

## PERERA TON SETS UP LANKA SERIES WIN OVER IRELAND

**MALAHIDE:** Kusal Perera and Seekkuge Prasanna both made career-best scores as Sri Lanka beat Ireland by 136 runs in the second one-day international at Malahide on Saturday. Victory saw Sri Lanka enjoy their second heartening win in a matter of days as they took the two-match series 2-0 and gave them a confidence boost ahead of their upcoming five-game ODI campaign in England.

Put into bat, they amassed 377 for eight. Perera top-scored with an ODI best 135 and Prasanna made 95 — his highest score at this level. Ireland, in reply, were bowled out for 241. Sri Lanka, again sent into bat as

they had been in their 76-run win in the first ODI at Malahide on Thursday, were well-placed at the half-way stage.

And when Suranga Lakmal and the recalled Farveez Maharoof removed Ireland's top three with just 41 on the board, the rest of the match proved a formality. John Anderson, an accountant and the only amateur in the Ireland side, showed promise for the future with 34 and Andy McBrine, batting at No 8, finished the innings in some style with 79 from 64 balls, including seven fours and two sixes. McBrine and Boyd Rankin (18 not out) delayed the inevitable with a last wicket

stand of 54 — both making their highest scores for Ireland and Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews had to bring himself back to break the partnership and win the match with five overs to spare. Sri Lanka, put in on another excellent batting pitch, made the perfect start with Kusal Perera and Danuska Gunathilaka sharing an opening stand of 147.

### Superb display

Gunathilaka was the first to go, in the 27th over, for 63, just two short of his ODI best, but both Perera and Prasanna easily passed their previous highest scores at this

level. Prasanna, promoted to a pinch-hitting role at number three, played his role to perfection to more than double his career best in a superb display of hitting. He was dismissed five runs short of a deserved century having faced just 46 balls with nine sixes and five fours and he dominated the second wicket stand of 161 with Perera which took just 93 balls. Perera reached his second ODI hundred from 105 balls with 10 fours and two sixes and added another 35 before he was caught at mid-wicket off Middlesex's Tim Murtagh. In all he faced 128 balls and finished with 16 fours and two sixes. Sri Lanka were on

course for a total in excess of 400 but Ireland pulled them back by taking four wickets for 13 runs in the last three overs, although by then the damage had been done. Barry McCarthy, a 23-year-old seamer in only his second international, was Ireland's most impressive bowler, finishing with two for 52.

By contrast Boyd Rankin, in his first home series for five years after appearing for England, finished with one for 86 from his 10 overs. Ireland will now look for an improved showing when they face Pakistan in a two-match home ODI series in August. — AFP

## CHEIKA LOSING PATIENCE WITH MISFIRING WALLABIES

**MELBOURNE:** Coach Michael Cheika says he will forcefully get his message across to his misfiring team after the Wallabies threw away their chance of squaring the Test series against England this weekend. The Wallabies let themselves down with a multitude of handling errors, many in strong attacking positions, as England triumphed 23-7 on the back of a monumental defensive effort in the second Test to clinch their first-ever series in Australia on Saturday.

While the Wallabies conceded 14 penalties in losing 39-28 in the Brisbane series



Coach Michael Cheika

opener, this time it was their shoddy handling that let them down, losing possession a staggering 13 times. The Wallabies enjoyed 68 percent possession and 56 percent field position, yet could only come up with one try after scoring four tries in the previous Test.

Cheika was fuming over the butter-fingered Wallabies throwing away their chance of taking the three-Test series to a decider in Sydney next Saturday. "I've got

to own that because we prepare that during the week and I've got to explain it to the lads more forcefully," he told reporters after Saturday's loss. "I've got to own that as a coach with those things. That's the stuff we set out and I've got to make sure that message is clear.

"I know that we want to play a lot of rugby, but it doesn't always convert into the scoreboard and that will happen sometimes, but it shouldn't happen regularly." The Wallabies were frustrated by England's resilient defense with the Six Nations champions making a total of 215 tackles to Australia's 81.

### Humbling defeat

"You have to pay credit to England, they played very well in both games," Cheika said. "They've played very smart, they've played in the right areas, they've played well in the ruck and spoiled a lot of good ball for us. That's well done to them. They've seen that we're going to play a lot of footy and chosen the opposite way and their way has been victorious pretty clearly. "Even though we've had a lot more attack, we only got the one try this week. We have to take that, suck it up and use the scars later on."

What began with the Wallabies as clear favorites to beat the Eddie Jones-coached England after reaching last year's World Cup final materialized into a humbling series defeat for the first time at home. Injuries to key men David Pocock and Kurtley Beale did not help, but the Wallabies were out-thought and out-played by the Six Nations Grand Slam champions, who now have won eight consecutive Tests.

"Our squad's changed a fair bit. I think there's 10 or 11 different from the World Cup squad, but that's the opportunity for us to grow our depth and that's what we're going to get out of this," Cheika said. "But the opportunities that we let go tonight just through errors are at this point more at the forefront of my mind than the other things we may be getting from this series." — AFP

## 'OFF DAY' LEAVES HAMILTON SEEKING HIS LOST RHYTHM

**BAKU:** Triple Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton blamed a rare 'off day' for an error-filled qualifying performance on Saturday at the Baku street circuit that hosts Azerbaijan's first grand prix. The Briton, winner of the two previous races in Monaco and Montreal, will start in 10th place after clipping a wall and breaking his car's suspension while Mercedes team mate and rival Nico Rosberg took pole position.

Hamilton also ran off the track twice. The champion is nine points adrift of the German after seven races and hoped he might be able to regain the lead in Baku but that looks a tall order now unless misfortune strikes Rosberg.

"It just wasn't a good one," Hamilton told reporters. "It was nothing to do with anyone else, it was just me not doing good laps," he added. "I just couldn't get into a rhythm today. It wasn't just in qualifying, it was in practice as well. Just an off day, unfortunately. An expensive day, but an off day today." Hamilton had been quickest in Friday practice and on Saturday morning, but said some overnight changes had affected the car's handling and meant he could not brake at the same places as pre-

viously. "It was just one of those bad days," agreed Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff. "He was blindingly fast in the first sector but couldn't put the sectors together." The race in Baku should see plenty of action, with the circuit's 2km straight the longest in the sport, but there is also the risk of frequent interruptions.

"The race I'm sure is going to be very exciting," Rosberg told reporters. "It's one of the easiest tracks to overtake, so there's going to be a lot of changing places I think, probably a lot of safety cars as well, exciting re-starts and everything."

The German side-stepped attempts to get him to comment on Hamilton's remarks on Friday that some drivers-Rosberg included-were 'moaning' too much about track conditions and safety. The Briton had also explained how he saw no point in inspecting the track on foot and questioned the value of simulators. "Fine. It's his opinion," said Rosberg, who said he was unaware of the comments until after qualifying. "I was definitely one of the guys questioning today and I still do. "Everybody has their own approach. He's a three times world champion so he must be doing something right." — Reuters



**BAKU:** From R: Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team's British driver Lewis Hamilton, Haas F1 Team's French driver Romain Grosjean, McLaren Honda F1 Team's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso, Sauber F1 Team's Brazilian driver Felipe Nasr and Sahara Force India F1 Team's German driver Nico Hulkenberg steer their cars during the European Formula One Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit. — AFP



**LE MANS:** Switzerland's Neel Jani takes the Porsche 919 Hybrid over the finish line to win the 84th Le Mans 24-hours endurance race. — AFP

## PORSCHE WIN DRAMATIC LE MANS AS TOYOTA SETTLES FOR HEARTACHE

**LE MANS:** Porsche snatched victory in one of the most dramatic finishes in Le Mans 24 Hour Race history after Toyota suffered an agonizing power failure with just minutes left yesterday. Neel Jani powered the Porsche 919 Hybrid over the line, to elation and tears of joy in their garage, after Kazuki Nakajima's TS050 stuttered to a halt when looking nailed-on to win the endurance race for the Japanese team for the first time in three decades of trying.

Jani, Romain Dumas and Marc Lieb, drivers of the Porsche number two car, celebrated wildly in front of a crowd that swelled to 263,500 for the 84th edition of the grueling showpiece, which began on Saturday under driving rain and behind a safety car. In contrast, Toyota saw their Le Mans jinx strike at the worst possible time. The Toyota garage looked on aghast as

Nakajima's car suddenly began slowing with only five minutes of the 24 hours to go. He had been as much as 90 seconds ahead at one point, but suddenly it all went wrong and he began to rapidly lose pace, allowing Jani to close fast. With just over three minutes to go Nakajima came to a stop on the straight as Jani sped past to victory. The Toyota was ranked as declassified, a humiliating culmination to a day-night of racing.

"I'm ready to cry," Nakajima said over the radio as he labored home. "Heartbroken," was the simple tweet from the devastated Toyota team. Toyota's number six car with Stephane Sarrazin at the wheel crossed the line in second with an Audi third. "What a Le Mans race!" Audi tweeted, calling Toyota "winner of hearts." "We know that Le Mans can be cruel. But what happened to Toyota was incredible!"

Among the stunned crowd was Brad Pitt, part of the usual colorful cast of professional drivers and Hollywood royalty who turned out to see one of motor racing's A-list events. Pitt flagged the race off 24 hours earlier, when heavy downpours ensured a soaking start to the occasion and saw the first seven laps take place behind the safety car as torrential rain lashed the track and the 60 cars on the grid.

The drenched crowd was kept on their toes by over 30 changes of lead during the night and several safety car appearances. By the closing stages it became a straight fight between Porsche and Toyota, with the two playing cat and mouse for the lead. By the time the cars crossed the line-under altogether more forgiving weather-they had covered a similar distance to a round trip from Le Mans to Moscow. — AFP

## FENCING FINDS ITS SUPERSTAR IN AMERICAN IBTIHAJ MUHAMMAD

**BEVERLY HILLS:** In Ibtihaj Muhammad, fencing might have finally found an athlete whose story transcends the sport. Muhammad will make history at the Rio Games by becoming the first American athlete to wear a hijab - a Muslim head scarf - while competing in the Olympics. Muhammad's Olympic goal - beyond winning a medal, of course - is to be a positive role model for the Muslim-American community. Muhammad is well on her way to doing so, recently earning a spot on Time's 100 Most Influential People of 2016 list.

"I've been in this sport for a pretty long time - at this point I feel like I've kind of created a name for myself. If anything, I think the wonderful thing is that now these young kids, they see Muslim women involved in sports. So it's not an anomaly anymore," Muhammad said at the Team USA media summit Los Angeles in March. But Muhammad is hardly the only American poised for a breakout in Rio.

The US might be as strong as it's ever been ahead of an Olympics - and the fact that this year's Games will be broadcast live in the Eastern time zone should only help fencing's growth domestically. The Americans and Russians caught some bad luck because two of their top teams - men's sabre and women's foil - won't compete in Rio because the IOC only has room for 10 of the sport's 12 divisions during the Olympics. But those athletes will still compete as individuals. Here are some of the key story lines to follow during this year's Olympic fencing tournament.

### US ON THE RISE

The US, France and Italy have three teams ranked in the top three in their weapon in the most recent FIE rankings, trailing only Russia's four. The Americans haven't won a gold medal in men's Olympic fencing since Albertson Van Zo Post in 1904. But Alexander Massialas, the son of former national team coach Greg Massialas, is ranked No. 1 in the world in men's foil. Gerek Meinhardt and Race Imboden - who's also a fashion model - also owned top-five spots in that weapon as June 18.

Daryl Homer and Eli Dershwitz are ranked 10th and 11th in men's sabre, well within striking distance of a medal. Two-time Olympic gold medalist Mariel Zagunis is a medal favorite in women's sabre, and Muhammad (10th, sabre) might be peaking just when she needs to. Lee Kiefer took a year off from her



**BEVERLY HILLS:** In this March 8, 2016, file photo, Fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad poses for photos at the 2016 Olympic Team USA media summit. — AP

studies at Notre Dame to focus on Rio, and she's ranked third in foil.

### RETURNING STAR

Arianna Errigo is the new face of Italian fencing after Valentina Vezzali, a six-time Olympic champion, failed to qualify for Rio. Errigo, who lost to teammate Elisa Di Francisca 12-11 in the gold medal match in London, went on to win world championships in 2013-14 and is currently ranked No 1 in foil. Errigo's 270 points earned so far in 2016 are the most of any individual fencer. Sophia Velikaya of Russia (sabre) was also a runner-up in London who has since ascended atop the world rankings, one spot ahead of Zagunis. Top-ranked Anqi Xu of China will seek her first world championship in epee.

### OLYMPIAN EFFORT

Ruben Limardo, Venezuela's flag bearer for Rio, will be asked to bear the weight of a continent's worth of pressure as South America's best hope for a fencing medal. But the favorite in Limardo's weapon, Gauthier Grumier, has led

France to five team epee world titles and is desperate to claim Olympic gold as an individual. Japan's Yuki Ota and James Andrew-Davis of Great Britain are the biggest threats the US will likely face in foil. Russia's Alexey Yakimenko is ranked No 1 in sabre on the strength of a strong end to 2015. But South Korea's Kim Jung-hwan recently won a Grand Prix in Moscow and looks primed for a run at gold in Rio.

### RULE CHANGES

The biggest change fans will notice from London in 2012 to Rio is the shift in the piste, or fighting strip, from parallel to angled. The venue in London only allowed fans to view from two sides of the arena. But with seats circling all of Carioca Arena 3, spectators should have a much clearer and more dimensional view of the matches. There will also be a family-friendly area just outside the venue, where passers-by will be able to grab a weapon and give fencing a try free of charge. Coaches will be on hand to provide instructions, and safety equipment will be provided. — AP