

# Raptors' role players rise to the occasion in Game 3 win

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By Israel Fehr

5/22/2016

TORONTO – For one night the Toronto Raptors got to feel what it's like to be kings, and their role players are why they're wearing the crown.

Bismack Biyombo was a rim-protecting and rebounding machine. Cory Joseph made tough and timely shots and played great defence. Patrick Patterson stepped into an unfamiliar role to help stop a lineup that had given Toronto fits in the first two games of the Eastern Conference finals.

When those three rise to the occasion and play like they did and DeMar DeRozan and Kyle Lowry score efficiently the Raptors are going to win more often than not, and they did in this one, beating the Cleveland Cavaliers [99-84 in Game 3](#) on Saturday night to cut Cleveland's series lead to 2-1.

DeRozan dropped 32 points and Lowry had 20, but it was Biyombo who did the dirty work and energized his teammates and the Air Canada Centre crowd. Biyombo came down with 26 rebounds, tying Hakeem Olajuwon and Dwight Howard for the most boards in a playoff game in the last 30 years. He also had four blocks – all punctuated with the patented Dikembe Mutombo finger wag, in homage to the Hall of Fame centre.



"I got the license from Mutombo. I saw him one time and we were having this conversation, and he was telling me how I haven't give you permission to use my finger (wag) yet," said Biyombo, who like Mutombo hails from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "I've had several conversations with him, especially defensively, how he was able to impact the game, and of course once he gave me permission to use his finger wag, then I guess I just want to leave his legacy and make sure that I show him some love."

There wasn't anyone in the arena getting more love than Biyombo, and with good reason. When Biyombo wasn't grabbing a rebound or blocking a shot and finger wagging, he was relishing the opportunity to guard LeBron James on the perimeter. A free agent at season's end, the Raptors will have competition for his services as his play has earned himself a nice contract on the open market.

"It was amazing," said DeRozan. "Twenty-six rebounds. Protecting the rim. He was big time tonight. Without him tonight, we probably wouldn't get this win."

The same can be said for the contributions from Joseph and Patterson. Joseph thrived all season as Toronto's backup point guard, but he hasn't been quite as effective in these playoffs. When Lowry got into foul trouble in the first half, Joseph entered the game and put those struggles behind, scoring 14 points and hassling Kyrie Irving defensively.

"I thought once Kyle got in foul trouble Cory did a good job of handling the pressure, handling their defensive pressure, switching and making sure he had the right person involved in the pick-and-roll," said Raptors head coach Dwane Casey. "Most of all, I thought he did a good job with his defensive presence in the pick-and-roll situations."

Patterson hasn't been at his best in the playoffs, either, but he too came up big. With Jonas Valanciunas still

sidelined, Casey tabbed Patterson as the team's de facto backup centre. Really, he needed him to fill that role for one particular stretch.

The Cavaliers have had [tremendous success using a lineup](#) that has James flanked by Matthew Dellavedova, Iman Shumpert, Richard Jefferson, and Channing Frye. Entering Game 3, those five have outscored opponents 46 points per 100 possessions since the first round.

Patterson's presence was key in keeping Cleveland's new super group in check to start the second quarter. Buoyed by their discovery, it was the Raptors that went on a 23-7 run, and that was ultimately the difference in the game.

The notion that role players perform better at home is a generally accepted truth in the NBA. The play of Biyombo, Joseph, and Patterson, who had 10 points and six rebounds, would seem to confirm it.

"That's what he's been at home and every playoff and every regular-season game," James said, specifically of Biyombo. "We understand he feeds off the crowd, but he's also a huge impact on the glass at home. He gives them a lot of energy, he gives them a lot of second-chance points."

There's another axiom that rang true in Game 3: the NBA is a make or miss league, and the Cavaliers missed some shots they ordinarily would make. James scored 24 points on 9-for-17 shooting, but Irving and Kevin Love hoisted their fair share of misses.

While Irving's 3-for-19 clunker was very much a product of the Raptors' defence, six of Love's nine attempts [were wide-open shots](#). Love made one, a three-pointer, for his only basket of the game.

Irving and Love aren't likely to be ice-cold shooting like that again, but it can happen even for All-Star calibre players. There's not much, if anything at all, Toronto can do to predict when their opponents will have off nights.



What the Raptors do know is that they have at least one more home game to play. A win in Game 4 on Monday night ensures there will be a Game 6 back in Toronto on Friday.

"It's a long series. It's not over with yet, but everybody thought we were going to get swept. I think that fuels us," said Casey. "And if that's what it takes, so be it."

A repeat from the role players might be exactly what it takes, and at home, they're in a position to deliver their second conference finals win in franchise history and tie the series.

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