

Sports

Verlander strikes out 12 as Astros defeat White Sox 5-1

Twins overcome slow start to roll past Angels

HOUSTON: Justin Verlander carried a no-hitter into the seventh inning, and Michael Brantley keyed a four-run uprising in the fifth with an opposite-field double to left as the Houston Astros claimed a 5-1 victory over the visiting Chicago White Sox on Tuesday. Verlander (8-1) flirted with his third career no-hitter, dominating the White Sox with a season-high 12 strikeouts while allowing just one baserunner entering the top of the seventh. After Verlander recorded his 11th strikeout to open that frame, he lost his no-hitter and shutout when Jose Abreu drilled a first-pitch fastball for a homer to straightaway center field. Verlander gave up one run, one hit and one walk in eight innings. Houston's Yuli Gurriel hit a solo homer, and Michael Brantley had a two-run double.

CUBS 3, PHILLIES 2

Javier Baez ripped a pinch-hit, walk-off single in the bottom of the ninth inning to lift Chicago to a win over visiting Philadelphia. Before the game, Cubs manager Joe Maddon said Baez would be held out for the second consecutive day due to an injured heel and would undergo an MRI exam. However, after more than 3 1/2 hours on the bench, Baez delivered in the game's most critical moment. Albert Almora Jr. also had an RBI during a two-run ninth for Chicago. The Cubs bounced back after Andrew McCutchen ripped a two-out, two-run single in the seventh inning to put the Phillies ahead 2-1. Philadelphia's four-game winning streak ended.

YANKEES 11, ORIOLES 4

Clint Frazier homered twice and drove in five runs, and Gary Sanchez hit a three-run homer for the second straight night as New York prevailed at Baltimore. Frazier hit a two-run homer and a three-run shot. Sanchez belted his three-run homer in the first-after hitting a tiebreaking three-run homer in the ninth inning that gave New York a 10-7 victory on Monday night. The Yankees posted their 12th victory in 15 games. The Orioles have now allowed 100 home runs in just 48 games to set a dubious record. The 2000 Kansas City Royals (57 games) were the previous fastest team to serve up 100.

GIANTS 4, BRAVES 3

Joe Panik capped a three-run ninth inning with a two-out, two-strike, two-RBI single, rallying San Francisco to a win over visiting Atlanta. After Julio Teheran had made his fourth straight solid start, the Braves took a 3-1 lead into the last of the ninth. Atlanta got within one out of a win before Kevin Pillar stroked a

single to score Brandon Crawford, getting the Giants within one. After Pillar stole second and took third on Pablo Sandoval's pinch-hit, infield single, Mac Williamson pinch-ran for Sandoval and also stole second, putting the potential tying and winning runs in scoring position. That's when Panik, with a full count, poked a pitch from Luke Jackson (2-1) into right field, easily scoring the two baserunners for the walk-off win.

AS 5, INDIANS 3

Mark Canha belted a two-run homer among his two hits in place of injured slugger Khris Davis, lifting visiting Oakland past Cleveland. Jurickson Profar hit his second homer in as many games, and Matt Chapman ripped an RBI double for the Athletics, who have won a season-high five in a row. Francisco Lindor launched his 14th career leadoff homer, and Carlos Santana went deep for the third time in four contests for the Indians, who have lost four of five versus Oakland this season. Davis' return to the Athletics' lineup didn't last long as he was lifted in the third inning, with pinch hitter Canha going deep. Davis is dealing with the lingering effects of the left hip contusion he sustained after running into a wall at PNC Park in Pittsburgh on May 5, and he is headed to the injured list.

TWINS 8, ANGELS 3

Minnesota started slowly but put together big innings late in the game to rally past Los Angeles in Anaheim, Calif. Angels starting pitcher Trevor Cahill held the Twins hitless until the fifth inning before the Minnesota offense got rolling with three runs in the sixth and four more in the seventh, primarily against the Los Angeles bullpen. Minnesota got a big boost from the top of the lineup, as the first four hitters—Max Kepler, Jorge Polanco, Marwin Gonzalez and Eddie Rosario—combined for eight hits, six runs and seven RBIs to lead the Twins to their seventh victory in their past eight games.

PADRES 3, DIAMONDBACKS 2

Eric Hosmer capped a three-run sixth inning with a two-run, two-out opposite-field homer off Zack Greinke to give San Diego a victory over visiting Arizona. Arizona built a 2-0 lead against Padres starter Matt Strahm on solo homers by Eduardo Escobar (fourth inning) and John Ryan Murphy (fifth inning). Ian Kinsler started San Diego's sixth-inning rally with a one-out single to left, and he moved to second when Reyes grounded out to Greinke up the first base line. Manny



HOUSTON: Eloy Jimenez #74 of the Chicago White Sox makes a sliding catch on a line drive off the bat of Alex Bregman of the Houston Astros in the third inning at Minute Maid Park in Houston, Texas. —AFP

Machado drove in Kinsler with a single to center. Hosmer then drove Greinke's next pitch high to left, the drive just clearing the leap of Blake Swihart at the wall.

ROCKIES 5, PIRATES 0

German Marquez gave up three hits over eight shutout innings and added an RBI single as Colorado ended a four-game losing streak by winning at Pittsburgh. Marquez (5-2) walked one and struck out seven. Carlos Estevez stranded two runners in the ninth to complete the shutout. Charlie Blackmon (3-for-5 with a two-run triple) and Trevor Story (solo home run) led the Colorado offense. Pirates starter Chris Archer (1-4) went five innings, giving up four runs (three earned) on six hits with two walks and three strikeouts.

RANGERS 5, MARINERS 3

Lance Lynn struck out a season-high 11 in seven strong innings as Texas defeated Seattle in Arlington, Texas. Joey Gallo hit a two-run homer, and Nomar

Mazara went 3-for-4 with two doubles for the Rangers, who won their second straight game in the series and third in a row overall. Lynn (6-3) allowed two runs on five hits and a walk to defeat Seattle for the second time this season. Shawn Kelley earned his third save of the season despite giving up a solo home run to Omar Narvaez with two outs in the ninth.

DODGERS 7, RAYS 3

Clayton Kershaw took a shutout into the seventh inning, and Joc Pederson drove in two runs as Los Angeles earned an interleague victory against Tampa Bay in St. Petersburg, Fla. In his first career appearance at Tropicana Field, Kershaw (4-0) struck out eight, walked one and gave up six hits in 6 1/3 innings. The Dodgers improved to 7-0 in his starts this season and have won 15 consecutive times he has taken the mound going back to last season. Joc Pederson had two hits and two RBIs for the Dodgers. Tampa Bay's Austin Meadows went 2-for-5 and drove in a run. — Reuters

Crisis-hit boxing federation faces Tokyo verdict

LAUSANNE: The International Olympic Committee was poised to decide yesterday on whether to strip amateur boxing's crisis-hit governing body of the right to organise the event at Tokyo 2020. The verdict to be delivered by IOC president Thomas Bach comes after an investigation into the International Boxing Federation (IBFA), which has faced allegations of serious mismanagement.

Formed in 1946, AIBA has overseen decades of signature Olympic moments, notably the 1960 gold medal win in Rome by Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali. But relations between AIBA and the IOC took a sharp downward turn following the 2016 Rio Games, when 36 officials and referees were suspended amid allegations of bout fixing.

An internal investigation by AIBA raised deeper questions about the judging in Rio, with particular suspicion falling on a French official. Then in 2017, AIBA executives forced out the body's president C.K. Wu, amid claims of multi-million dollar accounting fraud.

Wu, a Taiwanese national, denied wrongdoing and remains a member of

the IOC, an indication that he retains the support of senior Olympic officials. Wu was ultimately replaced by the controversial Uzbek businessman Gafur Rakhimov, who the US Treasury Department has linked to "transnational criminal organisations".

Rakhimov vehemently rejects such charges and insists the allegations against him are "politically motivated lies". Rakhimov stepped down in March, while the IOC audit into AIBA's affairs was ongoing.

He was replaced as interim president by Moroccan doctor Mohamed Moustahsane—the fourth head of AIBA in 18 months.

BOXING IN TOKYO?

Audit firm Deloitte, which led the AIBA probe on behalf of the IOC, submitted a list of 41 questions to the boxing federation, on subjects ranging from finances, governance and ethics to anti-doping, refereeing and judging.

AIBA's current leadership insists the organisation has met all the requirements stipulated by the IOC. The governing body's chief executive Tom



LAUSANNE: International Olympic Committee (IOC) members Denis Oswald (L) and Nenad Lalovic look on prior to a meeting of the IOC executive committee on boxing at the 2020 Olympic Games yesterday in Pully near Lausanne. — AFP

Virget told AFP this month that the organisation had "done everything that has been asked by the IOC".

"Every single document asked, we produced, every single requirement we have met, including our president self-suspending," he said, referring to Rakhimov's departure. Media reports have indicated that AIBA would sue if it is denied the right to organise boxing, including the qualifications, for the

Tokyo Games.

Asked on May 7 if AIBA planned to take the matter to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, Virget said the body planned to "explore" its options, but declined further comment. Bach has indicated that IOC would be capable of organising an alternative qualification process, independent of AIBA, as a means to ensure boxing is featured in Tokyo. — AFP

Hamilton heads into Monaco after loss of Lauda

MONACO: Barely 48 hours after the death of Niki Lauda, Lewis Hamilton approaches today's Monaco Grand Prix opening practice in sombre mood as he aims for only his third victory in the classic Mediterranean street race.

Lauda, the non-executive chairman of Mercedes who passed away on Tuesday morning, was instrumental in Hamilton's career-defining move from McLaren to the Silver Arrows team.

"My buddy, I'm struggling to believe you are gone," said Hamilton in his social media posts on Tuesday. "I will miss our conversations, our laughs, the big hugs after winning races together."

The Briton, who has won four of his five world titles at Mercedes, added: "It's truly been an honour working alongside you over these past seven years. I wouldn't have been in this team if it wasn't for you."

Lauda's death, following long-term health problems, will cast a shadow across a racing occasion known for glamorous parties, fabulous boats and celebrity visitors as major sponsors jockey for attention and deals.

But it is unlikely to affect the on-track concentration of the drivers, especially at Mercedes where his passing will be most keenly felt, as Hamilton bids to add another Monaco win to those in 2008 and 2016 – and register a triumphant tribute to the great three-time world champion Austrian.

As always, Hamilton will face a determined challenge from his Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas and both the Ferrari and Red Bull teams with Max Verstappen, in fine form this year, looking a likely threat to the continuing supremacy of Mercedes.

The Silver Arrows reeled off an unprecedented fifth consecutive season-opening one-two in Spain this month, Hamilton's triumph lifting him back to the top of the drivers' championship. "It's a race that I've not really won much and I struggle with that each year," said Hamilton.

"I'm quick there, but it's very hit and miss so I'm really hoping this year's on target because it's a great track to win at." He added that he felt the team's greater understanding of the performance of their longer wheelbase cars would give them a better chance this year, a view backed by Bottas.

"It's such a unique track, you need a really special car in terms of how it works mechanically, with all the warps and bumps and everything. I've actually never been on the podium there so it's something I really look forward to and something I will definitely focus on 100 per cent."

Many local residents of the Mediterranean principality will be keen to see Monegasque Charles

Leclerc challenging for Ferrari, if he can edge clear of team-mate and four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, but Red Bull's Verstappen is likely to be the major threat to Hamilton and Bottas.

"It's a street circuit with a lot of history and it's not been the best one for me over the last few years, but hopefully it's time to turn this around," said Verstappen, who has reeled off 10 top-four finishes in succession.

His former team-mate Daniel Ricciardo, now at Renault, won last year's race for Red Bull and his successor Pierre Gasly said he hopes his team has the performance to beat Ferrari and challenge Mercedes.

"Ferrari is really strong in the straights—we know they have the best engine at the moment – but in the corners we seem to be a bit more competitive than they are. So in Monaco, it suits the Red Bull car usually pretty well, and we know it's all about qualifying."

"It will be important to just manage the perfect lap on Saturday and I think we could have a chance to be in front of them." His Red Bull team boss Christian Horner was also optimistic, but wary of Mercedes all-round domination so far this year.

"Mercedes looked pretty mighty particularly in the last sector in Spain, but we've always run well in Monaco – and Max is due a bit of redemption there," he commented.

The opening two free practice sessions on one of Formula One's most demanding and unforgiving circuits are staged today rather than their usual Friday slot in the Principality. — AFP

Injury-hit Osaka heads to French Open after 'rocky' clay season

TOKYO: After pulling out of last week's Italian Open due to injury, World number one Naomi Osaka admitted she has had a "rocky" claycourt season heading into the French Open.

Osaka, who won the Australian Open in January to follow on from her dramatic victory over Serena Williams at the US Open in 2018, is looking to become just the 11th woman to claim a third consecutive Grand Slam title.

However, following the hand injury that forced her out of a quarter-final clash with Kiki Bertens in Rome and an abdominal injury suffered in Stuttgart last month, Osaka arrives in Paris with concerns over both her form and fitness.

The 21-year-old has proved herself a destructive and powerful hardcourt player with her two Grand Slam wins in the past year, but her record on clay is less impressive.

Osaka has never won a top level WTA event on the surface and has failed to progress past the third round previously at Roland Garros.

"I would describe (my clay season) as rocky," Osaka said in Rome.

"But I can't necessarily say it's been ups and downs because if I think about it, it's definitely been going up. Every match I've played I've learned a lot. I've tried to take what I've learned into the next match and I think I've done that well."

Anyone tempted to doubt Osaka ahead of the French Open, which begins next week, should consider her Grand Slam record.

Osaka saves her best performances for the biggest stage: she has won 76% of all of her Grand Slam matches. Her win ratio at other tournaments is in the 50s.

During a recent interview with the Financial Times, Osaka admitted to feeling the pressure that comes with being world number one.

"I've never been number one and a lot of people were talking about it and I think I let it get to my head a little bit," she said.

"When you're number one you're not really supposed to lose. At least, that's how I feel. Of course, people lose all the time. But I just felt like I should at least win a tournament every month or something."

Osaka's compatriot Kei Nishikori looks a far cry from the player who last reached the French Open quarter-finals in 2017.

The 29-year-old is still coming back from a wrist injury suffered in 2017, but did win his first title in three years at the Brisbane International in January. — Reuters