

25 Chen defends title with record-setting skate, Japan's Hanyu takes second

26 S Africa seal Sri Lanka series despite Isuru Udana heroics

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Harden scores 61 as Rockets stop Spurs

Nets eliminate Lakers from postseason contention



HOUSTON: Gerald Green #14 of the Houston Rockets shoots the ball during the game against the San Antonio Spurs on Friday at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. — AFP

HOUSTON: James Harden matched his career high with 61 points, delivering early and late to bail out the host Houston Rockets in their 111-105 win over the San Antonio Spurs on Friday. Harden, who also scored 61 points on Jan. 23 at Madison Square Garden against the New York Knicks, finished 19 of 34 from the floor while drilling 9 of 13 from 3-point range. After the Rockets coughed up a 19-point, third-quarter lead and fell into a 100-94 hole late in the fourth, Harden responded with three successive 3-pointers and a pair of drives to the basket to secure the victory, the Rockets' third consecutive win over the Spurs. Bryn Forbes led five Spurs in double figures with 20 points while Derrick White added 18 with eight rebounds. DeMar DeRozan posted 16 points, eight rebounds and eight assists while LaMarcus Aldridge paired 10 points with five blocks for San Antonio, which captured its first lead at 85-84 on a Patty Mills reverse layup with 10:48 to play.

NETS 111, LAKERS 106

Joe Harris scored 26 points, and visiting Brooklyn made enough plays down the stretch to earn the victory and eliminate Los Angeles from postseason contention. The Nets followed up their historic comeback win in Sacramento and improved to 2-3 on a season-high, seven-game road trip that continues tomorrow in Portland. D'Angelo Russell had 21 points and 13 rebounds for Brooklyn. JaVale McGee led Los Angeles with career highs of 33 points and 20 rebounds. The Lakers lost their fifth straight, dropped to 2-12 in their last 14 games and will miss the playoffs for the sixth straight season. The loss officially ensured that LeBron James will miss the postseason for the first time since his second season with the Cleveland Cavaliers in 2004-05. James had 25 points, 14 assists and nine rebounds.

THUNDER 116, RAPTORS 109

Russell Westbrook had his 28th triple-

double of the season as he scored 18 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and added 13 assists, and visiting Oklahoma City came back to defeat Toronto and end a four-game losing streak. Paul George added 28 points, and Dennis Schroder had 26 points for the Thunder, who lost to the Raptors in overtime on Wednesday and overcame a 13-point deficit on Friday. Kawhi Leonard scored 37 points for Toronto. Pascal Siakam added 25 points while Danny Green had 19 points.

NUGGETS 111, KNICKS 93

Nikola Jokic scored 21 points and pulled down 17 rebounds night for surging Denver, which moved back into a tie for the top seed in the Western Conference by cruising past host New York. With their sixth straight win, the Nuggets (49-22) tied the idle Golden State Warriors for the best record in the West. Denver has never earned the top seed in the West and has yet to make an appearance in the NBA Finals. Jamal Murray scored 18 points for the Nuggets, who also received

14 points from Gary Harris.

BUCKS 116, HEAT 87

Giannis Antetokounmpo posted 27 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to lead host Milwaukee over Miami. The Bucks' Kris Middleton contributed 18 points, a game-high 10 assists and eight rebounds. The Heat, who were led by Hassan Whiteside's 14 points, nine rebounds and a game-high three blocks, had closed their deficit to 63-58 early in the third quarter before falling apart. Their three-game winning streak ended. The Bucks have the best record in the NBA at 54-19. Their 29-6 home record is the best in the Eastern Conference.

CLIPPERS 110, CAVALIERS 108

Danilo Gallinari scored 27 points, and Los Angeles hung on to beat host Cleveland. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 16 points, adding five assists and two steals as the Clippers earned their ninth win in 10 games. Lou Williams scored 15 and had six assists off the

bench for Los Angeles. Montrezl Harrel scored 14 and had a crucial offensive board late in the game to stave off the Cavaliers. Kevin Love led Cleveland with 22 points and had eight rebounds. The Cavaliers had their four-game home winning streak snapped.

MAGIC 123, GRIZZLIES 119 (OT)

Evan Fournier gave Orlando its first lead of the game with 4:05 to go in overtime, then gave the Magic the upper hand for good with another hoop with 1:14 remaining, giving the Eastern Conference postseason hopefuls a much needed victory over visiting Memphis. The come-from-behind win allowed the Magic to stay within arm's length of the seventh and eighth playoff positions in the East, spots currently held by Brooklyn and Miami. Fournier finished with 27 points, eight rebounds and six assists while teammate Terrence Ross led all scorers with 31 points. Memphis lost despite a 23-point, 24-rebound performance by Jonas Valanciunas. — Reuters

Djokovic, Osaka win Miami openers as Thiem tumbles

MIAMI: Novak Djokovic put his Indian Wells disappointment behind him on Friday at the ATP and WTA Miami Open with a ruthless 7-6 (7/2) 6-2 destruction of Australian Bernard Tomic to move into the third round. The Serbian world number one endured a meek exit at the hands of German Philipp Kohlschreiber in the California desert but arrived desperate to land what would be a record seventh title in South Florida.

Tomic, the current world No. 81, gave the 31-year-old a few problems yet the Australian struggles to consistently challenge the best players and this was evident once again as Djokovic eased through the gears at Hard Rock Stadium with just one hour and 13 minutes on the clock. "In Indian Wells I wasn't feeling my best," conceded Djokovic who won 81% of points on his first serve and hit 11 aces.

"Everyone has nerves coming onto center court regardless of how much experience you have and what your ranking is. You care about it and if you are nervous that means you care. "I commonly feel like that. This was my first time playing at this new stadium, it felt like being indoors a little bit. It's unique.

"Now hopefully," he added, "I can build some momentum." On a day that saw Djokovic, top-ranked woman Naomi Osaka and 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams advance, the shock of the day was the departure of Indian Wells Masters winner Dominic Thiem, who was beaten 6-4, 6-4 by highly rated Polish 22-year-old Hubert Hurkacz. Elsewhere, there was disappointment for Kei Nishikori. The fifth seed lost to Serbian Dusan Lajovic 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 but reigning champion John Isner outlasted Italian qualifier Lorenzo Sonego 7-6 (7/2), 7-6, (9/7).

Japanese star Osaka had to keep her emotions in check as she opened her campaign by outlasting Yanina Wickmayer 6-0, 6-7 (3/7), 6-1. Since winning her second consecutive Grand Slam title in January at the Australian Open, Osaka has failed to go deep in Dubai or Indian Wells.

But she appeared in solid form against 141st-ranked Wickmayer, despite losing her way in the middle of an entertaining match at Hard Rock Stadium. The 21 year-old was forced to dig deep

after the Belgian, who reached the Miami Open last eight in 2010, forced a third set as Osaka's game badly dipped. "In the second set, I got really emotional, so in the third, I just tried to shut off my feelings," Osaka said. "I started thinking about winning and not the things I could do in order to win. I had a dip and she started playing really well. "I just had to breathe and regroup," she said. "I find myself doing it often when I am in emotional situations, it's like an energy saver."

Next up in the third round is Taiwan's Hsieh Su-Wei, who defeated American Alison Riske 6-2, 7-5. The pair had a rollercoaster clash in the Australian Open at the start of 2019 with Hsieh a set and 4-1 up in Melbourne only to lose a dramatic third-round encounter.

Serena Williams survived a second-set lull to beat Sweden's Rebecca Peterson 6-3, 1-6, 6-1, and elder sister Venus also advanced with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 win over Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro. There will be a repeat of last week's WTA final in Indian Wells between Bianca Andreescu and Angelique Kerber. Canadian 18-year-old Andreescu, who brilliantly won her maiden WTA title in California, beat American Sofia Kenin 6-3, 6-3 to book a third-round meeting with three-time Grand Slam winner Kerber, who saw off Russia's Karolina Muchova 3-6 6-3 6-3. — AFP



MIAMI GARDENS: Naomi Osaka of Japan plays Yanina Wickmayer during the Miami Open Presented by Itaú at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP