

Sports

James injury rocks Lakers in loss to Hawks, depleted 76ers cruise past Kings

LeBron out indefinitely high ankle sprain

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James crashed out of the Los Angeles Lakers' 99-94 loss to the Atlanta Hawks Saturday with a right ankle injury that will sideline the NBA superstar indefinitely. The Lakers superstar collapsed to the Staples Center court in agony after a collision with Atlanta's Solomon Hill in the second quarter, crying out in pain and clutching his right ankle.

The 36-year-old returned briefly to hit a three-pointer before limping back to the locker room, knocking over a chair in frustration. ESPN later reported that an MRI scan revealed a high ankle sprain and that James faced an "indefinite" injury layoff. Depending on the severity, high ankle sprains can take anywhere from a few weeks up to several months to recover from.

James did not speak to reporters, but tweeted later that he would return as soon as possible. "Nothing angers and saddens me more than not being available to and for my teammates!" James wrote. "I'm hurt inside and out right now. The road back from recovery begins now. Back soon like I never left."

A lengthy layoff for James would be a devastating blow to the reigning champion Lakers, who are already without star Anthony Davis as he recovers from

Achilles tendon trouble. "It's certainly going to be a challenge any time you're undermanned," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "But if you play team first basketball and you defend at our level you'll have a chance to win and that'll be our mindset."

Lakers team-mates Kyle Kuzma and Montrezl Harrell admitted that the sight of James leaving the arena was unnerving. "We do forget he's human sometimes, to see him in pain like that," said Harrell, who was unhappy with Hill's dive for the ball that led to James's injury. We don't feel like it was one of those basketball-type plays," Harrell said. "He had to go through his leg to get the ball."

With James missing, the Lakers offense struggled to get in the groove as the Hawks — fueled by 27 points and 16 rebounds from John Collins — notched their eighth straight victory, the longest active streak in the league. The Lakers fell to 28-14 to remain in second place in the Western Conference behind the Utah Jazz.

Tied for fourth

The Hawks improved to 22-20, tied for fourth with the Miami Heat in the Eastern Conference led by the Philadelphia 76ers — who beat the

Sacramento Kings 129-105 despite the absences of three injured starters.

Shortly before tipoff, the Sixers announced that Ben Simmons would be sidelined with a sore left knee. Joel Embiid missed his fourth straight game with a bone bruise in his left knee and Seth Curry was out with a sprained left ankle.

Tobias Harris led the Sixers with 29 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists. Shake Milton added 28 points and Danny Green chipped in 18. Despite the lack of star-power, the 76ers set an early tone, scoring 42 points in the first quarter. They led wire-to-wire, pushing their advantage to as many as 36 points.

The Milwaukee Bucks kept the accelerator down, notching their sixth straight victory 120-113 over the San Antonio Spurs. Two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo had 26 points and a season-high 15 assists to go with eight rebounds for Milwaukee. Khris Middleton scored 23 points and Jrue Holiday added 21.

Grizzlies bounce back

In Memphis, the Grizzlies got the better of short-handed Golden State, turning the tables on the Warriors a night after losing to them with a 111-103 victory. Jonas Valanciunas scored 19 points



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts to an apparent injury during the second period of a game against the Atlanta Hawks at Staples Center on Saturday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

and pulled down 15 rebounds. Dillon Brooks scored 19, Brandon Clarke scored 16, Ja Morant chipped in 14 with eight assists and the Grizzlies clamped down defensively in a tight fourth quarter to get the win.

The Warriors were without Stephen Curry for a second straight game as he recovers from a bruised tailbone. Kevon Looney, James Wiseman and Eric Paschall were all sidelined by coronavirus contact tracing. —AFP

Bayern CEO Rummenigge rules out Flick departure

BERLIN: Bayern Munich CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge told German media yesterday he had made it "unmistakably clear" to Hansi Flick that the coach would not be freed from his contract to succeed Joachim Loew in charge of Germany. "This has nothing to do with probability, it's a fact," said Rummenigge in an interview with Welt am Sonntag newspaper, when asked whether Flick would stay beyond the end of the season.

Flick, 56, has been named among the favorites to take over from departing Germany boss Loew when the 61-year-old ends a 15-year spell in charge of the national team after this summer's European Championships. The Bayern coach was Loew's assistant coach when Germany won the World Cup in 2014, before serving as German FA (DFB) sporting director between 2014 and 2017.

Yet on yesterday, Rummenigge said that the DFB had assured him they would not make an offer to lure the Bayern coach back into the national team set-up. "DFB president



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's German head coach Hans-Dieter Flick reacts during the German first division Bundesliga football match between FC Bayern Munich and VfB Stuttgart in Munich, southern Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

Fritz Keller confirmed that to me again in a phone call," said the Bayern CEO, adding that he expected Flick to see out his contract, which runs until 2023.

"I told Hansi that we are very happy with him, and that we would be well advised to fulfill our contractual agreement. I made that unmistakably clear," said Rummenigge. Bayern are keen to hold onto Flick, who took over with the club in crisis in 2019 and led them to a league, cup and Champions League treble in his first season in charge.

Yet speculation over his future has been fuelled in recent weeks by tensions between Flick and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic. Flick

spoke publicly about the differences between the pair, before finally apologizing a few days ago for some harsh words spoken to his sporting director on the team bus, which had been leaked to the press.

Rummenigge sought to play down the spat on Sunday, likening it to recent tensions inside the British royal family over an interview with Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle. "I call it family affairs, and we have to be careful not to be even worse than the royal family in England," joked the Bayern CEO. "Bayern is a big family, and things that happen inside the family should stay inside the family," he added.

Lewandowski stays patient

Meanwhile, Robert Lewandowski said he will "stay patient" in his bid to break Gerd Mueller's Bundesliga record of 40 goals in a single season after the Bayern Munich striker netted a hat-trick on Saturday. Lewandowski is on 35 league goals this season and closing on Mueller's record set in 1971/72 for Bayern, after scoring three times in 21 minutes during a 4-0 thrashing of Stuttgart in Munich.

"It's a big challenge to always be ready in the head and always be hungry for goals," said Lewandowski, who has netted 42 times in all competitions this term. All four goals came after Bayern left-back Alphonso Davies was shown a red card in only the 12th minute. Poland striker Lewandowski has eight Bundesliga games left to equal Mueller's record, which many thought would never be broken.

"I think from game to game, not about how many more goals I need. I don't want to think about it (the record) too much," added Lewandowski. He is set to be the Bundesliga's top-scorer this season for the fourth straight season and the sixth time in total. "The strain is high, playing every three days," he added. "Now comes the national team and then we are also in the Champions League. That is important. I have to stay patient." Holders Bayern will face Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last eight in a repeat of last year's final. — AFP



MOTERA: India's captain Virat Kohli holds the trophy after winning the Twenty20 series against England at the end of their fifth and final Twenty20 international cricket match at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera on Saturday. — AFP

Match-winner Kohli to stay as T20 opener after India success

AHMEDABAD: Skipper Virat Kohli said he will continue to open the batting in Twenty20 cricket after his unbeaten 80 set up India's series-clinching win over England. Kohli was promoted up the order to partner Rohit Sharma for the first time in the shortest format and the move proved key as they put on a blazing stand of 94 to lay the foundation of India's 224-2, their highest Twenty20 score against England.

Sharma blasted 64 before departing and Kohli, who started cautiously, finished with a flourish in his 52-ball knock in Ahmedabad. "I am going to open in the IPL as well," said Kohli, who captains Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League, after India's 36-run win on Saturday gave them a 3-2 series victory. "Look I have batted at different positions, but I feel we do have a very solid middle-order now. And now it's about your two best players getting maximum number of balls in T20 cricket. So I would definitely like to partner Rohit at the top."

Kohli anchored the innings after being invited to bat first by England captain Eoin Morgan, while Sharma blazed away with four fours and five sixes in his 34-ball blitz. Once Sharma fell to Ben Stokes, Kohli took the lead and finished with seven fours and two sixes.

"As I rightly said, if we have a partnership and we both are set then you know that one of us is going to cause some serious damage," said Kohli. "And the other guy feels much more confident when one of us is still in and they know that they can play freely. So it augurs well for the team. I would like this to continue and hopefully continue this form through to the World Cup."

India are scheduled to host the T20 World Cup in October and November. Kohli finished as the leading scorer over the five matches with 231 runs, including three half-centuries, and was named player of the series. The teams will now contest a three-match one-day international series next week before the IPL starts on April 9.

Morgan said he wants his players to improve and shine in the IPL with the T20 World Cup looming later this year. "Taking advantage of the up-and-coming IPL is going to be huge. As a team and individuals we don't want to stand still but move forward," said Morgan, who captains Kolkata Knight Riders. "Any opportunity guys get at the IPL you want to try to make the most of it, because we are going to be playing at home all summer and then we go to Bangladesh and Pakistan." — AFP



LENZERHEIDE: (From left) Second-placed France's Clement Noel, first-placed Austria's Manuel Feller and third-placed France's Alexis Pinturault pose for pictures in the finishing area after competing in the second run of the Men's Slalom event during the FIS Alpine ski World Cup in Lenzerheide yesterday. — AFP

Feller wins season-ending slalom

LENZERHEIDE: Austrian Manuel Feller edged two Frenchmen to win the slalom which brought to an end the World Cup season in Lenzerheide, Switzerland, yesterday. Feller jumped from sixth to first on the final run and recorded a combined time of 1min 47.24 sec to beat Clement Noel by 0.08sec with Alexis Pinturault, who clinched the overall title on Saturday, by 0.11. Austrian Marco Schwarz, who had already clinched the small globe for slalom champion, was fastest after the first run but was 15th on

the second run to end up sixth.

Meanwhile, New Zealand teenager Alice Robinson won the season-ending giant slalom in Lenzerheide, yesterday, beating American Mikaela Shiffrin who had set the fastest time in the first run. The 19-year-old recorded a combined time of 2min 19.48sec to beat Shiffrin by 0.28sec with Slovakian Meta Hrovat third. Italian Marta Bassino who had already secured the discipline title was seventh and Slovakian Petra Vlhova, who took the overall title on Saturday, was 11th.

"I wasn't happy at all with my first run," said Robinson. "So I just thought I have to go full gas any give it all my energy in the second run, since it was the last of the season I gave every bit of energy and power that I had." This was Robinson's third World Cup victory. She won two giant slaloms last season, the first while still 17. — AFP

Ducks advance as COVID-19 cancels March Madness game

WASHINGTON: COVID-19 issues knocked Virginia Commonwealth University out of the US national college basketball tournament on Saturday, serving notice that March Madness would not be immune from the deadly virus.

The seventh-seeded University of Oregon Ducks advanced to the second round of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's basketball championship over the 10th-seeded Rams after the cancellation.

"The NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Committee has declared the VCU-Oregon game scheduled for Saturday night at Indiana Farmers Coliseum a no-contest because of COVID-19 protocols," the NCAA said in a statement.

An outbreak involving Richmond-based VCU's team ahead of their tournament opener at Indianapolis, Indiana, forced the decision, made in consultation with local health department officials. "As a result, Oregon will advance to the next round of the tournament. The NCAA and the committee regret that VCU's student-athletes and coaching staff will not be able to play in a tournament in which they earned the right to participate."

VCU coach Mike Rhoades's team went 19-7 this season, finishing second in the Atlantic 10 Conference. Remaining unknown was exactly who or how many VCU players were involved. "Because of privacy issues we cannot provide further details," the NCAA said.

Last year's tournament was called off due to the COVID-19 pandemic but safety measures were established this year with the intention of playing a complete tournament in a "bubble" atmosphere in and around Indianapolis rather than at venues around the nation as usual. Teams had to show seven consecutive days of negative COVID-19 tests before being allowed into the controlled environment in Indiana, where teams undergo daily testing. There was a Tuesday night deadline to allow for substitute teams to replace any who had COVID-19 issues but it came and went with no teams struck. — AFP