

Bucks seeking 2-0 lead over Raptors in East finals

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

When the season started, everyone knew the Eastern Conference would have a new king.

LeBron James left Cleveland, having taken his talents to Los Angeles.

And even Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo wasn't sure who would take his place.

"I didn't know we were going to be in the Eastern Conference finals or not," Antetokounmpo said. "I just know that he's a top player that we always had problems against him and the Cavs. Now he's not playing for the Cavs, so it's going to be a little bit easier. I didn't see it as an opening. But when you look back and see how everything went, it's definitely an opening not having LeBron in the East."

The Bucks are three wins away from taking full advantage of that opening, and becoming the team that replaces James after his eight consecutive seasons going to the NBA Finals as a representative of the Eastern Conference. Game 2 of the East final is Friday night in Milwaukee, where the Bucks will aim to take a 2-0 series lead over the Toronto Raptors.

"We're happy," Antetokounmpo said. "But the job is



Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo dunks during the first half of Game 1 of the NBA Eastern Conference basketball playoff finals against the Toronto Raptors on Wednesday in Milwaukee.

AP Photo/Morry Gash

not done. We've got to protect our home. We've got to be able to get Game 2."

Toronto got swept out of the 2017 and 2018 playoffs by James and the Cavs. Now they're already facing a 1-0 deficit against Antetokounmpo and the Bucks, after dropping Game 1 despite leading for 37 of the game's 48 minutes.

"Sometimes, we just missed some shots," Raptors

guard Kyle Lowry shrugged.

The way the Raptors see it, the adjustment to make finals might not be an adjustment at all. They liked most everything but the outcome of Game 1 — a 108-100 Bucks win — and figure that if they play the same Friday, they'll have another chance at stealing away home-court advantage.

"This team has handled downs pretty well and ups

pretty well, and that's been one of our focuses since day one of training camp," Raptors coach Nick Nurse said. "So let's hope we can keep that going a little bit."

The Bucks won a game where they shot just under 40 percent and were 11 of 44 from 3-point range. They made up for that on the defensive end and on the backboards — they held every Raptor not named Lowry

or Kawhi Leonard to 1 for 23 shooting after halftime, and outrebounded Toronto 60-46.

Still, Toronto insists it is not worried about the offense.

"Everything starts on the defensive end," Raptors forward Serge Ibaka said.

Here's some other things to know going into Game 2:

Rare loss

The last time Toronto had two 30-point scorers in the same game and lost — before it happened Wednesday — was Feb. 2, 2012. Game 1 was only the third time this season that the Bucks allowed two opponents to score 30 in the same game; Brandon Ingram and LeBron James did it for the Los Angeles Lakers in a Milwaukee win on March 1, and Leonard and Pascal Siakam did it in a Toronto victory on Jan. 5.

Rare win

Before Wednesday, Milwaukee had been 0-7 this season when not shooting better than 40 percent. The Bucks shot 39.8 percent in Game 1. The Raptors had been 9-1 this season when holding teams to such a low shooting percentage; the only other previous blip came in Game 2 of the second round against Philadelphia, when the 76ers shot 39.5 percent

and won in Toronto.

Brogdon's impact

Much gets made of Milwaukee's bench mob, and rightly so, but having Malcolm Brogdon back after he was out for basically all of the first two playoff rounds with a heel injury is a huge plus for the Bucks. Brogdon played 27 minutes in Game 1; he scored 15 points and the Bucks outscored the Raptors 57-39 in those minutes. When Brogdon wasn't on the floor, Toronto held a 61-51 edge.

Danger time

Friday isn't technically a must-win for the Raptors, but a loss might conjure up some unfriendly memories for the franchise. Toronto has dropped the first two games of a playoff series seven times; the Raptors are 0-7 in those series, and four of them ended in sweeps — one of them a 3-0 decision, the others by 4-0 counts.

Almost perfect

Milwaukee is off to a 9-1 start in these playoffs. It's the 24th time in NBA history that a team has opened a postseason with at least nine wins in 10 games; of the previous 23 to start at least 9-1, 15 went on to win the NBA championship. Only six teams have started 10-0.

Mid-major to millions: Ja Morant's life is changing quickly

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

CHICAGO — Here's how much everything has changed for Ja Morant in the last 12 months: He's gone from being considered the No. 3 option at Murray State to the possible No. 2 pick in the NBA draft.

Put another way, he's a player from a mid-major and will soon be a multimillionaire.

Even Morant doesn't fully understand how quickly it has all come to fruition.

"It's been crazy, honestly," Morant said. "Coming from being under the radar to one of the most talked-about players now, obviously, it's been rough. It's something I'm getting used to. But I'm happy for it."

Morant made his appearance at the NBA's draft combine Thursday; he wasn't playing, but has talked with a handful of teams since he arrived in Chicago. With Zion Williamson seeming very much like a lock to go No. 1 overall, a pick held by the New Orleans Pelicans, that would seem to point to



AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh

Ja Morant, from Murray State, speaks with the media at the NBA draft basketball combine day one in Chicago on Thursday.

Morant going No. 2 to the Memphis Grizzlies.

Morant has met with the Grizzlies. If they've decided he's their guy, they haven't told him yet.

"I haven't heard it myself from Memphis," Morant said. "But obviously, I've seen what was on the internet. I'd really be happy with any team that drafts me. It means they see something in me. It's just an honor to play this game at the highest level and just to be in the position that I'm in right now."

Williamson is not attending the combine; he met with teams earlier this week and left Chicago before the com-

bine technically started.

The NBA invited 77 players to the combine. Of those, 41 are listed on rosters to compete in games through Friday. Others will go through various testing and have their measurements such as height, weight and wingspan recorded — but won't be playing any 5-on-5. Morant is hardly alone in that regard; most of the top players who were invited are doing the same thing, including Texas Tech guard and presumed early lottery pick Jarrett Culver.

"There are a lot of talented guys here," Culver said. "To be talked about as one of the top players in this draft, it's just an honor."

They're already selling tickets at Murray State for a draft party to watch Morant, so Racers fans can cheer him at least one more time. He helped them to back-to-back Ohio Valley Conference championships and a 54-11 record over the last two seasons. He averaged 12.7 points as a freshman, then 24.5 points and 10 assists while shooting 50 percent as a sophomore.

McLaren misses entire day of Indy 500 practice fixing car

By JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

INDIANAPOLIS — McLaren had another miserable day preparing for the Indianapolis 500 as the team worked tirelessly in a failed effort to get Fernando Alonso on the track Thursday for practice.

Alonso crashed early Wednesday at Indianapolis Motor Speedway and McLaren has frantically been trying to piece together its spare car to get back on the 2.5-mile oval. The team worked until 2 a.m. on the car and literally spent all of Day 3 at the track patching together a new Indy car for the former Formula One champion.

"It's definitely slow going," said McLaren head Zak Brown. "We had to borrow pieces from the one car and move them to the other car, bring in bits from an outside location, change the engine. It's been a lot of work. We're just trying to get it done right, put some extra TLC in it and make sure it is ready to go."

McLaren is back at the Indy 500 for the first time since the 1970s and the first three days have been a mess. The team was slowed by electrical problems, Alonso's first career crash on an oval, then needed an entire day to rebuild the car. When the team felt it was close to getting back on the track for the final hour Thursday, heavy rain brought the session to an early end.

Chip Ganassi Racing didn't have the same problems getting Felix Rosenqvist back out following his crash some 18 hours earlier. The team had its spare car in its nearby shop and its sports car personnel to assist in preparations.

McLaren, Brown noted, is a Formula One team that has undertaken an enor-



AP Photo/Michael Conroy

The team of Fernando Alonso, of Spain, works on his car in the garage area during practice for the Indianapolis 500 IndyCar auto race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway on Thursday in Indianapolis.

mous task in trying to make the Indianapolis 500 as an independent team. Although McLaren has a technical alliance with Carlin, the small McLaren crew of mechanics and engineers are on their own and stretched for time.

Brown is trying to take McLaren full-time racing in the IndyCar Series and it will be an embarrassing blow if Alonso, one of 36 drivers vying for 33 spots in the May 26 race, fails to qualify.

"I've seen lots of drama here before, and I don't want any drama," Brown said. "The speed in the car (Wednesday) seemed to be OK, Fernando will get right back up to speed, he's not fazed, so I think we are just trying to put together a car that is ready to go and ready to perform."

With nothing to do in the car, Alonso had time to spend with seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson, who arrived Thursday morning for his first visit to IMS during 500 activities.

League of her own: woman in Puerto Rico baseball tournament

By DÁNICA COTO
Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — A woman in Puerto Rico is set for the first time to play in an otherwise all-male baseball tournament organized by a popular semi-pro league.

Diamillette Quiles is to take over at first base in the fifth inning for the Mountaineers of Utuado.

"I'm leaving it all in God's hands," she said.

The 33-year-old woman joined the team Thursday just days before the last games of the season in the Superior Double A League, which has 42 teams around the island.

The Mountaineers play a key game Sunday, and Quiles is expected to make her debut with jersey No. 53, manager Rafael Juarbe said.

The team has won four national championships and is in second place in a five-team division in Puerto Rico's northern region. The Mountaineers are trying hold home-field advantage in the opening round of the playoffs.

Quiles has come a long way from when she first took to the game. As a young teenager, she would grab a broomstick and hit malt-beverage bottle caps that her brother and father would lob at her.

She quickly advanced through the ranks of softball, playing girls ages 17 and 18 when she was just 13 and a starting player. She joined the island's female national baseball team, and two World Cups later, someone told Juarbe about her talent.



AP Photo/Carlos Giusti

Diamillette Quiles Alicea, first baseman and member of the National Women's Baseball Team, is presented as the first female player to sign with The Utuado Highlanders, one of the teams that participate in the Superior Double A Baseball League, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Thursday.

"We're betting on Diamillette," he said of his decision to put her in Sunday's crucial game.

Quiles has 11 hits in 18 at-bats for a .611 average on Puerto Rico's national team this season.

She is only one of a handful of women signed by all-male baseball leagues around the world, said Kat Williams, a history professor at Marshall University and president of the International Women's Baseball Center.

"This is huge," Williams said. "Until we're no longer having this conversation about how big of a deal this is ... those women are going to be carrying the weight of being the first women to do it."

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