

Thunder storm to NBA title

Oklahoma City Thunder defeats injury-hit Indiana Pacers in Game 7 to win NBA Championship

● **Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scores 29 points, 12 assists, named Finals MVP**

● **Haliburton injured early**

● **Oklahoma City wins first title since 2008 relocation**

AFP | Oklahoma City

The Oklahoma City Thunder crowned a dazzling season with an NBA title on Sunday, pulling away relentlessly in the second half to beat the injury-hit Indiana Pacers 103-91 in game seven of the NBA Finals.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 29 points and handed out 12 assists and the Thunder's swarming defense finally proved to much for a Pacers team that lost talisman Tyrese Haliburton to a leg injury just seven minutes into the contest.

The underdog Pacers hung tough and held a 48-47 lead at halftime, but the Thunder outscored them 34-20 in the third quarter and pushed the lead to as many as 22 points in the fourth.

"It doesn't feel real, so many hours, so many moments, so many emotions, so many nights of disbelief," Gilgeous-Alexander said, his voice breaking "It's crazy to know that we're all here. "But this group worked for it,



Aaron Nesmith #23 and Benedict Mathurin #00 of the Indiana Pacers battle for the ball with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder

this group put in the hours and we deserved this."

Gilgeous-Alexander put himself among some of the game's greats as he earned Finals Most Valuable Player honours to go with his regular-season MVP and scoring title along with his first championship.

Jalen Williams scored 15 of his 20 points in the second half and Chet Holmgren added 18 points, eight rebounds, a steal and five of the Thunder's eight blocked shots.

A crowd of 18,203 at Paycom Center were given some tense

moments as the Pacers chipped away at the deficit, but 23 Indiana turnovers leading to 32 Thunder points were ultimately too much for the Pacers to overcome.

The Thunder, who led the league with 68 regular-season wins, captured their first title since the club's controversial move to Oklahoma City in 2008, the franchise having won it all in 1979 as the Seattle SuperSonics.

The Pacers, three-time American Basketball Association champions in the 1970s -- remain in search of a first title

since joining the NBA in the NBA-ABA merger.

Haliburton injured

Haliburton, already nursing a right calf strain when the Pacers won game six to force the first Finals game seven since 2016, had scored nine points -- all on three-pointers -- when he went down as he tried to drive past Gilgeous-Alexander.

Haliburton's right leg gave out and he sprawled forward, slapping the court in pain and disappointment.

Teammates gathered around



It doesn't feel real, so many hours, so many moments, so many emotions, so many nights of disbelief. But this group worked for it, this group put in the hours and we deserved this

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER

him before he was helped off the court and to the locker room, supported and hopping on one leg with a towel over his head.

In his absence, the Pacers dug in. Down by three after the first quarter, they took a 43-42 lead on a three-pointer by Benedict Mathurin with 2:02 left in the second quarter.

Oklahoma City would take the lead again before Andrew Nembhard drilled a step-back three-pointer with 4.3 seconds left to put the Pacers up 48-47 at halftime.

The first half featured 10 lead changes, both teams coming out with determination on the defensive end with everything at stake.

The three-point shot was an early difference-maker for the Pacers, who connected on eight of 16 from beyond the arc in the first half, but had just three after the break.

The Thunder struggled early from long range, but Gilgeous-Alexander made his first three-pointer of the night



Shai Gilgeous-Alexander became just the third player in NBA history to win regular-season MVP, scoring title, and Finals MVP in the same season, joining Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal

with 8:16 left in the third, Holmgren followed with a trey and Jalen Williams added another -- the quick 9-0 run giving Oklahoma City a 65-56 lead that set the stage for the rest of the game.

"We had 24 minutes to go get it -- we had 24 minutes to finish our season," Gilgeous-Alexander said of the Thunder's mindset coming out for the third.

"It was either gonna be bad or it was going to be pretty. We did everything we could."

Benedict Mathurin led the Pacers with 24 points off the bench. Pascal Siakam and T.J. McConnell added 16 points apiece and Andrew Nembhard scored 15.

But the famously resilient Pacers, who rallied from a 10-15 season start and authored a string of stirring comeback wins, finally came up short.

Bahrain's 3x3 basketball boom

● **From 157th to 73rd in just three months — Bahrain's rise is no accident**

TDT | Manama

Bahrain has made a remarkable climb in the FIBA men's 3x3 basketball world rankings, jumping 84 places to reach 73rd globally and 17th in Asia.

Rapid Rise, Strategic Roots

It's easy to look at the numbers and label Bahrain's ascent a breakthrough, and it is, but the real story lies in how it happened. Back in March, Bahrain sat outside the top 150. Today, they're firmly in the global conversation, and that's largely down to two things: elite-level performances abroad and smart planning at home.

Internationally, Mohamed Kuwaid has been central. The national team standout impressed in FIBA 3x3 World Tour events in Vienna and Ulaanbaatar, where he represented Riffa Club with consistency and purpose. His impact on the scoreboard has translated directly into valuable ranking points for the national federation.



Action from a match (file photo)

Building the Game, Not Just the Ranking

At home, the Bahrain Basketball Association hasn't waited for results, it's been creating them. The launch of the Bahrain

Summer Open 3x3 Championship was a ranking catalyst. The FIBA-sanctioned event drew in competition, created playing opportunities, and contributed directly to the national total.

It's an example of strategy in action: invest in domestic infra-

BETTER YOU KNOW

Bahrain's total of 80,568 in June marks its highest-ever ranking in FIBA's 3x3 history, more than doubling its score from earlier in 2024

structure, host recognised tournaments, and empower players with exposure and minutes that count.

Asia on Notice

In a stacked Asian field, moving to 17th regionally puts Bahrain in a more competitive bracket. It brings with it new expectations, potentially better tournament placements, and access to higher-quality opposition.

With the rankings based on ongoing performance and activity, staying here — or climbing further — will require the same formula: competitive minutes, consistent output, and sustained local engagement. But as far as statements of intent go, this one's loud and clear.

Pogba says he is talking to a club about comeback after ban

AFP | Paris

Former France midfielder Paul Pogba, who wants to resume his career after a doping ban, said on French television on Sunday he is "talking" with a club, which sources close to him said was Monaco.

The 32-year-old also said he had re-established contact with his brother Mathias, sentenced to a year in prison last December for his involvement in a plot to extort 13 million euros (\$15 million) from the 2018 World Cup winner.

Pogba, who played for Manchester United and Juventus, is hoping to put three chaotic years behind him.

Pogba suffered through repeated injuries and patchy form that led to his departure from United in 2022. He returned for a sec-

ond stint at Juventus, where his problems continued.

He failed a drugs test after a game in Italy in August 2023 and was handed a four-year doping ban, which was reduced 18 months on appeal. It ended in March.

"It was very, very hard," he said.

He said he was "talking" to a club, which multiple sources said was Ligue 1 Monaco.

Pogba said he was determined "to get back on the pitch, mentally ready, physically ready, it's just a matter of time".

The extortion case involving six men linked to Paul Pogba shocked France because the perpetrators included three childhood friends and his own brother.

The five other defendants were found guilty of extortion, kidnapping and detention, as well as participation in a criminal association, and sentenced to up to eight years in prison.

