The Peninsula Local focus, Global vision
Sport
TUESDAY 21 DECEMBER 2021





Nadal tests positive for COVID-19 after Abu Dhabi comeback

As a result of the situation I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyse my options depending on my evolution. I will keep you informed of any decisions about my future tournaments.

Rafael Nadal

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LA LIGA: Villarreal vs Alavés, Sevilla vs Barcelona **SERIE A:** Udinese vs Salernitana, Genoa vs Atalanta, Juventus vs Cagliari

Qatar will stage the greatest FIFA World Cup ever: AFC President

AGENCIES – DOHA

The President of the Asian Football Federation Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa says he believes Qatar's staging of the Arab Cup over the past two weeks has proved its capacity to stage "the greatest-ever FIFA World Cup" later next year.

African champions Algeria beat Tunisia in the final in Doha on Saturday at Al Bayt stadium, which will host the opening match of the World Cup next November. Qatar's own national team finished third after beating Egypt on penalties.

The Arab Cup was revived, after the scrapping of the Confederations Cup, as a final World Cup test event and used six of the stadia involved. This was the first pan-Arab tournament to be held under the FIFA umbrella and took place exactly a year before Qatar will host the region's first FIFA World Cup.

The tournament featured 32 matches over 19 days and 83 goals, at an average of 2.59 per game.

It also provided Qatar with a vital opportunity to fine-tune preparations for the FIFA World Cup. Qatar is set to host the most compact version of the tournament in modern history, with all the stadiums in close proximity of central Doha and fans having the chance to attend more than one match a day during the early stages of the competition.

Shaikh Salman, who attended the final at Al Bayt Stadium on Saturday, said Qatar is more than ready to stage the greatest-ever FIFA World Cup in 2022.


Asian Football Federation President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa presents the golden glove to Algeria's Rais Mbolhi after the final of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2021 on Saturday.

"Over the last 19 days, the world has witnessed the warmth of Qatar's hospitality and the impeccable organisational expertise and efficiency led by Qatar's Supreme Committee for Legacy & Delivery executed to perfection. More importantly, the FIFA Arab Cup confirmed what we in Asia have known all along, that Qatar is more than ready to stage the greatest-ever FIFA World Cup in the tournament's proud history," Shaikh Salman said.

"On behalf of the Asian football family, I would like to congratulate the Qatar Football Association, the Qatar Supreme Committee for Legacy & Delivery and the local authorities for their outstanding efforts, particularly under these challenging circumstances, and I must reiterate the AFC's support towards our collective ambitions to showcase the true spirit of our Asian and Arab hospitality. We must also congratulate our Asian teams for their valiant and brave displays throughout the tournament.

"Qatar were extremely unfortunate to narrowly miss the final, but credit must go to all our 10 Asian participating teams and everyone working tirelessly behind the scenes for showcasing great resolve and for doing the continent proud," the AFC president added.

Meanwhile, President of the Algerian Football Federation Charaf-Eddine Amara has also praise Qatar's role in organising a highly successful tournament.

He was impressed by good organisation and the great capabilities that were put in place. His sentiments were echoed by former Kuwaiti international Bashar Abdullah.

"I have previously participated in three editions of the Arab Cup, where there was lack of interest. But this edition was different as there was immense spotlight on the event, which mainly because of Qatar's organisational capabilities and facilities," Abdullah said.

Meanwhile, Tunisian striker Seifeddine Jaziri said the that the Arab Cup was organised in a impeccable manner. Jaziri, who as the tournament top scorer with four goals, said his team had lived in a World Cup kind of atmosphere throughout tournament.

"The atmosphere was special during the tournament and the level we presented, we hope it will motivate us to do well in future and we qualify for the World Cup finals in Qatar 2022," Jaziri said.

More than 600,000 tickets were sold for the 16-team Arab Cup, including a Qatari-record 63,439 crowd when the hosts played fierce rivals the United Arab Emirates in the quarter-finals.


Algerian players celebrate with fans.




Algerian fans celebrate and welcome the national team as they arrive in a bus after their FIFA Arab Cup win, in Algiers.

PL set to plough through festive schedule despite COVID-19 surge

REUTERS – LONDON

Premier League clubs have agreed to continue playing games scheduled over the festive period despite several fixtures being postponed due to a surge in COVID-19 cases, the League announced after a meeting between all teams yesterday.

Ten Premier League games have been postponed this month due to outbreaks amid a busy schedule where teams are set to play three times between Boxing Day and Jan. 3.

Only four of this weekend's 10 fixtures were played after teams told the Premier League they were missing players due to COVID-19.

"While recognising a number of clubs are experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and challenges, it is the League's collective intention to continue the current fixture schedule where safely possible," the Premier League said.

"A range of issues were discussed at this afternoon's meeting, including the adaption of the Premier League COVID-19 postponement process in response to the impact of the Omicron variant.

The Premier League only grants a postponement if a club has fewer than 14 players available, with the board examining requests on a case-by-case basis.

England's Football Association (FA) said FA Cup replays in rounds three and four have been scrapped to help clear the fixture backlog after several postponements.



QVA hosts special event for Afghan refugees in Doha

QNA/THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The Qatar Volleyball Association (QVA) has organised a special event for Afghan refugees in Doha.

QVA President Ali bin Ghanem Al Kuwari told Qatar News Agency (QNA), said: "We seek to extend the scope of our expansion programs in spreading the game to include the Afghan refugees facilities and housing units which will help to leave tangible psychological impact on the participants and their families."

Al Kuwari indicated that the event also aimed to improve the health and safety of youth and children in Qatar through volleyball and support the social development pillar of Qatar National Vision 2030, which is in line with the goal of organizing this event.

Raja Casablanca coach braces for 'tough task' in Doha finale

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Belgian Marc Robert Wilmots, coach of the Moroccan giants Raja Casablanca has admitted the difficulty of the task awaiting his team when they face African Champions League winners Al Ahly of Egypt in the CAF Super Cup final tomorrow in Doha.

Ahead of the title clash to be held at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, Wilmots said: "We are aware of the difficulty of the task, and we appreciate the strength of the opponent, who have a history full of championship titles. But we are not afraid of them, and we have come to Doha for one goal, which is to take the Cup back to Casablanca, as Raja used to in all the finals they have fought."

He continued: "These type of matches are decided by some small details, including good psychological preparation. So we try as much as possible to avoid pressure and maintain our calm."

Wilmots took over as the head of the technical staff of Raja Casablanca last month and has been involved with the team in only three matches of the Moroccan League. His appearance in the CAF Super Cup will be the first time with the Moroccan team.

Raja Casablanca will enter the continental match as champions of Confederation Cup, against Al Ahly – holders of African Champions League title the last two editions.

Meanwhile, Al Ahly centre-back, Rami Rabia, has said that the team is fully prepared and focused ahead of the final.


Raja Casablanca players during a training session in Doha, yesterday.

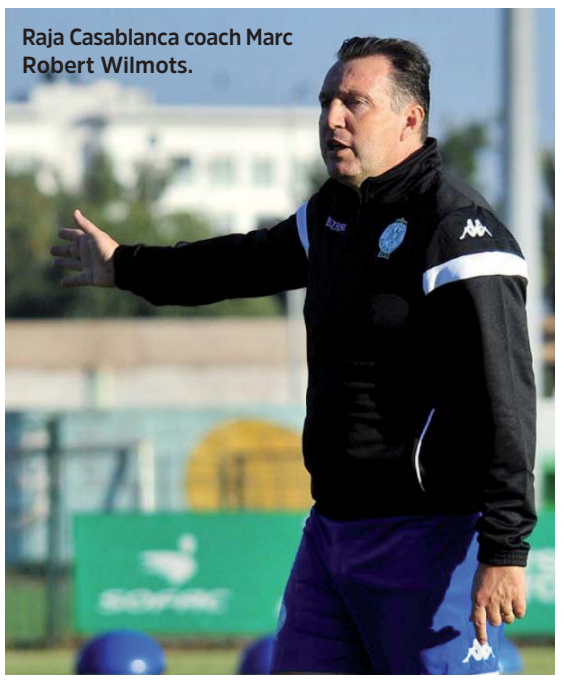
Following a remarkable start to the season, which saw Al Ahly sit top of their domestic League with a perfect record, the club decided to organise two friendlies in preparations for the game.

Their first game saw them draw 1-1 with El Gaish, before hosting Smouha, who they had beaten 4-1 in their last official game before the Egyptian Premier League was put on pause due to the FIFA Arab Cup.

Rabia understands the difficulty of the challenge ahead of them but says they are prepared for the clash.

"It will be a difficult match because Raja is a strong team with a great history in African competitions. But we are very focused on the match," he told Al Ahly's media.

"Having the Al Ahly fans in the stands will motivate the players. The team seeks to win all the trophies in order to make them happy," he added.


Raja Casablanca coach Marc Robert Wilmots.

Xavi thinks Sevilla should serve as example to Barcelona

REUTERS – BARCELONA

Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez wants his team to be aggressive and fearless as they face second placed Sevilla in LaLiga on Tuesday, while also showing great respect and admiration for their rivals.

"They are doing things very well," Xavi told a news conference on Monday.

"You can look at Bayern (Munich), they are playing great, but I what I like about Sevilla is how they work, their coach (Julen Lopetegui) is one of the best, they also have Monchi (sports director). Sevilla should be an example for us."

In a match postponed from week four, Barcelona will have a difficult task to stop a Sevilla side who are in great form, having lost only two league games so far this season. Their 2-1 win over Atletico Madrid on Sunday kept them within six points of LaLiga leaders Real Madrid with one game in hand.

"We have to be daring to beat teams like Sevilla. We were daring against Bayern and lost 3-0 because of details. We won't change that, it's in our identity to be aggressive but Sevilla is also like that. It will be a extraordinary match on Tuesday," Xavi said.

Barcelona are seventh in the standings, 16 points behind Real Madrid. However, Sevilla manager Julen Lopetegui said that he is seeing progression at the Nou Camp since the arrival of Xavi a month ago.

"We had a tough game on Saturday and now will have a tougher one against a much improved rival," Lopetegui told a news conference on Monday. "What I see is one of the best Barcelona in a long time. They are developing types of players that are difficult to see, young and talented, plus they have Ousmane Dembele back from injury.

"I expect a very powerful, very complex Barcelona, with the clear touch that Xavi has given to them."



Xavi Hernandez

Biennial World Cup would raise extra $4.4bn, FIFA tells delegates

REUTERS – LONDON



International football leaders were told by FIFA yesterday that a switch to a biennial World Cup would create an extra $4.4 billion in revenues for the world body.

FIFA is holding a 'global summit' of leaders of national football federations to discuss their proposal to increase the frequency of the World Cup from every four years to every two.

The financial data forms part of an overall feasibility study which FIFA is presenting yesterday. No vote is planned from the event which forms part of FIFA's consultation process.

The upbeat reports are in marked contrast to analysis put forward by critics of the proposals.

There has been opposition from European clubs, the top leagues and European governing body UEFA whose President Aleksander Ceferin has threatened to boycott any additional tournament.

Last month, a report commissioned by the World Leagues Forum said the FIFA proposal, allied with changes to the Club World Cup could cost the big domestic soccer leagues and UEFA around €8bn ($9bn) per season in lost TV rights and match day and commercial agreements.

UEFA, on Friday, published a report they had commissioned from consultancy firm Oliver & Ohlbaum which warned that said the changes to the international calendar would impact see revenues for European national federations drop between €2.5-3bn ($3.38bn) over a four year cycle.

The delegates to yesterday's summit were told that a report by Italian company Open Economics had found that domestic leagues and UEFA competitions do not have their revenues hurt by national team and international club competition.

The report, some of which has been seen by *Reuters*, said that revenue of national leagues had increased in years when a major international tournament was held.

Professor Pasquale Lucio Scandizzo, of OpenEconomics told the delegates that the plan "promises significant and positive net macroeconomic benefits, distributed over time and space".

A report from Nielsen predicted that the plan would see revenues rise from an expected $7bn - for a 48 tournament - to $11.4bn over a four year cycle thanks to increased ticket receipts and media rights and sponsorship revenues.

FIFA officials told the delegates that $3.5bn of the extra revenue would go to a new 'Member Association Solidarity Fund' with each national federation allocated around $16m in a four year period, while extra funds would also be given to the FIFA Forward Program for development projects.

FIFA said that the funds would help reduce the gap in revenues between the developed and less developed football markets.

Any vote on the plans would likely involve all the 211 national associations.

Along with UEFA, South American confederation CONMEBOL has opposed the proposal.

Earlier this month, Victor Montagliani, president of North and Central American and Caribbean confederation CONCACAF, told Reuters that a compromise solution could be for an additional tournament to be a revamped version of the old Confederations Cup rather than a full World Cup with a separate qualifying process.

Holders PSG reach French Cup last 32

REUTERS – PARIS



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring his first goal.

Holders Paris Saint-Germain strolled into the last 32 of the French Cup with a no-nonsense 3-0 win at amateur side Entente Feignies-Aulnoye as two Ligue 1 sides were knocked out on Sunday.

Kylian Mbappe and Mauro Icardi both netted first-half penalties before the France forward completed a double in the second half as the Ligue 1 leaders eased past a team playing in the French fifth tier.

Mbappe converted a penalty in the 16th minute after being brought down in the area and Icardi also scored from the spot following another foul on Mbappe.

Mbappe, the only member of PSG's formidable front three to start, with Neymar injured and Lionel Messi being rested, added the third six minutes into the second half after latching onto a cross from Colin Dagba. Angers crashed out with a 2-0 defeat at fifth division side Linas Montlhery, who prevailed thanks to a Pascal Leno first-half double.

Leno headed the first in the ninth minute and doubled the advantage at the end of a counter attack 15 minutes later. Fourth division team Bergerac also sent a top-flight side packing when they eliminated Metz 5-4 on penalties after a goalless draw.

Olympique de Marseille survived a scare at home against fifth division side Le Cannet Rocheville, who opened the scoring in the first half, before Arkadiusz Milik's hat-trick led the Ligue 1 club to a 4-1 win. Monaco, St Etienne, Girondins de Bordeaux and RC Lens also went through, joining 2019 winners Stade Rennais, who made it into the last 32 on Saturday.

On Friday, the Paris FC v Olympique Lyonnais match was abandoned following crowd trouble at halftime.

The French federation said it would make "quick decisions" on the tie, which could see Lyon, whose fans invaded the pitch, eliminated.

Woods and son ride birdie blitz to finish second at PNC Championship

REUTERS – ORLANDO

Tiger Woods and his 12-year-old son Charlie reeled off 11 straight birdies to card a final round 57 and finish in second place at the PNC Championship on Sunday, two shots behind winners John Daly and his son John Daly Jr.

Tiger more than delivered in his highly-anticipated return to competitive golf after a February car accident nearly cost him his leg, and was all smiles but fatigued after going bogey-free over the two-day, non-PGA Tour level event.

"I'm happy and thankful that I'm able to do this. What a blast it was," said Woods, who used a cart to get around the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando.

"I still have my old leg, which was questionable for a while, and it's functioning. I'm just really tired. I'm not used to this. I think this might be my fifth round of golf this year," he said.

"I'm a little worn out, but it was nice to have a cart." While Tiger was the main attraction, his son Charlie stole the show, displaying his father's unflappable calmness while delivering accurate drives and timely putts on a sunny day in central Florida.

Team Woods, clad in Tiger's trademark Sunday red shirts, started the day three shots off the pace but moved into a share of the lead after a birdie-birdie-eagle start at 14-under par.

After three consecutive pars, Tiger landed an approach shot close to the hole on the seventh for a tap-in and Charlie drained long putts on eight and nine to keep the momentum going.

Tiger drove the ball too long on the par-three 12th but Charlie was there to pick him up as his drive landed on the green and rolled back towards the hole. Tiger quickly returned the favour by sinking the birdie putt after Charlie missed his attempt. The pair birdied every hole on the back nine with the exception of 18, where they were forced to settle for par.

The event featured 19 father-son pairs and the father-daughter team of Nelly Korda and her dad Petr.

Justin Thomas and his father Mike, the tournament's defending champions, finished tied for third alongside Stewart and Reagan Cink.

Honda celebrate incredible racing season

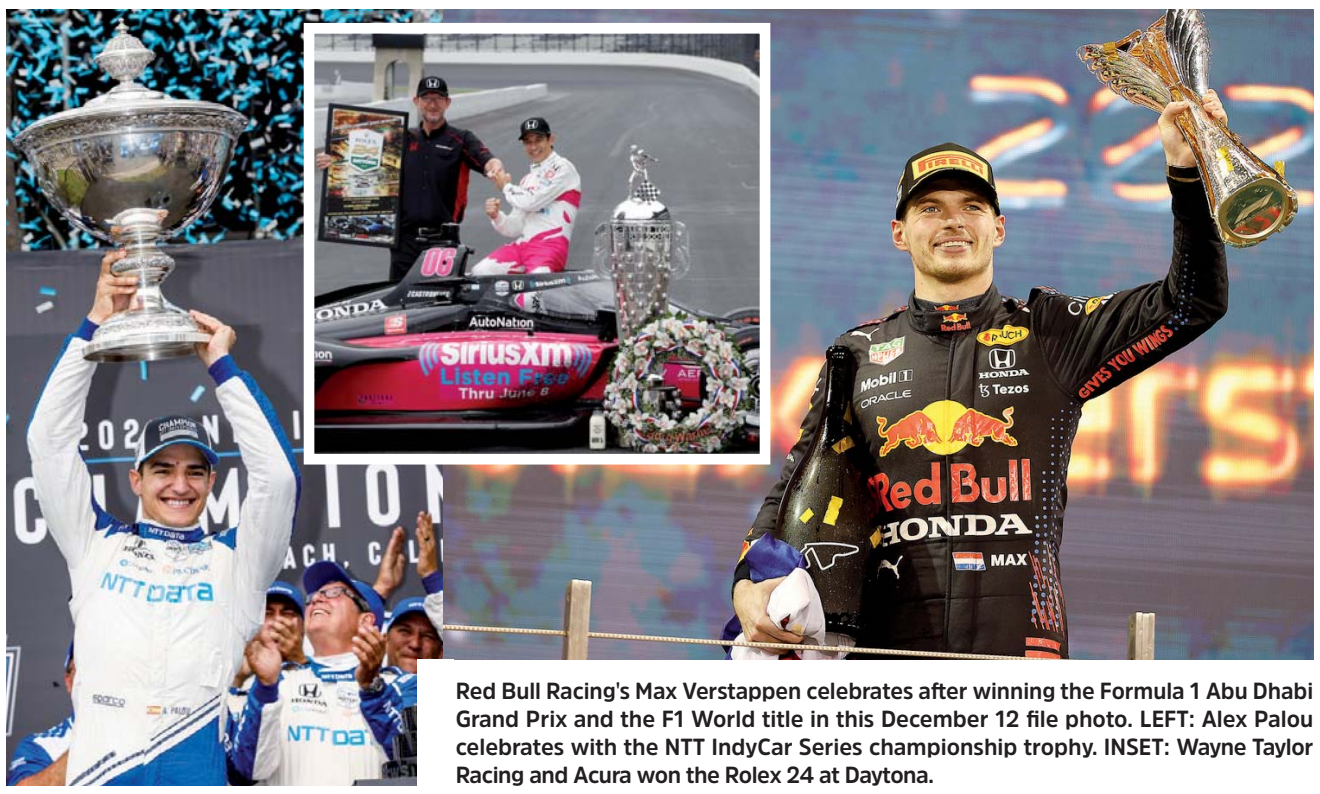
THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Honda celebrate their most successful season of racing worldwide, highlighted by its drivers claiming both the FIA Formula One and NTT INDYCAR Series championships.

This marks the first time Honda-powered drivers have won these titles in the same season – and the first time for any racing engine firm in nearly 40 years.

The titles won by Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen in Formula One and Chip Ganassi Racing's Alex Palou in INDYCAR competition are just two of the championships and major race victories recorded by Honda this year, including:

- Honda's 10th INDYCAR Manufacturers' Championship, the fourth consecutive title for the company
- Honda's 14th Indianapolis 500 win, and a record-tying fourth Indy victory, for Meyer Shank Racing's Helio Castroneves; with Chip Ganassi Racing's Scott Dixon claiming pole
- Manufacturer, Driver and Team IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup championship for Acura, Wayne Taylor Racing and drivers Filipe Albuquerque, Ricky Taylor and Alexander Rossi
- Eleven wins in Formula One competition, including the prestigious Grand Prix of Monaco for eventual champion Verstappen
- Victory for the Honda Ridgeline Race Truck in November's Baja 1000, with drivers Jeff Proctor, Rossi, Richard Glaszczak and Steve Hengeveld
- Acura's first overall Rolex 24 at Daytona victory with Wayne Taylor Racing
- Ten INDYCAR wins in 2021, for a total of 262 victories in CART, IRL and INDYCAR competition



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen celebrates after winning the Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and the F1 World title in this December 12 file photo. LEFT: Alex Palou celebrates with the NTT IndyCar Series championship trophy. INSET: Wayne Taylor Racing and Acura won the Rolex 24 at Daytona.

"It's been an incredible season from start to finish," said David Salters, president and technical director of Honda Performance Development, the North American motorsports arm for Honda Racing and Acura Motorsports.

"We began the season with an historic win for Acura at the Rolex 24 at Daytona; and we finished it with the FIA Formula One Drivers World Championship; plus the Indianapolis 500, INDYCAR titles and Baja 1000. It's a credit to our awesome teams, brilliant drivers, magnificent HPD associates and the inspiring women and men involved in Honda's worldwide racing programs. Thank you Honda, for supporting our challenging spirit and providing joy to millions of race fans worldwide."

Racing is ingrained in the corporate culture of Honda, in a way unlike any other automotive manufacturer. A former racer himself, founder Soichiro Honda believed in competition at the highest levels as a means of improving his company, its people and products.

More than 55 years later, Honda continues to view racing as an ideal training ground for engineers and designers. The pressures of racing challenge them, forcing them to find new solutions to problems as they arise. They also demand that you be ready on time – for the new season, for qualifying, for the race. If you can't respond quickly and correctly, you'll be left behind.

Australia ace pink Test despite Buttler resistance to grab 2-0 Ashes lead

REUTERS – ADELAIDE



Australia players celebrate after taking the wicket of England's James Anderson and winning the 2nd Ashes Test in Adelaide, yesterday.

Jos Buttler's dogged resistance ended in a bizarre fashion as Australia thrashed England by 275 runs in the day-night second Test to go 2-0 up in the five-match Ashes series yesterday.

England resumed the final day on a precarious 82-4, needing 386 more runs for an improbable win or to at least bat out the last three sessions to force a draw.

They lost talismanic Ben Stokes in the first session and Chris Woakes fell after a fighting 44, which was the highest individual score in England's abject second innings batting display.

Buttler, who had a wretched time behind the wicket, dropping several catches, then produced a spectacular rearguard, spread over 207 deliveries, for an uncharacteristically dogged 26 that kept alive England's faint hopes of saving the match.

It was soon snuffed out when the batsman, retreating deep into the crease to work a Jhye Richardson delivery on the off-side, trod on his own stumps.

For Australia, Richardson claimed 5-42 in a magnificent display of pace bowling.

"They showed some great resilience today," Australia's stand-in captain Steve Smith said of their opponents.

"Jos played a really good innings, he faced over 200 balls.

"We were trying to stay as calm as we could out in the middle and just thought, a couple of good balls and a couple of wickets and we'll keep going."

Australia's Marnus Labuschagne was adjudged man-of-the-match for his 103, the only century hit by a player from either side in the match.

Australia were without regular captain Pat Cummins, who missed out for being a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case, and injured paceman Josh Hazlewood.

"We made mistakes throughout the game that we made last week, whether it be no-balls, missed chances," England captain Joe Root said.

"We just have to be better. We have to learn those lessons very quickly over the next week." Australia began with their senior bowlers, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon, who have thrived in this Test in the absence of Cummins and Hazlewood.

Ollie Pope lasted seven balls, a boundary through midwicket his sole contribution, before he nicked Starc to Smith in the slips.

Smacking his bat against his foot as he walked off, Pope has had a poor tour to date and will be worried about his place for the third Test.

Stokes was England's last major hope of salvaging a draw and his batting was restrained, a sweep to the boundary off Lyon in the 55th over a highlight.

A few minutes later though, Lyon delivered a ball that replays showed to be hitting leg stump and Stokes was gone lbw for 12 runs in 110 minutes.

Buttler smacked Richardson through point for four runs off the quick's second delivery but England highlights were otherwise sparse. While Buttler's obdurate batting took England's fight to the final session, the miracle they needed to save the match did not materialise.

The third Test begins in Melbourne on Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES

AUSTRALIA 9 for 473 dec (Labuschagne 103, Warner 95, Smith 93, Carey 51) and 9 for 230 dec (Head 51, Labuschagne 51) beat ENGLAND 236 (Malan 80, Root 62, Starc 4-37) and 192 (Richardson 5-42) by 275 runs

Never doubted win, says Smith

REUTERS – ADELAIDE

Stand-in captain Steve Smith never doubted Australia's victory in the day-night second Ashes Test against England despite Jos Buttler's dogged resistance, the 32-year-old said after putting his team 2-0 ahead in the five-match series yesterday.

Buttler, who dropped several catches behind the wicket, tried to redeem himself with 26 off 207 balls in a spectacular rearguard spread over more than four hours even though it was not enough in the end.

"I was not getting nervous just yet," said Smith, who was put in charge of the team after regular skipper Pat Cummins was ruled out hours before the match for being a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case.

"I thought Jos early on was content to stay at one end. He'd do four balls at one end and get up to the other end. When you get to that point I thought there was enough in the wicket and I was confident.

"I thought he played really well. It's not the traditional Jos we have seen in the past. His defence was really good. He gave them a bit of a shift there for a while." Smith said he only knew how as taking over the captaincy a few hours before the match began on Thursday.

"On day one, there was not a lot of nerves. I only found out about 10 or 11 a.m. I had two missed calls from Pat and a missed message from (head coach) Justin Langer..." Smith said.

"I found out the news that Pat was out for the game and I was going to be captain. It's been an enjoyable week, hopefully we can keep this momentum going." Smith complimented fast bowler Mitchell Starc and Jhye Richardson, the latter returning after two years out of Test cricket through injury.

Richardson added another dimension, Smith said.

"He's a bit more skiddy than the others. We did bowl a lot fuller than England did, Jhye is a thinker," he added.

New Zealand to return to Pakistan for 5 ODI, 5 T20 matches

AP – ISLAMABAD

New Zealand will make up for this year's abandoned tour of Pakistan by playing 10 white-ball matches in April 2023, the Pakistan Cricket Board said yesterday.

New Zealand aborted its limited-overs tour to Pakistan in September due to security fears just before the toss in the first one-day international was due to take place at Rawalpindi. England followed the New Zealand decision by also abandoning its short tour to Pakistan just before the Twenty20 World Cup in October.

New Zealand's tour in April 2023 comprises five ODIs and five Twenty20s. Dates and venues have not been determined.

The PCB also said that New Zealand will tour Pakistan in December 2022 to play two test matches as part of the World Test Championship and will also play three ODIs which will count towards qualification for the 2023 World Cup in India.

The PCB said the twin tours by New Zealand to Pakistan were finalized after successful negotiations between PCB chairman Ramiz Raja and his New Zealand Cricket counterpart, Martin Snedden.

"I am pleased with the outcomes of our discussions and negotiations, and thank Martin Snedden and his board for their understanding and support," Raja said.

NZC chief executive David White said heads of both cricket boards "had very fruitful and constructive discussions while in Dubai, further strengthening the bond between the two organizations."

Pakistan is now set to host Australia, West Indies, England and New Zealand between March 2022 and April 2023 for eight test matches, 14 ODIs and 13 Twenty20s.

International teams had mostly stayed away from Pakistan since an attack by Islamist militants on the Sri Lanka team bus in Lahore in 2009 that killed six policemen and two civilians. That forced Pakistan's national teams to play "home" matches outside the country for more than six years.

Pakistan this month swept West Indies in a three-match T20 series. A three-match ODI series between the same sides was postponed to next June due to a coronavirus outbreak on the West Indies team.

PENOMAG CLASSIFIEDS



NBA-leading Suns rout Hornets 137-106

AP – PHOENIX

In Phoenix's last game, a victory over Washington on Thursday night, the Suns had eight players score in double figures. Devin Booker returned to action Sunday night - and they had nine.

Booker scored 16 points in his return from a hamstring injury and the NBA-leading Suns set a season-scoring high in a 137-106 victory over the Charlotte Hornets on Sunday night.

After missing seven games because of a hamstring injury, Booker played 26 minutes, and sat out the fourth quarter.

The Suns never trailed, led by as many as 36 and improved to 24-5, moving a half-game ahead of Golden State.

"I learned some things from the sideline that I tried to implement today," said Booker, who was 4 of 8 from 3-point range.

The Suns made 20 of 41 3-point shots, also a season high for that category, and shot 56.8% overall.

They dominated the paint behind Deandre Ayton, who had 15 points and 15 rebounds, and Javale McGee, who led Phoenix with 19 points in 16 minutes off the bench. McGee made 9 of 10 shots.

NBA RESULTS

Timberwolves 111, Mavericks 105
Trail Blazers 105, Grizzlies 100
Pistons 100, Heat 90
Kings 121, Spurs 114

Nadal tests positive for COVID-19 after Abu Dhabi comeback

REUTERS – MADRID

Rafael Nadal said yesterday he had tested positive for COVID-19 after returning from his comeback appearance at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition event in Abu Dhabi last week.

The 20-times Grand Slam champion and former world number one said he was having some "unpleasant moments" but was hoping to feel better soon and would keep people informed about his plans over future tournaments.

The positive test casts further doubt on whether the 35-year-old participates in next month's Australian Open -- a tournament he has won once and finished runner-up four times -- having already said he could not guarantee he would play.

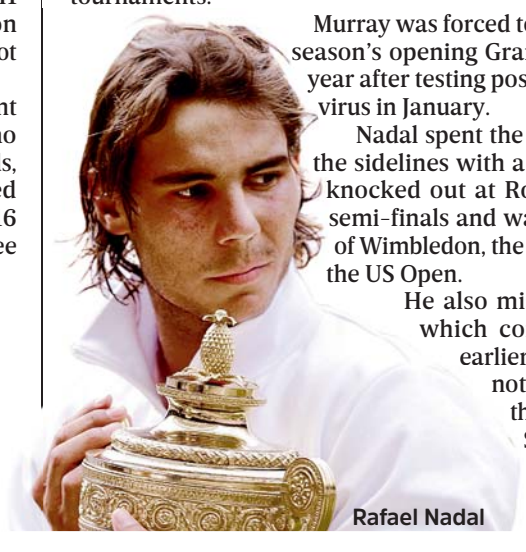
"I wanted to announce that on my return home after playing the Abu Dhabi tournament, I have tested positive for COVID in the PCR test that has been performed on me when I arrived in Spain," Nadal wrote on Twitter.

Nadal said he had tested negative at all times when he was in Kuwait and Abu Dhabi, and had last tested negative on Friday last week.

The Spaniard's comeback from injury at the exhibition event -- his first tournament appearance since the Citi Open in Washington in August -- ended in two defeats by Andy Murray and Denis Shapovalov.

"I am having some unpleasant moments but I hope that I will improve little by little. I am now homebound and have reported the result to those who have been in contact with me," he wrote.

"As a result of the situation I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyse my options depending on my evolution. I will keep you informed of any decisions about my future tournaments."



Rafael Nadal

Murray was forced to withdraw from the season's opening Grand Slam earlier this year after testing positive for the coronavirus in January.

Nadal spent the last four months on the sidelines with a foot injury. He was knocked out at Roland Garros in the semi-finals and was forced to pull out of Wimbledon, the Tokyo Olympics and the US Open.

He also missed the Davis Cup which concluded in Madrid earlier this month and will not feature for Spain at the Jan. 1-9 ATP Cup in Sydney.

The Australian Open begins on Jan. 17.