

Raptors' Game 1 fate far too familiar, lose first round opener to Pacers

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TORONTO – Three years in you would think the Raptors would have this finally figured out by now.

Tipping off at 12:30 p.m. on the first day of the playoffs for the third straight year, the Raptors showed they learned from their mistakes, at least with the pregame festivities. General manager Masai Ujiri did not address [the fans assembled outside the Air Canada Centre](#) after [being fined for using inappropriate language](#) in his speeches each of the last two years.

But other than Ujiri not depositing his money into the NBA's equivalent of a swear jar, how the rest of afternoon played out was far too familiar for the Raptors.

Toronto is facing a 0-1 series deficit after dropping Game 1 of the first round Saturday to the Indiana Pacers [100-90](#), just like they did against the Brooklyn Nets in 2014 and Washington Wizards in 2015. In the Raptors' eight playoff appearances overall, they've never won the first game of a first-round series. They've only gone on to win the series once, in 2001 against the Knicks when the first round lasted five games.

DeMar DeRozan and Kyle Lowry never found a groove offensively, missing shots and turning the ball over. The defence sagged in the second half. The team looked nothing like the one that won a franchise-record 56 games and earned the two-seed in the Eastern Conference. And the game operations plan for in-game entertainment more than made up for Ujiri's silence in terms of public embarrassment with [two skits meant to poke fun at Indiana](#) that fell completely flat.

DeRozan and Lowry shot a combined 4-of-17 from the field in the first half for six and five points, respectively. Pacers forward Paul George was an equally unimpressive 2-of-9 shooting and the Raptors led 45-43 at halftime.

One of the three All-Stars would find his game in the second half and lead his team to victory. Unfortunately for the Raptors, it was George.

George went off in the third quarter, scoring 16 of his 33 points, while DeRozan and Lowry's struggles continued. DeRozan finished with 14 points on 5-of-19 shooting and Lowry scored 11 points, making three of his 13 field goal attempts. Jonas Valanciunas grabbed 19 rebounds, 11 of them on the offensive glass, but couldn't take full advantage going 4-of-14 as his aggressiveness was slowed by foul trouble. The team committed 20 turnovers; Lowry's six leading the way in that department.

The only real positive for the Raptors was the play of Cory Joseph, who scored a team-high 18 points off the bench, and Patrick Patterson, who had nine points and six rebounds.

"We got some open looks – [Valanciunas] missed like four or five tip-ins, DeMar missed some floaters, I missed some wide-open threes," said Lowry. "I don't think we were tentative. I think we just missed some shots and turned the ball over too much."

George's performance brought back memories of Paul Pierce; the scars from Pierce's evisceration of Toronto, with his words and his shots, with the Nets and Wizards are still fresh.

DeMarre Carroll, signed in the offseason specifically to guard the opposing team's best player in the playoffs, came off the bench as he slowly works his way back from a knee injury that kept him out for most of the last three and a half months.

While Carroll's return is certainly welcome, it does force head coach Dwane Casey to tinker with his usual substitution patterns. That proved to be a challenge for Casey, especially as George began to catch fire in the third.

"I was searching for someone to stop Paul George. That's what we were searching for," said Casey. "I thought our normal rotation was a little skewed, just adding that extra player in there ... And it wasn't really fair to put DeMarre in there after [George] got going ... we'll come up with a rotation in that situation.

"I thought as a team we were tight offensively. And then that frustration carried over to the defensive end and you can't do that."

The Raptors entered the series as prohibitive favourites, and one game doesn't change that. Saturday's loss looked a lot like the ones from the recent past, with a disjointed offence and a star on the other side they couldn't stop. This is not the start the team envisioned, that's for sure, but they remain confident that they're not headed to the same end result.

"This is different. Different team, different moments," said DeRozan. "We're not panicking, we understand we just played bad. We played terrible at home. We understand we have to go on the road and get one. We play extremely well on the road. We just have take care of home Monday [in Game 2]."

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