

Sports

Athletics' Fiers no-hits Reds as Royals hit 2 slams to crush Astros

Mets edge Padres on Cano's milestone night

OAKLAND: Oakland Athletics right-hander Mike Fiers threw the major leagues' first no-hitter of the year Tuesday night, blanking the visiting Cincinnati Reds 2-0 in the opener of a three-game interleague series.

In recording the second no-hitter of his career, the A's ace threw 131 pitches and faced just two batters over the minimum, allowing two walks. A third Cincinnati batter also reached base on an error, but one of the Reds' baserunners was erased on a double play. Fiers became the 35th pitcher to record multiple no-hitters, counting the regular season and postseason. It was the 300th no-hitter in major league history, counting the postseason. Fiers' previous no-hitter was recorded on Aug. 21, 2015, for the Houston Astros in a 3-0 interleague victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers. Told by manager Bob Melvin after the seventh inning that he would be replaced if he allowed another baserunner, Fiers retired the side in order in the eighth and ninth innings, striking out Eugenio Suarez on a 2-2 curveball in the dirt to finish it off.

ROYALS 12, ASTROS 2

Ryan O'Hearn and Whit Merrifield belted their first career grand slams, and Kansas City bashed host Houston. The Royals squared the three-game set with Houston by recording eight extra-base hits, six against Astros right-hander Collin McHugh (3-4) in three-plus innings. O'Hearn capped a five-run third inning with his blast, lining a first-pitch cutter from McHugh 373 feet and into the seats in right field. Merrifield smacked his grand slam off Astros left-hander Framber Valdez with two outs in the seventh and finished 4-for-5 with three runs and five RBIs.

DODGERS 9, BRAVES 0

Justin Turner had a career-high three home runs and six RBIs, and Hyun-Jin Ryu threw his first complete game since his rookie year to lift Los Angeles to a win against visiting Atlanta. Ryu (4-1) threw a four-hitter, striking out six and walking none. His last complete game covered eight innings in a 2-1 loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks in September 2013. In May of that season, he pitched a nine-inning, 2-0 shutout over the visiting Los Angeles Angels. Turner finished with four hits, and Cody Bellinger, Alex Verdugo and Max Muncy added two each for the Dodgers, who have not lost a series to the Braves since July 2015.

METS 7, PADRES 6

Rookie Pete Alonso snapped a ninth-inning tie with a two-run homer, and New York hung on for a victory at San Diego. With the score 5-5, New York's Robinson Cano singled to open the ninth against Adam Warren (2-1) for his fourth hit of the game. Alonso, who had gone 0-for-4 Monday night with three strikeouts, then hit a drive 449 feet to left field. Alonso, who earlier had two run-scoring singles, wound up with four RBIs for the game. Cano's first hit of the night was the

2,500th of his career-making him the 101st player in major league history and sixth player from the Dominican Republic to reach the milestone.

CUBS 5, MARLINS 2

Kris Bryant blasted a three-run, walk-off homer in the ninth inning to lead Chicago past visiting Miami. Bryant homered in a third consecutive game for the first time in his career. He has six homers this season. The blast to left-center came on a 98 mph fastball from Adam Conley (1-4).

Former Marlins reliever Steve Cishek (1-1) earned the win, pitching one scoreless inning.

YANKEES 5, MARINERS 4

Gio Urshela hit the game-tying, two-run homer with one out in the ninth, and DJ LeMahieu hit a walk-off single later in the inning as the New York Yankees withstood a lengthy rain delay and rallied for a 5-4 victory over the visiting Seattle Mariners on Tuesday night. The Yankees won for the 15th time in 20 games since April 16 and pulled off the comeback following a 72-minute rain delay in the top of the seventh. New York tied the game when Urshela lifted an 0-2 fastball from Anthony Swarzak (2-2) over the center field fence. Cameron Maybin followed with a single, stole second and scored when LeMahieu slapped a single to right against Roenis Elias.

PHILLIES 11, CARDINALS 1

Bryce Harper hit a grand slam in a six-run second inning as Philadelphia cruised to a win at St. Louis. Struggling through a 6-for-48 slump, Harper slugged his seventh home run and first grand slam with the Phillies off Dakota Hudson (2-3) in the big inning, which featured six unearned runs, two throwing errors, two walks and a passed ball by the Cardinals.

Philadelphia starter Aaron Nola (3-0) tossed six innings of one-run ball and made his third straight strong start by giving up just three hits and fanning seven.

RAYS 6, DIAMONDBACKS 3

Brandon Lowe hit a first-pitch home run and drove in two runs, and Tampa Bay rode a three-run seventh inning to victory over Arizona in St. Petersburg, Fla. Arizona's Taylor Clarke (0-1), a 25-year-old rookie making his second appearance and first start, pitched six strong innings after Lowe drove his first pitch of the game—a 92-mph fastball down the middle—over the center field fence. Lowe went 2-for-5 to extend his hitting streak to 11 games.

BREWERS 6, NATIONALS 0

Lorenzo Cain hit a three-run double off Stephen Strasburg in the seventh inning to snap a scoreless tie, and host Milwaukee beat struggling Washington. The Brewers, who scored all six of their runs in the seventh, have won nine of their last 12 games, while the Nationals have dropped 13 of 18. It was the first career hit for Cain against Strasburg in nine at-bats. Milwaukee

resent ASICS as a brand ambassador." Last year ASICS renewed its contract with Rugby Australia for a further six years. Folau's case has proved complex and divisive, pitting his right to free speech against the offence he has caused others and damage to rugby's reputation.

It has split opinion with several Pacific Island-origin players supporting him, while others, including within the Wallabies camp, have been critical.

Jones, who coached the Wallabies during a golden era in the late 1980s, has been a frequent critic of Rugby Australia and one of the staunchest defenders of Folau's right to free speech. Now an influential and outspoken radio broadcaster, known for his conservative views, he relayed a message Tuesday he said he received from the player. "I've just had a note from Israel, he won't mind if I'm sharing it with you because I said to him, 'Hold your head up,'" Jones said on his morning programme.

"He said, 'Alan, I'm at peace, mate. My head is held high.'" Jones has previously railed against free speech being "completely corrupted" in Australia and he let rip again Tuesday. "Nothing wrong with Israel, it's the society and those who prosecute him who are sick," he said. Jones added that he was "ashamed" of the sport he loves and that "the battle has just begun".

"Israel Folau, with my support and the support of millions of Australians, will take this fight every inch of the way," he said. "Rugby union preaches diversity—they really mean uniformity. They preach inclusion but they exclude Israel."

The code of conduct panel could decide to fire Folau, or issue fines or suspensions. No timescale was given for its decision, with legal experts warning that whatever happens an appeal is likely, potentially followed by a drawn-out court battle. — AFP



OAKLAND: Stephen Piscotty #25 of the Oakland Athletics slides into home plate to score a run ahead of a tag from Tucker Barnhart #16 of the Cincinnati Reds during the second inning at the Oakland Coliseum in Oakland, California. The Oakland Athletics defeated the Cincinnati Reds 2-0. — AFP

pitcher Freddy Peralta (2-1), who came on in the third, threw five scoreless innings while allowing three hits and two walks with five strikeouts. Strasburg (3-2) was tagged for four runs and six hits in 6 2/3 innings with 11 strikeouts and two walks.

RED SOX 8, ORIOLES 5

Mitch Moreland hit a tiebreaking three-run homer in the fifth inning to lead visiting Boston past Baltimore. The home run, Moreland's 10th of the season, handed the Red Sox a lead they never relinquished. The Red Sox ended up with homers from Moreland, Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez, while Moreland and Martinez drove in three runs apiece. Martinez hit the 200th home run of his career. Marcus Walden improved to 5-0 in 13 relief appearances as he got the win thanks to giving up one run in three innings. Matt Barnes came on in the eighth and got the final four outs for his third save.

ANGELS 5, TIGERS 2

Rookie Griffin Canning tossed 5 1/3 solid innings to earn his first major league win as Los Angeles won at Detroit to snap a two-game losing streak. The Tigers have alternated losses with wins in each of the past seven games. Canning (1-0) surrendered two runs on four hits and one walk while striking out seven in his second career start. Luke Bard retired all five batters he faced before Ty Buttrey tossed a perfect eighth. Hansel Robles earned his third save with a one-hit ninth.

Reigning American League Rookie of the Year Shohei Ohtani batted third for the Angels and went 0-for-4 with an RBI groundout in his season debut. Ohtani, who split his time between the mound and the field last season but underwent Tommy John surgery Oct. 1, will be limited to designated hitter duties for the rest of 2019.

PIRATES 5, RANGERS 4

Gregory Polanco hit a two-run homer and Melky Cabrera added a pinch-hit two-run double as Pittsburgh took a three-run lead then held on to beat visiting Texas. Starling Marte was 2-for-3 with an RBI single for the Pirates, who swept a two-game series at Texas last week and have won three straight and five of six overall. Hunter Pence went 3-for-3 and drove in all four Texas runs with a two-run homer and a two-run double. The Rangers have lost four of six.

WHITE SOX 2, INDIANS 0

Lucas Giolito scattered three hits over a season-high 7 1/3 innings, and Yoan Moncada continued to torment Cleveland as visiting Chicago posted a victory. Moncada had an RBI single in the third inning to give him six hits—including two homers—to go along with eight RBIs and five runs in four games against the Indians this season. James McCann added an RBI single in the sixth inning to cap his two-hit performance for the White Sox, who have won seven of their past 11 games. Francisco Lindor recorded three singles and Jason

Kipnis had a pair of doubles, but the rest of the Indians' lineup went 0-for-22 with nine strikeouts. Cleveland has been outscored 21-1 during a three-game losing skid.

TWINS 3, BLUE JAYS 0

Jose Berrios allowed four hits while pitching seven shutout innings to win his fifth consecutive start, and Mitch Garver had three hits—including a two-run homer—to lead visiting Minnesota over Toronto.

Berrios (6-1) pitched around leadoff singles in the third, fourth and sixth innings and didn't allow a batter to reach second base until Billy McKinney's two-out ground-rule double in the seventh. Berrios, who didn't walk a batter and struck out five, then got Brandon Drury to ground out to end the threat. Taylor Rogers overcame two singles in the ninth to pick up his fourth save.

GIANTS 14, ROCKIES 4

Mac Williamson homered and drove in four runs in his 2019 debut, and San Francisco routed Colorado in Denver. Williamson, who hit three home runs Monday night for Triple-A Sacramento, was called up Tuesday and paid immediate dividends when his three-run homer off Antonio Senzatele broke a 1-1 tie in the fourth. Evan Longoria and Kevin Pillar also homered for San Francisco. Joe Panik had three hits, and Brandon Belt had two doubles. Charlie Blackmon and Chris Iannetta went deep for Colorado, which got three hits from Raimel Tapia. — Reuters

Wallabies sponsor dumps Folau as ex-Australia coach slams verdict

SYDNEY: Sportswear company ASICS dumped Israel Folau as a brand ambassador yesterday over homophobic comments, as former Wallabies coach Alan Jones slammed those punishing him as "sick". The devoutly Christian player on Tuesday was found guilty of a "high-level" breach of the sport's code of conduct after posting an anti-gay statement on social media, leaving his career hanging in the balance.

He faces his lucrative four-year Rugby Australia contract being terminated, with the three-person code of conduct panel taking written submissions from his legal team and the governing body before deciding on his punishment. Rugby Australia moved to sack him after he posted a banner on Instagram last month that read: "Drunks, homosexuals, adulterers, liars, fornicators, thieves, atheists and idolaters—Hell awaits you." It followed a similar tirade last year.

ASICS, which is also a leading Wallabies sponsor, severed ties with Folau, saying "we believe sport is for everyone and we champion inclusivity and diversity". "While Israel Folau is entitled to his personal views, some of those expressed in recent social media posts are not aligned with those of ASICS," it added in a Facebook statement.

"As such, our partnership with Israel has become untenable and he will no longer rep-

Hamilton favourite for Spain in big test for Ferrari

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton is favourite to win the Spanish Grand Prix for a fourth time, and third in a row, on Sunday and retake the Formula One world championship lead from Mercedes team mate Valtteri Bottas.

Needless to say, Ferrari have another script in mind for a race seen as something of a litmus test for their title prospects.

Sebastian Vettel and Charles Leclerc dominated pre-season testing at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya amid excited talk of Ferrari ending Mercedes' five-year stranglehold on the sport.

They return reeling from four successive Mercedes one-two finishes, an unprecedented start to the season by any team, and hoping an engine upgrade-brought forward by two races-will swing things their way.

If Mercedes are again quicker at such a benchmark circuit, where the champions have won four times in the last five years, the writing will be on the wall for Ferrari. They need to step up a gear and start turning things around.

Both teams have been talking up the other's chances.

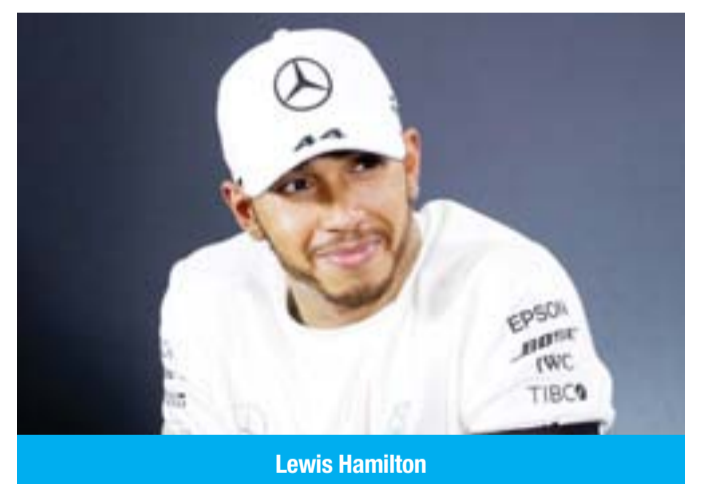
"The last four races, on average, we were not quite there so I think we are not the favourites going to Barcelona," said Vettel, winner with Red Bull in 2011, after finishing third in Azerbaijan.

Team principal Mattia Binotto agreed: "Obviously Mercedes are very strong at the moment. I'm pretty sure they will be very strong as well in Barcelona."

"Many teams will bring aero package or car developments, so that will be again a different balance compared to what we've seen so far in the season," he added.

FLATTERING

Mercedes principal Toto Wolff dismissed Vettel's portrayal of Ferrari as underdogs for the first race of the European season. "The results seem to paint a relatively clear picture, but the truth is that they're too flattering. The performance has



Lewis Hamilton

fluctuated in the first four races," said the Austrian.

"Our opponents were blisteringly quick in winter testing, so the Spanish Grand Prix will be anything but easy."

Bottas leads five times world champion Hamilton by a single point, with both men on two wins, by virtue of the Finn's fastest lap in the Australian season opener.

British bookmakers William Hill have Hamilton as race favourite at 6-4, with Bottas on 9-4 and Vettel and Leclerc priced at 9-2.

Barcelona has also been a happy hunting ground for Red Bull, with Max Verstappen becoming the sport's youngest winner there in 2016.

"It is always a special one for me," said the 21-year-old of a track whose future remains uncertain, with talk of Verstappen's home Dutch circuit Zandvoort taking the slot next year.

"The temperatures will be a bit different (to testing in March) and everyone is bringing new parts to their cars, so it will be interesting to see how competitive we can be."

Former Red Bull team mate Daniel Ricciardo, now at Renault, has a three-place grid drop as punishment for a bizarre collision with Toro Rosso's Daniil Kvyat in Baku.

A Brazilian-Austrian flag will be displayed on the podium in tribute to the late triple champion Ayrton Senna and Roland Ratzenberger who died at Imola in May 25 years ago. Sunday's race is the first since the anniversary. — Reuters