

Sports

George's 45 tops Harden's 42 as Thunder eke out win

Absent Antetokounmpo, Bucks routed by Magic

HOUSTON: Paul George outgunned James Harden in a matchup of MVP candidates, and the Oklahoma City Thunder erased a 26-point deficit to escape with a 117-112 win over the host Houston Rockets on Saturday. George finished with a game-high 45 points plus 11 rebounds, torching the Houston defense with six 3-pointers plus 15-for-18 free throws. Westbrook matched an NBA record set by Wilt Chamberlain with his ninth consecutive triple-double: 21 points, 12 rebounds, and 11 assists. The Thunder posted a 53-39 edge on the glass. Harden totaled 42 points, his 29th consecutive game with at least 30, but he missed a contested 3-pointer after Westbrook pushed the Thunder ahead.

MAGIC 103, BUCKS 83

Orlando took advantage of the absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo, snapping host Milwaukee's six-game winning streak. Jonathan Isaac led the Magic in scoring for the first time this season with 17 points. Eric Bledsoe led Milwaukee with 19 points, 11 rebounds and five assists, and Malcolm Brogdon added 14 points. It was Milwaukee's most lopsided loss and the fewest points they've scored all season. Orlando has won four of its last five and is now 2 1/2 games out of the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference.

CLIPPERS 123, CELTICS 112

Landry Shamet made four 3-pointers in the fourth quarter and scored 17 points off the bench in his debut for Los Angeles, which rallied from a 28-point deficit to knock off host Boston. It's the third time in the past five games the Clippers have come from at least 20 points down to win, with the 28-point rally setting a franchise record. It was also the largest comeback by any NBA team in the last two seasons. Montrezl Harrell led Los Angeles with 21 points off the bench, and Danilo Gallinari had 19 points and 10 rebounds. Gordon Hayward scored 19 points off the bench to lead the Celtics, who lost leading scorer Kyrie Irving to a right knee sprain with about four minutes left in the first half.

HORNETS 129, HAWKS 120

Kemba Walker was 13-for-27 from the field and 9-for-17 on 3-pointers in reaching the 30-point mark for the fourth straight game, scoring 37 as Charlotte

defeated host Atlanta. It was the 40th time that Walker has topped 20 points and the 17th time he's scored at least 30 this season. He added seven assists. Charlotte's Marvin Williams came back to haunt his former team with 27 points. Atlanta was led by John Collins with 21 points, and rookie Trae Young added 20 points and 11 assists.

PACERS 105, CAVALIERS 90

Bojan Bogdanovic led a balanced offense with 23 points, the fifth time in his last six games he has topped 20 points, as host Indiana avenged a home loss in December to the Cavaliers. Cory Joseph came off the bench to finish with 10 points, nine rebounds and 10 assists. Domantas Sabonis did not score in the first half, but finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds, also off the bench. Reserve Jordan Clarkson scored 18 points to lead Cleveland, which has lost four straight and 10 of its last 12.

GRIZZLIES 99, PELICANS 90

Joakim Noah had 19 points and 14 rebounds as host Memphis, playing its first home game since making two trades at Thursday's deadline, defeated New Orleans. Justin Holiday added 15 points, rookie Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 14, newcomer CJ Miles had 13, Mike Conley II and Ivan Rabb 10. Miles and Delon Wright, who were part of the trade that sent Marc Gasol to Toronto, made their debuts, as did guard Avery Bradley, who was acquired in a separate deal with the Clippers. Julius Randle led the Pelicans with 21 points, Jrue Holiday had 15, Anthony Davis had 14 points and 16 rebounds and rookie Kenrich Williams had 10 points and 13 rebounds.

WIZARDS 134, BULLS 125

Jabari Parker and Bobby Portis made a triumphant return to Chicago, helping Washington win its second straight game. The meeting was the first since Washington acquired Parker and Portis from Chicago at the trade deadline for Otto Porter Jr. All three played significant roles when their two new clubs won the front end of back-to-backs on Friday, with the Wizards beating Cleveland at home, while the Bulls surprised Brooklyn on the road. Parker had 20 points, and Portis had a game-high 12 rebounds in Saturday's win, during



HOUSTON: James Harden #13 of the Houston Rockets handles the ball against Russell Westbrook #0 of the Oklahoma City Thunder on Saturday at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. — AFP

which the Wizards built a 15-point lead in the first half and kept the Bulls at arm's length the rest of the way. Porter, who made a pair of 3-pointers, finished with 17 points for Chicago.

RAPTORS 104, KNICKS 99

Kyle Lowry scored a game-high 22 points and hit a 3-pointer with 7:03 remaining that gave Toronto the lead for good in fending off host New York. Serge Ibaka registered a double-double (15 points and 13 rebounds) for the Raptors, who have won four consecutive games. Marc Gasol, playing his first game for the Raptors since he was acquired from the Memphis Grizzlies on Thursday, scored seven points and pulled down six rebounds in 19 minutes as a reserve. Kevin

Knox scored 20 points, and DeAndre Jordan posted a double-double with 10 points and 18 rebounds for the Knicks, who tied a franchise record by losing their 16th straight game.

JAZZ 125, SPURS 105

Donovan Mitchell scored 23 points and Rudy Gobert added 21 points and 13 rebounds to lead host Utah to its second straight win while sending San Antonio to its fourth straight loss in Salt Lake City, Utah. Royce O'Neale matched his season-high with 17 points off the bench as the Jazz had six players score in double figures. DeMar DeRozan scored 23 points and LaMarcus Aldridge added 15 to lead the Spurs. — Reuters

Reprieved Stokes and Buttler lead England recovery

GROS-ISLET: Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes featured in England's best partnership of a deeply disappointing series as they lifted their team to 231 for four at stumps on the opening day of the third and final Test against the West Indies on Saturday.

Put in to bat by West Indies stand-in captain Kraigg Brathwaite, and seeking to regain some lost prestige after already surrendering the series and the Wisden Trophy, the fifth-wicket pair played with increasing fluency through an extended final session in putting on 124 runs to the close of play at the Darren Sammy Stadium.

It was England's first century partnership of the series with Buttler getting to 67 and Stokes reaching 62 at the close. Both made the most of lucky escapes. Buttler's first scoring shot was an edge off Shannon Gabriel to which a leaping Shimron Hetmyer at second slip could only get his fingertips.

Stokes was caught and bowled on 52 by Alzarri Joseph and was already in the England dressing room when he got the call to return to the middle as the lanky fast bowler had delivered a no-ball.

"We've been disappointed with the

way we've played," said Stokes at the end of the day in reflecting on defeats by 381 runs and ten wickets in the first two Tests. "This is still a challenging wicket so to come off (the field) four wickets down, we're pleased with that."

England's contented mood at the end of the day was in sharp contrast to the situation just three hours earlier as Joe Root's personal tale of batting woe on this disastrous Caribbean campaign continued.

He fell to Joseph for the third consecutive innings just before the tea interval, wafting at an innocuous delivery from Joseph to give a simple catch to wicket-keeper Shane Dowrich. Root's painstaking innings of 15 off 54 deliveries leaves him with a tally of just 54 runs from five innings, typifying England's desperate struggles with the bat from their first innings of the series when they were routed at Kensington Oval for just 77 on the way to a 381-run mauling.

Gabriel, the fastest of the West Indies bowlers, was the other wicket-taker in the afternoon session, removing Joe Denly with an lbw decision that again highlighted the technical deficiencies of many of England's top-order batsmen.

Yet while he lacks the pace of Gabriel, Joseph and Kumar Roach, Keemo Paul was the star with the ball for the hosts on day one, making an immediate impact with a wicket with the first ball he bowled in the morning.

Drafted into the final eleven as replacement for regular skipper Jason Holder, Paul ended Keaton Jennings' tortuous occupation of the crease when the opening batsman fell for the third time in



GROS ISLET: Ben Stokes (L) of England and Roston Chase (R) of West Indies collide during day 1 of the 3rd and final Test between West Indies and England at Darren Sammy Cricket Ground, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia. — AFP

three innings in the series to catches in the slip cordon.

Dropped earlier by Roston Chase at third slip off Roach, Jennings failed to make the most of the reprieve as the left-hander drove loosely at the seam bowling all-rounder's opening delivery midway through the session to depart for eight off 43 balls via a Darren Bravo catch at first slip.

Paul then removed the other opener, Rory Burns, leg-before for 29 early into the afternoon session. Jennings was

dropped from the England eleven after failing in both innings of the first Test in Barbados, which allowed Denly to make his Test debut in Antigua.

He is one of two changes to the tourists' eleven as left-handed all-rounder Sam Curran was omitted in preference for fast bowler Mark Wood. West Indies' only change to the victorious team from the first two matches was forced by the International Cricket Council's decision to ban Holder for a slow over rate. —AFP

Australia can win World Cup with Smith and Warner: Ponting

MELBOURNE: Australia can successfully defend its World Cup title in England this year with Steve Smith and David Warner back in the fray, newly-appointed assistant coach Ricky Ponting said yesterday.

His upbeat assessment comes despite the misfiring team losing its two most recent ODI series at home, to India and South Africa. "Absolutely, I actually do," said Ponting when asked in Melbourne if Australia could win the World Cup.

"India and England are probably the two standout teams right now but if you add Warner and Smith back into that lineup, I think that team looks as strong as any. "Conditions in England will suit our style of play," added Ponting, who was appointed on Friday as assistant to coach Justin Langer for the World Cup, focusing on the batting group.

The former national captain is hugely experienced in the one-day game, playing at five World Cups and winning at three. "I think I have a pretty good grasp on what it takes for tournaments like that," he said. "Hopefully I can have an impact right from the start. The feedback from the boys has been positive."

Ponting, a close ally of Langer, will start after Australia's upcoming one-day tours against India and Pakistan. Smith and Warner are available for selection again from March 29, when their one-year bans for ball-tampering expire. Cameron Bancroft, who was suspended for nine months, is already back playing.

"Once we get Warner and Smith and Bancroft back into the fray, and looking ahead to the World Cup, I don't think they'll be too many better teams on paper. "You've got a lot of experience as well as a fair bit of youth going into that tournament," he added.

"Any team I've been a part of, we've always had a really good mix of youth and experience and this current group will certainly have that going into the World Cup." Ponting, who played 375 one-dayers and 168 Tests, previously worked as an assistant with Australia's Twenty20 side in 2017 and 2018.

He also accompanied Langer during his first tour to England after taking over as head coach from Darren Lehmann last April following the tampering scandal in South Africa. Ponting suggested he could be available for the Twenty20 World Cup next year, although his commentating duties during the Australian summer made it hard for him to commit to Test cricket. —AFP

US WCup defender, veteran coach Clavijo dead

CHICAGO: Fernando Clavijo, a US 1994 World Cup defender who became a top coach, has died at age 63 after a battle with cancer, his family announced Saturday.

Uruguayan-born Clavijo died Friday at his home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, after a five-year fight with multiple myeloma, cancer of plasma cells (white blood cells). A career that spanned more than 45 years as a player, coach and technical director led to Clavijo being inducted into the US Soccer Hall of Fame in 2005.

"All of us in the US Soccer family are deeply saddened by the passing of Fernando Clavijo, one of the pioneers of soccer in the United States," said US Soccer Federation president Carlos Cordeiro.

"As a player, a coach, a mentor and a friend, Fernando impacted the lives of generations of people involved in the sport to which he dedicated his life.

Our thoughts today are with his family and friends as we reflect on his great legacy."

No details regarding funeral and memorial services were announced. "It is with deep sadness that we share the news of Fernando Clavijo's passing on February 8 after a courageous battle with cancer," the Clavijo family said in a statement.

"The support and encouragement he received from friends and the entire soccer community throughout his fight will always be appreciated. "At this time the Clavijo family requests privacy as we mourn the loss of a great man."

Clavijo, who played indoor soccer from 1981 through 1992, had 61 caps for the United States from 1990 through 1994. He served as coach of Major League Soccer's New England Revolution from 2000-2002 and the Colorado Rapids from 2005-2008, serving as coach for the Haiti national team in between.

Since 2012, he served as technical director for MLS side FC Dallas, stepping down last September to focus on health issues. "Major League Soccer deeply mourns the passing of Fernando Clavijo, a gifted player, coach and sporting director," MLS commissioner Don Garber said.

"Fernando was an important leader with three MLS clubs and he played a key role in the league's



Fernando Clavijo

player development strategy. More importantly, he was a joy to everyone who knew him and inspired countless young players.

"Fernando fought cancer with strength, courage and grace, and we are all heartbroken by the news of his passing." — AFP