

Sixers, Celtics cruise in NBA Playoffs, Knicks edge Cavs

Joel Embiid and James Harden sparked a Philadelphia 76ers romp while the Boston Celtics cruised to victory behind Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum in NBA playoff openers on Saturday.

NBA scoring champion Embiid scored 26 points while NBA assists champion Harden added 23 points and 13 assists in the Sixers' 121-101 rout of visiting Brooklyn, AFP reported.

The host Sixers, who led the NBA in 3-point shooting percentage, sank a club playoff record 21 3-pointers in 43 attempts to seize a 1-0 lead in the Eastern Conference best-of-seven opening series, which continues today in Philadelphia.

The Celtics ripped visiting Atlanta 112-99 behind 29 points and 12 rebounds from Brown and 25 points and 11 rebounds from Tatum.

Brown played with a wrapping on cut fingers and a protective mask he has had for two months due to a facial fracture.

"Got to come out and be ready to go," he said. "My team depends on me. My city depends on me. I don't make no excuses. I come out



Philadelphia 76ers' James Harden (red) reacts after a shot as Brooklyn Nets' Spencer Dinwiddie (26) and Mikal Bridges (1) defend during Game 1 in the first round of the NBA Playoffs in Philadelphia, PA, US, on April 15, 2023.
● DERIK HAMILTON/AP

and playball." The first NBA playoff nail-biter came at Cleveland, where Jalen Brunson scored 21 of his team-high 27 points in the second half

to lead New York over Cleveland 101-97. The host Cavaliers, who had 38 points from Donovan Mitchell in a losing cause, went on a 9-0 run for a 93-

92 lead before the Knicks reclaimed the lead. Brunson's driving layup boosted the Knicks ahead 99-95 but Jarrett Allen's dunk tightened the game

for Cleveland. A Brunson miss was rebounded by New York's Julius Randle, who had 19 points and 10 rebounds, and that set up two clinching Knicks free

throws by Quentin Grimes. Philadelphia's Embiid, the NBA season scoring leader with 33.1 points a game, went 7-of-15 from the floor but the Cameroonian star was 11-of-11 from the free throwline.

Harden, who hit 7-of-13 from 3-point range, became the first player in 76ers history with 20 points, 10 assists and five 3-pointers in one contest.

He also helped eight Sixers in all to make 3-pointers. In the times the Nets stifled Embiid, Harden picked them apart with inside moves, skilled shot-making and precision passing.

Philadelphia made a club one-half playoff record of 13 3-pointers on the way to a 67-58 halftime edge.

Brooklyn's Mikal Bridges scored a game-high 30 points, but only seven in the second half.

At Boston, Derrick White contributed 24 points for Boston, which used a 20-3 second-quarter run to seize a 74-44 half-time lead.

The Hawks, led by Dejounte Murray's 24 points, rallied in the second half but could not mount a sustained threat.

Record-holder Kipchoge headlines stacked Boston Marathon field



● KAZUHIRO NOGI/GETTY IMAGES

World record-holder Eliud Kipchoge headlines a star-studded Boston Marathon field today as the world's oldest 26.2-mile race takes on a somber tone 10 years after a bombing attack near the finish line.

Survivors, first responders and other members of the public gathered on Saturday in Boston in honor of the victims of the marathon bombing, one of the most high-profile attacks on U.S. soil that claimed three lives and saw scores more injured.

A shattered community came together in the wake of the attack, adopting the slogan "Boston Strong" in a show of unity and resilience.

"This year, I am thinking about the importance of continuing on in the face of pain and setbacks," Boston's Coordinated Response Team Director Tania Del Rio said in a statement. "As we mark ten years since the 2013 Marathon, we run to keep our departed loved ones in our minds and hearts."

Speedy fields

Twice Olympic champion Kipchoge, a man who needs no introduction after he unofficially became the first to run a marathon in under two hours in 2019, is aiming to add a Boston title to his 10 World Marathon Major victories. He will face a tough challenge in his Boston debut from his fellow Kenyans, defending champion Evans Chebet and 2021 winner Benson Kipruto, as well as Ethiopian Lelisa Desisa, the 2019 world champion who won Boston in 2015 and 2013.

Ethiopian Amane Beriso, who produced the all-time third-fastest marathon in Valencia late last year, headlines a speedy women's field with twice major winner Joyciline Jepkosgei of Kenya and Ethiopia's world champion Gotytom Gebreselase.

Kenyan Edna Kiplagat will vie for her third Boston title with her fellow former champions American Des Linden and Ethiopian Atsede Baysa also expected to run.

British Joyce says 'journey will continue' after losing to China's Zhang



Zhilei Zhang (L) is in action against Joe Joyce at the Copper Box Arena, London, Britain, on April 15, 2023.
● ANDREW COULDRIDGE/REUTERS

Joe Joyce declared his "journey will continue" after his world-title ambitions were rocked by a shock first career defeat against Zhilei Zhang. The British heavyweight, 37, suffered a sixth-round technical knockout at London's Copper Box Arena on Saturday, BBC Sport reported.

Referee Howard Foster stopped the fight as Joyce struggled with a swollen eye, having suffered repeatedly against the hard hitting of China's Zhang. "I've had my loss but I'll be back," Joyce told BBC Sport. "The journey will continue." Joyce's swollen eye, inspected twice by the ringside doctor, was hindering his sight by the

time Foster called a halt. But the Londoner said: "I can still see through it, I think it's just bruised. It's a formality to go to the hospital now to check it's not fractured or anything." In addition to his undefeated record, Joyce's defeat has also cost him his WBO interim belt and his status as mandatory challenger for unified world champion Oleksandr Usyk's WBO title.

Throughout fight week, there was much talk on when Joyce - who had held mandatory challenger status since July 2021 - would get his world-title shot. Although it was not something Joyce was guilty of himself, many fans and pundits may have overlooked the threat of

'Big Bang' Zhang.

Joyce faced arguably his biggest-hitting opponent to date. A southpaw heavyweight with strong amateur pedigree - winning silver at the 2008 Olympic Games - the 39-year-old's only loss came on points to Filip Hrgovic in August, in a fight many observers felt he won. Zhang has catapulted himself into world-title contention and is now the WBO's number one challenger for Ukraine's Usyk.

The sanctioning bodies have a rotation policy for mandatory defenses, meaning Usyk must first defend against WBA mandatory Daniel Dubois, with IBF number one Hrgovic second in line.

'It is win, win and win': Guardiola challenges City before title run-in

Pep Guardiola said Manchester City's 3-1 win over Leicester was absolutely vital in the pursuit of Arsenal, with the champions' hosting of the leaders a week on Wednesday like a cup final in their defence of the title.

Erling Haaland scored twice, to make it 47 goals for the season, and John Stones once, with Kelechi Iheanacho's late strike immaterial to the result, the Guardian reported.

If City's had a superior goal difference remains intact and they win all of their last eight games a third consecutive championship is theirs. Guardiola was asked if beating relegation-threatened Leicester was important in keeping the pressure on Mikel Arteta's side.

"Absolutely - it is win, win and win," said the manager of what was required. "They have made an incredible run and I don't think they will drop many points, so it is important to be in there and arrive in the final in the next PL game against them."

Guardiola said: "It is a final to play more finals because if you lose this game, it will be almost over. We spoke a month ago that hopefully we can arrive having the chance to be there. We want this opportunity knowing how difficult it will be." The manager was pleased with the display against Leicester, particularly as it followed Tuesday's 3-0 Champions League quarter-final first leg victory over Bayern Munich, Guardiola making five second-half substitutions with a view

to Wednesday's return in Germany.

"It was a really good game after the Champions League as well, against a team that is fighting and in a difficult position for them. In the end when you make a lot of substitutions you drop a little bit. I had to avoid injuries. Normally when you make changes it happens - [we got the] three points and on to the next one."

This was Dean Smith's first match in charge of Leicester. His team are two points from the last safe spot with 21 left to compete for. "I'm obviously disappointed but a two-goal deficit to the best team in the world isn't the end of the world," he said. "Our season won't be defined here, we have a run of games where we have to win."



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola during a Premier League victory over Leicester City at the Etihad Stadium, Manchester, Britain, on April 15, 2023.
● LINDSEY PARNABY/AFP