

The Virgin Islands Daily News

Sports

Thursday, July 19, 2018



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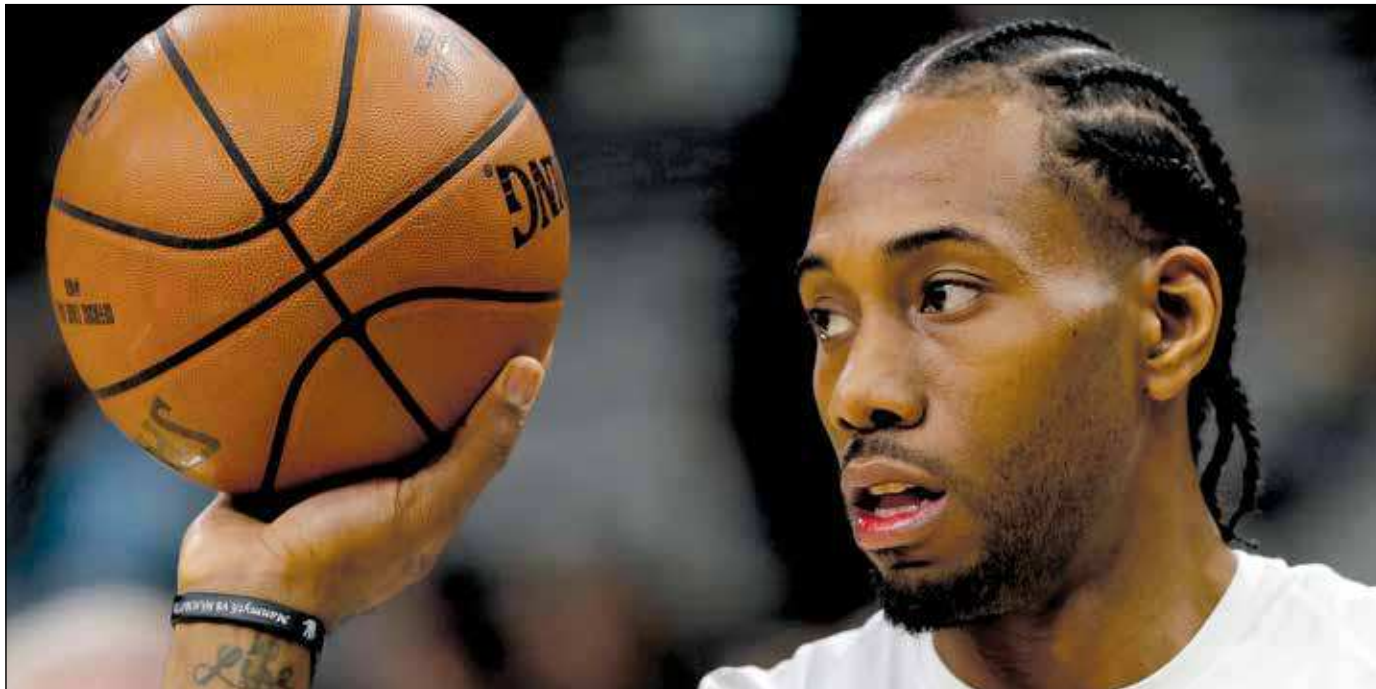


Photo by ASSOCIATED PRESS

The San Antonio Spurs have reached an agreement in principle to trade disgruntled star forward Kawhi Leonard, above, and guard Danny Green — to the Toronto Raptors for All-Star guard DeMar DeRozan.

Spurs send Leonard, Green to Toronto

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
The Associated Press

The Kawhi Leonard saga in San Antonio is over. So is DeMar DeRozan's time in Toronto.

An NBA summer blockbuster got pulled off Wednesday, with the Spurs sending Leonard to the Raptors as part of a four-player deal that has DeRozan heading to San Antonio. The Spurs also got center Jakob Poeltl and a 2019 protected first-round draft pick,

while the Raptors acquired sharpshooter Danny Green.

For Leonard and the Spurs, there's finally closure to a relationship that seemed fractured beyond repair and played out like a soap opera as the season went along. But in the end, Spurs coach Gregg Popovich — insisting that looking back at what happened would not be worth his time, and that Leonard was a good teammate throughout his tenure in San Antonio — simply said he hopes the move works out for everyone involved.

"Kawhi, obviously, worked very hard to become the player he is," Popovich said in San Antonio, a couple of hours after the trade became official when the teams got approval on the terms from the NBA. "Our staff worked very hard to help him get there. We wish him all the best as he moves on to Toronto. I think he's going to be great."

Leonard was the 2014 NBA Finals MVP and had been with the Spurs for

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Hoopsters hope to be a force in P.R. tournament

St. John teens to get exposure, relief from ravages of storms

By **ANDREA MILAM**
St. John Correspondent

ST. JOHN — When 12 St. John basketball players take off for Puerto Rico today, not only will it be the first time for many of them to get off the island since the hurricanes, but it will also be the first time some of them have ever left St. John.

The group of 16- to 18-year-olds, led by coach Clarence Stephenson, will compete against teams from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and St. Croix in the Puerto Rico International Shoot-out, which takes place today through Sunday.

The team, dubbed St. John Force, is an initiative started by the St. John Youth Organization arm of the St. John Long Term Recovery Team. Stephenson, an EMT and sergeant with VI Fire Service, has been working with the youth organization and credits his fellow board members Catikawa Richardson, Chelsea Baranowski, Shikima Jones, Christy Beaty, Kristen Carmichael-Bowers, and Aniece Evans for their efforts in helping the trip happen. St. John Force's tournament entry fee was waived by organizers, and the trip was largely funded by the St. John Community Foundation, with E&C Service Station

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The St. John Force is slated to compete this weekend in the Puerto Rico International Shootout in Puerto Rico. The team comprises, front row, kneeling, J'ki Jackson, left, Kobe Valmond, Lee Christian, and Arkeel Clersaint. In the back row are Eddy Louis, left, Shukiou Sprauve, Ty Massaquoi, Steven Payne, Nekhori Sprauve, Joel Williams, Patrick Hendrickson, and coach Clarence Stephenson. Not pictured are assistant coach Roy Freeland and Taevion Calixte.

ST. JOHN

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donating some funds as well.

“In the aftermath of the hurricanes, we need to do a lot of things to raise the kids’ spirits,” said SJCF Director Celia Kalousek. “Getting them off-island to separate themselves, particularly if people in their circle are still in disaster mode, gives them a breather. It’s a good morale booster and a mental break.”

The team started practicing for the tournament at the end of June. Stephenson, who’s been active in the youth basketball scene on St. John since the 1990s, has previously coached many of the St. John Force

players during their elementary and junior high basketball careers.

Scouts will be on hand at the tournament, giving players entering their final year of high school the opportunity to get some exposure, possibly giving them a leg up on a college basketball career. Stephenson said the team is talented and they have a shot at putting in a great showing — as long as nerves don’t get the better of them.

“We don’t play in tournaments with a lot of people in the audience,” he said. “At tournaments in Puerto Rico and the states, the gyms are filled with spectators so it’s a different atmosphere. This is a really great opportunity for them, and they’re

very excited.”

The St. John Force basketball team and their trip to the Puerto Rico tournament represent what Stephenson says is his first of many ventures through the St. John Youth Organization.

“Something good did come out of Irma,” he said. “I have a great group of people who I work with in the youth organization, and we have a lot of projects on the table that we’re getting together for the kids.”

Stephenson said working with young people in the 16-18 age group is important to him.

“They are the ones we’re losing to the streets, and we need to let them know we aren’t giving up on them,” he said.

LEONARD

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seven seasons, averaging 16.3 points, though was limited to just nine games last season because of a leg injury. DeRozan has been in the league for nine years, all of them with Toronto, and is a career 19.7 point-per-game scorer.

DeRozan has led the Raptors in scoring in each of the last five seasons. He was key to Toronto winning 59 games and securing the No. 1 seed for the Eastern Conference playoffs last season. But after getting swept in the second round by Cleveland, the Raptors decided massive changes were necessary — first the firing of coach of the year Dwane Casey, and now the trading of a perennial All-Star who once famously declared “I am Toronto.”

DeRozan’s initial reaction seemed to be one of anger and frustration.

“Ain’t no loyalty in this game,” DeRozan wrote in an Instagram story that appeared in the wee hours of Wednesday, around the time that ESPN and Yahoo Sports reported that the trade was approaching the imminent stage, several hours before it was finalized. “Sell you out quick for a little bit of nothing ...”

DeRozan did not specifically reference the trade in that post, but his message didn’t exactly need translation. Raptors president Masai Ujiri has been traveling in Africa and was not immediately available

for comment.

Not only is the trade huge, it’s potentially risky for both teams.

Leonard hasn’t played since January because of the somewhat mysterious right quadriceps injury — and the level of severity was something that even some of his now-former teammates reportedly questioned last season while San Antonio was trying to qualify for the Western Conference playoffs. The Raptors clearly aren’t worried about Leonard’s status, and Popovich indicated Wednesday that Leonard has recovered sufficiently enough to play.

During the 2016-17 season, he averaged a career-best 25.5 points and was third in the MVP voting. When healthy, there may be no better two-way player in the game.

And that makes him worth the risk for Toronto.

Leonard can be a free agent next summer. When he asked the Spurs for a trade weeks ago, it was made clear that he wants to play for the Los Angeles Lakers — a team that landed LeBron James earlier this month to lead their planned rebuild back into a contender. That means the Raptors are entering into this deal knowing that they could have given up a star like DeRozan for someone who might not be in Toronto for long.

Popovich and Leonard met last month, but nothing the Spurs could say apparently changed Leonard’s mind about wanting a trade.



Photo by ASSOCIATED PRESS

DeMar DeRozan has led the Raptors in scoring in each of the last five seasons. He was key to Toronto winning 59 games and securing the No. 1 seed for the Eastern Conference playoffs last season.

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