

Sports

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TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2016

ATLETICO TOUGHER THAN REAL MADRID, WARNS PIQUE

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OAKLAND: C.J. McCollum #3 of the Portland Trail Blazers goes up for a shot against Stephen Curry #30, Brandon Rush #4, and Leandro Barbosa #19 of the Golden State Warriors at ORACLE Arena on April 3, 2016 in Oakland, California. — AFP

WARRIORS REBOUND FROM HOME LOSS TO BEAT BLAZERS

OAKLAND: Stephen Curry scored 39 points and the Golden State Warriors bounced back from their first regular-season home loss in more than 14 months by beating the Portland Trail Blazers 136-111 on Sunday night to tie the mark for the second-most wins in a season. Draymond Green added 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his 13th triple-double, and Klay Thompson scored 21 for the Warriors, who matched the 1996-97 Chicago Bulls and 1971-72 Los Angeles Lakers with 69 wins. Golden State needs to win four of its final five games to break the record of 72 victories set by Chicago in 1995-96. That chase was dealt a setback Friday when Boston snapped Golden State's record 54-game regular-season home winning streak. Damian Lillard scored 38 points to lead the Trail Blazers, who had their four-game winning streak broken.

CLIPPERS 114, WIZARDS 109

Chris Paul had 27 points and 12 rebounds and Blake Griffin scored six points in his return from a three-month absence to help the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Washington Wizards. Griffin shot 2 of 7 and contributed five rebounds and two assists while playing 24 minutes after missing 45 games because of quadriceps and hand injuries. The team went 30-15 and clinched a playoff spot during his absence. Marcin Gortat scored 21 points and Markieff Morris added 18 for the Wizards, who never led in losing for the fifth time in seven games.

CAVALIERS 112, HORNETS 103

LeBron James scored 31 points, J.R. Smith matched a season high with 27 and the Cleveland Cavaliers knocked down 16 3-pointers while playing without an injured Kyrie Irving in a win over the Charlotte Hornets. James added 12 assists and eight rebounds and Kevin Love added 25 points for the Cavs, who held off a comeback in the fourth quarter to open a 31/2-game lead over idle Toronto for the top playoff seed in the Eastern Conference. Smith made six 3-pointers and Love had five. Kemba Walker scored 29 points - 21 in the second half - and Marvin Williams added 22 for the Hornets, who got within 96-92 in the fourth before Smith and Love answered with 3-pointers.

ROCKETS 118, THUNDER 110

James Harden had 41 points with nine assists to help the Houston Rockets improve their playoff chances with a win over the Oklahoma City Thunder. With 30 seconds left, Harden stole a pass from Kevin Durant and found Patrick Beverley for a transition dunk to give Houston an eight-point lead and the Rockets held on for an important victory. Durant had 33 points and eight rebounds for the Thunder, who led by six early in the fourth until Harden hit back-to-back 3s to tie the game at 93. Oklahoma City lost for just the second time in the past three weeks and had won nine of its previous 10 entering Sunday.

MAVERICKS 88, TIMBERWOLVES 78

Wesley Matthews hit six 3-pointers and scored 19 points and the Dallas Mavericks topped the Minnesota Timberwolves. J.J. Barea scored 21 points and the Mavericks (39-38) made 14 of 40 3-pointers to overcome 38.6 percent shooting for their fourth straight victory. They forced 18 turnovers and held their opponent under 100 points for the fourth straight game as they push for one of the final playoff spots in the Western Conference. Andrew Wiggins scored 30 points and Karl-Anthony Towns had 11 points, 21 rebounds and nine assists for the Timberwolves. Ricky Rubio had nine points and five assists, but left with four minutes to play after taking a shot to the face.

PELICANS 106, NETS 87

Tim Frazier had career highs with 19 points and 13 assists, Luke Babbitt added 21 points and the New Orleans Pelicans beat the

Brooklyn Nets. Alexis Ajinca added 16 for the Pelicans as the Nets lost their fifth straight game. Sean Kilpatrick led the Nets with 15 points. Henry Sims and Markel Brown each had 12 for the Nets.

JAZZ 101, SUNS 86

Gordon Hayward led five Utah players in double figures with 22 points, and the Jazz boosted their playoff chances with a win over the Phoenix Suns. Rodney Hood added 18 points, Derrick Favors had 17, Trey Lyles 13 and Rudy Gobert 12 for the Jazz, who scored 26 points off 22 Suns turnovers and committed only 10 turnovers themselves. Mirza Teletovic led the Suns with 24 points, and Tyson Chandler added a season-high 21 to go with 18 rebounds. Phoenix has lost six straight.

MAGIC 119, GRIZZLIES 107

Nikola Vucevic scored 25 points off the bench, Victor Oladipo and Evan Fournier added 22 points each and the Orlando Magic topped the struggling Memphis Grizzlies. The Grizzlies, trying to hold onto the fifth seed in the Western Conference, have lost six straight games for their longest skid since November 2009. Orlando, meanwhile, has won three straight games at home and four of its last five. The Magic (33-44) continued their offensive surge that had seen them average more than 118 points in their previous four games heading into Sunday. Memphis was led by Matt Barnes, who had 24 points.

CELTICS 107, LAKERS 100

Isaiah Thomas scored 26 points and Boston clinched a playoff berth while besting Kobe Bryant for the final time with a victory over the Lakers. Jae Crowder added 22 points for the Celtics, who blew an early 17-point lead and survived a tense fourth quarter in their first game since ending the Golden State Warriors' NBA-record 54-game home winning streak. Bryant scored 34 points in his final showdown with the Lakers' historic rival, putting up the second highest-scoring performance of his farewell season. He hit a jumper with 56 seconds left, and Julius Randle's three-point play moments later trimmed Boston's lead to four points. But Bryant missed two late jumpers, and the Celtics secured their eighth playoff berth in nine years.

BULLS 102, BUCKS 98

Jimmy Butler scored 25 points on 10-of-11 shooting, Pau Gasol had 16 points and eight rebounds and the Chicago Bulls held off a second-half surge by the Milwaukee Bucks. Butler had six points and an assist in the final 3:45, when the Bucks had narrowed a 19-point deficit to one at 87-86. Justin Holiday hit a tough jumper from the corner with 1:15 left and later grabbed a defensive rebound on a missed finger roll by Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo with 43.9 seconds to go. Antetokounmpo scored a career-high 34 points, while Jabari Parker added 24 for Milwaukee.

PACERS 92, KNICKS 87

Paul George returned from an injured ankle to make the tiebreaking jumper with 23.6 seconds left, and the Indiana Pacers beat the New York Knicks to tie for seventh place in the Eastern Conference. The Pacers blew an 18-point lead in the second half against a Knicks team missing its two best scorers, but recovered to join Detroit at 41-36 and stay two games ahead of ninth-place Chicago. George finished with 20 points and nine rebounds, returning to the game midway through the fourth quarter after the Pacers had said he was questionable to play further because of a sore left ankle. Sasha Vujacic scored 21 points for the Knicks, who rested Carmelo Anthony and had fellow starters Kristaps Porzingis and Jose Calderon already out with injuries. Arron Afflalo added 15 points. — AP

MESSI DENIES TAX EVASION IN PANAMA PAPERS SCANDAL

BARCELONA: The family of Lionel Messi denied yesterday that he was involved in tax evasion after the Barcelona star emerged as one of many personalities accused of shady offshore dealings in the Panama Papers scandal.

"The Messi family wants to make clear that Lionel Messi has not carried out any of the acts attributed to him, and accusations he created a...tax evasion plot, including a network of money-laundering, are false and insulting," it said in a statement.

The scandal erupted on Sunday when media groups made public a year-long worldwide investigation into a trove of 11.5 million documents leaked from a Panama-based law firm that exposed a tangle of offshore financial dealings by the elite.

Among the accused are close associates of Russian President Vladimir Putin, relatives of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Iceland's Prime Minister Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson as well as sports celebrities and screen stars.

Messi and his father are named as owners of a Panama company that had not previously been disclosed during a Spanish probe into their tax affairs. "The Panama company to which they refer to is a totally inactive company that never had any funds or any open current accounts," the Messi family said.

They added that the firm was created by the family's former tax advisers and that everything had since been brought into line where Messi's fiscal situation was concerned. Barcelona published a message of support to their star player on their official website.

"The club supports the arguments which the Messi family published in a statement today," said the Barca statement. "Since the very first moment that the 'Panama papers' which accuse Leo Messi were released, FC Barcelona has sent its affection and support to the player and to his whole family.

"The Club makes all of its judicial means, fiscal and administrative, at the family's disposal in order to make his actions and honour clear in this case."

FRONT COMPANIES

Messi and his father Jorge have been charged with tax fraud in a separate



Lionel Messi

case for allegedly failing to declare 4.16 million euros (\$4.74 million) in taxes related to his image rights between 2007 and 2009 through front companies in Belize and Uruguay.

The pair are accused of ceding the player's image rights to the companies in order to avoid declaring money made from lucrative deals with sponsors in Spain. Their trial in this case is set to begin on May 31 at a court in Barcelona and is expected to run until June 3.

Lawyers acting on behalf of the tax office have asked for both defendants to be slapped with prison sentences of 22-and-a-half months. Both father and son have denied the accusations and instead blamed a former financial advisor.

Jorge Messi made a voluntary corrective payment of four million euros in August 2013 which is expected to mitigate any sentence. Even if convicted it is unlikely that either Messi or his father would enter prison as jail terms of less than two years are usually suspended for first-time offences in Spain. — AFP