

Sports

Jackson lifts Ravens over Cowboys in NFL matchup

Ravens beat Dallas 34-17

WASHINGTON: Baltimore's Lamar Jackson threw for two touchdowns and ran for another Tuesday as the Ravens beat Dallas 34-17 in an NFL game rescheduled from last Thursday due to COVID-19 issues. Jackson, coming back from a COVID-19 layoff, completed 12-of-17 passes for 107 yards and ran 13 times for 94 yards as the Ravens improved to 7-5, one game out of the last AFC playoff spot.

The Cowboys fell to 3-9, two games behind NFC East division co-leaders Washington and the New York Giants. After throwing an interception that set up a 31-yard Greg Zuerlein field goal for Dallas, Jackson drove the Ravens downfield and scored on a fourth-down 37-yard run up the middle. Jackson made the longest touchdown run ever surrendered by the Cowboys to a quarterback, lifting Baltimore ahead 7-3 late in the first quarter.

Tony Pollard answered with a 66-yard kickoff return for Dallas to set up a 13-yard touchdown pass from Andy Dalton to Michael Gallup just 41 seconds into the second quarter for a 10-7 Cowboys' lead. Baltimore's Patrick Queen inter-

cepted a Dalton pass and on the next play, Jackson connected with Miles Boykin on a 38-yard touchdown pass to put the Ravens ahead 14-10.

Justin Tucker added a 50-yard field goal with 50 seconds remaining in the second quarter to lift the Ravens ahead 17-10 at half-time. Jackson found Marquise Brown in the back left corner of the end zone for a 20-yard touchdown pass to boost Baltimore's lead to 24-10. The Cowboys came away empty on their next drive thanks to a third missed field goal kick by Zuerlein and the Ravens drove for a 22-yard Tucker field goal to seize a 17-point advantage.

Dalton flipped a 2-yard touchdown pass to Amari Cooper with 3:59 remaining but Baltimore, which ran for 294 yards, answered on a 5-yard touchdown run by JK Dobbins with 2:08 remaining to create the final margin. Former Cowboys receiver Dez Bryant did not play for Baltimore against his ex-teammates after testing positive for COVID-19 just before kickoff. "I'm going to go ahead and call it a quit for the rest of the season," Bryant tweeted after being benched. "I can't deal with this." —AFP



BALTIMORE: Quarterback Lamar Jackson #8 of the Baltimore Ravens rushes past defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence #90 of the Dallas Cowboys during the fourth quarter at M&T Bank Stadium on December 8, 2020. —AFP

Champions League referee implicated in match-fixing case

PRAGUE: Czech referee Pavel Kralovec, who officiates in the Champions League, has been implicated in a local match-fixing scandal, Czech media said yesterday. The case involves former Czech Football Association (FACR) deputy head Roman Berbr, who has been in custody over suspected match-fixing since October. Citing police wiretaps, the DNES broadsheet said Berbr had

called Kralovec ahead of July's Czech Cup final, in which Sparta Prague beat Slovan Liberec 2-1 to reach the Europa League group stage.

"Very simply, I need just one political thing, OK? You will understand. Josef Krula stopped by on Monday," Berbr said, according to the wiretap. Krula is Sparta's sports manager and a former referee. Kralovec, who answered that he did understand, came under fire after the game as he had notably refused to send off Sparta midfielder Martin Frydek for stepping on an opponent, despite calls from the video referee.

On Tuesday night, the 43-year-old Kralovec managed the Champions League game pitting Chelsea against Krasnodar. Sparta, who have lost a chance to advance from the Europa League Group H also comprising AC Milan, Lille and

Celtic Glasgow, have denied any wrongdoing and said they want "thorough investigation" of the case. Berbr was one of 19 people detained by police in October as part of an organized group in the match-fixing case, four of whom have ended up in custody.

He stepped down from his position as a result. A 66-year-old former referee, Berbr held his post since 2013 and according to local media has been pulling the strings in Czech football for years. Media have made allegations over Berbr in relation to corruption cases and bullying at the FACR, but he has never been charged. His wife Dagmar Damkova, the first female referee in the Czech Republic, stepped down from a post on the UEFA referees committee following the charges. —AFP

MLS lost nearly \$1 billion in revenues

NEW YORK: Major League Soccer lost nearly \$1 billion in revenues in a pandemic-hit 2020 season, commissioner Don Garber said Tuesday, and it must make key decisions for 2021 without knowing when spectators might fill stadiums again. Garber said the 26-team league is concerned about next year's prospects even with a COVID-19 vaccine on the horizon as it would be unable to handle another year like 2020. "The losses have been dramatic," said Garber. "Clubs are going to have to manage their economics as diligently as possible. We'll make adjustments... that's the reality of managing a pro sports league in the middle of a pandemic."

MLS concludes its 25th campaign Saturday when the defending champion Seattle Sounders try to capture their third title in five seasons by beating the host Columbus Crew in the MLS Cup final. The season was shut down after two weeks last March by COVID-19. Teams returned with an "MLS Is Back" tournament won by Portland in a bubble atmosphere in Orlando, then finished the season in empty home stadiums. "Our revenue for the enterprise, our league and our clubs, is down almost a billion dollars compared to last year," Garber said.

Teams have announced layoffs, players took a 5 percent pay cut and MLS has laid off 20 percent of its staff. "We're at the peak of the pandemic," Garber said. "This pandemic is raging at far deeper and more critical levels than it was even when we postponed the league in early March. Right now our teams have been able to manage... through their own equity infusions and ability to put debt on their clubs." MLS also had the extra expenses of chartering players to matches and funding the bubble to recover some match telecast money.

"While that was able to allow us to capture some revenue, the expenses of housing so many players and operating those games and creating the virtual stadiums were enormous," Garber said. "The impact of all this is probably deeper than what we expected and that is concerning to us... We're concerned about what this will look like leading into 2021 and are working, as I'm sure everybody could imagine, on figuring out how we could manage through that. I'm very hopeful that 2021 will be a way better year than 2020, because I don't think any business could sustain the kind of impact we sustained in 2020 for two years in a row."

MLS back in mid-March?

While key media rights deals are locked in until the end of 2022, MLS eyes a mid-March start with no sign of fans being allowed back into venues as every area faces different COVID-19 safety restrictions. "We can't wait for an understanding of the impact on the vaccine," Garber said. "We aren't going to know that and we have to set a schedule prior to that."

"Just the idea that the vaccine is available does not give us an indication fans will be returning to stadiums. It's not just about fans. It's about are we going to retain as much of our sponsor and media revenue. We're going to need some flexibility but we are not going to be able to wait to make a decision until somebody decides fans will be able to attend."

Austin FC is set to join MLS as an expansion club in 2021, when new stadiums in Columbus and Cincinnati are also set to open. The league is set to welcome Charlotte in 2022 and new clubs in Sacramento and St. Louis in 2023 to lift MLS to 30 teams. "For all that we achieved together, I can proudly say that this year will be a season we'll remember forever," Garber said. "And from these challenging times, Major League Soccer will continue to persevere, we will continue to grow, we will continue to emerge even stronger than ever." —AFP



Kuwait League roundup: Nasr receive first defeat

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: There is no longer an undefeated team in Kuwait's Football League as Nasr were handed their first defeat as Qadisiya beat them 0-1. Qadisiya had an offense-minded formation as Bader Al-Mutawaa was placed up front along with Lucas Gaucho, backed by Seif Al-Hashan, Ahmad Al-Dhafiri with Udai Al-Saifi behind them. Al-Nasr was keen on neutralizing Qadisiya with counter attacks in mind. The second half saw Qadisiya

attack relentlessly, until the 49th minute when Bader Al-Mutawaa scored the winning goal in a brilliant manner following a foul.

In another match, Yarmouk were able to out-play Shabab 5-2 as they grabbed their first win in the ranking league, and raised their point total to 5 points leaving the last place to Sulaibkhat on goal difference. Yarmouk's goals were scored by Udai Al-Dabbagh, Athby Shihab and Fahad Al-Rajhi, while Shabab's goals were scored by Abdallah Ashkanani and Abdallah Al-Bather.

In the third match of the night, Burgan and Fahaheel came out with a 1-1 draw, and this makes their total 11 points each. Fahaheel scored early as Mohammad Abdelhadi scored with a header in the third minute. Meanwhile, Burgan did not back off and continued to attack. Several opportunities were wasted until Rami Abu Shunaiba was able to score the equalizer at the end of the first half.



Street artist unveils mural to 'Saint' Diego Maradona

Buenos Aires: Tributes to late football legend Diego Maradona have included plans to rename a stadium and a street in his honor and put his face on a banknote. Now, a giant mural has been painted in Argentina to remember the icon, who died last month. Street artist Alfredo Segatori, 50, has painted a huge mural 20 meters high (65 feet) and 40 meters wide in the Argentine capital Buenos Aires to honor the country's favorite son.

The mural is in the heart of the traditional Boca neighborhood that is home to the imposing Bombonera stadium where Maradona once played for domestic giants Boca Juniors. "Now I say I have a religion, that religion is Diego. I want to believe in 'the Diego' - we're proposing a little bit of fantasy, metaphor and imagination," said Segatori.

There's nothing new about the idea of sanctifying Maradona: Franco-Spanish musician Manu Chao wrote a song about Saint Maradona, while a group of supporters founded the

Maradonian Church in 1998 with the former footballer as its godhead. Segatori's "Saint Diego of the Boca Neighborhood" mural shows Maradona holding up a ball from the 1986 World Cup, where he captained Argentina to victory. "He's special, he's (a) patron of artists, the dispossessed and sportsmen, too. That's sort of the connotation we want to give this project," said the street artist.

Segatori said he had long thought about such a project, but that it was always "for later." However, news of Maradona's death on November 25 from a heart attack caused the artist "total sadness," and he started painting immediately. "We were missing a Diego here in this neighborhood," said Segatori. There are other murals of Maradona in Buenos Aires—such as in Villa Fiorito, the neighborhood where the star was born, or on the walls at his first club Argentinos Juniors—but not in Boca. There's even one in Naples, where he spent seven years playing for Napoli.



Buenos Aires: Argentine street artist Alfredo Segatori paints a mural of late Argentine football legend Diego Maradona on Dec 1, 2020. —AFP

In fact, Napoli have decided to rename their stadium after Maradona, who guided the club to its most successful period, winning two Serie A titles and the UEFA Cup. It was while playing for Napoli that Maradona led his native country to glory at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. Segatori said he was "successful" in depicting

Maradona with "a beautiful expression of calm and good vibes from up above." "Maradona always had a close relationship with artists, many bands dedicated songs to him, and in this pandemic context in which art has been hit hard by the pandemic, we needed a wink from Diego," Segatori said. —AFP