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FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2026 | OKLAHOMAN.COM

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MEET THE 2026 BIG ALL-CITY BOYS BASKETBALL FIRST TEAM **SPORTS, 2B**

Thunder's playoff path to conference finals is clear



FAST LANE



Joe Mussatto
Columnist
The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

The NBA playoff bracket is shaping up swimmingly for the Oklahoma City Thunder.

As if the defending champs needed a break.

But the No. 1 seed, which the Thunder clinched Wednesday night, *should* have the smoothest postseason path. And, with three days left in the regular season, the Thunder (64-16) is staring down a fast track to the Western Conference Finals.

Remember when the Rockets were the perceived lightweight among the West's top-six? Houston was the team OKC, San Antonio and Denver would've loved a piece of. But the Rockets now look downright dangerous relative to what's left of the Lakers, which will likely be without Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves in the first round.

With the Rockets and Lakers very likely to play each other in the No. 4 vs.

Thunder at Nuggets

When: 8 p.m. CT Friday, April 10

Where: Ball Arena in Denver

TV: ALT and FDSOK

In Sports

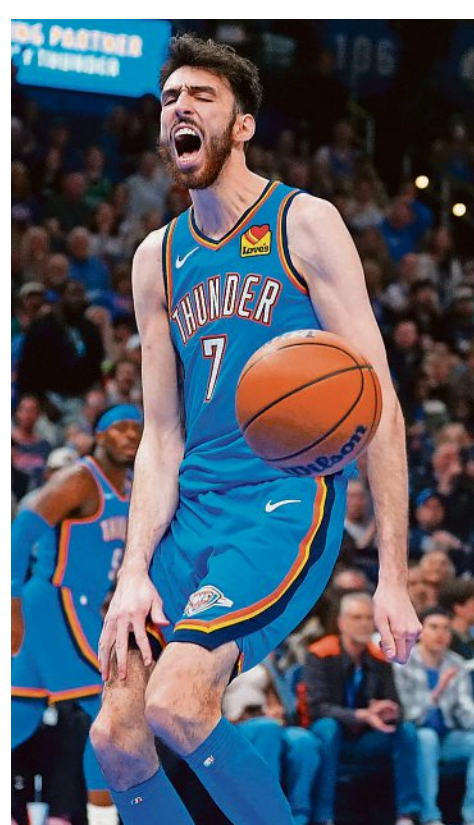
Thunder has "grown and learned" during journey to three straight No. 1 seeds. **1B**

No. 5 series, the cosmos have aligned for the Thunder. After getting the second-best of the play-in teams in Round 1, the Thunder would face the Rockets-Lakers winner in Round 2.

The Rockets, barring a medical miracle for the Lakers, will be heavy favorites to beat the purple and gold. Then Kevin Durant's crew will be massive underdogs against the Thunder in Round 2.

Denver took OKC to a seven-game series in Round 2 last year. If not for

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Oklahoma City's Chet Holmgren reacts after a dunk during the game between the Thunder and the Boston Celtics at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City on March 12.

TOP: Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander points after a 3-point basket during the game with the Utah Jazz at Paycom Center on April 5.

PHOTOS BY SARAH PHIPPS/THE OKLAHOMAN

Dems, Freedom Caucus uniting

Aim to stall vote to alter Oklahoma Constitution

Alexia Aston
The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Senate Democrats and far-right Freedom Caucus lawmakers have formed an unlikely alliance that could delay a state question backed by main-line Republicans.

They worked across party lines to shoot down an attempt to ask voters to change the state Constitution to reform the Judicial Nominating Commission on an election date with historically low turnout.

Senate Minority Leader Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City, said it was not a coordinated effort, but an alignment

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Judge nixes AG's poultry settlements

Says Drummond's deals wouldn't halt pollution

Dale Denwalt
The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Tulsa federal court Judge Gregory Frizzell has rejected Attorney General Gentner Drummond's attempt to reach a different result in the long-running poultry litter lawsuit.

Frizzell, who wrote his own final order in 2025 that requires poultry companies to reduce the amount of phosphorous-laden chicken waste that is applied to lands in the Illinois River Watershed, said that replacement settlements Drummond negotiated are unworkable, fail to fund

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Urban Institute report examines state's affordable-housing crisis

Jeff Elkins
The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Oklahoma has long been regarded as one of the most affordable states in the U.S., but a recent report shows that reputation could be in jeopardy.

From 2017-2025, home prices surged 29% and rent prices increased by 10% in Oklahoma, while average weekly earnings increased by less than 5%, according to a report by the Urban Institute released in March.

Those numbers mean housing costs

are rising close to six times faster than incomes.

The report found a large number of non-homeowners spend a considerable percentage of their wage on rent.

Nearly 46% of Oklahoma renters pay more than 30% of their income on rent, which is the threshold economists consider "cost burdened," according to the report findings.

Additionally, more than 22% spend more than half their income just to keep a roof over their head.

None of Oklahoma's 10 most populous counties that are home to 62% of

the state's population have enough affordable housing units for households with extremely low incomes.

The institute concludes that national trends, including high interest rates and high costs of new housing construction, compound the affordability issue.

"Addressing these challenges is important as Oklahoma continues to grow, having added more than 600,000 residents since 2000, about a third of them in Oklahoma City," the report summary reads.

Despite being considered one of the cheapest states to live in, Oklahoma's

affordable housing challenge is becoming more pronounced, even with both federal and state initiatives.

Those programs, according to the report, aren't adequately addressing the gap between what housing costs to build and what low-income families can actually afford.

The report offers an assessment and suggestions for improvements to affordable housing availability, but not everyone agrees with all the findings.

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