

# Thomas set to tee it up at first PGA Tour event of 2020

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LOS ANGELES, JANUARY 2

JUSTIN THOMAS' all-around game has made him one of the hottest players on the PGA Tour and the American will try to carry that momentum into this week's Tournament of Champions, the first event of 2020. Thomas, Dustin Johnson and Jon Rahm are the headliners for the event as the tour returns from a December hiatus at the par-73 Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii. The field, which consists of only those who won on the tour last year, includes just 34 golfers after several notable winners decided to skip the no-cut event.

Top-ranked Brooks Koepka is out with a left knee injury while Rory McIlroy, Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods also qualified but opted not to play, as did Justin Rose, Francesco Molinari and British Open champion Shane Lowry. That sets the stage for Thomas to take advantage. Thomas said his goal for 2020 is to get back to the world number one ranking. "All the motivation I need to get to number one in the world is in myself," he said.

"I don't need to try to prove anybody wrong. I don't need to do it because people said I can't. Because I want to be there is big enough motivation for me," he added.

The 26-year-old Thomas, one of only 10 players in PGA history to shoot a sub-60 round, won the BMW Championship in August, finished fourth at the Safeway Open in September and won the CJ Cup in October. Thomas also did well at the Presidents Cup in Australia last month, finishing with a record of 3-1-1, his loss coming in the singles competition.

The 2017 PGA Championship winner, Thomas has a burning desire to put together a complete season and get off to a strong start after last year was interrupted by a nagging right wrist injury. "Yeah, I could have been a pity party and asked for more attention, but I definitely didn't deserve anything special," said Thomas, who has qualified for this event four of the past five years. "I mean, I hadn't done what I had the year before and definitely not two years before that. "Even with the injury happening, I tried to stay patient, and I was glad to see it kind of come back to how it felt at the end of the year."

Thomas will have competition from world number three Rahm, who is the top-ranked player in the field. Spain's Rahm has three wins and 10 top-10s in his past 13 starts worldwide, vaulting him to a career-high ranking. Johnson is making his first start of the 2019-20 season and has seven consecutive top-10 finishes in the event. Defending champion Xander Schauffele overcame a five-shot deficit entering the final round last year by posting a tournament-record 62 on Sunday. He is trying to become the first player since Geoff Ogilvy (2009-10) to repeat as champion.



Thomas, one of only 10 in PGA history to shoot a sub-60 round, won the BMW Championship in August. *Reuters*



## NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION?

Nicolas Pepe and Sokratis Papastathopoulos scored the goals to secure Arsenal's second win in 16 games. *Reuters*

# Gunners dust up the old romance

A vintage aggressive performance over Manchester United gives Arsenal their first win under new manager Arteta

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MANCHESTER, JANUARY 2

MIKEL ARTETA got everything he asked for in his first win as Arsenal manager with a rampant first 45 minutes from the Gunners earning a 2-0 victory over Manchester United at the Emirates. Nicolas Pepe and Sokratis Papastathopoulos scored the goals to secure just a second win in 16 games. Arsenal started the game three times as many points off the top four as the relegation zone, but a first home win in 87 days hauls Arteta's men up to 10th and within four points of United in fifth. "I am very pleased with the performance, I'm even more pleased with the result," said Arteta after his third game in charge. "Everything I wanted to see on the pitch, I saw tonight."

There were signs of encouragement for Arsenal in Arteta's home debut against Chelsea on Sunday when only a late collapse saw a 1-0 lead turn into a 2-1 defeat. However, this time the hosts saw the game through as a dismal United performance raised fresh questions over their chances of finishing in the top four. "At the moment we are suffering to maintain that level of intensity of the first halves," added Arteta. "That will come, but as well I really liked the resilience they showed. I liked to see them suffer together."

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men were again shorn of Paul Pogba, who faces another month out after an operation on a troublesome ankle injury that has kept him out for the majority of the season. Pogba's absence is still evident in United's inability to create when denied the chance to counter-attack and they failed to recover after falling behind early on. "After they scored the first goal, it seemed like they got loads of energy," said Solskjaer. "They were the better team. They were aggressive, they regained the ball and it was hard to get the ball off

## Three arrested for racist, homophobic abuse

London: A Brighton fan was arrested for racially abusing Chelsea players during a Premier League match, and two other soccer fans were arrested in separate incidents during the same game for hurling homophobic abuse at rival supporters.

Brighton chief executive Paul Barber called the abuse "disgusting" and urged supporters to report wrongdoing at the stadium. "If the prospect of a life ban from watching their clubs play football isn't a strong enough deterrent, we have to ask the question as to whether the courts should be given the power to hand out more severe punishments?" Barber said in a statement on Thursday.

"Football can only do so much, and we are sick and tired of the game's reputation being tarnished by these people.

them."

For the first time Arsenal started with all of Pepe, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Alexandre Lacazette and Mesut Ozil together in attack and Arteta's bold choice paid dividends eight minutes in.

Pepe scored just his second Premier League goal from open play since a 72 million move from Lille when he swept home Sead Kolasinac's cross at the back post. The Ivorian was suddenly brimming with confidence as he twisted and turned Luke Shaw before crossing for Aubameyang to volley just over. Lacazette then rolled Harry Maguire easily in a night to forget for the world's most expensive defender before pulling his shot across goal. David de Gea is another of United's more experienced stars suffering an alarming dip in form and a poor

"I find it impossible to comprehend how and why some individuals think it's acceptable to behave in this way."

During a second division game on New Year's Day, an announcement was made in Huddersfield warning fans to stop offensive behavior after sectarian abuse was allegedly aimed at Stoke player James McClean.

McClean, an Ireland international, applauded when the announcement was made.

"People have to be held accountable for their behavior when they come to a stadium," said Stoke manager Michael O'Neill, who previously coached Northern Ireland.

"It's not something we want to be consistently talking about — sectarianism or racism or whatever." **AP**

clearance from the Spaniard offered another sight of goal to Pepe, whose long-range strike came back off the post.

Arsenal's first half dominance was rewarded with a second goal before the half-time interval as De Gea could only palm Lacazette's header from a corner back into the danger area and Sokratis pounced to fire into the roof of the net. As the hosts' energy levels dipped from a frantic first 45 minutes, United were allowed to dictate the game but did not have the guile to make their possession count.

Andreas Pereira had the best chance to give United a lifeline but fired into the side-netting from Nemanja Matic's clever reverse pass. "We have to be honest and admit physically we are not ready, but you have to show heart and this team is ready to change a lot of things," said Arsenal defender David Luiz.

## Not good enough

"They played with high intensity, aggression and passed the ball way better than us," said United defender Harry Maguire. "The second goal was disappointing, we are conceding far too many from set plays. We need to do the basics. And to lose the second gave us too much to do in the second half. We huffed and puffed but it wasn't good enough."

Once considered the Premier League's showpiece fixture when the clubs routinely battled for the title but, United and Arsenal now find themselves caught up in a topsy-turvy campaign. United were without Paul Pogba after the France international hurt his ankle and also missed the services of midfielder Scott McTominay. His replacement, Nemanja Matic, was sluggish in his passing and frequently beaten by Arsenal's Lucas Torreira, although Pepe was the home side's chief creator. The Gunners also looked far more assured in defence than they have all season and were quick to snuff out United's attackers whenever they advanced towards their area. "We have started again, I think we have a lot of space to improve," added goalscorer Sokratis. "The second half we didn't play like the first but I think every game we are getting better. The fun is back."

## Pogba set for operation

Paul Pogba will undergo surgery on a recurring ankle injury and is expected to spend another month on the sidelines, Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer confirmed. The French World Cup winner made his comeback after nearly three months out in a 2-0 defeat at Watford 10 days ago and also made an appearance off the bench in a 4-1 thrashing of Newcastle four days later. "We've had scans and it's nothing major, it's something that has to be sorted and dealt with. He's been advised to it as soon as," said Solskjaer.

# Nadal, Djokovic star as ATP Cup kicks off revamped season

REUTERS  
SYDNEY, JANUARY 2

RAFA NADAL and Novak Djokovic - the top two men's players in the world - will kick off a revamped Australian tennis summer on Friday with the inaugural edition of the ATP Cup team event.

The ATP Cup will see 24 nations contesting in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney over 11 days for the first time and will give the top men's players a solid platform to prepare for the Australian Open.

To accommodate the \$15 million ATP Cup, which also offers 750 ranking points, the year's first Grand Slam has been pushed back from its usual mid-month start by a week and will kick off at Melbourne Park from Jan. 20.

The participating teams for the event have been determined by the singles ranking of their best player and accordingly all top seven players in the world, barring Swiss great Roger Federer have arrived in Australia. Federer pulled out of the event to spend more time with his family. Britain's Andy Murray and Japan's Kei Nishikori are other notable absentees due to injury.

Australian Open holder Djokovic will make his ATP Cup debut for Serbia against South Africa in Brisbane on Saturday while Nadal will lead Spain into action against Georgia in Perth on the same day.

"We spend quality time and it's fun, because the concept of ATP Cup is a team concept, team format, and so it does give us an opportunity to represent our country and be a part of the team, which is not something that we do experience throughout the year very often," Djokovic told reporters.

## Davis Cup similarity

The tournament, however, comes just six weeks after the inaugural edition of the revamped Davis Cup, the International Tennis Federation's flagship event, which was similar in nature and question remains if the two can co-exist in the future.

The Davis Cup was held in November in Madrid's La Caja Magica with 18 nations playing a week-long soccer World Cup-style showpiece and Djokovic, the president of the ATP's Player Council, has led calls for a merger of the two tournaments.

The new ATP event has also had major implications for the other tennis events in Australia that have traditionally been used by players to prepare for the year's first Grand Slam.

The ATP Cup left no room in the revamped tennis calendar for the mixed-gender Hopman Cup, which is popular with players and has traditionally served as a warm-up for the Australian Open.

With Brisbane hosting matches in the ATP Cup, next week's Brisbane International will be a women's only tournament while the Sydney International - one of the oldest tennis tournaments in the world dating back to 1885 - has also gone missing.

Sydney's loss proved to be Adelaide's gain as the city will host the Adelaide International from Jan. 12, where Djokovic and women's world number one Ash Barty are the top draws.

ATP Finals champion Stefanos Tsitsipas and reigning Wimbledon champion Simona Halep will also play in Adelaide.

Sydney, which will host both the knock-out stage of the ATP Cup and the group stage, also has to deal with apprehensions about smoke from the deadly conflagrations impacting play.

Great Britain team captain Tim Henman said those concerns were ultimately not the priority.

"In the context of what this country is going through with the bushfires and for us having to deal with perhaps slightly poor at quality, I think right there is the perspective," he told reporters. "I don't envisage it being a problem at all."

## FATHER OF MODERN NBA

# David Stern, who made basketball league 'truly global brand', dies at 77

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LOS ANGELES, JANUARY 2

DAVID STERN, who masterminded the NBA's growth into a global sports powerhouse while serving as commissioner from 1984 to 2014, died Wednesday after suffering a brain hemorrhage last month. He was 77.

The NBA, whose championship games were not televised live in the United States when Stern's 30-year tenure began, announced his passing, which came with his family at his bedside. Stern, who underwent emergency surgery after he was stricken December 12, built the league into a global sporting empire by the time he retired on February 1, 2014, and passed leadership to current commissioner Adam Silver.

"David took over the NBA in 1984 with the league at a crossroads, but over the course of 30 years as commissioner he ushered in the modern global NBA," Silver said in a statement. "He launched groundbreaking media and marketing partnerships, digital assets and social responsibility programs that have brought the game to billions of people around the world. "Because of David, the NBA is a truly global

brand -- making him not only one of the greatest sports commissioners of all time but also one of the most influential business leaders of his generation." Stern boosted corporate backing for the league, such as superstars as Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal becoming household names and epic pitchmen.

"RIP Mr David Stern The best commissioner to ever do it," four-time NBA champion O'Neal tweeted. Stern oversaw expansion of the league from 23 to 30 clubs, the debut of active NBA talent in the Olympics and the sport's expansion to a popular worldwide television phenomenon. "Every member of the NBA family is the beneficiary of David's vision, generosity and inspiration," Silver said.

"Our deepest condolences go out to David's wife, Dianne, their sons, Andrew and Eric, and their extended family, and we share our grief with everyone whose life was touched by him." Stern was born in 1942 and worked in his father's New York delicatessen, growing up a fan of the NBA's New York Knicks. He became a lawyer in 1966 and began working for the firm that represented the NBA, leaving in 1978 to join the NBA as general counsel and becoming executive vice president of the NBA in 1980.

Key deals with the NBA Players Association



David Stern's made NBA players primetime stars, paving way for future phenoms like LeBron James. *AP*

were made regarding drug testing and a salary cap, setting the stage for Stern to replace Larry O'Brien as the NBA commissioner in 1984. "The entire basketball community is heartbroken," the National Basketball Players Association said. "David Stern earned and deserved inclusion

in our land of giants. His impact on our game and our business is immeasurable and the rewards we reap will continue to be appreciated by NBA players and their families for generations." As tough an adversary as he was across the table, he never failed to recognize the value of our players, and had the vision and courage to make them the focus of our league's marketing efforts -- building the NBA into the empire it is today. We owe him and we will miss him."

Stern oversaw the addition of seven NBA expansion teams -- the Charlotte Hornets, Miami Heat, Orlando Magic, Minnesota Timberwolves, Toronto Raptors, Memphis (originally Vancouver) Grizzlies and the New Orleans Pelicans. Companies such as Nike and McDonald's turned to Jordan and other NBA superstars for cross-promotion in selling their products, helping boost the profile of the players and the league all the while.

The 1992 US Olympic "Dream Team" of NBA superstars was the top attraction of the Barcelona Games and dazzled opponents in a way unseen before or since. Talent produced from the sport's higher profile added to the NBA's global attraction, Stern's legacy found in current stars such as Greece's Giannis Antetokounmpo and Cameroon's Joel Embiid.

## Digital Dave's impact on NBA

A lawyer by training, David Stern took over in 1984 when NBA was a glorified 23-city circus and the games aired on tape delay and the Finals were bumped off in favour of sitcoms. Treating the league like a start-up, Stern smooth-talked and negotiated his way into precious contracts, and took NBA's revenue from \$118 million in the season before he took over to \$5.5 billion in 2014, the year he retired after three decades in charge.

When Stern took over, NBA's image was the key item on the agenda as corporate sponsors shied away from embracing black athletes and drugs stigmatised the competition. He established strict drug testing and made NBA athletes into primetime stars.

Stern was also helped by lucking into Michael Jordan, and he capitalised on the

player's genius to woo sponsors and audience, as well as implement an approach that would be further boosted by talents such as Magic Johnson and Larry Bird, as well as future superstars like Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O'Neal and LeBron James.

During Stern's tenure, NBA added seven more teams and he was also a key player in establishing WNBA in 1997. Under Stern, NBA became the first league to open offices in China, and he helped secure international contracts for games in the wake of NBA's Dream Team's gold at the 1992 Olympics.

There were other upheavals (diversity in hiring of coaches, increased player salaries) and some missteps (replacing leather with a microfiber composite that resulted in lower bounce). But Stern's impact made NBA bigger than the game.