

Sports

COLLEGE FOOTBALL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

It's the Tigers' Time

■ Clemson routs No. 1 Alabama 44-16 to cap perfect 15-0 season and claim the title

By Ralph D. Russo
AP College Football Writer

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Dabo Swinney kissed the championship trophy and proclaimed this Clemson team the greatest of all time. He's got a case.

With stunning ease — and a freshman quarterback — Clemson toppled college football's greatest dynasty again to become the first perfect playoff champion.

Trevor Lawrence passed for 347 yards and three touchdowns and the second-ranked Tigers beat No. 1 Alabama 44-16 on Monday night in the College Football Playoff national championship game.

In the fourth consecutive playoff meeting between the Tigers and Tide, Clemson evened the series and beat 'Bama for the national championship for the second time in three years. Clemson is the first college football team to finish 15-0 since the 1800s, and the first team since the playoff started five seasons ago to get through a season unscathed.

"I mean, our guys had the eye of the tiger, but I'm so proud, and then for our seniors to be able to go out 15-0 and truly be the best ever — there was a lot of talk about best ever all year long," Swinney said, talking about Alabama. "We were never in that conversation. But tonight, there's no doubt. First 15-0 team, to beat Notre Dame and to beat Alabama to do it, this team won 13 games by 20 points or more and led by an unbelievable group of seniors, amazing group. I'm just thankful to be a part of it."

Alabama coach Nick Saban and the Tide (14-1) were looking for a sixth national championship in 10 years, trying to add to an already unprecedented run in the sport. Instead, Clemson crushed Alabama, becoming



Esra Shaw / Getty Images-TNS

Tua Tagovailoa (13) of the Alabama Crimson Tide is tackled by Clelin Ferrell of the Clemson Tigers in the CFP National Championship Monday in Santa Clara, California.

"We're 15-0, we beat the best team ever, nobody's taking that away from us."

— Christian Wilkins, Clemson defensive tackle

the first opponent to beat the Tide by more than 14 points since Saban became coach in 2007.

Swinney's Tigers sealed their status as a superpower, no longer just 1A to Alabama's 1.

"We're 15-0, we beat the best team ever, nobody's taking that away from us," Clemson All-American defensive tackle Christian Wilkins said.

Two seasons ago it was Deshaun Watson dethroning the Tide with a last-second touchdown pass. Clemson's new star quarterback didn't need the late-game heroics. The long-haired Lawrence cut through Alabama's defense with the help of another fabulous freshman. Justyn Ross made a juggling grab, a one-handed snare and broke a 74-yard touchdown about midway through the third quarter that made it 37-16 and had Swinney high-stepping down the sidelines.

Ross, who scored two touchdowns in the semifinal rout of Notre Dame, had six catches for 153 yards against his home-state team.

Swinney takes a different approach than Saban, running a more fun-loving program than Alabama's all-business organization. But the results have been every bit as good. And on Monday night at Levi's Stadium, in a championship game played more than 2,000 miles away from Clemson's South Carolina campus, the Tigers were way too much for an Alabama team that had spent the season mauling its opposition. The Tide won their first 14 games by an average of 31 points.

Alabama's Tua Tagovailoa threw two crucial interceptions in the first half, the first returned 44 yards for a touchdown by A.J. Terrell to put Clemson up 7-0. The Tide came in scoring 48 points per game, but was shut out over the final 44 minutes by an opportunistic Clemson defense.

Saban lamented numerous mistakes: blown coverages on third down (Clemson was 10 for 15), stall outs in the red zone and special teams mis-

haps, including a fake field goal that flopped on the first possession of the second half.

He laid the blame on himself. The Alabama program has set a championship-or-bust standard under Saban, but he didn't want this season looked at as a failure.

"One game doesn't define who you are," Saban said. "But I also told the players that sometimes we learn more when things don't go well, when we lose."

Tagovailoa, the sophomore who came off the bench to win the championship game last year for the Tide, went 22 for 34 for 295 yards and two touchdowns.

"We had a great season, but five words: Good is not good enough," Tagovailoa said. "We didn't finish the way we wanted to finish. We didn't do the things we needed to do to execute and be successful in this game, and that's all it is."

The Heisman runner-up was also the second-best quarterback on the field in the championship game. Lawrence finished 20 for 32, and went 18 for 25 for 277 yards over the final three quarters.

Nurkic leads Blazers to win

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND — It really hasn't been any easier for Jusuf Nurkic for the past half-dozen games, even if it appears that way.

Nurkic had 20 points for his fourth straight game with 20 or more and the Portland Trail Blazers beat the New York Knicks 111-101 on Monday night.

The 7-foot Bosnian center has been on a roll lately, averaging 21 points and 11.8 rebounds in the last six games for Portland.

"I work hard for that," Nurkic said when asked about his recent success. "I got in foul trouble tonight, but I keep myself in the game. We won, so it's good."

Damian Lillard added 17 points and nine assists for Portland, which has won four of five. CJ McCollum also had 17 points.

Enes Kanter came off the bench with 18 points and 14 rebounds for his third straight double-double for the Knicks, who have lost nine of 10.

The teams played a lackluster first half, but Portland pulled away in the third quarter, stretching the lead to 18 points at one point.

"Their big guy (Nurkic) is a beast. He's huge. He is a mountain man. You can't move him and the guy is so nimble. He's never really off balance. He sees the floor well and finishes great around the rim with his touch," Knicks coach David Fizdale said. "He's just a really difficult cover and he's just a mountain of a screener so when those guys come running off of him and he gets contact on you it's just really hard to get around to that screen and they've built some great chemistry together."

Blazer coach Terry Stotts echoed Fizdale's praise, saying it's likely one of the best stretches that Nurkic has had in Portland. Stotts pointed to the rapport he's developed with Lillard on pick and rolls.

"He's slowed his game down to where he's making good reads in those situations," Stotts said. "He's not turning the ball over as much. He's finishing in the paint. He's making his free throws. And that's not to mention what he's been giving us on the defensive end."

Warriors snap 3-game home losing streak

By Janie McCauley
AP Sports Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — Steve Kerr reminded his Warriors that with everything they have gone through already, Golden State reached the season's halfway point with 27 wins — so right on pace for 54. Klay Thompson is aiming higher.

"Who cares? We know how to play good basketball," said Kevin Durant, who is most concerned with how prepared the Warriors are for playoff time.

Now, a major reinforcement look to be joining the effort by month's end: a healthy DeMarcus Cousins, one of the NBA's best big men when at full strength.

Thompson scored 43 points with seven 3-pointers, Stephen Curry had his first double-double of the season with 14 points and a season-best 14 assists, and the Golden State Warriors snapped a rare three-game home losing streak by beating the cold-shooting New York Knicks 122-95 on Tuesday night.

NBA ROUNDUP

West-leading Nuggets slip past Heat

MIAMI (AP) — Nikola Jokic had 29 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for his fourth triple-double of the season, and his basket with 2.4 seconds left put the Western Conference lead-

ing Denver Nuggets ahead to stay in their 103-99 win over the Miami Heat on Tuesday night.

Jamal Murray had 18 points, Trey Lyles added 15, Paul Millsap had 12 and

Torrey Craig finished with 11 points and 16 rebounds for the Nuggets.

TIMBERWOLVES 119, THUNDER 117

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Andrew Wiggins had a season-high 40 points and 10 rebounds, and the Timberwolves beat Oklahoma City in Ryan Saunders' first game as

Minnesota's interim coach.

RAPTORS 104, HAWKS 101

TORONTO (AP) — Serge Ibaka scored the winning basket with 17 seconds left and Toronto won its sixth straight home game.

Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points, Pascal Siakam had 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Kyle Lowry scored 16 points for the Raptors.

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE BASKETBALL					WESTERN CONFERENCE				
Tuesday's Men's College Basketball Scores					Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB		W	L	Pct	GB
FARWEST					Houston	23	16	.590	—
Colorado St.	87	Air Force	64		San Antonio	24	17	.585	—
San Diego St.	84	Wyoming	54		New Orleans	19	22	.463	5
UNLV	80	New Mexico	69		Memphis	18	22	.450	5½
					Dallas	18	22	.450	5½
SOUTHWEST					Northwest Division				
Baylor	73	Iowa St.	70		Denver	27	12	.692	—
Oklahoma St.	61	Texas	58		Oklahoma City	25	15	.625	2½
Texas Tech	66	Oklahoma	59		Portland	24	17	.585	4
					Minnesota	20	21	.488	8
					Utah	20	21	.488	8
MIDWEST					Pacific Division				
Bowling Green	82	Ohio	63		Golden State	27	14	.659	—
Cent. Michigan	88	Akron	86	OT	L.A. Clippers	24	16	.600	2½
Drake	82	S. Illinois	70		L.A. Lakers	22	19	.537	5
E. Michigan	84	Ball St.	82	2OT	Sacramento	20	21	.488	7
Evansville	87	Loyola of Chicago	48		Phoenix	10	32	.238	17½
Maryland	82	Minnesota	67		Monday's Games				
Michigan St.	77	Purdue	59		San Antonio	119	Detroit	107	
					Boston	116	Brooklyn	95	
					Houston	125	Washington	113	
					Milwaukee	114	Utah	102	
					New Orleans	114	Memphis	95	
					L.A. Lakers	107	Dallas	97	
					Portland	111	New York	101	
					Sacramento	121	Orlando	95	
					Tuesday's Games				
					Indiana	123	Cleveland	115	
					Philadelphia	132	Washington	115	
					Denver	103	Miami	99	
					Toronto	104	Atlanta	101	
					Minnesota	119	Oklahoma City	117	
					Phoenix	115	Sacramento	111	
					Golden State	122	New York	95	
					L.A. Clippers	128	Charlotte	109	
					Today's Games				
					All Times PST				
					Indiana	at Boston	4 p.m.		
					Philadelphia	at Washington	4 p.m.		
					Atlanta	at Brooklyn	4:30 p.m.		
					Cleveland	at New Orleans	5 p.m.		
					Milwaukee	at Memphis	5 p.m.		
					San Antonio	at Dallas	5:30 p.m.		
					Phoenix	at Portland	6 p.m.		
					Orlando	at Utah	6 p.m.		
					Chicago	at Portland	7 p.m.		
					Detroit	at L.A. Lakers	7:30 p.m.		
					Thursday's Games				
					Boston	at Miami	4 p.m.		
					L.A. Clippers	at Denver	6 p.m.		
					Oklahoma City	at San Antonio	6:30 p.m.		
					Detroit	at Sacramento	7 p.m.		
					Friday's Games				
					Atlanta	at Philadelphia	4 p.m.		
					Milwaukee	at Washington	4 p.m.		
					Brooklyn	at Toronto	4:30 p.m.		
					Indiana	at New York	4:30 p.m.		
					Cleveland	at Houston	5 p.m.		
					Dallas	at Minnesota	5 p.m.		
					Charlotte	at Portland	7 p.m.		
					L.A. Lakers	at Utah	7 p.m.		
					Chicago	at Golden State	7:30 p.m.		

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