



SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry #30 hi-fives Klay Thompson #11 of the Golden State Warriors during Game 1 of the 2022 NBA Playoffs Western Conference Finals on May 18, 2022 at Chase Center in San Francisco, California. —AFP

Warriors cruise past Mavs

Curry outguns Doncic in WCF series opener

SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry scored 21 points as the Golden State Warriors bottled up Luka Doncic and the Dallas Mavericks to win their Western Conference Finals series opener 112-87 on Wednesday. Three days after Doncic destroyed the Phoenix Suns with a virtuoso performance, the Slovenian found the going harder against a ruthless Golden State at San Francisco's Chase Center.

Dallas had rained in buckets against Phoenix in Arizona on Sunday, but the scoring dried up against the six-time NBA champions. The Warriors started slowly but pulled clear decisively in the second half after leading 54-45 at half-time.

With Doncic appearing to be nursing a sore shoulder, the Warriors outscored the visitors 34-24 in the third quarter to lead by 19 points heading into the final period. An 8-0 start to the fourth quarter left the Warriors cruising 27 points clear at 96-69 to effectively put the game out of reach.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr was able to withdraw his starters with five minutes left in the game, earning valuable rest for what could be a long series. Curry led the scoring with 21 points, 12 rebounds and four assists, while Jordan Poole and Andrew Wiggins had 19 points apiece.

"We did what we were supposed to do — we won the first game, but there's a lot of work left," Curry said. "We had a specific game plan coming in and for the most part we executed it. It's going to take that same effort three more times to beat this team."

Kerr praised the defensive performance of Wiggins in shutting down Doncic. "Wiggins was fantastic," Kerr said. "Doncic is as difficult a cover as there is in this league. We just asked Andrew to hound him and guard him as best as he could, try to keep the pressure on him. He did a fantastic job."

Disconsolate Doncic

Klay Thompson failed to score a point in the first two quarters but got into the groove in the second



There's a lot of work left, says Kerr

half with 15 points. Seven Warriors players finished in double figures. Doncic led the Mavericks' scoring with 20 points but cut a disconsolate figure after a defeat where Dallas trailed for almost the entirety of the game. The 23-year-old insisted however that there was still time to turn the series around. "It's one game," Doncic said. "That's what the playoffs are about. If you lose by one point or 40 points, it's

just a loss. We just have to get ready for game two now. But I've got to be better. I've got to be better for the whole group and that's on me."

Dallas coach Jason Kidd pointed out that his team had recovered from a 2-0 series deficit against Phoenix. "We've lost two games in a row on the road before and found a way to get back in the series," Kidd said. "This is one game. They did their part and we've got to figure it out. But give them credit, they were good tonight."

Dallas somehow had only trailed by nine points at halftime after a wayward shooting performance in the first two quarters. The Mavs made just 14 of 44 attempts from the field in the first half, and only seven of 29 three-point attempts.

Yet they were able to remain within sight of the Warriors, who shot 22 of 39 but made only five of 18 attempts from beyond the arc. Thompson made only four attempts from the field in the first half — and missed them all — while Curry was also off target from long range, converting only one of six three-point attempts.

The Mavericks pulled to within two points at 35-33 midway through the second quarter, but a brisk 11-2 run, with Curry setting up three-pointers for Poole and Wiggins, saw the Warriors pull clear once more to lay the foundations of victory. Game two of the series takes place in San Francisco on Friday. The winner of the Western Conference finals will play the winner of the Eastern Conference, either Boston or Miami, in the NBA Finals. —AFP

The 20-year-old Sen proved a key player en route to India's 3-0 Thomas Cup final triumph against Indonesia, along with senior singles players Srikanth and Prannoy, and the doubles pairing of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty.

Kumar said India now needed to build on the team's achievements and begin to lay the foundations for future success. "They need to look at how they can market the sport better. Maybe get a team sponsor."

'Galvanized the whole nation'

"And with the money (that comes in) they can get grassroots development for the next line of players." The exploits of the team in Bangkok kept sports fans gripped across the cricket-mad country. "For three days, all of India was looking at badminton. I think that is their achievement, more than winning the Thomas Cup they gave Indians so much joy," journalist G Rajaraman told AFP.

Women's singles players such as Saina Nehwal and PV Sindhu kept Indian badminton in the spotlight in recent years by winning Olympic medals, but the sport stands a distant third to cricket and hockey in popularity.

"Badminton is one of our better sports in terms of results, achieved from Prakash (Padukone's) time going down to Gopi (Pullela Gopichand) and more recently through the women," said Rajaraman. "But to see them come together as a team, it galvanized the whole nation."

Now 48 years old, Gopichand has been singled out for being the architect of India's recent badminton success after he mentored Sindhu, Saina and Srikanth, who became world number one briefly in April 2018.

"It's a phenomenal success," Gopichand was



BANGKOK: India's Lakshya Sen hits a return against Indonesia's Anthony Sinsuka Ginting during the men's finals of the Thomas and Uber Cup badminton tournament in Bangkok on May 15, 2022. —AFP

quoted as saying by the Indian media. "What our boys achieved is simply incredible. It was my dream. I am confident that we can build on this success." The Gopichand academy — a state of the art badminton facility in the south Indian city of Hyderabad — has become synonymous with success.

"Nearly every player would have played with Gopi or his academy at some point of time," said Rajaraman. "I think that kind of selfless approach of his, where he has got in foreign coaches even in his own academy has helped India become a better badminton nation." —AFP

Cuban boxers set for professional comeback

AGUASCALIENTES: Cuban boxers will compete in their nation's first professional contest in six decades on Friday, eager to draw on their Olympic success to stage a victorious comeback. Four Olympic medalists, in a squad of six Cuban boxers, will make their professional debuts in Mexico on Friday, "for the first time in the history of boxing," event organizer Gerardo Saldivar said.

Cuba has long been a powerhouse of Olympic boxing, but participation in professional sport was barred by the late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro in 1962. After decades of defections by boxers who fled overseas to pursue salaried careers, the communist nation's authorities in April finally opened up participation in professional boxing competitions.

Members of the "Los Domadores" national team will fight their first professional bouts in Mexico's central city of Aguascalientes under a deal between the Cuban Boxing Federation and the Golden Ring Promotions company. "Let world boxing fans know that Cubans have the quality and pedigree to box in all kinds of fields," said two-time Olympic champion and team captain Julio Cesar La Cruz, 32.

'Let the whole world know'

Also competing against opponents from Mexico and Colombia will be three-time world champion and Olympic medalist Lazaro Alvarez, along with two-time Olympic champions Roniel Iglesias and Arlen Lopez. "I feel very proud and eager to make my professional debut," said Alvarez, who hopes for a "great show" on Friday.

"Let the whole world know and let all the boxers know that I'm looking forward to it and that I want to be great," added the 31-year-old, who will adopt the nickname "The Prince" for his professional debut. The Cuban squad is rounded out by world champion Yoennis Hernandez and super featherweight Osviel Caballero, who replaced Olympic gold medalist Andy Cruz at the last minute.

According to Cuban Boxing Federation President Alberto Puig, Cruz was excluded from the squad because he had neglected training. Cuban boxers hold around 80 World and 41 Olympic titles. Friday's contest comes as Cuba faces its worst economic crisis in nearly three decades, due to the coronavirus pandemic and biting US sanctions.

The Cuban Boxing Federation has said that fighters will be allowed to keep 80 percent of the salary owed to them for each fight. "Many of us have families. I am a father of two... so it will help us to raise our socio-economic status and solve many problems," Lopez told AFP in Havana last month. —AFP

'Years of hard work' pays off as India revels in badminton glory

NEW DELHI: India's badminton team hit new heights last week with their maiden Thomas Cup victory in Bangkok, even managing to keep cricket in the shade leaving former players confident the sport can "build on this success".

The men's team beat giants of the sport Malaysia, Denmark and then 14-time winners Indonesia to win badminton's equivalent to the Davis Cup in tennis. Team manager Vimal Kumar hailed the victory as the "biggest achievement" for a country whose rare top men's tournament successes in the past had included All England Open Championship wins for Prakash Padukone in 1980 and Pullela Gopichand in 2001.

Kumar, a former player who once won a team Asian Games bronze, said he always foresaw good things for Indian badminton as players began to come through. "From 2017 when there were three good singles players in Sai Praneeth, (Kidambi) Srikanth and (HS) Prannoy, I had faith in them," Kumar told AFP. "But as a team, they couldn't play together for various reasons. This win comes after years of hard work."

The latest talented youngster to emerge is Lakshya Sen, who made heads turn when he reached the prestigious All England Open Championship final in March, losing to Danish world number two and Olympic Champion Viktor Axelsen.