



SAN FRANCISCO: Otto Porter Jr #32 of the Golden State Warriors and Bones Hyland #3 of the Denver Nuggets go for a rebound during Game One of the Western Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Chase Center on April 16, 2022. —AFP

Warriors win as Curry returns to action

SAN FRANCISCO: Golden State's Stephen Curry made a triumphant return from a left foot sprain on Saturday as the Warriors, led by Jordan Poole's 30 points, routed Denver 123-107 in an NBA playoff opener. All-Star guard Curry, sidelined since March 16 with the injury, had 16 points on 5-of-13 shooting from the floor (3-of-6 from 3-point range) with three rebounds, four assists and a steal over 22 minutes off the bench as the host Warriors took a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven first-round series.

"Everything was smooth for the most part," Curry said. "It was nice to get back out there, to feel the playoff vibe again. It was nice to just be out there with my guys. It was a step in the right direction." Curry said he had no expectations about when he might start again. "I can hopefully provide a lot of energy off the bench," Curry said. "We have to keep things simple, be decisive, have confidence in each other. JP is a part of that now."

Poole hit 9-of-13 from the floor and 5-of-7 from 3-point range in his playoff debut. "It was good to get the first one under the belt," said Poole. "Just taking what they gave me, being patient and trying to be as aggressive as possible." Klay Thompson added 19 points and praised Poole, saying: "He's incredible, a star in the making. He's just going to keep getting better."

Other NBA playoff openers Saturday saw the Utah Jazz outlast Dallas 99-93, Philadelphia defeat

Toronto 131-111 and Minnesota upset Memphis 130-117. Curry started 0-for-5, got his first basket on a goaltending call off a drive to the hoop and played 12 minutes in the first half. "I like the way he approached the game," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "He found his rhythm as the game went on. It was a really good first game back for him and will set the table for what's to come."

Having Curry back was a thrill for Thompson, who missed more than two full seasons with injuries before returning to Golden State in January. "He's still Steph Curry and he still made huge shots for us," Thompson said. "The threat of him being out there is the best. It makes us a championship team." The Warriors closed the first half on an 18-4 run for a 58-47 edge and pulled away in the third quarter. "The key stretch was the end of the second quarter," Nuggets coach Mike Malone said. "We can't beat ourselves and the Warriors in the same game."

Serbian big man Nikola Jokic, last year's NBA Most Valuable Player, led Denver with 25 points. Utah's Donovan Mitchell scored 30 of his 32 points in the second half and the visiting Jazz beat the Mavericks, who were without injured All-Star guard Luka Doncic due to a left calf strain. "We have a lot of confidence," Utah's Royce O'Neale said. "We have the guys we need to make a long run. It's about us staying locked in."

Bojan Bogdanovic added 26 points while Rudy

Gobert grabbed 17 rebounds. Dallas pulled within 92-91 before O'Neale made his only basket, a 3-pointer with 57 seconds remaining, and Mitchell added four free throws to secure the victory. "Our mental toughness was challenged and we responded," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. "We kept our aggression." Mitchell began the game 0-for-6 and 1-for-9 from the floor but sparkled in the second half. "Just be in attack mode," Mitchell said of his halftime change. "I came out a little too passive in the first half." Jalen Brunson led Dallas with 24 points.

Sixers rip Raptors

Tyrese Maxey scored a playoff career-high 38 points and Tobias Harris added 26 to power the 76ers. "It's a testimony to the work," said Maxey. "The work you put in when nobody else is around, it shows when you perform before thousands." Cameroonian center Joel Embiid, the NBA scoring champion, added 19 points and 15 rebounds while James Harden contributed 22 points and a game-high 14 assists. Pascal Siakam led Toronto with 24 points. At Memphis, Minnesota's Anthony Edwards scored a game-high 36 points in his playoff debut and Karl-Anthony Towns added 29 points and 13 rebounds in a matchup of the NBA's two top-scoring clubs. Malik Beasley added 23 points off the bench for the T-Wolves. Ja Morant led Memphis with 32 points. —AFP



EWA BEACH, Hawaii: Hyo Joo Kim of The Republic of Korea poses with the Lotte Championship Trophy after winning the Lotte Championship at Hoakalei Country Club on April 16, 2022. —AFP

Kim Hyo-joo wins LPGA Lotte Championship

LOS ANGELES: South Korea's Kim Hyo-joo held off Hinako Shibuno to win the LPGA Lotte Championship by two strokes on Saturday. Kim teed off with a three-shot lead and was four up after birdies at the fifth and eighth holes at Hoakalei Country Club in Hawaii. But Japan's Shibuno, with birdies at the fourth and 11th, was within one stroke after Kim bogeyed the ninth and 17th.

Kim then missed the fairway at the par-five 18th, her second shot finding the rough. However, her wedge from the rough rolled within a foot of the cup to leave her a tap-in for birdie that all but sealed the win over Shibuno, who was in a greenside bunker. Kim signed for a one-under par 71 and an 11-under par total of 277. She notched her fifth LPGA title, a cache that includes her major victory at the Evian Championship in 2014, before she was a member of the LPGA Tour.

"There were a lot of expectations but also a lot of support coming from friends and family as well," said Kim, who had led by three shots after the second and third rounds. "There have been ups and downs and I think I am at the up part right now and I feel very proud, a little confident about the future and the outlook looks bright for me and I feel like I can do better moving forward." Shibuno, the 2019 Women's British Open winner, carded a two-under 70 for 279. South Korea's Choi Hye-jin was alone in third on 281 after a three-under par 69, with Ashleigh Buhai of South Africa fourth with a 70 for 282. —AFP

Spence stops Ugas to seize third welterweight belt

LOS ANGELES: Errol Spence punished Yordenis Ugas on the way to a 10th-round technical knockout on Saturday to add the Cuban's World Boxing Association title to his World Boxing Council and International Boxing Federation belts. Spence, fighting in front of home fans in the Dallas Cowboys' AT&T stadium in Texas, remained unbeaten, improving to 28-0 with 22 knockouts when referee Laurence Cole called a halt at 1:44 of the 10th on the advice of the ringside doctor.

By then, Ugas' right eye was swollen shut from the blows meted out by Spence, who rocked the Cuban in the seventh round and continued to pour in the punishment until it was over. Spence was fighting for the first time since an eye injury suffered in training forced him out of a planned bout with Manny Pacquiao last August. Ugas stepped in at the last minute and sent the Philippine legend into retirement with a unanimous decision victory.

But the 35-year-old Cuban had no answer for Spence's powerful combinations. He did rock the American in the sixth round, sending him reeling into the ropes after knocking Spence's mouthpiece out. Spence said he was distracted by the loss of his mouthpiece, and didn't defend himself adequately. "I thought the ref had said stop," Spence said. "That's my fault." It could have been ruled a knockdown, but Spence - who has never been sent to the canvas - insisted he was never out on his feet. He led on all three judges' scorecards when the fight was stopped as Ugas fell to 27-5 with 12 knockouts.



ARLINGTON, Texas: Errol Spence Jr celebrates after defeating Yordenis Ugas at AT&T Stadium on April 16, 2022. —AFP

'Kept on punching'

This would be Spence's second comeback from serious injury - the first when he was sidelined for months after a car crash in Oct 2019. The 32-year-old said during the in-ring interview post-bout he didn't have any doubts about his return after suffering a detached retina. "I believe in myself 100 percent. I train 100 percent. And I just knew I would be victorious," he said.

However, with his last fight being in December 2020 - a victory over Danny Garcia - Spence said he did feel his timing was a little off in the early rounds with Ugas. "But I knew I was going to catch

on later in the rounds. I just kept on working, kept on punching." With three belts in hand, Spence wasted no time in calling out unbeaten World Boxing Organization champion Terence Crawford. "That's the fight that I want, that's the fight everybody else wants," Spence said. "Terence, I'm coming for that belt."

Ugas, meanwhile, said he wished the fight had continued. "I couldn't see from the eye, but I wanted to keep going to the end," said the 35-year-old Cuban, whose eye was examined by the ringside doctor several times during the bout. "I feel sad because I trained really hard for this fight." —AFP