Durant propels Nets past Nuggets, Embiid leads 76ers to overtime win

Rockets' Harden after loss to Lakers: Situation can't be fixed

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant poured in 34 points and handed out 13 assists as the Brooklyn Nets rallied from an 18-point deficit to beat the Denver Nuggets 122-116 in the NBA on Tuesday. Durant added nine rebounds and Bruce Brown chipped in 16 points in a clutch performance in place of absent Nets star Kyrie Irving.

Brown's jump shot, off a feed from Durant, knotted the score at 113-113 with 2:16 to play. He followed with a floater that put the Nets ahead for good. Durant scored the Nets' next six points as Brooklyn put it away, denying the Nuggets a sweep on their three-game road trip.

Nikola Jokic had 23 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds for Denver, but they were outscored by the Nets 68-46 in the second half. It was a satisfying end to the day for Brooklyn, who were without Irving for a fourth straight game for what the team has called personal reasons.

His return date remains unknown, with the team and NBA reviewing video that surfaced on social media that appeared to show the star playmaker at a family gathering without a mask — in violation of league protocols aimed at containing coronavirus.

Games postponed

It's an especially sensitive topic as the league postponed two more games on because teams had too many players out due to coronavirus protocols. That brought the total to six postponements heading into the fourth week of the season.

With a welter of players sidelined either by positive or inconclusive COVID tests or because of risk of exposure, the league and players' union agreed Tuesday to stricter measures on masks, team meetings and even non-basketball activities.

In Philadelphia, the Miami Heat fielded the minimum eight players — with eight absent due to health and safety protocols — in a 137-134 overtime loss to the 76ers. Sixers center Joel Embiid scored 45 points with 16 rebounds and five steals.

Embiid's jump shot with 4.3 seconds remaining in regulation tied it up at 120-120 and he scored the 76ers first nine points in overtime. Danny Green drained a career-high nine three-pointers on the way to 29 points for the 76ers, bouncing back from an 0-for-9 shooting performance in a loss to Atlanta on Monday.

Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said he hoped the new guidelines would keep the number of Covid cases in the NBA at a minimum and the season on track. "All I can do is hope," Rivers said. "Listen, we are not in a bubble ... we are in cities. So we just have to do our best, everyone."

No-look LeBron

In Houston, LeBron James scored 26 points — and electrified his own Los Angeles Lakers bench with a nothing-but-net three-pointer — in the defending champions' 117-100 thumping of the Rockets. Anthony Davis scored 19 points and pulled down 10 rebounds as the Lakers notched their second big win over the Rockets in three days — after a 120-102 triumph on Sunday. The Lakers held the Rockets — led by scoring champion James Harden — to just 14 points in the first quarter as they grabbed a 21-point lead. Harden finished with 16 points on five-of-16 shooting.

James's 22 points in the first half included a three-pointer from the corner right in front of the Lakers' bench. The ball had barely left his hands when he turned to face his teammates, who surged up from their seats as it dropped through the net. James said he'd spun around to make eye contact with guard Dennis Schroder, who'd called out "bet you won't make it" before he took the shot. "You've got to look them in the eye" to seal a bet, James said. "I turned around and looked him in the eye and said, 'Bet.'"

James's no-look basket drew swift comparisons to Golden State star Stephen Curry, who delivered few fireworks for the Warriors in a 104-95 home loss to the Indiana Pacers. Myles Turner scored 22 points to lead five Pacers players in double figures. Andrew Wiggins led the Warriors with 22 points and Curry added 20, but Indiana closed the game on a 16-5 scoring run to claim the victory.

Can't be fixed

Houston star Harden's frustration with the Rockets boiled over after the team's second blowout loss to the Lakers in three days. Harden, the NBA's top scorer the past three seasons, finished with 16 points on five-of-16 shooting in the 117-100 home loss, in which the Lakers never trailed and led by as many as 30 points. "I love this city," Harden said. "I literally have done everything that I can. I mean, this situation is crazy. It's something that I don't think can be fixed." The season opened last month with Harden the center of trade-demand reports. The Rockets have reportedly discussed possible trades with various teams, but they expect a big return for their star and no deal is yet in the offing.

Guard John Wall, who arrived in Houston this season in the trade that sent Russell Westbrook to the Washington Wizards, admitted that team chemistry was lacking. "When you have certain guys that don't want to buy in, it's hard," said Wall, who scored 10 points and handed out five assists on Tuesday.

Specifically, Wall said when asked, forging a relationship with Harden has been difficult. "It's been a little rocky, not going to lie about that," Wall said. "I don't think it's been the best it could be. That's all I can say." At 3-6, the Rockets are second from bottom in the Western Conference. After back-to-back defeats they take on the Spurs in San Antonio today. — AFP

NEW YORK: Kevin Durant #7 of the Brooklyn Nets dunks as Nikola Jokic #15, Paul Millsap #4, and PJ Dozier of the Denver Nuggets look on during the first half at Barclays Center on January 12, 2021 in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP