

Sports

Harden joining Brooklyn Nets in blockbuster deal

Move ends Houston drama, reunites Harden, Durant in 'new super team'

LOS ANGELES: James Harden is joining the Brooklyn Nets in a blockbuster NBA trade from the Houston Rockets, US media reported Wednesday. ESPN and The Athletic reported that the 2018 NBA MVP will head to the Nets in a trade that will see Harden reunited with former Oklahoma City Thunder team-mate Kevin Durant.

The 31-year-old played alongside Durant for three seasons in Oklahoma City between 2009 and 2012. ESPN reported that the complex deal also involved the Indiana Pacers and Cleveland Cavaliers. In exchange for Harden, Houston received multiple players and draft picks as well as guard Caris LeVert. LeVert was traded immediately to the Pacers in exchange for Victor Oladipo. There was no immediate confirmation of the deal by Houston or Brooklyn.

Harden's move raises the prospect of the Nets emerging as a new super team, with the unhappy Rockets ace joining forces with Durant and Kyrie Irving. Harden's exit from the Rockets had loomed ever closer, with team-mates complaining of his attitude in the locker room.

On Tuesday, Harden had lashed out after the Rockets were thumped 117-100 at home by the Los Angeles Lakers. "I love this city," Harden said. "I literally have done everything that I can. I mean, this situation is crazy. It's something that I don't think can be fixed."

Team-mate John Wall, who arrived in Houston this year from the Washington Wizards, accused Harden of not being committed to the team. "When you have certain guys that don't want to buy in, it's hard," said Wall.

On Wednesday, Harden was barred from team practice following his outburst. "We felt it was best for James and best for the group for him not to be at practice," Rockets coach Stephen Silas told reporters on a video call. Silas said Harden's criticisms had been "hard to hear." "Especially when you don't believe it and you know it not to be true," he said.

The Rockets' DeMarcus Cousins meanwhile accused Harden of being "disrespectful" to the Houston locker room. "Will he ever need to play with us again? I don't know, quite honestly don't care," Cousins said. "He can feel however he wants to feel with the organization but the other 14 guys in the locker room have done nothing to him. So for us to be on the receiving end of some of the disrespectful comments and antics, it's completely unfair to us."

Harden, an eight-time NBA All-Star and a prolific scorer, joined Houston in 2012 after starting his career in Oklahoma City. However he was unable to guide the Rockets to an NBA Championship during that time, and instead suffered a string of playoff disappointments, with Houston failing to make the NBA finals once in eight straight playoff appearances. — AFP



SAITAMA: In this file photo taken on October 10, 2019 Houston's guard James Harden answers a question after the NBA Japan Games 2019 pre-season basketball match between Houston Rockets and Toronto Raptors in Saitama, northern suburb of Tokyo. —AFP

Nets await trade with dominant display, Lakers win

LOS ANGELES: The Brooklyn Nets limbered up for the expected arrival of James Harden in a blockbuster NBA trade with a 116-109 victory over the New York Knicks on Wednesday. Star forward Kevin Durant scored 26 points to lead seven Nets players in double figures — a performance all the more impressive with just nine Brooklyn players available.

News that the Houston Rockets would send their disgruntled star Harden to Brooklyn in a four-team deal electrified the league on Wednesday. It had yet to be confirmed, but the four players reported to be on their way out of Brooklyn — Caris LeVert, Jarrett Allen, Rodions Kurucs and Taurian Prince were unavailable and, according to coach Steve Nash, not at Madison Square Garden. Durant, however, scoffed at the suggestion the proposed deal had made for "drama and chaos" around a team already dealing with the absence of Kyrie Irving for undisclosed personal reasons.

Conference challenge

"The game simply is enough for us," Durant said. "The guys are coming out there enjoying playing every day no matter what the circumstance is. There's a lot going on throughout the season, and in this world right now, but basketball is one thing everybody in this locker room enjoys."

Durant, back this season after missing an

entire campaign recovering from a torn Achilles tendon, played on back-to-back nights for the first time, logging 30 minutes and connecting on 10 of 18 shots from the field, including three from three-point range.

The Nets, with Durant and Irving healthy, were already expected to contend in the East. The addition of former MVP Harden — the league's top scorer the past three seasons — would enhance their ability to challenge in a conference led by the Milwaukee Bucks in the past two seasons.

The Bucks notched their third straight win, 110-101 over the Pistons in Detroit, on

the back of a triple-double from two-time defending NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo. Antetokounmpo delivered 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his 20th career triple-double.

Jrue Holiday added 21 points as five Bucks players scored in double digits in the comfortable win. Brook Lopez drained three three-pointers in the first quarter and Milwaukee finished with 19 baskets from beyond the arc in a game they led by as many as 23 points. It was just one lopsided result on a night that saw the reigning champion Los Angeles Lakers rout the Thunder 128-99 in Oklahoma City. The Lakers improved their league-leading record to 10-3 and remained unbeaten in seven games on the road — their best road start ever in a season. — AFP



NEW YORK: Kevin Durant #7 of the Brooklyn Nets shoots the ball during the game against the New York Knicks on Wednesday at Madison Square Garden in New York City, New York. —AFP

Stanley Cup champion Lightning beat Hawks in season opener

LOS ANGELES: The Tampa Bay Lightning got their Stanley Cup title defense off to a roaring start on Wednesday by dominating the Chicago Blackhawks 5-1 on the same night they unveiled their second Stanley Cup championship banner.

Canadian forward Steven Stamkos had a goal and two assists and goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 22 shots in the season opening night of the 2020-21 NHL regular season which included a five-game slate. The Lightning began the 56-game season Wednesday but they won't be defending their title in front of home fans right away due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The team showed off their new championship banner at center ice in front of some family members of the players. They have decided to wait to raise it to the rafters until ticket-buying fans are allowed back into the arena which won't take place before at least February 7. Tampa beat the Dallas Stars in six games in last season's playoff final and this banner will join the one they captured in 2004 by beating the Calgary Flames in seven games. Stamkos, Ondrej Palat, Mathieu Joseph, Anthony Cirelli and Brayden Point scored goals for the Lightning who improved their league-leading winning percentage to 19-7-2 in season openers.

Dylan Strome scored late in the game on a power play for Chicago, and goalie Malcolm Subban stopped 28 of 33 shots in his 61st NHL start. Tampa played without star forward Nikita Kucherov who will undergo hip surgery and is expected to miss the entire season. In Philadelphia, American Joel Farabee finished with a goal and four points as the host Philadelphia Flyers scored three unanswered goals in the final period to beat Sidney Crosby's Pittsburgh Penguins 6-3. — AFP