

## Sports

# Warriors raise title banner, silence Thunder in NBA opener

## Warriors will move to a new arena in San Francisco next season

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant accepted their championship rings Tuesday for leading Golden State to a third NBA title in four campaigns, then powered the Warriors over Oklahoma City 108-100 in their 2018-19 season opener.

Curry scored 32 points with nine assists and eight rebounds while Durant had 27 points, eight rebounds and six assists as the Warriors held off a fourth-quarter fightback to make a triumphant launch to their quest for a third consecutive crown.

"The first game could go either way with timing and overall execution," Curry said. "We had a terrible third quarter but we withstood the run and were able to get the job done. We've got to take care of the ball better. That will come with more possessions as we get through the season."

"We know what's at stake. Winning three in a row would put us in some very select company. We're not shy talking about it. But you have to do the little things throughout the season. I think we're ready for it."

The first game of the NBA season was in Boston, where Jayson Tatum scored 23 points and grabbed nine rebounds while reserve Marcus Morris added 16 points and 10 rebounds as the host Celtics ripped Philadelphia 105-87. But the night's highlight came when NBA commissioner Adam Silver handed out championship jewelry-Golden State's Steve Kerr taking his fourth as a coach to go with four he won as a player-and praised the Warriors dynasty for far more than on-court skills.

"The Warriors have a tradition of excellence based on universal values like teamwork, respect and unity," NBA commissioner Adam Silver said. "They continue a long legacy of NBA players and teams who compete for something bigger than a game by embracing the power of sport to build bridges and make better people's lives."

Then came the final championship banner raising at

Oracle Arena, the NBA's oldest arena, built in 1966. The Warriors will move to a new arena in San Francisco next season. "Last year was an unbelievable journey," Curry told the crowd. "We do all this for you guys. So let's enjoy this all to the fullest."

Curry scored 19 points in the first half, helping the Warriors seize a 57-47 half-time edge, but the Thunder opened the third quarter with a 22-9 run to seize their first lead at 69-66, German guard Dennis Schroder sinking the go-ahead 3-pointer for Oklahoma City.

The Thunder battled Golden State to the finish, a free throw by New Zealand's Steven Adams pulling Oklahoma City within 99-97 with 1:57 remaining. Curry answered with a 3-point play and Kevon Looney added a layup for a 104-99 Warriors edge. Durant followed with an inside jumper with 24 seconds remaining to seal his former club's fate.

The Thunder were without star guard Russell Westbrook, who has not been cleared to return after undergoing arthroscopic right knee surgery last month.

Paul George led Oklahoma City with 27 points while Schroder added 21 and Adams had 17 points and 11 rebounds.

### HAYWARD BACK IN BOSTON

At Boston, Gordon Hayward contributed 10 points on 4-of-10 shooting with four steals in his return after breaking his left leg in last year's season opener. "A lot to work on for me but the joy of being out here was amazing," said Hayward. "It was so good to be out there, such a blessing I was able to play basketball again." Hayward was greeted by a standing ovation from the crowd when he left the game in the final seconds. Tatum had 13 points in the first half for the Celtics, who took advantage of injuries last season to have a stellar rookie NBA campaign.

"I'm a lot more sure of myself and confident and just



OAKLAND: Draymond Green #23 of the Golden State Warriors handles the ball against the Oklahoma City Thunder during a game on Tuesday at Oracle Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

relaxed," he said. "It's my second year. I knew what to expect. I was just happy to get back on the floor."

Boston's Kyrie Irving, whose prior season ended early with leg injuries, made only 2-of-14 from the floor for seven points but added seven assists.

Joel Embiid scored 23 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to lead the 76ers while Australian guard Ben Simmons, last season's NBA Rookie of the Year, contributed 19 points, a game-high 15 rebounds, eight assists, four steals and two blocked shots. — AFP

## Miranda silences Argentina with last-gasp winner

**JEDDAH:** Brazil snatched a dramatic 1-0 win over Argentina with an injury-time header from Miranda in their friendly match in front of a sell-out crowd in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. The Inter Milan centre-back was left all alone to thump in a 93rd-minute effort from Neymar's corner when the match between the fierce South American rivals seemed destined for a stalemate. The lapse spoiled an otherwise strong defensive performance from Argentina, who contained Brazil for long periods. He may be 34, but Miranda, whose career has also seen him play in France and Spain, says he is far from done in the yellow shirt of Brazil.

"Despite my age I've been able to show that I'm in good physical shape and, of course, I want to keep playing for the national team because I still have a lot to show in this jersey," he said.

With Neymar to the fore, Brazil exerted late pressure and could have scored in the few minutes before Miranda struck. Casemiro came close with a 25-yard free-kick manufactured by Neymar that flew past goalkeeper Sergio Romero's left post. Then Nicolas Otamendi stuck out a boot to deflect a diverted shot from Richarlison in the last minute.

Argentina's best chance came during a period of pressure around the hour mark, when Leandro Paredes hit a swerving, dipping drive that had Brazil keeper Alisson beaten. But while Brazil named a strong team including Manchester City's Gabriel Jesus, Philippe Coutinho of Barcelona and Liverpool's Roberto Firmino alongside Neymar in attack, Argentina were without a host of top stars, including Lionel Messi.

"It's always difficult, but our team is better than theirs because we've had the same foundations for



JEDDAH: Brazil's defender Miranda (L) kicks the ball before Argentina's midfielder Giovanni Lo Celso during the international friendly match Brazil vs Argentina at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium in Jeddah on Tuesday. — AFP

many years while they're in the process of a drastic renovation," Brazil's full-back Felipe Luis told TV Globo. Missing from the Argentina line-up were also Manchester City's in-form forward Sergio Aguero, Paris Saint-Germain winger Angel Di Maria and AC Milan striker Gonzalo Higuain. Messi has sat out Argentina's last four matches, all friendlies, since the country's disappointing last-16 elimination from the World Cup in Russia. He is believed to have asked for some time off

from international duty ahead of next year's Copa America in Brazil. It was the 105th time the South American arch-rivals have faced each other in an official match, with Brazil marginally ahead on 41 wins to 38, with 26 draws.

The two sides last met in June 2017 in a friendly in Australia, won 1-0 by Argentina, but Brazil romped to a 3-0 success in their last competitive fixture, a World Cup qualifier in November 2016. — AFP

## Netherlands claim friendly draw in Belgium

**BRUSSELS:** The Netherlands continued their resurgence under Ronald Koeman as youngster Arnaut Groeneveld's first international goal secured a 1-1 friendly draw with Belgium in Brussels on Tuesday.

Dries Mertens fired the World Cup semi-finalists into a sixth-minute lead, but Groeneveld marked his full debut for the Dutch by equalising before the half-hour mark. This was another strong performance for the Oranje after Saturday's stunning 3-0 Nations League victory over Germany, while Roberto Martinez's Belgium remain unbeaten at home since a loss to Spain in September 2016.

"I think there is still a lot of work to do, but we've shown that we've made good progress lately and at the end of the match we tried to play more offensively to try to win," said Koeman. "We had the best chances and overall we can be very happy with the last 10 days." The hosts struck early through a fantastic goal from Mertens, as the Napoli winger pounced after some slack Dutch defending, curling the ball past goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen and two men on the line, and into the top corner.

The 31-year-old continued to run the visitors ragged, stretching to dig out an excellent cross which Romelu Lukaku could only head over from less than six yards out. The Netherlands almost levelled after a quick counter-attack, but Memphis Depay failed to get a clean connection on his shot and was denied by the legs of Simon Mignolet, making his first appearance in the Belgian goal since March. But the Lyon forward cut open the home defence in the 27th minute, sending through a perfect pass



BRUSSELS: Belgium's Thorgan Hazard (L) vies with Netherlands' Pablo Rosario (R) during the friendly football match between Belgium and the Netherlands, at the King Baudouin Stadium, on Tuesday in Brussels. — AFP

for Nigerian-born winger Groeneveld to slide home on just his second international appearance after coming on as a substitute against Germany.

The visitors continued to slice through the Belgium defence with ease, and Quincy Promes saw a fierce long-range strike bounce back off the post with Mignolet scrambling. Eden Hazard, who has already scored 10 goals this season for club and country, should have restored the

Belgian advantage before half-time, but shot wide with the goal gaping after Lukaku's clever lay-off.

Martinez rang the changes at the break, bringing on Michy Batshuayi for Lukaku and Dennis Praet for Mertens, while Thorgan Hazard replaced his older brother. Batshuayi twice almost scored early in the second period, shooting narrowly wide and seeing a twisting header clutched by a diving Cillessen. — AFP

## Real outlines opposition to La Liga's Miami game in letter to Fed

**BARCELONA:** Real Madrid has written to Spain's football federation outlining its opposition to La Liga's plans to stage a match between Girona and Barcelona in Miami, delivering another blow to league hopes of playing one game a season in the United States.

A spokeswoman for the federation confirmed to Reuters that it had received the letter, which was widely quoted by local media yesterday. The Miami match, pencilled in for Jan. 26, would be the first game to take place as part of a 15-year deal struck between La Liga and entertainment company Relevent.

"First of all we would like to declare that Real Madrid were never informed that La Liga had requested to play the game nor of the intention to make the request, and we were never asked our opinion on it," Real said in the letter, signed by the club's Director General Jose Angel Sanchez.

"Nor, obviously, did La Liga obtain Real Madrid's agreement, despite the fact that this game affects a competition in which we participate." A spokesman for La Liga reiterated yesterday that no club would be forced to play in the United States and that it was entirely voluntary.

The Federation has told La Liga it cannot approve the proposal, which also requires the green light from UEFA, CONCACAF and the United States soccer federation, until it receives more information.

Federation President Luis Rubiales has expressed his opposition to the move while the Spanish footballers' union has also protested the plans. Real Madrid President Florentino Perez has spoken out against it while the club's coach Julen Lopetegui has said: "every team (in the league) should play at every ground".

Real's letter addressed the same concerns. "We cannot forget that the national league is a competition in which 20 teams participate, not two, and that it is fundamental that every team plays each other twice, home and away and at each stadium, as that guarantees the integrity and the equality of the competition," it said.

"As a consequence, Real Madrid manifests its opposition to the request made to play the game at the Hard Rock stadium in Miami as it affects the integrity and equality of the competition."

La Liga President Javier Tebas told Reuters earlier this month there were many things that could threaten the integrity of a competition but the Miami game was not one of them. "In a World Cup a team playing a ... semi-final on Tuesday has a greater advantage in the final than the team playing on Wednesday," Tebas said.

"Teams have also played at other stadiums while their grounds are being renovated or in order to generate more revenue. If we really believe in this sporting puritanism then we would need to make many changes in football." — Reuters