

## Sports

# Host Grizzlies sink Brooklyn Nets on Crowder's buzzer-beater

## Thunder roll to victory over defenseless Warriors

**MEMPHIS:** Jae Crowder drained a 3-pointer as time expired in overtime to lift the host Memphis Grizzlies to a 134-133 victory over the Brooklyn Nets on Sunday. Brooklyn appeared poised to record its second win in three outings after Memphis rookie Ja Morant failed to connect with Kyle Anderson on an inbound pass with 8.1 seconds left. Spencer Dinwiddie made one of two free throws to push the Nets' lead to 133-131, but Morant set up Crowder for the game-winning shot at the top of the arc. Morant scored 17 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter and pushed the game into overtime with a well-timed block of Kyrie Irving as time expired. Dillon Brooks made 9 of 15 shots from the field for 21 points as the Grizzlies overcame an eight-point deficit with 3:20 remaining in the fourth quarter to record their first win of the season.

### THUNDER 120, WARRIORS 92

Dennis Schroder scored 22 points as host Oklahoma City blew out Golden State, which has averaged 130.5 points allowed in back-to-back losses to start the season. The Thunder dominated from the start, scoring the game's first eight points. The margin was less than double digits for only about six minutes of game action. Oklahoma City led 70-37 at halftime. Danilo Gallinari added 21 points, and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander 19 in the win. The Thunder made 15 3-pointers, four by Gallinari. Stephen Curry led Golden State with 23 points but was just 2 of 9 from behind the 3-point line. The Warriors shot just 15.2 percent from behind the arc (5 of 33).

### TRAIL BLAZERS 121, MAVERICKS 119

Carried by 35 points from CJ McCollum, 28 from Damian Lillard and 20 from Rodney Hood, Portland overcame a sluggish first half to pull out a clutch victory at

Dallas. Lillard's lefty layup with 26.8 seconds to go — after a Mavericks shot-clock violation — put the Blazers ahead for good. Kristaps Porzingis led Dallas with 32 points, adding nine rebounds and five assists, while Luka Doncic had 29 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists.

### LAKERS 120, HORNETS 101

Anthony Davis scored 25 of his 29 points in the first half as host Los Angeles defeated Charlotte. Davis also had 14 rebounds and three blocks. LeBron James scored 20 points, dished out 12 assists and grabbed six rebounds. Dwight Howard delivered a solid effort off the bench, scoring 16 points on 8-of-8 shooting, grabbing 10 rebounds and blocking four shots for the Lakers. Miles Bridges led the Hornets with 23 points. Cody Zeller finished with 19 points, 14 rebounds (seven on the offensive end), three blocks and three steals. Terry Rozier also scored 19 points, while Dwayne Bacon added 15 points for the Hornets.

### TIMBERWOLVES 116, HEAT 109

Andrew Wiggins scored 16 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter — including three straight 3-pointers at one point — to lead Minnesota past Miami in Minneapolis. In a span of just over four minutes, Wiggins scored 16 of Minnesota's 17 points, as the Wolves went from a 96-93 deficit to a 110-101 lead. Prior to that stretch, he had been 0-for-5 on 3-pointers in the game. Then, he made five straight shots, including four threes, during the 17-5 run. Timberwolves big man Karl-Anthony Towns had 23 points and 11 rebounds. But he was fairly quiet after a 15-point first quarter. Miami was led by rookie guard Kendrick Nunn, who scored 25 points. He is off to the best three-game rookie scoring start in Heat history. — Reuters



**MEMPHIS:** Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets shoots the ball against the Memphis Grizzlies at FedExForum in Memphis, Tennessee. — AFP

## Hamilton hopes to avoid hit-man Verstappen in Texas showdown

**MEXICO CITY:** Lewis Hamilton hopes to steer clear of Max Verstappen at next weekend's United States Grand Prix in Texas, where he aims to clinch his sixth drivers' world championship. Like Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel who said he also concedes extra space to the Dutchman, Hamilton believes that when racing against the Red Bull driver there is a higher possibility of contact and an accident.

In the wake of his perfectly-executed strategic triumph for Mercedes in Sunday's Mexican Grand Prix, in which he made contact with Verstappen on the opening lap, Hamilton said he believed there was a higher risk of an

accident while racing against him than others. "Every driver is slightly different," said Hamilton, answering a question in the post-race news conference. "Some are smarter and some are very smart aggressive. Some are silly with it..."

"Through those experiences with racing with people, you give some more space than others, but, yeah, (with) Max, it's very likely you'll come together with Max — if you don't give him extra space.

"Most of the time you do. In my experience (in Sunday's race), I didn't have extra space to give him, but I don't think it was intentional. Nonetheless, I managed to keep the car in a straight line..."

Hamilton survived his brush with Verstappen to make full use of a well-judged one-stop strategy and claim the 83rd victory of his career and his 10th in 18 races this year, leaving him needing to finish in the top eight in the United States to take his sixth title.

Verstappen was chasing a hat-trick of Mexico victories, but undid his chances on Saturday in qualifying when he was punished for ignoring yellow flags following Valtteri Bottas' crash and then told a news conference that "it doesn't matter."

He was penalised three grid positions, losing pole position, and started fourth alongside Hamilton. The pair tangled and then Verstappen clashed with Bottas, who finished third in the second Mercedes. Verstappen suffered a puncture and pitted. He re-joined last, but charged through the field to finish sixth.

His surging and dramatic drive, packed with daring passing moves, was thrilling for his fans, but demonstrated why he is dubbed 'Mad Max' and given a wide berth by his rivals. "He got a puncture from that," said Bottas of Verstappen's hopeful failed lunge to pass him. "I couldn't really avoid him. I think he earned his own puncture. Definitely..."

Vettel, who finished second, smiled as he listened to Hamilton's responses before being posed the same questions about Verstappen. "Yes and yes," he replied, nodding his agreement with Hamilton's views. "Just copy and paste... It's true."

The four-time champion German smiled as he sat alongside defending five-time champion Hamilton with Bottas nearby. Verstappen, 22, a victim of his own impetuosity, was hardly in any position to argue after an afternoon that demonstrated his crowd-pleasing skills but also left another dent in his reputation. — AFP

## Federer withdraws from Paris Masters

**BASEL:** Roger Federer clinched his 103rd career title at Basel on Sunday but admitted that he may skip the opportunity to win a 104th at the Paris Masters. The 38-year-old won his 10th Basel trophy, smothering young Australian Alex De Minaur 6-2, 6-2 to secure what the Swiss legend described as "an unbelievable" success at the home-town tournament where he used to work as a ballboy.

He is now just six short of the record 109 ATP titles won by American Jimmy Connors but may be tempted to skip Paris, the final event of the regular season, to conserve his energy ahead of the ATP Finals in London.

"I've got a team meeting scheduled for Monday to discuss not just Paris but next season. I guess by tomorrow I'll know if I'm going to Paris or not," said Federer after lifting his fourth title of 2019 after Dubai, Miami and Halle. "My fitness is fine, I'm happy with how I feel. I just don't know if I should play next week. I'll figure it out with the team." Federer returned to the Paris Masters last year for the first time since 2015 and reached the semi-finals where he lost a three-set semi-final thriller to Novak Djokovic, who is top seed ahead of Rafael Nadal in the French capital this year.

On Sunday, Federer cut an emotional figure as he was presented with the trophy at the Basel tournament where he once worked as a ball boy. In the crowd of 9,000 were his wife and four children.

"It might be remembering back at all that went into this week, the family of maybe the (coaching) team aspect," said Federer when asked to explain his emotions. "People think I just go out there and do it at will — but it's not that way at all."

"Sometimes I stand there and look back at what I've gone through. The ballkids running onto court (for the trophy ceremony) — that can get me going. Also thanking the fans at the end." Federer said his success at Basel, where he is on a 24-win streak and has won 75 matches against just nine losses, had been "an incredible journey". "It leaves a mark for me," he added after making an appearance at his annual pizza party with all tournament ball boys and girls immediately after the trophy ceremony. "To be able to play in a stadium with people celebrating your tennis it's a wonderful feeling. I've had an incredible journey, it's hit me hard winning in Basel. This is not something that I take as normal. (Winning a title) is something unique and special, even if I've done it a lot." — AFP

## Svitolina eases past Pliskova in WTA finals

**SHENZHEN:** Defending champion Elina Svitolina continued her dominance over world number two Karolina Pliskova with a straight-sets victory at the WTA Finals in China yesterday.

Opening Purple Group, the eighth seed started her title defence impressively with a 7-6 (14/12), 6-4 win in one hour and 53 minutes at the Shenzhen Bay Sports Centre.

It was Svitolina's fourth straight victory over a misfiring Pliskova who had 42 unforced errors. "I was trying to be ready for her big serve and then take on the second serve," Svitolina said after the match. "The surface is a little bit slow and I had more time... it benefited my return."

It was a disappointing result for Pliskova who started well, mixing trademark hard-hitting blows from the base-

line with softer touch — including an exquisite drop shot to capture a break in the first game.

But Svitolina slowly clawed her way back into the match and broke in the fourth game as Pliskova's radar went awry.

It was a tense contest extending into a nerve-jangling tiebreaker with Pliskova's bold approach saving six set points, but she miscued on the seventh as the Ukrainian finally drew first blood.

A frustrated Pliskova was broken immediately to open the second set and never seriously threatened to stage a comeback against an increasingly confident Svitolina.

The 25-year-old is hoping to end a barren season on a high having not captured a title since last year's WTA Finals triumph.

Pliskova, who has a tour-leading four titles this season, is making her fourth straight appearance at the round-robin tournament and has reached the semi-finals for the past two years.

US Open champion Bianca Andreescu takes on Wimbledon winner Simona Halep in the later match in a battle of the past two Grand Slam champions. — AFP



**SHENZHEN:** Elina Svitolina of Ukraine reacts after winning against Karolina Pliskova of Czech Republic during their women's singles first round match in the WTA Finals tennis tournament in Shenzhen yesterday. — AFP

## Emotions spill over as PNG qualify for T20 World Cup

**MELBOURNE:** Global cricketers hailed one of the sport's "feel good" stories of the year on Monday after Papua New Guinea dug themselves out of a huge hole at a Dubai qualifier to book their maiden appearance at the T20 World Cup in Australia next year.

Emerging cricket nation PNG were 19 for six against Kenya after an early collapse at Dubai International Stadium but ended up thrashing the Africans by 45 runs on Sunday. PNG then had a nervous wait for the result of the Netherlands' game against Scotland, but they ultimately topped their group at the tournament due to a higher net run rate and qualify directly for Australia, their first World Cup in any format.

The PNG players celebrated wildly in the stadium's terraces and their Australian coach Joe Dawes was overwhelmed. "I am feeling a little emotional," former Queensland bowler Dawes told the global

governing body ICC. "It's been a pretty big two years, for them to achieve this is pretty special." Dawes said planning for next year's tournament could wait. "We are just going to enjoy the moment. For them to achieve this is a great thing for us and for the nation," he added.

PNG's automatic qualification came at the expense of the Netherlands, who defeated Scotland but will have to take the playoffs route to reach Australia. Cricket was introduced into PNG in the early 1900s by British missionaries but the national teams have struggled to make an impression on the world stage until recently.

The men's "Barramundis" team were awarded One Day International Status by the ICC in 2014 and they have benefited from development grants from neighbouring cricket power Australia. "The fact that Papua New Guinea have qualified for their first Men's T20 World Cup in 2020 is one of modern cricket's amazing feel good stories," commentator and former West Indies fast bowler Ian Bishop tweeted. India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin also hailed PNG's entry to one of cricket's biggest global stages. "So PNG qualifies for the T20 World Cup!! It's amazing to see the game expanding globally and will surely bring more young ones to play the great game," he tweeted. — Reuters

## Bulletproof vests': World Cup autopsy brutal, says All Black Williams

**TOKYO:** New Zealand icon Sonny Bill Williams said yesterday that the All Blacks players needed "bulletproof vests" during a brutal analysis of their devastating 19-7 World Cup semi-final defeat by England.

The treble-chasing All Blacks suffered only their second loss in 17 games against the English, who also snapped New Zealand's remarkable 18-match unbeaten run in the competition, one which had dated back to 2007.

Williams, who has two winner's medals, revealed that combing through the wreckage of Saturday's upset by a pumped-up England in Yokohama had stung and that the coaching staff had pulled no punches in a grim post-mortem.

"We went through the review this morning and some of the boys had their bulletproof vests on," said the hulking centre, set to bow out as an All Black after this week's third-place playoff with Wales.

"Now we've just got to get on with it. It was a little more stressful yesterday with my little one," added Williams, noting the effect a rare New Zealand failure had on his children. "Didn't sleep well, she was out of whack."

New Zealand, who had not lost at the World Cup since France stunned them in the 2007 quarter-finals, face Wales in

Tokyo on Friday after the Six Nations champions were beaten 19-16 by South Africa on Sunday. It is a match that nobody really wants to play — but Williams insisted it could prove cathartic for the wounded All Blacks.

"It was a tough night, but there were some lessons," said the 34-year-old, who has also won a pair of titles in Australia's National Rugby League and a WBA international heavyweight boxing crown.

"Straight after the game, I didn't really want to play this week — but five or 10 minutes later I flipped the script and thought how good it would be to get through this, play again next week and put those lessons into practice."

With All Blacks head coach Steve Hansen stepping down after seven years, along with captain Kieran Read, it felt like the end of an era for what England boss Eddie Jones described as the "greatest team in sport".

But assistant coach Ian Foster, tipped to take over from Hansen before their crushing defeat, echoed the sentiments of Williams as he promised this week's clash with Wales would mark the start of a healing process for the All Blacks.

"It's a chance to redeem ourselves," he said. "We have players and management that are hurting and we want to go out and show we're better than that, and start this process."

"Energy levels might be low with the quick turnaround but there are players jumping out of their skin (to play)."

Williams, meanwhile, called for a candidate with Pacific island or Maori blood to be considered for the All Blacks coaching set-up. "There are going to be a few guys putting their hands up," said Williams, who is of Samoan heritage.

"I'd like to see a Pacific Islander or a Maori in the coaching system that would have a bit of influence," he added.

"There's a lot of Island boys, a lot of Maori boys playing for the All Blacks — there's a lot of space there for that growth." — AFP