

Lady Rockets

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Inlow didn't stay quiet, putting up all nine of her points in the fourth quarter, sealing the win for the Lady Rockets.

"I thought the second half we were able to get going, and kudos to how much better we've gotten throughout the course of the season," said Murrell. "If this had been November, we

weren't going to pull that game off. It just goes to show how hard they've worked. Hopefully we can keep going. We have a really tough task Monday night against a really, really good team."

Kirby led all scorers with 19 points.

Forrest	6	7	20	14	—	47
Cascade	9	4	8	7	—	28

Forrest: Macyn Kirby 19, Kinslee Inlow 9, Megan Mealer 6, Carli Warner 6, Kaylin Pope 5, Samantha Hopkins 2 Cascade: Sophie Ray 12, Kaegan Young 4, Suzanna Crews 4, Laina Carter 3, Kadence Bynum 3, Kaydence Miller 2 3-Point goals: Forrest (5): Kirby 3, Mealer 2; Cascade (2): Carter, Bynum Halftime score: Forrest 13, Cascade 13.

New timer will affect more than just pitchers

By **NOAH TRISTER**
AP Baseball Writer

SARASOTA, Fla. — As one of the game's top prospects, Grayson Rodriguez will probably make his debut for the Baltimore Orioles pretty soon, and then the 23-year-old right-hander can begin adjusting to the big leagues.

In one respect, he has a critical head start: Rodriguez has plenty of experience with the pitch clock that was tested in the minors and will now be used in the majors.

"I was a big fan of it," he said. "Obviously, it speeds up the game. As a pitcher, it's kind of what you want. Big league hitters take a long time to get to the plate. That drives me crazy, so this pitch clock kind of expediting the process, I like it a lot."

Not everyone is as sanguine about the new timers — and whether you're a pitcher, a catcher, a hitter or a baserunner, there's no hiding from this rule change. Of all of baseball's tweaks under Commissioner Rob Manfred, the pitch clock might be the one that affects the most players.

The clocks will be positioned behind the plate and beyond the outfield, where pitchers and hitters can easily see them. They'll count down from 30 seconds between batters. Between pitches, it will be 15 seconds with nobody on and 20 if there's a baserunner. The pitcher must start his delivery before the clock expires. After a pitch, the clock starts again when the pitcher has the ball back, the catcher and batter are in the circle around home plate, and play is otherwise ready to resume.

So efficient communication between the pitcher and catcher is important, because the clock is ticking. The batter has a responsibility, too. He needs to be in the box and alert to the pitcher with at least eight seconds on the clock. Batters can call time once per plate appearance, stopping the countdown.

"You kind of have to shorten your routine up to the plate, while I guess cleaning out the box or talking to the umpire or the catcher," said Atlanta outfielder Michael Harris II, last year's National League Rookie of the Year. "I kind of went through it in Double-A, so I kind of know how that works and how it can speed up the game, but I guess it takes some getting used to."

The goal is indeed to speed up play, specifically by limiting the parts of the game fans find particularly tedious.

According to Major League Baseball, the pitch timer reduced nine-inning games by a whopping 25 minutes

last year in the minors, from 3 hours, 3 minutes in 2021 to 2:38. And other stats like runs per game, batting average and the rate of hit batters were essentially unchanged.

"The games were shortened, but not at the expense of game play," said Joe Martinez, a former big league pitcher who is now MLB's vice president for on-field strategy. "What was really removed from the game was that dead time — pitchers walking around the mound, batters fixing their batting gloves, taking extra pitches in the bullpen, walking in from there."

Games early in the season, in the second week, included an average of 1.73 violations. By week 24, that figure was down to 0.41. When surveyed, about 90% of both pitchers and position players said they adjusted to the pitch timer within about a month. If big leaguers get used to it that quickly, they should be ready around the end of spring training.

Still, there's a difference between compliant minor leaguers and big league veterans who are used to a certain routine — and the amount of information available to major leaguers can make pitcher-batter showdowns a mental battle in addition to a physical one.

"In this game, it's all about strategizing and really finding ways to get guys out. I think that's the unique thing about baseball nowadays," Pittsburgh right-hander Vince Velasquez said. "There's tons of talent that's spread around the league, and hitters are doing their homework just as much as we're doing ours, but I think it takes a little bit more time to kind of strategize and find ways to incorporate those things."

Velasquez doesn't like the pitch clock, and his teammate, catcher Kevin Plawecki, has concerns about the punishments.

"I feel like when you start doing automatic strikes, automatic balls, automatic runners advancing to bases, automatic runs scoring possibly, just based off of a step off, or a pickoff, to me I think that just changes the integrity of the game," Plawecki said.

When a pitcher fails to throw a pitch in time, the penalty is an automatic ball. When a batter isn't ready in time, it's an automatic strike. The clock would be easy to circumvent if the pitcher could simply step off the rubber or throw a pickoff to stall for time. To eliminate that loophole, pitchers are only allowed two disengagements per plate appearance. Pick-off attempts count toward that limit.



Photo by Jared C. Tilton/Getty Images

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. won the longest recorded Daytona 500 on Sunday to open the NASCAR season.

Stenhouse Jr. and JTG get breakout Daytona 500 win

By **JENNA FRYER**
AP Auto Racing Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — One victory in 28 years was all tiny JTG Daugherty Racing had to show for the time, sweat and money — so much money — the team had poured into trying to build a winning NASCAR organization.

The team owned by Tad and Jodi Geschickter, as well as former NBA player Brad Daugherty, entered Season 29 still committed to a driver stuck in a losing streak that stretched nearly six years.

But they believed in Ricky Stenhouse Jr., and so did the sponsors on the No. 47 Chevrolet, which includes grocery chain Kroger, a JTG partner for more than a decade. The trick was rebuilding Stenhouse's confidence and returning him to the level of driver who won a pair of Xfinity Series championships at the start of his NASCAR career.

Would a Daytona 500 win do the trick?

Certainly so. Stenhouse scored just the third Cup victory of his career by winning the longest Daytona 500 in history. He won Sunday night in double overtime, under caution, to snap a losing streak that spanned 2,060 days and 199 races.

He did it with crew chief Mike Kelley, who took over leading the team during the offseason, in a reunion for the pair. Kelley was Stenhouse's crew chief at Roush Fenway Racing for his Xfinity titles and spent one season as his Cup crew chief before stepping back into a support role the last seven seasons.

Kelley's return to the top has been stabilizing for Stenhouse.

"Not winning since 2017, having struggles, ups and downs, to have somebody like Mike, who when he took over the reins as soon as the season was over, it was: 'Hey, I know you can still get this done. We've just got to give you the right opportunities. We know if we give you cars capable of running up front, you can do that,'" Stenhouse said. "He believes in myself more than I do, I think, and that's huge. I feel like that's what separates crew chiefs these days, is that team aspect and leading your

guys and getting the most out of them.

"We all felt confident this off-season, but it's special to do it with Mike. We accomplished so much together. We've gone through ups and downs. He's been in the sport a long time. We need to make some new memories."

Stenhouse celebrated the win by scaling the fence at Daytona International Speedway — the Superman move created by four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves. Once the 35-year-old from Olive Branch, Mississippi, reached the top, he hung and did a pair of pullups before climbing back down to collect the checkered flag. Stenhouse's only other two Cup wins came in 2017.

Stenhouse then packed up his replica version of the Harley J. Earl Trophy for a late-night trip to a Daytona Beach-area Waffle House, where he sat with his new hardware on the table and wore a paper crown to mark his achievement.

For the Geschickters, the couple now will bring back to their North Carolina race shop only their second NASCAR trophy. And it happens to be the most important trophy in the sport and came in the opening race of NASCAR's 75th celebratory season.

JTG is the first single-car team since The Wood Brothers Racing in 2011 to win the Daytona 500, Jodi Geschickter is only the second female car owner to win the Daytona 500 and Daugherty is the first Black owner to be part of a winning Daytona effort.

Daugherty had to leave Sunday's race early after sponsor obligations because the bright sun was bothering the lingering effects of recent eye surgery. But when his car went to victory lane, Jodi Geschickter said, Daugherty wasted no time reaching out to Michael Jordan, who like Daugherty is a part-owner of a NASCAR team.

"He said that he and Michael Jordan are already talking trash," she said. "I'm not sure what was said, but there have been conversations."

The win was such a remarkable breakthrough for JTG, which in 2017 expanded to a two-car team, only to have to

contract back to one car last season when it didn't secure a charter for Ryan Preece. He elected to sit out the season and JTG has entered this year with just Stenhouse for a second consecutive season.

The ownership and sponsors could have bailed on Stenhouse at any time, and the sponsors could have bailed on winless JTG, as well. But that's not how the Geschickters run their business and they haven't been doing this nearly three decades to just give up.

"We didn't give up on Ricky because personally, I feel like he's got the spirit of a winner and I like what he represents as a person," Jodi Geschickter said. "I see flashes of brilliance in what he does. I felt like he could do it. I felt like he could get the job done, and I never questioned that."

Added her husband: "We have 18 corporate partners. There are not many drivers in this series that would do the work that Ricky Stenhouse does every day behind the scenes. "Appearances in front of grocery stores to trips to corporate headquarters," Tad Geschickter said. "He's a workhorse, and someone that believes in you that hard, you're going to keep believing back in them."

JTG and Stenhouse put the work in, understanding they are up against the biggest and best in NASCAR for 38 weekends a year. Stenhouse, who with the Daytona 500 win qualified for the playoffs for just the second time in his career, may not be a title contender but he proved Sunday night that JTG is headed in the right direction.

"Every morning I get up and I put on my shoes at peace and I go out. But make no mistake, this is a battle. The competition in this series is fierce and it's serious," Jodi Geschickter said. "It's a battle and it's a fight, and it's hard. It's not for lack of effort. We've come really close, so I try not to get our hopes up."

"We work hard. The guys do their jobs. We're prepared. We're prepared everyday. We don't quit. We're tenacious. We dig in. You get the information, you try to make good decisions, and you just don't quit."

Woods, McIlroy break ground on high-tech golf league site

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Sports Writer

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy put the silver-plated shovels into a pile of dirt and left sizable divots.

With that, their high-tech golf league got a bit closer to launch.

The ceremonial groundbreaking for the arena that will house the league that's being called TGL was held Tuesday at Palm Beach State College, with Woods and McIlroy —

two of the co-founders of TMRW Sports — there for the first step of actual construction.

TMRW — pronounced "tomorrow" — says TGL play will begin early next year, and the league will be in partnership with the PGA Tour. Woods and McIlroy, so far, have 11 players committed to the league. Besides them, the league will include world No. 1 Jon Rahm, Justin Thomas, Adam Scott, Collin Morikawa, Matt Fitzpatrick, Max Homa, Billy Horschel, Justin Rose and Xander

Schauffele.

That list includes six players currently ranked 10th or better in the world, plus the game's biggest draw in Woods.

"In terms of fan experience, it's going to be nothing like golf has offered before," McIlroy said.

The concept is this: six teams of three PGA Tour players, squaring off in match play on a data-driven virtual course that also includes a short-game complex for chipping and putting.

It'll be played on Monday nights, and will take only two hours, with in-arena fans all very close to the action. There will be 15 matches in the regular season, followed by semifinals and a final.

"We're going to have excitement, we're going to have something different, something that is is passionate," Woods said. "We've been involved in teams before whether it's Ryder Cup, President's Cup, Irish national teams, for me high school, college, > See **Golf**, Page B6