

Sports

NBA champion Lakers rout Mavs while Nets, Bucks and Heat roll

10th Christmas victory in 15 holiday appearances

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis scored 28 points while LeBron James added 22 as the defending NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers routed Dallas 138-115 in Friday's feature game of a record-setting Christmas slate. James had a game-high 10 assists and seven rebounds in 31 minutes, while Davis contributed eight rebounds, five assists and two steals and reserve Montrezl Harrell had 22 points for the Lakers, who played on the holiday for a 22nd consecutive year. "We have a lot of offensive firepower," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said.

James, who turns 36 on Wednesday, rose to second on the NBA's all-time Christmas points list with 383, passing Oscar Robertson by six to pull within 12 of matching the late Kobe Bryant's career record. It was the 10th Christmas victory in 15 holiday appearances by James, who equaled former Miami teammate Dwyane Wade for the most career Christmas NBA wins. Vogel wants to ease the workload on James after the shortest off-season break in NBA history but James is confident he can handle whatever comes.

"I train my body for whatever. I'm not your typical guy in his 18th season," James said. "If you stay ready you never have to get ready." Slovakian star guard Luka Doncic scored 27 points for Dallas, but the Mavericks were outscored in every quarter and out rebounded 53-27. "We got a really good team," Davis said. Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving and Miami's Duncan Robinson each matched an NBA Christmas record with seven 3-pointers, the Heat stretching their holiday win streak to eight games.

Irving scored 37 points, hitting 7-of-10 3-point attempts in his return to Boston, as the Nets ripped his former Celtics teammates 123-95. "I'm glad we could put on a performance for everybody," Irving said. "We're definitely going to continue to progress every day." Robinson finished with 23 points, hitting 7-of-13 from beyond the arc, in leading 2020 NBA

runner-up Miami over visiting New Orleans 111-98. "Getting more and more comfortable every day," Robinson said. "Last year was a great learning experience. We're just trying to build on it." Also rolling to a holiday triumph were the Milwaukee Bucks, who had a game-high 31 points from Khris Middleton to beat Golden State 138-99 - the second-most lopsided blowout in NBA Christmas history - thanks to a 72-43 Bucks edge in the second half.

"We just wanted to put on a show," Middleton said. At Boston, Brooklyn's Kevin Durant scored 16 of his 29 in the third quarter and the Nets seized an 86-77 edge before pulling away in the fourth quarter. The Nets became the first club since the 2008-09 Lakers to win their first two games by 20 or more points. "We can't exceed our own expectations," Irving said. "We know this is a long journey ahead." As for his return to Boston, Irving said, "I went to war with those guys. We're going to continue to lean on each other as brothers off the floor and compete on it."

No Butler, no problem

Goran Dragic came off Miami's bench to score 18 points, and Bam Adebayo added 17 for the Heat, whose NBA-best Christmas record is 11-2 despite Jimmy Butler missing the second half with right ankle stiffness. "When he goes down, it's up to us to pick it up for him," Robinson said. "I thought we did a good job of sticking with it and getting a good win today." Zion Williamson scored 32 points and grabbed 14 rebounds to lead the Pelicans. At Milwaukee, two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 15 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to spark the Bucks, while two-time MVP Stephen Curry had a team-best 19 points.

The Los Angeles Clippers beat host Denver 121-108 despite an injury to Kawhi Leonard midway



LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks guards LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers in the first half at Staples Center on December 25, 2020. —AFP

into the fourth quarter when teammate Serge Ibaka struck him in the face going for a rebound, leaving him bleeding and sprawled on the court. Paul George scored 23 points and passed off nine assists for the Clippers while Leonard had 21 points, seven

assists, five rebounds and four steals. Denver's Nikola Jokic barely missed being the first player since Magic Johnson in 1982 to open a season with back-to-back triple-doubles, producing 24 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds. —AFP

Barcelona loom for expected new PSG coach Pochettino

PARIS: Mauricio Pochettino is widely reported to be Thomas Tuchel's successor as Paris Saint-Germain coach and the number one item on the Argentine's in-tray will be February's date with Barcelona. Tuchel was reportedly given his marching orders on Thursday, four months after guiding the Qatari-backed club to their first ever Champions League final, August's 1-0 defeat to Bayern Munich.

The German, whose dismissal has yet to be officially confirmed by the club, leaves the Parc des Princes having secured a last 16 Champions League clash with Barca and PSG sitting third in Ligue 1, a point shy of leaders Lyon. Pochettino's opening match in charge will be January 6's trip to Saint-Etienne on Ligue 1's resumption after the winter break. Then, on February 16, the 48-year-old has his first massive test against his compatriot Lionel Messi's Catalans, with the return leg on March 6.

Pochettino was let go after five and a half years

at Spurs in the aftermath of leading the north London side to their first ever appearance in a Champions League final against Liverpool in 2019. Although he has yet to win any silverware the former PSG defender's stock is high in managerial circles. The Parisians will be keen to complete his signing and avoid missing their man who has been linked to the likes of Real Madrid, Manchester United and Barca in recent months.

Pochettino is due to team up with Neymar, Kylian Mbappe and other well-heeled company at PSG's first post-Christmas training session on January 3. While the club refrained from making any public comment about the abrupt change in personnel, France World Cup winner Mbappe took to Instagram to note Tuchel's departure. "Unfortunately it's the law of football but no-one will forget your time here," Mbappe said. "You wrote a great line of the club's history and I say thank you coach," he added.

Ideal fit

Pochettino arrives in the French capital with his successful stint at Spurs preceded by a season at Southampton. His maiden post as a coach was at struggling Espanyol, where in 2009 his first match in charge was against his expected future foes, Barcelona. He earned plaudits for saving the

Spanish outfit, where he played under Marcelo Bielsa in 1998, from relegation.

With his expected new employers hungry to finally fulfil their Champions league desire Pochettino will have little time to settle in before getting his new team firing on all cylinders for Barca. Like Tuchel, as Mbappe's tribute illustrated, Pochettino is at ease in man-managing a dressing room crammed with a galaxy of stars. The son of a farmer from Murphy, in the north of Argentina, he is a stickler for detail, which coupled with his tactical acumen, devotion to an attractive style of play, personnel skills, and popularity amongst the PSG fans from his playing days, makes him a potentially ideal fit as the new occupant of the PSG dugout.

He will have under his wing several compatriots to count on such as Mauro Icardi, Angel Di Maria and Leandro Paredes. His anticipated arrival before the winter transfer window will allow him to bring in new faces, with French newspaper Le Parisien identifying one as his former Spurs charge, Inter Milan's attacking midfielder Christian Eriksen. And looking further ahead, given their Argentine ties and knowing each other well Pochettino may be the catalyst for six-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi to start regarding PSG as potential new employers when he is free to move from the Camp Nou at the end of the season. —AFP

Kuwait shooters win six medals

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait shooters won six various medals (one gold, two silver and three bronze) during the Gulf tournament for the 10m Air Rifle and Pistol, which was held online from 24-26 December, 2020 under the patronage of the GCC Shooting organization committee - with the participation of 77 shooters of both genders. Kuwait's Hussa Nabil Al-Zayed won the first place and the gold medal in the 10m Air Rifle, while her teammate Mariam Mohammad Irzouqi took the second place. Hussa Al-Zayed, Mariam Irzouqi and Batool Ashkanani team won the silver medal in the team's event.

As for the men's 10m Air Rifle, Ali Farhan Al-Mutairi won third place, while the team

of Ali Al-Mutairi, Abdallah Al-Harby and Bandar Al-Mutairi won the bronze medal in the team's event. The team of Hamad Al-Namshan, Ali Al-Mutairi and Saad Al-Ajmi won the bronze medal of the teams' 10m Air Pistol.

Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Secretary General dedicated the victory to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, board of directors and the entire shooting community. Al-Osaimi said he is proud of the shooters achievement in this tournament.



Talk of title is for others not Solskjaer's Man Utd

LONDON: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said on Thursday talk of Manchester United winning their first Premier League title since 2013 will remain out of bounds amongst him and his players. The 47-year-old Norwegian finds himself now being praised after guiding United into third place in the table-five points off leaders Liverpool-having been favored for the sack earlier in the season. United could move into second if they beat Leicester, who presently occupy that place, on Saturday.

Solskjaer takes them to the Foxes on the back of reaching the League Cup semi-finals-where they will meet holders Manchester City. "There is noise around Man Utd anyway, so for us it's about improving as a team, taking one game at a time-and we have to, that's the name of the game," said Solskjaer when asked about the title. "That is the only way that you are going to challenge for anything at the end of the season anyway so it's not something that we talk about."

Solskjaer-who guided United to three semi-finals last season-said being complimented added another factor for him and the players to deal with. "The only thing that we talk about and focus on is improving day by day and learning, and how to deal with certain situations," he said. "Maybe now at the moment we are getting praise and that's another thing to learn to deal with." —AFP

Skating star Hanyu makes stylish return to competition

TOKYO: Japan's two-time Olympic figure skating champion Yuzuru Hanyu made a stylish return to competition Friday after skipping the Grand Prix season over fears of coronavirus infection. Resplendent in a gold-studded black outfit, Hanyu unveiled a new short program routine set to "Let Me Entertain You" by Robbie Williams at the Japanese national championships in Nagano, and claimed the lead with a score of 103.53.

The 26-year-old star had been out of action since February after deciding his asthma made competing in this season's Grand Prix series too risky during the pandemic, but he picked up where he left off with a confident performance. "First of all, it was important just to get back to competition," said Hanyu, who

admitted to feeling "conflicted" about competing this week as infections surge around Japan.

"I had been able to do some really good practice, and although my performance wasn't worth the score I got, I managed to land all my jumps. Now I want to execute my program tomorrow," Hanyu leads 17-year-old Yuma Kagiyama, who won the NHK Trophy last month in his senior Grand Prix debut, and Pyeongchang Olympic silver medalist Shoma Uno, who is attempting to win his fifth straight national title. With Canadian coach Brian Orser unable to join him because of travel restrictions, Hanyu sat alone clutching a Winnie the Pooh soft toy as he waited for his score, after unveiling his high-tempo new routine.

He opened with a quadruple salchow before nailing a quad toe loop to triple toe loop combination, then followed with a triple axel before channeling British pop star Williams with a slide on his knees to finish. "It was a rock song so there was a rock theme," said Hanyu. "I tried to do it in the same kind of style as Robbie Williams. At first I was looking for piano music for the routine, but given all that has

gone on in the news, I thought it would be better to choose something more upbeat. I wanted to give people watching something uplifting amid all the gloomy things that have been going on."

Japan's national championships this year double as a qualifier for the world championships in Stockholm next spring. Hanyu is aiming to win the national title for the first time since 2016, having missed the event three times since then through injury or illness. "To be honest, I was a bit disappointed that I couldn't hear any cheers," said Hanyu said of his performance, in front of a crowd ordered not to yell because of virus countermeasures. "But I felt that people watching on TV and over the internet would be cheering at home, so I was able to enjoy myself." —AFP



Yuzuru Hanyu

Oldest Olympic champion Keleti to turn 100



Agnes Keleti

BUDAPEST: Hungarian gymnast Agnes Keleti, the world's oldest living Olympic champion as well as a Holocaust survivor, is still showing off as she looks forward to turning 100 next month. "I feel good, but I don't look in the mirror, that's my trick! Then I remain young!" Keleti told AFP in Budapest last month. A five-times Olympic champion, Keleti, who celebrates her birthday January 9, is also Hungary's most successful gymnast, and one of the most decorated Jewish athletes in history.

While she now has dementia that affects her short-term memory, her feisty spirit remains intact. Moving in a sprightly manner around her apartment where both her life mementoes and Olympic medals are on display, she joked about not being let perform the full-leg splits anymore. "I'm told by my caretaker that it's not good for me at this age," she laughed, while leaving through a new book "The Queen of Gymnastics, 100 years of Agnes Keleti" published to mark her centenary birthday. Keleti's life story, including Olympic glory and Holocaust escape, reads like a gripping Hollywood film script. Born in 1921, she won 10 gymnastics medals in all, most won after she turned 30 and was competing against gymnasts half her age, including five golds in Helsinki (1952) and Melbourne (1956). "I did sport not because it felt good but to see the world," Keleti told AFP in a 2016 interview. Called up to the national team in 1939, she won her first Hungarian title the next year, but later in 1940 was barred from taking part in any sporting activity due to her Jewish background.

After the Nazi German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, she escaped deportation to a death camp by getting false documents and assuming the identity of a maid girl Pirooska Juhasz. "I stayed alive thanks to Pirooska with whom I swapped not only clothes and papers, but also the way she talked," said Keleti, who kept fit while hiding in the countryside by regular running. Keleti's father and several members of her family were killed in Auschwitz, while her mother and brother were rescued thanks to the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. —AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Leeds United v Burnley		15:00
beIN Sports HD 1		
West Ham v Brighton & Hove Albion		17:15
beIN Sports HD 1		
Liverpool v West Bromwich Albion		19:30
beIN Sports HD 1		
Wolves v Tottenham Hotspur		22:15
beIN Sports HD 1		