

WNBA

Alana Beard wasn't first option, but best one for Sparks

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MINNEAPOLIS -- Alana Beard had one field goal when the Los Angeles Sparks began their final possession of the game. When she got the opportunity for her second, she hit a game-winning baseline jumper as time ran out to give the Sparks a 78-76 victory over the Minnesota Lynx at the Target Center.

“I don’t think I’ve ever hit a game-winner, so it’s pretty cool,” Beard said.

The Lynx’s Maya Moore hit a layup with 24.7 seconds left to tie the game at 76. It came down to one final possession.

So Beard taking the last shot was the plan all along, right?

“Yeah, that wasn’t option one, that was option two,” said Sparks coach Brian Agler.

5 months after getting cut from the Olympic team, a determined Candace Parker is looking for a WNBA title

They wanted to give Kristi Toliver a look and get some cutters to the rim, Agler said. That just didn’t develop thanks to the Lynx defense, so Chelsea Gray got the ball to Beard in the corner, who was left alone and sunk the shot.

The Lynx were ready for that final play, said Lynx coach Cheryl Reeve. They just didn’t get a deflection, and the ball ended up in Beard’s hands.

“We got caught over-helping, and they made a good pass,” Reeve said.

The Sparks’ Candace Parker, who finished with 14 points, also pointed to the couple of defensive stops for her team in the closing minutes. One of those resulted in a Moore turnover with 1:32 remaining with the Sparks up by a basket.

It was the 16th turnover for the Lynx, and the Sparks scored 18 points off of those. The Lynx scored four points off 12 Sparks turnovers.

As you'd expect in a game with the league's two best teams, it was a fairly tight contest throughout. The biggest lead for the Sparks was five points. The Lynx led by a basket at the half, 36-34, and then had their biggest lead, 60-56, going into the final quarter.

But the Sparks took advantage of some Lynx fouls to go 9-of-12 on free throws in the final quarter. The foul line and all the turnovers lost the Lynx the game, Reeve said.

Moore, Sylvia Fowles and Lindsay Whalen led the scoring for the Lynx with 18 points each. All of Moore's points came in the second half, however, as the Sparks took care of her defensively. It's a "team concept to try to corral her a little bit," Agler said. Seimone Augustus was also held scoreless in the first quarter, and she finished with six points. Fowles added 13 rebounds.

Meanwhile, Whalen led the overall scoring in the first half with 12 points.

League MVP Nneka Ogwumike and Toliver led the Sparks with 19 points apiece.

Game 2 in the best-of-five series is set for 8 p.m. ET Tuesday at the Target Center.

"This is only one game, and that's how we think about it," Beard said. "We wanted to get a win, so now we have another game."