

SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES CONTINUE IN TOKYO

Hoops stunner: U.S. men lose

By Tim Reynolds
AP Basketball Writer

SAITAMA, Japan — The final buzzer sounded and France barely celebrated.

To them, beating the United States again wasn't really a surprise. And that might be the biggest indicator yet that the Americans — even after three consecutive Olympic gold medals — are no longer feared by other top international teams.

A 25-game Olympic winning streak for the U.S. is over, ending Sunday, July 25 when France closed the game on a 16-2 run to beat the Americans 83-76 in the Tokyo Games. Evan Fournier's 3-pointer off a broken play with just under a minute left put France ahead for good, as the Americans simply fell apart in the final minutes.

"They are better individually," Fournier said of the Americans, "but they can be beaten as a team."

That's been proven with alarming regularity in the last two years. Starting with France's win over the U.S. in the Basketball World Cup quarterfinals at China two years ago, the Americans are merely 3-5 in their last eight games with NBA players in the lineup.

The U.S. missed its final nine shots, five of them coming in a 21-second span in the final minute shortly after



Robert Gauthier-Los Angeles Times/TNS

Team France shooting guard Evan Fournier (10) knocks the ball from Team United States forward Kevin Durant (7) in the second half at Saitama Super Arena on Sunday, July 25.

"They are better individually, but they can be beaten as a team."

— Evan Fournier, French Olympic men's basketball team member, talking after France beat the U.S. on Sunday

Fournier — who led all scorers with 28 points — made the go-ahead 3-pointer. Rudy Gobert wildly missed a layup on that play, but Guerschon Yabusele chased down the bouncing rebound and just before he dove into the U.S. bench he made a desperation swipe at the ball in an effort to knock it into Fournier's direction.

Fournier turned Yabusele's dive into a dagger, and just like that the Americans are in Olympic trouble.

"I think that's a little bit of hubris if you think the Ameri-

cans are supposed to just roll out the balls and win," U.S. coach Gregg Popovich said. "We've got to work for it just like everybody else. And for those 40 minutes, they played better than we did."

The Americans lost for only the sixth time in 144 games at the Olympics all-time, and fell to 53-4 in the Olympics with NBA players on the roster. The 2004 team at the Athens Games lost the other three, and won bronze. Every other U.S. team in the era that started with the "Dream Team" in 1992 won the gold

and this one still can — but it's far from a certainty.

"When you lose a game, you're not surprised," Popovich said. "You're disappointed."

Fournier had 28 points for France, while Rudy Gobert scored 14 and Nando de Colo had 13. Jrue Holiday had 18 points for the U.S., Bam Adebayo had 12, Damian Lillard 11 and Kevin Durant had 10 for the Americans — who are just 2-3 in their games this summer, the first four of them exhibitions in Las Vegas that weren't supposed to mean much.

The Olympics, they were supposed to be different.

They weren't. They lost, again.

"I mean, it's great," Gobert said. "But until we have what we want to have around our neck it doesn't really matter."

The idea of anyone else leaving an Olympics with gold hasn't been all that realistic in recent years. Now, it's very real.

A 10-point U.S. lead in the third quarter was wasted, and so was a 12-point barrage from Holiday in the opening 4 ½ minutes of the fourth quarter as the Americans went from six points down to start the period to six points up with 5:23 remaining.

The U.S. lead was seven with 3:30 left. France outscored the U.S. 16-2 from there.

Ledecky's gold medal streak ends

By Paul Newsberry
AP Sports Writer

TOKYO — Katie Ledecky strolled onto the deck first, which meant she was headed to the second spot on the medal podium.

What a strange place for her to be.

For the first time in a brilliant career, Ledecky wasn't the first swimmer to touch the wall in an individual event at the Olympics.

She had nothing to be ashamed of. She swam one of the best races of her career on the biggest stage. She was simply beaten in the 400-meter freestyle by someone who was a bit better on this day.

Still, it was a bit jarring.

"Of course, you always want to hear your national anthem," Ledecky said Monday. "But I'm just really proud of the time I swam."

It wasn't quite good enough to beat Australia's Ariarne Titmus, who chased down Ledecky over the final two laps to win in 3 minutes, 56.69 seconds.

It was the second-fastest time ever recorded, surpassed only by Ledecky's world record of 3:56.46 at the 2016 Rio Games.

Ledecky touched in 3:57.36, her fastest time in three years and fourth-fastest in the history of the eight-lap event.

"I felt so good coming into this meet," the 24-year-old said. "I felt like I really believed in myself going into that. It is very satisfying to swim a time like that and start my meet off like that."

U.S. softball team wins group stage

By Ronald Blum
AP Baseball Writer

YOKOHAMA, Japan — Kelsey Stewart has a knack for walk-off hits in Japan.

Stewart hit a game-ending home run leading off the seventh inning, and the United States rallied late to beat Japan 2-1 Monday and win the Olympic softball group stage — and with it the right to bat last in the gold medal game.

"It's like you dream about when you're a little kid, about hitting a home run at the Olympics, let alone a walk-off," Stewart said.

Trying to bounce back from their 3-1 loss to Japan in the 2008 gold medal game, the Americans finished the group stage 5-0 while Japan dropped to 4-1.

The gold medal game is scheduled for Tuesday, July 27. Rain is in the forecast, however.

Cleveland Guardians? At least it's a mascot that reflects city's history

Scrolling through my Twitter feed last week, I remember seeing the hashtag, "#Guardians," trending, and I decided to do some digging.

When I saw the Indians, the mascot of Cleveland's Major League Baseball franchise, will be no more after this season, that didn't shock me. However, on hearing that the team is changing its mascot to the Guardians, my first reaction was similar; I suspect, to most of the fandom of the realm of baseball.

I was skeptical.

Since 1915, Cleveland's baseball team has been known as the Indians, and the blatant cultural appropriation was something that aggravated indigenous cultures. Similar to what the Washington Football Team in the NFL went through with formerly being known as the Redskins, both of these franchises finally answered the calls back in 2019 for changes as Washington dropped the mascot, and Cleveland was going to remove the Chief Wahoo logo from its brand. Two years



COREY KIRK

later, the team name of the Guardians was announced this past Friday, July 23, the name to take effect at the start of the 2022 season.

Reading the initial tweet, I wanted to reach out to one of the biggest Cleveland sports fans I knew, a former boss of mine from Arizona. Expressing my doubt, she completely shut it down by letting me in on a secret. The Guardian name is enriched in the history of the town.

Since 1932, the Guardian of Traffic statues on both sides of the Hope Memorial Bridge are among the city's historical pieces of art. There are four, each standing more than 43 feet tall.

Wilbon Watson, a bridge engineer, told Sports Illustrated that each statue signifies, "the spirit of progress in transportation."

"This is a historic moment for our franchise, and we

are excited for our players and staff to debut our new team name and look in 2022," Cleveland president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said in a statement Friday. "We look forward to our team proudly representing the city of Cleveland as the Guardians."

Though many might have expected Cleveland to pick a mascot referencing the Rock 'N Roll Museum in the city, to me that would have been too predictable and hard to rally behind.

After learning the history of what the Guardian Statues mean to the city, my feelings of skepticism disappeared with a new perspective.

If it means something to a city, then that should be what matters. At least Cleveland didn't follow Washington and choose to name themselves the Cleveland Baseball Team. Guardians has a solid

backstory, and is a lot more creative than most names. It could be a lot worse.

Corey Kirk is sports editor for the Baker City Herald.

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