

How the offensively-charged Warriors game-planned for DeMar DeRozan

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TORONTO – DeMar DeRozan’s season-opening scoring tear has lifted him into the [company of Michael Jordan](#) – and the NBA is taking notice. Particularly the offensive juggernaut Golden State Warriors, who drew the unenviable task Wednesday of trying to slow down the Raptors’ star guard.

“He’s playing with unbelievable confidence,” said Warriors coach Steve Kerr. “He’s a guy who gets to the line a lot – any great scorer gets to the line on a nightly basis and that’s what keeps them scoring at a high level – but he’s making shots, he’s posting up, he likes any matchup he seems to have a size advantage using his strength and his body. He’s been brilliant.”

DeRozan was more battering ram than brilliant Wednesday night, fighting for his 34 points on the back of 17 made free throws for his ninth game scoring at least 30 over the season’s first 11 games.

That DeRozan’s latest offensive outburst came in a [127-121 loss](#) is disappointing for him on a personal level, but considering the circumstances was still impressive. The Raptors were playing the second game of a back-to-back one night after meeting the reigning champion Cavaliers on the road, making the margin of error against Golden State even slimmer than usual. And with former MVPs in Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant and All-Stars in Draymond Green and Klay Thompson on the roster, that bar is set extremely high.

Nothing easy

The Warriors made DeRozan work hard for his points, early and often, by trying to keep the ball out of his hands or force him into taking a tough shot. Golden State used multiple defenders against him as well – rotating Green,

Thompson, Andre Iguodala, Shaun Livingston, and even Curry in an effort to keep the Raptors' shifty high-flyer from finding a rhythm.

"He's very crafty. You can tell he's the type of guy who loves to play basketball. He's one of those guys that I actually like watching him play," said Iguodala. "The way he's been playing this year has been really fun to watch; I told him that on the court."

On top of deploying different defenders on DeRozan, the Warriors sent a number of double-teams at him when he had the ball and switched on screens. Because of his maturation on the floor, teams must now respect DeRozan as a facilitator – representing a change from his scoring-only approach during the early years of his career. It's all part of the process that's taken him from a raw rookie with tunnel vision and shaky handles, to a gold medalist on the U.S. Olympic team in Rio.

"I think (playing for Team) USA really helped him. He has a lot of pop in his game," said Livingston. "He's obviously going to be here a long time, his role is solidified, but he's playing with a swag and I think physically too he looks a lot better. He's a lot more sure, getting to his spot, his balance, and he can get to the line. He's a tough cover for sure."



Finding comfort in chaos

What's drawn extra attention to DeRozan's historical start is how he's accomplished it: a total domination of the mid-range game. It has not mattered whether or not he's been closely guarded most of the time, either. Even as the league as a whole continues to get faster and rely more on three-pointers, DeRozan is sticking with a throwback approach.

"They try to label him and say he shouldn't play a certain way and take as many mid-range shots but he's sticking to what he's great at," said Iguodala. "This league is all about confidence. If you can get some confidence and you work hard the results are going to show: you're going to get better and better. A prime example is a guy like him."

DeRozan's style of play, however, can take its toll, physically and mentally. Seeing Durant in a Warriors uniform is proof of that. The driving force behind Durant leaving Oklahoma City and signing with Golden State in the offseason

was the allure of playing in an offence that spreads the ball around and results in open looks. Durant was, in effect, tired of settling for the type of shots that have become DeRozan's calling card. That Warriors offence was too much for the Raptors, with Curry and Durant combining for 65 points.

Golden State, recognizing the growth in DeRozan's game, threw everything they could his way and the defensive strategies used by Kerr and the Warriors – different defenders, double teams, switching – is going to be the new normal for DeRozan moving forward.

"You expect it when you're a scorer and you're able to get it going," said DeRozan. "It's not really too much of a challenge, it (comes) down to me understanding what's the best route to take to hurt them."

Toronto's opponents, including the Warriors, can attest to this: DeRozan has been bringing the pain this season.

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