

## Sports

# MLB locks out players in sport's first work stoppage since 1994

**NEW YORK:** Major League Baseball locked out its players shortly after midnight yesterday as failure to agree on a new collective contract sparked the sport's first work stoppage since 1994.

Disagreement on how to divide \$10 billion in revenues from the elite level of America's national pastime saw negotiations come to a halt on Wednesday afternoon, and after the collective bargaining agreement expired at 11:59 pm MLB announced it would lock out players.

In a "Letter to Fans" posted on Twitter, MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said he was disappointed that the league was "forced to commence a lockout of Major League Players, effective at 12:01 am on December 2."

Manfred said MLB executives believe an off-season lockout "is the best mechanism to protect the 2022 season. "We hope that the lockout will jumpstart the negotiations and get us to an agreement that will allow the season to start on time.

"This defensive lockout was necessary because the Players Association's vision for Major League Baseball would threaten the ability of most teams to be competitive. It's simply not a viable option." The shutdown is the first since the bitter player strike that wiped out the 1994 World Series and led to a shortened 1995 campaign once the dispute was resolved.

Even after games returned, fans were disenchanted and both attendance and television viewership plunged. This stoppage comes in baseball's offseason, giving negotiators more than two months before the start of Spring Training camps and exhibition games that would lead up to the scheduled start of the regular season on March 31.

But Manfred was already ratcheting up the rhetoric, blaming the MLB Players Association for intransigence in negotiations

so far. "From the beginning, the MLBPA has been unwilling to move from their starting position, compromise, or collaborate on solutions," Manfred said in his statement, adding that the union "already had a contract that they wouldn't trade for any other in sports."

MLB and the MLBPA representatives had met again on Wednesday afternoon in suburban Dallas. The union is seeking reduced revenue sharing among clubs and a drop from six years to five years for players to become eligible for free agency, measures that owners fear would make small market clubs uncompetitive.

The union has also pitched an expanded playoff proposal. Owners offered several ideas last week, including an increase in minimum player salaries, creating a designated hitter rule for the National League that would end the practice of pitchers coming to the plate and the creation of an NBA-style lottery for top MLB Draft picks.

## 'Owners' choice'

Manfred pointed to the fact that there is no salary cap in baseball and no maximum length or dollar amount on contracts as evidence that players are getting their share of baseball revenue.

He also rejected the idea that free agency is "broken," pointing to a rash of recent big-money free agent signings that included the Texas Rangers signing Corey Seager to a 10-year deal for a \$325 million contract and 37-year-old star pitcher Max Scherzer signing a three-year deal for \$130 million with the New York Mets.

"In the month of November \$1.7 billion was committed to free agents, smashing the prior record by nearly 4x," Manfred wrote. Free agency signings and trades will be suspended during the lockout as team officials and players are barred from communicating.

The MLBPA also issued a statement early Thursday morning,



Rob Manfred

calling the lockout "a dramatic measure, regardless of the timing."

"It was the owners' choice, plain and simple, specifically calculated to pressure Players into relinquishing rights and benefits, and abandoning good faith bargaining proposals that will benefit not Just Players, but the game and industry as a whole," the union said. "We remain determined to return to the field under the terms of a negotiated collective bargaining agreement that is fair to all parties, and provides fans with the best version of the game we all love." — AFP

## 'Incredible' Djokovic doubles up as Serbia reach Davis s-finals

**MADRID:** World number one Novak Djokovic performed double duty to lead Serbia into the Davis Cup semi-finals for the fifth time on Wednesday with a come-from-behind win over Kazakhstan.

Serbia, the 2010 champions, will face neighbours Croatia on Friday for a place in the final. Djokovic comfortably preserved his 10-year undefeated Davis Cup singles record when he eased past 36th-ranked Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-4 in 77 minutes to level the quarter-final at 1-1.

The 34-year-old then teamed with Nikola Pecić to see off Andrey Golubev and Aleksandr Nedovyesov 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in the decisive doubles. "I couldn't be prouder of our fighting spirit. We dropped in level in the second set, but we managed to bounce back, stay calm and turn the tide," said Djokovic.

Djokovic had not won a Davis Cup doubles match since 2015 and went into Wednesday's decider on a run of three defeats — including a loss against Golubev and Nedovyesov in 2016. Earlier Wednesday, Mikhail Kukushkin saved four match points to defeat Miomir Kecmanovic to give the Kazakhs the opening point of the quarter-final. Kukushkin, the world 182, triumphed over 69th-ranked Kecmanovic 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 7-6 (13/11) after more than three hours on court. — AFP

## Antetokounmpo fuels NBA champion Bucks, Doncic dazzles

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo drove for the game-winning layup with two seconds left on Wednesday, lifting the NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks to a 127-125 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. Antetokounmpo, a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player and MVP of the 2021 Finals, scored 40 points with 12 rebounds and nine assists as the Bucks rallied for an eighth straight win.

The Hornets were on fire early at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, making 10 of 17 three-pointers in the first quarter. They led by as many as 18 points in the first half, but couldn't maintain the torrid pace, Milwaukee closing the deficit to 68-60 at halftime.

The Bucks took the lead for the first time with 2:26 remaining in the third quarter, when George Hill's three-point play put them up 91-90. They led by two going into a fourth quarter that developed into a back-and-forth battle that featured 10 lead changes.

Khris Middleton, who scored 21 points for the Bucks, drained a three-pointers with 52 seconds remaining for a 123-122 lead. LaMelo Ball, who led the Hornets with 36 points, drained a three with 5.9 seconds left—enough time for Antetokounmpo to get the ball out of a timeout and drive for the winner.

There was little suspense in New Orleans, where the Dallas Mavericks led virtually all the way in a 139-107 rout of the Pelicans. Luka Doncic scored 28 points and handed out 14 assists and Kristaps Porzingis added 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Mavs, who were coming off a 114-96 loss to Cleveland.

The Mavs—who had lost five of their past six—shook off their

recent shooting woes in a big way, connecting on 57 of 83 shots from the floor, including 18 three-pointers. Their 68.7 shooting percentage was a franchise record for a game, breaking the previous high of 68.6 set in 1983. "It all started with Luka," Porzingis said. "Our energy was there ... the chain-reaction starting from him."

Doncic, who had a triple-double in the loss to Cleveland, had 22 points and 10 assists in the first half to join Damian Lillard and Trae Young as the only players with multiple 20-point, 10-assist halves since the 2018-19 season. "We came out with a lot of energy," Doncic said. "Those shots were open, so we knocked them down." — AFP



MILWAUKEE: Jrue Holiday #21 of the Milwaukee Bucks strips the ball from LaMelo Ball #2 of the Charlotte Hornets during the second half of a game at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP