

LIONS CAPTAIN WARBURTON EAGER TO TASTE NEW ZEALAND BLOOD

LONDON: Sam Warburton has never savoured victory over New Zealand but says he is relishing scaling the "pinnacle of my career" when he captains the British and Irish Lions against the world champions.

The Wales back-row was named skipper when Lions coach Warren Gatland announced a 41-man squad Wednesday for the three-Test series in June and July. Warburton, the victorious captain during the 2013 2-1 series win in Australia, is just the second man after England great Martin Johnson (1997 and 2001) to lead the Lions on two tours.

But he has yet to enjoy a Test win over New Zealand—with Wales's last success against the All Blacks coming way back in 1953. The Lions' lone Test series tri-

umph in New Zealand was in 1971. Added to that, two of the three Tests this year will be played at Eden Park, where New Zealand have not lost in the professional era—with the All Blacks reeling off 36 consecutive wins, including a 2011 World Cup final triumph, at their Auckland fortress since 1995.

As for the Lions, their solitary win in 10 Tests at Eden Park was a 9-6 success in 1959. Eden Park was also the venue where Warburton was sent off for a dangerous tackle during Wales's agonising 9-8 World Cup semi-final loss six years ago. "New Zealand are the only team I haven't beaten yet in my international career and it's something I'd love to do," said Warburton after the squad was announced. "People would look at that

as a bad thing, but I would never take the field against New Zealand and think, 'Crikey, I haven't beaten these before,'" the Cardiff Blues flanker, a veteran of 76 Tests, added. "You respect them for what they are and you know they've got a fantastic history and win percent ratio, but every time you take that field you've got a chance to win, regardless of who you are or where you are playing." However, he admitted: "It's going to be the toughest thing I've done. 2013 (winning tour) was amazing, it was all fresh, it was all new. "But captaining the Lions for a second time and the fact it is in New Zealand, it definitely ranks as the pinnacle of my career so far," added Warburton, who expects to have recovered from a knee injury by the time the squad

departs at the end of May.

'BRAVE DECISIONS'

The Lions may be underdogs but Ireland's 40-29 victory over the All Blacks in Chicago in November proved the world champions are not invincible. "What was impressive, and when England beat them in 2012, the breakdowns were ferocious," said Warburton.

"They were both extremely brave in their decision-making and you know you are going to have to score tries.

"We are going to have to be slightly more attacking than we are used to (in the Six Nations)."

This season saw Warburton's Wales place called into question amid fierce competition from fellow loose forwards

Justin Tipuric, Taulupe Faletau and Ross Moriarty, all of whom have been selected for the Lions by Gatland, the Kiwi on secondment from his role as Wales boss.

Warburton resigned as Wales captain, with lock Alun Wyn Jones leading the side in the Six Nations.

But while the softly spoken Warburton has sometimes appeared a reluctant skipper, he insisted he was in the right frame of mind to lead the Lions again after recovering from a slump in form. "If I felt I'd only scraped into the squad and they asked me to captain, I would have said I was not in the right frame of mind to do it," he said.

"Because now I do feel I am playing well and I feel very confident about my game, that's why I said yes." —AFP

BASEBALL

CUBS RALLY PAST BREWERS TO SNAP FOUR-GAME SKID

CHICAGO: The Chicago Cubs pounded out 14 hits, including home runs from Kyle Schwarber and Miguel Montero, as they snapped a four-game losing streak with a 9-7 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers on Tuesday in a Wrigley Field slugfest. The Cubs rallied from a 7-4 deficit with a four-run sixth keyed by Albert Almora's two-run pinch single and Jon Jay's RBI triple. The rally overshadowed another big night for the Brewers' offense. Eric Thames went 3-for-5 with three runs, hitting safely in a 12th consecutive start. Travis Shaw was 3-for-4 with a homer and three RBIs. Justin Grimm (1-0) worked a scoreless sixth inning, and Carl Edwards and Hector Rondón followed with one shutout inning apiece. Wade Davis pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his third save.

MARLINS 5, MARINERS 0

Wei-Yin Chen, Brad Ziegler and Kyle Barraclough combined for a one-hitter, Justin Bour had two hits, including a two-run home run in the third, and Miami shut out Seattle. The Marlins lost the no-hit bid when Mitch Haniger singled with one out in the ninth inning against Barraclough. Chen (2-0) was in full command throughout, throwing 64 of his 100 pitches for strikes, and keeping Seattle hitters off-balance with a low-70s curveball and change-up. Chen tossed seven innings, allowing no hits, striking out two and walking two.

WHITE SOX 4, YANKEES 1

Miguel Gonzalez came within two outs of a shutout, and Avisail Garcia hit a long three-run home run in the seventh inning as Chicago snapped New York's eight-game winning streak. Gonzalez retired the first 12 hitters and gave up one run on four hits in 8 1/3 innings. Leury Garcia also homered for the White Sox, who won for the fifth time in their past seven games. The Yankees' Luis Severino allowed four runs (three earned) and three hits in a career-high eight innings. After getting a career-high 11 strikeouts against the Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday, Severino fanned 10 on Tuesday, eight of them in the first five innings.

DIAMONDBACKS 11, PADRES 2

Shelby Miller allowed four hits over 7 1/3 innings and Yasmany Tomas hit a three-run homer as Arizona cruised past San Diego. Chris Iannetta also homered for the Diamondbacks, who scored a third straight victory. Miller (2-1) issued two walks with five strikeouts, allowing two hits through the first six innings while retiring the Padres in order four times. Padres starter Jarrod Cosart (0-1) retired the first 10 Diamondbacks he faced before departing the game before the fourth inning was over with a strained right hamstring muscle. Cosart was charged with three runs (one earned) on two hits in 3 2/3 innings.

ROCKIES 4, DODGERS 3

Nolan Arenado homered twice and Trevor Story also went deep as Colorado held off Los Angeles. The surging Rockies had lost seven straight games at Dodger Stadium since they last won there last season June 8. The victory was the Rockies' fourth in five games on a road trip that began in San Francisco and ends Wednesday. Arenado's first multi-homer game of the season gave him six for the season and 11 RBIs, including six in the past three games. Story, who entered the game 5-for-44, broke a string of 12 hitless at-bats with his home run.

RED SOX 8, BLUE JAYS 7

Andrew Benintendi's two-out double in the eighth inning provided the decisive run as Boston held on. Toronto's Ezequiel Carrera belted a pinch-hit, two-run homer in the ninth off Matt Barnes to make it 8-7. Blue Jays starter Marcus Stroman (1-2) went 4 2/3 innings, allowing six earned on 11 hits as Toronto lost for the 11th time in 13 games this season. Red Sox left-hander Brian Johnson (1-0), who was making his second career big league start, allowed four runs on seven hits over five innings to record his first career major league win. Mitch Moreland went 3-for-5 with three RBIs for Boston.

ATHLETICS 4, RANGERS 2

Andrew Triggs, who hasn't given up an earned run in 17 2/3 innings this season, helped Oakland snap a four-game slide. Adam Rosales hit a game-tying two-run homer in the Athletics' four-run sixth inning, Khris Davis had a go-ahead sacrifice fly and Ryon Healy added a pinch RBI sin-

gle. Triggs (3-0) allowed three hits and two unearned runs in six innings. Santiago Casilla pitched a perfect ninth for his second save.

ANGELS 5, ASTROS 2

Albert Pujols blasted his 29th career home run at Minute Maid Park, a three-run shot that was the decisive blow in Los Angeles' victory. Pujols' second home run of the season came against Houston's Joe Musgrove (1-1) with one out in the fifth inning, plated teammates Yunel Escobar and Mike Trout, and helped snap the Angels' six-game slide. Pujols has 54 career home runs against the Astros, his most against any club. Los Angeles' Andrelton Simmons snapped an 0-for-11 skid with his opposite-field, solo homer off Musgrove in the second. That blast snapped a 21-inning scoreless drought for the Angels.

INDIANS 11, TWINS 4

Jose Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion each hit two-run homers, and Francisco Lindor added a two-run triple as Cleveland routed Minnesota. Ramirez, Lindor, Carlos Santana and Michael Brantley each had two hits and the Indians scored in five of the first six innings to support starter Josh Tomlin (1-2). Encarnacion added an RBI groundout for Cleveland after entering the game with one homer and two RBIs this season. Lindor ran his current hit streak to 12 games while Ramirez is 14-for-24 with seven runs, three homers and 10 RBIs in his last six games. Phil Hughes (2-1) was out after 3 1/3 innings for Minnesota, allowing eight hits and six runs (four earned).

NATIONALS 3, BRAVES 1

Max Scherzer allowed two hits over seven shutout innings as Washington handed Atlanta its first loss in its new Sun Trust Park. Scherzer (2-1) struck out seven and walked three in recording his third consecutive quality start. He allowed only two runners to reach scoring position and improved to 6-3 in his career against the Braves. Washington's Sammy Solis pitched a scoreless eighth inning but closer Blake Treinen loaded the bases in the ninth and allowed a run. Shawn Kelley entered and retired Emilio Bonifacio on a fly to right and struck out Chase d'Arnaud to end the game and earn his first save.

REDS 9, ORIOLES 3

Adam Duvall hit his first career grand slam and Joey Votto added a two-run homer to lift Cincinnati past Baltimore. Cincinnati's Bronson Arroyo (1-2), who needed a positive start after two rough outings in his return to the major leagues after two seasons, allowed three runs in five innings. The Orioles' Adam Jones hit a two-run homer off Arroyo, his third of the season. Kevin Gausman (1-1) started for Baltimore and didn't make it through the third inning, allowing 13 of 20 batters to reach base.

CARDINALS 2, PIRATES 1

Mike Leake threw 6 1/3 solid innings in his third straight quality start and a shaky bullpen got the job done in St. Louis' victory over Pittsburgh. Leake (2-1) scattered seven hits and allowed a run, walking none and striking out one. He recorded 12 of his 19 outs via grounders and saw his National League-low ERA rise to 0.84. The Cardinals own consecutive wins and a series victory for the first time this season. Brett Cecil bailed Leake out of a seventh-inning jam by inducing a 6-4-3 double play from pinch hitter Jose Osuna, who was making his major league debut. Matt Bowman tossed a scoreless eighth, and Seung Hwan Oh worked out of a bases-loaded spot in the ninth for his second save in as many nights.

PHILLIES 6, METS 2 (10 INNINGS)

Cameron Rupp scored the tying run in the eighth inning and lofted the go-ahead sacrifice fly during a four-run 10th inning as Philadelphia defeated New York. The Phillies won for the second time in seven games while the Mets lost their fourth straight. Odubel Herrera homered in the first for Philadelphia, which fell behind in the bottom of the inning when Jay Bruce delivered an RBI single and Yoanis Cespedes raced home on a wild pitch. The score remained 2-1 until the eighth when Rupp drew a two-out walk, went to third when third baseman Jose Reyes dropped what should have been an inning-ending popup by Galvis and scored on a double by pinch hitter Andres Blanco.—Reuters



MONACO: Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after winning against Britain's Kyle Edmund during the Monte Carlo ATP Masters Series tournament tennis match yesterday in Monaco. — AFP

TENNIS

MURRAY, NADAL IN TOUGH WINS TO START CLAY SEASON

MONTE CARLO: Andy Murray returned from over a month out with an elbow injury to launch his clay-court season with a gruelling 7-5, 7-5 defeat of Gilles Muller at the Monte Carlo Masters yesterday.

The world number one was joined in the third round by nine-time tournament champion Rafael Nadal, who held off British surprise-package Kyle Edmund 6-0, 5-7, 6-3 in the Spaniard's 400th career match on clay.

The Scot Murray waited until late in both sets to make his move, finally putting Muller away in just under two hours as he builds up to the French Open in May-June.

But the 29-year-old was poor on his serve with eight double faults while breaking Luxembourg's Muller four times.

"I definitely played better as the match went on, obviously first service game was not ideal," Murray said. "But when you are coming back from not really serving for a few weeks, it's I

think normal.

"Maybe the technique changed a little bit. You get into the match, and it's tricky."

Murray was kept on the back foot in the opening set as he lost the first game and only caught up late.

In the second he was also far from his fluent best, before grinding out victory. It was the first time back on the ATP since his elbow problem—his last match was a second-round loss to Vasek Pospisil at Indian Wells on March 12.

The three-time Monte Carlo semi-finalist Murray, who has had a sticky start to 2017 with form and injury, now stands 13-3 on the season and has one title from Dubai in his pocket.

Murray said: "My elbow's always a bit sore, always. That's nothing to do with this week. "The last two years, always when I serve, it's just a little bit sore. But it was nothing out of the ordinary today."

Victory for Nadal came in his 400th match on

clay, his record on the surface an outstanding 366-34. The Spaniard swept the first set 6-0 against 45th-ranked Edmund, but found himself fighting for survival in the third set.

The fourth seed finally squeezed home after two and a quarter hours.

Murray and Nadal were joined in round three by Swiss third seed Stan Wawrinka, who saw off Czech Jiri Vesely 6-2, 4-6, 6-2. Three-time Grand Slam winner Wawrinka won Monte Carlo three years ago over compatriot and friend Roger Federer. "Overall it was a good match, the first match on clay," said the Swiss. "The feeling was good. Winning in three sets means it was a good victory. It's important to win and keep going."

"I prepared well, practise was good. Physically I'm fine. "I know my level is good. If I'm able to improve I might have a chance in this tournament." Czech ninth seed Tomas Berdych put an end to the run of 39-year-old Tommy Haas 3-6, 1-6, 6-4. — AFP

TENNIS TOURNAMENT CONCLUDES

KUWAIT: The General Tennis Tournament concluded Tuesday evening at the Tennis Center of Kuwait Tennis Federation, as the final match was attended by KTF secretary General Abdelreda Al-Ghareeb, Treasurer Faleh Al-Otaibi, Board Member Ali Al-Daihani, Yarmouk Sports Club board member Hussein Al-Ghareeb, Khaitan Club member of the board

Hakem Al-Enezi and technical director Abbas Al-Busairi. The final match was between Yarmouk and Khaitan Clubs. In the first individuals match Khaitan Club player Hamid Al-Sulaiteen defeated Yarmouk Club player Abdelhameed Al-Shatti 6/4, 1/6, 6/2. In the second individuals match Yarmouk's Nasser Abdelsalam, defeated Khaitan's Abdallah Al-

Qallaf 6/0, 6/0. So a deciding double's match was played ending with Yarmouk's double's players Abdallah Maqdis and Hassan Al-Mousa, defeated Khaitan's Ali Ibrahim and Ahmad Al-Rabee 6/3 - 6/4. The final standings of the teams were as follows: Yarmouk, Kuwait, Khaitan, Kazema, Salmiya, Tadhamon, Shabab, Qadisiya, Sahel and Sulaibkhat.

