

Sports

Westbrook 14th triple double of the season as Thunder edge Portland

Rolling Raptors rout Kings

LOS ANGELES: Russell Westbrook bagged his 14th triple double of the season as the Oklahoma City Thunder overpowered Western Conference rivals the Portland Trail Blazers on Tuesday. Westbrook finished with 29 points, 10 rebounds and 14 assists—to reach double digits in three key statistical categories—while teammate Paul George led the scoring with 36 points in a 123-114 victory at the Chesapeake Energy Arena. The win saw the Thunder improve to 29-18, tightening their grip on third place in the West ahead of fourth-placed Portland, who slipped to 29-20 with the defeat. While Westbrook and George led the Thunder's scoring, they received support throughout the lineup, with every starter posting double-digits. New Zealand's Steven Adams and shooting guard Terrance Ferguson had 14 points apiece while Jerami Grant had 11 points. Dennis Schroder added 13 off the bench in his 22 minutes on court. "It's very important to get everyone involved," Westbrook said. "We've got so many guys in this team that are talented. We try to get everyone involved and into the game." The burden of Portland's scoring was once again shouldered by Damian Lillard, who had 34 points. C.J. McCollum added 31 points while Bosnian international Jusuf Nurkic added 22 points.

RAPTORS 120, KINGS 105

Fred VanVleet scored 19 points and added seven rebounds and seven assists Tuesday night as the Toronto Raptors defeated the visiting Sacramento Kings 120-105. Kyle Lowry added 19 points and nine assists for the Raptors, who won their season-best

10th straight home game and are 9-2 in January. Pascal Siakam had 18 points and Serge Ibaka had 15 points and 10 rebounds for the Raptors. C.J. Miles added 15 points and Norman Powell had 11 points. Marvin Bagley III scored 22 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Kings, who have lost two in a row. Bogdan Bogdanovic added 16 points, eight rebounds and nine assists.

MAVERICKS 106, CLIPPERS 98

Disillusioned guard Dennis Smith Jr., returning from a six-game absence, scored 17 points and grabbed a season-best eight rebounds to lead Dallas past visiting Los Angeles. Smith missed three games with a sore back and an illness before leaving the team for another three games, upset over his role playing alongside rookie sensation Luka Doncic. Amid trade rumors, Smith stayed away from the club as it lost four of the six games. The explosive guard's return provided a burst of offense that Dallas needed in snapping a four-game losing skid. Patrick Beverley paced the Clippers with 16 points and nine rebounds.

TIMBERWOLVES 118, SUNS 91

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 25 points, grabbed 18 rebounds and handed out seven assists to lead Minnesota to a win at Phoenix. The Suns were seeking payback after Derrick Rose's buzzer-beating shot on Sunday lifted the Timberwolves to a 116-114 win, but Towns and Minnesota had other ideas. Josh Okogie scored 21 points for the Wolves. Josh Jackson finished with 27 points and 10 rebounds for the Suns. — Agencies



OKLAHOMA CITY: CJ McCollum #3 of the Portland Trail Blazers shoots the ball against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. — AFP

Woods raring to go ahead of 2019 bow

LA JOLLA: Tiger Woods makes his 2019 debut here today, having replaced the trepidation of a year ago with an eagerness to capture an eighth Farmers Insurance Open crown in California. Woods got his first look at the Torrey Pines course on Tuesday when he played a nine-hole practice round in the company of Jordan Spieth.

It was a happy return to the cliff-top course overlooking the Pacific Ocean, where he won the last of his 14 Majors at the US Open more than a decade ago. "I haven't played on the Tour since September, so it's been a while and looking forward to getting started, looking forward to getting out there and playing," said Woods.

"This is a golf course property that I've always loved. Jordan asked me today as we were playing, he said, 'How long have you been coming down here?' I said, 'Well, 10 years longer than you've been alive,'" the 42-year-old quipped.

"I've been coming out here quite a bit. This is the first PGA Tour event that I ever attended with my dad when this was the old Andy Williams tournament. "To have won on this property and had

the success I've had, it's been a lot of fun and looking forward to getting out there this week."

Twelve months ago, Woods didn't know what to expect as he returned here in his attempt to come back from a near two-year injury absence. He eventually finished 23rd. It took just three events to silence those critics when Woods fell one shot shy of forcing a play-off in the Valspar Championship.

Woods then led, albeit for two holes, during the final round of the Open Championship at Carnoustie while he drew record crowds to Bellerive when he got himself into contention a few weeks later at the PGA Championship.

'A MOVING TARGET'

Woods finally ended a more than five-year winless drought amid emotional scenes at the Tour Championship in suburban Atlanta. "My expectations are now way different to a year ago," he said Tuesday.

"I know what my body can and cannot do. So last year was very fluid and it was like trying to hit a moving target. "It was quite interesting to try and figure it all out as the year progressed and it evolved.

"This year I have a great understanding of what I can and can't do. There's not uncertainty that I had going into the year last year after what I did at the end of last year. Playing seven out of nine weeks was quite a bit. Body held up better than I thought it would, even though I



MELBOURNE: In this file photo taken on December 5, 2018 US golfer and captain of the US Presidents Cup team Tiger Woods attends a press conference in Melbourne, one year ahead of the 2019 edition to be held at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club. Tiger Woods will make his 2019 debut at next week's Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines. — AFP

got pretty tired at the end. Overall, it held up pretty good.

Woods revealed his back now feels so strong he spent part of his off-season deep-sea diving in the Bahamas and off the coast of Florida, using scuba tanks for the first time in years.

"One of the best things I did in the off-season was get back into diving again and be able to do some spear fishing and free diving is something that I truly missed," he said. "Even tank diving,

I haven't tank dived in years. I just couldn't afford to have that weight on my back and compressing my disk and my disk was already screwed up.

"So whenever you put any weight on it, it made it worse. I haven't tank dived in years and to be able to do that again, to be able to get in the water and free dive, put the fins on and load the body up and drop down like that, that was something I truly missed. I love being in the water." — AFP

Olympic champ Pendleton reveals suicidal thoughts

LONDON: Former Olympic champion Victoria Pendleton revealed on Tuesday she once considered committing suicide. British cyclist Pendleton has suffered with mental health issues in the past and she has exposed just how bleak the situation became.

The 38-year-old, who retired from cycling after winning gold at the London 2012 Olympics, was diagnosed with severe depression after returning home from an aborted charity climb of Mount Everest.

She also separated from Scott Gardner, her husband for five years, in 2018, saying the couple had "grown apart". "I had accumulated one-and-a-half times the dose of drugs to kill myself," Pendleton told the Daily Telegraph.

"I had it there, in front of me, and I knew how much it would take. And how long I would have to be left for it definitely to work. "It wasn't even like I was really upset about it. I just felt numb.

"I felt horribly guilty for even considering it (killing herself). "I said to my mum: 'Please would you forgive me (if I killed myself)?' Obviously, it was very upsetting for her to hear that. "But I really wanted my family to be able to forgive me. Because... I wouldn't do it to hurt them on purpose. You just can't understand how much I was suffering on the inside."

After suffering a panic attack at a friend's house, Pendleton sought help. She also turned to former British Cycling psychiatrist Steve Peters, who she telephoned during her darkest moment.

"It must have been about 6.30am," she said. "I had been awake for hours. "I remember lying there with tears rolling down the side of my face. Not really crying, but just feeling a sense of hopelessness. I was so low. So helpless.

"And I just thought: 'I don't want to see tomorrow'. I'm so grateful that he (Peters) picked up (her phone call). Because I don't think I would be here if he hadn't." Pendleton, whose weight had dropped considerably, moved in with her mother in Hertfordshire for a time.

A subsequent holiday in France made her feel she had "turned a corner" before she embarked on a surfing trip to Costa Rica. "I guess it was a very unconventional thing to do," she added. "It was against the recommendation of my family and almost everyone else. — AFP

DeChambeau has world domination in mind at Dubai Desert Classic

DUBAI: Bryson DeChambeau returns to the Dubai Desert Classic three years after his debut as the top-ranked player in the field at world number five, but the American has made it clear that he is far from satisfied with his meteoric rise.

The 25-year-old, popularly referred to as the 'Mad Scientist' because of his use of scientific methods in trying to improve his game, was the leading amateur and shot 12-under par on his first Dubai appearance in 2016.

However, he is one of the hottest players in the professional game right now, having won four times on the PGA Tour last year, including three in his last eight starts.

DeChambeau headlines a stellar field in the tournament, which is celebrating its 30th edition this year and starts at Emirates Golf Club today. All of DeChambeau's six wins as a professional have come on American soil and he quickly established what he wanted to achieve, saying: "It's an honour to be back here and super excited.

"Obviously, played well on this golf course here a couple years ago. Didn't putt very well but I think we figured out why for this year. "I am looking forward to a really good week. The game is in great shape... I am hitting it well, putting it well. I'm honestly just excited to try and capture an international victory. That's really what I want to do this week."

Winner in back-to-back weeks of the

FedEx Cup playoffs in 2018, DeChambeau said he is still not satisfied with the progress he has made since his last visit. "Not satisfied. There's more to learn. There's more to achieve," said DeChambeau.

"For me, it's not necessarily about being the number one. I mean, that's the result of all the hard work, right? But for me, it's more about understanding the game at a whole other level that's never really been done before.

"I want to achieve different insight into all the different variables that go through you having to adjust properly to the course at hand."

China's Li Haotong is the defending champion this week in a field that also includes 2017 champion Sergio Garcia. Garcia is enjoying a great run of form and has not finished outside the top 10 in his last six starts, including a win at the Andalucia Valderrama Masters.

"I've always looked at it that you can't get victories without being up there and finishing in the top 10 or anything like that," said the 2017 Masters champion when asked if he was frustrated his form and consistency has not led to more wins.

"If you're fighting to finish 25th, you don't have a chance of winning. Winning has become tougher and tougher as the years went by... all the kids are much better now than they used to be.

"At the end of the day, the only thing I can do is give myself the best chance and try to play the best way possible. If I'm around the top 10, I have my chances of winning. If it happens, great, and if not, it's still a great week."

Also in the field are European Ryder Cup star Tommy Fleetwood, 2007 champion Henrik Stenson and Ireland's Shane Lowry, winner of last week's tournament in Abu Dhabi. — AFP

Pouille credits coach after reaching s-final

MELBOURNE: Lucas Pouille hailed new coach Amelie Mauresmo for bringing him "a lot of confidence" after yesterday becoming the first Frenchman to reach the semi-finals of the Australian Open since Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in 2010.

The 28th seed fought back from a break down in the first set to stun 16th seed Milos Raonic 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4 and reach the last four of a Slam for the first time. The 24-year-old had never won a match at Melbourne Park before this year but will on Friday face Novak Djokovic for a place in the final.

"I think she's bringing a lot of confidence to my game, to my personality, to my state of mind," he said of the Frenchwoman, who won the singles crown at Melbourne Park in 2006. "As I said at the beginning, the goal is not to reach the final, the semi-final, the goal is to improve my tennis, to put into a match what I work on during practice.

"That gives me less pressure. I'm just trying to focus on my game, not on the consequences and the results." Pouille recruited the double Grand Slam title winner Mauresmo to his team in the off-season after a splitting with long-time coach Emmanuel Panque.

Mauresmo, who also won Wimbledon in 2006, had in the past been the subject of criticism on social media while coaching Andy Murray, with some saying men could not be coached effectively by a woman.

"Men are coaching women, so why not the contrary? I mean, they don't get it," Pouille said, adding that more men should hire female coaches. "As I said again and again, it's not about being a man or a woman, it's about knowing tennis," said Pouille, who in March last year broke into the top 10 of the ATP Tour rankings for the first time. "She's a champion. She's a great coach."

MAKE HIM PLAY

Currently ranked 31, Pouille arrived in Melbourne in poor form: he had lost all three of his singles matches at the Hopman Cup and suffered a first-round exit at the Sydney International. "I just kept working hard. All the matches I decided to take step by step, give everything on every point and here I am."

Former world number three Raonic raced to a 3-0 lead after breaking Pouille's first service game as the Frenchman seemed to take a few minutes to adjust to the magnitude of the occasion on Rod Laver Arena.

Pouille soon settled into the match so effectively that he broke back at 5-3 down and took the set in a tiebreak on the back of 18 winners to only five unforced errors. "I really wanted to return as much as possible and make him play, take care of my serve and not put too much pressure on myself," said Pouille.

Pouille had equalled his best Slam performance by reaching the quarter-final and was aiming to become the first Frenchman to reach the last four at any major since Gael Monfils at the 2016 US Open.

An early break in the second put him in the driving seat. Raonic had to dig deep at 3-3, 15-40 in the third set with his famed huge serve coming to the rescue before clawing one set back in another tiebreak. But Pouille put Raonic's serve under increasing pressure in the fourth set and converted his third match point to close out the match in 3hr 2min. — AFP