

## Sports

# Harper, Schwarber power Phillies over Padres as Yankees advance

## Philadelphia Phillies defeat San Diego Padres 2-0

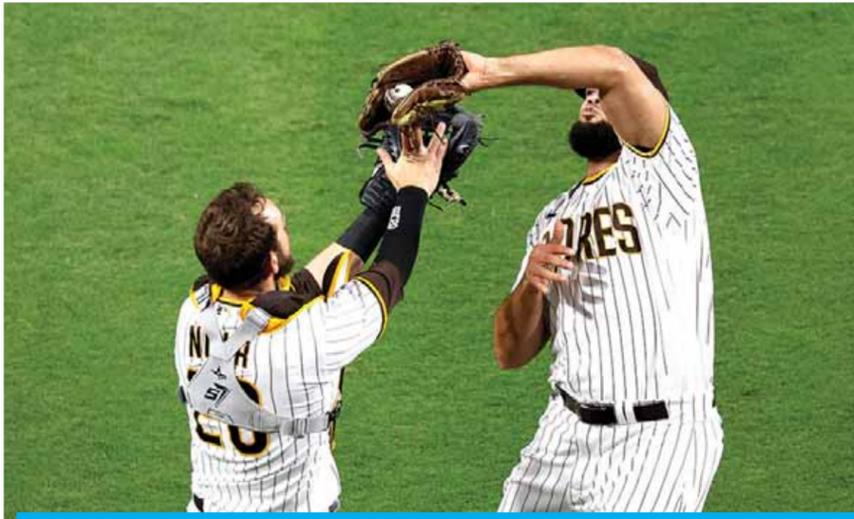
NEW YORK: Bryce Harper and Kyle Schwarber crushed home runs as the Philadelphia Phillies defeated the San Diego Padres 2-0 on the road in their National League Championship Series opener on Tuesday. Harper blasted a 368-foot shot into leftfield off Padres pitcher Yu Darvish to open the scoring in the top of the fourth inning at Petco Park. Schwarber then obliterated an inviting Darvish cutter in the top of the sixth inning to give the Phillies a 2-0 lead. San Diego, who upset the Los Angeles Dodgers in a raucous division series victory last Saturday, were unable to get their bats into the game in the face of a gem from Phillies pitcher Zack Wheeler.

Wheeler delivered seven scoreless innings with just one hit and eight strikeouts to lay the foundations for a crucial win against the underdog Phillies. Phillies closer Jose Alvarado had a nervous start to the bottom of the ninth inning, allowing Jurickson Profar and Juan Soto to get on base, before sealing the win with the outs of Manny Machado and Josh Bell in quick succession. The winner of the best-of-seven NLCS will meet either the New York Yankees or the Houston Astros in the World Series.

### Yankees advance

The Yankees advanced to an American League Championship Series showdown with the Astros after downing the Cleveland Guardians 5-1 earlier Tuesday. Giancarlo Stanton and Aaron Judge bagged home runs to give the Yankees a 3-2 series victory in a game that had been delayed 24 hours after rain washed out play on Monday. "We know we've got a big challenge now going to Houston but we look forward to it," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said after the win, paying tribute to the hitting of Stanton and Judge.

"When those guys are rolling it makes it challenging," Boone said. "For (Stanton) to get us off to that start in the first was huge." The Yankees were always in the driving seat Tuesday after jumping on starter Aaron Civale early on. Yankees pitcher Nestor Cortes



CALIFORNIA: Luis Garcia #66 of the San Diego Padres pitches during the ninth inning against the Philadelphia Phillies in game one of the National League Championship Series on October 18, 2022.—AFP

meanwhile stymied the Cleveland bats, allowing just three hits, one run, and one walk before departing after the fifth inning. Civale's rocky start saw Gleyber Torres walk before Anthony Rizzo advanced to first base after being hit by a pitch.

Stanton then stepped up to smash a line drive to right-center field for a three-run shot that left the Yankees 3-0 up. Josh Donaldson then singled on a ground ball prompting Cleveland skipper Terry Francona to yank Civale from the mound for Sam Hentges. Francona admitted later that pulling starting pitcher Civale in the first inning had been a tough call. "I felt terrible taking him out that quickly, but I just

didn't think we could give up any more," Francona said.

Hentges got through the remainder of the inning with no more damage but then saw Judge crush a home run into right field in the bottom of the second for a 4-0 lead. Cleveland pulled a run back in the top of the third when Jose Ramirez's sacrifice fly scored Austin Hedges. But Rizzo restored the Yankees' four-run cushion at the bottom of the fifth, singling to score Torres. "Every game is its own game. They beat us today," Francona said. "We pushed them about as far as we could and they came out and beat us today, so they get to move on and we don't."—AFP

## Blackburn go top of Championship

LONDON: Blackburn moved to the top of the Championship at the expense of rivals Burnley with a 2-0 win over Sunderland as Norwich were beaten 1-0 at home by Luton. Ben Brereton Diaz's left-footed curler put Blackburn in front before Scott Wharton headed in a second four minutes into the second half. The win lifts Rovers on to 27 points, two clear of Burnley and Sheffield United, although Jon Dahl Tomasson's side have played two games more.

Norwich also began the night with a chance to move top of the table but the Canaries are now without a win in four as with Carlton Morris haunted his old side with the only goal at Carrow Road. Kenny McLean's sending off 24 minutes from time did Norwich no favours as they were booed off at full-time. Victory moved Luton up to third and within a point of the automatic promotion places.

Only goal difference separates Swansea from the playoff places after producing a remarkable turnaround to beat Reading 3-2. The power went out at the start of the night at the Swansea.com Stadium, but once the lights returned it was Reading who were switched on, leading 2-0 after Yakou Meite and Tom Ince struck inside the opening 33 minutes. But Harry Darling halved the deficit before the interval and second half goals from Ollie Cooper and Jay Fulton lifted Swansea up to seventh.—AFP



MOENCHENGLADBACH: Italy's head coach Roberto Mancini (top right) supervises his players during a training session of Italy's national football team in Moenchengladbach, western Germany.—AFP

## Euro kings nursing World Cup wound

MILAN: Italy are still hurting as the European champions sit on the sidelines while the rest of international football's elite prepares to descend on Qatar for the upcoming World Cup. Roberto Mancini will once again have to watch the tournament on television as he begins another Azzurri rebuild while all eyes are on the Gulf.

And the determined coach of the four-time world champions is not hiding the hurt that missing out for the second time in a row has brought one of football's most important countries. "The World Cup is a cut that will bleed right to the end, we can only heal it by winning the next one," he said after drawing England in qualifying for Euro 2024.

Italy's pain has been doubled because Mancini had heralded their comeback to the pinnacle of the international game, creating a formidable team unit from the ashes of the 2018 World Cup qualification disaster. His arrival after the misery of Gian Piero Ventura's tenure which ended with play-off devastation at the hands of Sweden was like a ray of sunshine for a country plunged into darkness. The 57-year-old threw away the dusty old rule book which said Italy teams needed to be stodgy, cynical and disciplined, and built a team that didn't just win, but won with style.

Their triumph at Euro 2020 was supposed to be the

consecration of Italy's return to the top table, but instead the partying of the warm summer nights led to a hangover which dragged well into this year and past their shock play-off defeat to North Macedonia. By the time Italy were left shell-shocked by former Palermo man Aleksandar Trajkovski in his old stadium, back in March, a once cocksure 'Nazionale' were already badly off-form.

Mancini had led Italy to 13 wins in a row up to their Euro quarter-final victory over Belgium, during which time they scored 36 times and conceded just twice. But between then and the North Macedonia collapse they drew six times in nine matches with five of their 13 goals coming in one of their two wins, against Lithuania. And their displays afterwards hardly gave cause for optimism, thrashings at the hands of Argentina and Germany highlighting just how far behind Italy had fallen once more.

However there are still signs that Mancini has something to give, as recent wins over England and Hungary took them into the Nations League finals and suggested new players like Napoli forward Giacomo Raspadori might breathe some new life into a jaded squad. And that's just as well as Mancini's contract runs until after the 2026 World Cup and he has every intention of seeing it out. "I'm still young," Mancini said in March. "My aim is to win a European Championship and a World Cup, and for the World Cup we will need to wait a bit. "I like my job, I think I can still have fun and do something special with the boys."—AFP

of accepting seven million yen from a merchandise firm, which Japanese media named as Sun Arrow and said was licensed to sell soft toys of the cute Games mascots.

Three other people including ADK president Shinichi Ueno were also arrested on Wednesday. ADK Holdings said it was "extremely regrettable that we find ourselves in this situation, and we would like to apologize for the enormous trouble" caused by the arrests. "Since the investigation remains ongoing, we will refrain from disclosing details," it said, adding it would fully cooperate with authorities "to help resolve the case".

The latest arrest of Takahashi—a former advertising executive who served on the Tokyo 2020 board from June 2014 — reportedly brought the total sum of the bribes he allegedly pocketed to 196 million yen. He has previously been accused of taking bribes from publishing giant Kadokawa and another advertising agency, Daiko. The ballooning saga is not the first time questions have been raised over impropriety around the Tokyo Games. The former head of Japan's Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, stepped down in 2019 after French prosecutors launched an investigation into corruption allegations linked to Tokyo's Olympic bid.—AFP

## Brazil eye 6th World Cup with European armada floundering

PARIS: With a month to go until the World Cup it is Brazil who have earned the tag of favorites as the South Americans seek to win the trophy for the sixth time while Europe's heavyweights are plagued by question marks about form and fitness. What happened in the past may be irrelevant, particularly in the first World Cup in the Middle East and the first to be played in November and December. But history might play a part as all of the Brazilians' last four World Cup triumphs came outside Europe.

If they crumbled under the pressure as hosts in 2014 and underperformed in Russia four years ago, they head to Qatar on a formidable run and with a strong squad not overly reliant on Neymar. He will still attract the most attention, but coach Tite has a formidable squad — from Alisson Becker in goal, to the steel of Fabinho and Casemiro in midfield, the pace of Vinicius Junior and the goal threat of Roberto Firmino and Richarlison.

"Brazil today are much more prepared and experienced. They don't depend on one player," Selecao legend Cafu recently told Globoesporte. "We have a team that will allow that player to stand out. I think Brazil look good and have a good chance of winning the World Cup." The big question mark surrounding Brazil, however, is that they have not been tested by leading European opposition since Belgium dumped Tite's side out of the 2018 World Cup in the quarter-finals.

### Messi's last chance

In contrast, Argentina pitted their wits against Italy earlier this year in London and the Copa America winners triumphed 3-0. The two-time world champions are also heading to Qatar in good shape, unbeaten in 35 games since losing to Brazil at the 2019 Copa America. Currently ranked third in the world, coach Lionel Scaloni does not have the same depth of quality as Brazil but there are enough good players to bring out the best in Lionel Messi, scorer of nine goals in his country's last three games. At 35, this is Messi's last chance to win a World Cup and that motivation could be powerful. "It is very likely my last World Cup, yes,"

Messi told ESPN recently. "We come into it with a well-equipped and strong squad, but anything can happen. Every game is so difficult and it is not always the favorites who win it."

### Can France defend title?

Just look at France in 2002, when a team led by an injured Zinedine Zidane went to South Korea as the holders and reigning European champions, only to crash out in the group stage without scoring a goal. Two decades on, Les Bleus are again the holders but all is not right in Didier Deschamps' squad. Kylian Mbappe has been distracted by reports he wants out of Paris Saint-Germain, while injuries are creating headaches. The all-action N'Golo Kante will miss the tournament and Paul Pogba is battling to get back to fitness after knee surgery.

Then again, Deschamps does have a strike pairing of Mbappe and Karim Benzema, the new Ballon d'Or. "I hope to be in the squad for Qatar, to go to the World Cup and do everything to win it," Benzema said this week. At least France will be there, unlike Italy who failed to qualify a year after winning the Euro. Form is an issue for England, who went six games without a win in a disastrous Nations League campaign and are also set to be without their rampaging right-back Reece James, one of their best players, due to injury.

It is not clear if Germany are really any better than the side that went out of Euro 2020 in the last 16, despite Hansi Flick replacing Joachim Loew as coach since then. The Netherlands are back but do they, or for that matter Belgium, really look like potential World Cup winners? Portugal are wondering if they need to faze out Cristiano Ronaldo and give more space to their younger attacking stars. It also remains to be seen if Spain have the defense or the attack to go all the way, and that leaves two other questions to be answered.

Can a European surprise package emerge, like Croatia in 2018? If so, then Denmark and Serbia may be worth watching. Alternatively, can Sadio Mane's Senegal go far on the back of winning the Africa Cup of Nations? As for Brazil and Argentina, by winning their groups they would be set on a course to meet in the semi-finals with the ultimate prize then within sight. Right now that looks plausible, but with domestic leagues in action right up to the World Cup much can change in the next few weeks.—AFP

## Tokyo Olympics bribery scandal widens with mascot allegations

TOKYO: A corruption scandal surrounding the Tokyo Olympics widened on Wednesday as a former Games executive was re-arrested on suspicion of taking bribes from two firms, one of which reportedly sold official mascot toys. Prosecution documents seen by AFP accused former Tokyo 2020 board member Haruyuki Takahashi of accepting 54 million yen (\$360,000) in bribes from a major advertising firm and a merchandise company.

It was the fourth time the 78-year-old has been arrested over the scandal, following allegations that he received a similar amount from a suit retailer that was an official partner of last year's pandemic-delayed event. Prosecutors alleged that Takahashi helped advertising giant ADK Holdings with a sponsorship contract and received 47 million yen "knowing it was meant to be thank-you money". They also accused him



PARIS: Brazil's coach Tite (center) leads a training session at Charlety stadium in Paris.—AFP