

## AFTER PLAYOFF COLLAPSE, DURANT FUTURE IS THUNDER'S QUESTION

**OAKLAND:** As Stephen Curry dribbled out the clock in a raucous Oracle Arena, Kevin Durant could only stand and watch. The Golden State Warriors are heading back to the NBA Finals, while Durant's future in Oklahoma City is much less certain. Two nights after blowing an opportunity to close out the defending champion Warriors at home, the Thunder got sent home for the summer when they lost Game 7 of the Western Conference finals 96-88 on Monday night. "We wanted to win the whole thing," Durant said. "There's no moral victories in our locker room after the game. We were all upset. We wanted to get a chance to play for a championship in the finals, so that hurts."

Instead of becoming known as the team that knocked off the Warriors after their record-setting 73-win regular season, the Thunder will be remembered for a playoff collapse. They became just the 10th NBA team to lose a playoff series after taking a 3-1 lead and now head into an uncertain offseason with Durant eligible to become an unrestricted free agent. Durant said it was too soon to even think about what will happen in July. "It hurts losing, but everybody fought hard every single moment, left their soul out on the court," Durant said. "We have no regrets."

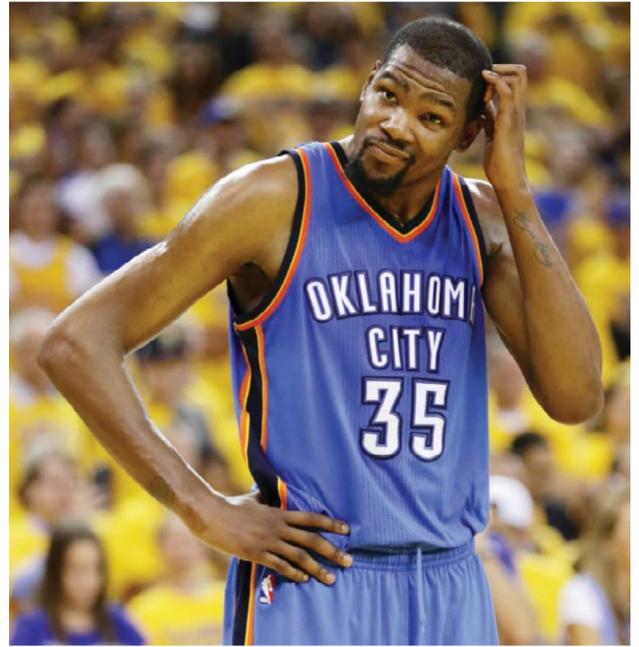
If he does leave the only franchise he has played for in his nine-year

career, he will do it having failed to deliver the championship to Oklahoma City. The closest the Thunder have gotten in Durant's tenure was when they lost the NBA Finals in five games to LeBron James and the Miami Heat in 2012. They then lost in the second round the next season, in the conference finals in 2014 to San Antonio before missing the playoffs entirely because of an injury to Durant last year. But under first-year coach Billy Donovan, Oklahoma City earned the third seed in the top-heavy Western Conference this season and then upset 67-win San Antonio in the second round. The Thunder followed that by winning three of the first four games against the Warriors, with a pair of lopsided wins at home.

But after losing Game 5 on the road, the Thunder blew an opportunity to eliminate the Warriors at home on Saturday night. Oklahoma City led by seven points with less than five minutes remaining but made only one basket and committed six turnovers down the stretch of a 108-101 loss that could haunt the franchise for years. The Thunder responded on the road in Game 7 by taking a 13-point lead in the second quarter. But once Curry and Klay Thompson started hitting Oklahoma City with a flurry of 3-pointers, the

Thunder had no answer. The Splash Brothers combined for 13 3-pointers as Golden State outscored Oklahoma City by 30 points from behind the line. "There was an opportunity for us to close the series out in 5 and 6 and 7 and we came up a little short," Donovan said. "But I don't know if that tells the story of the full seven games if you look at the entirety." Oklahoma City's stars were no match. Russell Westbrook missed 14 of 21 from the field and shot just 36.8 percent in the three potential clinchers. Durant finished with 27 points but took only 10 shots in the first three quarters.

Durant did score seven straight points to cut an 11-point deficit to four with 1:40 remaining. But Serge Ibaka then fouled Curry on a 3-pointer with the shot clock running down, allowing Golden State to build the lead back to seven. "That was the dagger for us," Durant said. "That kind of hurt us." Durant then missed two shots and could only stare blankly when Curry ended Oklahoma City's season with a 3-pointer with 26.8 seconds left. Now the Thunder can only hope it doesn't end Durant's tenure in Oklahoma City as well. "We just lost like 30 minutes ago," Durant said. "I haven't even thought about it. I'm just embracing my teammates and reflecting on the season." —AP



**OAKLAND:** Kevin Durant #35 of the Oklahoma City Thunder stands on the court in Game Seven of the Western Conference Finals against the Golden State Warriors during the 2016 NBA Playoffs at Oracle Arena on May 30, 2016. —AFP

## BAYLISS BACKS COOK TO TOP TENDULKAR'S TOTAL

**CHESTER-LE-STREET:** England coach Trevor Bayliss believes Alastair Cook has it in him to surpass India great Sachin Tendulkar as Test cricket's all-time leading run-scorer. Cook became just the 12th player in history to score 10,000 Test runs during the course of his unbeaten 47 as England beat Sri Lanka by nine wickets in the second Test at the Riverside in Chester-le-Street on Monday. The England captain was also the first Englishman to achieve the feat and, at 31 years and 157 days, the youngest to get to the landmark, breaking Tendulkar's record by more than five months. Cook is unlikely ever to play white ball international cricket again having been dropped from the one-day side prior to last year's 50-over World Cup. But even without that burden, Tendulkar's aggregate tally of 15,921 Test runs is still some way off for left-handed opener Cook, who now has 10,042 to his credit. However, given Cook has scored at a rate of around 1,000 runs a year for the past decade, only a career-ending injury or a sharp decline in form could deny him the chance to surpass Tendulkar's haul. "It will be about how long he wants to keep doing it," said Bayliss. "But certainly there is time on his side, so there is no reason he couldn't if his heart is still in it and his will to do it is still there," the Australian added.

Former Sri Lanka coach Bayliss is no

doubt of Cook's quality. "He is right up there with any of the best international players. He has these powers of concentration," he said. "He is not the biggest stroke-player of all time - (but) he knows his game very well, he is very patient and he sticks to it. "To be able to do that over the period of time he has played and score as many runs as he has is a fantastic effort." Victory at the Riverside, the headquarters of north-east county Durham, saw England take an unassailable 2-0 lead in their three-Test series with Sri Lanka. England quickly announced an unchanged 12-man squad for next week's third Test at Lord's.

That means they still have the option of giving a debut to Nottinghamshire seamer Jake Ball. Fast bowler Steven Finn, who plays at Lord's for Middlesex, could be vulnerable if England want to assess Ball in international match conditions ahead of their upcoming home Test series against Pakistan. But Bayliss indicated Finn and struggling number three batsman Nick Compton, another Middlesex man, would get a fair run to prove their worth. "There have been discussions over the last month or so, but we have been about giving guys the opportunity to show us what they have got," said Bayliss. "The team has been a winning one, so there is no reason to change it just at the moment!" —AFP

## ONE-ARMED WILDCARD STUNS WOMEN'S BEST

**SUVA:** One-armed American surfer Bethany Hamilton sealed third place in the Fiji Women's Pro yesterday after beating some of the world's best to make the semi-finals. Hamilton, whose left arm was bitten off in a shark attack in 2003, entered the event at Tavarua as a wildcard rated little chance of making an impact. But the 26-year-old from Hawaii reached the final four with an incredible giant-killing run. She defeated Australia's world number one Tyler Wright in the second round, then beat six-time world champion Stephanie Gilmore in the third. Another Aussie, the highly rated Nikki Van Dijk, succumbed in the quarter-finals before Hamilton finally fell to the competition's eventual winner, France's Johanne Defay, in the semis. "Beyond stoked to finish 3rd... as the wildcard! LOVED competing & looking forward to more adventures," she tweeted after the event.

It is the sixth time Hamilton, who had a child last year, has competed on the elite tour, with her previous best a ninth place in 2010. But the simple fact she is competing

has already inspired a Hollywood movie, 2011's "Soul Surfer" featuring Dennis Quaid and Helen Hunt. Hamilton was a promising junior aged 13 when a huge tiger shark mauled her, losing 60 percent of her blood after it ripped off her arm. But she refused to give up her dream of becoming a pro surfer and was back on a board less than a month after the near-fatal attack.

She embarked on intensive physical therapy and strengthening exercises to adjust her balance and movements to compensate for the missing arm. The only concession made to her handicap is a handle on the surfboard, which allows her to duck-diver under approaching waves when she paddles out. She spoke after making the quarter-finals in Fiji about what it meant for her to compete among the best. "I know I'm in a unique position to hopefully encourage young girls... to chase their dreams," she said. "Even after losing my arm I'm still doing everything I hoped I could do. I'm a reminder for young girls that you can do it if you set your mind to it." —AFP



**TAVARUA:** Bethany Hamilton of the US pictured before her semi-final at the Fiji Women's Pro at Tavarua. —AFP



**PITTSBURGH:** Brian Dumoulin #8 of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Tomas Hertl #48 of the San Jose Sharks fall on the ice during the second period in Game One of the 2016 NHL Stanley Cup Final on May 30, 2016. —AFP

## PENGUINS EDGE SHARKS

LATE BONINO GOAL LIFT PENS IN STANLEY CUP OPENER

**WASHINGTON:** Nick Bonino scored the game winner in the waning minutes Monday as the Penguins edged the San Jose Sharks 3-2 in Pittsburgh in the first game of the NHL Stanley Cup finals. The Penguins, seeking their first NHL championship since 2009, will try to stretch their lead in the best-of-seven series when they host game two on Wednesday, before the series shifts to San Jose. The Penguins let a 2-0 lead in the contest get away from them, as San Jose, playing in the championship series for the first time, scored twice in the second period.

But Bonino scored from the inner edge of the left circle, after a feed from defenseman Kris Letang, firing past San Jose goaltender Martin Jones to make it 3-2 at 17:27 of the third. "He put it right on my stick-it was a great play by Tanager and it wasn't the hardest shot I've had, but I was able to flip it over (Jones)," Bonino said. Bryan Rust, who later left the contest with an undisclosed injury, and fellow rookie Conor Sheary scored little more than a minute apart in the first period for the Penguins, who had 24 saves from rookie goalie Matt Murray. Tomas Hertl and Patrick Marleau responded with goals for the Sharks in the second, but after Bonino's goal Murray made the lead stand up even as the Sharks played most of the last two minutes on the power play. "He made a couple of big saves on (Sharks center) Joe Thornton coming down the wing at the end," Penguins left winger Chris Kunitz said of Murray. "He's always rising to the occasion for the team." Jones was under pressure in the Sharks net throughout the first and third periods, finishing with 38 saves. "They played their game for longer stretches than we did," said Sharks coach Peter DeBoer, who noted that in the face of the Penguins' vaunted speed his players at times "stood around and watched."

"They're a fast team and they dictated play," DeBoer said. "They were better than us, and we've got to fix that." But Penguins center Matt Cullen said Pittsburgh can't afford to be complacent. "We can't pat ourselves on the back, because game two comes in a hurry," Cullen said. "We've got to come out with the same urgency." Rust got the ball rolling for the Penguins at 12:46 of the first, batting in the rebound of a shot by Justin Schultz that deflected off Sharks defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic directly to Rust. "They came out flying," Sharks center Logan Couture said. "The games are too big to have a start like that."

**Fast and fearless**

Rust departed the game after a blindside hit to the head by Marleau, and Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan said he is day-to-day with an upper body

injury. "I'm sure the league will look at it," Sullivan said of the Marleau hit, which promoted a two-minute penalty. Sheary made it 2-0 only 1:02 later. Penguins star Sidney Crosby gained control of the puck along the half-wall and made a pinpoint pass to Sheary in the right circle for a shot under the crossbar. The Sharks cut the deficit to 2-1 when Hertl beat Murray from a long the goal line at 3:02

of the second. Marleau tied it late in the second when he beat Murray with a backhand. Although Crosby didn't find the net for Pittsburgh, in addition to setting up Sheary's goal he looked like the fastest player on the ice for much of the contest. "We want to play fast and fearless," Sullivan said. "We're at our best when we're on our toes and skate." —AFP

## VERSTAPPEN: MONACO TAUGHT ME TO STAY AWAY FROM WALL

**LONDON:** Dutch teenager Max Verstappen says he has learned from his Monaco Grand Prix crash, with the first lesson being to stay away from walls and barriers. The 18-year-old Red Bull driver, who two weeks earlier in Spain had become Formula One's youngest race winner, crashed in both Saturday's first qualifying and Sunday's race around the metal-fenced street circuit.

The first accident, when he broke his car's suspension on a kerb and hit the wall at the exit to the swimming pool complex, left him at the back of the field for a race which started behind the safety car due to wet conditions. Verstappen battled back into the top 10 before hitting the barriers at Massenet, on the climb to Casino Square, and retiring. "It started off quite OK but then after we had the crash in qualifying it went a bit downhill," he said in a

Red Bull video interview. "The beginning of the race was very good, we showed great pace-sometimes the fastest lap around-and I think it was all coming very well together...then unfortunately, when we fitted the soft tyres, I made a mistake and hit the wall." Verstappen said the team had deserved more after rebuilding the car following the first crash. "I learned a lot of things - of course to stay out of the wall first of all," he added. "Now, it (the task) is just to analyse how and what went wrong and why we got into this situation. It is all part of the learning curve and getting more experience."

Verstappen made his Formula One debut with Red Bull-owned Toro Rosso last year as the youngest ever driver. The Spanish Grand Prix was his first for the energy drink manufacturer's senior team after trading places with Russian Daniil Kvyat. — Reuters



**MONACO:** Infiniti Red Bull racing's Belgian-Dutch driver Max Verstappen sits in his car at the Monaco street circuit in Monaco, ahead of the Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix. —AFP