

Sports

Embiid dominant as Sixers cruise to 7th straight win

Philadelphia 76ers thrash Charlotte Hornets 121-82

News in Brief

Kuwait Jet Ski Championships

KUWAIT: The third and final round of Kuwait Jet Ski Championship (Drag Race 2023), organized by the jet ski committee at Kuwait Sea Club, at Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City in Khairan, has concluded. In the open competition, the racer Mohammad Al-Baz came first, followed by Mohammad Burabee and Suleiman Busakhr (third). Burabee came first in the stock category; second was Ibrahim Al-Kharraz and third Abdullah Al-Gabandi. In the super stock competition, Fahad Al-Khelfan was the number-one champion, followed in second rank by Zaid Taher, while Abdulaziz Zainel came third. Khaled Al-Fodari the club secretary, told KUNA, that the competitions were quite close and involved 39 jet skiers. — KUNA

Kuwait Club crowned champion

KUWAIT: Kuwait Club has been crowned champion of the 39th edition of the Gulf Clubs Men's Handball Championship beating the Bahraini team Al-Najma 27-29 in the final match of the tournament that ended in Manama on Friday. The two teams maintained a draw throughout the match until the last moments when the Kuwaiti strikers achieved the victory with a couple of goals with remarkable performance by the goalkeeper, Ali Safar. The UAE team came third beating the Qatari team, Al-Arabi, 28-32. — KUNA

Kuwait SC secure second place

AMMAN: Kuwait SC secured the second position following a 3-0 defeat against Qatar's Al-Rayyan in the final match of the West Asian Volleyball competition held in the Jordanian capital, Amman. Scoring sets at 25-22, 25-20, and 25-22 placed Al-Rayyan in first place, trailed by Kuwait SC and Police SC (Qatar) in third. Vice Chairman of Kuwait SC, Bader Al-Osaimi told KUNA that this is consider a great achievement for the volleyball team and the first of its scale, especially taking into consideration the strenuous conditions the team faced with three consecutive matches leading to the final. Kuwait SC athlete Abdullah Hussain also said, "we did our best to achieve for Kuwaiti volleyball, but weren't successful in the final due to the exhaustion." Just yesterday, Thursday, Kuwait SC coddled in a five games match against Dar Kulib of Bahrain, following another five games against Jordan's Hussein Youth Club the day before putting a toll on players going into the final. — KUNA

Speedy Alonso cautious

JEDDAH: Fernando Alonso put in another speedy showing for Aston Martin in Friday's practice in Jeddah but cautioned he had no idea where he would end up on the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix grid. The 41-year-old Spaniard, whose thrilling charge to claim his 99th career podium lit up the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix, said the team had made a good start, but was wary that Friday form is not a reliable indicator for Saturday. Alonso was second behind defending double world champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull in second practice, splitting the two Red Bulls at the high-speed Jeddah Street Circuit. Sergio Perez was third. "We were P1 on Friday in Bahrain and then maybe fifth or sixth in qualifying," he explained. "So, you don't know. You never know until you get to qualifying on Saturday." — AFP

Mexico book Classic semis

MIAMI: Mexico staged a dramatic comeback to stun Puerto Rico 5-4 on Friday and set up a semifinal showdown with Japan at the World Baseball Classic. In-form Puerto Rico stormed into a 4-0 lead in the first inning after tormenting Mexico's starting pitcher Julio Urias with some ruthless hitting at Miami's LoanDepot Park. Emmanuel Rivera's sacrifice fly scored Enrique Hernandez to put Puerto Rico 1-0 ahead before Javy Baez and Eddie Rosario launched back-to-back two-out homers to stretch the lead to 4-0. But Urias settled down to quell the Puerto Rico bats thereafter and Mexico chipped away at the deficit before finally edging ahead in the bottom of the seventh. — AFP

Schenk grabs Valspar lead

MIAMI: Adam Schenk, playing for a 10th consecutive week, fired a two-under-par 69 to grab a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the PGA Valspar Championship. The 31-year-old American, who shared the 18-hole lead, was on seven-under 135 after 36 holes at Innisbrook's Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida. "It really couldn't have been a ton better with the amount of putts I made," Schenk said. "We're doing a really good job managing the courses." Countryman Kramer Hickok, chasing his first PGA crown like Schenk, was second on 136 after a second 68 in windy conditions. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid maintained his dominant scoring streak as the Philadelphia 76ers extended their winning streak to seven games with a 121-82 thrashing of the Charlotte Hornets on Friday. Embiid, one of the front-runners for the NBA's Most Valuable Player award, rattled in another 38 points during a one-sided road victory. The Sixers star is averaging 35 points a game in March and has not scored fewer than 31 in eight games this month.

Embiid's latest tally came on 16-of-21 shooting, with 13 rebounds and five assists. "Home or road, it doesn't matter," Embiid said afterward. "We know what it takes offensively and defensively, everybody doing their job... tonight we did it as a team." James Harden had a rare off-night with only 11 points after shooting 4-of-15 from the field, but the Sixers still had far too much firepower and defensive savvy for a Charlotte team that is second from the bottom of the Eastern Conference. Tobias Harris added 18 points while Tyrese Maxey chipped in with 13. Despite the one-sided nature of the win, Sixers coach Doc Rivers was pleased that his team emerged with a clean bill of health.

"It's just good to get the game

over with and be healthy," said Rivers, who also took satisfaction from the Sixers' ruthless performance. "It just shows that we are focused, and we are showing up and playing," he said. "There is no guarantee each night how you're going to play, but there is a guarantee how you can show up - and we're showing up every night." Philadelphia improved to 47-22 with the win and are third in the East, behind leaders Milwaukee (50-20) and Boston (49-22).

Boston revival

Boston's revival continued with a 126-112 win on the road over the Portland Trail Blazers. Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 34 points, while Jaylen Brown added 27. Damian Lillard poured in 41 points in Portland's losing effort. In other games Friday, Maxi Kleber nailed a 27-foot buzzer-beater as the Dallas Mavericks put a dent in the Los Angeles Lakers' postseason charge to snatch a sensational 111-110 road victory. Kyrie Irving scored 38 points - and provided the late assist for Kleber - to set up a thrilling win for Dallas. Irving's tally included 13 in the fourth quarter as Dallas overturned a late five-point deficit to claim the win.

The defeat dropped the Lakers to



PORTLAND: Marcus Smart #36 of the Boston Celtics and Damian Lillard #0 of the Portland Trail Blazers go after a loose ball during the fourth quarter at the Moda Center on March 17, 2023. — AFP

10th in the Western Conference with a 34-37 record. Dallas meanwhile moved up to the sixth spot. Elsewhere Friday, Golden State's poor road form continued with a 127-119 defeat at Atlanta, with Trae Young leading the Hawks' scoring with 25 points. With

the Warriors missing the defensive presence of the suspended Draymond Green, the reigning NBA champions dropped their 10th straight game on the road. The Warriors are now 36-35 overall and sixth in a congested Western Conference table. — AFP

Rybakina topples Swiatek to book Indian Wells final

INDIAN WELLS: Elena Rybakina again proved too much for world number one Iga Swiatek, denying the defending champion a return to the Indian Wells final with an emphatic 6-2, 6-2 semi-final victory on Friday. Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina, the reigning Wimbledon champion who stunned top-seeded Swiatek in the fourth round of the Australian Open on the way to the final, will now get a chance to turn the tables on Aryna Sabalenka, who beat her in Melbourne to capture a first Grand Slam title.

World number two Sabalenka advanced with a 6-2, 6-3 victory over seventh-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece. Rybakina, ranked 10th in the world, was all over Swiatek from the opening game, painting the lines with her punishing ground strokes and serving with pinpoint precision. Swiatek, winner of the French and US Opens last year in a campaign that included eight titles in all, simply had no answer and surrendered the first set with a double-fault on the first set point.

It was more of the same in the second as Rybakina raced to a 5-0 lead. Swiatek, who revealed after the match she was dealing with "discomfort" in her ribcage, finally managed a hold for 5-1, and pounced to break as Rybakina suddenly struggled with her first serve in the next game. Rybakina still managed to muster two match points at 40-15, but Swiatek saved

one with an overhead and another with a blistering return of a second serve, winning two more points to complete the break for 5-2.

But there would be no comeback. A mis-hit as Swiatek appeared to trip chasing a ball back to the baseline gave Rybakina another match point and she converted it with confidence. "I didn't expect that I was going to play that good today," admitted Rybakina, who battled through three sets to beat Czech Karolina Muchova in the quarter-finals. "Hopefully I'm going to play like this on Sunday," she added after denying Swiatek's bid to become the first woman since Martina Navratilova in 1990-91 to win back-to-back titles in the California desert.

Swiatek, who said she still expected to defend her title at the Miami Open that starts next week, was disappointed she couldn't execute her coach's ideas for stopping Rybakina. "We were thinking about the Australian Open more like we wanted to kind of learn a lesson from that match," she said. "I wanted to kind of use his tips and improve my game. But I wasn't able to do that today." Sabalenka had to battle back from a set down to beat Rybakina in the Australian Open final, and the Kazakh was optimistic she could avenge that defeat in the looming battle of reigning Grand Slam champions. "If I play like today, I think I have all the chances," she said.

Stadium Court slugfest

Sabalenka out-duelled Sakkari in a Stadium Court slugfest. Playing with supreme confidence, Sabalenka opened with a quick service hold that featured two aces and broke Sakkari for a 3-1 lead. Sakkari immediately broke back as Sabalenka



INDIAN WELLS: Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina hits a backhand return to Poland's Iga Swiatek in their semifinal match at the 2023 WTA Indian Wells Open on March 17, 2023. — AFP

ka double-faulted on break point. But the Belarusian won the next five games to pocket the set and take a 2-0 lead in the second.

Sakkari, perhaps trying to do too much in the face of Sabalenka's powerful groundstrokes, made three forehand errors to give her triple set point. She saved two with a service winner and an ace but fired another forehand out of the court on the third. Sabalenka was rolling, breaking Sakkari again with a blistering backhand service return up the line for a 2-0 lead in the second. But she gave the break back with a sloppy service game and Sakkari held to level the set before Sabalenka steadied to win three straight games. — AFP

Crystal Palace fire Vieira after miserable run

LONDON: Crystal Palace sacked manager Patrick Vieira on Friday after a miserable run of one win in 14 Premier League games sucked them into a relegation battle. The London club, without a win in 2023 under the former Arsenal and France midfielder, are 12th in the table but are just three points above the drop zone. The bottom nine clubs are separated by just five points, cranking up the pressure as the season enters its final months.

The dismissal of the French World Cup winner takes the number of managerial sackings during the 2022/23 campaign to nine, one fewer than last season's total, which equaled the Premier League record. "It is with enormous regret that this difficult decision has been made," chairman Steve Parish said in a club statement.

"Ultimately, results in recent months have placed us in a precarious league position and we felt a change is necessary to give us the best chance of retaining Premier League status." Parish praised Vieira for making a "significant" impact at the club. Palace finished 12th last season and reached the FA Cup semi-finals. The club said in their statement that the process to appoint a new manager was under way. Three members of Vieira's coaching staff - Osian Roberts, Kristian Wilson and Said Aigoun-have also left Selhurst Park.

Vieira, 46, replaced Roy Hodgson before the start of the 2021/22 season and was praised for implementing an exciting brand of football. But this season they have scored just 21 goals in 27 games - only three clubs have scored fewer. Their 1-0 defeat by Brighton on Wednesday was their third loss in a row. Palace travel to leaders Arsenal on Sunday, with under-21s boss Paddy McCarthy taking charge. Vieira, who won three Premier League titles as a player with the Gunners, previously managed New York City and Nice. Parish told Sky Sports that the mood in the camp was good despite the team's miserable run. "You know, everybody loved Patrick, genuinely," he said. "The players had all the time in the world for him. You saw from the performances he never lost the players at all, they were all running and playing for him." — AFP



WELLINGTON: Sri Lanka's Kasun Rajitha (center) bowls past New Zealand's Tom Blundell (left) on day two of the second Test cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka on March 18, 2023. — AFP

Williamson and Nicholls put NZ on top in Test

WELLINGTON: Aggressive double centuries for Kane Williamson and Henry Nicholls powered New Zealand's dominance in the second Test against Sri Lanka in Wellington on Saturday. The Black Caps declared their first innings at an imposing 580-4 before reducing Sri Lanka to 26-2 at stumps on day two, leaving the tourists with a very slim prospect of squaring the two-match series. The in-form Williamson scored 215 and Nicholls posted a career-best 200 not out, with the pair's third-wicket stand of 363 virtually batting Sri Lanka out of the contest.

Their partnership was the fifth-highest by any New Zealand combination and they became the country's first batters to reach 200 in the same innings. Sri Lankan captain Dimuth Karunaratne will resume on 16 on Sunday and nightwatchman Prabath Jayasuriya remains on four, with the deficit a daunting 554 runs. Sri Lanka's bowlers struggled to generate life on a flat Basin Reserve pitch, forcing Karunaratne to set defensive fields during much of the mammoth partnership.

Williamson and Nicholls batted at a lively clip from the outset, advancing quickly from a 155-2 overnight score and barely looking troubled as they unleashed an array of attacking strokes through the first two sessions. Williamson was impenetrable as he reached three figures for the third time in successive Tests, becoming the first New Zealander to pass 8,000 runs in the process. It was a sixth double-century for the 32-year-old-whose unbeaten 121 was pivotal in a final-ball first Test in Christchurch earlier this week.

Having resumed on 26, Williamson struck 23 fours and two sixes before holing out in the deep off spinner Jayasuriya as he tried to escalate the scoring rate. Nicholls marched on from his overnight 18 to reach three figures before pushing past his previous-best score of 174. His aggressive 240-ball knock, which featured four sixes, represented a remarkable return to form for the left-hander, whose place in the team was under pressure after failing to reach 40 in his 15 previous innings.

Nicholls said he was aware of criticism of his on-going selection but said he was made to feel comfortable by support from his teammates and coach Gary Stead. "Everyone in the group's been great and you really feel that support," he said. "For me, it was just about trusting that I had done it before. It hasn't happened as much as I'd like in the last period. "Now the challenge is doing it again knowing that the blueprint is there." — AFP