800] - Senator Wyden

So I made it clear this morning when people were asking that if we get our dream and the Blazers are in the finals and they were dealing with Toronto. So I'm gonna make sure that I am doing everything I possibly can to work on the Senate Intelligence Committee to make sure that Enes Kanter can travel there and play there.

[00:39:27.250] - Tara

It's really amazing how it's really, I mean basketball brings people together but it also expands our world at the same time. And you know until Kanter came here like I'd followed a little bit about you know what had been going on with him and with Turkey, I mean I watched him when he did the livestream when he was stuck in the airport in Europe last year. But you know just when people, whether or not he's you know here after this year or if he's just here for a little while you know he's made an impact by being in this community.

[00:40:00.850] - Senator Wyden

He's an incredibly appealing guy. My wife and I are older parents. My eleven year old son William came with me when Enes and I got together and in March and it was really exciting. First thing William looks at me and goes, "Daddy, he's like really tall. You're taller than everybody else but he's way taller than you." I said, "William, yeah I'm 6 foot 4 inches you know and Enes is almost 7 feet. I said, "William, what I wanted you to do was to meet this wonderful young man who's been so courageous

in speaking out for the right kinds of values making sure everybody gets treated treated fairly and maybe someday you'll say you met him and you grew up a little bit like him.

[00:40:49.730] - Tara

Yeah. And so young too. I mean I don't know what you were doing when you're 26 years old probably something much more important than doing it but still like so many of these basketball players who stand up for something we don't remember they were very young when they start speaking up. It's very impressive just really impressive.

[00:41:09.100] - Senator Wyden

It is. And Enes Kanter, his work transcends basketball. In other words, he is the kind of person when he talks about his father being harassed, the sacrifices family makes so that Enes can have these opportunities to play him in the NBA, just say to yourself as I said to my son, this is somebody who is really a role model.

[00:41:34.450] - Tara

Well we have just a couple minutes left. You want to talk some hoops.

[00:41:38.790] - Senator Wyden

Yeah. Oh yeah of course.

[00:41:40.950] - Tara

So have you enjoyed this season do you have any highlights for for the Blazers?

[00:41:46.810] - Senator Wyden

Well this season's highlight of course is Dame's with the Thunder. I mean everybody just looks at that and just the idea that he's out there at 37 feet. He's going to take the title and walks off by waving at them, it was something really to remember but there are lots of great moments. I mean, you talk about Enes, I mean the fact he's out there with this incredibly painful shoulder injury and standing up to a to a bully. C.J. I mean the fact that a lot of people don't really recognize him nationwide. What incredible player he is made a lot of big shots against Denver in Game two. And the Chief, Al-Farouq Aminu you know I always joke that my favorite rendition of Hail to the chief is when Aminu hits the three.

[00:42:40.960] - Tara

Oh I love that. I don't know if you know this but yeah chief is one of my absolute all time favorite basketball players. I love it when people get to bring him up.

[00:42:53.110] - Senator Wyden

I think I may have may have heard that. These are really good people too. I think you know when we had a few years when, you know, what went on off the court wasn't exactly something you were incredibly proud of but these guys are just great and all of them really kind of tried to reach out. Terry Stotts, he stopped by when I got together with Kanter, with Enes in March. I mean he's a coach who deserves a lot more recognition nationally. Hopefully he'll get it. But you just go all the way up and down the team. And of course you know Dame, Dame's Rip City now, he really represents our values, on and off the court.

[00:43:50.050] - Tara

So last question what do you think the Blazers are going to have to do to make it to the next round?

[00:43:56.170] - Senator Wyden

Honestly a couple of things. I mean yeah the fact that we won the second game I thought was huge because you know if you go down two in the playoffs that always is a challenge. Sometimes I think we come out 1 and 1 and you're home and you know it's going to be a Friday night crowd you're almost too amped up. So our guys you can be very fired up but it just it just feels so positive this year, they play well together. They complement each other. And I think if we keep keep building on what we've already accomplished we've overcome a lot, there's no question. Nurk being injured everybody

under normal circumstances says "oop, that's it, no way to [compete in the] paint against Denver but there we are competing and it's just the fact it's a Game 5 against Oklahoma City everybody loves that too. So we've overcome a lot didn't didn't get here by osmosis, lets put it that way.

[00:45:05.350] - Tara

Yeah they did. They worked. They've been working so hard they've been building this chemistry for years and we're really seeing I think the results of it.

[00:45:13.870] - Tara

Well I want to thank you so much for taking the time to join me and sounds like you've been cheering for the bright Blazers real loud so losing your voice from all that cheering, right?

[00:45:24.220] - Senator Wyden

Sure, its from some of the great moments. No Larry Weinberg sent me to talk to Soviet Sports Federation about Arvydas Saboins, it reminded me of the Rocky movie when when you had everybody from the Soviet Sports Federation talking and you wondered if you're gonna have some kind of foreign policy calamity. And I've just I've just enjoyed being somebody who could say that our Trail Blazers and Rip City is really the Oregon way.

[00:46:03.700] - Tara

Right on. Thank you so much for joining me today. I really appreciate it's been awesome.

[00:46:07.960] - Senator Wyden

Let's do it again soon. Let's just keep our fingers crossed and our hopes that we're going to be playing well into June.

[00:46:19.270] - Tara

Well that was awesome. I had no idea that Oregon's Senator held the record for most free throws from his time in the House of Representatives. That was impressive. Clearly he has been doing a lot of talking lately because his voice was very very hoarse and he's been making the rounds but I really appreciate that he took the opportunity to spend some time talking directly to Blazer fans on the podcast. You guys want to add anything.

[00:46:49.920] - Danny

I mean I think you kind of covered it all right.

[00:46:53.440] - Tara

Well let's let's look ahead now to how the Blazers might finish out the rest of this series. Do we have any latest word on Kantor's health? Because I know at the end of the game he was talking about he was unclear whether or not he was going to be able to play. Have you guys heard anything lately?

[00:47:12.070] - Danny

I have not. I've been kind of out for the morning but I haven't seen any updates. I don't think they ended up having practice today. I think they just had a film session. I think I just had a film session and treatment.

[00:47:23.510] - Dave

So the playoffs honestly for the playoffs they're going to try to keep that kind of thing under wraps as long as possible because they don't want to tip off the opponent and or create a weak spot. Now obviously it's already known. You can see Jokic going at him, and by the way that's playoff basketball. I mean I'm sorry I don't like it. It would really suck to be the guy with the injury. But if you're out there playing with an injury you can expect that your opponent is going to exploit it, one hundred percent, in professional sports. Because nobody's going to remember that 10 decades from now all they're going to remember is if you won.

[00:47:57.850] - Danny

Exactly. We talked about this in the OKC series. What did I say over and over about Paul George? If

he's going to be on the floor, you have to test it. You have to run him into as many screens as possible and all that kind of stuff like that. That clip it's circulating of Jokic throwing his arm, I don't have a problem with it from like a clean or dirty perspective. The only thing I have a problem with is whether or not they're going to call foul or not.

[00:48:20.800] - Danny

The inconsistency in how they've kind of called the big men in two of the three games has been one of the things that makes you scratch your head. And I'm harder on the refs than probably anybody. The flip side of this is, I thought from basically the fourth quarter on throughout the rest of the game, it was an incredibly well officiated game and they just kind of let the players handle it and nothing really crossed the line of egregious other than a couple, you know, travel calls. I mean if you look at the last two minute report that came out it actually is a last twenty two minute report.

[00:48:53.230] - Danny

I went through every one of the calls and the staggering majority are correct. Non calls. And the other ones. I think a few more went against Portland than went against Denver as far as incorrect call but almost all of those were travel calls. So they weren't like physical contact type calls. And in that case like cool, I can get behind that. I just I just want to see the "big m'n" as Steven Adams like to call him. I just want to see him officiated to the point of basically where unless they're tearing each other's arms off don't call foul.

[00:49:25.390] - Tara

What do you guys think they're going to be looking out at those film sessions do you think. How much time you think they're going to spend on Damian Lillard having Will Barton come out from behind him and block shots. I never want to see that again ever.

[00:49:38.890] - Dave

I mean you know he had fresh legs though I mean he was another guy. And by the way he made a lot of mistakes early. He scored over them late but Barton has not really been a positive in this series until the last couple overtime. So I think the Blazers will live with Will Barton and how he's playing. I think if anything they probably need to adjust and again that this is their game plan to let people loose on the perimeter. If it means keeping Jokic out of there. But at this point they're kind of doing neither.

[00:50:12.970] - Dave

So I think they need to adjust a little bit how and where they double from. And in addition to just when the double team comes, when to get out of it and get back and where's your man. Because that's the part if any part of the defense is falling a part that's it. You make the initial play but then you're stuck in no man's land and Jokic either scores over you or the pass is so easy and the shot so wide open that you're just dodging bullets all night long.

[00:50:38.020] - Tara

Dan what would you add for film study time?

[00:50:43.050] - Danny

Realistically Yeah I think the plan is sound. I like the aggressiveness that has been there for the last couple of games. I would like to see when they do double or if they are going to bring that double when Jokic is in the post. I would like to see it basically anybody other than C.J. McCollum being the guy. Because realistically, this isn't a shot at C.J.. C.J. is sixthree, one hundred eighty nine pounds. How big is Jokic?

[00:51:09.130] - Tara

Bigger. Yeah. Much bigger.

[00:51:10.650] - Danny

He's slightly bigger. So that that help coming from the corner, how effective is it really? And what's what's the net value of C.J. helping? Like if C.J.'s helping off of Gary Harris in the corner, a guy who historically has been very very good from that spot, do we think that over the long haul that that's not

going to you know play out in Portland's favor. So I'd like to see mostly just slight adjustments.

[00:51:39.650] - Danny

I think the game plan itself is very sound. I think the execution for the most part has been very good. I like that Portland is still being aggressive in the passing lanes. I mean they're they're getting more steals in games right now than I have ever think I've ever seen on this iteration on team. I mean they had 13 last night and Dave hit on this a little bit as far as ball security. This. . . .that four overtime game was dumb on one particular point. 13 turnovers for the Blazers. 13 turnovers when you're that tired . . .

[00:52:10.790] - Tara

How come all these sudden they figured it out because like what have you noticed anything different or is it just that attention? What do we know this is different?

[00:52:23.300] - Danny

If you if you're watching the broadcast last night you know exactly how many times per game's Jokic is touching the ball, right? ESPN couldn't shut the hell up about it, but the other thing was the amount of time that he has the ball is one of the fewest. Its like less than 10 seconds per possession. Meanwhile Dahm and C.J. are holding the ball significantly longer 7, 8, 9 seconds. Well when the ball's in Damian Lillard and C.J. McCollum's hands, your two best ball handlers, playmakers, creators, whose hands is it not in? It's not going to Aminu, its not in Harkless's it's not in Collins', guys who have got a little bit of case a butterfingers at times and that I think takes away from the opportunity cost of those turnovers. Now, that doesn't make Dame an C.J. immune to those. We've seen, we saw Dame in game one with some boneheaded atrocious just try to split the defense loft lollipop passes over the coverage that kind of stuff but I think when you look at those guys when they're holding the ball, and this is kind of that you know which side of the knife you live on, things are going to be better in the long run even if it does limit some of the effectiveness of the other guys because you're you're taking such prized care of those possessions.

[00:53:40.400] - Dave

Well it's not just Dan let me interrupt here that it's not just that the other players aren't touching it, when they were touching it in game 1 they were holding it and there was a lot of indecision they were passing up open shots, thinking "should I shoot this?" They were then dribbling or passing into coverage and that was a disaster. Right now when Aminu or Harkless or even Zach Collins touched the ball, Meyers Leonard too, Jake Layman when he was in for 10 seconds in Game 2, that they're either shooting it right away or passing it quickly and that decision making process I think is what improved even more than their physical ability or the defense. And credit to them for doing it. Credit for the coaching staff who I assume gives them the confidence to say look we're not going to yell at you if you shoot the shot and miss it, we're going to yell at you if you if you hold it and it results in a turnover because you had an open look that you didn't take because you weren't sure. Then you can't stay on the court.

[00:54:44.480] - Danny

The perfect example of that I think is Collins who clearly I've been hard on in the past. He in that game offensively, every single three that he took I was like yes hell yes. That is the right play. Take that shot. Get your feet set. Let it fly. But people around me were like "but you don't usually cheer him on." I'm like, it's in the flow. He's taking he's taking the shot he needs to take. Al-farouq Aminu, I've talked to a few people in the past you know 12, 18 hours who say "what was Chief doing out there on the floor blah blah blah blah blah, he was two for nine." Yeah, but you know what? In the course of those overtime games or overtime periods, Chief was taking the shots he needed to take on those kick out threes. They were good looks. Did he knock them down? No. But you have to, like the Nuggets, when when the Blazers double team you have to kick it out to the guys who were your shooters and expect them to deliver.

[00:55:35.270] - Danny

Those are just those things that you like when you look at the end of the game. Yeah. The Superstars are gonna get there. That's what the playoffs are all about. But it's it's about everything on the

margins. And when you can tighten those things up and you're you're executing the way that you need to execute, then I can live with that. Win, loss, or otherwise.

[00:55:53.120] - Tara

So, I just had a thought and I'm curious what you guys think about it. It's like, for game 3, the Blazers removed the high-risk, high-reward plays and decided to go with the low-risk, medium-reward plays. You don't, like, you don't seem like you've talked about the bounce passes through all of the, you know, the whole season. We're seeing very few of those but we're seeing that the tried and true scoring that might not you know get as high of a big splashy might not run up the score as fast but it's slow and steady as opposed to like high, you know, like I said, high risk high reward.

[00:56:35.180] - Danny

The variance plays are not there.

[00:56:39.530] - Tara

Like alley-oops.

[00:56:42.800] - Dave

With those variance plays people get out of position because even your teammates don't quite see them coming. When the shots were within the flow of the offense, look where everybody is. Now the Blazers are in position to match the Nuggets on offensive rebounds for instance which by the way they did, right? Weren't they like twenty four a piece or something like that in this and in game 3? So that that became a weapon for Portland as well. Also they're able to get back and everybody knows if you can time it, it's a rhythm and the passing lanes and the passing opportunities are clearer and evident to everyone so then people can move. So when you take the randomness out of it even if it's spectacular randomness you do get that sense of everybody playing better together as a unit.

[00:57:31.610] - Danny

We do have slightly breaking news the injury report has been sent out from Blazers PR, guess who's not listed on it?

[00:57:38.450] - Tara

Kanter?

[00:57:40.450] - Danny

Kanter is not listed.

[00:57:42.070] - Tara

All right.

[00:57:42.980] - Dave

There's a surprise.

[00:57:43.360] - Tara

He's not even listed as questionable?

[00:57:47.390] - Danny

Nope.

[00:57:47.390] - Tara

I'm surprised about that.

[00:57:49.960] - Dave

I think this is like a wrestling promo thing at this point. Kanter gives the interview and says "Oh yeah it's really hurt. I don't know if I'm going to be able to make it. Brock Lesnar is a huge opponent. I have no idea." And then I go out there and Hurricane Ron are all over the place.

[00:58:05.440] - Tara

He's got himself all of the pictures of himself getting treatment and everything. Yeah well guys I think we should wrap it up there you know. Thanks to all of our listeners who have been supporting us through this whole this whole playoff run by consistently listening

[00:58:23.240] - Danny

You can call it an ordeal.

[00:58:24.430] - Tara

Well we keep putting out content because stuff keeps happening. You know for for so long we've been so steady with our regular schedule but there's just so much happening we just have to keep talking about it. So we're gonna keep talking about it as long as stuff is happening. And thanks for the list to the listeners for always listening. It's great to know that people are out there and want to know you want to hear what's going on. You guys want to go ahead and tell folks how they can find you just in case they don't already know.

[00:58:54.100] - Danny

Go ahead, grand poo-bah.

[00:58:55.840] - Dave

Well there is a little web site called Blazersedge.com. You can often find me writing there, @DaveDeckert on Twitter or even email me, Blazersub@gmail. com. That's been true forever and ever and ever. I'm always pretty accessible. Depends, I get a lot of emails so if I can't answer personally, forgive me. But if you send in a question we'll try to use it in the mailbag. You've got something interesting to say that you want us to think about. Let me know and we'll talk to you that all right.

[00:59:24.910] - Danny

As always folks you can find me on Blazers Outsiders before and after every game. We'll have the immediate postgame coverage for NBC Sports Northwest since the network coverage is all national now. So thanks to everybody who's been joining us. Yes, we've seen a lot more people watching the show with the playoffs and how crazy things have been. It's been an awesome experience. We do have some stuff planned as we kind of progressed this series and if they make it to the Western Conference Finals we've got some cool stuff possibly in the works.

[00:59:55.130] - Danny

But as always you can find on social media and at blazers edge at @dmarang . Send questions, comments, concerns anything. I'm always available in that sense. And Tara, take us out of here.

[01:00:09.380] - Tara

You can find me @tcbbiggs on Twitter, you can also find the Hoops and Talks podcast @hoopsandtalks. We did release one today that has nothing to do with this current playoff series so if people are listening for looking for a little content to just kind of like take your minds off of all of the activity that has been going on with the Blazers right now, it's a really fun look at one woman's quest to find her childhood hero who happens to be Bryant Reeves of the Vancouver Grizzlies. It's super charming and

[01:00:39.230] - Danny

Shout out "Big Country".

[01:00:40.280] - Tara

Y'all should check it out because it's really fun. Thank you so much again to the listeners. Find us on Blazers Edge, subscribe to the Blazersedge podcast feed and we will talk to you soon.