

Sports

Giannis scores 41 as Bucks trim Suns' lead in NBA Finals

MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo powered Milwaukee to a crucial 120-100 victory over Phoenix on Sunday in the NBA Finals, reviving the Bucks' chances to win their first title in 50 years. The 26-year-old Greek forward scored 41 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to spark the Bucks, who pulled within 2-1 in the best-of-seven championship series ahead of game four tomorrow at Milwaukee. "To give ourselves an opportunity to win this series, we've got to stay aggressive," Antetokounmpo said. "It's all going to be mental from here."

The two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, who had 42 points and 12 rebounds in a game two loss, joined Shaquille O'Neal in 2000 and LeBron James in 2016 as the only NBA Finals players with back-to-back 40-point, 10-rebound performances. Antetokounmpo hit 14-of-23 shots from the floor and 13-of-17 from the free throw line to lead the Bucks to a crucial victory, as no team has ever rallied from 3-0 down to win an NBA playoff series. "We knew what type of game it was going to be," Antetokounmpo said. "We knew we had to play good basketball. I was trying to be as aggressive as I could."

Jrue Holiday added 21 points and nine assists while Kris Middleton had 18 points, seven rebounds and six assists. "I was trying to drive and open things up. I knew I had to get Kris and Jrue involved," Antetokounmpo said. "My teammates want me to be aggressive."

The Bucks, hosting their first NBA Finals game in 47 years, improved to an NBA-best 8-1 at home in the playoffs by beating the Suns, who had been a playoffs-best 6-2 on the road. "We knew what we had to do. We knew what this game meant to us, to the city," Holiday said. "It was about us coming out hard and being able to execute."

The Bucks won their only NBA crown in 1971 while the Suns seek the first title in their 53-year team history. "It was a tough lesson for us to learn," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "We know we have to play with an unreal amount of aggression for 48 minutes and all our guys know we didn't. I expect our guys to bounce back."

Holiday went 8-of-14 after struggling in the first two games, Antetokounmpo drawing defenders to ease his outside shooting efforts. "It's awesome. Knocking down shots, it just fuels us and gives us energy," Holiday said. "We're going to keep feeding it to him."



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks shoots the ball during the game against the Phoenix Suns during Game Three of the 2021 NBA Finals on Sunday at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

We have to stay confident and knock down the shots." Suns guard Chris Paul, in the first NBA Finals of his 16-year career at age 36, led the Suns with 19 points while Deandre Ayton and Jae Crowder each added 18. Phoenix guard Devin Booker went 3-of-14 from the floor, 1-of-7 from 3-point range, and had only 10 points. Williams would not talk about officiating but noted: "We had 16 free throws. One person (Antetokounmpo) had 17."

'We've got to learn'

Antetokounmpo scored nine in a 20-6 spurt to give Milwaukee a 50-42 edge. The Bucks closed the first half on a 10-0 run for a 60-45 Bucks half-time advantage. "They played with a great deal of aggression for longer stretches than we did," Williams said. "We knew

it was coming. We did not respond to it well, especially in the second and third quarters."

The Suns began the third quarter by hitting 9-of-10 shots from the floor and pulled within 74-70, with Crowder hitting three 3-pointers. But Milwaukee battled back, scoring the final 16 points of the third quarter to grab a 98-76 lead entering the fourth.

Antetokounmpo, who had 18 points in the first half, scored 16 in the third quarter while Holiday added 12. "I felt like the momentum was going their way before that," Holiday said. "I got the momentum going back on our side." The Bucks held the Suns at bay in the fourth quarter, ensuring a fifth game Saturday at Phoenix. "This is one of those games you typically in NBA speak say flush it," Williams said. "But in the NBA Finals you can't. We've got to learn from it." — AFP

Wilander added: "I think he will win another three next year and two or three the following year, so I think he ends up on 25 or 26."

'Doesn't look 34'

"Novak just doesn't look 34, he looks mid-20s, he's flying around the court." When Djokovic won last month's French Open, he became the first man in 52 years to claim all four majors twice and third overall after Laver and Roy Emerson. It is not just at the Slams where Djokovic has tightened his grip on the race to be crowned the sport's greatest.

He has 36 Masters titles, the same as Nadal. However, he is the only man to have won each one of the series and the only one to have won all of them twice. He has already surpassed Federer for total weeks in the world number one slot — his 329th started yesterday.

Djokovic was also the first of the 'Big Three' to break the \$100 million prize money barrier. Sunday's win took him comfortably past \$150 million. In head-to-heads, he also has the advantage. Against Nadal he is 30-28 and 27-23 in match-ups with Federer. However, Djokovic insists that he will never anoint himself as "the greatest".

"I believe that I am the best, otherwise I wouldn't be talking confidently about winning Slams and making history," said Djokovic. "But whether I'm the greatest of all time or not, I leave that debate to other people. It's very difficult to compare the eras of tennis. We have different racquets, technology, balls, courts."

There are still some areas where Djokovic at the moment lags behind. His career total of 85 titles is three fewer than Nadal while Federer has 103. He still has some way to go to beat Jimmy Connors' all-time record of 109.

In total earnings, Federer commanded \$106.3 million in 2020, according to Forbes, while Djokovic made \$44.6 million. Sidelined for most of 2020 to recover from two knee surgeries, Federer's bank balance remains healthy due to the \$300 million 10-year contract he penned with Uniqlo in 2018.

Many regard Australia's Laver as tennis's supreme power, arguing he would have collected many more than his 11 Slams had he not been banished between 1963 and 1967 for turning professional. Djokovic also has some distance to make up on the best women players of all time. Margaret Court tops the all-time list with 24 Slam titles, Serena Williams has 23 while Steffi Graf retired on 22. — AFP

The greatest? Djokovic has time, momentum on his side

LONDON: With a record-equaling 20th Grand Slam title secured, Novak Djokovic has time and winning momentum on his side in the race to be crowned the greatest player of all time. The world number one went level with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal on 20 majors with a sixth Wimbledon title thanks to his four-set win over Italy's Matteo Berrettini on Sunday.

The 34-year-old has won eight majors and appeared in nine Grand Slam finals since turning 30. Incredibly, when Federer secured his 20th at the 2018 Australian Open, Djokovic was still way back on 12. "He's amazing. He's like in the movies. You have to kill the guy 27 times and still he gets up and you have to kill him again and he gets up," said Goran Ivanisevic, one of the Serb's coaching team.

'Unbeatable'

"The guy is unbeatable at the moment. For me Novak is the best ever. He's writing history," Ivanisevic believes that Djokovic's coronation as the greatest male player of all time will come at the US Open in September. A fourth career title there will make him only the third man in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam of all four majors after Don Budge in 1938 and Rod Laver in 1962 and 1969.

"He's going to do it at the US Open. I strongly believe he's going to win all four in one year. Then I think the debate is over," said Ivanisevic. At 34, Djokovic is a year younger than Nadal and has the best part of six years on Federer who turns 40 in four weeks' time.

Nadal skipped Wimbledon after losing to Djokovic in a bruising French Open semi-final last month. A sub-par Federer made a quarter-final exit at the All England Club. Former Slam winners John McEnroe and Mats Wilander believe Djokovic can easily win at least four or five more Slams. "I'm going to say Roger Federer's never going to win another one," McEnroe told the BBC. "I think Rafael Nadal wins one more and Novak Djokovic is going to win four or five more."



LONDON: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates winning the third set against Italy's Matteo Berrettini during their men's singles final match of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships in London, on Sunday. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Conor McGregor of Ireland (left) and Dustin Poirier face off in the first round in their lightweight bout during UFC 264: Poirier v McGregor 3 at T-Mobile Arena on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

McGregor undergoes surgery, vows to return to octagon

LOS ANGELES: Conor McGregor underwent three hours of surgery on Sunday, less than 24 hours after suffering a "clean" break of his left shinbone during a devastating UFC defeat to American brawler Dustin Poirier. Doctors revealed that McGregor broke his left tibia and fibula bones in the opening round of the non-title lightweight bout in Las Vegas.

McGregor said in a video message posted on social media that he expects to be on crutches for six weeks before eventually making a return. "Conor is in recovery after 3 hours of surgery," McGregor's agent Audie Attar said. "The surgery was successful repairing fractures of his tibia and fibula." He added doctors were "confident that with time he will make a full recovery. We anticipate his return to the octagon."

Poirier overpowered McGregor on Saturday at T-Mobile arena, winning their trilogy fight by a TKO after the Irishman snapped his left leg in the waning seconds of the opening round. The fight was officially ruled as a "doctor's stoppage" at the end of the first round after a bloodied McGregor swung and missed a punch then stumbled backwards, his lower leg grotesquely buckling under him near the edge of the octagon.

Poirier then pounced on McGregor, raining down a series of punches and elbows as the bell sounded to end the round. It was the second time Poirier had beaten McGregor in six months. The scheduled five-round rubber match was expected to settle the score and complete the trilogy between the former two-weight UFC champ McGregor and his longtime rival Poirier, who now looks set to get a shot at an undisputed title and establish himself as one of the sport's superstars.

There was plenty of bad blood between the two in the lead up to their third fight. McGregor insulted Poirier's wife on social media before the fight and then a second time in the ring as he sat, waiting for the medic to stabilize the leg. Before the fight McGregor told Poirier he was going to leave the ring in a box. Instead McGregor had to be carted out on a stretcher. Poirier said his payback was karma. "This guy is a dirt bag," Poirier said in the ring immediately after the fight. "Karma's not a b****. She's a mirror." — AFP

Messi dedicates Copa title to family, country and Maradona

BUENOS AIRES: Lionel Messi has dedicated Argentina's Copa America triumph over Brazil to his family, his country and also late idol Diego Maradona. "I want to dedicate this success to my family, who have always given me the strength to continue, to my friends whom I love so much, to all the people who support us and above all to 45 million Argentinians who have suffered so with this dreadful virus," Barcelona megastar Messi wrote on Instagram.

Argentina is approaching a 100,000 COVID-19 death toll and weeks before the start of the Copa tournament Buenos Aires refused to co-stage the event with Colombia owing to the surge in pandemic cases. South American confederation CONMEBOL ultimately transferred hosting rights to Brazil at the last minute despite that country having seen more than half a million virus deaths, the second highest global tally after the United States. Messi, 34, also paid tribute to the memory of Maradona, who died aged 60 last November, saying that "Diego was surely urging us on wherever he is".

Argentina's success over the Brazilians in Rio was not just Messi's first major trophy for the Albiceleste but his country's first continental honor in 28 years. Messi had been desperate to lead the side to glory after a series of disappointments both at World Cups and the Copa. Given its battle against the further spread of the virus, Argentina has not organized celebrations to mark their title win.

After arriving back in the country on Sunday, the squad were briefly received at the country's football federation headquarters and then dispersed for a pre-season break. Despite the low-key welcome, thousands of fans took to the streets despite tight virus restrictions. "To continue to party we must continue to take care of each other — let's not forget we have a long way to go to get back to normality," Messi warned. "Use this happiness to gather strength to fight this virus together." — AFP



ROSARIO: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi is embraced by his wife Antonella Rocuzzo upon his arrival at the Islas Malvinas airport in Rosario, Santa Fe province, Argentina, on Sunday, after Argentina won the 2021 Copa America final football match against Brazil. — AFP

Earthquakes, typhoons pose threat at Tokyo Olympics

TOKYO: The coronavirus might top the risks at the Tokyo Olympics, but organizers in Japan have other deadly, unpredictable threats to contend with: natural disasters. Japan is regularly rattled by earthquakes and battered by typhoons, and experts warn that disaster preparation for a major event like the Games should not take a back seat because of the virus. "For organisers, infection measures are an urgent challenge," Hirota Hirose, a specialist in disaster risk studies, told AFP.

"But the risks of a major earthquake mustn't be forgotten when you have an Olympics hosted by Japan," added Hirose, professor emeritus at Tokyo Woman's Christian University. Japan sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity that stretches throughout southeast Asia and across the Pacific Basin.

The country is also home to numerous active volcanoes and is regularly hit by typhoons in the season that runs from around May to October, peaking in August and September. When Japan hosted the Rugby World Cup in 2019, three pool matches were cancelled because of Typhoon Hagibis, which killed more than 100 people and caused widespread flooding.

Tokyo and surrounding areas sit precariously at the junction of shifting tectonic plates, and experts and officials regularly warn residents that the next "Big One" could strike at any time. Before last year's postponement, large-scale exercises were organized to rehearse the response to a massive quake ripping through Tokyo Bay. "There has been an earthquake. Please stay calm and protect yourself," blared a message in Japanese and English at one venue. "Taking action in a panic may lead to danger."

Tokyo 2020 says it has contingency plans for various natural disasters, "prioritizing the safety of spectators and people involved", though they declined to offer further details. The risks are real, said Toshiyasu Nagao, an expert on earthquake prediction studies with Tokai University's Institute of Oceanic Research and Development. "It would be no surprise if a big earthquake hit directly beneath the capital tomorrow," he told AFP. "And it's not just in Tokyo, the risks of an earthquake are everywhere in Japan." — AFP