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TENNIS

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FOCUS

QOC president honours Qatar Paralympic team

QNA
 Doha

Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) president His Excellency Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani honoured the players of Qatar paralympic national team who participated in the 2017 World Para-Athletics Championships held in London in July where Qatar claimed two medals.

Qatar's Abdulrahman Abdulqader won the gold medal in men's Shot Put (F34) event, with an effort of 11.38 metres in a new achievement for the Qatari sport while Sarah Masoud clinched silver medal in women's Shot Put (F33) event with an effort of 5.39 metres.

The honorees list also included Hamad Jaber al-Behaih, Saud al-Sulaiti, Khalifa al-Dosari and Abdullah al-Manai, who participated in the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games held in Austria.

During the ceremony, HE Sheikh Joaan extended his thanks and appreciation to the members of the Qatar paralympic team expressing his pride at the achievements at the last world Para-Athletics championships held in London and earlier events, including the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. He stressed that these achievements are a continuation of a series of successes made by Qatari sport.

"We in the State of Qatar pay a profound attention to Paralympic sports and in light of the directives of His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, we are committed to providing all the required support to Paralympic sports. We believe in the importance of this category as it demonstrates the spirit of determination and challenge. We are looking forward for more achievements by this category in line with the QOC's strategy and the ambitions of the Qatar sports community," said HE Sheikh Joaan.

The ceremony was attended by Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC) vice president Jassim al-Buainain, QPC secretary general Dr Hassan al-Ansari, QPC assistant secretary general Abdulqader al-Mutawaa and QPC executive director Ameer al-Mullah, in addition to the directors of various QOC Departments.



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani felicitates Abdulrahman Abdulqader, who won gold medal in men's Shot Put (F34) event at the 2017 World Para-Athletics Championships in London in July.



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani felicitates Sarah Masoud, who clinched silver medal in women's Shot Put (F33) event.



QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC) officials, including vice president Jassim al-Buainain, secretary general Dr Hassan al-Ansari, assistant secretary general Abdulqader al-Mutawaa and executive director Ameer al-Mullah, also attended the ceremony.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar celebrates Doha 2019 with world of athletics

By Sports Reporter
 London

Qatar brought the world of athletics together to celebrate Doha's hosting of the 2019 IAAF World Championships as the city prepares to receive the flag from London next week. Doha will be the next host of the world's third largest sporting event following the conclusion of the London World Championships on Sunday, bringing the event to the Middle East for the first time in history.

Over 500 people attended a reception hosted by the Doha 2019 Organising Committee at London's breath-taking Sky Garden with the city's stunning skyline as a backdrop. Attendees included International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) president Sebastian Coe, members of the IAAF, member federations from around the world, sponsors and organising committees.

Speaking on behalf of the Doha 2019 Organising Committee, Doha 2019 vice president and director general of Doha 2019, and IAAF vice president Dahlan al-Hamad said, "Hosting athletics flagship event is a natural next step



IAAF president Sebastian Coe (left) addresses the reception hosted by Doha 2019 Organising Committee as IAAF vice president Dahlan al-Hamad (right) looks on.

on our historic sporting journey. We are committed to combining our passion for athletics, our experience and knowledge of hosting major athletics events, and our warm hospitality and rich culture - to organise a unique, memorable and highly successful World Championships.

"Hosting the World Championships

in the Middle East for the first time in history provides the opportunity to introduce athletics to new audiences and new markets, inspire new athletes and capture the attention of new fans. The whole of the Doha 2019 team is fully committed to embracing this unique opportunity - and we will be working hard over the next two years to ensure

Qatar's Samba qualifies for 400m hurdles final

Qatar runner **Abderrahman Samba** qualified for the 400m hurdles final at the World Athletics Championships in London, which will conclude on Sunday, after winning the third semi-final heat in 48.75 seconds. The Qatari national team runner took advantage of his strong start and position in the sixth lane to settle the race quietly in the last few metres, making it to the final in search of his first world medal in this major sporting event. Samba will be up against some of the world's best athletes in today's final, and the Qatari champion's chances are considered good despite the presence of American runners, and Olympic and World Cup medallists.



that we maximise the full potential of our region's first ever World Championships."

Speaking further about the impact that the World Championships can have on the region, particularly with regards to women's sport, Sheikha Asma al-Thani, Communications and Marketing director of Doha 2019 and the Qatar

Olympic Committee (QOC), said, "It is our ambition that showcasing Arab women in athletics through the World Championships will help to inspire more young girls from across the region - not just to become future champions but to participate at any level - as athletes, coaches, officials or administrators. We want young girls to see that anything is

possible and that they can achieve their dreams. We hope to break down barriers and change perceptions of Arab women in sport - and to support the growth and development of women's athletics - and women's sport in general - across the Middle East."

Guests at the reception were able to sample Qatar's warm hospitality, unique culture, and history and heritage of athletics through Arabic calligraphy workshops, a photo exhibition, a falcon demonstration, henna painting and more.

The reception took place ahead of the evening session of day four of competition of the London 2017 World Championships. Team Qatar's athletes have had a successful start to the World Championships with Abdalleh Haroun scheduled to run last night's 400m semi-finals and Abderrahman Samba qualifying for tonight's 400m hurdles final.

Later in the week, Olympic silver and bronze medallist high jumper, Mutaz Barshim, double world junior champion, Ashraf Elseify and rising star in javelin, Ahmed Bader, will be in action. The flag handover from London to Doha will take place with a ceremony in the London 2017 stadium following the final session of athletics on Sunday.



2017 IAAF WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

McLeod tops hurdles; Rojas wins first gold for Venezuela

Kipyegon is 1,500m world champ a year after Rio win



Jamaica's Omar McLeod (right) celebrates winning the men's 110m hurdles final at the 2017 IAAF World Championships in London on Monday. (AFP)

DPA
London

Omar McLeod added the 110-metre hurdles world title to his Olympic gold from last year on Monday as he gave Jamaica a first gold at the London championships after the 100m sprinters had come up empty-handed.

Kenya's Faith Kipyegon also got a world title 12 months after her Rio Games triumph, in a thrilling women's 1,500m final.

Yulimar Rojas gave Venezuela a first-ever athletics world title as she denied Colombian Caterina Ibarguen a record third straight gold by two centimetres; while top favourite Anita Wlodarczyk claimed a third hammer throw gold.

McLeod led from start to finish for a convincing victory in 13.04 seconds, after Jamaica's 100m runners had managed only a bronze from retirement-bound superstar Usain Bolt while Elaine Thompson failed to medal on the women's side.

The 2015 champion Sergey Shubenkov took silver in 13.14, the first medal for the 19 Russians competing at the worlds as neutral athletes as their federation remains suspended in connection with a doping affair. Bronze went to Hungary's Balazs Baji in 13.28.

"There was a lot of pressure coming in but I channelled it positively," McLeod said.

"It's totally different to last year where we had Usain and Elaine winning, which I used to propel me. I didn't have that this time so I really wanted to



Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas poses with her gold medal on the podium for the women's triple jump event in London yesterday. (AFP)

come out and shine my own light."

Shubenkov said: "The Jamaican is just too fast. I'm just happy to be competing at a world champs and get a world medal. Last year was a disaster and not just because of the Russian ban (on competing at the Olympics) so I'm happy to be back winning a world medal."

In the 1,500m, Kipyegon had the most stamina in a sprint down the home stretch to hold on for victory in 4 minutes 2 minutes 59 seconds.

The 2011 champion Jennifer Simpson got silver for the US in 4:02.76 and South African 800m world and Olympic champion Caster Semenya stole



Kenya's Faith Chepngetich Kipyegon celebrates with the Kenyan flag after winning the women's 1,500m final in London on Monday. (AFP)

bronze by seven-hundredth from Britain's Laura Muir with a late lunge in her first major 1,500m final.

"I knew it would be fast, it is such a quality field. The best was going to win here. It was always going to be quick and competitive," Kipyegon said.

The thrilling triple jump saw the lead change several times between Ibarquien and Rojas before the Venezuelan unleashed the winning hop, skip and jump effort of 14.91m in her penultimate attempt.

The 2016 Olympic champion Ibarquien took silver with 14.89 and London 2012 gold medallist Olga Rypakova of Kazakhstan bronze with 14.77.

Rojas gold came the day after pole vaulter Robeilys Peinado the first-ever worlds medal, a bronze, for Venezuela which is embroiled in a political crisis as President Nicolas Maduro moves to consolidate power in response to often-violent protests against his rule.

The world record holder Wlodarczyk left it late to underline her hammer dominance with a 41st straight competition win, taking the lead in the fourth round and following up with her best throw of 77.90m in the fifth attempt.

China's Wang Zheng took silver with 75.94m and bronze went to Poland again, from Malwina Kopron's first-round toss of 74.76m.

SPOTLIGHT

Coe and IAAF behaviour 'inhumane': Gatlin's agent

AFP
London

guy, it's really not fair. It's inhumane. It's unsportsmanlike."

'THE LEGEND IS OK WITH IT'

Athletics chief Sebastian Coe and the IAAF's treatment of controversial 100 metres world champion Justin Gatlin is 'inhumane' and 'unsportsmanlike', the athlete's agent told the BBC in a blistering attack.

British athletics legend Coe – a two-time 1,500m Olympic champion – had told the BBC on Sunday two-time drugs cheat Gatlin's victory in the sport's most high profile event in London, which was watched by over eight million viewers in Britain, was not the 'perfect script'.

Gatlin, 35, had been loudly booed throughout the 100m rounds and the verbal abuse was ratcheted up a few notches when he won the final, denying Jamaica superstar Usain Bolt a 12th world title in his last individual final. The 60,000 plus spectators jeered Gatlin whilst chanting bronze medal winner Bolt's name as if he were the champion.

Coe – who had said prior to being elected president of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) he felt 'queasy' about dopers returning and winning titles – remarked he wasn't very excited about the prospect of placing the gold medal around Gatlin's neck.

"I'm not eulogistic that someone who has served two bans has walked off with one of our glittering prizes," said the 60-year-old.

However, Gatlin's agent Renaldo Nehemiah, a former 110m hurdles world record holder, was scathing about Coe's remarks.

"I take offence to, with all respect, Lord Coe," he told the BBC.

"I don't condone doping but Justin Gatlin is not the poster child for it.

"He's done his time, he plays by the rules, the IAAF reinstated him. They said if you come back we should accept that.

"So to put a narrative out that it's just Justin Gatlin and he's the bad

Nehemiah, who won the 1984 Super Bowl with the San Francisco 49ers, said Coe and the IAAF should be more gracious and accept their rules allowed athletes like Gatlin to get a chance at redeeming themselves.

"Lord Coe's a part of the IAAF who set the rules, who set out the punishments, and when you serve the punishment you are supposed to be reinstated, which these athletes who have offended and abused some of these rules have, and if you don't want them in you should change the rules," said Nehemiah.

"You don't allow them in and then still condemn them," said the 58-year-old.

Coe has always been a hardliner on doping, believing second time offenders like Gatlin should have life bans – however that view has fallen foul of the legal system when athletes have gone to court to challenge such punishments.

Gatlin – who reacted to the crowd's booing of his victory by placing a finger to his mouth – served a four-year ban from 2006-10, reduced from eight years and also served a prior ban whilst a student, although that was also reduced as it was ascertained that he had taken medication for his Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

Nehemiah, who missed out on his chance of an Olympics due to the US boycott of the 1980 Games in Moscow over the invasion of Afghanistan, said if Bolt could accept graciously that Gatlin was justified in being there, then it should be good enough for anybody.

"If it's good for Bolt it should be good enough for everyone else," said Nehemiah, who observed that when Gatlin competed and won bronze at the 2012 Olympics in London he was not booed.

"If the king, the legend is OK with it we should all be OK with it."



Justin Gatlin (left) poses on the podium with his gold medal during the podium ceremony for the men's 100m event at the IAAF World Championships in London on Sunday. (AFP)

Kenya's Kiprop eyes El Guerrouj's record four world titles

Asbel Kiprop, Kenya's three-time world champion over 1,500 metres, said yesterday he has come to London to equal the four world titles of the Moroccan middle-distance great Hicham El Guerrouj. The 28-year-old Kiprop, a former Olympic champion, hopes to get his fourth championship at the World Athletics Championships, before he moves on to 5,000m. "I want to become the first and only Kenyan to equal El Geurrouj's four-title mark, then I move to 5,000m," Kiprop told Reuters at the Kenyan team hotel in central London. His 1,500m campaign starts tomorrow. British multiple world champion Mo Farah will again be the favourite in the men's 5,000m when the qualification rounds start today at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Stadium. The last Kenyan to win the 5,000m was Benjamin Limo in 2005 in Helsinki. "We have a serious challenge in the 5,000m," Kiprop said. "I hope and pray that I will be able to fulfil my ambition in the 1,500m before setting my eyes on this event (5,000m)."

Australia's Tallent out of 50km walk with hamstring injury

Australian Jared Tallent has been forced out of the men's 50-kilometre walk at the World Athletics Championships in London by a hamstring injury, Athletics Australia said yesterday. Tallent was one of Australia's main medal prospects, winning silver at the Championships in 2015 and 2011 and bronze in 2013. He also took the gold in the event at the London Olympics in 2012 and silver in Rio last year. He was due to arrive in London tomorrow, where he said he would cheer on his wife, Claire, who is returning to international competition in the women's 20km race after taking time off for the birth of their son. "On the one hand, my wife and I excitedly welcomed our son, Harvey, to the world and we could not be happier," Tallent said. "On the other I have been challenged... with recurring injuries and now a hamstring complaint that will prevent me from being able to start. The decision to withdraw is never easy... I am not done yet when it comes to contesting for gold medals. The Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, the 2018 IAAF World Race Walking Team Championships and, of course, Tokyo 2020 remain on my agenda."

SETBACK

Botswana's Makwala withdrawn from 400m final

Reuters
London

Botswana's Isaac Makwala was withdrawn from the 400 metres final at the World Athletics Championships after falling victim to an outbreak of sickness that has struck down scores of competitors.

The 30-year-old, who was considered as one of the main challengers to favourite Wayde van Niekerk of South Africa and is a national hero in his country, had also been ordered to withdraw from Monday's opening round of the 200 metres.

"Isaac Makwala was withdrawn from the men's 400 metre (final) due to a medical condition on the instruction of the IAAF Medical Delegate," the global athletics body (IAAF) said in a statement.



"Any further questions should be referred to the BOT team."

Earlier on Tuesday, Makwala had told the BBC that he had felt fit to race in the 200 metres on Monday and felt "ready" for the 400 metres final.

"I was not that sick," he said. "I just vomited. Like any other athlete, I vomit... I could have run because I did my warm-up well and I did everything well. I was ready to run."

He added that he was heartbroken on Monday when he was pulled from the 200 and been left in the dark about the reasons for his withdrawal.

"They say they are waiting for the medical results but I don't know because they didn't test me. I don't know what, which medical results they are waiting for.

"This is bad. I felt heartbroken yesterday. I was ready for this, I worked hard for this. So I feel like sabotaging or something... I don't know because I don't have

the full information about this."

He did not specify in what way he felt he had been sabotaged and the IAAF did not respond specifically to Makwala's comments when contacted by Reuters.

The sport's governing body said it had been working with Public Health England to contain the outbreak and had issued guidelines to teams and their doctors.

Several Botswana, German, Canadian, Irish and Puerto Rican athletes have been taken ill over the last few days, with some effectively put into quarantine and others forced to miss their events.

Competition organisers said on Monday that the illnesses were a result of gastroenteritis, but public health officials said yesterday that laboratory tests have confirmed two cases of norovirus among approximately 30 illness victims.

SPOTLIGHT

Man Utd trust in Mourinho's second season recipe

'Can we win it? We can, but maybe we won't. Everything is good and strong, but some of them (other clubs) are really strong in the market, so it is going to be difficult'



File picture of Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho during a training session.

AFP
London

After qualified success in his maiden campaign as Manchester United manager, Jose Mourinho will hope to dust off his tried and tested second-season formula in 2017-18.

Mourinho led United to victory in the League Cup and Europa League last season, the latter yielding a place in the Champions League, but their football was drab and they finished a distant sixth in the league.

Having won the league in his second season in his last five jobs – Porto, Chelsea (twice), Inter Milan and Real Madrid – he will be expected to mount a strong title challenge at the very least.

"Can we win it? We can, but maybe we won't," Mourinho told *ESPN* in a recent interview.

"Everything is good and strong, but some of them (other clubs) are really strong in the market, so it is going to be difficult.

"Normally the second season should be better than the first because you know the club, you know the players. The players, they know you.

"The club know you can affect in a positive way the structure, you can affect in a positive way the people that work around you.

"But this is modern football. It's getting much harder for everyone, so we don't know."

United's signings have been thoroughly in keeping with Mourinho's pragmatic approach to the game, the Portuguese having galvanised his squad with extra height and muscle.

Centre-back Victor Lindelof, midfielder Nemanja Matic and striker Romelu Lukaku are all over six feet (183cm) tall, giving United the second-tallest squad in the division behind Tony Pulis's West Bromwich Albion.

Lukaku faces the greatest scrutiny, having been brought in to replace Zlatan Ibrahimovic after the charismatic Swede was released in the wake of the serious knee injury he suffered last season.

Lukaku, 24, has scored 87 goals for

Everton over the past four seasons, statistics that moved United to sanction a £75 million (\$97.9 million, 82.9 million euros) acquisition.

MAKE-OR-BREAK FOR MARTIAL

But the Belgium international failed to convince Mourinho during their time together at Chelsea and will be playing in the Champions League proper for the first time.

A battering-ram striker in the finest Mourinho traditions, Lukaku's task is to sharpen an attack that mustered only 54 league goals last season.

"I'm here to score goals and be the focal point of the team," Lukaku said.

"At Manchester United, we play to win and that's the mentality when I get on the pitch.

"I've been waiting for this opportunity. Now I'm here and it's time to work hard and, hopefully, deliver."

With Ibrahimovic and Wayne Rooney no longer around, there is pressure on Paul Pogba to establish himself as the team's leader after blowing hot and cold in his first season following his return

from Juventus.

Anthony Martial, meanwhile, faces a make-or-break campaign, having slipped from view last season after failing to earn Mourinho's trust.

The 21-year-old Frenchman faces stiff competition for one of the two or three places in support of Lukaku, with Marcus Rashford, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Juan Mata and Jesse Lingard among Mourinho's other options.

Matic, who won the league with Mourinho at Chelsea in 2015, is expected to slot into midfield alongside Pogba and Ander Herrera, with former Benfica man Lindelof due to partner Eric Bailly at centre-back.

United face a relatively benign start to the season, Rooney's return to Old Trafford with big-spending Everton the most taxing assignment of their opening seven fixtures.

But October and November bring meetings with Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea in the space of three weeks, by which time United's Champions League campaign will be in full swing.

RARING TO GO

Kolasinac ready to rumble: Walcott



File picture of Arsenal defender, Sead Kolasinac.

AFP
London

Theo Walcott has backed Sead Kolasinac to bring some much-needed steel to Arsenal's defence after the intimidating Bosnian made his presence felt in the Gunners' Community Shield victory over Chelsea.

Kolasinac joined Arsenal on a free transfer from Schalke in the close-season and already looks an ideal fit for the physical demands of the Premier League.

The 24-year-old came off the bench in the first half of Sunday's friendly against Chelsea at Wembley and won over his new teammates with a commanding display, capped by Arsenal's 82nd-minute equaliser.

Kolasinac is usually a left-back, but he showed his versatility, replacing the injured Per Mertesacker at centre-back and helping the often leaky Gunners defence subdue Chelsea.

Not content with dominating at the back, Kolasinac popped up at the other end to score with a powerful header, forcing the penalty shoot-out that Arsenal won 4-1.

Walcott revealed the hulking Kolasinac has made a big impression with his no-holds-barred approach in training and the Gunners winger is expecting opposing forwards to get an even tougher time from the Bosnian this season.

"Sead looks an absolute tank. He is one tough unit to get past. His physical attributes are going to be key for us this season," Walcott said.

"He is an absolute animal. I see him in the gym everyday. You can just tell he looks after himself well. He eats the right foods. He is a professional.

"The power he's got and his pace, it's beautiful to watch. He's a great addition to the squad.

"Trust me, he is not easy to get around. He's quite wide as well. He fits perfectly for the Premier League. This league is the best and he's going to be one of the best in the league."

After last season's troubled

campaign ended with FA Cup final victory against Chelsea, Arsene Wenger's side are under pressure to challenge for the Premier League title.

But, consigned to the Europa League after failing to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in 20 years, Walcott admits it won't be easy to change the perception that Arsenal have lost ground on their title rivals.

BUZZING

"It's going to be a tough season, we all know that, with the Europa as well," he said.

"We will let people talk on the outside. We know what we have to do this season.

"We know how important it is. We are up for the challenge, we do like a good challenge.

"It is going to be different this year. It's how we react. We can't really dwell on the past anymore.

"We have to focus on our strengths. We had a good end to last season and we are getting used to a new system.

"We are slowly learning it. It is working for now and we will stick with it."

Key to Arsenal's success will be the form of club record signing Alexandre Lacazette.

The France forward, signed for £46.5 million (\$60.6 million) from Lyon, hit the post against Chelsea, but that was the highlight of a largely anonymous display.

Walcott defended his new teammate, saying: "When you give him time and space on the ball he can show his quality.

"He's a goalscorer and he is going to score goals for this club.

"The amount of players we have in key positions, they are going to supply chances for him."

Arsenal open their Premier League campaign at home to Leicester City on Friday and Walcott can't wait to get going.

"Being a night game might be better for us. The fans will be up for it," he said.

"The home support is always crucial. That will be so key this season if the fans are right behind us from the kick-off.

"It's exciting. The Premier League is back. You are asking anyone, we are buzzing now."

GRAND GESTURE

Barca honour Chapecoense

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona eased into life without Neymar by honouring Chapecoense, the Brazilian side still reeling from a devastating plane crash that killed 19 players and 24 club officials last year, in a 5-0 friendly win on Monday.

On an emotional night for the visitors, Chapecoense were captained by Alan Ruschel, one of only three players to survive the crash, on his return to action.

Ruschel was joined by the two other survivors Nieto and Jakson Follmann from the squad who were on their way to face Atletico Nacional in the final of the Copa Sudamericana when the aircraft crashed into the Colombian mountains on November 28 last year, killing 71 people.

Nieto and Follmann, who had his right leg amputated after the crash, both broke down in tears as they were invited to take an honorary kick-off in front of a crowd



Chapecoense's defender Alan Ruschel waves to Barcelona players as he holds the second place trophy.

of 65,000 at the Camp Nou.

"I am filled with happiness to be returning to play," Ruschel told Spanish newspaper *Marca*.

"I am one of the happiest people in the world because I am living something almost unthinkable. I consider myself fortunate

to be in Spain, facing Barcelona, playing in a stadium where I never thought I would be."

Ruschel also got a souvenir to savour as he swapped shirts with five-time World Player of the Year Lionel Messi after full-time.

Funds raised from the match will "help Chapecoense rebuild institutionally and recover the competitive level it had before the tragedy", Barca said in a statement.

Ruschel was given the unenviable task of facing up to Messi on his return and despite the sentimentality of the occasion, Barca didn't let up once the game got underway.

On a sporting level the Catalan giants have had a turbulent week with star Brazilian forward Neymar joining Paris Saint-Germain for a world record 222 million euro (\$264 million) transfer fee.

Barca are expected to splash some of that cash in the coming weeks with a host of players rumoured to be possible Neymar replacements, including Liverpool's Philippe Coutinho and Ousmane Dembele of Borussia Dortmund.

However, Gerard Deulofeu made his case to at least keep his place for Sunday's Spanish Super Cup first leg against Real Madrid with a goal and two as-

sists before half-time.

The former Everton winger opened the scoring with a tap-in after neat work from Ivan Rakitic and his cut-back was then curled into the top corner by Sergio Busquets to make it 2-0 inside 11 minutes.

"It has been an incredible experience. They deserve to be here and have enjoyed this marvellous day," said Deulofeu.

"They are heroes. When I think about what happened to them I start to cry."

Messi got his goal when he slotted home Deulofeu's low cross before Ruschel was given a standing ovation as he was substituted after 35 minutes.

Barca understandably took their foot off the gas after half-time, but Luis Suarez finally managed to get his name on the scoresheet from Messi's pass 10 minutes after the break before Denis Suarez rounded off the scoring.

Chapecoense did have one moment to savour when goalkeeper Artur Moraes saved Pato Alcacer's penalty late on.

Galatasaray plotting to bring back Arda Turan from Barcelona

Galatasaray are trying to bring out-of-favour Barcelona forward Arda Turan back to the Turkish club, president Dursun Ozbek said yesterday.

Arda, who made his professional debut for Galatasaray in 2004 and stayed at the club until joining Atletico Madrid in 2011, was an unused substitute in Barcelona's 5-0 friendly win over Chapecoense on Monday, even though coach Ernesto Valverde made 11 changes.

His exclusion has been reported in the Spanish media as a sign the Turk does not feature in Valverde's plans for the season and that he is on his way out of Barca.

"Arda is a Galatasaray fan, he really loves the club and he is going to play for us again," Ozbek told a news conference yesterday. "His only chance of playing in Turkey is here, and we hope he ends up seeing out his career at Galatasaray. We are working on his transfer."

Arda has scored 15 goals in 55 appearances for Barca but has failed to hold down a first team place at Barca since switching from Atletico Madrid in 2015 for 34 million euros.

His progress in his first campaign was stunted because he was banned from playing the first half of the 2014/15 season by the club's existing transfer ban.

Galatasaray are Turkey's most successful club with 20 league titles, but they finished fourth in the top flight last season, 13 points behind champions Besiktas.

Super Mario in hot water again after speeding incident

Mario Balotelli has again been caught speeding in his Ferrari, police told *AFP* yesterday as media reports claimed the striker had been caught doing 170-200kmh (105-125mph) in a race with a friend's Lamborghini.

The former Manchester City and Liverpool striker, now at French club Nice, was stopped by a highway patrol on the A4 highway near the northern Italian town of Vicenza on Saturday, a local officer told *AFP*.

Media reports claimed Balotelli had been doing up to 200kmh but had escaped with a fine and five penalty points because he had only been registered at 170kmh.

The police confirmed the star had been caught and fined, along with the Lamborghini driver, but described accounts of the incident as "exaggerated".

They would not divulge how fast Balotelli had been going but said he had been allowed to continue his journey after paying his fine and having five penalty points registered on his licence.

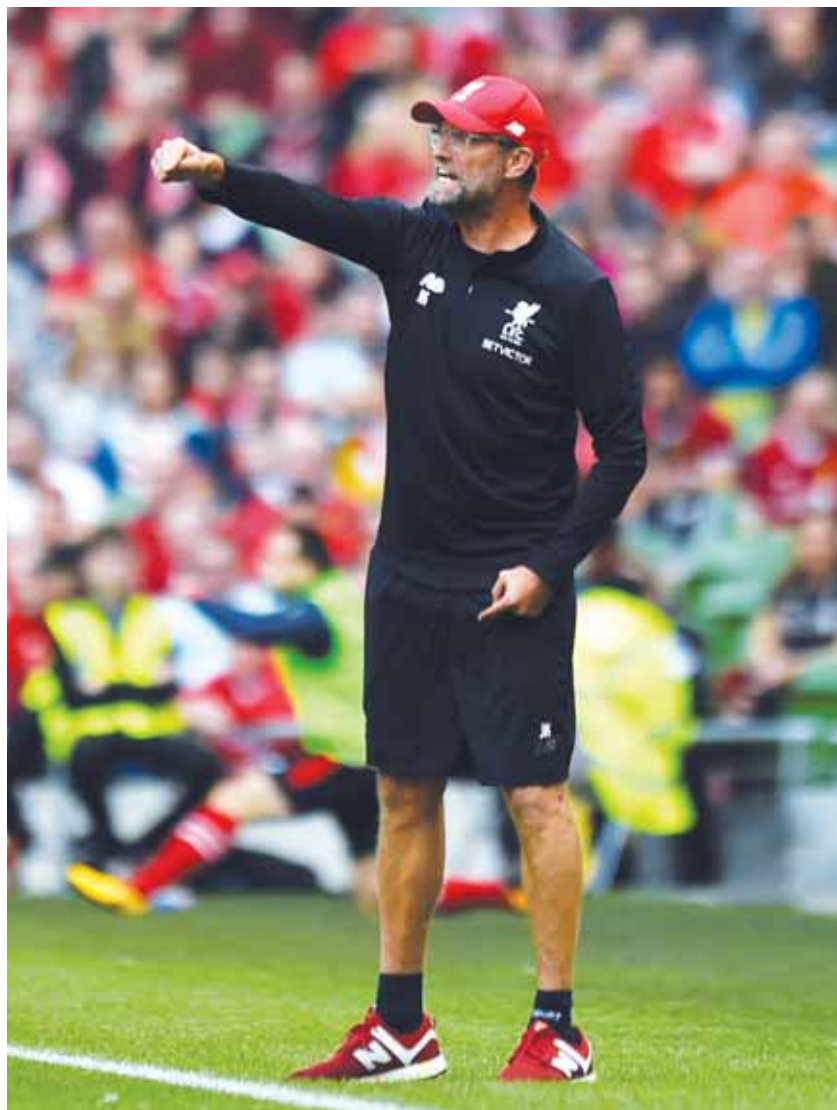
Balotelli racked up no fewer than 18 fines for mostly speeding offences in the space of two years in Italy in 2012 and 2013, often on the same A4 road.

In 2015, when he was playing for Liverpool, he was banned from driving for 28 days after being clocked driving at 109mph (175kmh) on the M62 motorway in northern England.

SPOTLIGHT

Pochettino, Klopp tested by great expectations

'Our idea was, the same as before, to try to provide the team with more strength and try to sign a few players before the end of the transfer window'



File picture of Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino (left) and Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp. The two managers have yet to win any trophies with their current teams.

AFP
London

Under pressure to turn tantalising potential into tangible prizes, Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino and Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp face the acid test of their talents this season.

Despite being feted as teams on the rise, Tottenham and Liverpool have yet to win a single trophy under their current managers.

Pochettino has been in charge at Tottenham since 2014, while Klopp is in his third season with Liverpool, making the forthcoming campaign a watershed moment for both bosses.

After finishing third in the Premier League in 2015 and second last season, Tottenham suddenly find themselves in danger of being stuck in reverse at a time when they should be putting their foot on the gas.

Building his team around England stars Harry Kane and Dele Alli and, with Christian Eriksen, Toby Alderweireld,

Jan Vertonghen and Son Heung-Min all influential in their own right, Pochettino has assembled a group capable of beating any side in the country on their day.

But the 45-year-old Argentine and his players have come up short two years in a row as the pressure of the title race proved too much for them.

Last season, they had Chelsea in their sights in the closing weeks before an FA Cup semi-final loss to the Blues triggered a stumble that saw them finish seven points behind the champions.

Making up a deficit that that order won't be easy this season as Tottenham have the thorny issue of playing their home games at Wembley while White Hart Lane is being redeveloped.

Wembley wasn't a welcoming arena for Tottenham when they played their European fixtures there last season, prompting claims that the high tempo pressing game Pochettino prefers was ill suited to the English national stadium's large pitch.

Adding to Pochettino's discomfort, he has so far gone through the summer transfer window without making a single

signing. While Tottenham's title rivals have shattered records with their lavish spending, Pochettino heads into the new campaign with a weaker squad than last year after selling England right-back Kyle Walker to Manchester City.

LIMITED SUCCESS

Publicly, Pochettino backs chairman Daniel Levy's cautious approach in an historically expensive market.

Yet the former Southampton coach might not be so sanguine if the window closes without fresh faces finally arriving in north London.

"We are working, trying to add some players to the squad," he said.

"Our idea was, the same as before, to try to provide the team with more strength and try to sign a few players before the end of the transfer window."

At Anfield, Klopp has spent the summer trying to close the gap on Tottenham and the rest of the Premier League's big guns with only limited success.

The German splashed out a club record

£43.9 million (\$57 million) on Roma winger Mohamed Salah and added Hull defender Andrew Robertson to the mix.

But Robertson is unlikely to be a game changer, while Salah's last taste of the Premier League with Chelsea was utterly forgettable.

Klopp has also failed to land Southampton defender Virgil Van Dijk and Leipzig midfielder Naby Keita, while having to fend off Barcelona's attempts to sign Reds playmaker Philippe Coutinho.

"Until the 31st of August we run through the world with open eyes," Klopp said of his transfer problems.

"It's not that we decide on our own, it's also about other clubs."

After finishing fourth last season, Liverpool need to rebuff the perception they took advantage of down years from Arsenal and Manchester United.

Having enjoyed unprecedented success with Borussia Dortmund, Klopp has proved he can beat the odds before, but winning Liverpool's first title since 1990 would be the 50-year-old's finest achievement.

Al Duhail end camp in Austria, head for Munich

The first football team of Al Duhail yesterday evening held their last training in Werfenweng, Austria, before heading to Munich to continue preparations for the next season 2017/2018.

The team's technical staff, led by Algerian Jamal Belmadi, had just completed ball training for the most part. Al Duhail are preparing for the last friendly match of the external camp, and will play the German team Traunstein today. Al Duhail will return to Doha on Thursday after an external training camp which began on July 21.

Qatar SC defeat Al Shamal in friendly

Qatar SC recorded a 5-1 victory over Al Shamal, in the friendly match they held Monday in preparation for the new season. It was the final friendly match for Qatar SC before they left for Slovenia to hold a training camp that will conclude on August 29. They will play five friendly matches there as they up their preparations for Qatar Stars League. Strong preparation for this season in particular is important as the league will see 12 teams competing instead of 14 this time. Qatar's first friendly match was against Mesaimer and ended in a 2-2 draw.

The second match was against Al Kharaitiyat, which they won 2-1.

They were also active in the transfer market, signing eight players so far this season. The team will feature in Qatar Stars League for the first time after their relegation two seasons ago.

QFA holds training camp for referees in Tunisia

Qatar Football Association has decided to set up a training camp for referees in Tunisia in preparation for the new season of Qatar 2017/2018. 43 referees will take part in the camp, which runs until August 28.

The referees will have practical exercises and physical fitness, as well as analytical lectures, they also will be briefed on the latest amendments to the game laws. The Tunisian camp is supervised by Naji Al Juwaini, Executive Director of the Arbitration Department of the Qatar Football Association, with the participation of international, European and Asian lecturers. The referees will be well prepared technically and physically for the management of the new season and other competitions organized by the Qatar Football Association, through fitness training and practical applications, as well as analytical lectures and explanation of the latest amendments to the game laws.

German clubs need help to battle organised ultras

German football clubs will need the help of the league and the country's football association to handle trouble by "ultra" fans, club executives said, days after a friendly match in England had to be called off.

Premier League Burnley's pre-season match with Bundesliga club Hanover 96 on Saturday was abandoned "on police advice", Burnley said in a statement. Media reports said German fans threw seats and surged towards Burnley fans during the first half, shortly after Burnley took the lead. "Ultra groups are being formed across the country and we will need to

find answers," Cologne sports director Joerg Schmidtke said on Monday.

"But we, the clubs, won't be able to do so, on our own. The DFB (the German Football Association) as the umbrella organisation and the DFL (the German Football League) need to get on board." Dortmund CEO Hans Joachim Watzke said this week he believed "there is the tendency for ultras to come stronger together." His team has had its share of fan trouble. It was given a 100,000-euro fine last season after its supporters attacked visiting RB Leipzig fans.

POWER STRUGGLE

Aussies embarrassed as FIFA steps in to resolve dispute

Reuters
Melbourne

Australian soccer faces an embarrassing intervention this week as a joint FIFA-Asian Football Confederation delegation arrives for talks aimed at ending a bitter power struggle that has plunged the domestic game into crisis.

The governing Football Federation Australia (FFA) has been at loggerheads with the country's 10 professional A-League clubs, and come under pressure from FIFA, to expand membership of its 10-member Congress into a more democratic model.

The Congress, which elects the FFA board, has representatives of the country's nine states and territories but just one delegate for all 10 clubs in the top-flight A-League and none representing the players.

The FFA has proposed a 13-member Congress, offering two additional votes to the clubs and one for the players, but this has been rejected by both the clubs and FIFA.

The clubs, who say they generate 80 per cent of revenues for football in Australia, want at least five seats but the FFA, led by chairman Steven Lowy and CEO David Gallop, have dug their heels in.

Lowy has been vocal about his distrust of the clubs' intentions and, like his billionaire father Frank Lowy, who was chairman before him, has rejected calls to allow an independent commission run the A-League.

"Club owners have made no secret of their demands for more power, and more money. They seek an independent league, run by them for their benefit," he said in a 2,000-word communique addressed to the 'Australian football community' over the weekend.

Apart from more Congress votes, the clubs have also demanded more money from the FFA. They have rejected the governing body's offer of A\$3.55 million in annual distributions following the record six-year, A\$346 million television deal announced in December.

The clubs have demanded up to A\$6 million, a figure the FFA has said would damage the grass roots of the game and cut deeply into funding to the national teams.

With the dispute rumbling on throughout the year, the FIFA-AFC delegation is set to arrive to hold talks with local stakeholders over the next two days in Sydney in a bid to end the impasse.

Without resolution by a Nov. 30 deadline, FIFA will disband the FFA board and install a 'normalisation committee' that would effectively take over governance of the sport.

That it has reached the point where FIFA has intervened is seen as another black eye for the FFA, which was embarrassed by the Garcia report into the World Cup bidding process for the 2022 tournament won by Qatar.

The report found "strong evidence" that the FFA had made payments to influence one of FIFA's voting members.

In addition, the ongoing power struggle has revived memories of the strife-torn National Soccer League, which collapsed under a weight of debt in 2004.

The idea that FIFA, an organisation still buffeted by corruption scandals on a number of fronts, could take over the running of the game is scarcely believable to many in Australian football.

"It makes me sick to think (FIFA) are here doing this," Jack Reilly, a former FFA board member, told local broadcaster SBS.

"They are a totally disgraced organisation."

BOTTOMLINE

Stoke's Ireland back in the game thanks to Aspetar

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Stoke City Midfielder, Stephen Ireland, has completed his treatment plan at Aspetar, the world's leading specialised orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital in Qatar, and will be soon declared fit to play.

The 30-year-old footballer broke his leg in two places after an innocent collision on the training pitch with defender Dinatan Teixeira last year. Ireland was subsequently ruled out from participating in competitive matches for more than 340 days.

Speaking to Aspetar media team, Ireland said: "I had been struggling to get back to full fitness and thought I had tried everything, but then I got to Aspetar. We weren't sure I was going to make it back to full fitness. Luckily, my hopes have been answered and I am going back to my club fit and healthy. I can't wait to start playing again."



Stoke City's midfielder Stephen Ireland at Aspetar.

"I had heard about Aspetar through other players who have been here already, such as Jack Butland, my teammate, and Shay Given. They spoke so highly of the place that I knew Aspetar could offer me an answer and, if it didn't, then perhaps there really was no way back for me. It was a great decision to

come here."

"Luckily, thanks to Aspetar, I am in a position to return next season. I still have few things to achieve and a bit more training to do, but I am very close now. Hopefully, it's just a matter of weeks," he said.

During his stay at Aspetar, Ireland benefited from Aspetar's

renowned specialist expertise in sports medicine, sports science, orthopaedic surgery and rehabilitation.

As part of the hospital's efforts to help athletes achieve maximum performance and reach their full potential, Aspetar's team took Ireland through a comprehensive treatment process to assess his injury and prepared a treatment plan to get him back on the field as quickly as possible.

Ireland also spoke highly of Aspetar's facilities and experts, saying: "The facilities here are fantastic and completely exceeded what I was expecting. For me, these facilities are the best in the world - you won't find them anywhere else. I am really happy that I made the decision to come here. I can't speak highly enough of the staff and I am very grateful for everything they have done for me."

On a separate note, Ireland shared his thoughts on Qatar's preparations for the World Cup in 2022, saying: "There is a lot of

work underway but it's a beautiful place already. I'd love to return for training and also with my family. It's very friendly and I have really enjoyed my time here, so, hopefully, I will return to watch some of the games."

Aspetar boasts one of the most advanced rehabilitation departments in the region, which forms an integral aspect of its multidisciplinary approach to athlete management. The hospital's method focuses on assessment and treatment of injured athletes by implementing personalised injury treatment programmes.

Utilising an evidence-based approach, Aspetar's experienced practitioners aim to return patients to their pre-injury lifestyle as quickly and safely as possible. It has a proven track record of treating international athletes from the PGA, WTA, ATP, World leaders in track and field, weightlifting and professional footballers from all major leagues, including the Premier League, Bundesliga and Ligue 1.

MLB

Trout gets 1000th career hit but Angels lose to Orioles 2-6

Trout reaches 1,000 hits with a double in the fourth inning off Baltimore's Bundy

Reuters
Los Angeles

Mike Trout had two hits on his 26th birthday to give him 1,001 for his career, but his Los Angeles Angels lost 6-2 to the Baltimore Orioles on Monday at the Major League Baseball. Trout reached 1,000 hits with a double in the fourth inning off Baltimore starter Dylan Bundy.

He joined Hall of Famers Mickey Mantle, Jimmie Foxx and Mel Ott as the fourth player to get at least 1,000 hits, 500 runs and 500 walks before his age 26-season. Baseball defines a player's age based on how old he is on July 1. The Big A crowd sang "Happy Birthday" to Trout in center field earlier in the inning. The fans gave him a standing ovation after his 1,000th hit. Trout also homered for the fourth time on his birthday in the sixth inning, but Manny Machado hit a tiebreaking grand slam in the seventh inning.

NATIONALS 3, MARLINS 2

Max Scherzer pitched seven sharp innings for Washington in his first start since he was sidelined by neck spasms.

Bryce Harper homered for Washington, and pinch hitter Adam Lind singled in the tiebreaking run in the eighth inning. The Nationals expanded their lead in the NL East over second-place Miami to 14 games. Brandon Kintzler (4-2) worked the eighth and Sean Doolittle got three outs to earn his sixth save.

Giancarlo Stanton hit his major league-leading 37th homer for the Marlins, matching his previous career high. Jarlin Garcia (0-2) got the loss.

Scherzer struck out nine and gave up two runs. The right-hander was coming off an abbreviated start against the Marlins six days earlier, when he was pulled after one inning with neck spasms.

CUBS 5, GIANTS 3

Javier Baez hit an inside-the-park homer to back Jake Arrieta's 11th win in the champion Cubs' first visit to AT&T Park since eliminating San Francisco in Game 4 of the NL Division Series last October.

Baez's 16th homer took a tricky bounce off the low wall in right-center and deflected past oncoming right fielder Carlos Moncrief nearly 100 feet back in the direction of the corner in right.

The NL Central leaders moved 1 1/2 games ahead of second-place Milwaukee, which lost 5-4 at Minnesota. San Francisco rookie Ryder Jones hit his first career home run with a two-run shot in the sixth off Arrieta (11-8).

Wade Davis got three outs for his 24th save in 24 tries. San Francisco left-hander Matt Moore (3-12) was charged with five runs and eight hits in six innings.



San Francisco Giants catcher Buster Posey (right) tags Chicago Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant in the seventh inning during the Major League Baseball at the AT&T Park in San Francisco on Monday. (USA TODAY Sports)

CARDINALS 11, ROYALS 3

Matt Carpenter hit a three-run homer in St. Louis' six-run fourth inning, and the Cardinals earned their third consecutive victory. Paul DeJong and Kolten Wong also connected for the Cardinals, who returned to .500 at 56-56.

Carlos Martinez (8-9) pitched eight innings of two-run ball for just his second win in his last nine starts.

Royals right-hander Ian Kennedy (4-8) was charged with seven runs, six earned, and six hits in six innings. He is winless in 14 consecutive starts at Kauffman Stadium since beating Minnesota on Aug. 20, 2016. Mike Moustakas, Eric Hosmer and Brandon Moss homered for Kansas City, which has dropped six of eight.

TWINS 5, BREWERS 4

Eddie Rosario doubled home the tying run in the seventh inning and scored the winning run for Minnesota on a balk.

After Eduardo Escobar drew a leadoff walk, Rosario hit a smash to right field that fooled Domingo Santana, who took two steps in before watching the ball sail over his head. Escobar scored to tie the

game at 4. Rosario was still at third with two out when the Brewers employed a dramatic shift on left-handed hitting Jason Castro. With no fielder near third base to hold him on, Rosario danced half-way down the baseline, causing Oliver Drake (3-4) to step off the rubber.

When Drake stepped back on the rubber, Rosario made another break for home. This time Drake flinched and plate umpire Bill Welke called a balk, sending Rosario home. Buddy Boshers (1-0) retired one batter in the seventh to earn the victory. Matt Belisle worked the ninth for his second save.

PIRATES 3, TIGERS 0

Trevor Williams pitched seven crisp innings, leading Pittsburgh to the win. Williams (5-4) struck out five and walked two, giving up only a leadoff single to James McCann in the third. Williams threw a career-high 107 pitches and never allowed a runner to third base.

Juan Nicasio got three outs for his second save, completing Pittsburgh's one-hitter. The Pirates have won three straight and four of five. Francisco Cervelli put the Pirates in front with an RBI double off

Jordan Zimmermann (7-9) in the second. John Jaso provided some late insurance with a pinch-hit two-run homer in the seventh.

Zimmermann struck out three and walked two in seven innings. The Tigers have dropped three straight following a four-game winning streak.

REDS 11, PADRES 3

Joey Votto homered for the third straight game and pulled into a tie with Ted Kluszewski on the Reds' career list.

The Reds homered four times in all, with Patrick Kivlehan hitting his first career grand slam. Adam Duval and Zack Cozart also connected.

Votto's 251st career homer off Jhoulys Chacin (11-8) moved him into a tie for fifth place with Big Klu, the first baseman who cut the sleeves off his uniform to free his big upper arms. Votto's 136th homer at Great American bumped him ahead of Jay Bruce for the ballpark record.

Jose Pirela drove in all of San Diego's runs with his first career multihomer game. The first was a two-run shot off Tim Adleman, who went only 4 2/3 innings.

NFL

Jets's receiver Enunwa out for the season

By Kimberley A. Martin
Newsday

The New York Jets haven't played a pre-season game yet, but they already have lost their top wide receiver for the season. Coach Todd Bowles announced after practice that **Quincy Enunwa** has a bulging disc in his neck and will be out six to nine months. Surgery is expected, pending a second opinion.

Bowles said he was told Enunwa's injury isn't career-threatening. "Going forward, we'll see," Bowles said.

"They said he should come out of it OK." The expected roster move came two days after Enunwa, 25, reinjured his neck at the team's Green and White scrimmage Saturday at MetLife Stadium. Enunwa suffered the non-contact neck injury while the offense was participating in 7-on-7 practice drills before the scrimmage.

According to Bowles, Enunwa felt a "tingling feeling" in his neck during the spring and underwent tests and received treatment on his neck. "He was doing better, he was doing fine. When he fell the other night, it just flared up again ... I don't think he had (a bulging disc) in the spring. It was treatable in the spring. He was healthy!"

The 2014 sixth-round pick caught 58 passes for 857 yards and four touchdowns in 2016 and entered the offseason as the team's No. 1 receiver after Brandon Marshall and Eric Decker left. Now, with their preseason opener coming up Saturday against the Titans, the Jets' coaching staff must figure out how to generate more offense from an inexperienced receiving corps.

"He's a big part of it," Bowles said of Enunwa, "so our young guys are just going to have to grow up fast." But he was quick to invoke the "next man up" mantra. "It's not deflating," Bowles said of the Enunwa news. "Injuries are a part of the (game). You take body blows in this league. Guys have to step up and we have to coach them."

Bowles also insisted that his confidence in his young receivers hasn't waned. "It hasn't changed," he said. "Obviously, they have to get some experience and get some reps. But they're talented. Just have to learn and get caught up to speed."

The Jets will look into adding another pass catcher, but it's unclear if he will be a veteran or another camp body. "We don't know yet," Bowles said. "We have a lot of young guys that we're trying to develop. So, if there's something out there that catches our eye, we'll sign him. If not, we'll stick with the guys we have. All options are open."

DOLPHINS' LANDRY UNDER INVESTIGATION

Dolphins star wide receiver Jarvis Landry is under investigation for possible battery, according to multiple reports. The investigation stems from an incident involving Landry and his girlfriend earlier this year in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Gase confirmed the team is aware of the report, but he declined to comment further.

49ERS PLACE SMITH ON INJURED RESERVE LIST

The San Francisco 49ers officially placed linebacker Malcolm Smith on the injured reserve list with a torn pectoral muscle, ending his 2017 season. The 6-foot, 225-pound Smith suffered the injury during practice.



NBA

Knicks' Ron Baker: Small town guy with Big Apple dream

By Barbara Barker
Newsday

It is hard to imagine a place less like Madison Square Garden than the cement slab where Ron Baker spent countless hours honing his game in high school.

This is a visitor's first thought as the Knicks guard gives a tour of the court his father poured in the front yard of the house where he grew up. Baker and his siblings' names are etched into the concrete, there is an old tractor parked across the street and a cornfield just a few blocks away.

Agriculture, family and sports are infused into every corner of this remote farm town in western Kansas. Scott City has two traffic lights, eight churches, 3,890 residents and some 150,000 beef cattle. The tallest structure in town is the grain elevator and the most important is the football stadium, which looks like something straight out of Friday Night Lights.

"Every small-town cliché you hear, it's legit for me," said Baker, who was a three-sport star — quarterback, basketball forward and baseball pitcher — at Scott Community High School.

The visitor has come to Western Kansas to see if she can figure out how Baker was able to leave it, to figure out what in Baker's makeup gave him the confidence he could play significant minutes for a storied NBA franchise in the biggest city in the country.

No American-born player since

John Starks has made a more improbable journey to Madison Square Garden than the one Baker has made. Baker, who paid his own tuition as a redshirt freshman at Wichita State, is believed to be the first college walk-on to play for the Knicks since Starks started 10 games in 1990-91. Now, after 52 games, including 13 starts, his rookie season, the Knicks are giving him a significant role in their rebuild. Last month, he agreed to a two-year contract reportedly worth \$8.9 million.

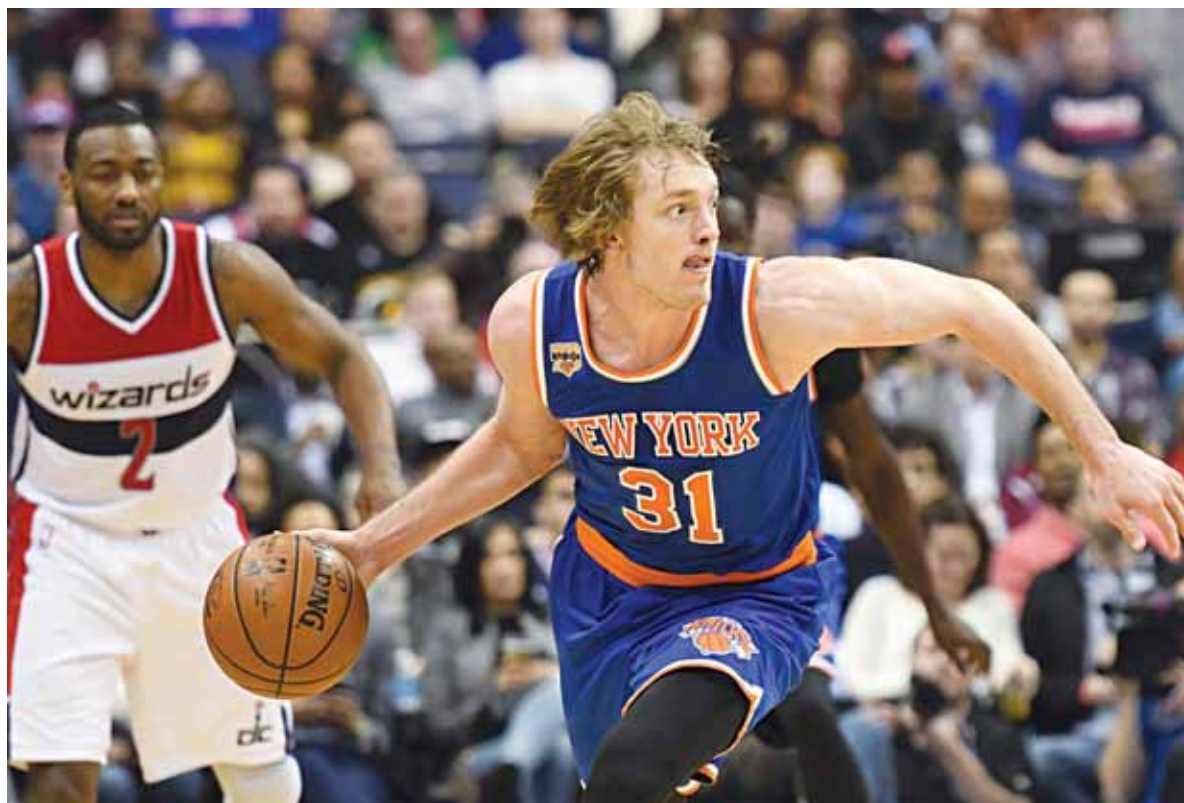
"I look at Ron as a guy who can play both guard positions," Knicks coach Jeff Hornacek said last week.

"He's not the traditional point guard where he can blow by you and use his speed to get around you. He does it with strength. The game of basketball isn't always about speed. If you know angles and create openings, you can make a lot of plays."

"Ron's a tough kid and plays hard and does whatever you ask. Those are guys who have a chance to grow as players. We feel Ron is just at the tip of it with what he can do out there on the court."

Knicks fans certainly hope so. Given that it was unclear if Baker, a restricted free agent, had drawn interest from other teams, there were a few raised eyebrows when the contract was reported. Those who know Baker say having to prove himself is not a problem. In fact, he thrives on it, given that he is a player who has been underestimated every step of his career.

"He's never been afraid of that big stage," said Brian Gentry, who coached



Last month, Ron Baker (right) agreed to a two-year contract with New York Knicks reportedly worth \$8.9 million.

Baker in both football and basketball at Scott Community High School. "When he was young, he was never afraid to step in with older kids. The fear of failure never seemed to bother him no

matter where he was coming from." In fact, playing sports in Scott City once seemed like the big time for Baker. Before moving there in middle school, he lived 50 miles to the east in Utica,

where his father's family owns a 6,000-acre wheat farm. With a population of 152 people, Utica is a city only in name. Not only does it not have a traffic light, it doesn't have paved roads. In elemen-

tary school, Baker never had more than six students in his class.

Like other kids in Utica, Baker helped out on the farm and he talks about agricultural equipment and crop rotation in the same offhanded, familiar manner that kids on Long Island talk about summer camp and trips to the beach. When he wasn't working or in school, Baker played every sport he could. The nearest basketball court was at a park several miles outside of town.

The Bakers are an athletic family. Baker's mother, Ranae, played volleyball, basketball and softball on scholarship at St. Mary of the Plains College. Ron's father Neil played baseball at Fort Hays State University. Ron played everything growing up and always wanted to win. "He's very competitive," Ranae said. "When he didn't win when he was little, he would pout. It didn't matter if it was a board game or whatever."

And in Western Kansas, they seem to be able to turn just about anything into a competition. Take the Scott County Free Fair held in July. In addition to carnival rides, chocolate waffle booths and livestock contests, there's a zucchini-growing event, a table-setting competition, something called cow-pie bingo and a hay bale decorating contest. First prize this year in the hay contest went to a bale that was decorated to look like Ron Baker holding a basketball.

Baker permanently cemented his status as a local celebrity since scoring the winning basket in the championship game of the 3A state tournament his senior year.

GOLF

Spieth chases history as PGA practice opens

24-year-old American could become the youngest player to win all four majors if he wins the event on Sunday



Jordan Spieth plays a shot during a practice round prior to the 2017 PGA Championship at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, North Carolina.

AFP
Charlotte

Jordan Spieth says he isn't carrying any extra pressure this week trying to become the youngest golfer to complete a career Grand Slam by winning the 99th PGA Championship.

But the 24-year-old American, who won his third major title two weeks ago at the British Open, wouldn't mind making history while finishing off a dream goal this week at Quail Hollow, where practice began Monday.

"I don't need to be the youngest. I don't feel any added pressure because of that," Spieth said.

"I really don't feel any added pressure whatsoever. If it happens great. If it doesn't then my next, probably last, life-long goal as a professional golfer would be to win the career grand slam." World number two Spieth, the 2015 Masters and US Open champion, could become only the sixth man to sweep the four major titles in a career after Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Ben Hogan, Gary Player and Gene Sarazen.

Spieth would be 24 years and 17 days old on Sunday, about six months younger than Woods — the youngest to win all four majors so far — was when he won the 2000 British Open to complete his career slam.

And Spieth could become the first player to complete a career slam with a victory at the PGA Championship. Nicklaus, Woods and Hogan completed their career slams at the British Open, Sarazen at the Masters and Player at the US Open.

For now, Spieth is among a select group of 13 players who have captured three of the four majors in their careers. He joins Tom Watson and the late Arnold Palmer in only lacking the PGA Championship.

That list includes US left-hander Phil Mickelson, a five-time major winner missing only the US Open after a record six runner-up showings in that event, and Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy, a four-time major winner lacking only the Masters to complete his career sweep.

Mickelson, like four-time major winner Ernie Els of South Africa, will make his 100th major appearance this week at Quail Hollow.

McIlroy is expected to be a contender for a third Wanamaker Trophy after wins in 2012 and 2014. That would put him fourth on the all-time list behind Nick-

In all, 97 of the world's top 100 are playing this week, with number 36 Brandt Snedeker dropping out injured on Monday, joining Germany's Martin Kaymer (64) and American Scott Piercy (77)

laus and Walter Hagen with five and Woods with four.

"It would be nice to make that a hat trick," McIlroy said.

And McIlroy has a strong history at Quail Hollow. He won his first US PGA title in 2010 on the 7,600-yard, par-71 layout at age 20 with a final-round course record 62. In 2015, he lowered the mark, a third-round 61 sparking him to a second tour title in Charlotte.

"I play well at Quail Hollow. I love the golf course," McIlroy said. "They have made a few changes but I'll have some really good vibes."

Possibly soft conditions with thunderstorms in the forecast into the weekend shouldn't dampen McIlroy's major chances, given that he won a rain-soaked US Open in 2011 by eight strokes at Congressional.

Spieth will play alongside fellow reigning major champions Sergio Garcia of Spain, who captured his first major title at the Masters, and American Brooks Koepka, the US Open winner, in the first two rounds.

The feature trio starts tomorrow from the 10th tee at 8:25am (1225 GMT) and Friday from the first tee at 1:35pm.

World number one Dustin Johnson will be in the group just behind them both days along with Australia's seventh-ranked Jason Day and Sweden's eighth-rated Henrik Stenson.

In all, 97 of the world's top 100 are playing this week, with number 36 Brandt Snedeker dropping out injured on Monday, joining Germany's Martin Kaymer (64) and American Scott Piercy (77). American Chris Kirk replaced Snedeker in the field.

McIlroy will play alongside Spain's Jon Rahm and American Rickie Fowler in the first two rounds.

Defending champion Jimmy Walker, who was diagnosed with Lyme disease in April, will join Mickelson and Jason Dufner in an all-US trio.

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, coming off a victory at the World Golf Championships Bridgestone Invitational, will join Els and England's Ian Poulter the first two days.

SPOTLIGHT

Players plot plans at new Quail Hollow



Zach Johnson says the greens will pose problems for players at the PGA Championship.

Reuters
Charlotte

Players have come to know Quail Hollow during its years of hosting the PGA Tour's Wells Fargo Championship, but given its recent makeover players were not exactly sure how it will play at this week's PGA Championship.

"Who knows?" William McGirt told Reuters when asked for a probable winning score after walking off the ninth green. "It could be six-under or it could be 18-under. No one knows."

Three refashioned holes on the front side add teeth to that nine, rough has grown in to punish errant drives and a change of grass on the greens has raised the speeds to hazardous levels.

Under the relaxed policy of the PGA of America, players were able to practice while wearing shorts, adding a casual air about Monday's preparations. But the 156-player field were seriously taking stock ahead of the year's last major starting on Thursday.

"The biggest change we've seen is the change in the greens," double major winner Zach Johnson told Reuters.

"Going from the bent to the bermuda is a substantial change and requires you to be really, really careful on your approach shots with the run-up and the release."

James Hahn put on a short-game clinic at the ninth, pitching from short of the green to two feet past the cup to ap-

plause from the fans ringing the putting surface.

Despite hitting such a sweet shot, he dropped another ball and took dead aim again, this time flipping the ball up to within one foot on its way to the cup earning a louder cheer.

But Hahn said the greens could be unfair when hitting from farther out in the fairway, noting that he and practice partner Vijay Singh both hit approaches that landed six feet from a cup with drastically different results.

"Mine stopped and Vijay's ran off about 30 feet," said Hahn. "I think that some good shots will not be rewarded."

Johnson agreed, but added: "I have one word to say and that's — 'golf'. It's a four-letter word." McGirt said the rough could be a deciding factor, especially if it rains all week as has been forecast.

"This rough is the great equaliser because you're going to get some balls that you can barely advance and some balls that will fly forever," he said.

"We've never played this golf course with actual rough... there hasn't been a ton of it."

McGirt said it can get fiendish when wet.

"It's gonna get squishy. It's already getting nasty on a couple of holes out there, really nasty. I had one on five. I hit a seven-iron as hard as I could and it went about 80 yards."

Despite that, McGirt expects some sizzling scores.

"The golf course is pretty receptive right now, so I'd expect fairly low scores."

BOTTOMLINE

PGA Championship to be shifted to May from August

Reuters
Charlotte

A much anticipated shift of the major golf calendar that would move the PGA Championship from its August slot to May is a done deal according to media reports but PGA officials were staying mum on the subject on Monday.

"We have no comment on that," a PGA of America spokesman told Reuters at Quail Hollow, site of the PGA Championship starting tomorrow.

"We won't have anything to say on that before our news conference on Tuesday."

The Associated Press reported on Monday that two officials involved in the discussions, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the PGA of America and PGA Tour will discuss details of the 2019 move as early as today at Quail Hollow.

Under a proposed revised schedule, The Players Championship would move back to March, with the US Masters leading off the series of majors in April followed by the PGA in May,



Bubba Watson tees off on the second hole during a practice round at Quail Hollow Club yesterday. Picture: Kyle Terada-USA TODAY Sports

the US Open in June and the British Open in July.

Last month, on the eve of the British Open at Royal Birkdale, R&A CEO Martin Slumbers told reporters it made no difference to him if the British Open remained the third major of the year or became the fourth and last.

"I don't think the final decision has been taken yet on that," Slumbers said at the time. "I

think from our perspective I don't really mind whether we're the third major or the fourth major. We try to do our very best with The Open Championship to make it as good as we possibly can do.

"I can absolutely understand some of the logic, and if it ends up as resulting in more people watching our game, then that's a great outcome."

Prior to last week's World Golf Championship - Bridgestone Invitational, Sean McManus, Chairman of CBS Sports, said in a conference call that such a shift in the golf calendar would be welcomed by the US TV networks. McManus said it would complete the major golf season, including the FedExCup playoffs, before the start of the NFL.

"We love the PGA Championship in August, but we would certainly love the PGA Championship in May," McManus said.

The move could also ease scheduling conflicts around the Olympics, now that golf has joined the Games programme.

● Augusta National Golf Club has agreed to purchase a parcel of land from the adjacent Augusta Country Club, according to a Golf Channel website report Monday.

A letter from Augusta Country Club officials to members said that the deal was struck after months of "collaborative and cooperative dialogue" with the home course of the Masters.

The memo, dated last Friday, said the property is on the north-west boundary of Augusta Country Club, next to Augusta Na-

tional's par-5 13th hole, the final hole of the famed "Amen Corner" stretch of the course that annually hosts the year's first major tournament.

There had been talk for years that Augusta National might look to lengthen the hole.

"It's fair to say, as is always the case, we are always looking at certain holes, certain other improvements to the golf course, and we talked about some of those, and I think they are all pretty obvious," Augusta National chairman Billy Payne said in April.

Augusta Country Club president Jay Forrester said in the letter that as part of the sale to Augusta National, "a portion of the eighth hole and a new ninth hole will be constructed at no cost to Augusta Country Club."

Exactly how much property was sold to Augusta National and at what price was not disclosed in the letter, but Forrester was not unhappy with the terms in his writing.

"Be assured this transaction will improve our golf course and will put Augusta Country Club in an even greater financial position for many years to come," he said.

CYCLING

Kwiatkowski signs new deal with Sky

Agencies
London

Michal Kwiatkowski signed a new three-year contract with Team Sky after his key role in Chris Froome's Tour de France win last month.

Kwiatkowski was labelled as Sky's game changer in France by team principal Dave Brailsford after the Pole excelled himself in the mountains to help Froome to a fourth Tour crown.

It was part of an impressive year for the 27-year-old, who has won one-day races in the Strade-Bianche, Milan-San Remo and Clásica San Sebastian.

"I've had great support from the team for the past two seasons — both last year, when I had a really difficult season, and this year, which has been great," he said.

"I've only been here for one and a half years, but it feels like far longer. That's what I need — to feel supported, like part of a

family, otherwise it can be difficult.

"I truly believe I can win lots more races in the future here."

Froome welcomed Kwiatkowski's deal, saying: "Kwato has had a brilliant year."

"He's obviously had some great wins himself, but to me his performance in the Tour de France epitomised everything about him and what he brings to Team Sky. "As a rider he is just so versatile and selfless."

Meanwhile, triple winner Alberto Contador will wear bib number one in his farewell Vuelta a Espana later this month as the Spaniard prepares to bring his career to an end.

Contador, who announced on Monday this year's Vuelta would be his last professional race, will be bidding for a fourth title after his triumphs in 2008, 2012 and 2014.

The number one bib is usually reserved for the defending champion, but organisers have broken with tradition and handed it to the Trek-Segafredo rider.

TENNIS

Nadal eyes No.1 in Montreal with Murray sidelined

'I'm trying to have the right preparation now and that's it'

AFP
Montreal

Rafael Nadal says he'll focus on the foes in front of him at the ATP Montreal Masters this week, and not on his chance to return to number one in the world.

A semi-final run in Montreal would see the Spaniard supplant Britain's Andy Murray atop the rankings.

"I don't even think about that now," Nadal said of number one. "I'm trying to have the right preparation now and that's it."

"I'm going to keep trying to play the way I did in the first part of the season, so if I'm able to make that happen, I hope to have a chance to do well."

The top seed is expected to open his campaign for a fourth Canadian title today with a second-round meeting against either Croatian Borna Coric or Russian lucky loser Mikhail Youzhny.

Nadal could also be on track for a third round showdown against 2009 tournament runner-up Juan Martin del Potro who beat hard-serving American John Isner in straight sets 7-5, 7-5 in a night match on Monday.

Murray is among the notable absentees from this key US Open tuneup. Novak Djokovic is taking off the rest of the season to rehab an elbow injury and US Open champion Stan Wawrinka has ended his 2017 campaign with a knee problem.

Murray is trying to recover from a nagging hip injury in time for the final Grand Slam of the season that starts later this month in Flushing Meadows.

Nadal claimed his 10th French Open title this year but bowed out in the fourth round at Wimbledon – his fifth exit before the quarter-finals in his last five appearances at the All England Club.

Roger Federer, who seized his 19th Grand Slam title at Wimbledon, is also slated to open today.

ISNER'S STREAK SNAPPED

Former US Open champion del Potro of Argentina snapped an eight-match win streak for Isner, who earned from back-to-back title in July at the Hall of Fame Open in Newport and the Atlanta Open.

Del Potro had to overcome 24 aces by 14th seeded Isner as he seeks to return to the final for the first time since losing to Murray in 2009.

Del Potro hammered nine aces, had three double faults and won 85 percent of his first serves in the one hour, 49 minute match.

Del Potro closed out the victory on his second match point by hitting a forehand winner down the line. He broke Isner at 5-5 in the second set then jumped out to a 40-0 lead in the final game.



A semi-final run would see Rafael Nadal supplant Andy Murray (not pictured) atop the rankings. (USA TODAY Sports)



Juan Martin del Potro of Argentina celebrates his win over John Isner of the United States (not pictured) on Monday. (USA TODAY Sports)

"I got lucky to win tonight," del Potro said. "Nobody wants to play John in the first round. But now I am in good

shape. I look forward to improving my game and winning more matches." Isner won back-to-back titles in

Newport and Atlanta in July before withdrawing from last week's tournament in Washington with a knee injury. He also pulled out of the Madrid tournament with knee trouble.

Del Potro next faces either Rogerio Dutra Silva or 18-year-old Canadian wild card Denis Shapovalov. If he wins, del Potro would likely face Nadal.

In early matches on Monday, Australia's Nick Kyrgios romped past Serbian Viktor Troicki 6-1, 6-2 and France's Gael Monfils shook off a slow start to beat American Steve Johnson 2-6, 7-6 (1), 6-1.

France's Benoit Paire also advanced, downing American Donald Young 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, but rising French star Lucas Pouille fell 7-6 (5), 7-6 (10/8) to American Jared Donaldson.

Monfils was broken twice in a sluggish first set, but gradually found his range, firing 11 aces and saving the only other two break points he faced in the one-hour, 38-minute victory.

"At 4-3 in the second set I started putting the ball in the court. I was able to move better," said Monfils who had his knees taped during the second set. "I was able to make it more difficult for him. From then on, I was able to get some more opportunities and I was able to make him have some doubts."

French veteran Richard Gasquet survived an early scare from Canada's Brayden Schnur but held on for a 7-6 (5), 5-7, 6-1 win in their opening round match.

seven winners.

"I'm feeling pretty tired right now," said Kvitova, who was trailing 4-1 in the second set before winning the tiebreak.

"I'm trying to come back as soon as possible but it is just a matter of time," added the 14th seed.

MLADENOVIC OUSTED

Strycova reached the second round for the fourth straight year, while Mladenovic remains winless in four attempts on the Canadian hardcourts after the first match on an overcast centre court in Toronto lasted just 75 minutes.

"I started very well and felt good on court," said the 26th-ranked Strycova, whose only career title came in 2011 in Quebec City. "I was playing a lot of balls and being patient and I think that was the key in this match."

"In the second set she started to play a little bit better, she is a tough opponent. It is a great win for me."

Playing her first event since a first-round loss at Wimbledon, Strycova got off to blazing start by breaking the misfiring Mladenovic three times on her way to a 5-0 lead.

Japan's Naomi Osaka advanced 6-1 4-1 when Britain's Heather Watson retired injured while Russian Daria Kasatkina battled past Italy's Roberta Vinci 7-6 (3), 7-6 (1).



Barbora Strycova of Czech Republic celebrates winning a point against Kristina Mladenovic of France at the Rogers Cup in Toronto on Monday. (AFP)

Strycova's stunning triumph was followed by another surprise victory when 12th seed Ostapenko lost 1-6, 7-6 (2), 7-6 (5) to American Lepchenko in two hours and 36 minutes.

After breezing through the first set, the 20-year-old Ostapenko's nerves began to show and unforced errors helped Lepchenko, 31, take the final

two sets in tiebreaks.

Fan favourite Petra Kvitova, determined to improve following a knife injury to her hand inflicted by an intruder at home, beat Spaniard Carla Suarez Navarro 6-1, 7-6 (5).

The Czech's six aces and 32 winners were too much for the 28-year-old Navarro, who had no aces and just

BOXING

Sparring partner Malignaggi slams McGregor

AFP
Los Angeles

Former boxing champ Paulie Malignaggi says he has no regrets about quitting Conor McGregor's training camp, saying the mixed martial arts fighter surrounds himself with "a bunch of yes men".

McGregor is preparing to face boxing star Floyd Mayweather in a Las Vegas boxing ring on August 26 in what could be one of the richest fights in history.

The 36-year-old Malignaggi, who retired from boxing five months ago, walked out of training camp last week after he said McGregor used him like a pawn, disrespected him in the dressing room and housed him and the other sparring partners in dump accommodations.

"He's a scumbag," Malignaggi said of McGregor in an interview Monday with the American website The MMA Hour.

He also gave a detailed breakdown of how their sparring sessions went, no doubt providing Mayweather with a blueprint on how to beat McGregor.

Malignaggi, a former multiple world champion, said despite training little during retirement he had no trouble getting the better of McGregor.

Malignaggi said McGregor is more concerned about putting on a spectacle in training camp than getting ready for a serious boxing debut against one of the greatest fighters of all-time.

Malignaggi was also upset about training camp pictures made public that show the Irishman in a positive light.

"The guy is all about his ego. He's actually not trying to get better. He's got a bunch of yes men in his corner who tell him he's doing good even if he's doing bad. It is just about him and cheerleading," Malignaggi told MMA Hour.

He said he asked McGregor to stop releasing misleading sparring photos that showed the MMA fighter getting the better of the exchanges. McGregor refused.

"At this stage I'm waiting for Ashton Kutcher to walk into the dressing rooms and tell me I got Punk'd. I thought it was a joke. I thought there was no way this guy is that much of an a*****," he said.



'SOME KIND OF CRACKHOUSE'

"I showed up with the best intentions to camp and at a certain point you start to realize you are being used as a pawn where somebody's trying to get ahead at your expense and not through your help."

"I said 'I can't deal with this! His team is a bunch of cheerleaders. They are not improving him. I don't need to be around these people. It is not like they brought me in for anything tactical.'"

He said the training camp accommodations were better suited to drug dealers. "They put me in some kind of a crackhouse," he said.

Malignaggi indicated that Mayweather should have little trouble with McGregor over 12 rounds of boxing as long as he goes to the body on a regular basis.

"From about six rounds on, he became very hittable," the former champ said. "So much more hittable that I was putting more weight on my shots and sitting down more on my shots, and of course, the body shots started to affect him more and more."

"In MMA the body shots aren't the same as in boxing in that there is consistency to body shots in boxing. There is a debilitating breakdown from the body shots in boxing. Little by little you feel the air come out of you with fatigue."

He said McGregor's biggest asset against Mayweather will be his excellent conditioning.

"Conditioning wise he could push the issue a little bit more than I could," he said.

RUGBY

All Blacks delayed involving police for five days after finding 'bug'

Reuters
Sydney

All Blacks management decided not to call the police for five days after a security consultant claimed he had found a listening device in a team meeting room in Sydney ahead of last year's test against Australia, a court heard yesterday.

It was only on the morning of the match that team manager Darren Shand, aware that the news was about to be published in New Zealand, instructed Intercontinental staff to involve the police, the hotel's then general manager Paul Walters said.

Adrian Gard, a security consultant used by the New Zealand team for a decade, is facing a charge of public mischief over the discovery of the device in a chair last August.

Walters, who gave evidence by video link from London, said he was called to a room in the hotel by Shand and Gard late on Monday afternoon.

"They told me that had found a listening device and showed me said device," said Walters.

"I said, 'Would you like me to contact police?' Mr Shand requested I do not contact police."

Walters said he asked Shand on three further occasions in the days that followed if he wanted to involve the police

but received the same answer.

That changed on the morning of the match.

"I woke to a missed call from Mr Shand," Walters said.

"I called him back... Mr Shand advised the news of the bugging would hit the press in 15 minutes and they were happy to get the police involved."

The timing of the release of the news, with the inevitable speculation that the host nation had been guilty of spying on the visitors, has been a matter of much friction between New Zealand Rugby and the Australian Rugby Union (ARU).

Australia coach Michael Cheika told local media only this week he felt so strongly about it that he had raised it with his New Zealand counterpart Steve Hansen.

"I want to play the game as hard as it can be, slugging it out, the physicality of the game, even sledging sometimes if it has to be, or the mindgames," he told the Payto and Panda Podcast.

"But I reckon that bringing in police and all that business, and making a clear inference, is crossing the line."

"I said that before and I've said it to the New Zealand coach personally, I feel it's crossing the line."

Australia, who lost last year's match 42-8, again host the All Blacks in Sydney on Saturday week.

Gard's hearing will resume on August 16.

Former England lock Botha retires

Newcastle forward Mouritz Botha has been forced to retire on medical advice after sustaining a serious concussion last season. Capped 10 times by England, South Africa-born Botha opted to hang up his boots rather than risk further concussion issues in the future. The 35-year-old spent two seasons with English Premiership side New-

castle after joining from Super Rugby outfit Sharks in August 2015. Botha had previously played 142 games during six seasons with Saracens, who he helped win the Premiership title in 2011. "I only have one overriding feeling – that I was truly blessed to have had enjoyed my time as a rugby player as much as I have done," Botha said in a statement.

REPORT

Venus wins but Mladenovic, Ostapenko upset

Reuters
Toronto

Venus Williams prevailed in a three-setter but French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko and 13th seed Kristina Mladenovic crashed out of Rogers Cup with first round defeats on Monday.

Williams outlasted a lengthy rain delay and pesky Romanian opponent Irina-Camelia Begu to win her opening match 6-1, 3-6, 6-3.

Less than a month after her run to the Wimbledon final, where she lost to Spain's Garbine Muguruza, 37-year-old Williams again had to turn back time against a young challenger.

After taking the opening set in dominant fashion, the American found herself in a fight as Begu rallied back to win a set before rain suspended action for more than an hour.

The decisive set was a rollercoaster with Williams moving ahead 3-1 only to lose consecutive games before bouncing back to seize three straight games and the match.

Earlier, Mladenovic was swept aside 6-2, 6-3 by Czech Barbora Strycova while Ostapenko fell to American Varvara Lepchenko as upsets marked the start of the tournament.



Barbora Strycova of Czech Republic celebrates winning a point against Kristina Mladenovic of France at the Rogers Cup in Toronto on Monday. (AFP)

Strycova's stunning triumph was followed by another surprise victory when 12th seed Ostapenko lost 1-6, 7-6 (2), 7-6 (5) to American Lepchenko in two hours and 36 minutes.

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two sets in tiebreaks.

Fan favourite Petra Kvitova, determined to improve following a knife injury to her hand inflicted by an intruder at home, beat Spaniard Carla Suarez Navarro 6-1, 7-6 (5).

The Czech's six aces and 32 winners were too much for the 28-year-old Navarro, who had no aces and just

SPOTLIGHT

Gibson coach talk encourages Proteas captain du Plessis

'I have asked the England team for their thoughts on Ottis, and they've given me positive feedback'

AFP

Manchester, United Kingdom

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis has liked what he's heard about potential new Proteas head coach Ottis Gibson.

The current England bowling coach, Gibson has been tipped to succeed Russell Domingo, whose contract with Cricket South Africa expired after the end of a tour that finished with a 3-1 series defeat following England's 177-run win in the fourth Test at Old Trafford on Monday. "I have asked the England team for their thoughts on Ottis, and they've given me positive feedback," du Plessis told reporters after a reverse that completed a tough tour for South Africa, who also suffered one-day and Twenty20 series losses to England, as well as a disappointing first-round exit in the Champions Trophy.

"I believe (England's) players are good judges, and will be honest with their reflections on a guy (and whether) he'll work as a head coach. They've said some really good, positive things about him. Personally, if he is going to be the guy, we have to get to learn about each other first."

Meanwhile England head coach Trevor Bayliss indicated he was getting ready for life without 48-year-old



South Africa's captain Faf du Plessis.



England bowling coach Ottis Gibson (right), seen here with captain Joe Root, is set to leave his position to become head coach of South Africa.

former West Indies head coach Gibson as a member of his backroom staff. "I only found out from you guys (the press) – that's the first we'd heard of it," said Bayliss of British media reports linking Gibson with the South Africa post. "There's nothing been finalised yet."

The Australian added: "I'm at a loss at the moment whether it's a go-ahead – we haven't heard for sure. By all accounts, it sounds like it."

Meanwhile du Plessis said he had held talks with CSA chiefs about the future identity of the South Africa coach. "There were conversations," he said. "The first was 'were we happy with

Russell?'; and the guys said yes. Then it was the panel's decision to try and see if there was someone they could see who would possibly take the team forward."

He added: "I just gave my input, where I said I think Russell is doing a good job at the moment but if there is someone who can challenge the team more, by all means go and look who's out there. That decision will only be made, as far as I know, when it gets to the board."

This was a difficult tour for Domingo, who had to fly home after his mother was involved in a car accident and return again when she died of her injuries.

But du Plessis said the upheaval and general uncertainty over Domingo's future could not account for a poor run of results. "I can't use that as an excuse. The coaching staff have been brilliant and they haven't been sidetracked by what was going on. If it ended for Russell like this then it's a disappointing way to send him off with the players not performing. He's been a crucial part of what we've been doing for the last while and we didn't play well."

South Africa arrived in England back in May without key fast bowler Dale Steyn, while seamer Vernon Philander was rarely fully fit. Several players who

might have been in the squad had ended their South Africa careers to play for English counties instead, while AB de Villiers, one of the world's leading batsmen, opted out of the Test series.

But du Plessis said South Africa had to get ready for a future where former captain de Villiers no longer played Test cricket. "We all know how good AB is, and we missed him, but we've spent too much time talking about 'when is AB going to come back?'" he explained.

"The hope of him coming back is something I think we need to move past. If AB comes back it's a huge bonus... but I don't expect it," du Plessis added.

FOCUS

Sreesanth believes in WC miracle after life ban lifted

AFP

New Delhi

Indian pace bowler Shanthakumaran Sreesanth said yesterday he was dreaming of playing in the 2019 World Cup after a court lifted a life ban imposed over a match-fixing scandal. The 34-year-old knows he faces a tough battle after four years in the wilderness, but he said he was inspired by the successful comeback of Pakistan's Mohammad Amir from a fixing ban.

The Kerala state high court lifted Sreesanth's ban on Monday, saying the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had not proved his role in the 2013 Indian Premier League scandal. Sreesanth said his first target would be to play games for Glenrothes in the Scottish league, and then Kerala state, as he bids to fight back into the Indian team.

"My dream is to play 2019 World Cup for India," Sreesanth told *The Times of India* in an interview. "But I know it is next to impossible and it would be a miracle if I play in that World Cup. But I have always believed that miracles can happen."

"There might be stiff competition for fast bowlers' spots now. But there was competition even when I made my way into the Indian team. I have always felt that competition gets the best out of

A Indian high court lifted Sreesanth's ban saying the Indian board had not proved his role in the 2013 Indian Premier League scandal.



me. I just hope that I can do justice to my talent on my comeback."

The BCCI has not made any comment on the ruling. It could appeal to a national court, or accept the verdict and let Sreesanth return. The 2013 IPL season was mired in controversy after police launched legal proceedings against several officials and three Rajasthan Royals players, including Sreesanth, for illegal betting and spot-fixing.

All three were cleared of spot-fixing charges by a New Delhi court in 2015, but Sreesanth's life ban by the BCCI remained in place until Monday's ruling. Sreesanth, who was 13 short of 100 Test wickets when he was banned, said he was optimistic of being given official approval to play.

"Today I'm feeling much better than how I felt when I got my maiden call-up to the Indian team," said Sreesanth, who was banned with fellow Ra-

asthan Royals players Ajit Chandila and Ankeet Chavan.

"It is a new life for me. Even the biggest of criminals don't go through what I or my family went through. "A small incident was portrayed in the wrong way in front of the world. Maybe that's how the world works, I don't know."

He highlighted the case of Pakistani bowler Amir, who was found guilty of match-fixing in court and banned for five years in 2011. Amir made an early return in 2015 and helped Pakistan beat India in the Champions Trophy final in June.

"I just hope that happens in my career too," said Sreesanth. While Sreesanth had denied any role in the IPL match-fixing, the Kerala court said he had been a victim of his own silence in not defending himself at the time.

"Complacency in the matter on the part of Sreesanth is really condemnable," said the judge in his ruling. To uphold the dignity of the game, he should have publicly disapproved (of) the conduct of Jiju Janardanan, especially when his name was dragged into the controversy."

Janardanan was a friend of Sreesanth who was accused of acting as a link between the players and illegal bookies. "Anyhow, having suffered a ban now almost for four years, nothing further is required in this matter," the court concluded.

England's Ali hails Saqlain red for success

Manchester, United Kingdom: MOEEN ALI has paid tribute to the "amazing" Saqlain Mushtaq for his role in helping the England all-rounder enjoy a record-breaking Test series against South Africa. Ali, a 30-year-old off-spinner and left-handed batsman, became the first man in cricket history to score more than 250 runs and take 25 wickets in a four-match Test series during the course of England's 3-1 victory over the Proteas.

Ali has often been regarded, even by himself, as a "second spinner" when the likes of Hampshire left-armers Liam Dawson have been in the England side. But under the guidance of England spin-bowling coach Saqlain, a former Pakistan off-spinner and star of a Surrey side that won English County Championship titles at the turn of the century, Ali's bowling has improved markedly.

"Saqqy has been amazing for me in terms of helping with my fields, helping me understand my bowling a lot more than I had done previously – and I think that has been the biggest difference," said Ali after bowling England to a 177-run win in the fourth Test at Old Trafford with more than a day to spare on Monday.

"Little things like that can make a big difference," explained Ali, who ended the match with two wickets in two balls for an innings return of five for 69 after finishing England's victory in the third Test at The Oval with a hat-trick.

"Before, I just bowled, (and) didn't really think too much," added Ali, who started the series with a 10-wicket haul in England's first Test win at Lord's. "I let the captain set the field. I would say I set the field a lot more throughout this series."

The South Africa series saw Ali, who showed his batting class with an unbeaten 75 not out in England's second innings at Old Trafford, cement his position of fourth in the International Cricket Council rankings for Test all-rounders.

"I feel a lot more confident in my ability," he said. "I feel like it was building. I had been batting well over the last year, and the bowling was coming."

Joe Root, whose first series as England captain ended with a decisive victory, has been delighted by Worcestershire star Ali's progress. "He is definitely improving all the time," said Root. "I hope it's not just a one-off series, and he can go on now and do it again and again."



TEST SERIES

Herath injured in fresh blow for Sri Lanka

AFP

Colombo

Key bowler Rangana Herath has joined Sri Lanka's growing injury list ahead of the start of the third and final Test against India starting tomorrow, in a blow to their hopes of a consolation win. The 39-year-old spinner, Sri Lanka's number one and the world number three in Tests behind India's Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin, is out with a back injury, chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya said.

"Herath will not be able to play in the third Test," Jayasuriya said. "He is suffering a stiff back." Sri Lanka have already suffered crushing defeats in the first two Tests and losing Herath compounds their problems.

All-rounder Asela Gunaratne and bowler Nuwan Pradeep picked up injuries in the first and second Tests respectively. Skipper Dinesh Chandimal missed the first Test after being hospitalised for pneumonia, and fast bowler Suranga Lakmal was ruled out before the series.



Herath's place is likely to be taken by left-arm spinner Malinda Pushpakumara. India will also be handicapped by the one-match ban slapped on Jadeja by the International Cricket Council for dangerous play. The left-arm spinner was reprimanded for a dangerous throw in the second Test in Colombo. He was also docked half his match fee and given six demerit points by the ICC over the second incident in a year.

After the final delivery of the 58th over, fielding off his own bowling, Jadeja threw the ball back at batsman Dimuth Karunaratne, who had not left his crease. The ball narrowly missed him in a manner which the umpires deemed "dangerous", the ICC said.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's cricketers have been urged to ignore trolling on social media after a dismal run of results triggered a wave of criticism with even a government minister poking fun online. Team mentor Aravinda de Silva said players should not be disheartened ahead of the third Test against India. Young players should "not be discouraged by extraneous elements that seek to demoralise them via social media and gossip sites", he said.

SECURITY FEARS

Pakistan says Under-19 Asia Cup in India must be moved

AFP

Karachi

Pakistani cricket authorities yesterday called for an upcoming tournament in India to be moved to a neutral venue, citing security fears in the South Asian country. India is due to host the Under-19 Asia Cup in November but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said it would press for a relocation at an Asian Cricket Council (ACC) meeting this week.

"We will discuss this matter in the ACC meeting in Colombo on Saturday and we think that the event can be held at any other secure venue outside India and Pakistan," Najam Sethi, chairman of the PCB's executive committee, said.

Political tensions have prevented the neighbours from playing a bilateral series since 2007, apart from Pakistan's tour to India in 2012-2013 when they played a short limited-overs series. Since then, sporting events have been marred by perennial tensions between the arch-rivals.

In 2013 officials were forced to move Women's World Cup matches from Mumbai to Cuttack over security fears and protests over Pakistan's participation. The same year, Pakistan athletes were expelled from a hockey league following protests.

Pakistan blamed a delay in visas for their non-participation in the Junior World Cup in India in 2016, while earlier this year their squash players had to opt out of an event in India due to visa glitches.

The PCB has also initiated legal action against India for not honouring a deal under which the two countries were set to play six senior series between 2014-2023, pending clearance from New Delhi.

The first of those series failed to materialise in 2015 and the second, due in November-December this year, has also been axed.

The PCB last week said it has allocated 1bn rupees (10mn dollars) for the legal battle. "The case will soon be filed with the ICC (International Cricket Council) dispute committee," said Shaharyar Khan, who completed his three-year tenure as PCB chairman, last week.