

NFL

Herbert offensive rookie of year

LOS ANGELES — Before the season began, no one was sure if Justin Herbert would play in 2020.

By the time it was over, no one was sure if Herbert could have played any better.

The Chargers QB capped his impressive arrival Saturday by winning the NFL's offensive rookie of the year award during the NFL Honors awards.

"Being a rookie quarterback is probably the hardest situation to be in in the NFL," teammate Justin Jackson said. "And he made it look easy, man. That's how you know he's going to be a great player. He already is a great player, if we're going to be honest."

Herbert, drafted No. 6 overall in April, opened the season as the backup to veteran Tyrod Taylor.

But Taylor was unable to start the Chargers' Week 2 game against Kansas City after a locker room medical accident minutes before kickoff resulted in him suffering a punctured lung.

Herbert was forced into action and led the offense on an eight-play, 79-yard touchdown drive to open the game, scoring himself on a four-yard keeper. He never did relinquish the starting job, even after Taylor returned to health.

"The kid's absolutely incredible on the football field," linebacker Drue Tranquill said. "And I think he's even a better person."

Herbert completed 66.6% of his passes for 4,336 yards and 31 touchdowns with 10 interceptions.

He set numerous franchise and league rookie records, produced eight 300-yard passing games and threw for at least three touchdowns six times. He also ran for five scores.

Also on Saturday night, Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers edged out Kansas City Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes for the most valuable player award, Rodgers' third; Tennessee Titans RB Derrick Henry was named offensive player of the year; L.A. Rams tackle Aaron Donald is the defensive player of the year; Washington's Chase Young is the defensive rookie of the year; Young's teammate Alex Smith is the comeback player of the year; Cleveland's Kevin Stefanski is the coach of the year.

The NFL also announced the 2021 Hall of Fame class: Peyton Manning, Charles Woodson, Calvin Johnson, Alan Faneca, John Lynch, Drew Pearson, and former Raiders and Seahawks coach Tom Flores.

— Los Angeles Times

BOXING

Former champion Leon Spinks dies

LAS VEGAS — Former heavyweight champion Leon Spinks Jr. has died after battling prostate and other cancers. He was 67.

Spinks died Friday night, according to a release from a public relations firm. His wife, Brenda Glur Spinks, and a few close friends and other family members were by his side when he passed away.

Spinks won gold at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. But he rose in prominence when he beat Muhammad Ali for the heavyweight title in 1978.

— Associated Press

Outdoors

Leading the way outside



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Mike Rougeux was named the new executive director of the Bend Endurance Academy, which offers development programs for youth and juniors in rock climbing, cycling, and nordic skiing.

New executive director of Bend Endurance Academy guides the nonprofit through the pandemic

BY MARK MORICAL
The Bulletin

Mike Rougeux stepped in as the interim executive

director of the Bend Endurance Academy the first week of March last year.

"Little did I know what the next week was going to bring," Rougeux said this week.

"Some of those indoor programs, like dance or gymnastics, or basketball, have definitely been more impacted. But people are still hungry to get their kids that social interaction. So outdoor programs are more able to operate and parents are more comfortable with it."

— Mike Rougeux, executive director of the Bend Endurance Academy

Rougeux has led the Bend Endurance Academy — a local nonprofit founded in 2009 that offers development programs for youth and juniors in rock climbing, mountain biking, and nordic skiing — throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and was recently announced as the official new executive director by the organization's governing board.

The longtime climbing director of the

Bend Endurance Academy, Rougeux took over for former executive director Sandy Visnak.

Operating youth outdoor sports programs has certainly been a challenge during the pandemic, but more and more youth are turning to outdoor pursuits as indoor sports have been mostly shut down over the past year.

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TENNIS | AUSTRALIAN OPEN PREVIEW



Andy Brownbill/AP file

Serena Williams reacts after losing a point to Karolina Pliskova during the 2019 Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia.

As Serena, Nadal eye records, virus looms

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Tennis Writer

Easy as it is to assemble a list of significant Australian Open story lines — from Rafael Nadal's bid for a men's-record 21st Grand Slam singles trophy to Serena Williams' try for her 24th, from Novak Djokovic's attempt to win a third consecutive title at Melbourne Park to Sofia Kenin's defense of her first major championship, and so on — nothing hangs over the upcoming two weeks quite like questions involving the coronavirus.

There is, after all, still a pandemic in progress.

"During the tough months

of quarantine in Spain," said Nadal, who equaled Roger Federer at 20 majors, three ahead of Djokovic, by winning the French Open in October, "(there) have been too many problems to think about tennis, no?"

And no matter how much better Australia has contained its COVID-19 outbreak than countries such as the United States, a reminder of the precarious nature of a large, international sports event came just a handful of days before the scheduled beginning of the year's first Grand Slam tennis tournament on Monday (Sunday PST):

See **Tennis** / B2

MOTORSPORTS | NASCAR SEASON PREVIEW

New teams, new tracks, new energy

BY JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Michael Jordan took his own advice and just did it: Air Jordan formed his own NASCAR team and expects the foundation will be in place to build a stock car Dream Team centered around Bubba Wallace.

Jordan has some company on the celebrity starting grid: Pitbull bought his own piece of a NASCAR team and "Mr. Worldwide" could have fans — up to 30,000 of them at the Daytona 500 — shouting "Dale!" at next week's season opener.

"There's no better time to be involved in NASCAR," said Pitbull, who was attracted to the sport by the 1990 movie "Days of Thunder" and is now partnered with new team Trackhouse Racing, which along with Mexican driver Daniel Suarez provides a platform to reach a broader audience.

"In the same way that music is a universal language, I also see NASCAR as a universal language," Pitbull added. "Everybody loves a fast car and a great story."

The fan favorites extend well beyond the owner's box. Chase Elliott, NASCAR's most popular driver, is the reigning champion and three-time Daytona 500 winner. Denny Hamlin — who helped usher MJ into the sport — has kids



Ralph Fresco/AP file

Chase Elliott holds up the NASCAR Cup Series season championship trophy as he celebrates with his race crew in victory lane after winning at Phoenix Raceway in November in Avondale, Arizona.

asking about his PJs in a national commercial tagline he can't shake.

The schedule underwent an overdue overhaul and now has a whopping seven road courses and five new venues. NASCAR is even set for an off-road detour through the dirt at fan-favorite Bristol Motor Speedway.

Perhaps in any other season, NASCAR could raise a glass to what its broadcast partner is billing as "The Best Season Ever." But promising "best" anything in a pandemic seems as outlandish as a 62-year-old driver — 1990 winner Derricke Cope — in the Daytona 500.

Yet here we are.

While NASCAR can hope

NFL | SUPER BOWL LV

Storylines galore as Mahomes, Brady clash

BY BARRY WILNER
AP Pro Football Writer

Someone will make history Sunday in a Super Bowl so filled with storylines it would fill a season of TV programming.

Tom Brady, already the true Game of Thrones king, going for a seventh ring. Patrick Mahomes, the apparent heir to the quarterbacking summit, seeking a second in a row with Kansas City — something no team

has done since Brady led New England to the double in the 2003 and '04 seasons.

Brady, 43, is in his 10th NFL title game, but with a new outfit, the Buccaneers — who happen to call Tampa home. Yes, Tampa, Florida, where the Super Bowl is being played this year. Pirates of the Caribbean make port: No host team has ever played in the big one in its home stadium.

"There's a lot that comes along with the Super Bowl," says Rob Gronkowski, the three-time champion tight end who came out of retirement to reunite with Brady. "There's a lot that comes along with this week. I've been there before. I've experienced it all before. But just having it at home, cutting out the travel, knowing where you can stay, where your friends can stay, where your family can stay, it just makes it a lot easier to have it at your home stadium, big time."

See **Super Bowl** / B3

See **Super Bowl** / B3

See **NASCAR** / B3