

Sports

Banchero and Isaac shine as Magic end Boston win streak

MIAMI: Number one draft pick Paolo Banchero scored 23 points as the Orlando Magic ended the injury-depleted Boston Celtics' nine-game winning streak with an upset 113-98 victory on Monday. Orlando, languishing three places off the bottom of the Eastern Conference with a 17-29 record prior to Monday's game, took full advantage of Boston's injury crisis to complete a deserved win at the Amway Center in Florida.

The league-leading Celtics were missing key defensive figures Marcus Smart and Robert Williams due to injury and their absence proved crucial as a fired-up Orlando stormed to victory. The 20-year-old Banchero showed a maturity beyond his tender years to orchestrate Orlando's win, which saw five Magic players reach double-digit totals, with Wendell Carter Jr posting 21 points and Germany's Franz Wagner 15.

"Anytime you get to play a championship-level team, a team that's been to the finals, and has been where you want to be, you want to put out your best effort and get the win," Banchero said afterwards. "That's my mentality, and that's our team's mentality, and we were able to do that. I just wanted to be decisive with my moves, when I decided to attack, when I decided to shoot - not force anything and let the game come to me. Be aggressive and decisive, and live with the results."

Arguably the most impressive contribution came in the form of a 10-minute cameo from Jonathan Isaac, making his first appearance in an NBA game since August 2020 following more than two years dominated by injuries. Isaac finished with 10 points, three rebounds and two steals during his encouraging return to the hardwood.

"It felt fantastic, just to touch the floor - I feel so grateful," Isaac said afterwards. "I feel good, I'm grateful to be with the Magic, plus to get a win - I couldn't be happier." Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown led the Boston scoring with 26 points each, while Derrick White added 11 and Sam Hauser 13 off the bench.

'Good to be out there'

In other games on Monday, Giannis Antetokounmpo and Khris Middleton returned from injury with a vengeance as the Milwaukee Bucks arrested their current slump in form with a ruthless 150-130 pounding of the Detroit Pistons. Antetokounmpo had missed the last five Bucks games with a lingering knee injury, a spell that saw Milwaukee lose three games. Middleton meanwhile had not played since mid-December.

But Antetokounmpo showed no sign of ring-rust as he led a comprehensive rout, scoring 29 points with 12 rebounds and four assists. Brook Lopez added 21 points while Middleton added eight points on his return. "It feels good to be out there with the team again, play, run up and down, make some plays," Antetokounmpo said. "Never take it for granted. Definitely just miss it - miss being around my teammates, miss playing basketball. I just missed being out there and competing."

The game was effectively over after the first quarter, with Milwaukee pouring in an astonishing 49 points in the opening period to take a 25-point lead into the second quarter. Milwaukee improved to 30-17 in the Eastern Conference standings, in third place behind Boston and Philadelphia. Detroit remain root-



ORLANDO: Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics drives on Paolo Banchero of the Orlando Magic during a game at Amway Center on Jan 23, 2023. — AFP

ed to the bottom of the table on 12-37.

In other games on Monday, a Memphis Grizzlies side missing star Ja Morant crashed to a third straight loss in a 133-100 mauling by the Sacramento Kings in California. Trey Lyles (24 points) led the scoring for Sacramento, whose balanced offensive unit had six players in double digits, with Harrison Barnes and Keegan Murray adding 20 apiece.

Memphis have lost all three games on their Western Conference road trip, with Monday's loss following defeats to the Los Angeles Lakers on Friday and the Phoenix Suns on Sunday. In Portland, Damian Lillard finished with 37 points and 12 assists as the Trail Blazers blew out the San Antonio Spurs 147-127. Anfernee Simons (26 points) and Jusuf Nurkic (25) also posted big totals. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after victory against Australia's Alex De Minaur on Jan 23, 2023. — AFP

'Machine' Djokovic sparks injury debate after masterclass

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic's seemingly remarkable recovery at the Australian Open prompted debate on Tuesday and raised the question: When is an injury not an injury? The 35-year-old Serb was battling a left hamstring problem before the Grand Slam began last week as he chases a record-equaling 22nd major crown. The red-hot favorite has required medical treatment during matches, worn heavy strapping and said a few days ago that he was not able to practice.

It appeared the injury could even torpedo his tournament altogether. And yet there he was on Monday, the strapping still there but the former world number one moving freely to sweep past home hope Alex de Minaur 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 and into the last eight. It was an ominous warning of intent from Djokovic and he said afterwards that the hamstring was so improved that "I didn't feel any pain".

He thanked his medical team and said he had been popping anti-inflammatories, something he does not like to do. "It's been honestly exhausting to be involved in a lot of different treatments and machines and stuff that we do," he said. At his post-match press conference, De Minaur - who noted how well Djokovic was able to move around the court - was asked about his opponent's hamstring and all the fuss around it.

"It's the only thing everyone's been talking about," said the 23-year-old. "Today I was out there on court against him. Either I'm not a good enough tennis player to expose that or... it looked good to me." The Australian subsequently took to Twitter on Tuesday to hit out at headlines which took his comments as casting doubt on how injured Djokovic really was. Speaking to Serbian media at Melbourne Park, Djokovic said suggestions that he had overblown or even faked the injury only motivated him more.

'Banged up'

Djokovic's left leg stirred wider discussion about how common it is for tennis players to compete with an injury and why a player would want to exaggerate or even fake being hurt. Aside from Djokovic, injuries have hampered a number of players in Melbourne, including on Tuesday Sebastian Korda, who retired hurt from his quarterfinal against Karen Khachanov.

World number nine Taylor Fritz tweeted that 80 percent of players "are always dealing w something (severity levels differ) but everyone is honestly always a little banged-up". "The media is only ever focusing on the top guys so their issues get more attention," the American said. "Also some players are more vocal talking about injuries than others. I don't think people fake injuries, I do think sometimes players stretch the severity of the injury because it depressurizes them and helps them play better." — AFP

Kuwaiti women win bronze at ISSF World Cup

RABAT: Kuwaiti Shahad and Sara Al-Hawal alongside Hajer Abdulmalik won a bronze medal in the women's trap team event at the ISSF Shotgun World Cup in Rabat that ended on Monday. Subsequently, the men's trap team, consisting of Khaled Al-Mudhaf, Naser Al-Miqled and Yousef Al-Rashidi, came fourth in their event, which saw USA first and Kazakhstan second. The bronze medal for Kuwait, as the global tournament drew to a close, is added to a silver earlier win in the men's skeet teams. — KUNA

Shiffrin earns record 83rd World Cup win

PLAN DE CORONES, Italy: Mikaela Shiffrin became the woman with the most alpine skiing World Cup wins after claiming Tuesday's giant slalom in Kronplatz to take her tally of victories to 83. American star Shiffrin broke the record she shared with compatriot Lindsey Vonn after clocking a combined time of two minutes, 0.61 seconds over two runs in the Italian Dolomites.

She made skiing history after beating giant slalom world champion Lara Gut-Behrami by 0.45sec, with home hope Federica Brignone completing the podium 1.43sec off the pace. After moving ahead of Vonn with her 18th giant slalom

Thailand, Cambodia brawl over kickboxing event name at Games

BANGKOK: Thailand will boycott a kickboxing event at the upcoming Southeast Asian Games in Cambodia, officials confirmed Tuesday, in a bitter row with the hosts over what to call the sport: Muay Thai or Kun Khmer. Thai officials are angry at plans by Cambodia to refer to the event - which they regard as their national sport - on the official program as Kun Khmer instead of Muay Thai.

While the name Muay Thai may be better known around the world, Cambodian officials insist the sport originated from their Khmer culture. The event is one of a series of combat sports at the 11-country regional games, alongside regular kickboxing, karate, taekwondo, kun bokator and vovinam. The games are due to get underway in May, with

Gatland wants review of Wales' 60-cap rule

LONDON: Wales head coach Warren Gatland said on Monday he would like the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) to look again at the 60-cap selection rule following concerns it could harm the national team amid fears of a player exodus. The rule was introduced in 2017, with players who signed contracts with clubs outside Wales deemed ineligible for international selection unless they had made 60 Test appearances or more.

Debate around the issue has intensified following



World Cup win it is now only a matter of time before the 27-year-old breaks the overall record of 86 held by Ingemar Stenmark.

Swedish legend Stenmark dominated the men's slalom and giant slalom disciplines for a decade from 1975 before retiring in 1989, but barring physical problems he will surely be outdone by Shiffrin. She will have a chance to draw one closer to Stenmark at Kronplatz on Wednesday with another giant slalom race. There are also two races this weekend at Spindleruv Mlyn in the slalom discipline from which 51 of her World Cup wins have come before the World Championships in Courchevel and Meribel next month.

Shiffrin's historic triumph also allowed her to move top of the giant slalom standings, 49 points ahead of Italian Marta Bassino who finished 10th. She extended her lead over closest rival Petra Vlhova at the top of the overall standings to 556, as a fifth crystal globe looks increasingly likely. — AFP



KRONPLATZ, Italy: Race winner USA's Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates on the podium after competing in the Women's Giant Slalom on Jan 24, 2023. — AFP

Cambodia hosting for the first time in 60 years.

Charoen Wattanasin, vice-chairman of the National Olympic Committee of Thailand, said the International Olympic Committee had not endorsed the term Kun Khmer. "They are violating international regulations for sports competitions," he told AFP. "The Thai Boxing Association won't be sending athletes to compete."

Cambodian sports officials are refusing to back down. "We are the host country so we have the right to change it to Kun Khmer as the sport has its origin in Khmer and it is our culture," Vath Chamroeun, secretary-general of the Cambodian Southeast Asian Games Organizing Committee, told AFP. "We have to satisfy our people." He said Cambodia would retaliate and not send fighters to Thailand when it hosts the 2025 games. The sport will be called Muay Thai at that event.

The International Federation of Muay Thai Associations (IFMA) condemned the Cambodian move. "Kun Khmer is not Muay Thai, like judo is not karate. There might be similarities but Kun Khmer has no recognized federation." IFMA gener-

al recruitment freeze for Wales' four professional teams - Cardiff, the Dragons, the Ospreys and the Scarlets. A new financial deal between the regions and the WRU has still to be signed off in writing, but the governing body had announced a "verbal agreement" in December. This has led to concerns more players could follow the example of Dragons and Wales lock Will Rowlands, who is set to join French side Racing 92 when his current club contract expires at the end of the season.

As things stand, Rowlands would be ineligible to represent Wales at the Rugby World Cup later this year, unless he receives special dispensation from the Welsh game's Professional Rugby Board. "I think it (the 60-cap rule) is definitely something we need to talk about," Gatland told reporters. "We need to be pragmatic, and it would be disappointing if some players miss out on the World Cup. Why

shoot ourselves in the foot if we don't need to?"

"I can't blame players for exploring the options because there is a certain level of uncertainty in Welsh rugby at the moment, particularly for those who are out of contract. They need to think about their own personal situation, and that is perfectly understandable from my point of view. I would love to make sure we keep our top players in Wales."

Gatland has recently returned for his second spell as Wales coach, with his first match back in charge the visit of world top-ranked Ireland to Cardiff for a Six Nations opener on Feb 4. His first stint in charge, from 2007-19, yielded four Six Nations titles, including three Grand Slams, and also saw Wales reach two World Cup semifinals. "I think that one of the things we've done in the past is work incredibly hard as a group, and we will continue to do that," he said. — AFP