

KIWIS REACH MATCH POINT IN AMERICA'S CUP CHALLENGER FINALS

BERMUDA'S GREAT SOUND: The heart-stopping moments keep coming for Emirates Team New Zealand in the America's Cup eliminations on Bermuda's Great Sound.

The Kiwis overcame a mistake by helmsman Peter Burling and barely held off Sweden's Artemis Racing in a drag race to the finish line of Race 6 Sunday to reach match point in the challenger finals. Emirates Team New Zealand won two of three races Sunday to take a 4-2 lead in the best-of-nine series.

The Kiwis need just one win today to clinch a spot in the America's Cup match against two-time defending champion Oracle Team USA and a chance to atone for their soul-crushing loss in the 2013 match. Team New Zealand had a big lead late in Race 6 when Burling, an

Olympic gold and silver medalist, missed the layline into the bottom mark. The 50-foot catamaran came off its foils and slowed dramatically, allowing Artemis to catch up. The Kiwis regained their speed on the short reach to the finish, had a better angle to the line and won by one second. "I think we definitely owe a few supporters a few beers or something like that," Burling said. "A few guys on the team reckon they lost a few years off their life watching that. It was my stuff-up. Plain and simple, we missed the layline. "We were planning on going through the gate and carrying on for another 18 seconds through the gate and gybing through the finish. We just missed the layline and we weren't quite ready to gybe back and we hadn't really accelerated out of the gybe.

"It was a simple mistake that shows you how tight this racing is," Burling said. "You make one little mistake and a big lead turns into nothing. We're just really happy with the way the boys dug really deep and managed to get that board down and get foiling again to get us to the finish a couple of seconds ahead."

On Tuesday, the Kiwis capsized at the start of a semifinal race against Britain's Land Rover BAR, throwing crewmen into the water and causing extensive damage. High winds blew out racing Wednesday, and the Kiwis returned to the course Thursday to close out that series and advance.

Artemis Racing skipper Nathan Outteridge, an Australian who also has won Olympic gold and silver medals, will have to rally again to keep his syndicate

alive. Artemis trailed SoftBank Team Japan 3-1 in semifinals before winning four straight to advance.

"We saw in the semifinals that anything's possible if we just keep chipping away," Outteridge said. "We'll review the footage from today and probably review yesterday's again, and come out tomorrow with a new and improved game plan."

Artemis won Sunday's first race after recovering from a potentially dangerous situation, when it came out of a tack, got high on its foils and then took a nose dive. The boat almost went sideways.

The Kiwis had to bear away and called for a penalty but it was waved off.

Team New Zealand won the second race after passing the Swedes late on leg three and pulling way ahead. Artemis

retired with a daggerboard problem just as the Kiwis crossed the finish line.

Artemis has won the start of all six races. "We're definitely learning a lot about how to come from behind, but at the same time we're making some pretty big improvements in the starting end.

"We're not too worried if we are behind because we've got so much confidence we can run them down. But we'd definitely prefer to be in front."

Four years ago, Team New Zealand reached match point in the America's Cup match at 8-1. Oracle Team USA then staged one of the greatest comebacks in sports, winning eight straight races to retain the Auld Mug. The Kiwis later sacked skipper Dean Barker. The America's Cup match starts Saturday. —AP

FOR DAVIS LOVE III, A FATHER-SON OUTING AT THE US OPEN

ERIN: Davis Love III is making his 24th appearance in the US Open, with one big difference. He'll only have clubs in his hand to clean them, not hit any shots. And for the first time, he'll be wearing shorts at a major championship.

Love is caddying for his son. Davis Love IV, who just finished at Alabama and turned pro, qualified for his first US Open as an alternate from the Georgia sectional qualifier. "I'm excited for him," Love said Sunday afternoon as he watched from some 300 yards away as his son, who goes by "Dru," teed off during a practice round with Ryder Cup captain Jim Furyk. "I've played with a bunch of 19- and 20-year-olds. But it makes me feel old that he's playing."

Dru Love won't officially be in the US Open field until the world ranking is published. The USGA held back six spots for anyone who moved into the top 60 in the world ranking after this week. Chris Wood of England finished right at No. 60, meaning the other five spots are distributed to alternates. The Georgia section, where Love was first alternate, was No. 5 on the list.

The son will have plenty of experience on the bag. Love won the PGA Championship in 1997 at Winged Foot when Dru was only 3. He also is a two-time Ryder Cup captain who will be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame this fall. Love played his first U.S. Open at age 24 in 1988, and he was a runner-up in 1996 at Oakland Hills. The 53-year-old Love has been slowed by a bad back this year and had no intention of trying to qualify for the US Open until he caddied for his son at the

first stage of US Open qualifying and Dru made it to the sectional qualifier.

Love played in the Columbus, Ohio, qualifier and missed out by eight shots. "The main reason I went is because he was going," Love said. "I thought, 'If I don't try and he gets in ... I had to try.'"

Erin Hills was busy for a late afternoon with strong wind. Playing ahead of Love group was two-time U.S. Open champion Ernie Els. Walking off the second tee, he looked back at the green and recognized a longtime colleague in shorts and carrying the bag. "Hey, caddie!" Els called out to Love. "I finally found a job," Love replied.

"Ryder Cup captain. PGA champion. Caddie. I think you finally found something," Els said with that easy smile. Dru Love will be making his second start in a PGA Tour sanctioned event. He played in the 2015 RSM Classic at Sea Island, which his father hosts, and missed the cut.

Love hopes to impart some knowledge gleaned over three decades playing majors, mainly how to prepare and pick out lines off the tee and not to get rattled when something goes wrong, which it often does for everyone at a US Open at some point.

Beneath the instruction was no small amount of pride. Dru Love is the third generation to play in the US Open. Davis Love Jr., a noted teaching pro, played in the US Open six times. Love's entire family is coming to Erin Hills to watch. "It's going to be a lot of fun," Love said. The first order of business? Love has set up an appointment with sports psychologist Bob Rotella on Monday. —AP



LONG POND: Ryan Blaney, driver of the #21 Motorcraft/Quick Lane Tire & Auto Center Ford, poses with the trophy in Victory Lane after winning the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Axalta presents the Pocono 400 at Pocono Raceway on Sunday in Long Pond, Pennsylvania. —AFP

MOTOR RACING

BLANEY WINS FIRST CAREER NASCAR CUP RACE AT POCONO RACEWAY

LONG POND: Ryan Blaney was stationed in victory lane with a headset on as a guest pit reporter just the day before at Pocono Raceway. But to get there again, on his own in the No. 21 Ford, he'd have to zip past a pair of hardened NASCAR champions with just 10 laps left.

Kevin Harvick and Kyle Busch may not be ready yet to officially pass the torch to the next generation of drivers. So it's up to young 20-somethings like Blaney to yank that torch - that checkered flag - and knock 'em off their perch.

Driving for owners with roots steeped in NASCAR history, Blaney blazed his way down the stretch past Busch, held off a hard-charging Harvick, and won his first career NASCAR Cup race Sunday at the raceway.

That's career win No. 99 for the Wood Brothers. No. 1 for Blaney, well, that felt pretty good. Blaney, a "Star Wars" nut, was tongue tied when he met actress Daisy Ridley in March. An hour or so after confetti fluttered on him in victory lane, he offered an open invitation to Ridley to join the post-race party.

The bash might last as long as a "Star Wars" marathon. "Maybe she watched the race today," Blaney said. "She better get on a plane right now. It'll actually be going on all night, so she's got plenty of time to get here."

The 23-year-old Blaney, son of NASCAR driver Dave Blaney, grandson of dirt track star Lou Blaney, won for the first time in 68 career starts and partied again in victory lane. He was a guest reporter for Fox during the Xfinity race.

Blaney interviewed Xfinity winner Brad Keselowski in victory lane on Saturday as part of an all-driver broadcast by Fox. Keselowski finished fifth on Sunday and returned the favor by crashing the broadcast and interviewed Blaney.

"What was going through your mind? You're in victory lane, man!" Keselowski said. "I just didn't want to make a mistake," Blaney told Keselowski. "That would have been the worst thing we could do." He was near flawless over those final 10 laps.

"He outran two guys today that are champions," Eddie Wood said.

It was a bit of a throwback for the Woods. Blaney's radio was busted and he had no communication with his team after about the first 40 laps. "It figures the one race we don't have radio communication, we end up winning it," Blaney said. "Maybe we should turn the radio off more often." The Wood Brothers have won at least one race in each of the last six decades, but none since Trevor Bayne won the Daytona 500 in 2011.

Blaney is the 18th driver to win a Cup race with the Wood Brothers. He is also part of a bumper crop of blossoming young talent that his hit NASCAR over the last couple of years. Two of those drivers were in the top 10: rookie Erik Jones was third and Chase Elliott was eighth.

Blaney joined Ricky Stenhouse Jr. and Austin Dillon as first-time Cup winners this season.

"We can finally add our name to that group," a beaming Blaney said. Harvick, the 2014 champion, knows the new generation is coming on strong. "These young guys have to get into victory lane to get these fans that don't like me and Kyle," he said. "The younger crowd has to win, and today Ryan was able to do that, so not only is it good for him, but it's good for the whole

sport." Blaney had a brief chat in victory lane with one of his best friends and fellow driver, Darrell Wallace Jr. Wallace finished a lap down in 26th in the first start by a black driver in the Cup series since 2006. He felt ill after the race and needed to go to the medical center. Wallace said he was embarrassed, but fine. "It was really cool,

a really fun day," Wallace said. The Wood Brothers share a technical alliance with team owner Roger Penske and "The Captain" would like to add Blaney to his roster, possibly next year. Next year was a worry for another day. "I like where I'm at," Blaney said. With the Wood Brothers. And, in victory lane. —AFP

GOLF

JUTANUGARN BEATS THOMPSON, CHUN IN PLAYOFF AT LPGGA CLASSIC

CAMBRIDGE: Ariya Jutanugarn was seated by the scorer's tent after finishing her final round Sunday, snapping selfies with In Gee Chun and thinking there was little chance they would return to the course for a playoff at the Manulife LPGA Classic.

A short time later, Jutanugarn was posing for pictures as winner of the Manulife LPGA Classic. Lexi Thompson buckled down the stretch and missed a four-foot putt to win in regulation, forcing her to return to the 18th tee with Jutanugarn and Chun for a playoff. Jutanugarn found the rough with her drive but her approach was pin-high and she made a 25-foot birdie putt for her first victory of the season. "I feel great, I feel like I broke through," she said. "I feel like I waited for my first win this year for a while." The 21-year-old from Thailand is a virtual lock to move up one position Monday and knock Lydia Ko off her perch as the world's top-ranked women's player.

Jutanugarn earned \$255,000 of the \$1.7-million purse for the victory. She raised her hand to her mouth in shock after hitting the winning shot.

"I knew it was a good putt," she said. "I didn't know it was going to go in." Jutanugarn is the 13th different winner on the LPGA Tour this season. Her last victory came at the 2016 Canadian Pacific Women's Open.

A five-time winner last year, she had three birdies over a four-hole stretch around the turn at Whistle Bear Golf Club. She closed with six straight pars for a 3-under-par 69 that left her at 17-under 271.

Thompson started the day with a one-shot lead and was up by four strokes after a birdie on No. 9. Four bogeys on the back nine did her in, with the final one coming when she three-putted on No. 18 to finish the round at 72.

"I had like a five-footer, six-footer, and about a four-footer and missed them all," Thompson said of her last three holes. "If I made those I would have won, but that's golf I guess." Chun finished the final round with a 70. Jodi Ewart Shadoff (69) was one shot back in fourth place. Mi Hyang Lee (68) and Laura Gonzalez Escallon (67) were at 14 under.

Brooke Henderson, of nearby Smiths Falls, was the top Canadian. She finished six strokes back in a tie for 11th after a 71. Her round included an eagle, six birdies and six bogeys.

"Obviously I'm a little bit disappointed, but (tied for) 11th, I can't complain too much," Henderson said. "I feel like my game is so close

to being so great."

Alena Sharp, of Hamilton, started the day three shots behind Thompson but was unable to make a run. She had a double bogey on her final hole and finished seven strokes back after a 76. Sharp, a co-leader after two rounds, was looking for her first victory in 246 career LPGA Tour starts.

"I played better today than yesterday," she said. "Just hit one bad shot on the last (hole) and didn't make any putts, so it's kind of not sitting well at this moment."

Manulife will not return as a sponsor next season. The LPGA Tour has said it hopes to return to the area and that is searching for a new title sponsor. — AP



ONTARIO: Lexi Thompson on the USA waves after making a birdie on the 9th hole during the final round of the LPGA Classic at Whistle Bear Golf Club in Cambridge, Ontario on Sunday. — AP

HAMILTON, VETTEL LOCKED IN GLORIOUS TITLE DUEL

MONTREAL: Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel's duel has turned this season's title race into one of the most keenly-anticipated - and most difficult to forecast - in decades.

Not since the heyday of Hamilton's childhood hero Ayrton Senna's intense rivalry with his McLaren team-mate Alain Prost nearly 30 years ago has a battle for glory so comprehensively captured the imagination.

Hamilton and Vettel's razor-sharp competitiveness has lifted performance levels to such a high that veteran paddock observers were left stunned at the Canadian Grand Prix.

London bookmakers have also reflected the close nature of this phenomenal scrap and on Monday installed the pair as joint favourites to win the drivers' championship at 10/11, Hamilton's odds having been cut from 6/4 thanks to his masterful triumph at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve.

Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff admitted to feeling "great" after seeing how Hamilton had inspired his team to claim a one-two triumph - their first this year - that erased the lingering feelings from last month's dismal showing at the Monaco Grand Prix.

Valtteri Bottas followed Hamilton home ahead of Daniel Ricciardo, of Red Bull.

The Australian's team-mate Max Verstappen was forced to retire due to electrical problems after snatching second with an aggressive start that saw him brush with the luckless Vettel, who was forced to make a belated early pit stop for a new front

wing. He came home fourth after a surging drive. Hamilton's victory, built on an equally outstanding 'Senna-esque' lap for his 65th pole position on Saturday, lifted him to within 12 points of Vettel in the drivers' championship while Mercedes regained the lead in the constructors' contest, eight points ahead of Ferrari.

"We have finally taken a 1-2 finish and done so at a track that we expected would be difficult for us - and which certainly was for us last year," said Wolff.

"Lewis delivered a stellar performance this weekend - a pole lap that was almost scary, when you watch the on-board, then a totally dominant race.

"Valtteri struggled in qualifying, but he got everything right in the race to complete a perfect day."

Wolff praised the entire Mercedes team both in Montreal and back at their factory in Brackley, in England, where staff worked tirelessly in a 24/7 effort to solve the problems that had enabled Ferrari to outclass them and score a 1-2 in Monte Carlo where Hamilton was seventh.

"Ever since Monaco, the guys and girls in the factory have been flat out," he said. "We ran the simulator 24/7 for 10 days in a row. Nobody took a weekend off in that group and there are no silver bullets in the sport."

Hamilton, too, was full of gratitude for the team effort and behaved, in Montreal, in a manner that endorsed the view that he has developed into a team-orientated driver, rather than a 'lone wolf'; to more than fill the vacuum created by the retirement of 2016 champion German Nico Rosberg. —AFP



MONTREAL: Race winner Lewis Hamilton of Great Britain and Mercedes GP celebrates his win on the podium with second place finisher Valtteri Bottas of Finland and Mercedes GP during the Canadian Formula One Grand Prix at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve on Sunday in Montreal, Canada. — AFP