

Sports

Blues narrowly beat Brumbies, book Super Rugby Pacific final

Crusaders overpower Chiefs 20-7

AUCKLAND: Attacking brilliance from Beauden Barrett carried the Auckland Blues to a desperate 20-19 semi-final win over the ACT Brumbies on Saturday, setting up an all-New Zealand Super Rugby Pacific decider against the Canterbury Crusaders. After conceding an early try to the Australian visitors, the Blues dominated the middle stages of the game before barely holding on over the closing minutes to record a 15th successive victory.

The top-qualifying Blues will return to Eden Park next week chasing their first full Super Rugby title since 2003 but they must overcome the competition's most decorated team in the final, after the Crusaders beat the Chiefs 20-7 in Christchurch on Friday. Blues captain and All Blacks Test playmaker Barrett was comfortably the game's standout performer, defying slippery conditions to unleash his full array of skills, whether it was running, offloading or kicking. He played a key hand in both his team's tries, to Hoskins Sotutu and Mark Telea, as they turned a 0-7 deficit into a 20-7 halftime lead.

He also pulled off a try-saving tackle on Brumbies fullback Tom Banks and nearly sealed victory near the end when he scythed through the defense and slid across the tryline, only narrowly failing to ground the ball. It gave a lifeline to the Brumbies, who lifted considerably in the second spell, creating two tries off lineup drives to reserve hooker Lachlan Loneragan. On both occasions they took advantage of the Blues having been reduced to 14 men through yellow cards-to Kurt Eklund and Adrian Choat-for dangerous tackles.

Late push foiled

A late push for victory was foiled when a dropped

goal attempt from Noah Lolesio was charged down by Blues prop Ofa Tu'ungafasi with a minute remaining on the clock. Barrett said Tu'ungafasi's desperation typified the spirit of his team, who have won a number of close encounters this year.

"Huge. It's those sort of moments you've just got to be alive for and live for. We needed the big fella to stand up at that moment. "You've got to give it to them (Brumbies), we could have easily run away with that one. But we had to fight hard and work hard to close it out," said Barrett, who will go head-to-head against brother and Crusaders captain Scott Barrett next week.

"We're stoked we'll be back here again. We've given ourselves a chance and that's all we can ask for." The result means Australian teams are still without a Super Rugby playoff win on New Zealand soil, having failed in all 13 attempts. After a brilliant individual try to Irae Simone in the third minute, the Brumbies were dominated for a long period in the set pieces, and found themselves dominated at numerous breakdown collisions.

Captain Allan Alaalatoa was pleased with the fightback but disappointed his team couldn't become the first Australian outfit to reach the final since the NSW Waratahs won the 2014 crown. "We knew it would take a hell of an effort to come over here and get the job done," he said. "We showed a lot of heart in the second half. Our maul really brought us back into the game and gave us an opportunity to win but we didn't quite ice it in the end." The game marked the end of a five-year head coaching tenure for Dan McKellar, who first signed with the Brumbies in 2014.—AFP



AUCKLAND: Bluesi Akira Ioane (center) is tackled by Brumbiesi Andy Muirhead (left) and Pete Samu during the Super Rugby Pacific semifinal match between Australia's Brumbies and New Zealand's Blues at Eden Park in Auckland on June 11, 2022. — AFP



BAKU: Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz steers his car during the third practice session ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on June 11, 2022. — AFP

Bumpy Baku gives drivers headache

BAKU: Baku's bumpy street circuit, venue for Sunday's Azerbaijan Grand Prix, has left drivers shaken from all the bouncing they are subjected to in this season's radically redesigned cars. The so-called 'porpoising' issue has dogged teams like Mercedes more than most with Lewis Hamilton saying he was left "a bit sore" after Friday's two practice sessions. "It's bouncing a lot" the seven-time world champion reported after posting only the 12th fastest time behind Charles Leclerc.

Pierre Gasly, who enjoyed his two sessions in the AlphaTauri, complained over the team radio: "The ride is pretty shocking, I have never felt that much bottoming". Ferrari's Carlos Sainz described the undesirable consequence of new rules to promote closer racing as "really annoying around here". Hamilton's teammate George Russell even suggested to the BBC that the problem was so profound the rules required a rethink. "I don't think it's right to run like this for the next four years or whatever we've got."

"Conversations are going to be needed because everybody is in the same boat." Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, tackled on 'porpoising' at Saturday's pre-qualifying press conference said: "Some cars don't have the issue, others have it worse, I can talk for our two drivers, they are having issues sometimes not even a physio can fix it." He said the two Silver Arrows were "bottoming out badly" at certain sectors of the track.

"We're losing a second on all straights to Ferrari and Red Bull".

'It's a challenge'

His Ferrari counterpart Mattia Binotto said that while they had also experienced "bouncing and bottoming" in Friday practice "it was not a limitation to our performance". Binotto did not go along with Russell's call for a change in the 2022 car's design. "A Formula One car is not the most comfortable car to drive, it's a challenge for drivers no doubt. "I'm pretty sure we can make progress and find a solution medium to long term." Haas boss Gunther Steiner insisted it was "a bit early to think about doing something dramatic".

"At the moment we need to stick with this regulation, in general it's not working badly," he added. Leclerc edged Monaco winner Sergio Perez in Friday's opening practice sessions and the Ferrari driver will fancy his chances of securing his sixth pole out of eight later Saturday after third and final practice. While the two Ferraris and Red Bulls fight out the title race Mercedes can only hope all their efforts to find a solution to their 2022 car's problems comes sooner rather than later.

"Our problem is not the engine, between the dragging and the bottoming it's like we seem to have a parachute behind the car," said Wolff. "When you are doing work as normal but it doesn't produce results then a feeling of frustration creeps in for sure, that's a normal consequence after success over many years then you find yourself in such a dip. "But there's lots to look forward to. We know there's inherent performance in car, but (at the moment) we are unable to unlock it. It's science, it's physics, sometimes it takes time." — AFP

Aussie rookie Kyriacou leads ShopRite Classic

NEW YORK: Stephanie Kyriacou, buoyed by some advice from Hall-of-Famer Karrie Webb, fired a six-under-par 65 on Friday to grab the first-round lead at the ShopRite LPGA Classic. Australia's Kyriacou, 21 and ranked 117th in the world, had six birdies on the Bay Course at Seaview Hotel and Golf Club in Galloway, New Jersey, and was one shot in front of fellow rookie Frida Kinhult. Kyriacou was in the first group off the first tee and set a target that no one could match.

World number one Ko Jin-young and 10-time LPGA winner Brooke Henderson—who were tied for second behind Celine Boutier in last year's tournament—shared third place on four-under par 67, along with Marina Alex and Dottie Ardina. Kyriacou has already stamped herself a precocious talent with two



GALLOWAY: Stephanie Kyriacou of Australia reads a putt on the 12th green during the first round of the ShopRite LPGA Classic at Seaview Bay Course on June 10, 2022 in Galloway, New Jersey. — AFP

McIlroy charges but Clark clings to lead

TORONTO: Rory McIlroy charged into contention but American Wyndham Clark fired a level par 70 to maintain a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the US PGA Tour's Canadian Open. World number 293 Clark, who led by one stroke after day one, made bogeys on two of the last four holes to stand on seven-under 133 after 36 holes at St George's Golf and Country Club in suburban Toronto. "Overall I played really good. I felt really confident with my game," Clark said. "I had some little mishaps coming in, but other than that I played some great golf for 36 holes. If I do that again, I'll have a great chance come Sunday." Northern Ireland's eighth-ranked McIlroy - the 2019 winner and defending champion after COVID-19 caused a two-year hiatus - birdied two of the last four holes to shoot 68 and share second on 134 with England's Matthew Fitzpatrick and Americans Keith Mitchell, Jim Knous and Alex Smalley.

Four-time major winner McIlroy sank an eight-foot birdie putt at the par-5 15th and rolled in a 23-foot birdie putt at 17 before paring the last with a clutch four-foot putt. "Overall it was a good score," McIlroy said. "I scrambled well when I needed to. I didn't really take advantage of how well I hit it off the tee. But overall I felt a couple under was a fair reflection of how the day went." Fitzpatrick, ranked 17th, led by two but made double bogey at the 14th and bogeys on the last three holes.

"Just didn't hole the putts I needed to on the last three," Fitzpatrick said. "Just pathetic. Yeah, just pathetic. Finish really with the putter. "Disappointing finish, but definitely not out of it." The seven-time DP World Tour winner seeks her first PGA victory after sharing fifth at last month's PGA Championship for his best major finish. Clark, 28, chases his first US PGA victory as well, his best finish a runner-up effort at the 2020 Bermuda Championship. Clark hit only eight greens in regulation, but backed his "great" short game and putting.

Fitzpatrick reeled off three birdies in a row thanks to five-foot putts at the par-5 ninth and par-5 11th sandwiched around a 15-footer at the par-4 10th, reaching 10-under par. But Fitzpatrick needed four shots to reach the fringe at the par-4 14th on the way to a double bogey, then followed an 11-foot birdie putt at the par-5 15th with three bogeys. His troubles left the lead to Clark, who made birdie putts from just inside five feet at the par-3 eighth and 11, but missed the green at 12 and made his first bogey of the week.—AFP

Ladies European Tour victories—as an amateur at the Australian Ladies Classic in 2020 and as a pro at last year's Green Egg Open in the Netherlands.

After playing 21 tournaments in 13 countries in 2021 she earned her LPGA card through the Q-Series, but she has struggled in her first LPGA season. She said a three-week break, during which she began working with coach Grant Waite of New Zealand, had boosted her confidence. And some advice from compatriot Webb this week has also helped. The two chatted on the putting green, and Kyriacou said she asked Webb how she controlled her nerves.

"I just asked how she coped with it and she gave me a few tips, and looks like it worked out there," Kyriacou said. "She kind of just said between shots to just close your eyes and breathe and listen to birds and stuff. "Just to get your mind off it. It's so simple but it's very helpful. "She's such a legend, and for her to take the time out of her day to play practice rounds with us and just talk to us, it's so nice." Kyriacou said she "didn't really make a mistake" in a round that was "just fun to play." She had four birdies on the front nine and added two more coming in to put herself in contention in the 54-hole event.—AFP

Azam, Haq, Nawaz star in Pakistan's 10th series win

MULTAN: Skipper Babar Azam and opener Imam-ul-Haq hit steady half centuries before spinner Mohammad Nawaz recorded his best figures as Pakistan beat the West Indies by 120 runs in the second day-night international in Multan on Friday. Azam scored a 93-ball 77 and Haq a run-a-ball 72 - both hitting their sixth consecutive half-centuries in successive one-day internationals - as Pakistan made 275-8 in their 50 overs. Left-arm spinner Nawaz then achieved career best bowling figures of 4-19 as the visitors were shot out for 155 in 32.2 overs. The win gives Pakistan an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series and their 10th consecutive ODI series win over the West Indies.

Pakistan's last ODI series defeat to the West Indies was back in 1991. The two wins give Pakistan 20 valuable points in the ODI Super League, a qualification round for 2023 World Cup in India. Chasing 276, West Indies lost first-match century maker Shai Hope for just four in the first over to Shaheen Shah Afridi but Shamair Brooks (42) and Kyle Mayers (33) added a brisk 67 for the second wicket. Once Mayers, who hit four fours and two sixes off 25 balls, was bowled by pacer Mohammad Wasim, the innings fell away. Nawaz dismissed Brandon King (nought), Brooks, Rovman Powell (10) and Nicholas Pooran (25) as West Indies lost five wickets for just 48 runs, including four off just 18. Brooks hit four boundaries and a six as he faced 56 balls. Nawaz's previous best figures of 4-42 were against the same opponents in Sharjah six years ago.

Fast bowler Wasim finished with 3-34 while Shadab Khan took 2-40. Pakistan won the first match by five wickets on Wednesday. The last match is on Sunday. All three are in Multan. "I think we were 10-15 short because we lost back-to-back wickets," said Azam. "But there was spin so we were confident at the break that we could defend this and Nawaz took wickets at crucial junctures and brought us back in the game."

Pooran praised Nawaz

"It was a tough day for us," said Pooran. "I thought we bowled well in the first 45 overs but conceded 20 too many. Credit must be given to Nawaz who bowled really well." Earlier, Azam, who on Wednesday became the first batter in ODI cricket to twice score three hundreds in as many matches, set the tempo after Pakistan won the toss and batted. He built the innings during a 120-run second wicket stand with Haq - their fourth successive 100 plus stand - before Haq was run out, without watching his static partner while going for a single. Haq hit six fours. Pakistan were cruising along at 187-2 with Azam set for fourth hundred in as many ODIs when spinner Akeal Hosein dismissed the skipper in the 36th over. Azam, who hit five fours and a six, failed to equal Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara's record of four hundreds in as many ODIs set in the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. Azam's wicket started a collapse as the West Indies grabbed five wickets in 23 balls for 20 runs, with Hosein (3-52) and Alzarri Joseph (2-33) sharing the spoils.—AFP



MULTAN: Pakistan's Mohammad Wasim (left) falls after playing a shot during the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and West Indies at the Multan International Cricket Stadium.—AFP