

Sports

# Dodgers, Braves on brink of advancing in baseball playoffs

## Winner will take on either Atlanta Braves or St Louis Cardinals in NL Championship Series

WASHINGTON: The Los Angeles Dodgers exploded for seven runs in the sixth inning Sunday on the way to a 10-4 victory over the Washington Nationals and a commanding lead in their Major League Baseball playoff series. The Dodgers, trying to get back to the World Series for a third straight year after falling to the Houston Astros in 2017 and the Boston Red Sox last year, lead their best-of-five National League Division Series two games to one.

Justin Turner's three-run home run capped the sixth-inning outburst that included two-run doubles from catcher Russell Martin and pinch-hitter Enrique Hernandez. The Dodgers became the first team in major league history to score so many runs in one playoff inning with two outs and two strikes.

The team trailed 2-1 going into the sixth after Juan Soto belted a two-run home run for the Nationals off Dodgers starting pitcher Ryu Hyun-Jin in the first and Los Angeles' Max Muncy hit a solo homer off Anibal Sanchez in the fifth.

Sanchez, who struck out nine, was replaced for the sixth by Patrick Corbin, who was charged with six runs. "It felt nice to contribute," said Martin, whose double to deep left center field scored Cody Bellinger and David Freese to open the floodgates in the sixth.

"We have a deep lineup so we kind of just pass the baton along and I came up with that big hit right there, got the guys going and then it just seemed like it was one good at-bat after good-at bat."

"The next thing you know," said Martin, who added a two-run home run in the ninth, "we had seven runs on the board." The winner of the series will take on either the Atlanta Braves or the St. Louis Cardinals in the NL Championship Series with a World Series berth at stake.

The Braves rallied with three runs in the ninth inning to beat the Cardinals 3-1 in St. Louis Sunday to take a 2-1 lead in their series.

The Braves, stymied all day by St. Louis pitcher Adam Wainwright, broke through against Cardinals closing pitcher Carlos Martinez. Josh Donaldson got the rally going with a double to start the ninth.

After two outs and an intentional walk to catcher Brian McCann, Dansby Swanson tied the game with a double to left field that plated one run. Adam Duvall, who entered as a pinch hitter in the eighth inning, followed with a single that drove in two runs.

"They never quit," Braves manager Brian Snitker said of his team. "They never give up. The heart and desire and will is unbelievable in those guys."

The Braves took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-five National League Division Series and will try to close out the set in game four in St. Louis.

### 'CRAZY STUFF HAPPENS'

Until the Braves erupted in the ninth, it was a pitching duel in St. Louis. Atlanta's rookie hurler Mike Soroka limited the Cardinals to one run on two hits while striking out seven in his playoff debut.

St. Louis scored their lone run in the second inning when Marcell Ozuna led off with a double and scored on Matt Carpenter's sacrifice fly. Wainwright, 38, turned back the clock, pitching 7 2/3 scoreless innings and striking out eight to keep the Cards in front until he exited to a standing ovation but then had to watch from the dugout as the contest slipped away.

"We were one out away and that is exactly what playoff baseball is all about," Wainwright said. "Just crazy stuff happens." —AFP



WASHINGTON: Justin Turner #10 of the Los Angeles Dodgers picks off Howie Kendrick #47 of the Washington Nationals in a run down during the seventh inning of Game 3 of the NLDS at Nationals Park in Washington. — AFP

## Successful world championships no desert mirage in the end

DOHA: A successful world athletics championships had looked like a desert mirage but the event eventually came to life with an oasis of thrills and packed houses to rescue Qatari organisers and officials before the curtain came down on Sunday. Struggling due to a lack of interest from locals, the 10-day showcase delivered on the final weekend as criticism over an empty stadium and stifling heat of around 38 degrees Celsius was replaced by an atmosphere at last worthy of a world event.

The athletes responded with memorable performances in the air-conditioned Khalifa Stadium, with temperatures kept at 21 degrees, highlighted by local hero Mutaz Barshim on Friday soaring to victory in the men's high jump

for Qatar's only gold.

On the same night American Dalilah Muhammad broke her own world record to win the women's 400 metres hurdles while the sport's big men seized the spotlight on Saturday as the shot putters gave a show hailed as the greatest ever in the event. The United States again topped the medals table, their 14 golds almost triple the next best of Kenya on five while Jamaica and China each had three. No other nation got more than two.

"It is pretty clear to us that on athlete performance this is the best world championships we have had," said International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) chief Sebastian Coe.

The head of the global governing body had spent a good amount of time during the opening days vigorously defending the decision to bring the championships to the Middle East.

"It is the athletes themselves who have come here better prepared for a championship that will be remembered for a long time.... maybe in a large part to the almost perfect conditions that these guys have created in the stadium."

Before the last three sessions, a nearby super mall with its shops, ice rink and amusement park had generated more buzz than the Khalifa Stadium with its swathes of empty seats. The warning signs came early when the blue riband 100 metres on the opening weekend did not attract even a modest audience.

American Christian Coleman's win was greeted with a smattering of polite applause, while Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce did a victory lap in a near-empty stadium with her sleepy son nestled in her arms.

### HUGE INTEREST

Qatar has shown huge interest in hosting the world's biggest sporting parties, including the 2022 soccer World Cup finals, but has displayed little desire to actually attend them. The futuristic air-conditioned Khalifa Stadium proved without doubt the country can build first-class facilities but hosting an event does not end when construction is completed.

The crowds over the final three days were as manufactured as the stadium, with organisers giving away thousands

of tickets to clubs and immigrant workers although the excitement was real.

While track and field athletes competing in Khalifa Stadium did so in air-conditioned comfort, there was plenty of suffering and complaining on the Doha roads. Marathoners and race walkers were forced to run at midnight along a soulless, almost spectatorless route to avoid the worst of the extreme heat and humidity, with temperatures hovering around 30 Celsius when the marathons and walks started.

Coe had little sympathy for those athletes who were complaining, saying at the midway mark of the meeting that they would be the ones leaving without winning titles.

"The athletes talking about externalities are probably not the ones who are going to be walking home with medals from here," he said. The rousing end to the championships provided an upbeat note for a sport that continues to wrestle with complex issues, including a Russian doping scandal that looks set to linger, with the country's federation banned from the event.—Reuters

## Six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez hailed by greats

BANGKOK: Tributes have poured in to the unstoppable Marc Marquez with the Spaniard hailed as "incredible" and "unbelievable" after he clinched his sixth MotoGP crown and eighth world title overall on Sunday. MotoGP rivals, Marquez's own brother and Formula One greats joined a chorus of congratulations for the daring 26-year-old who dived under Fabio Quartararo on the final bend to win the Thailand MotoGP and seal the title in a pulsating last-lap duel.

The win gave him an insurmountable lead over closest rival Andrea Dovizioso, who was gracious despite another season in Marquez's shadow. "We can speak and analyse all the things but at the end if you check his score it's something unbelievable," the Ducati rider told MotoGP.com.

Marquez has dominated the sport. Since 2013 he has only failed to win the world championship once — in 2015. The 2019 title is his fourth straight and

Marquez described this year as his "best" season ever. No one is disputing his assessment.

British rider Cal Crutchlow pointed out that Marquez has finished first or second in every race apart from one — the Grand Prix of The Americas when a mechanical problem caused him to crash when leading on the ninth lap in Austin. "He's an incredible talent," said Crutchlow, who is ninth in the standings. "I think he should just retire and give everyone else a chance," he joked.

Marquez is from a racing family and his younger brother Alex finished fifth in the Moto2 race in Buriram and is leading the class standings. If there is a sibling rivalry it was hard to see in Alex's endearing tweet about his brother's achievement. "Once again you leave us all speechless!" he said on his official account which showed a photo of the two brothers smiling after the win. "In spite of your eight championships, you'll still be the 'little twerp' brother that you are."

With six premier-class titles, Marquez surpasses Australian legend Mick Doohan. He trails only Italian great Valentino Rossi, who won the last of his seven championships in 2009, and Giacomo Agostini, whose record eighth came in 1975. Rossi predicted he will break both. "I don't think he'll struggle to reach nine," he told GPOne.com. Spanish



BURIRAM: Repsol Honda Team Spanish rider Marc Marquez celebrates on the podium after winning the MotoGP race for the Thailand Grand Prix at Buriram International Circuit in Buriram. — AFP

Formula One double world champion Fernando Alonso tweeted his congratulations, calling Marquez a "phenomenon."

Formula One driver Pierre Gasly, who attended the race before heading to Suzuka for next weekend's Japanese Grand Prix, tweeted: "What a race, what

a battle in the last lap."

French rookie Quartararo, 20, led most of the way but was left in awe of Marquez. "It's just incredible what he achieved, what he does with the bike," Quartararo told MotoGP.com. "He will be there for a long time." —AFP

## Vela sets scoring record to wrap up MLS regular season in style

LOS ANGELES: Carlos Vela scored a hat trick to set the MLS single-season goal scoring record as Los Angeles FC eliminated the Colorado Rapids from postseason contention with a 3-1 victory on Sunday.

Vela's three goals gave him 34 for

the season, earning the Mexico international the record and snapping a tie with Atlanta United's Josef Martinez, who set the previous mark with 31 last season.

Vela, who recorded his seventh multi-goal game of the season, finished four goals ahead of runner-up Zlatan Ibrahimovic who topped out at 30 goals. Vela's only other MLS hat trick came on March 30 at San Jose.

LAFc also set a record for points in a season with a 72, breaking the mark of 71 set by the New York Red Bulls last season. The records didn't stop there as they scored an impressive 85 goals this season.

LAFc already had clinched the Supporter's Shield and a first-round bye in the MLS Cup playoffs. They open the playoffs on October 23 or 24 against the winner of the first-round matchup between Minnesota United FC and Ibrahimovic's LA Galaxy.

Ibrahimovic didn't give up the scoring race without a fight. He scored his 30th in the ninth minute of a 4-2 loss to the Houston Dynamo on Sunday. The defeat means the Galaxy open the playoffs on the road.

The game marked the final MLS match for Houston player and former US national team member DaMarcus Beasley who left to a standing ovation

in the 89th minute. Beasley is retiring after a 20-year career.

The career of Rapids goalkeeper Tim Howard also came to an end in Sunday's final day of the regular season. Howard, 40, will head into retirement after 185 MLS games, and 121 with the US national team. He also had stints with Everton and Manchester United of the English Premier League.

Elsewhere, FC Dallas punched their ticket to the playoffs with a 6-0 demolition of Sporting KC at Toyota Stadium. Dallas, who finished seventh in the West, will face the Seattle Sounders in the first round of the playoffs on October 19 or 20. —AFP

## Bare knuckles to KO record for Myanmar woman breaking MMA mould

YANGON: Myanmar's Bozhena Antoniyar had to side-step conservative parents to take up bare-knuckle fighting, but she stealth paid off on her MMA debut when she knocked out her opponent in a record 24 seconds.

Bozhena picked up Myanmar's brutal martial art of lethwei when she was 16, secretly attending training sessions. "(My parents) had never seen or heard of girls doing lethwei," the 24-year-old told AFP. "I had to trick them by saying I was playing football."

The diminutive 1.57 metre (5ft 2in) fighter holds the record for the fastest MMA bout for the Singapore-based One Championship, the sport's biggest promotion in Asia. The bout ended at 24 seconds when Bozhena, sitting astride her opponent — compatriot Shwe Sin — landed a barrage of nine rapid punches to the head.

Bozhena, who goes by the nickname Toto, trains in a humid Yangon gym where she pummels her coach with jabs and hooks while ducking counterpunches. She will need to be on top form for her next outing at the end of this month against Indonesian star Priscilla Hertati Lumban Gaol at One Championship's card in Jakarta.

Bozhena hails from Myanmar's poor eastern Kayah state, where women are better known for using brass rings to elongate their necks rather than the traditional combat sport lethwei.

The bone-crunching Myanmar fighting style is considered one of the most aggressive in the world. Combatants eschew boxing gloves for thin gauze wrapped around hardened knuckles and head-butting is permitted.

Like many in Kayah state, the fighter's family are subsistence farmers. "My parents live hand-to-mouth. That helped drive me to success," said Bozhena.

Her ambition to excel in MMA was also inspired by the increasingly high profile of Myanmar-born fighters. The most well-known — and Bozhena's hero — is Aung La Nsang, an ethnic Kachin nicknamed the "Burmese Python" who holds both middleweight and light heavyweight world titles for One Championship.

The 34-year-old was even voted 2019 International Fighter of the Year at Las Vegas-based World MMA Awards. Bozhena's career is still in its infancy, but she is already proving a formidable foe. In a knuckle-biting battle in July against Vietnamese-American fighter Bi Nguyen, the judges favoured her in a split decision.

She has gained fans across Myanmar, including within her once-disapproving community, she says with a smile. "Now when I have a fight, my house is packed with people who come to watch," she said.

Social norms aside, Bozhena decries the lack of support for women wanting to get in the ring, saying men are more readily offered sponsorship deals and high-profile fights.

"There should be no gender discrimination," she said, explaining that was the reason she left the lethwei arena for MMA. Despite the challenges the trailblazer vowed to fight on. "I miss the days when I could be beautiful and feminine, but I prefer the path I have chosen." —AFP