

Sports

Ovechkin becomes first Russian to score 500 goals



Maradona offers praise on golden day for Napoli



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SEAHAWKS ESCAPE WITH 10-9 WIN OVER VIKINGS Page 16



ZURICH: (From L) Brazil and Paris Saint-Germain defender Thiago Silva, Croatia and Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric, Brazil and Real Madrid defender Marcelo, France and Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba, Spain and Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos, Brazil and FC Barcelona forward Neymar, Brazil and FC Barcelona defender Dani Alves, Argentina and FC Barcelona forward Lionel Messi, Spain and FC Barcelona midfielder Andres Iniesta and Portugal and Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo pose on stage after being selected in the 2015 FIFA FIFPro World XI during the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or award ceremony at the Kongresshaus in Zurich yesterday. — AFP

MESSI WINS RECORD FIFTH BALLON D'OR

CARLI LLOYD GETS FIFA WORLD PLAYER AWARD

JAMES SCORES 37, LEADS CAVALIERS PAST 76ERS

PHILADELPHIA: LeBron James raised the roof, then lifted the Cleveland Cavaliers to their seventh straight win, 95-85 over the Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday night. James tied a season high with 37 points and pushed both hands up in the air after several powerful dunks, drawing a rise out of the nearly 20,000 fans at the Wells Fargo Center. He had nine assists and seven rebounds in Cleveland's 13th win in the last 15 games. Even when James seems fallible he still steals the show. An unsuspecting James took an errant ball to the face during pregame warmups. The clip was a hit on social media. The 76ers pulled as close as two points with 8 minutes left before James thwarted the upset bid. Jahlil Okafor had 21 points for the Sixers, and Ish Smith had 18 points and 10 assists. Philadelphia is an NBA-worst 4-35.

CLIPPERS 114, PELICANS 111, OT

Chris Paul had 25 points and 11 assists, Jamal Crawford added 21 points, and Los Angeles beat New Orleans in overtime to extend the NBA's longest active winning streak to nine games. Two-time All-Star Anthony Davis, the Pelicans' leading scorer and rebounder, did not play because of a back contusion. He was hurt when he dove over the first row of seats chasing a loose ball early in the Pelicans' 91-86 home loss to Indiana on Friday night. The Pelicans forced overtime when Jrue Holiday made three free throws after he was fouled by Austin Rivers on a 3-point attempt from the top of the key with 1.6 seconds left. Los Angeles native Holiday scored 12 of his season-high 29 points off the bench in the fourth quarter to help New Orleans erase a 12-point deficit. Tyreke Evans added 26. Ryan Anderson, making his fourth start of the season in Davis' power forward spot, had 16 points and 10 rebounds in 42 minutes.

TRAIL BLAZERS 115, THUNDER 110

Damian Lillard scored 31 points, hitting five 3-pointers in the last 3:07, and Portland rallied to beat Oklahoma City. CJ McCollum added 22 points for Portland, which hit a season-high 19 3-pointers to snap a three-game losing streak. Thunder guard Russell Westbrook nearly had his fourth triple-double of the season, but fell just short with 25 points, 15 assists and nine rebounds. Last season, Westbrook led the NBA with 11 triple-doubles. Kevin Durant had 28 points for Oklahoma City.

KNICKS 100, BUCKS 88

Carmelo Anthony had 24 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, Kristaps Porzingis

had a few more highlight plays during New York's high-flying third quarter against Milwaukee. The Knicks broke it open in the third by outshooting and outdunking one of the NBA's most athletic teams. Porzingis was at the forefront, with a sensational follow dunk on one end and a blocked shot on the other as the Knicks began pouring it on in the middle of the period. He had 15 points for the Knicks, who won for the fourth time in five games. Greg Monroe had 28 points and 10 rebounds for the Bucks, and Khris Middleton added 20.

GRIZZLIES 101, CELTICS 98

Zach Randolph had 25 points and 13 rebounds and Memphis overcame a 21-point deficit in the second half to beat Boston. Isaiah Thomas, who led the Celtics with 35 points, launched a 3-pointer as time expired but officials confirmed the basket came after the horn, giving Memphis its biggest comeback victory of the season. Mario Chalmers added 18 points for the Grizzlies, hitting 11 of 13 free throws. Tony Allen finished with 15 points and 10 rebounds. Amir Johnson and Avery Bradley had 14 points apiece for Boston. Johnson also grabbed nine rebounds.

ROCKETS 107, PACERS 103, OT

Trevor Ariza scored a season-high 24 points and Corey Brewer hit the go ahead 3-pointer in overtime to help Houston beat Indiana. James Harden had 21 points and Dwight Howard added 21 points and 17 rebounds for his fifth straight double-double in his return after missing a game with soreness in his lower back. Indiana's Paul George had just four points in the first half before scoring 14 of his 20 in a 27-point third quarter to help the Pacers build a big lead before Houston came back in the fourth.

MAVERICKS 93, TIMBERWOLVES 87

Dirk Nowitzki scored 29 points, converted a big three-point play and grabbed a key loose ball in the final seconds to lead Dallas past Minnesota. Nowitzki hit four of Dallas' six 3-pointers. Andrew Wiggins led Minnesota with 21 points. The Timberwolves have dropped six straight and 10 of 11.

JAZZ 86, LAKERS 74

Gordon Hayward scored 25 points and Utah beat Los Angeles to snap a seven-game road losing streak. Kobe Bryant didn't play for the Lakers because of a strained right Achilles tendon. Lou Williams led the Lakers with 18 points, eight rebounds and six assists, after scoring a career-high 44 on Friday night a home loss to Oklahoma City. — AP

ZURICH: Lionel Messi reclaimed the FIFA Ballon d'Or award for the world player of the year yesterday, after watching his great rival Cristiano Ronaldo walk off with the prize for the previous two years. The Barcelona and Argentina forward finished ahead of Ronaldo and Brazil forward Neymar as he scooped the award for the fifth time overall, having previously won it four years in a row from 2009 to 2012.

Messi helped Barcelona win a Spanish league, cup and Champions League treble plus the Club World Cup and also led Argentina to the Copa America final, where they lost to Chile. "It's a very special moment to be back here, winning another Ballon d'Or," said Messi as he received the award.

"It's incredible to win a fifth... more than anything I ever dreamed of as a kid. I want to thank my team mates, without them none of this would have been possible." Barcelona's Luis Enrique was voted coach of the year.

United States World Cup winner Carli Lloyd, who scored a hat-trick in the final against Japan, was named women's player of the year.

Ronaldo ended last season trophyless with Real Madrid although he helped Portugal qualify for Euro 2016. Neymar won a treble alongside Messi at Barcelona but had less happy time with Brazil, receiving a four-match international ban after he was sent off during the Copa America.

Much has changed since, just 12 months ago, a disgruntled Messi, fresh from losing a World Cup final and disillusioned with coach Luis Enrique's regime at Barcelona, sat in stony silence as Ronaldo announced his intention to hunt down the Argentine's then-record four Ballon d'Or haul.

A year on, the roles were reversed, Messi's record now even further beyond Ronaldo's reach in the personal duel between the two men who have taken standards to unseen heights in their domination of the sport during the past decade. Rarely has there been such little debate over who was the deserving winner. Even in the Spanish capital, unlike in previous years, there was no campaign for Ronaldo in the year he became Real Madrid's all-time leading goalscorer. In Zurich last year, Messi had even cast doubt on his future at Barcelona. His benching for a 1-0 defeat to Real Sociedad the most ignominious start to what would turn out to be the second most successful in Barca's 116-year history.

DISSAPPOINTING YEAR

Messi missed an open training session with the club's fans, Barca sporting director Andoni Zubizarreta was sacked and club legend Carles Puyol walked. Enrique would have followed suit had Messi demanded it. Instead, he used the fuel of the most disappointing year of his career in 2014 to fire Barca to a treble of Champions League, La Liga and Copa del Rey trophies.

His partnership with Neymar and Luis Suarez suddenly kicked into gear, between them hitting 137 of Barca's record 180 goals in 2015, making the South American trio one of the most frightening frontlines the game has ever seen.

Even a two-month injury layoff due to knee ligament damage couldn't derail Messi's case as he also scored in the UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup finals to take Barca's total trophy haul for the year to five. There was still disappointment at international level. Another final defeat this time on penalties to Chile at the Copa America - means Messi has still to deliver a major trophy for La Albarcelestee.

However, whilst others may use his record with Argentina to doubt his candidacy as the best player ever, in Barcelona 2015 enshrined his legacy as the greatest. He scored the goal that sealed a fifth La Liga title in seven years and maybe even his best ever goal in the Copa del Rey final. Yet, his signature moment came with the return of an old mentor in Pep Guardiola when Bayern Munich visited in the Champions League semi-finals in May. Guardiola had made his long-awaited return to the Camp Nou as a fan in the earlier rounds, unable to hide his admiration as Messi's repertoire of outrageous skill tore Manchester City to shreds in the last-16. His first visit as an opposition coach since winning 14 trophies in four years between 2008 and 2012 was seen as a referendum on who had been the inspiration for the most glorious period in Barca's history.

MAGICAL GOALS

Messi won by a landslide. Two magical goals in three minutes at the Camp Nou dealt a killer blow from which Bayern never recovered. "There is not a system or coach to stop talent of his magnitude," said Guardiola. After a two-year spell on top, not even Ronaldo could prevent Messi's march back to being the world's best. The ceremony, at the Zurich Kongresshaus theatre, was held against the backdrop of FIFA going through the worst corruption crisis since it was founded in 1904.

The sport is facing criminal investigations in both Switzerland and the United States, where some leading FIFA officials are among 41 individuals and sports entities who have been indicted on corruption charges. Outgoing FIFA president Sepp Blatter, normally a central figure at the ceremony, was not involved after being banned for eight years by the Ethics Committee in December.

There was no President's Award, traditionally awarded for outstanding services to the game. Blatter was replaced by acting president Issa Hayatou who played a low-key role, reading a brief speech before the start of the ceremony and appeared on the stage when the awards for best player and women's player were presented. — Agencies



ZURICH: FC Barcelona and Argentina's forward Lionel Messi poses with trophy after receiving the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or award for player of the year during the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or award ceremony at the Kongresshaus in Zurich yesterday. — AFP



ZURICH: USA and Houston Dash's midfielder Carli Lloyd speaks after receiving the 2015 FIFA Women's World Player of the Year award during the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or award ceremony at the Kongresshaus in Zurich yesterday. — AFP