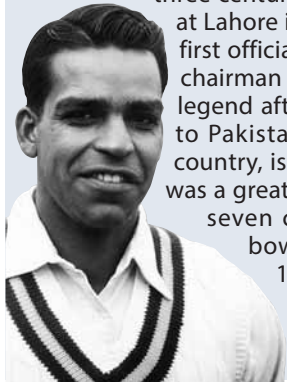


PAKISTAN'S FORMER TEST CRICKETER IMTIAZ DEAD

ISLAMABAD: Imtiaz Ahmed, Pakistan's former Test wicketkeeper-batsman who became a chief selector after his playing career, has died. He was 88. The Pakistan Cricket Board said Ahmed, Pakistan's oldest living test cricketer, died Saturday in Lahore following a chest infection. Ahmed played 41 tests from 1952-62, scoring 2,079 runs at an average of 29 and taking 77 catches. He hit three centuries, including a career-best 209 against New Zealand at Lahore in 1955, three years after touring India with Pakistan's first official test side. "This is a sad day for Pakistan cricket," PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan said in a statement. "Losing another legend after Hanif Mohammad in the same year is a great loss to Pakistan's cricket. The entire cricketing fraternity, in this country, is in sorrow over the sad demise of Imtiaz Ahmed. He was a great gentleman and will be missed." Ahmed notably took seven catches off the pace bowling of Fazal Mehmood's bowling to help Pakistan beat England at the Oval in 1954. He served as chief selector from 1976-78 and was a consultant for the PCB's women's cricket activities from 2005-08. — AP



GUARDIOLA LAUDS KLOPP'S 'HEAVY METAL' FOOTBALL

LONDON: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola heaped praise on Juergen Klopp, saying his Liverpool counterpart was the best when it comes to instilling an attacking style of play at a club. Since joining the club from Borussia Dortmund in 2015, Klopp has transformed Liverpool from Champions League qualification hopefuls to Premier League title contenders, with the Merseyside club second in the table, six points behind leaders Chelsea after 18 games. City are a point behind Liverpool and will hope to leapfrog them with a victory in Saturday's clash at Anfield. "Maybe he is the best manager in the world creating teams who attack the back four, with this amount of players, this intensity, with the ball without the ball," former Bayern Munich manager Guardiola told British media. "I like a lot the way they play because in three or four seconds they are attacking. It is not easy to do that. I think there is not another team in the world attacking this way with so many players. "When he speaks about his football being heavy metal, I understand completely, it is so aggressive. — Reuters

BROOM REPLACES INJURED GUPTILL IN NZ T20 SQUAD

CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand opener Martin Guptill will miss the Twenty20 series against Bangladesh with a hamstring injury and will be replaced by in-form batsman Neil Broom, the country's cricket board said yesterday. Guptill will be sidelined for up to four weeks after he sustained the injury while running between the wickets in the third one-day international against Bangladesh at Saxton Oval in Nelson yesterday. Broom was in fine form during the ODI series against Bangladesh, scoring 109 (not out) and 97 runs in his last two innings as the hosts completed a 3-0 series sweep. "We needed to replace an attacking opening batsman and with Neil's experience opening in the T20 format and his current form — he was a ready-made replacement," coach Mike Hesson said in a statement. "Martin also leads our fielding in white ball cricket and so we're expecting Neil to be a big contributor in that area as well." New Zealand will begin their three-match Twenty20 series against Bangladesh at McLean Park on Tuesday. — Reuters



WOODS GETS 'AT LEAST ONE WIN' NEXT YEAR: BEGAY

BAHAMAS: Tiger Woods celebrated his 41st birthday on Friday and long-time friend and fellow professional Notah Begay III predicts he will have more to celebrate in a triumphant return to the PGA Tour in 2017. Though Woods has competed only once over the past 16 months due to chronic back problems that required multiple surgeries, Begay was encouraged by that solitary tournament appearance earlier this month in the Bahamas.

Woods made his long anticipated return at the Hero World Challenge which he hosts and despite delivering mixed form he ended the week with a tournament-high aggregate of 24 birdies.

"I don't think anybody in the inner circle, including Tiger, could have been happier," Begay told Reuters about Woods' performance in the elite, limited-field event.

"There was a lot of curiosity around what was going to happen, what his swing was going to look like how his mind was going to adjust to the tournament environment because it's just so different, you can't recreate that focus in practice.

"For him to go out and make more birdies than anybody else in the field after being on the shelf for 15 months was quite remarkable. He's seeing some definite returns on the time that he's put in with regard to his recovery."

Woods has already committed to playing in the PGA Tour's Genesis Open at Riviera Country Club from Feb. 16-19 and is also expected to tee it up three weeks earlier in the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines.

PEAKING BY SPRING

Begay, a 44-year-old Native American who won four times on the PGA Tour, has forecast that Woods will hit top form by the opening major of the year, the April 6-9

Masters. "I expect him to win, and I expect him to have at least one win next year based upon what I've seen," said Begay, who played with Woods on the Stanford University golf team. "It's just a matter of getting some more tournament rounds. I'm not going to say it's going to happen early in the year but I think you should expect to see Tiger peak during the spring time." For all the birdies accumulated by Woods over the four rounds of the Hero World Challenge, the roller-coaster nature of his form was illustrated by the fact that he also led the field with six double-bogeys. Former PGA Tour winner Brandel Chamblee, who like Begay works as a Golf Channel analyst, was impressed by Woods' wedge game from outside 70 yards but said that his chipping and driving needed fixing. "There wasn't anything that took place in the Bahamas that wasn't fixable," said Begay. "I don't think Tiger was comfortable with his three-wood but that's fixable." Begay said he thought it was too early to tell about Woods' accuracy off the tee. "He hit something like 52 drivers in the Bahamas and you've got to see at least a few hundred before you start figuring out what the patterns and trends are."

Woods bladed a few bunker shots over greens during the Hero World Challenge but Begay saw no indication of the chipping yips that afflicted the former world number one in early 2015.

"The majority of chips that I saw around the green that might cause some problems he executed very well, his bunker game was solid, his little feel shots around the green were good," said Begay. "I'm not going to say there was perfect execution across the board but, for the most part, the shots you would want to have and the outcomes you would expect from a world-class player were all right there." — Reuters



LAS VEGAS: Amanda Nunes, right, throws a punch at Ronda Rousey in the first round of their women's bantamweight championship mixed martial arts bout at UFC 207, Friday, in Las Vegas. Nunes won the fight after it was stopped in the first round. — AP

BRAZIL'S NUNES PUMMELS ROUSEY IN UFC TITLE FIGHT

LAS VEGAS: Ronda Rousey's UFC comeback didn't even last a minute. Rousey was stopped 48 seconds into her first fight in 13 months Friday night, losing to bantamweight champion Amanda Nunes at UFC 207. Rousey (12-2) never managed to get her footing against Nunes (14-4), who rocked Rousey with her very first punches. Rousey showed little defensive acumen as she staggered and stumbled backward with Nunes relentlessly pursuing her and landing 27 punches in the brief bout.

"Forget about Ronda Rousey!" Nunes shouted to the sellout crowd. "She's going to go do movies. Forget about her. She has a lot of money already." Indeed, Rousey's future in the sport is clearly in question. The biggest star in the women's game, who left the arena without giving an interview, is likely considering retirement shortly before her 30th birthday. "That's it for her," Nunes said. "For sure, she's going to retire." Referee Herb Dean stopped the bout with Rousey still on her feet, and Rousey briefly protested the stoppage before leaving the cage in her mother's arms. Nunes put her finger to her lips and circled the cage after the stoppage, pausing to taunt Rousey's much-maligned coach, Edmond Tarverdyan.

"Her coach put some crazy things in her head, and her career started going down," Nunes said. "I'm the real striker here."

Cody Garbrandt won the men's bantamweight title in the penultimate bout at UFC 207, battering champion Dominick Cruz to earn a surprising decision victory at T-Mobile Arena in the promotion's traditional end-of-the-year show in its hometown. But the sellout crowd left shocked when Rousey couldn't compete in her first fight since losing her belt to Holly Holm 13 months ago in her first career defeat. Rousey became arguably the world's most famous female athlete and a combat sports trailblazer while she rocketed

atop the UFC, but a year away from the sport apparently did little to heal the holes in her game. She made a guaranteed \$3 million for her comeback bout, while Nunes' guaranteed payday was just \$200,000.

"I knew I was going to beat (Rousey)," Nunes said. "I'm the best on the planet." Rousey hadn't fought since November 2015, when Holly Holm stopped her with a head kick in one of the biggest upsets in MMA history. Rousey had never lost or been in much trouble while the former Olympic judo medalist earned a series of one-sided victories, but Holm's veteran striking made Rousey look unprepared.

QUICKER

Rousey's return fight was similar, but even quicker. Nunes claimed the belt at UFC 200 in July with a violent stoppage of Miesha Tate, who had beaten Holm in March. Nunes made an impressive ascent after losing three fights earlier in her career to opponents beaten easily by Rousey.

Rousey nearly vanished from public view after her first loss, taking time away from the gym and attending to her acting career. The UFC also was sold during her absence to WME-IMG, the entertainment conglomerate that also represents Rousey's career. But Rousey refused to promote this pay-per-view show, leaving Cruz, Garbrandt and Nunes to do most of the work. While Rousey's media blackout will hurt her cut of the pay-per-view revenue, it didn't affect her guaranteed payday, which matched Conor McGregor for the biggest disclosed check in UFC history.

Earlier, Garbrandt (11-0) remained unbeaten with a virtuoso performance to claim the belt held for the past 11 months by Cruz (22-2), who ended up with a gaping cut over his left eye. Garbrandt used precise striking, multiple takedowns and remarkable charisma to win over the judges, who all favored him by

scores of 48-46, 48-46 and 48-47. Cruz hadn't lost an MMA fight since March 24, 2007, winning 13 straight bouts in a career marked by multiple comebacks from major injuries.

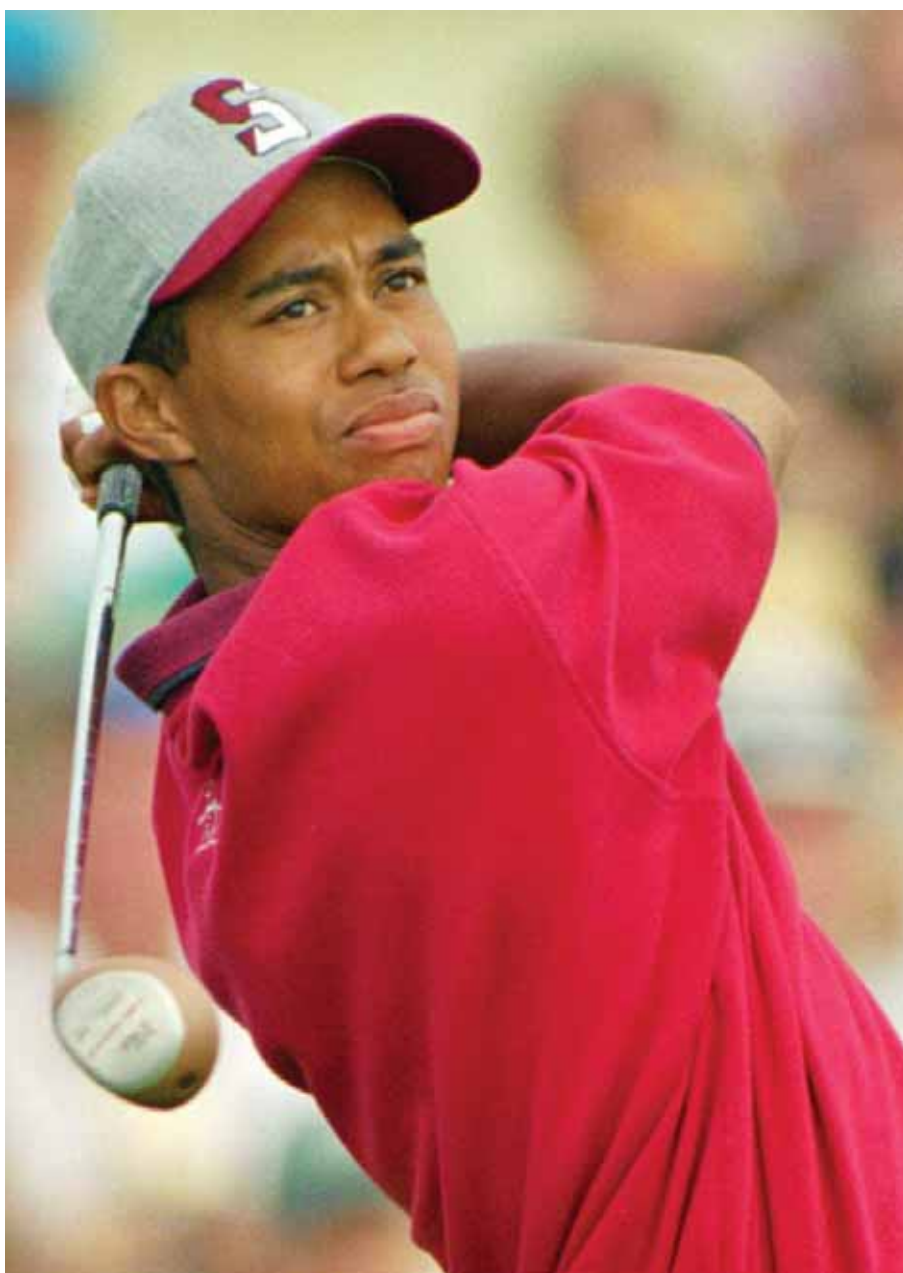
The 25-year-old Garbrandt is a native of Uhrichsville, Ohio, who trains in the Sacramento-area gym of veteran fighter Urijah Faber. Cruz and Garbrandt taunted each other repeatedly during the promotion of their bout, and their genuine dislike translated into a frenzied five-round fight. Garbrandt lived up to his boundless promise with a resourceful effort against Cruz, who was favored to defend his belt.

DOMINATED

"If you don't lose, you don't grow," Cruz said. "We're all competitors here, and it's a game of inches. He beat me by a couple of inches tonight, and that's OK. ... There wasn't one second of this fight I wasn't trying to win. I chased him around the cage the whole night." While Cruz threw 100 more strikes, Garbrandt landed a higher percentage of his shots and did more damage.

Both fighters landed significant strikes in the first two rounds, but Garbrandt turned the fight in his favor early in the third during the exchange that opened the cut on Cruz's face. Garbrandt put on a performance in the fourth round, repeatedly knocking down Cruz when he wasn't dancing away from the champion.

After receiving his belt, Garbrandt wrapped it around the waist of Maddux Maple, a 10-year-old leukemia survivor from northern Ohio who has been his motivational talisman. Garbrandt's first title defense could be against T.J. Dillashaw, who dominated John Lineker in a unanimous-decision victory moments earlier at UFC 207, winning 30-26 on all three cards. Dillashaw (15-3) showed off precise striking and a superior ground game to trounce the Brazilian brawler. "Come try me!" Garbrandt shouted at Dillashaw afterward. — AP



Tiger Woods

INDIA HALTS FUNDING OF NOC FOR HONOURING ADMINISTRATORS

NEW DELHI: The Indian Olympic Association's (IOA) move to honour two controversial administrators has infuriated the government with the sports ministry cutting off funding and the use of other facilities extended to the body.

The IOA named its former presidents Suresh Kalmadi and Abhay Singh Chautala as life presidents on Tuesday, a decision that has been heavily criticised after both are facing allegations of corruption.

Kalmadi spent nine months in jail after the allegations, stemming from the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. He was released pending an appeal to Delhi High Court and has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing.

Chautala is also facing unrelated corruption charges in an ongoing court case. He has also denied the allegations.

"IOA will cease to enjoy the privileges and prerogatives bestowed on it by the

Government as the National Olympic Committee (NOC)," the sports ministry said in a statement.

"All Government assistance, financial or otherwise, to IOA will also be stopped." Kalmadi has declined the post until his case has been heard, while Chautala, who was initially adamant to stay on in the patron's role, has hinted at stepping down.

The IOA sought time until Jan. 15 to reply to a sports ministry notice, citing its presi-

dent Narayana Ramachandran was abroad, but the ministry dismissed it as a "ploy" to buy time.

"Although the Government has utmost respect for the Olympic Charter and is committed to protecting the autonomy of sports, it cannot remain a mute spectator to blatant violation of principles of ethic and good governance by IOA..." the ministry said. Former shooter Abhinav Bindra, India's first individual Olympic gold medalist, wel-

comed the suspension of the IOA, which is perceived in cricket-mad India as a clumsy organisation relying mostly on government largesse and run by politicians who are opposed to new faces and fresh ideas.

"The @Olympics movement and specially the movement in India can no longer hide behind autonomy. It's the age of good governance and ethics," tweeted Bindra, who won the 10m air rifle gold in 2008 Beijing Olympics. — Reuters