

CURRY SPARKLES AS WARRIORS SILENCE THUNDER

OAKLAND: Steph Curry scored 28 points as the Golden State Warriors roared back to life in their Western Conference finals series against the Oklahoma City Thunder with an emphatic 118-91 victory on Wednesday. Curry seized control of the contest with a spellbinding third-quarter points blitz as the Warriors squared the series at 1-1 heading into Sunday's game three in Oklahoma City.

The 27-point blowout victory preserved Golden State's remarkable season-long record of never having suffered back-to-back defeats. "Our ball movement was a lot better tonight. We got it going side to side and set screens and found easier shots and thankfully they went down," a relieved Curry said. "That's the way we've got to play going forward." Curry meanwhile played down what looked like a swelling on his right elbow which appeared after he tumbled into the stands. "We'll get freshened up and get ready for another dogfight on Sunday," Curry said. "That's what this series is going to be about—who wants to be more physical." Warriors coach Steve Kerr paid tribute to Curry's virtuoso display. "He's the MVP for a reason and he knows he didn't have his best night in Game One. He came out and played exceptionally well," Kerr said. "Business as usual. This is what he does." "They were playing well and they had some momentum; I just know we made some stops and Steph got loose," Kerr said. "That's what Steph does, when he can find some space and make a few threes in front of the home crowd it's a huge boost." Asked how he had felt watching Curry run riot, Kerr replied: "I feel great joy. It's true." Kerr meanwhile said he would have no difficulty motivating his team for the challenge of facing Oklahoma City on the road. "We knew we needed to win tonight badly and we responded well," Kerr said. "Now we've got to go there and play well and it's a tough place to play. I don't think we'll have any problem getting 'appropriate fear' from our guys."

'Must do better'

Thunder coach Billy Donovan agreed Curry's flurry changed the game. "I thought we were in good shape and then they hit us with that flurry," Donovan said. "Obviously we let Curry get loose a few times and we need to do a better job in that area. They played very well." Oklahoma City had stunned the reigning NBA champions and their fans at the Oracle Arena in game one on Monday, overturning a 60-47 halftime deficit to run out deserved winners.

A similarly nail-biting encounter looked likely in the early exchanges in game two, with the Thunder always managing to stay in touch despite an error-strewn first half characterized by several turnovers. Yet the Warriors took control in the third quarter with Curry's devastating scoring burst propelling them to a double-digit lead. A technical foul from Oklahoma City star Kevin Durant had provided the impetus, gifting Curry the chance to hit four free throws to put Golden State ahead 71-59. That was swiftly followed by two swaggering three-pointers and an outside jumper from Curry and suddenly Golden State were up 79-59.

Curry eventually was responsible for all 15 points of a 15-2 Golden State run in the third quarter and this time there was to be no fight-back from the Thunder. The Warriors had soon stretched their lead to 20 points, a margin they held as they headed into the fourth quarter, ahead 88-68. An Andre Iguodala three-pointer early in the fourth followed by an emphatic dunk put Golden State 25 points clear at 93-68, as the Thunder reeled in the face of relentless pressure. For Oklahoma City, Durant scored a game-high 29 points with one assist and six rebounds while the talismanic Russell Westbrook finished with 16 points and 12 points. Yet in contrast to Monday's all-around Thunder performance, Westbrook and Durant were the only two Oklahoma City players to score in double figures, highlighting the problems the visitors had penetrating a determined Warriors defensive display. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: Oklahoma City Thunder's Kevin Durant (right) battles for possession under the basket against Golden State Warriors' Draymond Green during the first half in Game 2 of the NBA basketball Western Conference finals on Wednesday, May 18, 2016. — AP

GOLF

MUIRFIELD LOSES OPEN AFTER REJECTING WOMEN MEMBERS

LONDON: Scottish golf course Muirfield has lost its status as a British Open venue after voting against admitting female members, the sport's joint ruling body the R&A announced yesterday. A proposal to allow female members did not receive the required two-thirds majority needed, with 387 members-or 64 percent-voting in favor and 219 members-or 36 percent-voting against. The R&A-encompassing the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews-reacted immediately by announcing that Muirfield will no longer be selected as a venue for the Open, which is golf's oldest major.

"The Open is one of the world's great sport-

ing events and going forward we will not stage the Championship at a venue that does not admit women as members," said R&A CEO Martin Slummers in a statement. Scotland's political leader, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, branded Muirfield's decision "indefensible". In an open letter to members of the Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers (HCEG), the club, located to the east of Edinburgh, had recommended that they vote in favour of the resolution. But after the postal ballot of members failed to reach the required threshold, the R&A announced that it was dropping Muirfield from its 10-course Open venue roster.

"We have consistently said that it is a matter for the Honourable Company to conduct a review of its membership policy and that we would await their decision," Slummers said. "The R&A has considered today's decision with respect to The Open Championship. The Open is one of the world's great sporting events and going forward we will not stage the Championship at a venue that does not admit women as members. "Given the schedule for staging The Open, it would be some years before Muirfield would have been considered to host the Championship again. If the policy at the club should change, we would reconsider Muirfield as a venue for The Open in future."

Troon to vote

Announcing the result of the ballot, Muirfield captain Henry Fairweather said: "The Honourable Company is a members club, and, as such, the members decide the Rules of the Club, including its membership policy. "Women will continue to be welcome at Muirfield on the course and in the clubhouse as guests and visitors, as they have been for many years." Sturgeon wrote on Twitter: "Scotland has women leaders in every walk of life. It is 2016. This is simply indefensible." The records of the club show that women have played golf at Muirfield since 1904. Women's and men's single-sex golf clubs, although reducing in number, have been a feature of golf provision in Great Britain and Ireland and comply fully with equality legislation. Muirfield has staged the Open on 16 occasions since 1892 and most recently in 2013, when America's Phil Mickelson won. It was due to host the Open again in 2023. Royal Troon, the venue for this year's Open, is also an all-male club. It will vote later this year on whether to become a mixed club. — AFP

MCILROY HITS OUT AT 'NEGATIVE SPIN'

DUBLIN: Rory McIlroy's frustrating season boiled over on the eve of the Irish Open in criticizing what he describes as the "negative spin" that's been put on his recent performances. The four-time Major winner is hosting the event at the K Club and the first time the course, located just south of Dublin, has played host to a major tournament since staging the 2006 Ryder Cup. Back then McIlroy was just 18 years of age and he had taken a three-hour bus ride leaving Belfast at 5.30am to witness the final round on Sunday.

In contrast, he returns to the course with his photograph appearing everywhere from Dublin Airport and all along the route to the course while his photograph is also on the official program, draw sheets, entry tickets and car passes. However, it's now been more than six months since McIlroy last tasted success and that was in November's European Tour season-ending DP World Tour Championship. In that time, McIlroy has had six top-10 finishes

including the latest in sharing fourth place a fortnight ago in the defence of his Wells Fargo Championship. But after an indifferent Players Championship effort last week, that included see-saw rounds of 72, 64, 75 and 70, the current world number three is not too pleased what he's been reading. "I'm relaxed about it but it also frustrates me, I guess the negative spin that's put on my form," said McIlroy. "I know expectations for myself are higher than other players, but you look at my record this year with a third in Abu Dhabi, a fifth in Dubai, a third at Doral, fourth in the Match Play so my bad weeks are Top-10s, basically. "So it just frustrates me that the narrative is about there's something missing in Rory's game or what's wrong with Rory or where I don't feel like there's anything wrong. "It's very close and it's just that I'm waiting for something to happen. I might need to make something happen, but it's not as far away as I feel some people think it is. —AFP