

Painters add to Alaska woes

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DOUBLE-TEAM: CYRUS BAGUIO AND SONNY THOSS OF ALASKA MAKE LIFE MISERABLE FOR RYAN ARANA OF RAIN OR SHINE IN LAST NIGHT'S GAME.

MANILA — Ryan Arana already had a big shot to close out the third quarter, but he had the biggest points in the end.

The lefty guard canned two pressure-packed charities in the last 6.6 seconds, lifting Rain or Shine to an 80-79 squeaker over Alaska and into the middle of the pack in the PBA Philippine Cup at the Araneta Coliseum.

The Elasto Painters then harassed Cyrus Baguio into missing a gliding jumper and his own follow-up and Joe Devance into flubbing his own putback try before the final buzzer that capped Rain or Shine's sterling defensive efforts in the last half of the fourth period.

"I think at the end of the game, napunta sa amin ang suwerte," said RoS coach Caloy Garcia, whose charges battled back from several 9-point deficits and went on a 10-0 run in the final

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4:51 of the game.

The freebies capped a gutsy effort by Arana, whose prayer of a heave from beyond mid-court beat the buzzer and whittled what was a 58-67 deficit into a very manageable 61-67 count going into the final 12 minutes of play.

It was a big turnaround for RoS, which went into the game giving up a league-worst 93.6 points per game. Alaska's output was the lowest the Painters have given up to an opponent in the conference and Garcia said it was borne of the defensive mind-set he is trying to inculcate into his team.

"The only way we can beat Alaska is through defense and our efforts paid off in the end," Garcia added, referring to the way they stifled Alaska into a 0-of-10 shooting and four turnovers after Mark Borboran's jumper gave the Aces a 79-70 lead, 5:52 to go.

The triumph jacked the Painters' win-loss record to an even 5-5, good for a share of fifth-running spot with Meralco.

"Blessing siguro sa amin ito, kasi we're in the middle of the pack again and have a chance to get a (middle) seeding sa (playoff) series," Garcia said.

After the 14-game eliminations, teams ranked Nos. 3 and 6 and 4 and 5 square off in best-of-threes battles in the quarterfinals.

Alaska dropped to 5-7 and slid to seventh, just half-a-game ahead of eighth-running Air21. Should they stay that way, they will have twice-to-win handicaps against the No. 2 and 1, respectively, in the quarterfinals.

Gabe Norwood wound up with 17 points, including two charities to spark the closing surge and an eight-foot jumper from the left flank that brought RoS within 78-79, 54.3.

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Rookie RJ Jazul added a career-best 16 anchored on four triples and Arana finished with 13 points and six rebounds.

Sol Mercado, who reinjured his left foot while playing with the National Team in the Guangzhou Asiad, participated in the warm-up and suited up, but did not play on his own volition.

Borboran also re-set his career-high with 19 points while Devance, Sonny Thoss and Baguio each had at least 10 points for Alaska. Thoss and Devance also combined for 21 rebounds.

Alaska had a gaping hole in offense when LA Tenorio went scoreless, the first time he did so in his last 94 games, or since Game 3 of the same tournament's 2008-09 finals against Talk N Text. His eight-second violation in the last 16.7 seconds led to RoS' final crucial play.

As drawn up by Garcia, Norwood got the inbound and drove into the lane, before passing off to the cutting Arana, who momentarily mishandled the ball but still managed to throw it up while getting a from Tenorio.

The Aces actually had the chance to seal it, but Dela Cruz muffed a baseline jumper. The ensuing Painters fastbreak saw Jeffrey Chan issuing a passing error, 25.3 seconds left.