

NBA

Rockets trade Harden to Nets

HOUSTON — The Brooklyn Nets have agreed to acquire three-time scoring champion James Harden from the Houston Rockets, a deal that reunites him with Kevin Durant and gives him the move that he has sought for weeks, said a person with knowledge of the situation.

Harden is going to the Nets as part of a four-team deal that also involves Indiana and Cleveland, according to the person who spoke to The Associated Press Wednesday on condition of anonymity.

At least four draft picks and additional pick swaps are also part of the deal, the person said. Other key players: Victor Oladipo goes from Indiana to Houston, and Caris LeVert goes from Brooklyn to Indiana, the person said, adding that Cleveland was also part of the massive trade.

The deal was struck less than 24 hours after Harden seemed to deliver a farewell address of sorts following the Rockets' loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday night.

"We're just not good enough. ... I love this city. I literally have done everything that I can," Harden said Tuesday night. "I mean, this situation is crazy. It's something that I don't think can be fixed."

It was obvious the end was nearing Wednesday, when the Rockets told him they didn't want him at practice after his comments about the team.

"We felt it was best for James and best for the group for him not to come to practice," first-year coach Stephen Silas said. About two hours later, ESPN and The Athletic first reported that Harden was being moved.

—Associated Press

BASEBALL

MLB halts political contributions

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball is suspending all political contributions in the wake of last week's invasion of the U.S. Capitol by a mob loyal to President Donald Trump, joining a wave of major corporations rethinking their efforts to lobby Washington.

"In light of the unprecedented events last week at the U.S. Capitol, MLB is suspending contributions from its Political Action Committee pending a review of our political contribution policy going forward," the league said in a statement on Wednesday.

Following the insurrection last week by Trump supporters while Congress attempted to certify the results of the presidential election, many companies have said they will avoid making donations to members of the House and Senate who voted to overturn President-elect Joe Biden's victory over Trump. Others, like MLB, have postponed political giving to both political parties altogether.

MLB is the first of the major professional sports leagues to say it would alter its lobbying strategy in the wake of the deadly Capitol riots.

The Office of The Commissioner of Major League Baseball Political Action Committee has donated \$669,375 to Senate and House candidates since the 2016 election cycle, with 52.4% of that money going to Republican candidates, according to The Center for Responsive Politics.

—Associated Press

NFL PLAYOFFS

AGE GAP

AFC's young QB quartet, old NFC guard create interesting dynamic heading into the divisional playoffs

BY SCHUYLER DIXON • AP Pro Football Writer

Andy Reid has been here before, with a young franchise quarterback on a team contending for the Super Bowl year after year.

The Kansas City coach is at it again with Patrick Mahomes, and thrilled to see similarly youthful leaders among the AFC playoff teams in what is the biggest QB age discrepancy between conferences in the divisional round since the merger.



Charlie Riedel/AP file

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes throws before a game against the Atlanta Falcons on Dec. 27 in Kansas City, Missouri. The final four teams remaining in the AFC feature younger quarterbacks, including Mahomes, while most of the remaining teams in the NFC feature more experienced QBs, including the Saints' Drew Brees and the Buccaneers' Tom Brady.

"I think it's great for the game, this influx of new guys at the position. It's great for viewers, fans, cities. It gives these different cities an opportunity to compete."

— Andy Reid, Kansas City Chiefs head coach

How big is the gap? Well, for starters, a pair of 40-somethings will face off in the NFC with Tampa Bay's Tom Brady and Drew Brees of New Orleans. Meantime, the elder statesman of AFC playoff quarterbacks is 25-year-old Baker Mayfield.

"I think it's great for the game, this influx of new guys at the position," said Reid, who went to four consecutive NFC championship games with Donovan McNabb in Philadelphia, starting with the 2000 season. "It's great for viewers, fans, cities. It gives these different cities an opportunity to compete."

To Reid's point, Buffalo won a playoff game for the first time in 25 years with 24-year-old Josh Allen in charge. Cleveland ended an 18-year playoff drought behind Mayfield and hum-

bled six-time Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh in the wild-card round.

Reid and Mahomes, also 25 but 156 days younger than Mayfield, are a win over the Browns away from their third consecutive AFC championship game after the Chiefs won their first Super Bowl in 50 years last season.

Baltimore's Lamar Jackson, the 24-year-old 2019 MVP, has his first playoff victory in hand, over Tennessee, as the Ravens prepare to visit the Bills.

"My mother-in-law sent me something the other day saying I was the old guy," Mayfield said. "Somebody sent me just how close everybody is in age. It's pretty crazy to see between Josh and Lamar and obviously Pat. Pat's got the most experience out of all of us."

NBA

Amid COVID-19 pandemic, a blowout epidemic also happening

BY TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the NBA is also seeing a blowout epidemic.

One can only wonder if the two are related.

Games are turning into runaways far more than usual throughout the first three weeks of this NBA season. Maybe it's because there are no fans in most arenas, maybe it's because teams are tired from playing with a bit less rest than they've gotten in recent years or maybe it's because the strains of a COVID-19 world are weighing heavily on players.

It's probably a combination of all that and more.

But the numbers are also quite a bit overwhelming: The average margin of victory right now in the NBA, about 12.3 points per game, is on pace to be the largest in league history. And the rate of teams going up by 30 or more points — it's happened in 20% of games played so far — smashes what has been the norm even in this 3-point-wild, faster-paced era of NBA play.

"This is going to be the craziest NBA season ever," Brooklyn coach Steve Nash said. "We've already seen some incredible scores and oddities and so I think just trying to just be adaptive and continue to work through things and learn through your games as much as anything rather than practices is just essential."



Kyusung Gong/AP file

Dallas Mavericks' Luka Doncic, left, drives to the basket past Los Angeles Clippers' Patrick Beverley in Los Angeles. Amid a season laden with large deficits, Dallas held a record 50-point lead at halftime over the Clippers in this game on Dec. 27.

"This is going to be the craziest NBA season ever. We've already seen some incredible scores and oddities."

— Steve Nash, coach of the Brooklyn Nets

Last season, one NBA team took a 30-point lead on the other 10% of the time. The season before that, 2018-19, that rate was 11%. The year before that, 9%.

Milwaukee has played 11 games and held 30-point leads in four of them; the Bucks only got to a 25-point margin in their win over Orlando on Monday.

The Los Angeles Clippers have played 11 games; they've either led or trailed by at least 20 points in eight of those, including the biggest deficit in the NBA so far this season — 57 points against Dallas on Dec. 27.

The only teams in the NBA that haven't led by even 20 points yet this season? Chicago, Minnesota, Oklahoma City and Sacramento. The only team that hasn't been down by 20 yet? Indiana. Every other team has been in a very, very deep hole at least once so far this season — and Pacers guard Malcolm Brogdon isn't shy about calling first-year coach Nate Bjorkgren a great one.

See **NBA** / A7

GOLF



Matthew Thayer/The Maui News via AP

Collin Morikawa hits from the first tee during the final round of the Tournament of Champions on Sunday in Kapalua, Hawaii. Over 30 players, including Morikawa, play the Sony Open in Honolulu this week after playing in Maui last week.

Another tourney in Hawaii, a fresh start for most players

BY DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

HONOLULU — For the 31 players at the Sony Open who took the 30-minute flight over from Maui, the decision to play was easy. They're already in Hawaii, guaranteed a tropical climate and the course at sea level is an easy walk.

Collin Morikawa wouldn't know it any other way.

In the two years since he left Cal and turned pro, he has won each year on the PGA Tour and been eligible for the Tournament of Champions to start the new year. Plus, his family has history in Hawaii.

Would the PGA champion fly out to the middle of the Pacific Ocean for just one week?

"It's a great hypothetical," Morikawa said with a smile.

"But Hawaii is special to me. I would love to come out here starting the year. It has obviously the right kind of vibes. It gets you going to start the year. And I love it out here."

His year didn't start too badly, except for one round. With consecutive rounds of 65, he went into the final round at Kapalua one shot out of the lead and shot a 73.

For the other 113 players at Waialae, the long trip was worth their while. That includes Charles Howell III, who is making his 20th consecutive start at the Sony Open and has never left the islands without money in the bank. Along with never missing the cut, Howell has seven finishes in the top 5, but still no victory.

See **Golf** / A6