

25 Rockies outlast Red Sox in 11 innings despite 24 Ks



26 Dumoulin toughs out Giro d'Italia despite knee injury



27 Aston Villa beat West Brom on penalties to reach playoff final



OAKLAND: Damian Lillard #0 of the Portland Trail Blazers shoots the ball during the second half against the Golden State Warriors in game one of the NBA Western Conference Finals at ORACLE Arena in Oakland. — AFP

Curry powers Warriors over Blazers

Warriors shrugged off absence of injured superstar Kevin Durant

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry drained nine three-pointers on the way to 36 points Tuesday to propel the Golden State Warriors to a 116-94 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers in game one of the NBA Western Conference finals.

Curry added seven assists and six rebounds as the Warriors led all the way over a Trail Blazers team coming off a game-seven victory over Denver in the second round on Sunday.

Klay Thompson added 26 points and provided an imposing defensive presence as the Warriors shrugged off the absence of injured superstar Kevin Durant. Draymond Green added 12 points, 10 rebounds, five assists, two steals and three blocked shots for the two-time defending NBA champions, who are playing in their fifth straight Western Conference final. Curry said he just took advantage of what a free-flowing Warriors offense gave him. It was a nice flow," Curry said. "It just puts so much pressure on the defense.

"You can't key it on one guy and even if you try to somebody else is going to be open." The Trail Blazers connected on only 36.1 percent of their shots from the field, making just seven of 28 three-point attempts as the Warriors drained 17 from beyond the arc.

Portland star Damian Lillard hit just four of 12 shots to score 19 points with six assists, four rebounds and seven turnovers. CJ McCollum, who starred as Lillard struggled in game seven against the Nuggets, scored 17 points on seven-of-19 shooting.

"The schedule favored us," acknowledged Golden State coach Steve Kerr, whose Warriors polished off the Houston Rockets on Friday. "I thought we took advantage of the situation and got off to a good start."

The Warriors pushed their lead to 10 in the second quarter before Portland put together a run that trimmed the deficit to 48-45.

Curry answered with a pair of late three-pointers—abetted by a Lillard turnover—to send the Warriors to

the locker-room leading 54-45.

The Trail Blazers made another push in the third period, cutting a 17-point deficit to six. Rodney Hood and Seth Curry both had three-pointers in the Blazers' 11-4 scoring run to end the quarter, but those were the only points of the night for the younger Curry brother—a Portland reserve—as the game marked the first time siblings have met in an NBA conference final.

The Warriors reserves opened strong in the fourth quarter to rebuild the cushion in a stretch that Kerr called key. "Great job by our bench," Kerr said. "If we can buy some time for our starters to rest and even extend the lead, that's a huge deal for us."

TURNOVERS COST BLAZERS

Despite their shooting woes, the Trail Blazers managed to stay in touch much of the night thanks to making 27 of 31 free throws and out-rebounding the Warriors 47-42.

But their 21 turnovers led to 31 Warriors points—a gift no team can afford to give Golden State. "You can't allow that," said Lillard, who admitted it was hard to come back from the emotional high of beating the Nuggets in Denver.

"I thought our minds were right. We came into the game ready," he said. "But they're a team that can go on runs, they make shots and the game can get away."

In particular, Lillard said, the Blazers need to make things more difficult for Curry, who had open look after open look.

"That was poor execution defensively on our part," Lillard said. "Having our bigs back that far, we've got to bring our guys up and run them off the line."

The Warriors will try to double their advantage in the best-of-seven series when they host game two on Thursday. They are again expected to be without two-time NBA Finals MVP Durant, who has a right calf strain. — AFP

Svitolina, Zverev shocked in Rome as Serena withdraws from Italian Open

ROME: Two-time women's holder Elina Svitolina crashed out of the WTA and ATP Italian Open on Tuesday along with Germany's Alexander Zverev as Serena Williams's return to the courts was short lived with her knee injury flaring up to force the American star out of the final warm-up before the French Open in two weeks time.

Svitolina—who had a first round bye as fifth seed—held a match point at 5-2 in the third set before slumping 6-4, 1-6, 7-5 to Belarus Victoria Azarenka in a 2hr 14min battle at the Foro Italico which was twice interrupted because of rain.

Serena earlier announced she was withdrawing having just returned after two months out injured, before she was due to play her older sister Venus for the first

time in 21 years in Rome. The 37-year-old had eased past Sweden's Rebecca Peterson in her first round match on Monday, but a day later could not continue "due to pain in my left knee".

"I'll be concentrating on rehab and look forward to seeing you all at the French Open and next year in Rome," Serena said in a statement. Her withdrawal sends Venus, the 1999 winner, through to a third round meeting with either Britain's Johanna Konta or US seventh seed Sloane Stephens.

There are now doubts whether Serena can target a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title in Paris, having played just nine matches this year, and one on clay. Her last Grand Slam singles title was won at the Australian Open in 2017, where she was pregnant, breaking a tie with Steffi Graf for the most, and she is just one short of Margaret Court.

The three-time French Open winner revealed getting back to fitness has been tougher than she had expected. "I haven't been able to train or practice a lot, I was out much longer than I expected," she explained.

"I feel like I'm taking it one day at a time." Nevertheless, last year she arrived at Roland Garros without any clay-court warm-up and still reached the last 16 before retiring before her match against Maria Sharapova, also because of injury.



ROME: Ukraine's Elina Svitolina plays a backhand return against Belarus' Victoria Azarenka during their WTA Masters tournament tennis match in Rome at the Foro Italico. — FP

Svitolina and Azarenka battled late into the night at the Foro Italico before former two-time Australian Open winner Azarenka won through. Svitolina came back after the rain break to drop the second set but rolled off the first three games in the third, before being broken

when serving for the match at 5-2 in the third set.

Azarenka saved match point and took the next game for love, rolling off five in a row to set up a meeting former French Open winner Garbine Muguruza or Danielle Collins for a place in the third round.

Collins advanced past former world number one Caroline Wozniacki who retired with a lower leg injury, after losing the first set 7-6 (7/5). Czech fourth seed Karolína Plisková eased through to the third round along with Australian Ashleigh Barty, the eighth seed.

In the men's competition, world number five Zverev, the 2017 winner and runner-up to Novak Djokovic last year in Rome, extended his terrible clay-court run, falling 7-5, 7-5 to Italian wild card Matteo Berrettini in the second round.

"The match that I played was horrendous," said Zverev, who has won just four matches on clay this season, including a run to the quarter-final of the Madrid Open where he was the defending champion.

"I've lost my voice screaming, I'm overjoyed. This is a victory that charges me," said 33rd-ranked Berrettini. Belgian David Goffin rallied from a set down to beat former French Open champion Stan Wawrinka 4-6, 6-0, 6-2 to set up a meeting with Argentine seventh seed Juan Martin Del Potro for a place in the third round. — AFP