

Pacers' rookie Rush rounding into form

Rookie goes for 29 again in victory against Wizards

By Mike Wells
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His biography lists him as a rookie out of the University of Kansas.

Brandon Rush's game these days, however, resembles that of a veteran player who feels like he can take any player off the dribble and make every shot he takes.

Just ask the Washington Wizards.

Rush continued his recent surge when he scored a career-high 29 points for the second straight game in the Indiana Pacers' 124-115 victory over the Wizards at Conseco Fieldhouse on Sunday night.

"That's the type of zone I'm in right now," Rush said. "I'm feeling good. That's why they drafted me. In the workouts, I showed I could beat anybody one-on-one."

Rush found his comfort zone about three weeks ago, but it wasn't until coach Jim O'Brien inserted him into the starting lineup against Charlotte on March 21 that his game really took off.

Rush, the No. 13 pick in last summer's draft, is averaging 21 points, almost seven rebounds and 38 minutes in the past four games. The Pacers are 3-1 in that span.

Rush said his goal is to not only continue to start the rest of this season, but also next season as well.

"That's what you have to expect from rookies," Pacers forward Danny Granger said about Rush's confidence. "They're going to be up and down, hopefully more up than down. He's coming along very nicely. He can score the ball. He's athletic and he's a good defender. He really helps us."

Rush demonstrated why team president Larry Bird was so high on him when he showed off his athleticism in a three-possession sequence in the third quarter.

On the first play, he trailed on the fast break, took a pass from Jarrett Jack and completed it with a dunk.

Rush then pinned Antawn Jamison's shot attempt against the backboard on Washington's next possession.

He completed things when he drove left on Washington All-Star Caron Butler and hit a pull-up 16-foot jumper over him.

Rush had 10 of his 29 points in the third quarter when the Pacers turned a seven-point halftime lead into a 16-point lead going into the fourth quarter. The Wizards shot 28 percent in the quarter.

"It's amazing what confidence can do for you," O'Brien said. "The flip side of that is, it might be amazing what a lack of confidence can do, too. He's playing very good basketball. You don't expect 29 points in back-to-back games, but he's playing at a very high level offensively."

Rush, who also had 10 rebounds, had plenty of help. Granger led five Pacers in double figures when he finished with 31 points. Jack added 19 points, seven assists, six rebounds and no turnovers.

"I thought we played a solid game," O'Brien said. "I thought we ran out of a little bit of gas at the end, but I was very pleased with the effort. It's five games now I thought we've played good basketball."