

# Old stars in unfamiliar roles pull out familiar result as Nets beat Raptors 102-100

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By Israel Fehr

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TORONTO – Adjusting to change can take time, even for three competitive NBA veterans who have experienced everything the game has to offer and have reached the greatest heights in professional basketball.

To wit: 3,842 regular-season games, 19 All-NBA selections, 21 All-Defensive team nods, one MVP, 425 playoff games, one Finals MVP, and three championships. These are just some of the combined career accomplishments of Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, and Jason Kidd.

The Raptors are certainly aware of their history, having been on the wrong side of their on-court exploits time and time again.

From 2007-08 to 2012-13, the Garnett and Pierce-led Boston Celtics were 19-5 against the Raptors. Kidd was 28-16 in the regular season in his career against Toronto and notched a playoff series win over the Raptors while playing for the then-New Jersey Nets in 2007.

But times have changed. Garnett and Pierce are no longer with the Celtics and Kidd is no longer suiting up to play in the games, instead he's suited up on the sidelines.

Brought together this offseason as part of Brooklyn's bold plan to challenge for the Eastern Conference crown, the

early returns have been nothing short of disastrous.

The Nets entered Tuesday night's game in Toronto on a five-game losing streak and with a 3-10 record on the season. Deron Williams and Brook Lopez are dealing with injuries and are out of the lineup. The team has struggled to find a rhythm on both sides of the court, ranking in the bottom ten in offensive efficiency and dead last in defensive efficiency.

It's been a challenging debut for the inexperienced head coach Kidd – and it wasn't too long ago that he was taking instructions from Raptors head coach Dwane Casey in Dallas while Casey ran Rick Carlisle's defence as the Mavericks went on to win the championship in 2011.

"Coach Casey is the best. I learned a lot from him in Dallas and I was very lucky to have had an opportunity to win a championship with him," Kidd said prior to tip-off. "To see him on the other sideline, to see [Portland Trail Blazers head coach and former Mavericks assistant coach] Terry Stotts on the other sideline, to have that connection it's surreal but now we're going against one another."

While Kidd makes the transition from the floor to the bench, Garnett and Pierce are attempting to get settled into their new realities.

They're still getting to the spots on the floor that have become synonymous with their games but not with the same degree of efficiency. Their minutes have been limited, especially Garnett's, and their numbers are down across the board.

With a double-digit lead late in the fourth quarter, they watched from the bench until a couple of quick baskets by Toronto brought them back into the game with just over three minutes left.

Kyle Lowry continued to spark the rally on both ends to get Toronto to within one. The Raptors had the ball down two with 10 seconds to play but Amir Johnson's corner three hit front iron as time expired and the Nets escaped with a 102-100 win.

Pierce scored 16 points, Brooklyn's third highest scorer behind Andray Blatche's 24 points and Joe Johnson's 21, and added four rebounds and four assists. Garnett finished the game with 12 points and six rebounds.

It was by no means a dominant performance, but for a team searching for answers and striving for cohesiveness, it left something to build on.

"We've been struggling but I thought for the most part we talked for 48 minutes tonight. [Our defence] was active, I thought we were aggressive. They had a run at the end there but we withstood it and won the game which is the most important," said Garnett.

"That last three minutes was almost a disaster. Fortunately we built such a big lead. If it was any closer, we would have lost tonight." said Pierce. "It sort of seemed like we wanted the time to run out instead of going out there and putting a stamp on the game. That's what we have to do."

"They have Hall of Famers on their team. Against those type of teams you have to throw the first punch, you can't wait to get hit like we did tonight," said Casey.

Garnett and Pierce have put in their time. Their move to Brooklyn was made understanding that it was creeping away from them.

It wasn't quite like the good old days, but in their unfamiliar roles Garnett, Pierce, and Kidd got the best of the Raptors yet again. For at least one more night, time was on their side and while the clock keeps ticking, you can bet they won't go away quietly.

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**Israel Fehr** is a writer for **Yahoo Canada Sports**. Email him at [israelfehr@yahoo.ca](mailto:israelfehr@yahoo.ca) or follow him on Twitter. [Follow @israelfehr](#)