

SPORTS

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AP Photo/Tony Dejak

Cleveland Cavaliers' Kyrie Irving (2) passes over Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry (30) in the first half of an NBA basketball game Sunday in Cleveland.

Irving clutch against Warriors again as Cavs win 109-108

Another rally, another win

By **TOM WITHERS**
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — With another clutch shot, Kyrie Irving took the Warriors on a trip down memory lane.

Irving dropped a short, turnaround jumper over Klay Thompson with 3.4 seconds left as the Cleveland Cavaliers rallied just the way they did in June's NBA Finals to defeat Golden State 109-108 on Sunday in a marquee Christmas matchup that more than lived up to the hype.

Down by 14 early in the fourth quarter, the Cavs chipped away and then put the ball in the hands of Irving, whose step-back 3-pointer over Stephen Curry on June 19 helped seal Game 7 and gave Cleveland its first major pro sports championship since 1964.

This time, Irving went deep in the lane before spinning and making his shot over Thompson, one of the league's best defenders.

"The kid is special," LeBron James said of his teammate. "It was never in doubt."

Golden State had one last chance but Kevin Durant, who led all scorers with 36 points in his first game in the league's hottest rivalry, lost his balance coming off a screen and couldn't get off a shot as time expired.

Durant felt he was fouled by Richard Jefferson. "I was trying to make a move," he said. "I didn't fall on my own."

James scored 31 points with a season-high 13 rebounds, Irving added 25 points and Kevin Love 20 for the Cavs, who were down 3-1 in the Finals before storming back to stun a Warriors team that won 73 games during the regular season, but came up one victory short of winning their second straight title.

Thompson added 24, Draymond Green 16 and Curry 15 — on 4 of 11 shooting — for the Warriors, who had their winning streak stopped at seven and fell to 9-1 against Eastern Conference teams.

The biggest present under the tree for basketball fans this holiday was filled with drama, intensity and more than a few moments that sparked reminders of last season's brilliant Finals.

"It lived up to what everyone wanted it to," James said.

Irving drained a 3 from the wing that looked a lot like the one he made on June 19, but his bucket over Thompson had a higher degree of difficulty.

"That's a really hard shot," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I thought Klay played tremendous defense. You don't do anything different."

The Warriors set up a game-winning chance for Durant, but he stumbled with pressure applied by Jefferson and fell to the floor and watched helplessly as Cleveland's fans roared and Cavs coach Tyrone Lue clapped and screamed.

"We all think we're fouled on every play in every single game," Jefferson said. "That's why I say I know the referees have a very hard job. I switched to his body. He looked like he lost his balance. He was trying to regain his balance and as soon as I saw him start to stumble, I ran off."

The teams will meet again Jan. 16 and then not again unless they make it back to the Finals — a "threequel" that would be the first in league history.

To remind their guests of what happened in June, the Cavs left a door propped open just down the hallway from Golden State's locker room where a large photo of James' game-changing, career-defining block of Andre Iguodala in Game 7 was on display.

The picture had been doctored with a Cavs championship ring taped over James' left index finger.

If there was any doubt that this game meant more than the other 81 to both squads and fan bases, Green took care of that in the opening minutes.

After being called for his second personal foul, Green stormed off the floor, cursing with every step on his way to the bench. Green, whose suspension from Game 5 of the Finals helped swing the series to Cleveland, was slapped with a technical and several of his teammates came over to calm him down before things got worse.

GRUMPY OLD MAN

Jefferson still has some hops at 36. His dunk over Thompson in the fourth quarter sparked a 14-3 run by the Cavs. Following the play, Jefferson, who missed his first eight shots, was called for a technical for winking at Durant.

"I was a little bit surprised by it, but I think they were trying to rein it in," said Jefferson, who was ejected from a game earlier this week.

TIP-INS

Warriors: Golden State fell to 11-15 on Christmas Day, 3-11 on the road. ... Curry's shooting a career-low 40 percent on 3-pointers, but Kerr is confident he'll find his touch. "The great thing about Steph is he doesn't worry about it too much," Kerr said. "He's got the confidence of M.J. (Michael Jordan). Very few players I've ever seen can miss 10 shots in a row and then make the next one like it's nothing. Steph's done it his whole career."

Playoff picture clearer after Steelers comeback

Pittsburgh scores with seconds left

Associated Press

Pittsburgh won the AFC North in spectacular fashion Sunday, scoring the winning touchdown with 9 seconds remaining to beat archrival Baltimore 31-27.

Antonio Brown reached over the goal line after taking in a short pass from Ben Roethlisberger for the 4-yard score. Brown was standing up inside the 1, but somehow extended the ball — barely — into the end zone.

The Steelers (10-5) scored 21 points in the fourth quarter. They eliminated the Ravens (8-7) from contention.

Defending Super Bowl champion Denver was knocked out, too, with its loss at Kansas City. The Broncos have lost three in a row and five of seven.

The entire AFC playoff field is set: New England, Oakland, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Houston and Miami.

The Steelers will be the No. 3 seed in the AFC and host the No. 6 seed during wild-card weekend on either Jan. 7 or 8.

Kansas City secured a playoff spot when the Ravens lost, and can still win the AFC West.

Earlier this weekend, Atlanta beat Carolina 33-16, then the Falcons clinched the NFC South title when New Orleans beat Tampa Bay 31-24. The Bucs' loss also allowed the New York Giants, losers to Philadelphia on Thursday night, to clinch a wild-card spot. Atlanta now has a chance in its regular-season finale to clinch a first-round bye after Seattle lost 34-31 to Arizona.

Houston beat Cincinnati on Saturday night to clinch its second straight AFC South title after Tennessee's 38-17 loss to Jacksonville. The Texans also will host a wild-card game.

Green Bay won its fifth straight to move closer to the NFC North title, eliminating Minnesota with a 38-25 victory. The Packers moved into the lead for a wild-card berth, and now the Packers must wait to face Detroit for the division crown on Jan. 1.

Miami beat Buffalo 34-31 in overtime to move closer to its first playoff berth since 2008. The Dolphins clinched an AFC wild-card berth Sunday night when Denver lost to Kansas City 33-10.

The regular season ends Jan. 1. Here's a closer look at the teams and scenarios:

AFC EAST

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS (13-2)

Remaining schedule: at Miami on Jan. 1.

Division record: 4-1. Conference record: 10-1.

Beat the Dolphins and clinch home-field advantage throughout.

MIAMI DOLPHINS (10-5)

Remaining schedule: vs. New England on Jan. 1.

Division record: 4-1. Conference record: 7-4.

They got the win they had to have in Buffalo and then the Chiefs' win that gave them a wild-card spot.

Eliminated: NEW YORK JETS (4-11), BUFFALO BILLS (7-8).

AFC NORTH

PITTSBURGH STEELERS (10-5)

Remaining schedule: vs. Cleveland on Jan. 1.

Division record: 4-1. Conference record: 8-3.

By beating Baltimore, the Steelers won the division and will play in a wild-card game.

Eliminated: BALTIMORE RAVENS (8-7), CINCINNATI BENGALS (5-8-1), CLEVELAND BROWNS (1-14).

AFC SOUTH

HOUSTON TEXANS (9-6)

Remaining schedule: at Tennessee on Jan. 1.

Division record: 5-0. Conference record: 7-4.

Tom Savage won his first career start at quarterback to help Houston clinch the division. They will play in a wild-card game.

Eliminated: TENNESSEE TITANS (8-7), JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS (3-12), INDIANAPOLIS COLTS (7-8).

AFC WEST

OAKLAND RAIDERS (12-3)

Remaining schedule: at Denver on Jan. 1.

Division record: 3-2. Conference record: 9-2.

Raiders must finish one game ahead of the Chiefs.

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (11-4)

Remaining schedule: at San Diego on Jan. 1.

Division record: 5-0. Conference record: 8-3.

Already guaranteed a wild card, a series sweep of Oakland gives the Chiefs a tiebreaker for the division, but they no longer control the AFC West race.

Eliminated: DENVER BRONCOS (8-7), SAN DIEGO CHARGERS (5-10).

NFC EAST

DALLAS COWBOYS (12-2)

Remaining schedule: vs. Detroit on Monday night, at Philadelphia on Jan. 1.

Division record: 3-2. Conference record: 8-2.

The Cowboys have a Texas-sized home-field advantage this postseason.

NEW YORK GIANTS (10-5)

Remaining schedule: at Washington on Jan. 1.

Division record: 3-2. Conference record: 7-4.

The Giants got the help they needed without having to wait for Week 17.

WASHINGTON REDSKINS (8-6-1)

Remaining schedule: vs. New York Giants on Jan. 1.

Division record: 3-2. Conference record: 6-5.

Not eliminated, but still game back of Green Bay for second wild-card berth.

Eliminated: PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (6-9).

NFC NORTH

DETROIT LIONS (9-5)

Remaining schedule: at Dallas on Monday night, vs. Green Bay on Jan. 1.

Division record: 2-2. Conference record: 7-3.

The Lions can win the division with a victory at Dallas and vs. Green Bay. They also are in the running for a wild card.

GREEN BAY PACKERS (9-6)

Remaining schedule: at Detroit on Jan. 1.

Division record: 4-1. Conference record: 7-4.

The Packers now sit in the second wild-card spot, but one more win makes them champions of the North.

Eliminated: CHICAGO BEARS (3-12), MINNESOTA VIKINGS (7-8).

NFC SOUTH

ATLANTA FALCONS (10-5)

Remaining schedule: vs. New Orleans on Jan. 1.

Division record: 4-1. Conference record: 8-3.

The Falcons not only have a division title but will have a chance at a first-round bye with a win against the Saints.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS (8-7)

Remaining schedule: vs. Carolina on Jan. 1.

Division record: 3-2. Conference record: 6-5.

The Bucs are on the outside looking in and need lots of help.

Eliminated: NEW ORLEANS SAINTS (7-8), CAROLINA PANTHERS (6-9).

NFC WEST

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS (9-5-1)

Remaining schedule: at San Francisco on Jan. 1.

Division record: 2-2-1. Conference record: 5-5-1.

First-round bye might be bye-bye for the Seahawks.

Eliminated: ARIZONA CARDINALS (6-8-1), LOS ANGELES RAMS (4-11), SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS (2-13).

SCOREBOARD

BASKETBALL

Vince Dulcich Tournament
 Tuesday's Schedule
 Girls

11 a.m.: Rainier vs. Estacada
 12:45: Sandy vs. North Marion

4:30: Hockinson vs. Philomath
 6:00: Redmond vs. Astoria

Boys

2:30: Rainier vs. Hockinson
 4:15: Molalla vs. Heritage
 7:45: Astoria vs. The Dalles