

Sports

Crusaders juggernaut flattens Hurricanes to enter Super final

Defending champions charge into their 13th Super Rugby final

CHRISTCHURCH: Defending champions Canterbury Crusaders charged into their 13th Super Rugby final with a comprehensive 30-12 victory over the Wellington Hurricanes in Christchurch yesterday. The platform was set by the All Blacks-laden pack who drove relentlessly into the Hurricanes, allowing fly-half Richie Mo'unga the time and space to dictate play.

In a match billed as the final before the final, with the conference format putting the top two teams from the regular season this year on the same side of the play-off draw, the Crusaders struck early and never fell behind. The eight times champions enjoyed 54 per cent of possession, forcing the Hurricanes to make 134 tackles and miss 31 more. Their ability to launch a long-range counter from turnover ball, and to score either side of half-time, proved crucial as they built a 18-7 lead at half-time and immediately moved to 25-7 after the resumption.

Captain Sam Whitelock said the Crusaders fed off the direction given by Mo'unga and a passionate defense. "Richie's done it all year. He's pretty quick over those first couple of steps and is hard to keep up with. "And defense reveals what the team means to you and the boys worked hard for each other." Hurricanes skipper Brad Shields, playing his last game before heading off to England, said the turnover proved costly. "You've

got to build phases down the right end of the field and a couple of times we let them off the hook pretty easy and turned around and they scored pretty easy."

The four tries to two outcome saw the Crusaders protect a remarkable record of being undefeated in 20 play-off matches on home soil. Hurricanes coach Chris Boyd said before the match that the result would be determined by the forwards and that's how it turned out with the Crusaders turning on a merciless display. It gave Mo'unga the chance to outshine his more illustrious All Blacks opposite Beauden Barrett. Mo'unga finished with 15 points, starting with a try in the 15th minute after the Crusaders had hammered away at the line for several minutes.

Julian Savea leveled for the Hurricanes before the Crusaders used turnover ball to pile on 11 points in the countdown to the break with a try to George Bridge and two Mo'unga penalties. It was a familiar pattern at the start of the second half when the Hurricanes lost the ball when pressuring the Crusaders line and the immediate counter attack ended with a try to David Havili more than 80 meters downfield. It was turnover ball again which saw a Mo'unga crossfield kick produce a try to Braydon Ennor. The Hurricanes bagged their second try in the final play of the day when left wing Ben Lam crossed for his record 16th try this year.—AFP



CHRISTCHURCH: Crusaders' Scott Barrett (center) is tackled by Hurricanes' captain Brad Shields (left) and Gareth Evans (2nd right) during the Super Rugby semi-final match between New Zealand's Canterbury Crusaders and Wellington Hurricanes yesterday. — AFP

Ramos 'ruthless and brutal' in Champions League final: Klopp

LONDON: Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp has slammed Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos for his foul on Mohamed Salah in May's Champions League final, saying the Spanish defender brought down the forward like a wrestler. Salah had a remarkable first season with Liverpool, scoring 44 goals in all competitions and helped the club reach the Champions League final against the Spanish giants. The Egyptian talisman went down under a challenge from Ramos inside the first half an hour of the match and suffered shoulder ligament damage which forced him off the pitch. "We are opening that bottle again?" Klopp asked in a news conference ahead of Liverpool's International Champions Cup game against Manchester United at the Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor.

"It is action-reaction-action-reaction and I don't like that but - if you watch it back and you are not with Real Madrid - then you think it is ruthless and brutal. "I saw the ref taking charge of big games at the World Cup and nobody really thinks about that later. But in a situation like that somebody needs to judge it better. "If VAR is coming then it is a situation where you have to look again. Not to give a red card but to look again and say: 'What is that?' It was ruthless."

Salah left the pitch in tears in Kiev with huge questions hanging over his participation at the World Cup in Russia. Liverpool goalkeeper Loris Karius, who it later emerged had suffered a concussion during the match, made couple of blunders to concede two goals against Madrid who won 3-1. Karius clashed with Ramos early in the second half and was seen holding



Sergio Ramos

the side of his head after the collision, which came before he made the mistakes that led to the goals. Ramos later brushed off allegations that he had deliberately injured Salah, saying he was being unfairly painted as a pantomime villain.

"I'm not sure it is an experience we will have again - go there and put an elbow to the goalkeeper, put their goalscorer down like a wrestler in midfield and then you win the game. That was the story of the

game," Klopp said. "Ramos said a lot of things afterwards that I didn't like. As a person I didn't like the reactions of him. He was like: 'Whatever, what do they want? It's normal'. "No, it is not normal. If you put all of the situations of Ramos together then you will see a lot of situations with Ramos ... It is like we, the world out there, accepts that you use each weapon to win the game. People probably expect that I am the same. I am not." — Reuters

Bremen snap up Everton misfit for reported club record

BERLIN: Werder Bremen have signed Everton misfit Davy Klaassen after paying a reported club record of 14 million euros (\$16.3m) for the Netherlands international, it was confirmed on Friday. The midfielder has quit Goodison Park having failed to make an impact in the 12 months since Everton paid Ajax £24.30m (27.3m euros) for him and Bremen have reportedly given Klaassen a four-year deal.

Having made just 16 appearances in total, and only three Premier League starts for Everton last season, Klaassen now hopes to kick start his career in the Bundesliga with Werder. The Dutch international will replace Danish midfielder Thomas Delaney who left Bremen for Borussia Dortmund last month in a deal reportedly worth 20 million euros.

Klaassen is expected to be a like-for-like replacement at Bremen for Delaney, who scored three goals in 32 league games last season. Having been told by new Everton boss Marco Silva there was no place for him in his plans, Klaassen believes he has found a suitable home with the Bundesliga club. "It was important to me to know exactly where the journey was going on the pitch and the ambitions of the club have convinced me," he told the Werder website.

"After my exchange with (Bremen coach) Florian Kohfeldt I have a very good feeling that I can make an important contribution here with my abilities. "I want to prove that I can make a big impact here. "The head coach wants to play a very open and attacking style of football and I am really excited about that." Bremen coach Kohfeldt headed up a delegation of Werder officials who flew to England earlier this week to convince Klaassen to come to north Germany. "We made our club goals very clear to him: what we want to achieve, how we want to play and what a special club Werder is," the Bremen boss told magazine Kicker.

"With him we brought the exact player we wanted to Bremen. "We have been watching him for a long time and are



Davy Klaassen

glad that this opportunity has opened up. "With his strategic sense, Davy is able to set a rhythm for the game, impresses with his creativity and is strong and aggressive at the same time.

"He will be a strong part of our game." Bremen, who finished 11th in Germany's top flight last season, start their 2018/19 Bundesliga campaign at home to Hanover 96 on August 25.—AFP

Barcelona under fire as men team fly business class, women relegated

BARCELONA: Barcelona's first mixed-sex tour was overshadowed by controversy after it emerged that the men's football team flew in business class to the United States while the women's team was relegated to the back of the plane in economy. The Spanish giants posted photos and videos of the two teams boarding the Portland-bound plane together but photos posted by the female players online showed they were flying in economy, sparking an outcry on social media after this was noticed by supporters of the women's team. "There was one photo of the team captains in business class before the men took their seats in business class and the women returned to their economy seats," wrote one much discussed fan-run account which tweeted extensively about the topic, @BarcaWomen.

"If any of the women were in Business Class, then we certainly didn't see them. If FC Barcelona is going to say that they are about Equality, then the actions must be there to back it up." But Alexia Putellas of the women's team said the teams flew in separate sections of the plane because the female squad had been added to the tour at a late stage after the club had already chartered its flight and all the business seats had already been assigned to the men. "The club made an effort to organize everything practically at the last minute... I wish we would always travel like this, in these conditions," she told reporters in Portland after the team's first training session.

Sports daily Marca reported that there were only 36 spaces at the front of the plane and each female player was booked three seats for comfort. "A controversy was generated without taking into account everything that we do. The club hired a chartered plane, but at the beginning it was not anticipated that the female team would be on the tour. It's a logistics problem," Barcelona vice president Josep Vives said in a statement. Maria Teixidor, director of the women's team, defended the club from what she said was unfair criticism.

"To all of you who these days decided to criticize the conditions of the women's team's trip, I say that Barca asked its female players to travel with its male players so that in the future they can travel in business class on their own plane," she wrote in a letter on Barcelona's official website. "That will be the day that we can talk about equality because women's sport will have the same media coverage, sponsorship deals and fan interest as men's sport." The women's team will return to Spain on July 29 - this time in business class, according to the club. The men's team will stay in the United States until August 4, where they will play friendlies against Tottenham, Roma and Milan.—AFP

Rockets, Capela reportedly reach \$90m deal

The standoff between the Houston Rockets and restricted free agent center Clint Capela appears over, as Capela signed a five-year, \$90 million contract with the club, ESPN reported Friday.

As a restricted free agent, Capela could have signed the team's \$4.3 million qualifying offer and reached free

agency in July 2019. But he had not yet signed it, instead holding out hopes for a deal in the \$100 million range, putting him on par with Thunder big man Steven Adams (four years, \$100 million) and Jazz eraser Rudy Gobert (four years, \$102 million).

Capela is a strong defensive presence, and keeping him was essential for the Rockets, who already lost wings Trevor Ariza and Luc Mbah a Moute to free agency. The 6-foot-10 Capela, the No. 25 overall pick in the 2014 NBA Draft, averaged 13.9 points, 10.8 rebounds and 1.9 blocks per game in 74 games last season.

New York Knicks coach David Fizdale traveled to All-Star forward Kristaps Porzingis' native Latvia to get to know his franchise player and to see how his rehab from

major knee surgery is progressing. Porzingis tore the ACL in his left knee on Feb. 6 and isn't expected back until December.

"We've talked about his rehab. We've talked about how we want to play, our style of play. Talked a lot about the culture that we're building," the new Knicks coach told Latvian television network LSM. "We wanna make sure that he comes back strong and healthy and we don't want to rush it. We've had some really good conversations." The 7-foot-3 Porzingis, who turns 23 on Thursday, also is eligible for a five-year, \$157 million contract extension. Talks haven't progressed and may not until after Porzingis has recovered from the ACL tear.

Once again, Devin Harris is a Dallas Maverick. Yahoo

Sports reported that the veteran point guard, 35, agreed to a one-year, veteran minimum deal with the club.

Harris, 35, was traded from Dallas to the Denver Nuggets in February, but the team is bringing him back after losing Yogi Ferrell in free agency. The fifth overall pick in the 2004 NBA Draft, Harris was traded on draft night to Dallas, where he spent the first four years of his career. He was traded to the New Jersey Nets in 2008, but returned to Dallas in 2013 as a free agent.

California native Paul George explained to USA Today Sports why he never even bothered to meet with Lakers president Magic Johnson and instead re-signed with the Oklahoma City Thunder.—Field Level Media