

**'The physical and mental health of the players is the first priority'**

# New variant hits sports just as they were nearing normality

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Nov 27, (AP): Golf, cricket and rugby became the first major sports to be affected by the new COVID-19 variant on Friday, prompting fears of renewed travel restrictions and disrupted events just as they were returning to normal nearly two years into the pandemic.

European golfers withdrew midway through the season-opening DP World Tour tournament in Johannesburg and were scrambling to catch flights out of South Africa. Visiting cricket and rugby teams were doing the same.

Golf was the first to be hit by the emergence of the new B.1.1.529 variant that was initially identified in South Africa and is causing concern over fears that it may be more transmissible than current variants and resistant to vaccines.

It has already been detected in Israel, Hong Kong and Belgium as well

as several other countries in southern Africa.

While the start of the World Tour was ruined, rugby games in South Africa in a new European-South African tournament were postponed "due to the sudden developments," organizers said. A tour to South Africa by India's cricket team next month was likely to be reconsidered, although there was no official comment yet.

The Dutch cricket team, already in South Africa for a series, was considering whether to cancel its remaining games and return home early. The Royal Netherlands Cricket Federation said it was looking at options but was "unlikely" to be able to find flights at short notice.

"The physical and mental health of the players is the first priority," the federation said.

Organizers of golf's Joburg Open,

which started Thursday, said it would continue even after at least 23 mostly European players pulled out in the hours after South African health authorities announced they had detected the new variant. The tournament was later reduced to a 54-hole, three-round event ending on Saturday "to help non-South African resident players, caddies and tournament support staff return to their home countries," the organizers said.

The Joburg Open was scheduled to be the first of three events in South Africa to start the new season on the circuit formerly known as the European Tour. But next week's South African Open will now only be a South African tour event with international players likely to head home to beat travel restrictions. The Alfred Dunhill Championship set for Dec. 9-12 was canceled.

Many of the players who withdrew from the Joburg Open were from Britain or Ireland and reacted following the British government's announcement that it would re-impose a ban on visitors from South Africa and five other southern African countries from 4 a.m. Sunday. Returning residents would have compulsory 10-day quarantine periods in designated hotels. The European Union and the United States later said they also would stop air travel from the southern African region as countries across the world began putting in place new travel restrictions.

Irish golfer Paul Dunne, one of those to withdraw, told RTE Radio that he had managed to get a flight home via Dubai and the only ones now available went through Ethiopia, where a year-long conflict now threatens to reach the capital, Addis Ababa.

Not all were leaving. Scottish golfer David Drysdale said he had decided to keep playing in the Joburg Open and then stay in South Africa with his wife, who is also his caddy, and make a vacation of it.

Four rugby teams - two from Wales, one from Ireland and one from Italy - were also trying to return home from South Africa before they even had the chance to play after their games were postponed by the United Rugby Championship.

"With the situation in South Africa having changed so quickly, we are now looking to repatriate our staff ASAP," Welsh club Cardiff said.

There was bound to also be repercussions for other events in other countries, like the women's cricket World Cup qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe, another southern African nation listed on new travel bans. Nine national

teams, including the United States, are playing in that tournament, which runs until Dec. 5.

The African Cup of Nations, Africa's premier soccer tournament, is just over a month away and looming as a possible problem after having already been postponed for a year because of the pandemic.

The 24-team tournament will be played in Cameroon and only two southern African nations, Malawi and Zimbabwe, have qualified. But the African Cup would be hard-hit if European countries extend travel restrictions across Africa.

Top European soccer teams, and especially those in the Premier League, have previously prevented their African players from traveling and playing for their countries because of the risks and quarantine periods imposed on them when they return.

## Pakistan make a 'strong' reply

CHATTOGRAM, Bangladesh, Nov 27, (AP): Pakistan made a strong reply and reached 145 for no loss after fast bowler Hasan Ali claimed 5-51 to dismiss Bangladesh for 330 on day two of the opening test on Saturday.

Opens Abid Ali and debutant Abdullah Shafique played out the second and third sessions comfortably in a good batting track to cut the deficit to 185 runs.

Abid, who reached the 1,000-run mark in his 15th test, closed in on his fourth century, remaining unbeaten on 93 at stumps, owing to bad light. Shafique overcame a nervy start to finish the day on 52 not out.

"We are in good position now and will try to take it session by session," Ali said. "Our first target is to go past Bangladesh's 330 and then we will try to take a big lead to give our bowlers an

## CRICKET

advantage."

Abid struck the first three boundaries when Shafique struggled to get off the mark.

Shafique flicked through mid-wicket for four off pacer Abu Jayed and grew with confidence.

Abid was fluent in his approach and glanced offspinner Mehidy Hasan for a couple to reach his third half-century off 84 balls. Shafique brought up his half-century in style, clubbing occasional bowler Mominul Haque for the maximum.

Bangladesh's hope of racking up a substantial total was dashed by fast bowler Hasan Ali earlier.

Ali broke Bangladesh's resistance in the first session as the home side resumed on 253-4. He alone took four wickets on day two with Bangladesh adding just 77 runs for the rest of the six wickets.

Ali's sixth five-for was well-complemented by his new ball partner Shaheen Shah Afridi who returned figures of 2-70 and medium pacer Faheem Ashraf, 2-54.

For Bangladesh, Liton Das top-scored with 114 after hitting his maiden century and Mushfiqur Rahim added 91. Mehidy Hasan was not out on 38.

# Gallant off to record start as coach

Rangers beat Bruins

**BOSTON, Nov 27, (AP): Artemi Panarin scored the first of New York's three third-period goals with 8:25 left and the Rangers beat the Boston Bruins 5-2 on Friday, giving Gerard Gallant the best start in his first 20 games as coach in team history.**

The Rangers have 31 points in Gallant's first 20. Phil Esposito held the previous mark with 30 in 1986-87.

Ryan Strome, Dryden Hunt, Alexis Lafreniere and Jacob Trouba also scored, and Igor Shesterkin made 29 saves. The Rangers have won three straight and seven of eight.

Craig Smith and Patrice Bergeron scored for Boston.

## Capitals 4, Panthers 3

In Washington, Alex Ovechkin scored two of his three goals over 56 seconds in the second period and Washington beat Florida.

Ovechkin has 18 goals, most through 21 games in a season by a player in at least his 17th season. He's 19 goals from passing Jaromir Jagr for third on the career list following his 28th hat trick.

Washington has won eight of 10 and ended Florida's four-game winning streak. Ilya Samsonov stopped 19 shots for the Capitals.

Sergei Bobrovsky allowed Tom Wilson's eighth goal, which tied it at 1 at 1:34 of the second, and Ovechkin's first goal. Bobrovsky left after Ovechkin's

## ICE HOCKEY

goal at 2:50 but returned after Ovechkin scored against Spencer Knight at 3:46.

## Stars 3, Avalanche 1

In Dallas, Joe Pavelski scored twice in 20 seconds in the opening 1:31 to reach 400 career goals, and two goal-tenders combined to shut down the NHL's highest-scoring team as Dallas beat Colorado.

Denis Gurianov added a power-play goal for Dallas, which has won its last five home games and five of six overall.

Cale Makar scored at 16:39 of the third period with the extra skater on the ice for Colorado, which had its six-game winning streak halted. Makar has goals in a franchise-record five straight games for a defenseman.

## Penguins 1, Islanders 0

In New York, Tristan Jarry made 25 saves, Kasper Kapanen scored in the second period and Pittsburgh kept depleted



Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly (44) moves the puck past San Jose Sharks center Logan Couture (39) during the first period of an NHL hockey game in San Jose, Calif. (AP)

## Al-Azemi wins bronze

TUNIS, Nov 27, (KUNA): Yaqoub Al-Azemi, of Kuwait, won the bronze medal of the 400 m. race of the 8th Arab junior athletics championship, being by Rades.

Treasure of Kuwait Athletics Association (KAA) Faisal Al-Dasm congratulated Al-Azemi on the win which came in the second day of the championship.

In statements to KUNA, he expressed hope the Kuwaiti athletes will make more achievements in the remaining competitions.

"Despite the challenging conditions brought about by the corona-

virus pandemic, the performance of the Kuwaiti athletes lived up to our expectations," Al-Dasm affirmed.

He thanked the Tunisian athletics association for the good organiza-

## ATHLETICS

tion of the championship and setting the stage for Arab athletes to gain more expertise. The championship brought together 391 athletes from 15 Arab countries.

## Wild 7, Jets 1

St. Paul, Kirill Kaprizov scored and tied a career high with three assists to help the Minnesota Wild rout the Winnipeg Jets 7-1 on Friday.

Mats Zuccarello scored twice before leaving with an apparent injury, Alex Goligoski, Ryan Hartman, Jon Merrill and Matt Dumba also scored in the start of a five-game homestand. Minnesota is 6-2-0 on home ice, scoring at least four goals in each win. Zuccarello went to the locker room late in the second period after an uncalled slash to the left wrist by Nathan Beaulieu. Zuccarello did not return.

## Sabres 4, Canadiens 1

In Buffalo, Tage Thompson scored twice, Cody Eakin had a goal and an assist, and Buffalo beat Montreal to snap a four-game skid.

Buffalo also got a short-handed goal from Kyle Okposo and won for the third time in 13 games. Victor Olofinson and Jeff Skinner each had two assists. Dustin Tokarski made 25 saves.

## Hurricanes 6, Flyers 3

In Philadelphia, Sebastian Aho

## NHL Results/Standings

WASHINGTON, Nov 27, (AP): Results and standings from the NHL games on Friday.

Team	Score	Opponent	Score
NY Rangers	5	Boston	2
Minnesota	7	Winnipeg	1
Chicago	3	St. Louis (OT)	2
Carolina	6	Philadelphia	3
Anaheim	4	Ottawa	0
Washington	4	Florida	3
Nashville	4	New Jersey	2
Buffalo	7	Montreal	1
Columbus	4	Vancouver	2
Tampa Bay	3	Seattle	0
Pittsburgh	1	NY Islanders	0
Dallas	3	Colorado	1
Toronto	4	San Jose	1

  

Eastern Conference							Western Conference							
Atlantic Division							Central Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Florida	20	14	3	3	31	76	52	Minnesota	20	13	6	1	27	74
Toronto	22	15	6	1	31	61	48	St. Louis	20	10	7	3	23	65
Tampa Bay	19	12	4	3	27	62	52	Nashville	20	11	8	1	23	56
Detroit	21	9	9	3	21	58	69	Winnipeg	20	9	7	4	22	56
Boston	17	10	7	0	20	53	49	Colorado	17	10	6	1	21	67
Buffalo	20	8	10	2	18	58	67	Dallas	18	9	7	2	20	50
Montreal	22	5	15	2	12	48	80	Chicago	20	7	11	2	16	45
Ottawa	18	4	13	1	9	44	69	Arizona	20	4	14	2	10	37

  

Metropolitan Division							Pacific Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Carolina	19	15	3	1	31	64	39	Calgary	20	12	3	5	29	68
Washington	21	13	3	5	31	74	50	Edmonton	19	14	5	0	28	74
NY Rangers	20	13	4	3	29	60	54	Anaheim	21	11	7	3	25	69
Columbus	18	12	6	0	24	64	53	Vegas	20	12	8	0	24	64
Pittsburgh	20	10	6	4	24	59	53	San Jose	20	10	9	1	21	53
New Jersey	18	8	6	4	20	52	56	Los Angeles	19	8	8	3	19	49
Philadelphia	19	8	7	4	20	47	56	Vancouver	21	6	13	2	14	49
NY Islanders	17	5	10	2	12	32	52	Seattle	20	6	13	1	13	54

Note: Two points for a win one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

scored twice, Jesperi Kotkaniemi had a goal and an assist and Carolina beat Philadelphia.

Jesper Fast, Steven Lorentz and Andrei Svechnikov also scored for the Metropolitan Division-leading Hurricanes. They completed a six-game trip by winning four of six.

Ivan Provorov, Joel Farabee and Rasmus Ristolainen scored for Philadelphia. The Flyers have lost five in a row.

## Blue Jackets 4, Canucks 2

In Columbus, Elvis Merzlikins stopped 39 shots, Gustav Nyquist scored short-handed and had an assist, and Columbus beat Vancouver.

Jack Roslovic scored the tie-breaking goal 6:06 into the third period for Columbus, and Adam Boqvist and Max Domi also scored. The Blue Jackets have won three straight and four of five.

Vancouver has lost five in a row on the road. Vasily Podkolzin and Tyler Motte scored, and Thatcher Demko stopped 17 shots as the Canucks lost for the eighth time in their last nine games.

## Ducks 4, Senators 0

In Anaheim, Rickard Rakell had a goal and an assist, Anthony Stolarz made 34 saves and Anaheim beat Ottawa.

Troy Terry had a power-play goal and Isac Lundestrom and Derek Grant also scored to help the Ducks end a three-game losing streak. Stolarz got his fourth career shutout, and rookie center Trevor Zegras had two assists.

## Blackhawks 3, Blues 2, OT

In Chicago, Alex DeBrincat scored 1:27 into overtime and Chicago overcame an early two-goal deficit to beat St. Louis.

DeBrincat beat Jordan Binnington for his 12th goal with a one-timer from the left side of the crease after taking a cross-ice feed from Patrick Kane on a 2-on-1 break.

Chicago snapped a five-game losing streak against St. Louis and improved to 6-2-0 under interim coach Derek King.

## Predators 4, Devils 2

In Nashville, Roman Josi and Alexandre Carrier each scored and had an assist to lead Nashville over New Jersey.

Philip Tomasino and Mikael Granlund also scored and Juuse Saros made 23 saves for Nashville, winners of two of three.

## Maple Leafs 4, Sharks 1

In San Jose, John Tavares and William Nylander each had a goal and assist and Toronto beat San Jose.

Auston Matthews and Wayne Simmonds added goals, and backup goalie Joseph Woll stopped 34 shots as Toronto won for the eighth time in nine games. The Maple Leafs moved into a tie with Florida for first place in the Atlantic Division.

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