

## Sports

# Sixers hold off Simmons and Nets, Lillard sinks 60 points

## Jordan Poole hit a go-ahead layup to give Warriors a thrilling 122-120 victory over Grizzlies

**LOS ANGELES:** The Philadelphia 76ers won their grudge match against Ben Simmons and the Brooklyn Nets 137-133 on Wednesday as Damian Lillard erupted for 60 points in Portland's victory over Utah.

After an acrimonious split from Philadelphia last year, Simmons returned to his former home to face a hostile reception from the Sixers crowd. The game marked the first time that Simmons has faced former team-mate Joel Embiid since his trade to Brooklyn last February that sent James Harden to Philadelphia.

Simmons left Philadelphia last year after locker-room tensions with Embiid, and the lingering bad blood was evident from the outset. The high-scoring first quarter was dogged by trash-talking as the sides scored 41 points apiece and gave up a combined 13 fouls.

Despite his team coming away with the win, Sixers coach Doc Rivers was unhappy with Philadelphia's "emotional" approach to the game. "There's a difference between intensity, playing with emotion and being too emotional," Rivers said afterwards.

"I thought our side honestly were on the wrong side of that a lot tonight. We have to be better at handling our emotions." Tyrese Maxey led the Sixers' scoring with 27 points, while Embiid finished with 26 and Harden 23. Seth Curry led Brooklyn's scorers with 32 points while Kyrie Irving added 30. Simmons was restricted to 12 points.

In Portland, Lillard bagged the fourth 60-point performance of his career as the Trail Blazers won a thrilling shoot-out with the Utah Jazz 134-124.

Lillard nailed nine three-pointers while shooting 21 of 29 from the field as Portland improved to 23-25 in the Western Conference standings.

"That was incredible," Blazers coach Chauncey Billups said of Lillard's performance. "You don't get to see that very often." Lillard is one of only six players in NBA history with multiple 60-point games. Wilt Chamberlain holds the record with 32 60-pointers, while Kobe Bryant achieved the feat six times.

The other players on the list are Michael Jordan (5), Elgin Baylor (4) and Harden (4). "Even when things weren't going our way, I always felt I could get us back in the game," Lillard said afterwards. "When you get in that type of zone you feel like you can control the outcome."

Elsewhere Wednesday, Jordan Poole hit a go-ahead layup with 2.4 seconds remaining to give the NBA champion Golden State Warriors a thrilling 122-120 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies in San Francisco. A frenzied clash between the two Western Conference rivals saw Stephen Curry ejected for only the third time in his career.

Curry was tossed out of the game with 1min 14 remaining after throwing his mouthguard in frustration after a rushed three-point attempt by Poole. However Poole made up for it with his game-winning layup to seal victory in a see-saw clash that saw no fewer than 24 lead changes.

Despite the ejection, Curry led the Warriors' scoring with 34 points, making 10 of 19 from the field. Klay Thompson added 24 points while Poole finished with 21 points. Ja Morant led the Memphis scoring with 29 points.



PORTLAND: Anfernee Simons #1 of the Portland Trail Blazers drives to the basket during the game against the Utah Jazz on January 25, 2023 at the Moda Center Arena in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

In Los Angeles meanwhile, Anthony Davis returned from a 20-game injury absence for the Lakers with 21 points in their 113-104 win over the San Antonio Spurs. LeBron James added 20 points while Patrick Beverley chipped in with 18.

In other games on Wednesday, Giannis Antetokounmpo's 33-point haul helped the

Milwaukee Bucks score a 107-99 victory over the Western Conference-leading Denver Nuggets. Antetokounmpo delivered a dominant display which also included 14 rebounds and three steals as the Bucks took full advantage of the absence of Nikola Jokic to defeat Denver. Aaron Gordon led the Nuggets' scoring with 26 points. — AFP

## UK opposed to Russia athletes at Paris Olympics

**LONDON:** Moves to reintegrate Russian athletes for next year's Paris Olympics were strongly criticised by the British government on Thursday. Culture Secretary Michelle Donelan described plans by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to provide a pathway for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete under a neutral flag as "a world away from the reality of war being felt by the Ukrainian people."

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the IOC advised international sports federations last February to exclude athletes from their competitions. However, on Wednesday, the IOC said in a press release that "no athlete should be prevented from competing just because of their passport."

The British government has offered military and humanitarian support to Ukraine since the invasion began. Donelan said they would now work with "like-minded countries" to oppose the reintegration of Russian athletes.

"I want to be clear that this position from the IOC is a world away from the reality of war being felt by the Ukrainian people - and IOC president (Thomas) Bach's own words less than a year ago where he strongly condemned Russia for breaking the Olympic Truce and urged it to 'give peace a chance'," Donelan said. —AFP

## Ryder, Rai, Grant lead at Torrey Pines

**SAN DIEGO:** England's Aaron Rai posted a birdie-birdie finish to join a three-way tie at the top of the leaderboard after Wednesday's opening round of the PGA Tour's Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines in California. The 27-year-old from Wolverhampton took advantage of benign golf conditions on the North Course to fire an eight-under-par 64 and finish the day alongside Americans Sam Ryder and Brent Grant.

Teeing off on the back nine, Rai made three birdies before the turn and then reeled off five birdies down the stretch to complete a bogey-free round. Grant meanwhile made nine birdies and one bogey for his eighth under. Ryder's bogey-free round comprised six birdies and a brilliant opening eagle three on the par-five 10th hole.

"Definitely played great all around," Rai said afterwards. "Really drove it great off the tee, which is probably the most important thing. As soon as you miss the fairway here with anything more than a short iron it is very, very difficult.

"So that was key today, drove it very well. Hit a lot of real good iron shots and made a few putts around the turn there, so all in all a very good round." Ryder said his opening eagle had laid the foundation for his low score.

"It was pretty stress-free, it was fun," Ryder said. "Always nice to get off to a good start in the round where you don't feel like you're kind of pressing or anything." The trio are one shot clear of Brendan Steele, who fired a seven-under-par 65, and two in front of a cluster of seven players on six under. —AFP



Sarah Al-Hubail and Jamal Buhassan with participants.



Participants in action.

## Second stage of 'March of Gratitude' to conclude Saturday

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The first stage of the Gulf Initiative of bicycles being held under the theme "March of Gratitude" as riders covered more than 90 km,

while the second stage will still start from the seaside Shaab area towards Sahara Complex in Subhan, then they will head towards Safir Fintas covering a total distance of 70 km, while the initiative's activities will be conclude on Saturday.

Former Bahrain Member of Parliament Jamal Buhassan lauded the idea of the Gulf Initiative adding "this initiative is considered one of the joint Gulf initiatives that strengthens brotherly ties and integration that is built on love between all GCC citizens, and this comes through having such events." He wished the initiative success as well as all joint Gulf activities."



## Over 100 riders to partake in show jumping championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait International show jumping championship continues at Kuwait riding center with more than 100 riders and 150 horses with the support of Public Authority for Sport (PAS) and

Kuwait Olympic Committee (KOC).

Referee Ali Al-Shareef from Jordan said the participating horses are tested before the start of the championship, to make sure they are fit for the competition, as far as striding, lack of cuts, vaccinations and make sure the passport belongs to the actual horse.

Dr Ahmad Al-Jassasi from Oman, who is the foreign commissioned vet for the tournament said, all horses must be tested, and to make sure the horse's passport is valid.

He said the horse's examination is done in the presence of a committee formed by Kuwait Equestrian Federation with consultation with the



International Federation, adding that the horse's trot will be tested to make sure about its readiness.

He said 122 horses were registered and two were disqualified and another two were placed under observation.

## South Africa seek to avoid WCup embarrassment

**BLOEMFONTEIN:** South Africa go into a one-day international series against England in Bloemfontein on Friday needing a strong performance to ensure automatic qualification for the Cricket World Cup later this year. The three-match series is part of the International Cricket Council's World Cup Super League, from which the top eight teams will qualify for the World Cup in India in October and November.

South Africa need to win at least three of their remaining five fixtures - they also have to play two matches against the Netherlands - to climb above West Indies, who are currently in eighth place after completing their programme.

But Sri Lanka could also leapfrog the West Indies if they win at least two matches in their final series in New Zealand in March. South Africa can guarantee qualification by winning all five of their remaining games. Teams that fail to win a World Cup place automatically will have to play in a qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe in June and July.

The England ODI series comes at a time of transition for South Africa, following the resignation of Mark Boucher as head coach. Rob Walter, the new white ball coach, is completing his commitments with Central Districts in New Zealand and Shukri Conrad, appointed as Test coach, will stand in for the matches against England.

Conrad said he was in close contact with Walter. "We share similar ideas. We are in conversation literally every day." The South African selectors ignored calls for a shake-up in an under-performing 50-overs team, and have not injected new blood into their squad for the England series.

"It is a very settled squad," said Conrad. "They

understand what is required in this series." But it seems likely that there could be fresh thinking when Walter takes over next month. Walter showed in his first coaching role in New Zealand that he is willing to take tough action, after being appointed in charge of an Otago team that had failed to play to its potential.

"I had to take some tough decisions and it led to the departure of some senior players," he told South Africa's Rapport newspaper. One possibility could be a return to international cricket for former captain Faf du Plessis, 38, who hit the first century in South Africa's SA20 competition on Tuesday night.

But Walter, who worked with Du Plessis when he was head coach of the Titans franchise before moving to New Zealand in 2016, said his first task would be to talk to South African white-ball captain Temba Bavuma. Eight of England's squad have been playing in the SA20 competition, including captain Jos Buttler, who is the leading run-scorer, and fast bowler Jofra Archer, who has shown good form in five matches for the MI Cape Town team. —AFP