

Lakers overpower Sacramento Kings

James lifts Lakers; Morant catches fire against Cavaliers



LOS ANGELES: Talen Horton-Tucker #5 of the Los Angeles Lakers scores as he is fouled by Damian Jones #30 of the Sacramento Kings during a 122-114 Los Angeles Lakers win at Staples Center on January 04, 2022. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James made several clutch baskets in the waning minutes of the fourth quarter as the Los Angeles Lakers rallied from a late seven-point deficit to beat the Sacramento Kings 122-114 on Tuesday. James scored 14 of his team-high 31 points in the final quarter as the Lakers won for the fourth time in the last five games. Los Angeles' Malik Monk also had a strong final quarter, scoring 11 of his 24 points in the last seven minutes of the contest in front of a crowd of 17,900 in Los Angeles.

Monk drained six three-pointers in the game and James and Russell Westbrook put the finishing touches with layups in the final moments. Westbrook finished with 19 points. Reserve Talen Horton-Tucker also scored 19 points for the Lakers, who beat a Pacific Division team at home for the first time this season. De'Aaron Fox scored 30 points and Buddy Hield added 26 with seven three-

pointers for the Kings.

In Cleveland, Ja Morant scored the go-ahead basket with 22 seconds left in the fourth quarter to lift the Memphis Grizzlies to a 110-106 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Morant scored six of his 26 points in the final minute as the Grizzlies won their sixth straight game. "I don't fear nobody," said Morant. "If you are 7-foot-7 I don't care, I am coming straight at you." Morant hit a short jump shot to give the Grizzlies a 106-104 lead, then stole the ball from Cavs Brandon Goodwin for another score with 22 seconds remaining.

Morant then sealed the win by hitting a pair of free throws as the Grizzlies won for the 10th time in the last 11 games on the road. The Grizzlies were coming off a 118-104 win over the Brooklyn Nets on Monday. "We came in knowing we had back-to-back games. We just had to lock in defensively and find a way. We came up with some key stops at the

end of the game to get the win," Morant added. Morant also added six assists but his franchise-record run of 30-point games was halted at five.

VanVleet in hot form

Elsewhere, Devin Booker scored 33 points and Chris Paul finished with 11 points and 15 assists as the undermanned Phoenix Suns beat the New Orleans Pelicans 123-110. Mikal Bridges scored 23, Cameron Johnson added 18, Bismack Biyombo had 16 and Jalen Smith had 12 in the win. The Suns were without head coach Monty Williams. They were also missing starters Deandre Ayton and Jae Crowder, and reserve players JaVale McGee and Abdel Nader, all because of Covid-19 measures.

Devonte' Graham scored 28, Jonas Valanciunas had 25 points and 16 rebounds, Brandon Ingram scored 16 and Josh Hart had 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Pelicans. In Toronto, Fred VanVleet

scored 24 of his 33 points in the first half as the Toronto Raptors won their third straight game with a dominating 129-104 victory over the San Antonio Spurs. VanVleet also had seven assists and was seven of 14 in three-point attempts at Scotiabank Arena. VanVleet has scored at least 30 points in the past three games as the Raptors improved to 17-17 to reach .500 on the season.

He's the first Toronto player to score 30 or more in three straight since Kawhi Leonard did it in four straight in 2019. "You recognize when you're in rhythm and you just try to hold on as long as possible because it's not always like that," VanVleet said. "I try to keep my floor a little higher but when you're hot, you've just got to be aggressive and ride it out as long as you can." Pascal Siakam added 18 points, 12 rebounds and five assists, Gary Trent tallied 21 points, OG Anunoby and Justin Champagnie each scored 14 points in the win. — AFP

Beijing's smog woes cast pall over 'green' Winter Olympics

BEIJING: Beijing's air pollution is far below acceptable World Health Organization levels with the Chinese capital a month away from hosting the Winter Olympics - but environmental data shows its skies have improved dramatically in recent years. The city declared a "war on pollution" after winning the Olympics bid in 2015, shutting down dozens of coal plants and relocating heavy industries in order to shed its status as one of the world's most polluted cities.

China also hopes to use the Games to showcase its green credentials and has built dozens of wind and solar farms to power the sporting spectacle. Beijing's environment bureau said on Tuesday that the concentration of ultrafine PM2.5 particles - blamed for a rise in lung cancer, heart attacks and premature babies - dropped to 33 micrograms per cubic meter in 2021, down a third from levels in 2013 when the city was had some of the world's worst air quality.

But levels are still six times higher than the 5 micrograms per cubic metre mark recommended by the WHO. "Beijing's average PM2.5 reading was down 63.1 percent from 2013 when records began, decreasing at a pace that far exceeded the rates seen in developed countries over the same period," the city government said. The clean-air campaign - which



BEIJING: A worker sleeps near the Shougang Big Air venue, which will host the big air freestyle skiing and snowboarding competitions at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, at Shougang Park in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

has greatly reduced the number of days where the city is hit by thick smog - also pushed millions of households and businesses to switch from coal to natural gas for winter heating.

Despite the improved air quality, smog risks remain "severe", China's environment ministry warned last week. The ministry added that Olympic host cities Beijing and Zhangjiakou have contingency plans in place should smog envelope venues and affect visibility. But the air pollution figures showed major strides in the average reading of Ozone - an atmospheric gas responsible for tens of thousands of deaths in China each year - which stood at

149 micrograms per cubic meter last year, well above WHO standards.

"The 2021 air quality data for the city of Beijing is encouraging," Li Shuo, a campaigner for Greenpeace China said. "Air pollution is also a nation-wide challenge. While citizens in Beijing breathe with ease, many other provinces need to see much faster progress." China was home to 42 of the world's 100 most polluted cities last year, according to air quality tracker IQAir. According to the WHO, as of 2019 there was some 99 percent of the world's population living in places that do not meet air quality guidelines. — AFP

Liverpool's COVID crisis deepens: Assistant boss Lijnders tests positive

LONDON: Liverpool assistant manager Pep Lijnders has become the latest member of the club staff to test positive for coronavirus, throwing today's League Cup semi-final at Arsenal into further doubt. With manager Jurgen Klopp and three players - Alisson Becker, Joel Matip and Roberto Firmino - already isolating, Lijnders, who took charge of the team for Sunday's 2-2 draw at Chelsea, recorded a positive test late on Tuesday.

That was after Liverpool had made a submission to the English Football League to postpone the first-leg clash at the Emirates following further positive cases among the squad and other player availability issues linked to illness and injury. The club have cancelled yesterday's pre-match press conference, at which Lijnders was due to speak.

Liverpool are also missing Thiago Alcantara, Takumi Minamoto, Nat Phillips and Harvey Elliott through injury, while Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mane and Naby Keita are now on Africa Cup of Nations duty.

A Liverpool statement on Wednesday said: "Lijnders' test result comes in addition to a number of suspected positive cases among players and football staff recorded earlier on Tuesday, which forced the cancellation of the day's scheduled training session. "As a result of the outbreak and the suspension of preparations, as well as other illnesses and injuries recorded within the squad, the club submitted an application to the EFL for the postponement of today's tie with Arsenal, with the news of Lijnders' positive result coming after the request was lodged. "The outcome of this application is still pending." — AFP