

## Sports

# Heat rout Celtics, book NBA Finals showdown

## Miami Heat seek fourth NBA title

**BOSTON:** Jimmy Butler played a starring role as the Miami Heat advanced to the NBA Finals by routing Boston 103-84 on Monday, denying the Celtics a historic comeback after trailing the playoff series 3-0. Butler had 28 points, seven rebounds and six assists while Caleb Martin added 26 points and 10 rebounds to spark Miami, which will visit Denver on Thursday to begin the best-of-seven championship final.

Miami recovered from a gut-punch of a game-six defeat, where they fell on a last-second tip-in, to win the Eastern Conference final 4-3, silencing a loud Boston crowd. Taking full advantage of an injury to Boston star Jayson Tatum in the opening seconds and a cold-shooting Celtics start, the Heat avoided becoming the first team in 151 attempts to lose a playoff series after leading 3-0.

"We stayed together as a group," Butler said. "We talked about going to get a tough one on the road and we did just that. But we're not satisfied. We're happy. We're ecstatic. But we've got one more to get." Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said he never doubted his resilient squad could win game seven. "Sometimes you have to suffer for the things you really want," he said. "This group has shown fortitude when there are inevitable let-downs and failures, but had that perseverance to pick yourself up, that collective spirit to keep on forging ahead."

The Heat, seeking a fourth NBA title and first since 2013, last reached the NBA Finals in 2020, losing to the Los Angeles Lakers. The Nuggets, into the NBA Finals for the first time, swept the Lakers in the Western Conference final. It was a determined effort by a Miami squad that lost to Boston in seven games in last year's East finals. Miami also lacked any momentum after squandering their 3-0 edge

to set up a winner-takes-all road game.

"When the ship gets rocky, just stay together and keep believing in one another," said Miami's Bam Adebayo, who had 12 points and 10 rebounds. Spoelstra said last year's loss had weighed on the team. "They made us get better. We thought about it all season long," he said. Butler said his teammates enabled him to sink key shots and shut down Boston comeback bids. "They give me so much confidence to hoop at a high level," he said. "They're the reason we're here. I know how good a team we are and we made it happen."

### 'A shell of myself'

Tatum, who finished with 14 points on 5-of-13 shooting, turned his left ankle landing awkwardly after a baseline jumper in the opening seconds. He grimaced often and took only one shot in the first 17 minutes. "It swelled up," Tatum said. "I was like a shell of myself. It was tough to move. It was frustrating especially that it should happen on the first play." Miami stretched the lead as high as 17 points in the second quarter but Boston pulled within 59-51 early in the third.

Caleb Martin sank a baseline jumper to put Miami ahead 76-66 entering the fourth. Martin sank a three-pointer to ignite a 7-0 Miami run to open the fourth quarter for an 83-66 edge. "Not shooting the ball well had an effect on us," Tatum said. "And it kind of snowballed." The Celtics went nearly four minutes without scoring and never again threatened, finishing a woeful 9-of-42 from three-point range.

"They gave it everything they had," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "That's the most important thing to take from this. We failed, but it's not because the guys didn't have a sense of togetherness and character."



**BOSTON:** Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics shoots the ball during the second quarter against the Miami Heat in game seven of the Eastern Conference Finals on May 29, 2023. — AFP

Jaylen Brown led Boston with 19 points but had a career-high eight turnovers while Derrick White added 18 points. "We failed. I failed," Brown said. "We let the whole city down." An 18-6 Heat run to close the first quarter gave Miami a 22-15 lead with

the Celtics matching their season low for first-quarter points. Boston went 0-for-10 from three-point range in the first quarter, missing the first 12 from beyond the arc overall, and made only 6-of-23 from the floor in the opening period. — AFP

## Knights blank Stars to advance to NHL Final

**HOUSTON:** The Vegas Golden Knights advanced to the Stanley Cup Final for the second time in their six-season history on Monday by routing host Dallas 6-0 in the NHL playoffs. Swedish center William Karlsson scored twice for Vegas, which also reached the NHL final in 2018, losing to Washington in the Knights' debut campaign. The Golden Knights captured the best-of-seven Western Conference final 4-2 over Dallas and will host the Florida Panthers in game one of the championship series on Saturday.

"We had a good start," Karlsson said after Vegas shrugged off back-to-back losses to Dallas. "We kept it light. We know when to buckle down and play hockey. It has been a great journey so far. We still have four more wins to get but it has been a great journey so far." The Panthers, who swept Carolina in the Eastern Conference final, made their only prior NHL Final in 1996, when they were swept by Colorado.

Florida will have had nine days off before starting the Stanley Cup Final. The Stars had dropped the first three games of the conference final before rallying and hoped for a home triumph to pull the series level, but the Knights took command quickly. Vegas left wing William Carrier took advantage of a Stars turnover in their own zone and flicked a backhand shot past sprawled Dallas goaltender Jake Oettinger for the game's first goal only 3:41 into the contest.

Karlsson gave the Golden Knights a 2-0 edge with a power-play goal 10:25 into the first period, taking a rebound off Nicolas Roy's shot and firing it into the net. Keegan Kolesar boosted the Vegas advantage to 3-0 with six minutes remaining in the opening period off assists from Carrier and Roy. Jonathan Marchessault scored for the Golden Knights 10:25 into the second period for a 4-0 Vegas lead and Karlsson netted his second goal 2:06 into the third period to dim any hopes of a Dallas fightback. Michael Amadio gave Vegas a final goal with 7:35 remaining in the third period. — AFP



**DALLAS:** Jonathan Marchessault #81 of the Vegas Golden Knights celebrates during the second period against the Dallas Stars in Game Six of the Western Conference Final on May 29, 2023. — AFP

## Kosovo, COVID, kicked out of Australia: Novak Djokovic controversies

**PARIS:** Hailed as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, Novak Djokovic is at the centre of fresh controversy after writing "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop the violence" on a camera at the French Open after his first round match in response to clashes flaring up in northern Kosovo fuelled by ethnic tensions. "Kosovo is our cradle, our stronghold, centre of the most important things for our country," he told reporters in Paris. The 22-time major winner is no stranger to causing a stir on and off

the court. AFP Sport looks at some of the incidents that have dogged the career of the former world number one:

The famously unvaccinated Djokovic arrived in Melbourne to play the 2022 Australian Open claiming he had a valid medical exemption from the vaccine. However, after a protracted legal fight, his visa was cancelled on "health and good order grounds" before he was deported. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic accused the Australian government of conducting a "witch hunt" against Djokovic. As Djokovic left the country, he said: "I respect the court's ruling and I'll cooperate with the relevant authorities in relation to my departure from the country. I am uncomfortable that the focus of the past weeks has been on me and I

hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love." He returned to Melbourne in January this year where he swept to a 10th Australian Open title. His refusal to be vaccinated also led to him being banned from the 2022 US Open.

### US Open default

Djokovic saw his 2020 US Open title hopes dashed when he was sensationally disqualified from his last-16 match against Pablo Carreno Busta after accidentally hitting a female line judge in the throat with a ball. The Serb had lashed out in frustration after dropping serve in a match played on an empty Arthur Ashe Court where fans were banned due to the pandemic. "This whole situation has left me really sad

and empty," Djokovic said in a statement. "I checked on the linesperson and the tournament told me that thank God she is feeling OK. I'm extremely sorry to have caused her such stress. So unintended. So wrong."

### COVID-19 tour

In the midst of the pandemic in 2020, and with professional tennis shut down, Djokovic organized the Adria Tour, a series of exhibition events in the Balkans. However, the tournament was abandoned in Zadar in Croatia after Bulgarian player Grigor Dimitrov tested positive for coronavirus. Djokovic and his wife Jelena, as well as fellow players Viktor Troicki and Borna Coric, also went on to reveal positive tests. "I know there has been some criticism, especial-

ly from the West," Djokovic said. "Why do we have spectators there? Why is there no social distancing? Why is this kind of event taking place while there is a serious pandemic in the West?" said Djokovic. "It is not easy to explain to people that the situation in the United States or Great Britain is completely different from that in Serbia or the surrounding countries."

Djokovic has long faced accusations that he exaggerates injuries in matches. At the 2008 US Open, he took two medical timeouts in a gruelling five-set win over Tommy Robredo. Quarter-final opponent Andy Roddick then mockingly listed Djokovic's injuries to include "two hurt ankles, bird flu and SARS!" Djokovic defeated the American and hit back in his post-match, on-court interview. — AFP



## Kuwait Karting Club organizes championship

**KUWAIT:** The second Open Karting Championship was organized by Kuwait Karting Club at Al-Kout Arena. There were strong competitions during the final rounds. Faisal Al-Shuwaie won the men's title, followed by Abdelmajid Shaaban and Hazzaa Al-Aiban. The women's title went to Eman Shams Al-Deen, followed by Misk Al-Saleh and Asmaa Jayyash. Club Board Member Yousuf Al-Kandary and PR director Hanadi Al-Shaar awarded the winners. The chairman of the Board of the Karting Club Dr Hamid Busheri lauded the high technical level of competitors.

## Tomoooh Club players prepare for tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The Tomoooh Sports Club for the Mentally Disabled delegation left for Tunis to have a one-week training camp prior to the international Czech tournament for the disabled that will be held June 8th-10th. The delegation includes the Secretary General of Tomoooh Club Qaseema Al-Mousawi, an official Habbab Al-Hami, a coach Kefaya Abdelmalek, a supervisor and the players: Haneen Al-Misbah, Abdallah Salmeen, Hassan Sameer, and Fahad Al-Saleeli.

Sadeeqa Al-Ansari said the Czech International tournament is one of the approved events by the International Paralympics Committee and will see 150 players from around the world competing. She said Kuwait's participation is to give the players an opportunity to compete with international players and get qualifying numbers for international events.



"Our players succeeded in making outstanding achievements in their first Paralympics event at the Oman international games two months ago when Haneen Al-Misbah won a gold medal; Abdallah Sal-

meen won gold and silver medals, and Hassan Sameer won a bronze," she added. Al-Ansari expressed confidence in Tomoooh players to give great efforts and continue their Paralympic achievements.