

Sports

NBA Lakers thumped by Thunder, Raptors and Celtics win

Team owners pledge \$300m over 10 years to Black empowerment

MIAMI: Having clinched a Western Conference top seed in the NBA playoffs, the Los Angeles Lakers began experimenting for the post-season Wednesday and found they still have some work to do. In their first game since taking the top spot, the Lakers were routed 105-86 by Oklahoma City, never leading for the first time all season.

Chris Paul scored a game-high 21 points and Italian forward Danilo Gallinari added 19 as the Thunder, 42-25, stayed one game behind Utah for fourth in the West. Three-time NBA champion LeBron James led the Lakers with 19 points and 11 rebounds in 30 minutes on the court while Anthony Davis had nine points, eight rebounds and five assists.

"Some things we need to continue to work on," James said. "We've been out 4 1/2 months. "When you put in the hours, put in the reps, you can't worry too much. You've got to go get it." Everyone on the Lakers' roster played as the purple and gold looked to the playoffs by testing combinations and talent to see who might work well together when needed later in the Orlando bubble, where games resumed last week after a four-month COVID-19 hiatus.

"We have some guys who are new to the system," James said. "We're just trying to fit everybody in, do it on the fly, but at the same time get our legs back underneath us." The Orlando Magic and Brooklyn Nets each could have clinched an Eastern Conference playoff berth with a victory, but both were beaten by title contenders. Fred VanVleet scored a game-high 21 points and matched Kyle Lowry's game-high 10 assists to spark the defending NBA champion Toronto Raptors over Orlando 109-99. The Magic fell to 32-37, a half-game behind the seventh-place Brooklyn Nets, who fell to Boston 149-115.

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 21 points and Jason Tatum added 19 as Boston had seven double-

figure scorers and unleashed the team's highest one-game point total of the season despite playing without rested star guard Kemba Walker.

Cameroonian star Joel Embiid had game highs of 30 points and 11 rebounds to lead Philadelphia over Washington 107-98 but the 76ers lost Australian star guard Ben Simmons to a left knee injury in the third quarter. Simmons had eight points on 2-of-10 shooting with six rebounds and four assists in 23 minutes before exiting as the Sixers improved to 41-27, one game behind fifth-place Indiana in the Eastern Conference. The Athletic reported Simmons had an MRI on the knee that was negative and his status would be decided day to day. The Wizards, 24-44 and 0-4 in the bubble, will be eliminated from playoff contention with one more loss or if Orlando and Brooklyn both win. That could happen Friday when New Orleans plays Washington, Brooklyn faces Sacramento and Orlando meets Philadelphia.

AUSSIE INGLES SIZZLES

Australian guard Joe Ingles scored 25 points, hitting 6-of-11 from 3-point range, while Mike Conley added 23 and French center Rudy Gobert contributed 21 points and 16 rebounds to power the Utah Jazz over Memphis 124-115.

Dillion Brooks scored 23 to lead the Grizzlies, who had 20 points from rookie star Ja Morant plus 21 points and 14 rebounds from Lithuanian big man Jonas Valanciunas. "We battled tonight," Morant said. "All in all I thought we played good."

At 32-37, Memphis fell to only one game ahead of Portland for eighth place in the Western Conference. Denver's Michael Porter scored 30 points and grabbed 15 rebounds while Serbian 7-footer Nikola Jokic added 25 points and 11 assists to lead the Nuggets over San Antonio 132-126.



ORLANDO: Chris Paul #3 of the Oklahoma City Thunder defends against LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers as part of the NBA Restart 2020 at HP Field House at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, Florida. —AFP

Reserve forward Rudy Gay scored 24 points to pace the Spurs, who missed a chance to pull within a game of Memphis as well.

Meanwhile, National Basketball Association (NBA) team owners will contribute a total of \$300 million over the next 10 years to a charitable foundation aimed at accelerating economic growth in the Black community, the league said on Wednesday.

Each of the NBA's 30 teams will provide \$1 million annually during that time to fund the NBA Foundation, which is being launched by the league's board of governors and the players' union.

"The creation of this foundation is an important step in developing more opportunities for the Black community," said National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) President Chris Paul.

"I am proud of our league and our players for their commitment to this long-term fight for equality and justice, and I know we will continue to find ways to keep pushing for meaningful institutional change," Paul said. The foundation aims to drive economic empowerment for Black communities through employment and career advancement, increasing access and support for high school, college-age and career-ready Black men and women.

It will also work toward deepening the NBA's commitment to racial equality and social justice, movements that have gathered momentum after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed in police custody in May. —

Kyrgios unlikely for French Open

SYDNEY: Nick Kyrgios dropped a huge hint yesterday that he will skip the French Open, saying the chances of him travelling to Europe this year were "slim to none". The opinionated Australian last week pulled out of the upcoming US Open in New York due to the coronavirus pandemic, with world number two Rafael Nadal following suit.

Kyrgios, ranked just 40 but a big drawcard, said he wasn't surprised by the Spaniard's decision, noting that the clay court king was likely "eyeing the French Open" in late September. "And if I was to play I'd probably definitely rather go to Europe (than America) at this time of year for sure with everything going on," he added to Channel Nine television from his Canberra base. But Kyrgios suggested that was also unlikely, casting serious doubt over his presence at Roland Garros. "It's a very slim chance I'll play in Europe. Almost slim to none to be honest," he said. "I'm going to use this (time) to stay home, train, be with my family, be with my friends and I'm just going to act responsibly, and wait till I think there's better circumstances to play."

Kyrgios also cast doubt on next year's Australian Open, scheduled for January, as host city Melbourne battles a major outbreak that has triggered a stay-at-home lockdown and curfew. "I'm not too sure the Australian Open will be going ahead as it did at the start of the year with the pandemic in Melbourne," he said.

"It's sad times in Melbourne so I'm not too sure if the Australian Open will go on." Kyrgios has been vocal in his criticism of some other players during the pandemic, waging a social media battle with top names who played at Novak Djokovic's ill-fated Adria Tour exhibition. Djokovic, Grigor Dimitrov, Borna Coric and Viktor Troicki all tested positive for the COVID-19 illness after the event, where social distancing was minimal and some players went nightclubbing. The Serbian world number one, Austrian Dominic Thiem, Coric and Alexander Zverev have all been in Kyrgios's firing line and he lobbed another missile, without naming any players, on Thursday.

"Their behaviour throughout this time, I don't think has been great at all. Especially coming from some of our leaders of the sport," Kyrgios said. "On top of our game they're supposed to be setting an example for the rest of the tour, and them coming back at me with behaviour that I've done on court, I mean it just shows their intellectual level to be honest. "Putting lives at risk, it's not really comparable." —AFP



Nick Kyrgios