

Sports

Sixers into playoffs after Cavaliers defeat Nets

LOS ANGELES: Donovan Mitchell scored 31 points as the Cleveland Cavaliers defeated the Brooklyn Nets 115-109 on Tuesday to send the Philadelphia 76ers into the postseason. Mitchell made 10-of-22 from the field including five three-pointers while Caris LeVert added 18 from the bench against his former club as Cleveland improved to 46-28 to tighten their grip on fourth in the Eastern Conference.

Cleveland's victory ensured that third-placed Philadelphia became the latest team to punch their ticket to the playoffs despite not playing on Tuesday. While Cleveland are yet to clinch, it will take a monumental collapse in the final weeks of the season for them not to advance to the postseason. Tuesday's game could well turn out to be a sneak preview for the playoffs, with Brooklyn still occupying the sixth automatic qualifying spot in the Eastern Conference.

Against Cleveland they started brightly, taking a 30-23 lead into the second quarter before being outscored 71-48 in the next two periods to effectively cede the game, even if they managed to reduce the deficit to single digits in the final stages. Day'Ron Sharpe led Brooklyn's scoring with 20 points while Spencer Dinwiddie had 19 points with 11 assists and five rebounds.

Cavs coach J.B. Bickerstaff was unhappy that his team eased off late in the fourth quarter. "We need to play a complete game," Bickerstaff said. "We allowed the lead to dictate our emotions, we allowed a big play to dictate our emotions, instead of doing the job and finishing the game the way we need to finish the game," Bickerstaff added.

Nets coach Jacques Vaughn lamented his team's collapse in the second and third quarters. "That's a big question for us," Vaughn said. "I think we got a little stagnant with the basketball. Tough second quarter for us. Along those lines of putting four quarters together, it all seems as if there's one quarter that punches us in the gut a little bit."

Elsewhere Tuesday, the Los Angeles Clippers stumbled to a 101-100 defeat to the Oklahoma City Thunder in a game that saw Clippers ace Paul George exit with an apparent right leg injury in the fourth quarter. George needed to be carried back to the locker room after his right knee buckled in a collision with the Thunder's Lu Dort in the fourth



NEW YORK: Donovan Mitchell of the Cleveland Cavaliers dunks against Yuta Watanabe of the Brooklyn Nets during their game at Barclays Center on March 21, 2023. —AFP

quarter. There was no immediate word on the extent of George's injury, with Clippers coach saying the eight-time All-Star was still being evaluated.

Boston topple soaring Kings

In Sacramento, the Boston Celtics gave the high-flying Kings a postseason reality check with a blowout 132-109 win. Sacramento have been one of the surprise packages of the Western Confer-

ence this season, sitting third in the standings. But the Kings were overpowered by a Celtics line-up that showed flashes of their dominant early season form as they cut loose in the second half to outscore Sacramento 72-55.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics scoring with 36 points while Jaylen Brown added 27 points and Derrick White 20. In other games on Tuesday, Trae Young finished with 30 points in Atlanta's 129-107

win over the lowly Detroit Pistons, who are propping up the East with a league-worst record of 16-57. Atlanta improved to 36-36 with the victory and are on track for at least a spot in the play-in tournament.

In Orlando, Gary Harris finished with 22 points and Franz Wagner 20 as the Magic dented Washington's playoff aspirations with a 122-112 victory. The Wizards are currently outside the play-in places in 12th spot in the East with a 32-40 record. —AFP

Navratilova reveals she is 'cancer-free'

LONDON: Martina Navratilova has revealed she is now "cancer-free" after the tennis great feared she "may not see next Christmas" following a devastating double diagnosis. The former world number one, who won 18 Grand Slam singles titles during her long career, revealed in January she had been diagnosed with throat and breast cancer. The 66-year-old is due to undergo further preventative radiation treatment but said in an interview with Piers Morgan on TalkTV she should then "be good to go". "As far as they know I'm cancer-free," she said in the interview aired on Tuesday.

Navratilova, winner of 59 Grand Slam titles in singles and doubles, revealed her diagnosis had left her fearing the worst. "I was in a total panic for three days thinking I may not see next Christmas," she said. "The bucket list came into my mind of all the things I wanted to do. And this may sound really shallow, but I was like, 'OK, which car do I really want to drive if I live like a year?'"

Navratilova, who previously underwent treatment for early-stage breast cancer in 2010, sought medical help after noticing an enlarged lymph node in her neck, with tests subsequently confirming she had cancer. She added: "This was the first week in December, (I'm thinking) I will see this Christmas but maybe not the next one."

But doctors were able to tell her the throat cancer was "extremely treatable" and she had a "95-percent" chance of a full recovery. Navratilova, a Czechoslovakia-born naturalized American, brought a new physical dimension to women's tennis, with her powerful serve and agility at the net making her the dominant player of her era.

She won her first Wimbledon singles title in 1978 and went on to lift the trophy a record nine times — more than any other player in the men's or women's game. And she believes her competitive nature on the court helped her mentally prepare for the battle against cancer. — AFP

Kuwait, Oman sign Special Olympics MoU

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Special Olympics signed a memorandum of understanding with its Omani counterpart to cooperate in supporting and developing services, activities and programs for those with mental and growth disabilities in both countries. The MoU was signed by Kuwait National Special Olympic Director Rihab Buresli and Oman's Special Olympics Director Mohammad Al-Rashidi.

Buresli was pleased with the MoU to support cooperation with the Oman experience and work together to enable special Olympics players through sports and health initiatives and care programs. This is in addition to coordination and preparations for upcoming regional and international events, particularly the world games in Berlin to be held in June.

'I have never felt that much hate,' says Sabalenka

MIAMI GARDENS: Belarus' world number two Aryna Sabalenka says she has faced "hate" in the women's tour locker-room but hopes tensions with Ukrainian players will eventually ease. Australian Open champion Sabalenka lost to Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in Sunday's Indian Wells final and at the media day for this week's ATP-WTA Miami Open was asked about her recent comments on "tensions" in the locker-room between Ukrainian and Russian and Belarus players.

"It was really, really tough for me because I've never faced that much hate in the locker room," said Sabalenka. "Of course, there are a lot of haters on Instagram when you're losing the matches, but like in the locker room, I've never faced that," she added. "It was really tough for me to understand that there's so many people who really hate me for no reason, like no reason. I mean, like I did nothing," she said.

I am coming in with the number one ranking. That is something very special. I fulfilled my dreams quicker than I expected," he told reporters on Tuesday.

Because of his victory in Miami last year, Alcaraz must win at the Florida event again if he is to hold on to his number one spot, but he says he feels no pressure in that regard or to meet newly raised expectations. "I don't feel the pressure too much. I know the things I have to do. I need to play relaxed and not mind if I lose or if I play well or not," he said.

"My goal is always the same. To feel comfortable on court. To enjoy playing tennis and try to have great thoughts when playing. That is why I am playing at a good level. I am enjoying every single second and playing relaxed. That is what I am thinking about on court," he added.

'You have to improve'

As at Indian Wells, world number two Novak Djokovic is missing after being refused entry to the United States due to his lack of a COVID vaccine and Alcaraz says he misses the Serb's presence, along with the injured Rafael Nadal. "I'm a profes-



Buresli said the memorandum dealt with the cooperation mechanism in training and competitions sanctioned by the Special Olympics. It also includes bilateral cooperation to form teams for unified games and work towards developing parallel programs to sports that will help mental and growth of disabled persons.

Rashidi lauded the care disabled persons in Kuwait are enjoying as well as the good efforts of Kuwait Special Olympics in this field. He said the MoU is an important step towards the activation of sustainable development goals, especially since Kuwait and Oman have extensive experience in caring for the disabled.

Sabalenka said sometimes the tension had gone beyond awkward silences and abrupt conversations. "I had some, not like fights, but I had some weird conversations with, not the girls, but with members of their team. It was really, it was tough. It was tough period. But, now it's getting better," she said.

In comments at Indian Wells Sabalenka had said she had been in a dispute with Ukrainian Lesia Tsurenko's coach Nikita Vlasov. Tsurenko was due to play Sabalenka at Indian Wells but withdrew before their match. The Ukrainian said she had a "panic attack" and had also been upset with a conversation about the war and the position of Russian and Belarusian players with WTA CEO Steve Simon.

Sabalenka said she had found it hard to deal with the locker-room atmosphere initially. "I was really struggling with that because I really felt bad, like I did something and it's still not so good in the locker room with some of the Ukrainian girls. But then I realized that it's not my fault and I did nothing bad to them. And I'm pretty sure that the rest of the Russian and Belarusian athletes did nothing to Ukrainians," she said.

"I just realized that this is all emotions and I just need to like ignore it and focus on myself with understanding that I did nothing bad. And I cannot

sional tennis player, but also I'm a huge fan of tennis and I always want to watch the best players in the world, like Rafa, like Djokovic," he said.

"I played a couple of times against Rafa and I wish to play against him more and with Djokovic as well. I wish to play against him more times, you know, but obviously in every tournament I want them to be playing and I hope we get them back soon," he said.

Far from feeling the weight of following in the footsteps of the 'Big Three' of Djokovic, Nadal and the now retired Roger Federer, Alcaraz says he is trying to draw lessons from their successes. "You have to improve, you have to get better every day. That's why the big players, the Big Three, for example, did all through their careers - to improve every day a little bit," he said.

Alcaraz can expect plenty of support from the crowd in Miami, which includes many Spanish-speaking fans. "It's so special to come back here and feel the same energy that I felt, for example, last year," he said. "I have great supporters here, a lot of people supporting me. I remember last year it was unbelievable you know, with the crowd. I feel like I



MIAMI GARDENS: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus fields questions from the media during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 21, 2023. — AFP

control emotions of others," she said. "It seems like everyone's just ignoring each other," she said. "Not everyone actually, I'm still talking to some of the Ukrainians, but there are some of the girls who are like really aggressive against us. So I'm just staying away from that," added Sabalenka. — AFP

Alcaraz returns to Miami Open after rapid rise

MIAMI GARDENS: World number one Carlos Alcaraz heads into this week's Miami Open looking to defend both his title and top ranking and admitting even he has been surprised by his dizzying rise to the top of the sport. A year ago, the 19-year-old came to Miami on the back of wins on clay in Croatia and Brazil and hoping to make his mark on the hard courts. His victory in South Florida launched a remarkable year.

The highlight was his US Open triumph which made him the youngest player to become world number one and he returns to Miami after last week's win in Indian Wells, achieved without dropping a set in the tournament. "It's all been very fast, when I got to Miami last year I was around number 20 and a year later



MIAMI GARDENS: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain fields questions from the media during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 21, 2023. — AFP

am at home, you know," he added. The top seed will begin his title defense against Argentine Facundo Bagnis or a qualifier and could face two-time Miami champion and former world number one Andy Murray in the third round. — AFP