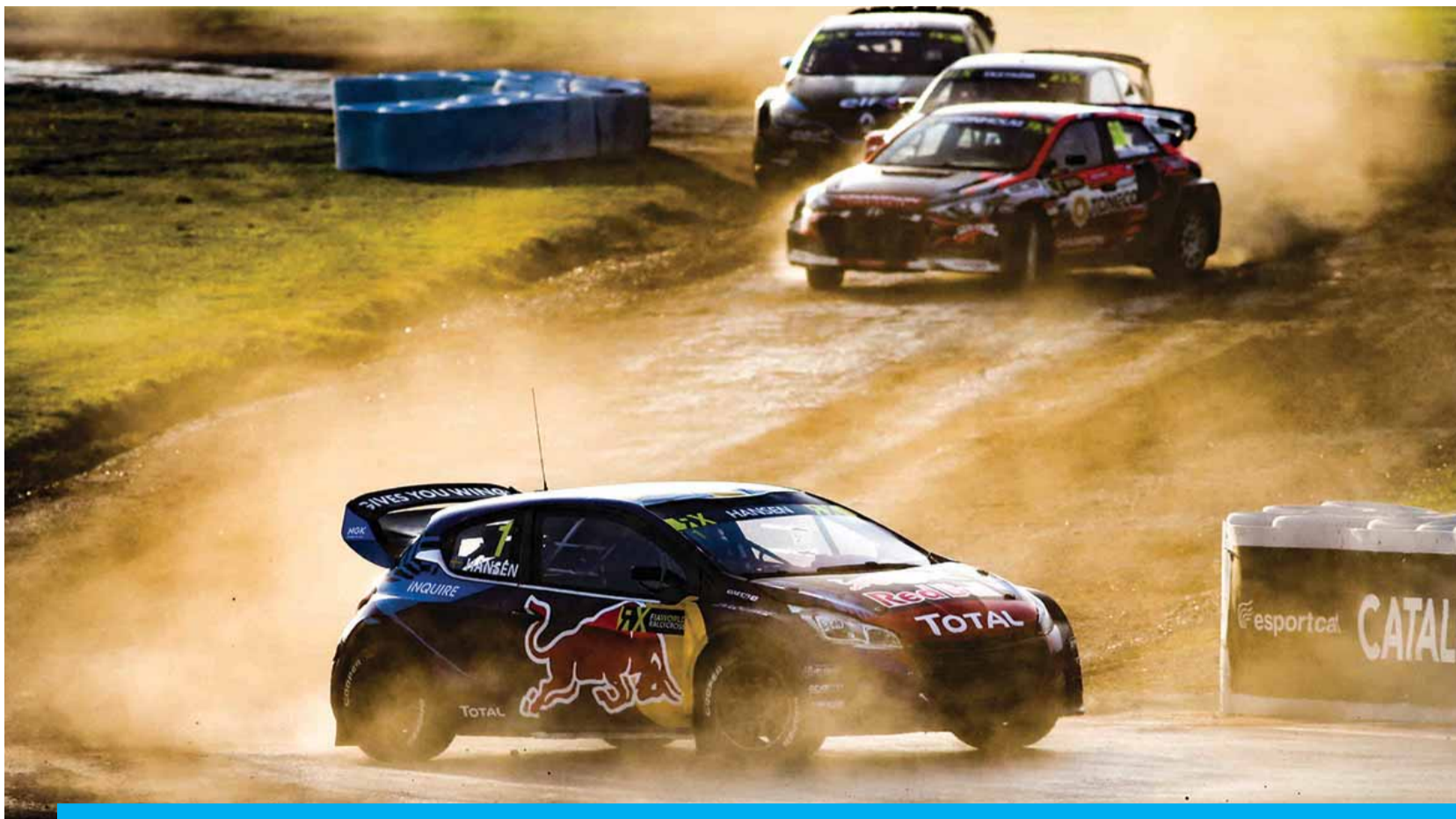


Sports

Photo of the Day



Timmy Hansen performs during FIA World Rallycross Championship in Barcelona, Spain. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

All Blacks bounce back to crush grieving Argentina

New Zealand shut out Argentina 38-0 in Tri-Nations test

NEWCASTLE: The All Blacks crushed Argentina 38-0 yesterday to restore some pride as they roared back from two straight defeats to put one hand on the Tri Nations trophy. The three-time world champions were under enormous pressure after slumping to the Wallabies then the Pumas, leaving them facing the prospect of losing three in a row for the first time in more than 20 years.

But spurred on by a backlash from their notoriously demanding fans, Ian Foster's team bounced back emphatically with a five tries to nil win in brutally hot and humid conditions at McDonald Jones Stadium in Newcastle, north of Sydney. It was a far more disciplined All Blacks who dominated the first half, going to the break 10-0 ahead, but there were also missed opportunities with two tries disallowed. Argentina, playing just days after the death of football legend Diego Maradona, lacked cohesion after making 10 changes to the team that drew with the Wallabies last week.

Two tries in quick succession from young fullback Will Jordan in the final quarter sealed the victory and a crucial bonus point for winning by three tries or more. "It's extremely satisfying. There's no hiding that we've had tough few weeks, we felt the pain of the losses and I'm really proud of the work we have put in the last two weeks," said All Blacks captain Sam Cane. "The way that the Pumas defended and kept us out numerous times is a real credit to their desire. But I'm proud of the way we were able to stay patient and we got there in the end."

Maradona tribute

It all but secured the silverware for New Zealand, who have 11 points from four games. Australia play Argentina next week and either side could feasibly edge them out, but it would take a bonus point win and by a huge margin given New Zealand's vastly superior

points differential. Defeat brought Argentina's fairytale run to a shuddering halt in the tournament's penultimate round after they beat New Zealand 25-15 then battled to a 15-15 draw with Australia. It proved extra painful for Mario Ledesma's men, who were hoping to lift the spirits of their nation after Maradona's death aged 60 this week. Cane laid an All Blacks jersey emblazoned with Maradona's name and shirt number, 10, in the centre circle ahead of the kick-off as a mark of respect.

"We were not clinical, there were too many han-

dling errors when we got the ball, some mistakes in defense as well, so not a good thing for us," said Pumas skipper Pablo Matera. "I don't think that was the problem," he added, when asked about the team's wholesale changes. "It was a whole team thing. There were many, many mistakes." Victory eased the pressure on Foster, who had been facing calls for his axing after just five games in charge following their twin defeats. He shuffled his forward pack to better deal with Argentina's physicality and they responded well. —AFP



NEWCASTLE: Argentina players push against New Zealand players in a maul during the 2020 Tri-Nations rugby match between New Zealand and Argentina at the McDonald Jones Stadium in Newcastle yesterday. — AFP

Hamilton tops Bahrain practice, blasts Pirelli

MANAMA: Lewis Hamilton relished his return on Friday after 12 days' off by securing a 'double top' with the fastest lap in both opening practice sessions at the Bahrain Grand Prix. After outpacing Red Bull's Max Verstappen in an incident-filled day, the newly-crowned record-equaling seven-time champion said he was very happy to be back in his Mercedes car - and then lambasted Pirelli as he explained why he was unhappy with their 2021 prototype tyres.

"It is great to be out there again," he said. "I always

love driving! "It has been a bit like a test day with a lot of stuff to do and the track has been very dusty." Hamilton, who was fastest in the morning's opening practice, outpaced his rivals again to top the times in the afternoon's twice red-flagged second session. He clocked a late best lap in one minute and 28.971 seconds at the Bahrain International Circuit at Sakhir, and then hit out at the quality of the new Pirelli tyres being tested for 2021.

"I'm really trying very hard not to say anything," he responded when asked about the tyres. "But they are three kilos heavier and like a second a lap slower." Hamilton prefaced his comments with respect and praise for the role of the Italian tyre suppliers in F1 before he gave vent to his feelings, as shared by many other drivers. "Weekend in and weekend out, every year, we've got a team here from Pirelli and I have the utmost respect for the guys who come here and load our tyres up, bring them here and keep us safe - they do an amazing job. —AFP



SAKHIR: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton drives during the third practice session on the eve of the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in the city of Sakhir yesterday. — AFP

Finch, Smith blaze centuries; Aussies crush India in ODI

SYDNEY: Skipper Aaron Finch and Steve Smith blazed centuries and Josh Hazlewood ripped apart the Indian top order as Australia won by 66 runs in the first one-day international at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday. The Indians, coming out of coronavirus quarantine, looked rusty in their first taste of international cricket since February, as the Australians went on a run rampage to reach 374 for six after winning the toss.

Hazlewood then put the skids under the tourists, triggering a top-order wobble. Among his victims was coveiled wicket of skipper Virat Kohli, as India amassed 308 for eight in reply. Australia enjoyed perfect batting conditions. Finch belted 114 and shared an opening stand of 156 with David Warner, who made 69 off 75 balls. Smith had some early luck early before taking charge and hitting 105 off 66 balls with four sixes. He was saved by DRS after a confident appeal for leg before wicket on 15. Then Shikhar Dhawan badly missed Smith's miscue on 38 at long on. "I've been searching for something for a couple of months now, but a couple of days ago I started to hit the ball where I wanted it, and everything came back, the rhythm came back," man-of-the-match Smith said. "Finchy and Davey set an excellent platform, we could come and just take off." After Finch raised his 17th ODI century he was out for 114 off 124 balls trying to steer a Jasprit Bumrah lifter behind the wicket in the 40th over. Glenn Maxwell hit a rumbustious 45 off 19 balls as Australia built a massive total to defend under the evening lights. India made a fast start, the openers flaying the Aussie attack for 53 before Mayank Agarwal fell to Hazlewood for 22. Kohli was dropped on one by Adam Zampa at fine leg after top-edging a Pat Cummins lifter. —AFP

News in brief

Aussie McKeown breaks record

SYDNEY: Olympic hopeful Kaylee McKeown set a new 200m backstroke short-course world record at the Australian national championships, officials said yesterday. The teenager clocked a blistering 1:58.94 to smash Hungarian Katinka Hosszu's 2014 mark of 1:59.23. "Short-course is something we don't get to very often so I was excited to see what I could put up after some solid training this year," said McKeown. "I headed over to my teammates and my coach and they said, 'you just got a world-record, and I was like, what?' I didn't actually know till a few minutes later." The Australian short-course championships are being held in virtual format this year due to COVID-19, with swimmers competing at the same time in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Hobart. The titles started on Thursday, with McKeown setting her record in Brisbane on Friday evening, although Swimming Australia only tweeted the result yesterday. — AFP

Thunder clinch League title

SYDNEY: Fine bowling helped propel Sydney Thunder to an upset seven wicket win over Meg Lanning's Melbourne Stars and claim the women's Big Bash League title yesterday. Rachael Haynes' team restricted the Stars to just 86 for nine off their 20 overs after losing the bat flip at North Sydney Oval and chased down the total easily with more than six overs to spare. England star Heather Knight (26 not out) and Haynes (21 not out) steered them home after fast bowlers Shabnim Ismail (2-12) and Sammy-Jo Johnson (2-11) left the Stars' top-order in tatters. It was the Thunder's second title in the tournament's sixth season, having won the inaugural championship in 2016. "It's an incredible feeling. It's an amazing effort from everyone at the club," said Haynes. "I'd like to thank all the international players and staff who went through quarantine to get the tournament up and running." — AFP

'Pintu' edges Kristoffersen

LECH: France's Alexis Pinturault edged Norwegian arch-rival Henrik Kristoffersen to win the World Cup parallel slalom in Lech in Austria on Friday. Pinturault's 30th World Cup victory came by a margin of 0.11sec and saw him take the lead in the overall standings. "Thirty wins, that's starting to look a decent number and I'm proud of it, I hope I can keep it up," said Pinturault. This was only his second win in the discipline, his first coming in Moscow in 2012 for his debut World Cup success. Germany's Alexander Schmidt was third after seeing off Austrian Adrian Pertl. Norwegian Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, overall champion last season, was eliminated in the round of 16 and eventually finished 14th. — AFP

Barca reach deal to cut wages

BARCELONA: Barcelona have reached an agreement with representatives of their players and coaching staff to temporarily cut salaries and post-pone bonuses due to the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the club said on Friday. The Liga club said it expected to save around 172 million euros (\$205.61 million), with 122 million from reductions to fixed wages this season and a further 50 million euros through the deferral of bonuses for three years. "This principle of agreement is pending ratification in the coming days by the group of players and technical staff affected," the club said in a statement on their website. "The agreement, if it is ratified, will represent a milestone of great importance in redirecting the current economic situation." Last month Barca posted a record loss of 97 million euros after tax for the 2019/20 financial year and a 14% revenue fall and said the club was braced for a bigger drop this season. — Reuters

Tasman edge Auckland

WELLINGTON: An ice-cool David Havili, unwanted by the All Blacks for the past three years, showcased his talent yesterday with the match-winning penalty as Tasman snatched a 13-12 victory over Auckland in the New Zealand provincial championship final. Havili, who played three Tests in 2017, and is a key member of the Super Rugby champion Canterbury Crusaders, slotted a 42-metre penalty with 10 minutes remaining to secure the one-point victory for the defending champions. The match may have been a cliffhanger, but it was not pristine and with current All Blacks away on Tri-Nations duty the scrappy performance from both sides was not a good showcase for New Zealand rugby. Tasman scored the only try and the remaining points came from penalties with 27 awarded in the match, 14 against Auckland. — AFP

Bairstow powers England to victory

CAPE TOWN: Jonny Bairstow powered England to a five-wicket win over South Africa in the first Twenty20 international at Newlands in Cape Town on Friday. Bairstow thrashed 86 not out off 48 balls as England chased down a victory target of 180 with four balls to spare. England were struggling at 34 for three before Bairstow and Ben Stokes (37) changed the momentum of the match with a fourth wicket stand of 85. Even so, South Africa still had a realistic chance of winning as England went into the last four overs needing 51 runs. But left-arm fast bowler Beuran Hendricks conceded 28 runs in the 17th over, including three wickets which cost eight runs, as Bairstow and England captain Eoin Morgan went on the attack. Morgan said the win was "extremely pleasing, given that we were pretty average apart from two or three players." — AFP