

NBA Playoffs:

Tatum, Brown spark Celtics past Sixers; Booker scores 47 as Suns beat Nuggets

ASSOCIATED PRESS – Jayson Tatum scored 27 points, Jaylen Brown had 23 and Boston Celtics spoiled Joel Embiid's MVP coronation, beating Philadelphia 76ers 114-102 Friday night to take a 2-1 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinal series.

Game 4 is tonight in Philadelphia. Embiid had 30 points and 13 rebounds in his second game back from a sprained right knee after receiving his MVP trophy in a pre-game ceremony.

Boston gave 76ers fans little reason to cheer again.

The Sixers pulled within five on DeAnthony Melton's 3-pointer to get the crowd back into the game for all of 20 seconds before Malcolm Brogdon countered with a 3 to give Boston a 100-92 lead. Al Horford crushed the Sixers again – as he has most of his career – when he buried a 3 for a seven-point lead.

Embiid, forced to try and win it alone without any serious offensive help, missed a pull-up 18-footer and Tatum drained a jumper that all but put the game away. Tatum hit one more 3 for good measure and the Celtics won their second straight.

"We just held the ball too long, too much," Embiid said. "We don't start our actions fast enough. That's why it looks so slow. We're not scoring the ball. We're not making shots."

Embiid was flanked by his parents and teammates as he received the MVP trophy from NBA Commissioner Adam Silver before Game 3.

Boston spiked any emotional carryover from the ceremony and raced to a quick 10-point lead.



Celtics' Jayson Tatum (0) shoots during a victory over the 76ers in Game 3 of the NBA Eastern Conference semifinal series in Philadelphia, PA, US, on May 5, 2023. nba.com

The Sixers spent the rest of the game playing catch-up. All the energy spent to come back and take brief leads quickly evaporated and the Celtics snagged them right back.

James Harden's 45-point effort in a Game 1 upset in Boston seemed more an aberration than a sign of things to come. Harden followed his 2 of 14 in a Game 2 loss with 3-for-14 shooting for 16 points.

Elsewhere, Devin Booker scored 47 points, Kevin Durant added 39 and the Phoenix Suns beat the Denver Nuggets 121-114 to cut Denver's lead to 2-1 in their NBA Western Conference

semifinal series. Booker had another ultra-efficient scoring night, shooting 20 of 25 from the field, including 5 of 8 from 3-point range. Durant shot just 12 of 31 from the field, but made 14 of 16 free throws.

The Suns will try to even the series in Game 4 tonight in Phoenix.

The Suns took a 90-88 lead into the fourth quarter, retaking the lead after the Nuggets erased a 15-point halftime deficit. Phoenix scored the first nine points of the fourth – including the final two on Durant's fast-break dunk – to push their advantage to 99-88.

They wouldn't trail in the fourth quarter. Durant started 1 for 9 from the field but made 11 of his final 22.

"It's frustrating not making shots, because that's what I'm paid to do," Durant said. "But there also comes a time when you've just got to figure it out and push through it."

Denver's Nikola Jokic – who finished second in the MVP voting on Tuesday to Embiid – finished with 30 points, 17 assists and 17 rebounds.

Jamal Murray led the Nuggets with 32 points, while Michael Porter Jr. added 21 points and 12 rebounds.

Denver coach Michael Malone said his team played well at times, but that the defense against Booker was "unacceptable." Booker repeatedly got near the rim for short jumpers or layups, which contributed to the 20 of 25 shooting night.

"I wasn't a math major but that is a really high percentage," Malone said. "We have to be a lot better."

The Suns put Cameron Payne in the starting lineup to take the place of 12-time All-Star Chris Paul, who suffered a strained left groin in the Game 2 loss and didn't play on Friday. Payne – a playoff hero

for a few games two seasons ago when Paul was out – scored seven points, including a big 3-pointer early in the fourth.

Williams also shook up the bench rotation, giving Terrence Ross, Jock Landale and TJ Warren more minutes. Landale finished with six points and nine rebounds, while Warren hit a couple crucial buckets in the final minutes to help the Suns keep the lead.

Booker scored 27 points in the first half on 12-of-15 shooting to push the Suns ahead 67-52 by halftime. Durant added 21, including 11 points on free throws.

Tayebi's double sends Palma into UEFA Futsal Champions League final



GETTY IMAGES

Sports Desk

Iranian international Hossein Tayebi bagged a brace as Mallorca Palma Futsal defeated Benfica 4-3 in the UEFA Futsal Champions League semifinals.

The Spanish club will host Sporting CP in today's final in Palma Arena.

Sporting thrashed Anderlecht 7-1 in the other last-four clash earlier on Friday.

Tayebi opened the scoring for Palma from the spot in the second minute after Benfica keeper Leo Gugiel brought down Cainan in the box.

Mancuso doubled Palma's lead in the fifth minute and Tayebi netted his second of the night against his former club in the 18th minute – turning in Mario Rivillos' cross.

Chishkala and Gugiel scored on either side of the interval to give the Portuguese side a lifeline but Cainan restored the two-goal cushion for the host in the 22nd minute.

Gonçalo Sobral caught the deficit to one three minutes later but Palma held off Benfica's late push to become the fifth team to reach the final on its debut at the competition.

Sporting will be chasing a third title in a record 10th final appearance.

Iran's Amiri into last-16 at World Boxing Championships



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Sports Desk

Iranian heavyweight boxer Pouria Amiri advanced into the last-16 round at the IBA World Boxing Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Representing the country in the 92kg weight class, Amiri outmuscled Bakyt Toktosun Uulu of Kyrgyzstan by a unanimous decision (5-0) on his opening fight at the event. The Iranian will take on Armenia's Narek Manasyan in the next round on Monday.

Earlier on Friday, Amiri's compatriot Pouria Abdolmaleki was knocked out of the competition after falling to a 5-0 defeat against Armenian Artur Bazeyan in the featherweight (57kg) class.

More than 530 boxers will represent 107 countries in the 22nd of the event until May 14.

Recovering Nadal skips Italian Open to cast doubts over Roland Garros

REUTERS – Rafa Nadal will miss next week's Italian Open as he has yet to regain full fitness from the hip injury he sustained at January's Australian Open, casting further doubt over his participation in the French Open.

Nadal, a 14-times Roland Garros champion, skipped the ongoing Madrid Open and has also missed tournaments at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona. "I'm very sorry to announce that I will not be able to be in Rome," the 36-year-old Spaniard, a 10-times champion in Rome, said in a statement.

"You all know how much it hurts to miss another one of the

tournaments that have marked my professional and personal career for all the love and support of the Italian tifosi.

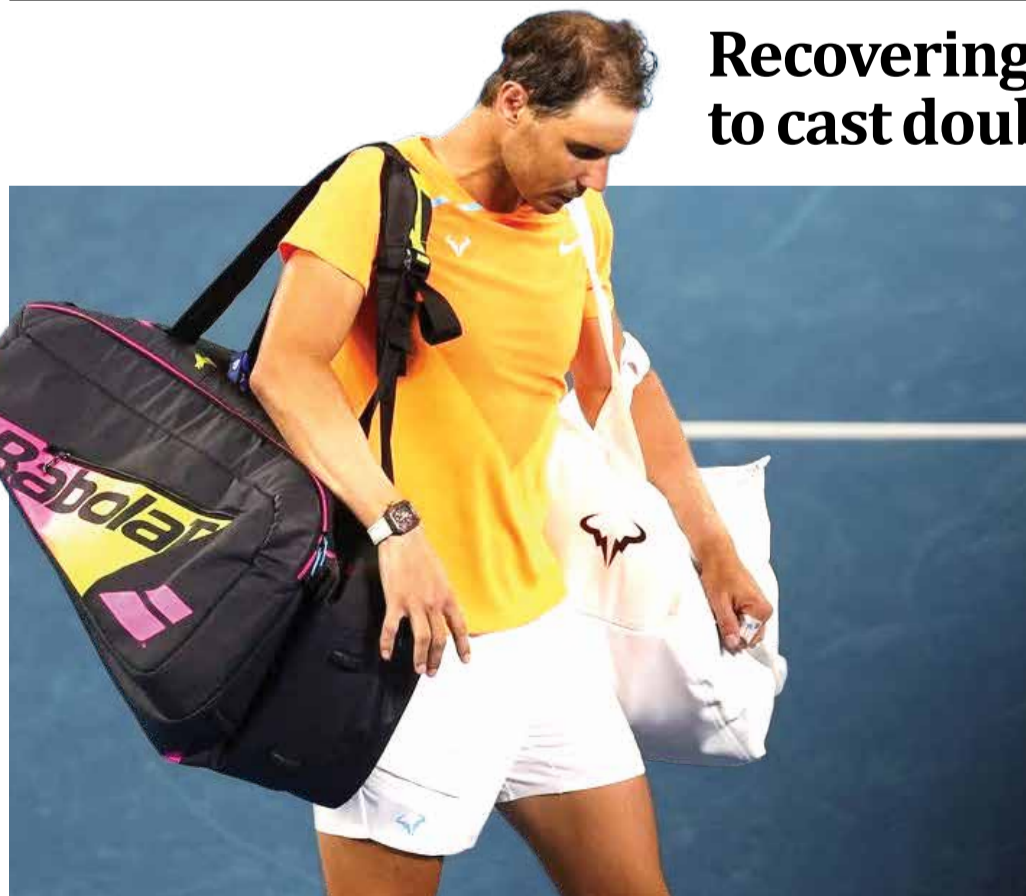
"Despite having noticed an improvement in recent days, there have been many months without having been able to train at a high level and the readaptation process has its times and I have no choice but to accept them and continue working."

Nadal, who has dominated the claycourt season for years, has competed at Roland Garros every year since winning the first of his men's record 22 major titles in Paris in 2005. The French Open begins on May

28.

He was initially set to miss up to eight weeks after suffering the hip flexor injury in January in his second-round match against Mackenzie McDonald that effectively ended his Melbourne Park title defence.

But a setback in his recovery ahead of the Madrid tournament and his subsequent withdrawal from Rome means that if he is fit in time, Nadal would be heading to Roland Garros without having played any competitive matches. In March, Nadal slipped out of the top 10 of the ATP ranking for the first time since 2005 and is currently ranked 14.



HANNAH MCKAY/REUTERS