

Nuggets suffer heaviest defeat of NBA season



Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) drives to the basket during an NBA victory over the Nuggets in Denver, CO, US, on December 29, 2023.
● USA TODAY SPORTS

BBC – Reigning NBA champions Denver Nuggets suffered their heaviest defeat of the season as they were beaten 119-93 by Oklahoma City Thunder.

It is the Nuggets' second defeat by Thunder in the space of two weeks and ends their six-match winning streak.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points for Thunder and Chet Holmgren added 24 points.

Nikola Jokic had 19 points, 10 rebounds, seven assists and seven turnovers for the Nuggets, but they were without forward Aaron Gordon for the second consecutive game because of hand and facial injuries sustained from dog bites.

Also on Friday, Boston Celtics' winning run at home continued as they beat Toronto Raptors 120-118.

Jaylen Brown had 31 points, 10 rebounds and six assists in the Celtics' fifth consecutive victory.

Elsewhere, Washington Wizards beat Brooklyn Nets 110-104 to earn their first win in four games.

Kyle Kuzma scored 26 points and Deni Avdija added 21 points and 13 rebounds for the Wizards.

Devin Booker, with 35, was one of four Phoenix Suns players to score at least 21 points in their 133-119 victory over Charlotte Hornets.

Kevin Durant, Jusuf Nurkic and Eric Gordon were the other contributors as the Suns secured back-to-back wins for the first time in more than a month.

Terry Rozier was the Hornets' standout performer with 42 points, one shy of his career-best, and added eight assists.

Portland Trail Blazers avenged Thursday's defeat by San Antonio Spurs to beat the same opponents 134-128 with Jerami Grant and Malcolm Brogdon scoring 27 points each.

LA Clippers played their fourth consecutive match without injured star Kawhi Leonard but still earned a 117-106 win over Memphis Grizzlies.

Clippers' Paul George scored 23 points and Ivica Zubac added 15 points with 20 rebounds.

Franz Wagner's season-high 32 points and nine rebounds helped Orlando Magic beat the New York Knicks 117-108.

Greco-Roman Wrestling National Championships:

Mohmedi draws first blood against Alizadeh; Hedayati outmuscles Yousefi

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestler Alireza Mohmedi will be looking to go all the way to represent the country at next year's Paris Olympics after coming out on top against Nasser Alizadeh in the Greco-Roman Wrestling National Championships.

All eyes were on the 87kg final at the event in Qom – serving as the first round of the national team trials – as to who would take advantage in the race to be the Iranian contender for an Olympic berth.

It was Mohmedi who built on a world 82kg silver-winning run in September to walk away with a thrilling 5-4 victory over his opponent – the Asian 87kg champion for the past three years and runner-up in October's Asian Games. The fate of the weight class is far from settled as both will still have to take part in several Olympic qualification tournaments in the coming months but Thursday's victory surely gave Mohmedi a slight edge over Alizadeh, who was part of the Iranian squad at the World Championships in Belgrade – knocked out in the quarterfinals.

The other highly-anticipated showdown came in the 130kg contests, where superheavyweight prodigy and reigning world under-20 champion Fardin Hedayati outpowered the 2021 world senior champion Ali-Akbar Yousefi 4-1 for the ultimate prize. Friday's triumph means Hedayati will likely be given a shot at the Asian glory in April, though Amin Mirzazadeh is all but guaranteed a superheavyweight place in Paris after his world gold in the Serbian capital sealed the Olympic slot for the country.

Meanwhile, with veteran Mohammad-Ali Geraei serving a one-year ban over the bottle-throwing incident in Belgrade, 77kg questions remain over the Iranian 77kg slot for the upcoming Olympic qualifiers.

Amir Abdi defeated Ali Oskou 3-2 in Thursday's final to throw down the gauntlet to Amin Kavi-



Alireza Mohmedi lifts fellow-Iranian Nasser Alizadeh in the 87kg final at the Greco-Roman Wrestling National Championships in Qom, Iran, on December 28, 2023.
● IWF

anejad, who was absent in the National Championships due to his runner-up finish at the Asian Games.

Elsewhere, Mohammad-Mahdi Gholampour dominated the 60kg contests, cruising to a technical-fall victory over Mahdi Javaheri in the final, and will join Mahdi Mohsennejad in the national team training camp ahead of the Olympic qualifiers.

In the absence of the world 67kg sensation Mohammadreza Geraei, local boy Mohammad-Javad Rezaei made the most of the opportunity to make a quick work of Armin Moheb-Sabet in less than two minutes for the gold.

Still, the younger of the Geraei brothers, who had to settle for a consolation bronze in Belgrade,

will be leading the charge for Iran in the weight division as he will be chasing a second successive Olympic gold next August.

In the 97kg event, Asian champion Mahdi Bali came out victorious (3-1) against Amir-Reza Akbari in the final, though he will likely stand second in the pecking order behind Mohammad-Hadi Saravi – a winner of a world gold and double bronzes, who will be eager to add a second Olympic medal to his Tokyo bronze.

In the non-Olympic competitions, Mohammad-Mahdi Sha'bani marched to a 9-0 triumph over Mohammad Hosseinvand in the 55kg final, while Meysam Dalkhani – world champion in 2021 – defeated Erfan Jarkani 8-5 for the 63kg gold.

Mohammadreza Rostami eased past Mohammad Elyasi (11-3) for the 72kg crown, with Rasoul Garmsiri grabbing the 82kg gold at the expense of Abbas Mahdizadeh.

Having already secured seven Greco-Roman and freestyle spots for the Olympics, Iran hopes to make a clean sweep of 12 berths before heading to Paris.

Freestyle wrestlers Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) and Hassan Yazdani (86kg) finished on the podium in Belgrade, while Rahman Amouzad, despite the failure in defending his world 65kg title, managed to finish fifth to book a third freestyle spot for the country.

Kamran Qasempour missed out on the National Championships in mid-December with an injury, but

has been given a second chance by the coaching staff at the Zagreb Open, where he will represent the country – alongside reigning Iranian champion Amir-Ali Azarpira – in the 97kg event, as he will be looking to add the Olympic glory to his double world 92kg golds in 2021 and 2022.

A gold winner in the National Championships, Hossein Abouzari and world 79kg silver winner Mohammad Nokhodi will be the frontrunners in chasing the 74kg quota for Iran, while Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan will be keen to build on a dominant 57kg campaign in the national event – featuring a final victory over former world silver medalist Alireza Sarlak – to punch a ticket for Paris.

Turkey Super Cup final in Riyadh called off amid Ataturk T-shirt row



Fans are seen in the stands ahead of the Turkish Super Cup final, which was eventually called off, at Al-Awwal Park, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 29, 2023.
● AP

AL JAZEERA – The Turkish Super Cup final between Galatasaray and Fenerbahce scheduled to be played in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh was called off over an apparent disagreement about the players' jerseys.

The Turkish Football Federation (TFF) and the two teams – who returned to Istanbul on Saturday after Friday's postponed match – said the decision was made because of "some problems" in the event's organisation.

Haberturk television and other Turkish media said players from both Istanbul football teams wanted to wear T-shirts that featured an image of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the revered founder of the modern Turkish republic, during a prematch warm-up, but were not authorised to do so by Saudi organisers.

Turkish media also reported that Saudi authorities did not allow

banners featuring political slogans and Ataturk T-shirts to be displayed ahead of the match, including those with Ataturk's "peace at home, peace in the world" slogan.

The clubs refused to play in the final at the King Saud University venue, which is also known as Al-Awwal Park stadium. Saudi state TV cited a statement by organisers saying that the cancellation was the result of the teams not adhering to match regulations.

"We were looking forward to holding the match on time in accordance with the international soccer rules and regulations that require the sport to be presented without any slogans outside its scope, especially since this was discussed with the Turkish [Football] Federation in the framework of the preparatory meetings for the match," the

statement said.

"Despite this agreement, it was unfortunate that the two teams did not adhere to what had been agreed upon, which led to the match not being held," it added.

A joint statement by the TFF and the clubs posted on X said: "The 2023 Super Cup ... has been postponed to a later date as a result of a joint decision we made with our clubs, due to some problems in its organisation."

It also expressed "gratitude to the football federation of the host country and the relevant institutions for their efforts in organising" the event.

On Saturday, photographs and video footage showed hundreds of Galatasaray and Fenerbahce fans cheering, waving Turkish flags and carrying pictures of Ataturk at the Istanbul and Sabiha Gokcen airports.