

Sports

Bucks rally to push Celtics to brink, Grizzlies maul Warriors

LOS ANGELES: The Milwaukee Bucks erased a double-digit fourth-quarter deficit to beat Boston 110-107 on Wednesday and push the Celtics to the brink of NBA playoff elimination as the Memphis Grizzlies stayed alive with a 134-95 drubbing of Golden State. The Grizzlies, facing elimination and playing without injured All-Star guard Ja Morant, weren't about to go out on their home floor.

They raced to a 38-28 first-quarter lead and never trailed as they cut the deficit in their best-of-seven Western Conference series to 3-2, sending it back to San Francisco on Friday. "We just stuck to the game plan," said Grizzlies forward Jaren Jackson Jr. one of three Memphis players with 21 points. "We knew what was at stake. We didn't change anything though, we just calmed down, looked at the film, understood what we had to take away from the last game and just went out there and executed."

Desmond Bane and Tyus Jones also scored 21 for the Grizzlies, who had seven players score in double figures in the wire-to-wire win. Klay Thompson led the Warriors with 19 points. Jonathan Kuminga added 17 and superstar Stephen Curry scored 14 on four-of-10 shooting for the Warriors, who coughed up 22 turnovers leading to 29 Grizzlies points.

"It was awful, embarrassing," Thompson said. "We all had the mindset we were going to close it out tonight, but sometimes basketball is an inexact science and we played like a shell of ourselves." The Grizzlies outrebounded the Warriors 55-37 and led them 24-5 in second-chance points. Up by as many as 55 late in the third quarter, the Grizzlies were flirting with NBA history, with the largest margin ever in the playoffs — 58 points.

It was a massive comedown for the Warriors, who

played their second straight game with head coach Steve Kerr sidelined by COVID-19. The third quarter hadn't ended when stars Curry, Thompson and Draymond Green were pulled by acting coach Mike Brown. In contrast, it came down to the wire in Boston, where Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 40 points and Bobby Portis and Jrue Holiday came up big late as the reigning NBA champion Bucks rallied to take a 3-2 lead in their Eastern Conference series.

Reserve forward Portis put back Antetokounmpo's missed free throw with 11.4 seconds remaining to give the Bucks a 108-107 lead. Jrue Holiday plucked an attempted shot by Marcus Smart from the air with 8.1 seconds remaining before teammate Pat Connaughton added a pair of free throws to seal the comeback for a Bucks team that trailed by 14 early in the fourth quarter.

Milwaukee took a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series and will have a chance to close it out when they host game six on Friday. Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown combined for 60 points for the Celtics, who took control with a 28-19 second quarter that saw them take a 54-47 halftime lead. They maintained the edge throughout the third, but the Bucks didn't back down. Connaughton's three-pointer with 7:34 to play cut the deficit to 98-90. Jrue Holiday added a jump shot to cut the margin to 101-99.

'Golden opportunity' missed

Three-pointers from Antetokounmpo and Holiday knotted the score at 105-105 with 43.2 seconds left, setting the stage for a dramatic finish. "Obviously, in Boston, you're down 14 in the fourth quarter, people would say everything's against us. But we come



BOSTON: Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics dunks the ball during the first half of Game Five of the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Milwaukee Bucks at TD Garden on May 11, 2022. —AFP

together," Holiday said. "We live and die like that." Holiday added 24 points for Milwaukee while Portis scored 14 and Connaughton 13 off the bench. "We just didn't do what we were supposed to do," said Smart, who scored 15 points for the Celtics. "We didn't execute when we were supposed to, and when

it mattered the most, they did."

Celtics coach Ime Udoka said it was a bitter defeat after "we outplayed them for three and a half quarters. We talked about showing our resolve, and we made it tougher on ourselves now." Udoka said. "We gave up a golden opportunity tonight." —AFP

Nadal, Swiatek ease into last 16, Wawrinka wins

ROME: Rafael Nadal eased into the last 16 of the Italian Open on Wednesday with a straightforward 6-3, 6-1 win over John Isner, while Iga Swiatek is on course for a fifth straight WTA triumph after seeing off Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-3, 6-0. Third seed Nadal made short work of Isner as he bids for an 11th title in Rome, the King of Clay seeing off his American opponent in one hour and 17 minutes under blazing sunshine at the Foro Italico.

A quarterfinal loser to fellow countryman Carlos Alcaraz in Madrid, Nadal could profit from the in-form teenager's absence in the Italian capital to win the last big clay event before the French Open later this month. The 35-year-old had been out for six weeks with a rib injury before returning in the Spanish capital last week but Isner put up little resistance against the 21-time Grand Slam winner.

"I need to build again the things after a tough stop and that's what I'm trying, just to stay with the right attitude and let's see if I'm able to make that happen," Nadal said court-side. The match swung in Nadal's favor in game eight, when Nadal broke veteran world number 27 Isner before serving out to take the first set.

From there Nadal cruised to victory, dropping just 14 points on his way to setting up a third-round clash with Denis Shapovalov. "I need to play better than I did today but after a while out it's another victory and tomorrow another chance to play against one of the best players in the world," Nadal added.

Red-hot Swiatek

Nadal later told reporters that Swiatek was doing "amazing things" and it was difficult to argue after she set up a third-round match with Victoria Azarenka after wiping the floor with Ruse. The 20-year-old Swiatek is in red-hot form after winning her last four tournaments and will be eyeing a second title at Roland Garros after winning there as a teenager in 2020. Swiatek dropped just nine points in a second-set demolition of Ruse which highlighted the gulf between the two players.

Former champion Karolina Pliskova was dumped out of the women's tournament after being beaten by Switzerland's Jil Teichmann 6-2, 4-6, 6-4. Pliskova had made the previous three finals in Rome, winning the title in 2019, but the sixth seed lost to 24-year-old Teichmann in a battle which lasted two hours and 40 minutes. Third seed Aryna Sabalenka strolled into the next round with a routine 6-2, 6-0 win over Zhang Shuai, while Coco Gauff is also in the last 16 after seeing off fellow American Madison Brengle 6-2, 6-4.

Wawrinka sets up Djokovic clash

Stan Wawrinka, who won for the first time in 15 months in the first round, edged out Laslo Djere 7-6 (10/8), 3-6, 6-3 to set up a last-16 clash with world number one Novak Djokovic. The injury-hit 37-year-old beat Djokovic in finals to win two of his three Grand Slam titles, but has lost 19 of their 25 career meetings.

Stefanos Tsitsipas was forced to work hard to beat Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) in a tough match in which he had to save two match points before eventually prevailing in a third-set tie-break. Bulgarian Dimitrov, beaten by world number five Tsitsipas in both Barcelona and Madrid in recent weeks, fought back from 5-3 down in the second set to level the match and looked to have the better of his Greek opponent in set three. —AFP

No more shared medals, say Tamberi and Barshim

DOHA: Gianmarco Tamberi and Mutaz Essa Barshim, who provided one of the emotional peaks of the Tokyo Olympics by sharing the high jump gold medal, will not repeat the gesture if they are tied again. "We already talked about it, it is not going to happen again," Italian Tamberi said ahead of his first clash with his Qatari friend since the Olympics at the Doha Diamond League meeting on Friday.

Barshim, 30, who holds the world title as well as joint Olympic gold, was sat alongside Tamberi as he made the statement on the extraordinary events of August 1 last year. Both cleared 2.37 m and with neither able to make 2.39m, track officials offered a jump-off but Barshim famously asked: "Can we have two golds?"

It was the latest episode in their unlikely rivalry-friendship that he has seen them console each other when each had a career-threatening ankle ligament injury. But with a world championships looming this year, both know that sentiment has to be put to one side. If they were tied again, "we will look at each other, we will say OK let's go" to the jump off, declared Tamberi at a press conference Thursday.

Sindhu outplayed as India crashes out of Thai Uber Cup

BANGKOK: India crashed out of Thailand's Uber Cup on Thursday after women's badminton superstar PV Sindhu came up short against local crowd favorite Ratchanok Intanon. Thailand will now progress to the women's semifinals against China, while Japan will meet Korea on Friday. Spurred on by a rowdy crowd, eighth-ranked Intanon - a former world champion - fought back from one game down to beat Tokyo bronze medalist Sindhu 18-21, 21-17, 21-12.

Light on her feet, Intanon's technical skills helped her battle the severe sideways drift on court. "I know she is an attacking player... I was trying to be myself," Intanon told reporters. Fourth-ranked An Se-young from South Korea triumphed over Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt - who is 14th in the world - 18-21, 21-15, 21-18.

Earlier, world number one Akane Yamaguchi saw off Taiwan's Tai Tzu Ying - a day after a surprise loss to Bilqis Prasista, a teenage Indonesian rookie ranked 333rd in the world. Tai-ranked second in the world - pushed her Japanese 24-year-old opponent

'Cultural experience' promised for first all-Pacific isle clash

SYDNEY: Fijian Drua and Moana Pasifika will put pride on the line and are promising a "cultural experience" when Super Rugby breaks new ground on Saturday with the first clash of two Pacific island sides. The powerful islanders, with their flair and unorthodox style, have always been an integral part of teams in the southern hemisphere club championship.

But this year for the first time they have teams of their own, with the competition rebranded Super Rugby Pacific. The round 12 clash may only be a battle to avoid the wooden spoon, but it will be a historic occasion with bragging rights on the line when Moana Pasifika and Fijian Drua run out

together." Holiday said. "We live and die like that." Holiday added 24 points for Milwaukee while Portis scored 14 and Connaughton 13 off the bench. "We just didn't do what we were supposed to do," said Smart, who scored 15 points for the Celtics. "We didn't execute when we were supposed to, and when

it mattered the most, they did."

Triple target

Tamberi wants to add a world title to his Olympic gold. Barshim wants to establish his name among athletics greats by becoming the first to win three straight high jump titles at the world championships in Eugene in July. The Qatari hero said it had already been "amazing" to be the first to defend the world title in Doha in 2019. "Now I am trying to find some goal, some target to motivate myself and maybe it is even better to be the only one that did it three times so that keeps me going. It is not easy to find motivation after such a big year, such a big success."

Their competition will be a highlight of the opening Diamond League meeting of the year. Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis will be aiming for a new world record having set his latest best of 6.20m at the world indoor championships in Belgrade in March. No-one has cleared 6.0 metres at Doha's outdoor track. But he is also aiming for a first world title to add to his Olympic gold and so has lined up a



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on Aug 2, 2021, joint gold medalists Qatar's Mutaz Essa Barshim and Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi pose on the podium of the men's high jump final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium. — AFP

five meetings before Eugene.

"It comes down to these really tiny margins so I'm just trying to get everything in the right place for when it comes to competing in the world championships to make sure that, when the bar is at that gold medal height, I'm on the right pole, right grip, right run." In the men's 200 meters, Olympic champion Andre De Grasse of Canada will compete against American world title holder Noah Lyles. —AFP



BANGKOK: Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon hits a return against India's Pusarla V Sindhu during their women's singles quarterfinal match at the 2022 Thomas and Uber Cup badminton tournament on May 12, 2022. —AFP

to three games but lost 10-21, 21-19, 19-21. Meanwhile, Prasista, 18, managed to put up an admirable fight against China's He Bing Jiao - ranked

ninth in the world - dragging out play for three games. But after losing the first game 25-year-old He sealed victory: 19-21, 21-18, 21-7. —AFP

at CommBank stadium in Sydney. "Our boys are really excited ... It is a clash of the islands and we are really looking forward to it," said Drua coach Mick Byrne. "It should be a massive cultural experience."

Moana Pasifika coach Aaron Mauger, highlighted the mutual respect the islanders have for each other. "It's a celebration of both teams' inclusion into Super Rugby," said Mauger. "From a supporter perspective, we're right behind them. (They) are obviously part of our beautiful moana (ocean), the Pacific, so the boys have been right in behind them and connecting with quite a few of their players."

Fijian-born Moana Pasifika wing Timoci Tavatavanawai is looking forward to the challenge of going up against his islander "brothers". "It's going to be cool playing against the Drua boys, they're like my brothers," said Tavatavanawai. "I played with half of the team when I was younger. I've never played against them so it's going to be interesting."

Auckland Blues coach Leon MacDonald had a

good look at the Drua when his table-topping side battled to a 35-18 win against the islanders and found them "so different" to every other team. "The way they attack the game is refreshing. We're sitting here frustrated because we were unable to play the game we wanted to because they didn't allow us to."

Moana Pasifika are arguably playing the better rugby and go into the match off the back of a narrow 26-20 loss to the NSW Waratahs, after leading 17-0 at half-time. The Drua, however, suffered a 67-5 thrashing by the Wellington Hurricanes and Byrne's task was to pick them up again after a "quite poor" training session at the start of the week. "But, it is a learning curve," he said.

Moana Pasifika face selection issues after Mauger on Thursday left out center Levi Aumua and lock Sam Slades from his match-day squad for breaching unspecified team protocols. "They've been two of our best rugby players all year and they know they got it wrong, so there was a consequence coming," he said. —AFP