

Sports

Freeman blasts Braves past Brewers, Dodgers stay alive

Astros eliminate White Sox, face Red Sox in American League Championship Series

LOS ANGELES: Freddie Freeman crushed the winning home run as the Atlanta Braves defeated the Milwaukee Brewers 5-4 to book their place in Major League Baseball's National League Championship Series on Tuesday. After a roller-coaster battle at Truist Park, veteran first baseman Freeman slammed a two-out homer into centerfield in the bottom of the eighth inning off Brewers closer Josh Hader.



Braves to face Dodgers or Giants in NLCS

Braves reliever Will Smith then had Kolten Wong caught by catcher Travis D'Arnaud after a bunt pop out to start the ninth before striking out Willy Adames with an 82mph slider. Smith then dismissed Brewers star Christian Yelich with three strikes to spark wild celebrations and send the Braves back to the NLCS for a second straight year. "I just tried to get a good swing on it," Freeman said afterward of his winning blast against Hader, one of the best closers in baseball who had not conceded a home run since July 28.

"There's no rhyme or reason to it," Freeman said. "I was feeling good all game, worked on some stuff before the game and it worked out." The Braves will face either the San Francisco Giants or the Los Angeles Dodgers for a place in the World Series.



ATLANTA: The Atlanta Braves pose for a photo after defeating the Milwaukee Brewers 5-4 in game four of the National League Division Series at Truist Park on Tuesday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

Dodgers force decider

The Dodgers forced a decisive game five in San Francisco on Thursday after Mookie Betts and Will Smith homered to set up a series-levelling 7-2 victory at Dodger Stadium on Tuesday. The Dodgers bats had been scoreless in a 1-0 defeat in game three on Monday, but came alive in game four.

Trea Turner and Chris Taylor got early hits to put the Dodgers 2-0 ahead before Betts drilled a two-run shot off Jarlin Garcia in the bottom of the fourth for a 4-0 lead. The Giants pulled one back when Darin Ruf ground out to score Evan Longoria in the top of the fifth, but Betts' sacfly allowed Bellinger to come home in the fifth inning to make it 5-1.

After the Giants closed to 5-2 in the eighth, Dodgers catcher Smith made the game safe with deep fly ball to center field to seal victory. Dodgers ace Walker Buehler, coming off short rest, bottled up the Giants offense early on, striking out four in 4.1 innings. "I felt great, probably the best the second half of the year," Buehler said afterwards. "We'll see how I feel tomorrow, but tonight I felt pretty good."

In other playoff games Tuesday, Jose Altuve blasted a three-run home run as the Houston Astros routed the Chicago White Sox 10-1 on Tuesday to reach the American League Championship Series for a fifth straight season.

The game four win sealed a 3-1 series victory and sends the Astros into a best-of-seven ALCS against the Boston Red Sox, with game one set for Friday. It is repeat of the 2018 ALCS where the Red Sox won 4-1 before going on to win the World Series.

In a game four postponed from Monday due to bad weather, Gavin Sheets raised hopes for the White Sox in the bottom of the second inning, lashing a home run into center-field off Houston ace Lance McCullers to put the hosts 1-0 up. But the Astros took the lead at the top of the third after Carlos Correa doubled into left field to score Jose Altuve and Alex Bregman to make it 2-1 and the visitors never looked back.

Martin Maldonado, Bregman and Michael Brantley all kept the scoreboard ticking over before Altuve pounded a fly ball into the left field stands to score Kyle Tucker and Chas McCormick to complete the scoring. Astros starter McCullers meanwhile struck out five through four innings with the only blemish Sheets' early home run. — AFP

Toyota celebrates sixth win in WRC season at Rally Finland

JYVASKYLA: The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) recently achieved Toyota's sixth win during the 2021 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) at Rally Finland, thanks to an outstanding performance from Elfyn Evans and his co-driver Scott Martin in the No 33 Toyota Yaris WRC. The duo is now the only crew who can challenge teammates Sebastian Ogier and Julien Ingrassia in the battle for the championship with two rounds remaining, meaning a Toyota driver is now guaranteed to win the title for the third year in a row. The team has also taken a step closer to clinching the manufacturers' championship for Toyota.

In the first Rally Finland to be held for over two years, the team faced tough competition on the high-speed gravel roads. Evans, in the No 33 Toyota Yaris WRC, was GR's best-placed driver at the end of the opening day in third overall, having produced a strong performance despite running second on the road. On the second day, he surged into the lead with four stage

wins out of four and took an advantage of 9.1 seconds into the third and final day where he sealed the win in style with the fastest time in the rally-ending Power Stage, claiming the maximum five bonus points.

The result means that the Toyota Yaris WRC - built in the rally's home city of Jyväskylä - maintains its unbeaten record on its home roads since its debut in 2017. It is the vehicle's 25th WRC victory in total and the 200th WRC podium for Toyota, becoming only the third manufacturer to reach the achievement. With his second win of the season, Evans has reduced the gap with championship leader Ogier to 24 points. In the manufacturers' championship, Toyota's lead has increased to 61 points. Rally de Espana, set to be held in Salou in the south of Barcelona from 14-17 October, will be the penultimate round of the season. The event is returning to the calendar after a year away and will be held on fast and smooth asphalt roads, after several years as a mixed-surface challenge.



Morgan, Kohli target T20 World Cup title legacy

DUBAI: Five years after losing a heart-stopping T20 World Cup final to the West Indies, Eoin Morgan's England start as narrow favorites in their bid to become double world champions despite the absence of Ben Stokes. Not far behind though are Virat Kohli's India, an ever-lethal West Indies and World Test champions New Zealand — not to mention South Africa, Australia, former winners Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and fairytale outsiders Afghanistan.

Postponed and moved twice because of the pandemic, the tournament's seventh edition kicks off on October 17 with Oman — joint hosts with the United Arab Emirates — taking on Papua New Guinea in a first qualifying round. The top nations will join the event — played in stadiums 70-percent full — on October 23 with Australia and South Africa playing the opener of the Super 12 stage and England up against holders West Indies. England, ranked as the world number one nation in T20 cricket, beat New Zealand to win the 50-over title at Lord's in 2019 and victory in the shortest format's showpiece event will further

cement their white-ball dominance.

Morgan's team will, however, be without Stokes and Jofra Archer, who played a key part in their one-day World Cup triumph, but vice-captain Jos Buttler insists the team is "certainly one of the favorite teams." "I know we are missing Ben and Jofra, who are two superstars of the game, but I still look down that list and see some real match-winners in our side."

War horses

England had to defend 19 runs in the last over of the 2016 final at Kolkata's Eden Gardens but Carlos Brathwaite hit Stokes for four straight sixes, giving the Caribbeans their second world T20 title. Many of that winning team will be back, led by Kieron Pollard and old war horses Dwayne Bravo, 38, and 42-year-old Chris Gayle. Asian giants India will begin their campaign against arch rivals Pakistan on October 24 with Kohli looking to go out with a bang before stepping down as captain of the T20 side after the tournament. Kohli will look to repeat India's triumph in the inaugural tournament in 2007 with the then skipper MS Dhoni joining the team as mentor.

Swashbuckling opener Rohit Sharma is widely tipped to be Kohli's successor and will be key to the team's chances along with yorker king Jasprit Bumrah. KL Rahul, meanwhile, hit the most sixes — 30 — in the Indian Premier League, which wraps up just before the T20 World Cup and which has allowed many stars the chance to get used to the UAE pitches.



LAS VEGAS: Robin Lehner #90 of the Vegas Golden Knights defends the net against Alex Wennberg #21 of the Seattle Kraken in the first period of the Kraken's inaugural regular-season game at T-Mobile Arena on Tuesday in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Knights spoil Seattle debut, Donato scores first Kraken goal

LOS ANGELES: The Seattle Kraken embarked on their first season in the National Hockey League on Tuesday, losing a hard-fought contest 4-3 to the Vegas Golden Knights, the second youngest team after joining the league four years ago. The Kraken stumbled out of the gate Tuesday giving up the first three goals of the game but then clawed their way back to tie it before Vegas' Chandler Stephenson scored the go-ahead goal on a controversial play in the third period.

Despite the one-goal loss, Seattle sent a message to the rest of the NHL that they expect to be competitive. The Kraken contest was one of two NHL games on tap on the opening night of the 2021-22 season. In the other game, the Pittsburgh Penguins put a damper on the Tampa Bay's Stanley Cup festivities by routing the Lightning 6-2. When it came to brand new teams in the NHL, losing used to be the norm. That is until the Golden Knights rewrote the playbook for expansion teams and made it all the way to the Stanley Cup finals in their inaugural 2017-18 season. The Kraken are the

NHL's 32nd team and will compete in the Pacific Division. They play their first five games on the road before hosting the Vancouver Canucks in their first home game on October 23. Ryan Donato scored the first goal in Kraken history halfway through the second period from directly in front of the Vegas net. Donato took a couple of swipes at a loose puck, eventually jamming it past Golden Knights goaltender Robin Lehner.

That sparked a rally as Jared McCann scored 72 seconds later to cut the Vegas lead to 3-2. Morgan Geekie tied it 3-3 with a high sharp angle shot in the third period, setting the stage for Stephenson's controversial winner with 11:27 left in the third. Stephenson skated around a Kraken defender then cut to the net allowing the pass across from a teammate to deflect off the outside of his skate and in. The play went to video review which showed Stephenson pushed the puck in with the outside of his skate but didn't deliberately kick it.

In Tampa, Danton Heinen and Brian Boyle scored second-period goals for the Penguins, who had a dozen players record at least one point. Pittsburgh beat the defending Stanley Cup champion Lightning despite playing without all-stars Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin. Standout Tampa goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy allowed three goals on 32 shots, while Penguin netminder Tristan Jarry made 26 saves. Tampa Bay got third period goals from Anthony Cirelli and Alex Killorn as the Lightning lost for the first time in eight season openers. — AFP

'Six, seven contenders'

Trans-Tasman neighbors New Zealand, led by Kane Williamson, will also be eyeing two successive world crowns after they won the inaugural Test championship, beating India in the final in June. "We're in a tough pool, I genuinely think there are six, seven teams that could win this tournament and I guess that's good for world cricket as well," said Kiwi coach Gary Stead.

New Zealand are clubbed with India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in Group 1. England, Australia, South Africa and West Indies make up Group 2. South Africa and former champions Pakistan remain underdogs while Sri Lanka and Bangladesh need to fight it out with associate nations to join the heavyweights in the Super 12s. A few weeks after the country's takeover by the Taliban, the dream winners would be outsiders Afghanistan, all of whose players are based abroad. Their South African coach Lance Klusener recently boasted of his team's "best spin attack in the world" comprising Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi. The tournament was originally meant to take place in Australia at the end of 2020 but was called off because of the pandemic. Then it was slated to happen in India and was finally moved to the Gulf, but with the Indian cricket board, the BCCI, still hosts. The matches will be held across four venues — the Dubai International Stadium, the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Stadium, and the Oman Cricket Academy Ground — with the final scheduled for Dubai on November 14. — AFP



KOLKATA: In this file photo taken on April 03, 2016 England's captain Eoin Morgan walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal during the World T20 cricket tournament final match between England and West Indies at The Eden Gardens Cricket Stadium in Kolkata. — AFP