

18 US PGA's Memorial to track fans to maintain COVID-19 social distancing



19 Ligue 2 clubs want to keep promotion but suspend relegation

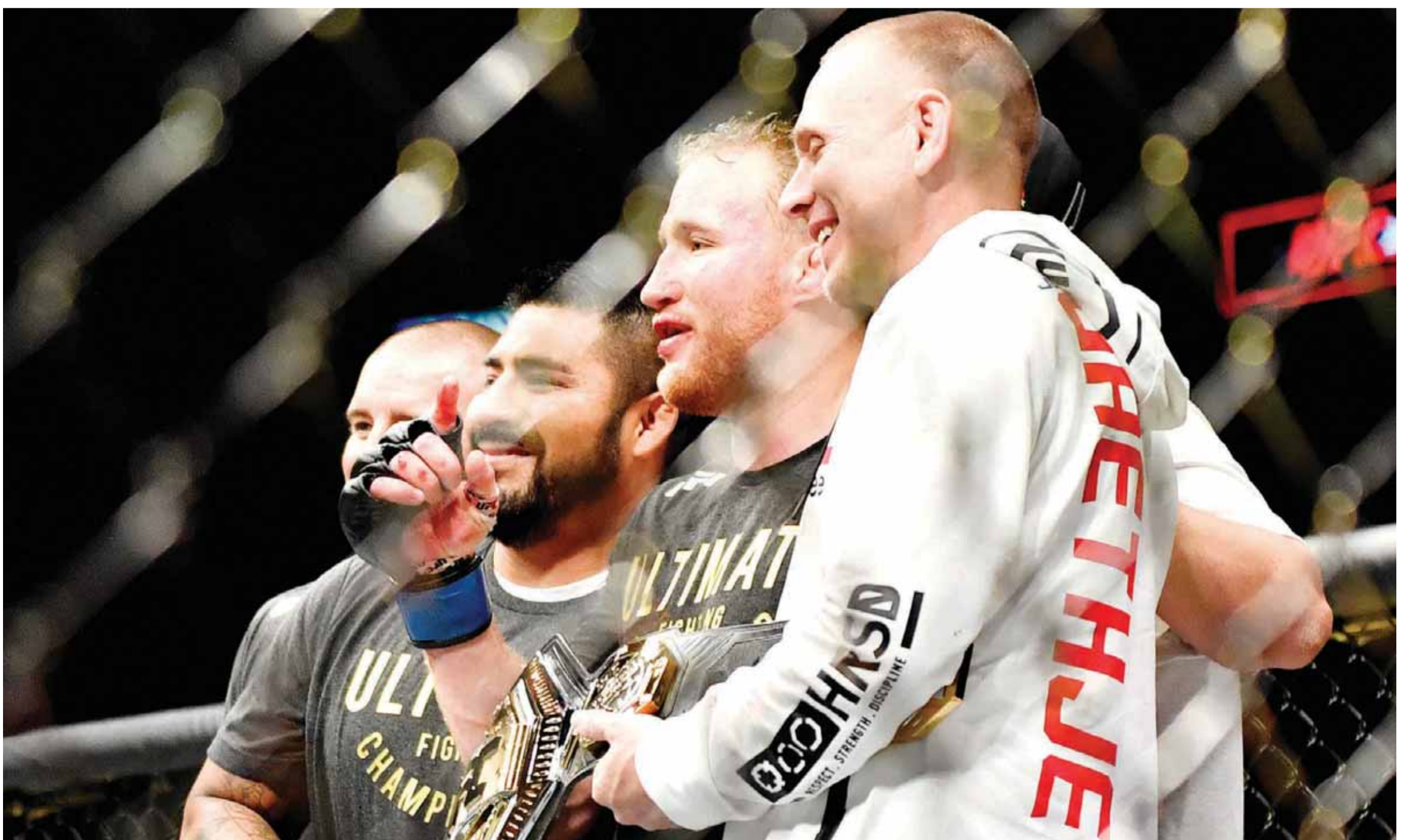


19 Sri Lanka captain praises Arthur, eyes top-four rank



Gaethje upsets Ferguson to win

UFC interim lightweight title



JACKSONVILLE: Justin Gaethje of the United States celebrates with his team after defeating Tony Ferguson of the United States in their Interim lightweight title fight during UFC 249 at VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena on May 09, 2020 in Jacksonville, Florida.— AFP

FLORIDA: Justin Gaethje put on a striking masterclass to score a surprise knockout victory over Tony Ferguson and win the interim lightweight title at UFC 249, which took place at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena in Jacksonville, Florida on Saturday.

Ferguson, who came into the fight on a 12-win streak, suffered damage as Gaethje chopped at his legs and landed thunderous hooks before referee Herb Dean stepped in to end the fight late in the fifth round.

With over 80,000 deaths in the United States due to COVID-19, the UFC has come under fire for putting on the event, which took place with no fans in the stands and with stringent health and safety protocols in place.

Despite the absence of a crowd, the fights them-

selves lacked nothing in intensity, with Francis Ngannou scoring the knockout of the night, blitzing Jairzinho Rozenstruik with a left hook to force a stoppage after just 20 seconds of the first round.

Sam Alvey was the first fighter into the empty arena on the night, pointing and high-fiving the imaginary crowd as he made his way to the cage where he fell to a decision loss to Ryan Spann in the evening's opening fight on the prelim card. Apart from the fighters, the referees and the commentators, event staff wore face masks and only one corner-man per fighter was

allowed into the cage in the breaks between rounds.

"It was funny, I could hear a lot. Everybody out there I could hear really clearly, but at the same time ... it wasn't much different than if the crowd were there," Vicente Luque told reporters following his stoppage win over Niko Price.

Such was the silence that Luque was able to hear the commentators, and heavyweight Greg Hardy said he was able to take the advice of TV commentator Daniel Cormier to counter Yorgnan De Castro's leg kicks en route to a decision victory. In the co-main event, Henry Cejudo

retained his bantamweight belt with a second-round stoppage win over Dominick Cruz before immediately retiring in the octagon. The 33-year-old, who won a gold medal for wrestling at the 2008 Olympics, has said he was happy with his career and that he wanted to start a family.

Returning after a long layoff, former champ Cruz was dropped with a knee to the head and suffered the first knockout of his career with just two seconds left in the second round.

However, the biggest prize of the night went to Gaethje, who is now next in line to face Khabib Nurmagomedov for the undisputed lightweight crown.

"I'll wait for the real one," Gaethje said as he tossed the interim belt aside moments after it was put around his waist. — Reuters



Empty arena on the night

World Cup star Alex welcomes daughter

LOS ANGELES: Two-time women's World Cup winner Alex Morgan and husband Servando Carrasco have welcomed a new player to their team, announcing the birth of daughter Charlie Elena Carrasco on Saturday.

Morgan tweeted that the baby was born on Thursday. "She made us wait longer than expected, but I should have known she would do it her way and her way only. My super moon baby," Morgan wrote.

Morgan, 30, was due to give birth in April and said on ABC's "Good Morning America" earlier in the week that she hoped to give birth within the week. Morgan, who also won Olympic gold with the US women's team, announced that she was pregnant in October, when she said she still intended to play for the USA at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

She did light training with the national team in February. But with the Tokyo Games postponed a



Alex Morgan

year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Morgan will have even more time to prepare. Carrasco, 31, played in his ninth MLS season in 2019 with the Los Angeles Galaxy. — AFP

Andres Iniesta, best footballers of all time

BARCELONA: A shy village boy who could not bear to leave his parents' bed, Andres Iniesta may have seemed an unlikely candidate to become one of the best footballers of all time, but anyone who saw him play rarely had serious doubts.

Iniesta, who turns 36 today, weaved his magic for Barcelona for 16 years and was one of the architects of the club's greatest era, playing a defining role as they won 32 trophies including nine Spanish titles and four Champions League crowns.

"This kid is going to retire us all," said Pep Guardiola when he first watched a teenage Iniesta in action while Spain coach Luis Enrique describes the diminutive midfielder as "Harry Potter, waving his wand".

Iniesta conducted an equally mesmerising orchestra for Spain and clinched his country's finest sporting achievement when his extra-time goal against the Netherlands sealed victory in the 2010 World Cup

final. That cold-blooded strike in Johannesburg's Soccer City Stadium forever endeared Iniesta to Spaniards no matter their allegiances, earning him standing ovations even when playing away to Barca's sworn enemies Real Madrid and Espanyol.

Most touching, though, was how he celebrated that career-defining goal — ripping off his shirt to pay tribute to his late friend and fellow footballer Dani Jarque who died the previous year.

Jarque's sudden death and a series of injuries had led Iniesta into a severe bout of depression, things getting so bad that he asked to sleep in his parents' bed, just as he had done as a 10-year-old when home from Barcelona's academy. He conquered his demons with the help of a psychologist and a supportive coach in Guardiola, who had never forgotten how Iniesta backed him when he got off to a rocky start in his first season at Barca. That campaign ended with Barcelona winning the Champions League, helped by Iniesta's stoppage-time goal against Chelsea to reach the final, sparking a 50% surge in the birth rate in Barcelona.

Last week, he honoured the anniversary of the "Iniestazo" by calling up some of the children his goal had given life to. "Iniesta is the boyfriend every mother would want for her daughter," said his former Spain team mate Sergio Ramos, summing up the player's universal appeal.—Reuters