

Los Angeles Times

LAKERS

Phoenix's bench shows no reserve in building on lead

Suns' substitutes 'probably did the best job they have done this year,' their coach says in helping their team beat the Lakers, 118-103. Phoenix's bench scores 52 points; the Lakers' bench scores 31.



Phoenix forward Jared Dudley, right, celebrates after hitting a three-pointer as Lakers forward Lamar Odom looks on during the Suns' 118-103 victory Monday. (Mark J. Rebilas / US Presswire / December 28, 2009)

By Broderick Turner
December 29, 2009 | 8:11 a.m.

Reporting from Phoenix - They don't give out game balls in the NBA, but Phoenix Suns Coach Alvin Gentry wanted to give out one to a group of players on his team.

"If I was going to give a game ball to anyone, I'd say our bench probably did the best job they have done this year," Gentry said after the Suns dismantled the Lakers, 118-103, on Monday night at US Airways Center.

Gentry's reserves were dominant. They were a force. They were game-changers.

That's something that used to be said about the Lakers' bench. Now it's rarely said this season.

The Lakers' substitutes saw a Suns bench that was rolling, that came into the game and actually increased the score instead of giving up the lead.

Phoenix's bench scored 52 points. The Lakers'

bench scored 31 points.

During his postgame news conference, Gentry went down a roll call with his reserves.

He talked about forward Jared Dudley, who tied his career high with 19 points; he also contributed seven rebounds, three assists and one blocked shot.

He talked about the play of Goran Dragic, who had 14 points on five-for-10 shooting; Robin Lopez, who had eight points on four-for-four shooting and five rebounds, and Louis Amundson, who didn't score but played solid defense.

"Jared, he has done a tremendous job for us," Gentry said. "I think Goran is growing every day. I thought he played with so much confidence tonight that it was great. Robin gave us great minutes. Lou came in and gave us some good minutes tonight."

The Suns knew that the Lakers' bench was not the same now that key reserve Lamar Odom is starting in place of Ron Artest (concussion).

It wasn't that the Lakers' bench played poorly.

It was just that the Suns' bench played so well.

"With Lamar starting, their bench is not the same," Dudley said. "Sasha Vujacic is around and he is a good player, but it's different when Lamar is not on the bench. And we have confidence in our bench."

When the fourth quarter started, Gentry had reserves Dragic, Dudley, Lopez and Leandro Barbosa in with starter Channing Frye.

They were going up against Lakers' starters Kobe Bryant, Pau Gasol and Andrew Bynum, along with reserves Vujacic and Jordan Farmar.

All Gentry wanted his reserves to do was not give up the 12-point lead the Suns had entering the fourth.

And they didn't.

In fact, the Suns' bench went to work, opening a 19-point lead in the fourth.

It began with a Dudley three-pointer off an assist from Dragic.

Barbosa had a running seven-foot bank shot and Dragic had a driving layup.

Dudley even hustled back into the lane and blocked a shot by Bynum.

That's how good it was going for the Suns' bench.

"JD [Dudley] and, like I said, I think Goran is getting better every single day," Gentry said. "They played with so much confidence and made so many plays for us that we were still able to keep Steve [Nash] over there [on the bench] and keep the other starters over there. I just thought those guys played so well that they should finish out the game."

broderick.turner@latimes.com