

Sports

Photo of the day



Sports climber Janja Gambret is seen at the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg, Austria. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

NHL ex-star Howie Meeker dies at 97

LOS ANGELES: Four time NHL Stanley Cup champion Howie Meeker died Sunday, four days after his 97th birthday, the Toronto Maple Leafs confirmed. Meeker won four championships with the Maple Leafs before going on to a three decade career as a premier hockey broadcaster for Canadian television. He was known for his catch phrases such as "Golly gee willikers" and "Jimmy Crickets" while working on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Hockey Night In Canada episodes.

CBC reported Meeker passed away in hospital in Nanaimo, British Columbia. "Howie Meeker connected countless fans to hockey with his wisdom and infectious voice," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said. "The National Hockey League celebrates his life and mourns his passing." A spokesman for the Maple Leafs confirmed the death of the oldest living former Toronto player, without giving a specific cause of death. "The Maple Leafs organization is deeply saddened by the passing of Howie Meeker. Our deepest sympathies go out to his family," the club said in a statement.

Meeker also ran a series of successful youth hockey camps near his home in Parksville, on Vancouver Island. The first day of every Meeker hockey camp featured the sound of a chain saw echoing through the halls of the rink as he loathed people using long hockey sticks, arguing they limited a player's stick-handling skills. Meeker also liked to point out he rarely hired NHL stars to work his hockey schools, saying he preferred instructors who could teach basic skills over someone that played the game instinctively at a high level.

Meeker was a three-time all-star forward who finished his career with 83 goals and 185 points in 346 NHL games with the Maple Leafs from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s. He helped Toronto win the Stanley Cup in 1947, 1948, 1949 and 1951. After coaching the Maple Leafs for the 1956-57 season he switched to broadcasting. He was inducted to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1998, not for his skills as a player, but for his work in television. In 2010, Meeker was named a Member of the Order of Canada. —AFP

DeChambeau blasts away in Masters practice round

A notice to Augusta National

News in brief

MotoGP rider Iannone banned

LAUSANNE: Italian MotoGP rider Andrea Iannone was suspended four years for an anti-doping violation yesterday, after the Court of Arbitration for Sport extended his initial 18-month suspension following an appeal. Iannone, 31, was suspended in March after testing positive for an anabolic steroid in a urine sample collected at an in-competition test at the Malaysian MotoGP in Sepang last November. The Aprilia rider was also disqualified from the final two races of the 2019 season - in Malaysia and then Valencia - which he had not finished. In its ruling, CAS said the Italian's suspension would be backdated to December 17, 2019. Iannone had contested that the presence of drostanolone in his system was the result of eating contaminated meat in Malaysia. However, CAS rejected his argument and upheld a WADA appeal seeking a four-year ban. —AFP

Maradona progressing well

OLIVOS: Argentine football great Diego Maradona is progressing well after brain surgery on a blood clot and could be discharged this week, his doctor said Monday. Maradona, 60, underwent surgery last Tuesday to remove a clot lodged between his brain and skull. "Diego is in the mood to leave, and we are evaluating the discharge that could be tomorrow, we have to see the clinical parameters, but the progress is very good," Leopoldo Luque told reporters. Maradona, who went into isolation two weeks ago after one of his bodyguards displayed coronavirus symptoms, had looked unwell during a brief appearance on October 30 at his 60th birthday celebration at the stadium of Gimnasia y Esgrima, the Argentine Primera Division team he coaches. He seemed to have difficulty walking and did not hang around to watch his side's match. —AFP

NBA, players reach agreement

NEW YORK: The National Basketball Association (NBA) and the players' association (NBPA) have reached an agreement in principle on a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) for the 2020-21 season, which will begin on Dec. 22, they said. The NBPA last week approved the date for the opening of the new season that will have a reduced 72-game schedule. After a meeting on Monday, it and the NBA said in a joint statement - the salary cap would be \$109.140 million and tax level would be \$132.627 million. Both figures are unchanged from last season, U.S. media reported late on Monday. "In subsequent seasons of the CBA, the salary cap and tax level will increase by a minimum of 3% and a maximum of 10% over the prior season," the league and players' union added. "A new system will be used to ensure the parties' agreed-upon split of basketball-related income (BRI). —Reuters

Dream ticket: Fantasy games win big from cricket's IPL

MUMBAI: Unable to bet legally, tens of millions of Indian cricket fans have turned to fantasy games based on the Indian Premier League, which have exploited a loophole to create a billion-dollar industry. Bolstered by foreign investment, Indian firms have invested heavily in the cash-for-points online games, despite fears that gov-

ernment regulation could put the new industry at risk. Dream11 - now the main sponsor for the IPL, which had its final yesterday in Dubai - says it has more than 100 million users for its cricket, football and NBA platforms.

Users pay a fee, often less than 50 US cents, to join a contest that escapes India's ban on gambling because it's considered a game of "skill". They register a team of favorite players and win points for their performances in IPL games, which can be turned into cash. The number of fantasy games has mushroomed for this year's IPL, which is being held in the United Arab Emirates as India struggles with the world's second biggest coronavirus outbreak. Despite the possibility of new regulations, the cash is rolling in, and industry players say the sector

Golf talking points: Naked Faldo, old jackets, cold cuts

HONG KONG: The delayed US Masters, which will finally get under way tomorrow with Tiger Woods defending the title he won 19 months ago, dominates AFP Sport's golf talking points this week:

Hold back Bryson, please

If bulked-up US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau manages to batter Augusta National into submission this week, then it could unleash unintended consequences. Nick Faldo, the three-time Masters champion and now CBS TV analyst, was asked Monday if DeChambeau might become the first player in history to drive the green at the opening hole this week. Given that the par-four opening hole is 455 yards uphill, "not bloody likely" was Faldo's typically forthright response. "Bryson will not be driving the first at 445," Faldo declared confidently. "If he does, I will leap out my (commentary) tower and run around naked round Augusta National." So, Bryson, on behalf of TV viewers around the world, please use the three-wood.

Schwartzel's 4-minute warm-up

Charl Schwartzel's Masters warm-up didn't finish in the way the 2011 Augusta champion might have envisaged. Needing a par three on his 36th hole at the Houston Open to make the cut on Friday, Schwartzel's tee shot in the final group in fading light could only find the green apron 81 feet from the hole. By the time he reached his ball he reckoned it was too dark to carry on, and was the only player in the field who opted to wait until Saturday morning to complete his round.

But resuming at 7.11 am, his tournament lasted just four minutes longer. One chip and two putts later he was done, cut missed, and in a car to the airport for a flight to Georgia. If the unexpected extra weekend of practice at Augusta National leads to a second green jacket, Schwartzel will be hoping the famous garment fits better than his first. "They gave me a 38 regular. The jacket is too short for my arms and it is slightly too big for me," he told Golfweek recently. "I kept the original that they gave me at the ceremony. I've

could grow to be worth billions of dollars.

When software engineer Amit Bhandari started playing Dream11's fantasy cricket two years ago, he never expected to get hooked on its promise of easy money. "I am still awaiting my big-money day," said the 38-year-old, who called the habit "harmless" even though he hides it from his family, fearing disapproval. The stigma is familiar to Vinit Godara, co-founder of MyTeam11, a fantasy platform launched in 2016. In its early years, the company could not get a digital payment platform or a corporate bank account, due to worries about even a hint of betting in India. Match-fixing scandals regularly hit cricket, and Godara has struggled to explain the difference between fantasy

rough for distance and position. With only minor rough at the Masters, the stage could be set for an epic overpowering of the course. "He's trying to just take everything out of play," said fellow ball-basher Matthew Wolff, the 21-year-old US Open runner-up. "The way that me, Bryson and other people are going with hitting it longer, my goal is to not overpower a golf course. It just so happens that sometimes I can do that because I do hit the ball far."

Covid-stricken Garcia out

While the approaches and putts must still be top grade, rivals like Patrick Cantlay appreciate the edge extra length gives DeChambeau. "It has been impressive," Cantlay said. "I think this place probably fits it about as good as any place. It doesn't surprise me he's hitting it much farther than other guys and having success."

DeChambeau and Woods, the 15-time major champion trying for his record 83rd US PGA victory and record-tying sixth Masters title, were joined on the back nine for the afternoon by 1992 Masters winner Fred Couples and 2017 PGA Championship winner Justin Thomas. DeChambeau's buzz mixed with the shock exit of 2017 winner Sergio Garcia after the 40-year-old Spaniard tested positive for COVID-19. Garcia, coming off his first US PGA win since the Masters last month, said Monday he tested positive after missing the cut in last week's Houston Open, the first US-based PGA event to have spectators with 2,000 allowed each day.



AUGUSTA: Tiger Woods of the United States and Bryson DeChambeau of the United States putt on the 16th green as Justin Thomas of the United States looks on during a practice round prior to the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on November 09, 2020. —AFP

"On Saturday night after driving back from the Houston Open, I started feeling a bit of a sore throat and a cough," Garcia tweeted. "The symptoms stayed with me on Sunday morning so I decided to get tested for COVID-19 and so did my wife Angela. Thankfully she tested negative, but I didn't." For the first time in history, the Masters is taking place in November rather than its traditional April slot following disruption to the season caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which also has forced a ban on spectators.

One worry for DeChambeau and other big-hitters was in the forecast, with rain

and thunderstorms in the projections until the weekend. Soggy conditions could deny extra roll to the ball off the tee but help approaches hold onto the notoriously treacherous greens. It became tougher to make the Masters cut Monday as Augusta National said it was ending an extension to its cut policy that allowed anyone within 10 strokes of the lead into the weekend as well as the top 50 and those level after 36 holes. Since 1962, anyone within 10 strokes of the lead had been allowed into the third and fourth Masters rounds no matter where they ranked in the overall scoring. —AFP

never changed it to the right size."

No fans, fewer players

Not only will there be no spectators, or patrons as Augusta National likes to call them, at this year's US Masters, there won't be as many players either. The news in the last 24 hours that 2017 champion Sergio Garcia has joined young Chilean world number 42 Joaquin Niemann in testing positive for Covid-19 has reduced the field to 92 because, unlike other majors, the policy at the Masters is not to replace withdrawn players. And the field could be whittled down to as few as 50 for the weekend. Previously anyone within 10 strokes of the leader was eligible to play at the weekend. Now that's been ditched and it will be just the top 50 and ties.

Last year, 65 players made it to rounds three and four, the most since the cut was introduced in 1957. There would have only been 56 without the 10-shot rule. With fewer hours of daylight in November, it makes sense for organizers to restrict who makes the weekend this year. But the club made it sound like the change is here to stay. "Beginning with the 2020 Masters Tournament," its official Twitter feed said, "the low 50 players and ties will qualify for the final 36 holes." —AFP

sports and illegal betting to customers.

But this year, Indian fans have seized on fantasy gaming, eager to escape the boredom of lockdown and encouraged by a marketing blitz featuring top stars such as Virat Kohli. "The IPL has come as a boon for the fantasy gaming industry and we have observed a significant jump in user engagement," Godara told AFP. Other platforms have also seen a surge in business. "We are looking at crossing 80 million users by the end of the IPL," Sai Srinivas, co-founder of the Mobile Premier League app, told AFP. The Games24x7 platform is predicting 900 percent growth in paid users from 2019 to 2020 because of "pent-up demand in the lockdown", co-founder Bhavin Pandya said. —AFP