

## Sports

# Taylor walk-off homer sends Dodgers into MLB playoff clash with Giants

**LOS ANGELES:** Chris Taylor belted a two-run walk-off home run Wednesday to lift the Los Angeles Dodgers to a 3-1 victory over the St Louis Cardinals and into a Major League Baseball playoff showdown with the San Francisco Giants. Los Angeles kept their bid for a World Series repeat on track with the triumph in the hard-fought National League wild-card game at Dodger Stadium.

The reigning champions found themselves in the win-or-go-home round despite amassing 106 regular-season wins. Their reward for the victory will be a National League division series clash starting on Friday with the Giants - who snatched the West division crown from the Dodgers with 107 victories. "It's going to be fun," said Taylor. "Yeah, two of the best regular-season records of all time. We've been battling all year. I expect a hard-fought series."

It will be the first time in the 131-year history of the Giants-Dodgers rivalry that they will play each other in a post-season series. Taylor, who entered the game as a defensive replacement, ended a tense affair against the surging Cardinals when he connected on a two-run shot off St. Louis relief pitcher Alex Reyes. Reyes came in after relief pitcher T J McFarland walked Cody Bellinger with two outs.

Bellinger took second on a pitch that Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina couldn't quite control and Taylor finished the

job. "Honestly, I was just trying to hit a single, not trying to do too much, and he gave me a good slider to hit and I was able to get it up in the air," Taylor said. Dodgers starting pitcher Max Scherzer wasn't at his best, giving up one run and three hits with three walks and four strikeouts in 4 1/3 innings.

He allowed at least one baserunner in every inning he pitched. But Scherzer's determination was on full display as he got his head down and kept the Cardinals off the board after a wild pitch that let Tommy Edman score from third base standing up in the first inning. Dodgers manager Dave Roberts pulled Scherzer with two on and one out in the top of the fifth inning, and reliever Joe Kelly promptly came through by inducing a ground ball out and delivering a strikeout to end the inning.

The Dodgers - kept in check early by Cardinals starting pitcher Adam Wainwright - got on the board in the bottom of the fourth when Justin Turner seized on a curveball from Wainwright for a home run into the left-field bullpen. "What a game," Turner said. "What a job by our bullpen, going out and putting up zeros. Scherz battling all night - he didn't have his best stuff, but he kept us in the game, and then that big swing by CT - just awesome."

Wainwright gave up one run and four hits in 5 1/3 innings. He struck out five and walked two. The Cardinals, who won 17



**LOS ANGELES:** Chris Taylor #3 of the Los Angeles Dodgers hits a walk off two-run home run in the ninth inning to defeat the St Louis Cardinals 3 to 1 during the National League Wild Card Game at Dodger Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

straight games in September as they powered into the wild card spot - stranded 11 runners, finishing 0-for-11 with runners in scoring position. —AFP

## Stokes could miss Ashes after finger operation

**LONDON:** England all-rounder Ben Stokes could miss the Ashes series in Australia after undergoing another operation on his injured finger, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday. The 30-year-old has not played since July, when it was announced he was taking a break to focus on his mental wellbeing and to rest his left index finger.

"Ben Stokes has undergone a second operation on Monday 4 October to address ongoing issues with the finger that he injured in the IPL (Indian Premier League) in April," the ECB said in a statement. "Stokes had two screws and scar tissue removed from the index finger of his left hand. He will now undergo an intensive period of rehabilitation for the next four weeks under the supervision of the ECB's medical team."

The operation places his participation in England's five-Test series in Australia, scheduled to start in Brisbane on Dec 8, in serious doubt. Concerns over player welfare and Australia's strict coronavirus restrictions have led to fears the tour may not take place. The ECB is meeting this week to decide whether the Ashes can go ahead, with reports suggesting there have been positive talks with Cricket Australia.

Stokes burnished his reputation as England's talisman during the 2019 Ashes, when his unbeaten 135 helped England chase a record fourth-innings target of 359 at Headingley with one wicket remaining. The all-rounder announced himself in Test cricket in the 2013/14



Ben Stokes

Ashes, scoring his maiden Test century in tough batting conditions in Perth but Australia completed a 5-0 whitewash.

Stokes missed England's last tour of Australia in 2017/18 after his involvement in a brawl outside a Bristol nightclub. He was subsequently found not guilty of affray. The tourists missed Stokes' contributions with bat and ball as Australia eased to a 4-0 series win to regain the urn. —AFP

## Psychologists for players at T20 World Cup: ICC

**DUBAI:** Psychologists will monitor players at the T20 World Cup to help cope with the growing number of mental health cases in coronavirus safety bubbles, cricket's governing body said Thursday. Pandemic strain has become increasingly apparent in recent months with England's Ben Stokes on a prolonged mental health break, and other leading players complaining about the pressures of going from bubble to bubble in different tours and tournaments.

A number of players missed or left the conclu-

sion of the Indian Premier League in the United Arab Emirates because of bio-bubble stress. And the 16 nations at the World Cup, starting in the UAE and Oman on Oct 17, will be confined to their hotels for the majority of the month-long tournament. "Some people will be affected, their mental health will be affected by being in confined conditions again, particularly perhaps those who have done it for a prolonged period of time," Alex Marshall, International Cricket Council head of integrity and bio safety, told reporters.

"The ICC will have available 24 hours a day, a psychologist to speak to any individual who seeks help. We are also providing (a) lot of resources, so people can decide what the best way of addressing the issue is for them." Following comments by leading players, including India captain Virat Kohli, many teams have increased their psychological support for players ahead of the tournament. —AFP

## Hyderabad beat Bangalore after final-ball IPL thriller

**ABU DHABI:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar kept his nerve with the final ball as Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Royal Challengers Bangalore by four runs on Wednesday in the Indian Premier League. Kumar clinched the victory for his side after defending six runs off the final ball against AB de Villiers in a low-scoring thriller at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi. Kane Williamson-led Hyderabad are bottom of the league table but their nail-biting victory effectively dashed any chance of Virat Kohli's Bangalore finishing second.

RCB looked on course for an easy win as Glenn

Maxwell smashed 40 off 25 balls after captain Kohli (5) and Dan Christian (1) failed with the bat chasing a target of 142. But Williamson's brilliant direct hit caught Maxwell out of the crease before Kumar and Jason Holder made a strong comeback, bowling the two last overs for 13 runs. Devdutt Padikkal scored 41 off 52 balls and Shahbaz Ahmed contributed a quick 14 off 9 balls.

But Kumar (1-25) held his nerve in the final over against De Villiers, who ended unbeaten on 19, and George Garton. Sunrisers batted first after losing the toss but made a shaky start with Abhishek Sharma (13) losing his wicket to Garton in the second over. His dismissal was followed by a 70-run stand between opener Jason Roy (44) and Williamson (31) before pacer Harshal Patel knocked over the skipper. Priyam Garg scored 15 off 11, Wriddhiman Saha 10 off 8 and Holder made a brisk 16 off 13 balls. Harshal Patel finished with bowling figures of 3-33. —AFP