

Howard scores 22 as Storm dispatch Mercury 82-70

Washington cruise to easy win over New York

WHITE PLAINS, New York, Sept 4, (AP): Elena Delle Donne scored 25 of her 30 points in the first half and the Washington Mystics cruised to a 93-77 win over the New York Liberty.

Ariel Atkins added 23 points for the Mystics (24-8), who have clinched a top-two seed for the playoffs and extended their lead over second place Connecticut to 1½ games. The season ends Sunday.

Washington raced to a 31-19 lead after one quarter and with Delle Donne scoring 17 points in the second quarter stretched the advantage to 58-40 at the break.

Delle Donne and LaToya Sanders both had 10 rebounds as the Mystics dominated the boards 42-23.

Marine Johannes led the Liberty (9-23), which has lost five straight and 13 of 14, with a career-high 22 points. The rookie from France had scored 21 points in her previous game.

The Mystics, who have won four straight, signed Tianna Hawkins, a former first-round pick, to a contract extension through the 2020 season, then

rested her against the Liberty. Kristi Toliver missed her ninth straight game because of a knee injury that is expected to keep her out until the playoffs.

Storm 82, Mercury 70

In Phoenix, Natasha Howard scored 11 of her 22 points in the first quarter and the Storm got off to a strong start en route to a win over the Mercury.

BASKETBALL

Seattle (17-15) moved into a tie with Minnesota for the sixth seed and holds the tie-breaker. The Mercury (15-17) will finish eighth. When the playoffs open next week, the fifth and sixth seeds have home games and the seventh and eighth seeds are on the road in the single-elimination first round.

The Storm shot 58% in the first quarter to 39% for the Mercury and steadily pulled away. It was 50-35 at halftime and the margin was 20 entering the fourth quarter. Brittney Griner had 22 points for Phoenix.

Before the game the Storm announced Sue Bird, who had preseason knee surgery, would not play this season.

It was Women of Inspiration night in Phoenix with the Mercury players wearing custom shoes dedicated to the women who inspired them.

Sparks 70, Dream 60

In Los Angeles, Candace Parker and Chiney Ogwumike each had double-doubles and Los Angeles overcame a slow start to beat the last-place Dream in a game that put the Sparks in position to earn a first-round bye in the playoffs.

Parker had 21 points and 11 rebounds, Ogwumike 17 and 10. Ogwumike started for her sister Nneka, who was out with an illness that sidelined her for the second half of the team's last game against Las Vegas.

After trailing by 11 after one quarter, the Sparks rallied in the second quarter, took the lead in the third and held off Atlanta to move a full game ahead of fifth-place Chicago with two games to play.



Phoenix Mercury guard Sophie Cunningham (left), drives past Seattle Storm forward Natasha Howard during the second half of a WNBA basketball game on Sept 3 in Phoenix. (AP)

Close to home, Iturria takes first stage 'victory' at Vuelta

Roglic keeps overall lead

URDAX, Spain, Sept 4, (AP): Mikel Iturria couldn't have asked for a better setting for his first professional cycling win.

Just a few kilometers (miles) from home and with his family watching, Iturria used a solo breakaway to win the 11th stage of the Spanish Vuelta on Wednesday.

"To win the Vuelta, close to home and with my family here, is a dream come true," the Spaniard said. "Before the race I was asked which stage I wanted to win, and I said this was the one. I gave all I had. I was going as fast as I could, finding strength that I didn't know I had, and was able to make it to the end and win the stage."

Iturria held on for the victory after making an impressive solo run with about 25 kilometers (15 miles) to go

of the 180-kilometer (112-mile) ride from Saint-Palais to Urdax in Spain's Basque Country.

Iturria, a 27-year-old rider from team Euskadi-Murias, finished six seconds ahead of the first group of chasers. He had built a gap of nearly 50 seconds with about 15 kilometers (9 miles) to go.

"I don't have words for this," the Basque Country rider said. "We'll have to toast with champagne tonight."

Overall leader Primož Roglic finished safely in the peloton, which crossed the line almost 20 minutes after Iturria. Roglic remained 1 minute, 52 seconds

in front of Alejandro Valverde, with Miguel Ángel López 19 seconds behind.

"It was a bit of a hard start but then it was a nice day and my team did a great job," said Roglic, a former ski jumper from Slovenia who rides for team Jumbo-Visma. "We've proven this is a big team already. I don't think tomorrow's stage is more dangerous

CYCLING

than the high mountains. I don't have any problem with short climbs. We need to be focused on the moment and do our best."

On Thursday, riders will face three difficult short climbs near the end of a 171-kilometer (106-mile) stage that will finish in Bilbao, still in Basque Country.

Germany and Dutch renew rivalry

Italy hit by injuries

LONDON, Sept 4, (AP): If Germany's players are tired of facing The Netherlands, they're not showing it.

Two of European soccer's biggest rivals will meet for the fourth time in 11 months on Friday in European Championship qualifying.

Germany looks to continue its recent turnaround in form, while the Dutch return to action for the first time since losing the Nations League final to Portugal in June.

Already, injuries are dogging Europe's top teams. Italy has four players out for Thursday's visit to Armenia, while France is without Paul Pogba and Belgium is missing Eden Hazard and his brother Thorgan.

With 12 goals in their last three meetings, Germany's games against The Netherlands have been entertaining.

Friday's match will be the first time the Germans have hosted the Dutch since Virgil van Dijk's last-gasp equalizer earned his team a spot in the Nations League semifinals last year.

"The Netherlands guys are flexible, adjustable, quick and cool-headed in front of goal," Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said. "We've got to be careful and wide awake."

With five goals in three league games this season for Leipzig, Timo Werner will be hoping to replicate his club form at international level for the Germans.

Northern Ireland is the surprise early leader in Group C but must still play Germany and The Netherlands twice each. The squad Italy is taking to Armenia and Finland isn't the one coach Roberto Mancini wanted.

Four players from his original selection, most recently forward Lorenzo Insigne, have been replaced because of injury. Besides Insigne, defenders Giorgio Chiellini and Mattia De Sciglio, and midfielder Bryan Cristante are out. Italy has a three-point lead in Group J. The team has won its last five games and is unbeaten in almost a year.

In Group H, World Cup champions France is without Pogba, who picked up an ankle injury in Manchester United's draw against Southampton.

That gives Arsenal midfielder Matteo Guendouzi a chance to make his debut for France, which along with Turkey and Iceland is one of three teams in Group H with nine points. France can build a lead with wins over Albania on Saturday and Andorra on Tuesday.

After Portugal's slow start with two draws, Cristiano Ronaldo and teenager João Félix are back together this month.

Félix, touted at home as the new Ronaldo, was included again in the national team's squad for the Group B games against Serbia on Saturday and Lithuania on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old Félix hadn't played with his idol since joining Atlético Madrid from Benfica in the offseason. Félix and Ronaldo played together in the Nations League, which Portugal won. A feature of Gareth Southgate's impressive tenure as England coach has been his willingness to call up the country's brightest young players, likely influenced by his previous role in charge of the Under-21 team.

Wan-Bissaka, 21, was the latest youngster brought into the squad ahead of home qualifiers against Bulgaria and Kosovo at Wembley Stadium, but the Manchester United right back was withdrawn because of a back problem.

Young players hoping to make their first appearances include playmakers Mason Mount and James Maddison,



Kuwaiti shooter Abdulrahman Al-Faihan celebrates on the podium with fellow winners after finishing second in the trapshooting contest.



Mansour Al-Rashidi, with his team, celebrates after finishing third in the skeet shooting competition.

Kuwait shooting team bag two medals in Italian Shotgun Open

KUWAIT CITY, Sept 4, (KUNA): Kuwait's national shooting team claimed a silver medal and a bronze amid stiff competition in Italy's Shotgun Open Green Cup.

Kuwaiti shooter Abdulrahman Al-Faihan came in second in the trapshooting contest, while his compatriot Mansour Al-Rashidi finished third in the skeet shooting competition, the team's coach Mohammad Mazyad told KUNA

via telephone. He said he was satisfied with the national team's performance given the world-class quality of the competition at the event, where the Kuwaitis had their hands full against seasoned shooters from the host nation and abroad.

He went on to say that the overwhelming support the team has received was the key to their impressive outing.

who have started the Premier League season well with Chelsea and Leicester, respectively. England leads Group A after winning its opening two qualifying games, including a 5-0 rout of the second-place Czech squad.

Spain enters the qualifying week with coach Robert Moreno's first squad since he took over permanently from Luis Enrique.

The former assistant brought back players such as Paco Alcácer of Borussia Dortmund and Dani Ceballos, who has been thriving since joining Arsenal in the Premier League this season.

Moreno had been in charge since Luis Enrique stepped away in March because of his daughter's illness, but the former Barcelona coach was still involved in the player lists. Luis Enrique's daughter died last week because of a type of bone cancer.

Spain leads Group F with 12 points and plays at Romania on Thursday be-

fore hosting the Faroe Islands.

Belgium is still cruising toward qualification. Even with Eden Hazard and Thorgan Hazard both out injured, the Belgians remain the strong favorites against San Marino on Friday and Scotland on Monday in Group I.

Russia can tighten its hold on second place if it beats Scotland on Friday and Kazakhstan three days later.

World Cup finalists Croatia is outside the qualifying spots in Group E and its chances could take a further blow if it can't beat second-place Slovakia on Friday and Azerbaijan on Monday. Hungary leads, while Euro 2016 semifinalist Wales is fourth and in danger of missing the tournament.

Group D leader Ireland can take a big step toward qualification by beating Switzerland on Thursday. Poland have four wins from four matches in Group G and face Slovenia on Friday and Austria on Monday.

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