

14 Indians punch playoff ticket with walk-off HR; Giants beat Rockies



15 Qatar's Al Sadd book Asian Champions League last 16



15 Krasnodar, Salzburg edge closer to Champions League group stage



Denver Nuggets hold off Lakers

Murray nails two crucial late 3-pointers in closing minutes



ORLANDO: Kyle Kuzma #0 of the Los Angeles Lakers drives to the basket against the Denver Nuggets during Game Three of the Western Conference Finals on September 22, 2020. — AFP

ORLANDO: Jamal Murray scored 28 points as the Denver Nuggets held off a ferocious late fight-back from the Los Angeles Lakers to roar back into contention in the Western Conference finals series on Tuesday. Murray nailed two crucial late three-pointers in the closing minutes as Denver held on for a 114-106 victory in game three to reduce the Lakers' lead to 2-1 in the best-of-seven series.

But the Nuggets—who looked in complete control for long periods of the contest—were given a mighty scare by the Lakers in a thrilling fourth-quarter battle. The Lakers had trailed by 20 points with just over 10 minutes remaining but whittled away the Denver lead to just three points with 3min 53sec left on the clock in Orlando. But just as it looked as if LeBron James and Anthony Davis were poised to complete a remarkable comeback, Murray regrouped to take the game away from the Lakers.

The 23-year-old Canadian's three-pointer from 26 feet gave Denver a seven-point advantage at 106-99 and he then provided the assist for Paul Millsap to make it 108-99. With less than a minute on the clock, Murray struck the dagger blow with a 29-foot three-point jumpshot to make it 111-99 and effectively seal victory. Denver coach Michael Malone said his team—who had suffered an agonizing buzzer-beater defeat in game two on Sunday—were determined not to go 3-0 down in the series. The Nuggets have already overturned 3-1 series deficits en route to the Western Conference finals.

'Not ready to go'

"I had no doubt we were going to show up tonight," Malone said. "We have won six straight elimination games. Everybody always has us packing our bags and leaving, but we're not ready to go. They're a very resilient group and they have proved that time and time again." Asked about his

late flourish, Murray said he had set out to lead by example. "That's my whole energy, my whole approach to the game, not getting down if I miss a couple of shots," Murray said.

"I'm just trying to be aggressive... but the most important part is the energy I bring when I'm talking to my team-mates, being a vocal leader, getting up and down and pushing everybody so they tend to follow. I just wanted to see them have a lot of fun today." The Lakers meanwhile were left reflecting on an uneven display which ultimately left James and Davis with too much to do. James led the scoring with a triple double comprised of 30 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists, with six turnovers. Davis had 27 points, with Kentavious Caldwell-Pope (12) and Kyle Kuzma (11) the only other Lakers players to crack double figures.

Murray, who also had 12 assists, was backed with 26 points from Jerami Grant while Nikola Jokic weighed in with 22 points, 10 rebounds and

five assists. "You put yourself in an 18-point hole, it's tough to climb out of that," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "I thought Denver played with great energy throughout the game. We didn't match it early, we matched it late. They're a great basketball team so credit it to them for the win. They played a really good basketball game."

"We were not as sharp as we could have been on both ends of the floor. We were playing at a high level, but were a little bit off in the first half. "But I liked the spirit that the guys competed with down the stretch to try and make it a game." Game four in the series takes place in Orlando today. The winner of the Western Conference will play either the Boston Celtics or Miami Heat in the NBA Finals. The climax to the COVID-19-interrupted NBA season is taking place at Disneyworld in Orlando, where teams have been based in a secure "bubble" since July in order to allow the NBA to complete the campaign. — AFP

Raiders, Saints fined for face covering violations

LOS ANGELES: The Las Vegas Raiders and New Orleans Saints have been fined \$250,000 each for breaches of the NFL's Covid-19 safety protocols regarding face coverings, reports said Tuesday. Raiders head coach Jon Gruden and Saints counterpart Sean Payton were also fined \$100,000 apiece for their failure to wear face coverings during Monday's meeting between the two teams in Nevada, NFL Network reported. The latest round of fines comes after the league hit the Seattle Seahawks, San Francisco 49ers and Denver Broncos and their head coaches with identical fines on Monday for violations over the weekend.

The NFL began handing out penalties a week after giving all 32 clubs in the league a reminder to follow face covering guidelines. Raiders coach Gruden apologised on Monday when asked about his failure to wear a mask during his team's 34-24 win over the

Saints. Gruden revealed he had contracted Covid-19 during the off-season but had recovered. Saints coach Payton also contracted coronavirus earlier this year.

"I'm doing my best. You know, I've had the virus. OK, I'm doing my best," Gruden said on Monday. "I'm very sensitive about it, but I'm calling plays. "I just wanna communicate in these situations and I apologize and if I get fined, I will have to pay the fine, but I'm very sensitive about all of that and I apologize." Meanwhile Seattle coach Pete Carroll apologized on Tuesday for his breach of face-covering rules, admitting he had "screwed up". "I had a coach who was reminding me about it throughout the game," Carroll said. "I even changed masks at halftime to find one that worked better. Sometimes you have to admit that you screwed up and have got to do better." — AFP

Sports face impact of empty stadiums

LONDON: Sports clubs and associations in England are bracing themselves for six more months without paying spectators after plans for a fans' return in October were scrapped on Tuesday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the House of Commons the government could not go ahead with the planned reopening of venues on a socially distanced basis from October 1 due to a sharp rise in coronavirus infections. He suggested the measures would remain in place for "perhaps six months", making it almost certain the sports sector will need some financial support from the government to prevent an unprecedented loss of professional and grassroots clubs from the landscape.

It is a devastating blow to sporting organizations, many of whom rely heavily on match-day revenue for survival, and there have already been calls from governing bodies for emergency funding. Sports governing

bodies held an emergency meeting with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Oliver Dowden to discuss the impact of the decision. Professional sport, including the Premier League and Test cricket, has largely been played behind closed doors since it returned following the coronavirus shutdown earlier this year.

The English Football League has estimated its clubs will lose a collective £200 million (\$255 million) without fans in stadiums for the whole of the 2020/21 season. The Premier League warned of the "devastating impact" the continued absence of supporters was having on its clubs and communities. "Last season, Premier League clubs suffered £700 million in losses and at present, our national game is losing more than £100 million per month," it said in a statement. "This is starting to have a devastating impact on clubs and their communities."

The Rugby Football Union has called for government aid, estimating a loss of more than £100 million from a lack of crowds at Twickenham for autumn internationals and Six Nations games alone. "From the outset we have been clear that an autumn without crowds would leave us with little choice but to approach the government for financial help," said chief executive Bill Sweeney.

"Unfortunately, we are now in that position. Without support we are in danger of clubs at the heart of communities across England, as well as players and volunteers, disappearing forever."

The Jockey Club also called for direct government support, saying the lack of paying spectators threatened the survival of sports organizations and the livelihoods they supported. English cricket recently revealed it had lost £100 million as a result of the pandemic and that could double with further disruption next year. "The impact of having to stage cricket behind closed doors again next year would be severe," said a statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said the government would "work together" with sports representatives on limiting the damage caused by the virus. "I've just held a meeting with major spectator sports to discuss today's decision to help contain the virus through winter," he tweeted. "We agreed to work together to help them through this difficult period." Dowden also confirmed that pilot events scheduled for the remainder of September had been cancelled. Each event had been capped at a maximum capacity of 1,000, regardless of venue size. — AFP