

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Giannis a giant as Bucks bury Pistons

Antetokounmpo puts up 41 to lead Milwaukee to easy sweep of Detroit

DETROIT — Giannis Antetokounmpo drove to the hoop and drew yet another foul, this one a hard hack on the arm by Blake Griffin.

Griffin fouled out and headed to the bench as the home crowd gave him a standing ovation. Then many fans headed toward the exits.

Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks were on their way to another rout against the Detroit Pistons on Monday night.

Antetokounmpo scored 41 points as the Bucks won 127-104, completing a four-game sweep and advancing to the second round of the NBA Eastern Conference playoffs for the first time since 2001.

The last time the Bucks won a postseason series, they made it all the way to the conference final. This year's team isn't there yet, but so far Milwaukee looks the part of the top seed in the East.

"I remember our first playoff series (in 2015)," Antetokounmpo said. "Chicago, Game 6, they beat us by 50 or something insane. But where we were and where we are right now, it's been an unbelievable journey."

On Monday, Milwaukee closed the third quarter with a 17-3 run, taking a 10-point lead after the Pistons had led much of the way.

Detroit set an NBA record with its 14th consecutive playoff loss, a skid that began in 2008.

The Bucks will face Boston in the second round. The Celtics are coming off a sweep of their own against the Indiana Pacers.

"I think it's important that we take a second tonight to enjoy it,"



Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo goes for a layup during Monday's 127-104 win over the Detroit Pistons.

USA TODAY SPORTS

Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "It's a good night for Milwaukee. It's a good night for the Bucks."

Reggie Jackson scored 20 of his 26 points in the first half for Detroit. Griffin fouled out with 7:06 remaining after scoring 22. He missed the first two games of the series with knee problems.

"Blake played his heart out with basically one leg," said Pistons coach

Dwane Casey, whose voice was hoarse during his postgame news conference.

"He fought through a lot of pain and swelling."

Griffin was on the bench for much of Milwaukee's crucial run, including the final 4:35 of the third quarter.

Antetokounmpo scored 16 points in that quarter, half of which came on free throws.

Detroit led 20-8 early after a dunk by Griffin. The Pistons were up 62-56 at halftime but still couldn't prevent a fourth straight blowout at the hands of the team that had the NBA's best regular-season record.

Milwaukee won the four games by a total of 95 points, and no game was closer than 16.

Free reign

Milwaukee went 31 of 41 on free throws; Detroit was only 9 of 12. Casey was called for a technical foul in the third, and the fans weren't at all pleased with the officiating.

At one point Milwaukee had a 32-8 edge in free-throw attempts, but when that stat was posted on the main video board, there didn't seem to be any further reaction from the Detroit crowd.

"Giannis shooting eight more free throws than our entire team — you're not going to win a game like that," Griffin said. "And their team shooting 41. Some of that's on us."

The Bucks outscored the Pistons 62-42 in the paint and finished with 10 blocked shots to Detroit's one.

Brook Lopez had five blocks and Antetokounmpo had four, including one on Ish Smith that looked more like a volleyball spike.

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NBA China CEO Derek Chang (left) and Shao Xinmou, CEO of Dicos' parent company, Ting Qiao F&B Group, pose during a ceremony to announce their partnership on Monday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

NBA strikes deal with Dicos

By CHINA DAILY

With a new teammate on the floor, the NBA is confident of lifting basketball to even greater heights in China.

As playoff fever grips Chinese fans, the league has announced a new multiyear deal with fast-food chain Dicos, making the Taiwan-based brand a marketing partner of NBA China.

The linkup will see the fried-chicken vendor engage fans with NBA-themed meals, in-store decoration and family activities across its 2,500 outlets in China.

Dicos will also stage interactive fan events on the sidelines of this year's NBA China Games, featuring the Los Angeles Lakers versus the Brooklyn Nets on Oct 10 in Shanghai and two days later in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"Dicos shares our passion for the game of basketball, and we are delighted to welcome them to the NBA family," said NBA China CEO Derek Chang at Monday's ceremony in Beijing to announce the partnership.

"Through Dicos' expansive restaurant network, we look forward

to working with them to spread the excitement of the NBA experience and culture in new ways and to more fans."

This year's China Games will be the league's 27th and 28th preseason exhibitions here since 2004.

Chang reckons the arrival of Lakers megastar LeBron James to face the Nets, partially owned by Joe Tsai, co-founder of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, adds an extra dimension to the matchup.

"This is the one opportunity for fans in China to really engage with our product, our content, our players and our games on a live basis, so we do everything we can to make it our signature event of the year," he said.

Starting in June, Dicos will host an NBA-themed basketball challenge with teams and mascot elements during its Family Day event.

Dicos will also launch an "NBA energy meal" this summer, featuring franchise branding and new menu items.

Additional activities around the NBA China Games will be announced at a later date, according

to Shao Xinmou, CEO of Dicos' parent company, Ting Qiao F&B Group.

"For more than 20 years, Dicos has continuously challenged itself in pursuit of progress and excellence," said Shao.

"This collaboration with the NBA is key to the strategic upgrading of the Dicos brand and will position us to deliver some rich experiences to consumers."

Chang said Dicos' presence in China's third-tier cities will give the NBA more comprehensive exposure.

"NBA fans are very passionate and knowledgeable about our league," said the Chinese American.

"Dicos restaurants provide a great environment for NBA fans to talk about basketball with their friends and family."

The NBA estimates that around 700 million Chinese — about twice the total population of the United States — watched live games or league programming on TV or online during the 2017-2018 season, while more than 200 million people followed the league on Chinese social media platforms.

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