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(Colo.) - Lakers hold off Nuggets to take 2-0 series lead

By: John Thayer Posted at: 05/02/2012 07:00 AM

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Kobe Bryant scored 38 points, Andrew Bynum followed up his playoff-opening triple-double with 27 points and nine rebounds, and the Los Angeles Lakers weathered Denver's late rally for a 104-100 victory over the Nuggets on Tuesday night, taking a 2-0 series lead.

Pau Gasol had 13 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for the third-seeded Lakers, who still haven't trailed in this series despite nearly crumbling against a much-improved effort by the Nuggets and Ty Lawson, who scored 25 points and led the fourth-quarter charge.

Los Angeles' 19-point lead in the third quarter dwindled to four with 3 minutes to play, but Ramon Sessions scored four key points in the final 1:14 before Bryant's icing free throws with 9.4 seconds left.

Game 3 is Friday in Denver.

Lawson shook his awful series opener with 17 second-half points, but the sixth-seeded Nuggets lost their ninth straight road playoff game despite playing much closer to their preferred speedy tempo after the Lakers muzzled them in Game 1.

Sessions scored 14 points for Los Angeles, which played just enough fast-break ball of its own to stay ahead of Denver - and now the Lakers are halfway to the second round. They have only lost one playoff series in franchise history after winning the first two games, going 42-1.

Kenneth Faried had 14 points and 10 rebounds while Danilo Gallinari and Corey Brewer added 13 points apiece, but Denver still couldn't consistently defend Bryant or negate Bynum, who played another outstanding low-post game on both ends until disappearing a bit in a three-point fourth quarter.

A 14-5 run in the final minutes eventually trimmed Los Angeles' lead to 98-84, but Sessions hit a teardrop layup with 1:14 to play, and Bryant made a slick steal on the other end. JaVale McGee's tip-in with 30 seconds left trimmed the Lakers' lead back to four, but Sessions and Bryant hit their free throws.

Jordan Hill shook off brewing legal troubles to contribute six points and 10 rebounds for the Lakers, who used just three reserves. Denver's bench outscored the Lakers' reserves 35-8.

Bynum blocked just two shots after swatting 10 in the Lakers' series-opening victory, but Denver minimized his dominance with home run passes, speedy outlets and 30 fast-break points.

Denver coach George Karl attempted to help through the media after Game 1, saying Bynum and the Lakers played illegal defense constantly during the opener. Karl tried another gambit before Game 2, saying Staples Center is not a noisy, intimidating road building, but more like "a Broadway stage."

The Lakers were called for no illegal defenses in Game 2.

Los Angeles stretched its seven-point halftime lead to 19 in the third quarter with a 14-0 run, but the Nuggets trimmed it back to seven entering the fourth quarter with an 18-4 run.

Denver cut the lead to four points late on consecutive hustle plays by Faried, but Bryant scrapped for a loose ball on one end and led the break to the other, feeding Bynum for a dunk - his first points of the fourth quarter - and a foul with 2:15 to play.

Hill produced another strong performance off the Lakers' bench a day after news broke of a felony assault charge against him in Houston, where he played for the Rockets before a late-season trade. Hill said Tuesday night he was "shocked" by the charges, but thinks he won't miss any time in the Lakers' championship quest.

Notes: Metta World Peace served the third game of his seven-game suspension. ... Before the game, Denver announced F Wilson Chandler had surgery Monday to repair a torn labrum in his left hip. He should be ready for training camp in the fall. ... Bryant has never lost a first-round playoff series after winning the opener, going 11-0. ... Fans near courtside included Lil Wayne, David and Victoria Beckham, Poppy Montgomery and Mario Lopez.

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