

Sports

NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION CHRISTMAS DAY SLATE

Lakers rout Warriors but lose LeBron to groin injury

By Janie McCauley
AP Sports Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — LeBron James prides himself in his durability, being available night after night, game after grueling game.

That's why the Lakers star is so mad he got hurt.

The Los Angeles Lakers lost LeBron in the third quarter to a strained left groin then went out and beat the two-time defending champions without him Tuesday night, getting King James' 17 points, 13 rebounds and five assists before the injury in a surprising 127-101 rout of the Golden State Warriors.

"I take a lot of pride in it," James said of always playing. "That's why it (angered me) not to be able to go back into the game. It's more than anything being available to my teammates, being available to my coaching staff. That's something I take more personal than anything. Hopefully it's not a long thing."

James grabbed at his left groin area with 7:51 left in the third after slipping under the Warriors' basket while trying for a loose ball. He tried to stretch it out, awkwardly walked toward the Lakers bench trying to loosen up before leaving on his own though gingerly out the tunnel for the locker room.

"I wasn't able to go back into the game, obviously. I'll get an MRI tomorrow and see what's up," James said. "With me with injuries, I'm never too concerned about them. I was able to walk off on my own power. I felt a pop, see if I could stretch it a few times, see if it would relieve but it didn't. ... I did a couple exercises to see if I could continue



Thearon W. Henderson / Getty Images-TNS

LeBron James (23) of the Los Angeles Lakers leaps in the air to pass the ball between Kevon Looney (5) and Andre Iguodala (9) of the Golden State Warriors during the first half of their game Tuesday at ORACLE Arena.

to go but I didn't feel like it would benefit my team or me. So I came back and got a jump start on the rehab."

He is scheduled for an MRI exam today and coach Luke Walton is preparing to be without James on Thursday night in Sacramento.

James has played in 156 straight games overall and 116 in the regular season. And he's not about to guess whether he will have to miss time.

Stephen Curry made consecutive 3s shortly after

James exited, and the Warriors got within 78-76 at the 2:48 mark of the third — but Kyle Kuzma and the persistent Lakers stayed at it every possession. Curry wound up with 15 points but the home fans had seen enough well before the final buzzer and headed out for the rest of Christmas.

"They played like they had nothing to lose. They played like they had a free swing," Curry said. "Everybody who touched the ball was aggressive. They just had a differ-

ent look in their eye and we weren't able to match that. They went out and won the game, that's basically it."

Kuzma contributed 19 points with a pretty baseline 3 late, Ivica Zubac had 18 points and 11 rebounds and Rajon Rondo 15 points and 10 assists off the bench as the Lakers snapped an 11-game losing streak on the Warriors' home floor since a 118-115 overtime win Dec. 22, 2012. Los Angeles also ended a seven-game skid overall in the rivalry with its first win in the series since March 6, 2016.

James made it look easy early on shooting over Jonas Jerebko and Kevon Looney. James hit a turnaround jumper at the 4:39 mark of the second quarter to put the Lakers ahead 52-37 and L.A. led 65-50 at the break.

It was James' second straight Christmas game at Oracle Arena after playing here with the Cavaliers last year and losing 99-92.

Walton — a former Warriors top assistant and dear friend of Steve Kerr — got some time with his Hall of Fame dad, Bill, before the game and a few moments to catch up with Curry and share holiday greetings in the hallway after the two-time MVP's warmup routine.

Kevin Durant, playing on a tender left ankle, had 21 points, seven rebounds and seven assists. Andre Iguodala came off the bench and made his initial five shots and 7 of 9 by halftime on the way to a season-high 23 points while also handling some of the load defending James.

Golden State shot just 9 for 36 from deep, Curry going 2 of 8 and Durant 3 for 8.

Jazz stifle Blazers in 117-96 win

By John Coon
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Tough defense has reemerged as a staple for Utah. It starts with Rudy Gobert.

Gobert has seemingly regained the edge he possessed last season when he won NBA Defensive Player of the Year honors. His attitude and energy is spreading to his teammates and turning the Jazz into a nightmare matchup for most opponents once again.

Gobert totaled 18 points, 14 rebounds and a season-high seven blocks to lead Utah to a 117-96 victory over Portland on Tuesday night. He spearheaded a defensive effort that resulted in the Trail Blazers shooting just 39 percent from the floor and becoming the 11th Jazz opponent to fail to reach 100 points this season.

"Our mindset has changed over the last few games," Gobert said. "We want to play defense and we're having fun playing defense. It changes the way we play."

Gobert's seven blocks were three more than his previous season-high, which he tallied on four occasions. The Jazz center described himself as giving 200 percent in the game and Utah coach Quin Snyder felt like Gobert made his presence felt over the entire court.

"It's what we need from him," Snyder said. "He can still protect the rim and also be impactful on the floor."

Donovan Mitchell added 19 points for Utah. Joe Ingles chipped in 15 points, seven rebounds, and five assists for the Jazz.

Utah (17-18) won for the fifth time in their last six home games while shooting 55 percent from the floor. The Jazz have won 10 of 11 games this season where they have shot 50 percent or better as a team.

Damian Lillard scored 20 points to lead Portland. Evan Turner added 12 points off the bench. The Blazers (19-15) lost to Utah for the second time in five days after trailing nearly the entire second half by a double digit margin.

"They're a really good defensive team," Lillard said. "They make you work on the offensive end. You got to compete on the offensive end."

Bucks win in rare Christmas game

By Brian Mahoney
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — Giannis Antetokounmpo was so eager to make a rim-rocking Christmas debut that he overshot the basket on his first attempt, a dunk from one side that ended with the ball all the way in the opposite corner.

"I was so excited that I went a little bit too high and I thought the rim was a foot taller," Antetokounmpo said.

He and the Milwaukee Bucks eventually settled down and showed they belonged on the holiday stage.

Antetokounmpo had 30 points and 14 rebounds, and Milwaukee celebrated its return to the Christmas schedule by beating the New York Knicks 109-95 on Tuesday.

"This is one of the highest stages," Antetokounmpo said. "Special teams play Christmas Day, and just it's an opportunity for us and we're really happy."

Brook Lopez scored 20 points for the Bucks, who played on Christmas for the first time since 1977. They were selected for the showcase slate of games largely because of Antetokounmpo but the timing also was perfect to show an emerging team, which improved the NBA's second-best record to 23-10.

Irving's 40 leads Celtics over 76ers

By Doug Alden
Associated Press

BOSTON — Kyrie Irving extended the game with a clutch shot, then ended it with two more in overtime.

Irving scored six of his 40 points in overtime, hitting back-to-back 3-pointers while leading Boston back from a five-point deficit as the Celtics beat the 76ers 121-114 on Tuesday night.

"Just competition at its highest. I love going against the best. It's not too often you get to do that in the regular season,

especially on a holiday like Christmas," said Irving, who also pulled down 10 rebounds. "I got to open presents with my family this morning then come into work. It was great."

It came very close to not being so great for Boston, which needed Irving's fadeaway jumper from 13-feet out to tie it at 108 with 20 seconds left in the fourth quarter, forcing the OT.

The Sixers, much improved from the team that lost here 105-87 in the season-opener, scored the first five points of

OT, but could not stop Irving when they needed to — again.

"There aren't many in his weight class," Philadelphia coach Brett Brown said. "Inevitably, you've got to stop him."

Irving hit a 3-pointer with 2:01 left to put Boston up 115-114, then struck again from 30-feet with 1:29 remaining in the OT and the Celtics held on to improve to 2-0 against Philadelphia this season.

Jayson Tatum and Marcus Morris scored 23 apiece for Boston and Terry Rozier had 10 points.

Rockets top Thunder for 7th win in 8 games

By Kristie Rieken
AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON — James Harden is on a roll and it's helping the Houston Rockets get on track after their terrible start to the season.

Harden scored 41 points and the Rockets beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 113-109 on Tuesday for their seventh win in the last eight games.

Harden has scored 30 points or more in a career-high seven games in a row, marking the first time a player has done that since Russell Westbrook had eight consecutive 30-point games in November 2016. He has scored at least 35 in his last five, which is the longest such streak since Carmelo Anthony did it in six games in April 2013.

The Rockets won just one of their first six games this season and were 11-14 after a three-game skid in early December. Since then, pow-

ered by Harden's dominance, Houston has lost just once to improve to 18-15 and move a season-high three games above .500.

"We've had that confidence all year," Harden said. "Our record isn't where we want it to be, but it's getting there. And we've got to continue to work hard every day, continue to get better and grow. We're preparing for a postseason. We're not going to be at our tip top right now."

A 3-pointer by Paul George with less than two minutes left got Oklahoma City within

4 before Harden missed a 3. Westbrook missed a shot for the Thunder, but George stole the ball from Harden and was fouled by him.

George made both free throws to get the Thunder within 2 with 43.6 seconds left. Harden then drove past George and into the lane for a layup to make it 112-108 with 20.4 seconds left.

Westbrook made 1 of 2 free throws to cut it to 3 with 15 seconds left, and Austin Rivers made a free throw with 7.4 seconds left to secure the win. George had 28 points and

14 rebounds for the Thunder, and Westbrook added 21 points with nine rebounds and nine assists.

"We had some bad bounces which got them a couple of extra possessions which got them some open 3s," George said.

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