

Blachowicz, Nunes keep belts at UFC 259

Sterling wins on DQ

LAS VEGAS, March 7, (AP): Israel Adesanya learned that holding two UFC title belts simultaneously is not nearly as easy as Amanda Nunes makes it look.

And Petr Yan learned that even a momentary lapse in discipline can dearly cost a champion.

Jan Blachowicz defended his UFC light heavyweight title with a unanimous decision over the previously unbeaten Adesanya at UFC 259, thwarting the reigning middleweight champ's bid to claim a second belt.

Two-division champion Nunes defended her featherweight belt with ease, beating Megan Anderson by submission 2:03 into the first round at the Apex gym on the UFC's corporate campus. Aljamain Sterling also won the UFC's bantamweight title when Yan was disqualified for an illegal knee strike in the fourth round.

The 38-year-old Blachowicz (28-8) made his first title defense in impressive style by outworking Adesanya (20-1), the fearsome 185-pound champion moving up for a shot at history. The Polish champion used his size advantage and veteran savvy, taking control of their fight with two huge takedowns and subsequent ground control in the fourth and fifth rounds.

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

Blachowicz won 49-46 on two judges' scorecards and 49-45 on the third. The Associated Press scored it 48-47 for Blachowicz.

Blachowicz ended the fight in full mount while raining down punches on Adesanya, who had never lost in a mixed martial arts career that began in 2012. The charismatic Nigerian-born New Zealander failed to join Nunes, Conor McGregor, Daniel Cormier and Henry Cejudo as the UFC's only simultaneous two-belt champions.

Adesanya appeared to be the sharper, more aggressive striker in the early rounds, but Blachowicz countered the onslaught with his own strikes and eventually implemented his game plan. Blachowicz turned the fight in the fourth round with an impressive takedown and strong ground work, all but forcing the judges to give him the round.

He took down Adesanya again midway through the fifth before ending the fight in a dominant position. Blachowicz joyously celebrated the latest victory in a late-career surge for a fighter who won his title last September after six years in the UFC and 13 years as a pro.

Nunes (21-4) handled her second featherweight title defense with her usual flair, making short work of her Australian challenger while extending her winning streak to 12 fights since 2014. After peppering Anderson (11-5) with strikes, Nunes jumped on her off-balance challenger and worked her way into a triangle armbar, forcing Anderson to tap out quickly.

The fight was Nunes' first since her wife, fellow UFC fighter Nina Ansaroff, gave birth to their first child. Nunes has been the UFC's bantamweight champion since 2016, and she added the featherweight strap in late 2018.

The much-anticipated slate of three championship fights at UFC 259 got off to a bizarre start when Yan's inexplicable rules violation handed the 135-pound title to Sterling, the first fighter to become a UFC champion on a disqualification.

The fight was stopped with 31 seconds left in the fourth when Yan drove his knee into the face of Sterling, who was kneeling on the canvas in front of him.

Crusaders rout Hurricanes in Super Rugby Aotearoa

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand, March 7, (AP): Hooker Codie Taylor scored two tries as defending champions the Crusaders beat the Hurricanes 33-16 Sunday to stay unbeaten after two rounds of Super Rugby Aotearoa.

Hurricanes captain Ardie Savea was sin-binned for pulling down a maul in the 19th minute and the Christchurch-based Crusaders scored three tries which put them on course to a 26-6 halftime lead.

The Wellington-based Hurricanes led 6-0 from two Jordie Barrett pen-



Brickyard Ride, (front left), with jockey Alexis Centeno, heads through a turn on the way to winning the San Carlos Stakes horse race at Santa Anita on March 6, in Arcadia, California. (AP)

Idol takes Big 'Cap

Life Is Good wins San Felipe

ARCADIA, California, March 7, (AP): Life Is Good won the \$300,000 San Felipe Stakes by eight lengths for Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert, affirming the 3-year-old colt's status as the West Coast's top Kentucky Derby hopeful.

Ridden by Hall of Famer Mike Smith, Life Is Good led all the way, and despite drifting out very wide through the stretch, was timed in 1:42.18 over 1 1/16 miles. Smith blamed the infield video board for distracting the colt.

HORSE RACING

"When the big screen is lit up, they can see it," he said. "In the mornings, he goes by the screen like it's nothing because it's not on. He was locked on it down the lane. I had a strong hold on him down to the wire, just holding onto him, making sure that he stayed straight."

Life Is Good earned 50 qualifying points for the Kentucky Derby, and he has 60 total, which assures him of a berth in the May 1 race that Baffert has won six times. The trainer earned his record eighth win

ing on the canvas in front of him.

MMA rules strictly prohibit such blows to a downed opponent, and the knee clearly hurt Sterling, who struggled and failed to get up for several minutes. The bout was called off by referee Mark Smith, who had verbally warned Yan not to throw such a strike a few seconds earlier.

Sterling (20-3), a Long Island native, appeared disoriented and disappointed when the belt was wrapped around his waist after a fight he

appeared to be losing to Yan (15-2). Sterling threw the belt onto the canvas before he left the octagon.

Earlier, former bantamweight champion Dominick Cruz beat Casey Kenney by split decision for his first victory since June 2016. Cruz, who turns 36 on Tuesday, saw his ascendant career derailed long ago by brutal injury problems, but he persevered against a similarly exhausted Kenney to win in just his sixth MMA bout since October 2011.

Backrower Ethan Blackadder who, with Taylor, was a powerful force in the game, drove over from close range on the half hour to give the Crusaders a 21-6 lead.

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RUGBY

three minutes after Savea left, catching the Hurricanes napping with a quickly tapped free kick.

Flyhalf Richie Mo'unga then scored and converted his own try to give the

in the San Felipe.

"I always thought he would be a super horse," Baffert said, "but at the quarter pole, I could tell he was just still cruising, just doing it easy."

Life Is Good paid \$3, \$2.20 and \$2.10 as the 1-2 favorite. Baffert's other entry, Medina Spirit, returned \$2.80 and \$2.20. Dream Shake was another 2 1/4 lengths back in third and paid \$3 to show.

Life Is Good is undefeated in three career starts, with earnings of \$274,200, and will be pointed toward the Santa Anita Derby on April 3.

In the \$400,000 Santa Anita Handicap, Idol rallied wide turning for home to win by a half-length.

Ridden for the first time by Joel Rosario, Idol ran 1 1/4 miles in 2:02.46. He paid \$12.80, \$6.40 and \$3.40 at 5-1 odds. He is trained by Richard Baltas.

Express Train returned \$5.40 and \$2.80. Maxfield, the even-money favorite, was another 1 1/2 lengths back in third and paid \$2.40 to show in having his five-race winning streak snapped.

The victory, worth \$240,000, increased Idol's career earnings to \$416,464, with three wins in six starts.

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Egypt's El Kama wins men's 800-meter freestyle

Ledecky finishes 4-for-4 in Texas meet

SAN ANTONIO, March 7, (AP): Katie Ledecky won the 800-meter freestyle in Texas for her fourth title in her first national competition in a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Her winning time of 8 minutes, 13.64 seconds at the TYR Pro Swim Series was a whopping 12.3 seconds ahead of Leah Smith, who touched in 8:25.67. Haley Anderson, who already qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in open water, was third.

Ledecky also won the 200, 400 and 1,500 freestyles over the four-day meet. She will attempt all four events in Tokyo, and likely some relays, too.

SWIMMING

Egypt's Marwan El Kama won the men's 800 in 7:58.33 over Jordan Wilimovsky, who has already qualified for the Olympics in open-water competition. El Kama earlier won the 400 free.

Simone Manuel won the 50 free in 24.70 seconds, ahead of Abbey Weitzeil, who touched in 25.00.

"I would've liked to swim faster. I'm always going to think that," Manuel said. "I had some goal times I wanted to hit at this meet that I didn't hit. I haven't been to a meet during COVID and that's a different experience."

Defending Olympic champion Ryan Murphy won the 100 backstroke in 53.56 seconds.

The women's 100 back was won by Olivia Smoliga in 59.49. She defeated world-record holder Regan Smith (59.50) and 2016 Olympic silver medalist Kathleen Baker (59.57).

The men's 50 free went to Santo Condorelli of Italy in 22.49. Nathan Adrian was second in 22.56.

Bidding to make a fifth Olympic team at age 36, Ryan Lochte finished fifth in the 200 individual medley. He was timed in 2:01.71. Michael Andrew won in 1:58.05.

Van der Poel masters gravel roads to win Strade Bianche



Mathieu van der Poel, of The Netherlands, holds his trophy on the podium after winning the Strade Bianche (White Roads) men's cycling race, in Siena, Italy, on March 6. (AP)

SIENA, Italy, March 7, (AP): Mathieu van der Poel's many talents across multiple disciplines came in handy when he won the Strade Bianche race ahead of a stellar field.

Having already accelerated on the last of 11 sections of white, gravel roads to winnow the lead group down to three, the Dutch champion left behind world champion Julian Alaphilippe and 2019 Tour de France champion Egan Bernal on the short but steep finishing climb to Siena's Piazza del Campo on a stretch of cobblestones where the gradient reached a leg-breaking 16%.

Van der Poel had time to unleash a series of fist pumps as he crossed the line in the piazza, which was empty of fans due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Alaphilippe crossed second, five seconds behind, and Bernal came third, 20 seconds back.

Van der Poel, who rides for the

CYCLING

Dhafiri, Kuwari win 2nd place in FIA T4

KUWAIT CITY, March 7, (KUNA): Kuwaiti rally driver Mishari Al-Dhafiri and his Qatari assistant, Nasser Al-Kuwari, won second place in FIA T4 category and fourth place in the third round of the World Championship of the Eastern Baha Rally 2021.

The rally was held in harsh weather conditions and poor visibility that led to the cancellation of Friday's rally and merging it with Saturday's stage, with a total distance of 645 km in Al-Aqi area, Al-Dhafiri told KUNA in a statement.

He added he won third place in general ranking of the world championship and keen to achieve the title of world champion for this year.

Al-Dhafiri thanked the Kuwaiti officials who helped facilitate his mission to achieve these results.

Alpein-Fenix team, required 4 hours, 40 minutes to complete the 184-kilometer (114-mile) route, which also began in Siena.

Having won last year's Tour of Flanders, this was another big road race victory for Van der Poel, who also has multiple titles in cyclo-cross and mountain bike racing.

"This is one of the races I was really focusing on this year," Val der Poel said. "I had really good legs and I made the difference where I wanted to."

Last year's winner Wout van Aert finished fourth and last year's Tour de France champion, Tadej Pogacar, came seventh.

The 136-kilometer (85-mile) women's race had a similar finish and a Dutch winner, too.

Chantal van den Broek-Blaak, the 2017 world champion, attacked to leave behind Olympic bronze medalist Elise Longo Borghini on the finishing climb up Via Santa Caterina.

Longo Borghini finished seven seconds behind and Olympic champion Anna van der Breggen came third, nine seconds back.

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