

## Falcons use table tennis to stay loose ahead of Super Bowl

## Pats' Brady hungry for much more, with no 'end in sight'

HOUSTON, Feb 1, (RTRS): New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady had some bad news for the National Football League's 31 other teams as one of the most prolific passers of all-time said he has no plans to hang up his cleats anytime soon.

## FOOTBALL

Brady, who turns 40 in August, is the NFL's oldest starting quarterback and will play in a record seventh Super Bowl when the Patriots face the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday.

But despite a career that has already assured him a place in the Pro Football Hall of Fame when he becomes eligible, Brady is happy to keep chasing more records and Super Bowl rings.

"Hopefully I can keep going. I don't see any end in sight," Brady told reporters on Monday when he met with the media for the first time ahead of Sunday's game.

A victory against the Falcons would give Brady a quarterback record fifth Super Bowl and tie him with retired



New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick and Tom Brady are introduced during opening night for the NFL Super Bowl 51 football game at Minute Maid Park on Jan 30, 2017 in Houston. (AP)

linebacker Charles Haley as the only players to win five NFL championships.

Before the 2015 season, Brady, who was 38 at the time, said he felt like he had another seven or eight years left in

## Houston's downtown revamped in time for Super Bowl

HOUSTON, Feb 1, (RTRS): When Houston last hosted the Super Bowl in 2004, the oil city's sleepy downtown lacked the sizzle befitting the big game — and that prompted civic leaders to act.

This time, fans arriving for Sunday's American professional football championship will discover a revamped downtown district with twice as many residents, a renovated convention area and a plethora of food and entertainment offerings.

the NFL. He got the Patriots one win away from a Super Bowl berth that season and returned in 2016 to once again play at an elite level.

"(I'll play for) as long as I'm willing to make the commitment to taking good care of myself," said Brady. "I got a good routine. It has gotten better as the years have gone on."

"It's nice to feel better as the season goes. To be an older player and have the mental experience and then to also

The Texas megacity near the Gulf Coast, with a population of more than 6 million that makes it the United States' fifth-biggest metropolitan area, is best known as a hub of the US petroleum industry and for NASA's famed Mission Control Center.

But those were not sufficient draws for travelers.

"We were losing convention business," said Peter McStravick, who oversaw the downtown revitalization.

feel great physically, I think it's a great benefit for me."

The Atlanta Falcons, preparing to battle the New England Patriots in Sunday's Super Bowl, brought along another game to help keep themselves loose ahead of the title clash.

The Falcons have imported their table tennis craze to Houston, a pastime that has helped the players bond, while stoking their competitive drive.

Quarterback Matt Ryan, the leading

"Two of the reasons included a lack of hotel rooms within walking distance (of the convention center) and a lack of destination appeal," said McStravick, who is chief development officer of Houston First, a local government corporation.

City planners and business owners are eager to show off the transformation dubbed Avenida Houston — Spanish for "Houston Avenue" — which was led by groups such as Houston First.

candidate for National Football League MVP honours, said on Tuesday that after going through some game films the players would have the rest of the day free for relaxation — and some table tennis.

"We've got a pretty good setup with our game room," Ryan told reporters. "There's some ping pong going on, which you guys who have been in the locker room know that's a big thing for us at (team complex in) Flowerly

Branch. And so, it has been fun."

"I brought my paddle. It gets pretty intense. We had some fun with that last night after Media Night. We played a little bit of ping pong and had a good time."

As part of an offseason redesign, the Falcons replaced a row of lockers in the middle of the room with a table tennis table and it became such a hit with players that they added another two and now take the game on the road.

Defensive tackle Grady Jarrett said head coach Dan Quinn loves to encourage competition.

"That's just another fun thing to bring us closer together, and we have fun with it," said Jarrett. "When it's time to work, we work. When it's to compete in other things, we do that too."

"Everything is about competition, what we do. It's like you got competitors in the locker room, so in between meetings just do a little thing of competition. You know that's Coach Q's thing — everything about competing. So it's fun."

## Women line-up raises eyebrows

## Greatest ever RAK Half threatens record

DUBAI, Feb 1: The intense spotlight of the global road running community, falls on the 11th edition of the RAK Half Marathon on Feb 10, where perhaps the greatest combined day of men's and women's half marathon racing in history beckons. Arguably the strongest ever women's half marathon field has been gathered and the Men's field too just oozes class, with twelve men able to boast best marks below the hour.

However, it might well be the women's line-up that raises eyebrows — and race standards — the highest, at this notoriously fast race in the UAE's northernmost emirate, just one hour's drive from Dubai, which increasingly, punches above its weight in every sector. Rio Olympic Marathon Champion Jemima Sumgong, a mere sixth here a year ago, prior to her London & Olympic victories, will find it no easier this time round.

She'll be severely tested by three-time Olympic champion Tirunesh Dibaba, like Sumgong London Marathon bound, and considered by many as the greatest female distance runner in history. Relatively inexperienced at this distance, Dibaba will be making her half marathon debut on a record-eligible course, but the chances are she'll find it equally hard to notch up another win, such is the calibre of the assembled field.

## MARATHON

Although not yet an Olympic Champion, reigning IAAF World Half Marathon Champion Peres Jepchirchir returns too, looking to pick up in 2017 where she left off, after her astonishing streak from last year, but even she was only fourth at RAK 2016, six weeks before storming to the world title in Cardiff.

Casting a shadow over them all, but another athlete without any Olympic hardware, is the returning course record holder and three-time New York Marathon champion Mary Keitany, who set a world record here in 2011 of 65:50.

She is also intensely keen to prove in 2017 that her being left off the Kenyan Olympic marathon squad for Rio was an error and uses this race yet again as preparation for her London Marathon challenge.

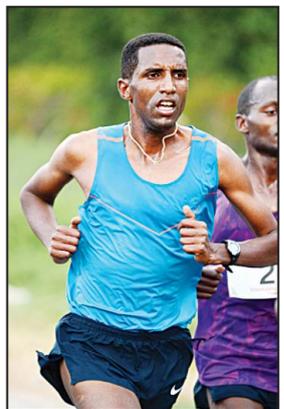
Eight women in the line-up have run under 68 minutes, four of them under 67 minutes and for the first time this year, the women will be highlighted by having their own start, prior to the elite men and masses. Last year Sumgong's 66:58 was a personal best, but she was nowhere near the rostrum.

Indeed, the first 11 home were a long way under 70 minutes, with Cynthia Limo leading them home in 66:04, the second fastest time of 2016.

When one considers that 19 of the fastest 50 women's times in history have been run on this route, the chances of another super-fast in-depth finish, are very high.

For the men, Patrick Makau's 58:52 race record of 2009 could be under serious threat, with two of the pacemakers being sub-60 minute performers themselves and so well capable of assisting with a fast pace through to the latter stages. Past winners such as Sammy Wanjiru and Geoffrey Kaworor have enhanced the event's reputation as one of the toughest wins to chalk up and this year will be no different.

Stanley Biwott returns after his second last year, itself ten weeks before his runner-up finish at the London Marathon. Having placed 2nd in



A file photo of Amlosom Nguse at RAK 2016

## First-of-its-kind off-road racing event

## Sharjah Sports Desert Fest 2017 'roars' into life today

SHARJAH, Feb 1: Sharjah's Al Bayader Desert is set to welcome thousands of visitors and petrol heads who will participate in the much-awaited first Sharjah Sports Desert Festival (SSDF 2017), which commences today (Thursday).

Held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Bin Sultan Al-Qasimi, Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, the two-day event aims to attract desert and safari motorsport enthusiasts from the UAE and beyond to enjoy the first-of-its-kind desert off-roading experience in Sharjah.

Organised by Sharjah Sports Channel, a subsidiary of Sharjah Media Corporation (SMC), SSDF 2017 will feature an array of events and competitions, a number of which have been formulated for professional contestants and others for non-competing spectators, with the aim of offering all family members an unforgettable experience.

Themed 'Become a Desert Hero,' SSDF 2017 contestants will participate in three vehicle classes. Entrants in the Buggy Quad Bikes category and in the MX1 and MX2 vehicle category will compete in 'Enduro Knockout' challenges, while participants in the Side X Side vehicle category will compete in a 'Time Trail' challenge. There will also be a number of off-road motorcycle races.

For non-competing spectators, SSDF 2017 offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy the desert ambiance of Al Badayer, where they can make the most of a variety of activities, including a safari tour from Al Badayer desert to Mleiha in Sharjah. Visitors can also participate in a number of desert sports in safety and comfort.

Designed to be an all-inclusive affair, SSDF 2017 has an array of entertainment offerings for younger members of the family, with its Kids Zone hosting sand painting, balloon bending and white henna painting. A 'Flames of Wonder' show will be also performed twice a day by expert pyro technicians.

A key aspect of SSDF 2017 sees it as a platform for prominent brands specialising in desert sports in the UAE. The event is being supported by Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), the in-

dependent government entity that is committed to establishing Sharjah as an investment, tourist and business destination, as well as developing the emirate's cultural heritage and natural landscapes.

Rashid Al-Obed, Director of Sharjah Sports Channel, said: "We have worked extremely hard over the past few weeks to put everything in place and to finalise all the arrangements for what will be a spectacular festival. We are proud to announce that the venue ready for SSDF 2017 to get underway. The event offers the perfect opportunity for off-road and desert racing enthusiasts to showcase their skills in front of a large audience."

With a racetrack designed by Emirati motocross star Mohammed Al-Balooshi, SSDF 2017 is the first-of-its-kind desert off-roading experience in Sharjah and the Northern Emirates. The MX rally champion was crowned Tunisia Arab Champion for the second year in a row in 2010 and also led the Red Bull 'Under My Wings' project in the UAE. Al-Balooshi, who was the first Emirati to participate in the Dakar Rally, will be monitoring the racing events to ensure that the contestants adhere to the festival's rules and regulations. Sharjah Sports Channel is giving exclusive broadcast coverage of the two-day event to allow enthusiastic armchair spectators to watch it live at home.

Image of the activities set to take place during the Sharjah Sports Desert Festival 2017

Kenneth Keter (KEN), 59:48; Pace, Geoffrey Yegon (KEN), 59:44; Pace, John Maina Ndirangu (KEN).

**Elite Women**

1. Mary Keitany (KEN), 65:50 CR;
2. Peres Jepchirchir (KEN), 66:39;
3. Jemima Sumgong, 66:58;
4. Tirunesh Dibaba (ETH), 66:56;
5. Belaynesh Dilela (ETH), 67:27;
6. Netsanet Gudeta (ETH), 67:31;
7. Helah Kiprop (KEN), 67:39;
8. Veronich Niya-rui (KEN), 67:58;
9. Rose Chelimo (BRN), 68:08;
10. Joyciline Jepkosgei (KEN), 69:07;
11. Gesa-Felicitas Krause (GER), Debut;
12. Etagegn Woldu (ETH), Debut;
13. Timothy Kimeli; Pace, Geoffrey Kipyego.



Image of the activities set to take place during the Sharjah Sports Desert Festival 2017

Kenneth Keter (KEN), 59:48; Pace, Geoffrey Yegon (KEN), 59:44; Pace, John Maina Ndirangu (KEN).

**Elite Women**

1. Mary Keitany (KEN), 65:50 CR;
2. Peres Jepchirchir (KEN), 66:39;
3. Jemima Sumgong, 66:58;
4. Tirunesh Dibaba (ETH), 66:56;
5. Belaynesh Dilela (ETH), 67:27;
6. Netsanet Gudeta (ETH), 67:31;
7. Helah Kiprop (KEN), 67:39;
8. Veronich Niya-rui (KEN), 67:58;
9. Rose Chelimo (BRN), 68:08;
10. Joyciline Jepkosgei (KEN), 69:07;
11. Gesa-Felicitas Krause (GER), Debut;
12. Etagegn Woldu (ETH), Debut;
13. Timothy Kimeli; Pace, Geoffrey Kipyego.

## NBA Results/Standings

| WASHINGTON, Feb 1, (RTRS): Results and standings from the NBA games on Tuesday. |     |           |      |                                       |               |               |     |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |
|---|-----|-----------|------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----|------------|--------|--------------|----|---------|------|------------------|-----|
| LA Lakers   | 120 | Denver    | 116  | Houston                               | 105           | Sacramento    | 103 | Washington | 117    | NY Knicks    | 81 | Toronto | 108  | New Orleans (OT) | 106 |
| Portland  | 115 | Charlotte | 98   | San Antonio                           | 108           | Oklahoma City | 94  |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |
| Eastern Conference Atlantic Division  |     |           |      | Western Conference Northwest Division |               |               |     |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |
| W   | L   | PCT       | GB   | W                                     | L             | PCT           | GB  | W          | L      | PCT          | GB | W       | L    | PCT              | GB  |
| Boston  | 30  | 18        | .625 | -                                     | Utah          | 30            | 19  | .612       | -      | Golden State | 41 | 7       | .854 | -                |     |
| Toronto   | 30  | 19        | .612 | 0-1/2                                 | Oklahoma City | 28            | 21  | .571       | 2      | LA Clippers  | 30 | 18      | .625 | 11               |     |
| NY Knicks   | 21  | 29        | .420 | 10                                    | Denver        | 21            | 26  | .447       | 8      | Sacramento   | 19 | 30      | .388 | 22-1/2           |     |
| Philadelphia  | 18  | 29        | .383 | 11-1/2                                | Portland      | 22            | 28  | .440       | 8-1/2  | LA Lakers    | 17 | 34      | .333 | 25-1/2           |     |
| Brooklyn  | 9   | 39        | .188 | 21                                    | Minnesota     | 19            | 29  | .396       | 10-1/2 | Phoenix      | 15 | 33      | .313 | 26               |     |
| Central Division  |     |           |      | Pacific Division                      |               |               |     |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |
| W   | L   | PCT       | GB   | W                                     | L             | PCT           | GB  | W          | L      | PCT          | GB | W       | L    | PCT              | GB  |
| Cleveland   | 32  | 15        | .681 | -                                     | San Antonio   | 37            | 11  | .771       | -      | San Antonio  | 37 | 11      | .771 | -                |     |
| Indiana   | 25  | 22        | .532 | 7                                     | Houston       | 36            | 16  | .692       | 3      | Memphis      | 29 | 21      | .580 | 9                |     |
| Chicago   | 24  | 25        | .490 | 9                                     | LA Lakers     | 19            | 30  | .388       | 18-1/2 | New Orleans  | 19 | 30      | .388 | 18-1/2           |     |
| Milwaukee   | 21  | 26        | .447 | 11                                    | Phoenix       | 15            | 33  | .313       | 26     | Dallas       | 18 | 30      | .375 | 19               |     |
| Detroit   | 21  | 27        | .438 | 11-1/2                                |               |               |     |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |
| Southeast Division  |     |           |      | Southwest Division                    |               |               |     |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |
| W   | L   | PCT       | GB   | W                                     | L             | PCT           | GB  | W          | L      | PCT          | GB | W       | L    | PCT              | GB  |
| Washington  | 28  | 20        | .583 | -                                     | San Antonio   | 37            | 11  | .771       | -      | San Antonio  | 37 | 11      | .771 | -                |     |
| Atlanta   | 28  | 20        | .583 | -                                     | Houston       | 36            | 16  | .692       | 3      | Memphis      | 29 | 21      | .580 | 9                |     |
| Charlotte   | 23  | 26        | .469 | 5-1/2                                 | LA Lakers     | 19            | 30  | .388       | 18-1/2 | New Orleans  | 19 | 30      | .388 | 18-1/2           |     |
| Miami   | 19  | 30        | .388 | 9-1/2                                 | Phoenix       | 15            | 33  | .313       | 26     | Dallas       | 18 | 30      | .375 | 19               |     |
| Orlando   | 19  | 31        | .380 | 10                                    |               |               |     |            |        |              |    |         |      |                  |     |



Denver Nuggets' Danilo Gallinari (right), dunks against Los Angeles Lakers' Ivica Zubac during the second half of an NBA basketball game on Jan 31, 2017 in Los Angeles. (AP)

## Leonard nets 36 pts as Spurs hold off Thunder

## Wizards top Knicks

SAN ANTONIO, Feb 1, (AP): Kawhi Leonard scored 36 points as the San Antonio Spurs held Russell Westbrook scoreless in the fourth quarter for a 108-94 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday night.

Westbrook had 27 points, 14 assists and six rebounds in 34 minutes, but was shut out after scoring 14 points in the third. Rookie forward Domantas Sabonis matched a season high with 13 rebounds and had 13 points.

## BASKETBALL

LaMarcus Aldridge added 25 points for San Antonio, while Spurs coach Gregg Popovich collected his 1,126th career victory, leaving him one shy of tying the league record for most wins with one franchise held by Utah's Jerry Sloan.

## Wizards 117, Knicks 101

In Washington, Bradley Beal went shot for shot with Carmelo Anthony and then some as Washington blew out New York to move into a tie for first place in the Southeast Division.

Beal scored 28 points, Markieff Morris had 24 and John Wall added 15 points and 13 assists as the Wizards rolled to their fifth victory in a row. Beal was 12 of 18 from the floor, while Anthony was 10 of 17 for 26 points.

## Raptors 108, Pelicans 106, OT

In Toronto, Kyle Lowry had 33 points and 10 assists, and made the tie-

## GNC out after NFL nixes advertisement

## Super Bowl 51 security tightens amidst tension over Trump order

HOUSTON, Feb 1, (RTRS): Security in Houston, America's fourth-largest city, is tight ahead of Sunday's Super Bowl 51, though officials have vowed to support peaceful demonstrations against President Donald Trump's executive order restricting entry to the United States for travelers from some Muslim-majority nations.

The approach by state, regional and federal US security officials reflects a delicate balancing act as more than 1 million spectators are expected to flood into the Texan city as the New England Patriots take on the Atlanta Falcons.

Protests against Trump's executive order on immigration have spread across the United States, including one last weekend in downtown Houston near where the National Football League has placed many pre-game activities.

Protests are expected to continue throughout the week and into the weekend, even at the game itself. Halftime performer Lady Gaga has been an outspoken critic of Trump.

While much of the world is talking about Trump's executive orders, including travel restrictions on seven Muslim-majority nations, players and coaches at the

Super Bowl remain silent.

Movie and television stars, business tycoons and politicians have all expressed concern over President Trump's controversial policies but members of the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons, who will clash in the National Football League's championship game on Sunday, dodged questions with the same skill they slip tackles.

Patriots coach Bill Belichick was willing to answer a question about his underwear habits but refused to talk politics.

A man of few words, Belichick had none when asked what message he might have for President Trump, simply shaking his head.

Belichick's quarterback Tom Brady, who will be competing in his seventh Super Bowl, was no less blunt when asked about his relationship with the President, flatly stating: "I'm not talking politics."

Meanwhile, GNC Holdings Inc will not advertise during Sunday's Super Bowl after the National Football League rejected the retailer's advertisement due to its policy against promoting supplements, the league and GNC confirmed on Tuesday.

Fox has been commanding an average of \$5 million per 30 seconds of air time, and GNC's spot was supposed to kick off the company's turnaround effort. Sales at the vitamin retailer have dropped consistently, including an 8.5 percent fall in same-store sales in domestic company-owned stores during the third quarter of 2016.

## Trail Blazers 115, Hornets 98

In Portland, Oregon, Damian Lillard scored 27 points as Portland handed Charlotte its fifth straight loss.

Allan Crabb added 21 points off the bench for the Blazers, who have won four of their last five games.

Kemba Walker scored 22 points for the Hornets and moved into third place on the team's career scoring list. Nicolas Batum, who spent his first seven seasons in Portland, added 18 points and eight rebounds.

## Lakers 120, Nuggets 116

In Los Angeles, Nick Young scored 23 points while Lou Williams added 21 as Los Angeles survived a frantic fourth quarter to snap its seven-game home losing streak against Denver.

Rookie Ivica Zubac scored a career-high 17 points for the Lakers, who snapped their three-game skid despite getting outscored 40-39 in the wild final period.



Trump