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Page 4

TENNIS

# Sweet 16th for Nadal as he powers to 3rd US Open title

**For Nadal, it was his fifth title of the year and 74th of his career while the \$3.7mn winner's prize boosted his earnings to a shade under \$90mn**

**RAFA FACTFILE**

**World ranking: 1**  
**Born: June 3, 1986**  
**Residence: Manacor, Mallorca, Spain**  
**Weight: 188lbs (85kg)**  
**Height: 6ft 1in (1.8m)**  
**Coach: Toni Nadal/Carlos Moya**  
**Career titles: 74**  
**Career Grand Slams: 16**  
**(Australian Open 2009; French Open (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Wimbledon 2008, 2010; US Open 2010, 2013, 2017)**  
**Career prize money: \$89,995,532**



Rafael Nadal of Spain holds the US Open trophy after defeating Kevin Anderson of South Africa in the final on Sunday.

AFP  
 New York

Rafael Nadal raced to a third US Open title and 16th Grand Slam crown on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 rout of South African giant Kevin Anderson.

The world number one, the champion also in New York in 2010 and 2013, added the US title to the record 10th French Open he captured in June.

Old rival Roger Federer won the season's other two Slams at the Australian Open, beating Nadal in the final, and Wimbledon in an illustration of the two Grand Slam greats' enduring appeal and power.

Nadal's Grand Slam tally is just three behind Federer's record 19.

For Nadal, it was his fifth title of the year and 74th of his career while the \$3.7mn (3.07 euros) winner's prize boosted his earnings to a shade under \$90mn.

"It's a very special two weeks for me. It's unbelievable what's happened this year after some seasons with serious injuries and not playing very well," said Nadal.

"It's been an emotional year since the Australian Open. I played a high level of tennis and winning here in New York again it's unbelievable."

Nadal also praised his coach and uncle Toni who has coached him since he was three but who will step down from his team at the end of the year.

"I cannot thank him enough," said the champion.

"Without him I would not be here playing tennis. He gave me strength and motivation. When I had injury problems I got through them because of him."

It was a desperately disappointing afternoon for Anderson, the world number 32 playing in his maiden Slam final at the 34th attempt.

He was the first South African in a US championship final since Cliff Drysdale in 1965 and was bidding to become his

country's first Slam champion since Johan Kriek at the 1981 Australian Open.

The Johannesburg-born, Florida-based Anderson finished the 2hr 28min final with 40 unforced errors to Nadal's 11, failing even to carve out a single break point.

Nadal, winning his first hardcourt title since January 2014 in Doha, gave up just 15 points on his serve and won 16 out of 16 net points.

"Rafa, we are the same age but I have looked up to you all of my life," said Anderson.

"It was an honour playing you. You are one of the great ambassadors of our sport."

In a final guaranteed to result in the fifth Slam champion in succession who is 30 or older, Nadal was on top from the start.

He had 28th-seeded Anderson scrambling to save two break points in the third and fifth games before the Spaniard converted his fifth off a forehand error for a 4-3 lead.

The world number one held and broke

again, cleverly forcing the 31-year-old South African out of position on set point after 58 minutes of action.

By the end of the opening set, Nadal had just five unforced errors to Anderson's 23 with the South African unable to muster a single break point.

The one-way traffic continued in the second set as Nadal broke for 4-2 off the back of three successive volleys.

Anderson even collected a time violation for his troubles as his efforts to compose himself failed horribly.

A brutal crosscourt forehand winner gave Nadal the second set 6-3.

Anderson was broken again in the opening game of the third set.

It was his fourth loss of serve in the final; before Sunday, he had been broken just five times in the entire tournament.

Anderson called the trainer for a bloody right index finger after the fifth game, but his struggles continued.

He saved a match point but Nadal wrapped it up with a clinical backhand volley.

SPOTLIGHT

## Rafa hails 'best season' and 'incredible era'

AFP  
 New York

Rafael Nadal described the year 2017 as "one of the best of his career" on Sunday after winning a third US Open and 16th Grand Slam.

World number one Nadal defeated South Africa's world number 32 Kevin Anderson 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 in a brutally one-sided final during which he did not face a break point.

Nadal also claimed an unprecedented 10th French Open in June after finishing runner-up to Roger Federer at the Australian Open.

"In terms of results, this has been one of the best seasons of my career, of course," Nadal admitted of a year in which he won at least two Slams for the fourth time in his career. Had he gotten the better of Gilles Muller at Wimbledon, where he lost the final set of his fourth-round clash 15-13, the year might have been even more memorable.

"I have been winning titles, playing three finals of Grand Slams, so that's a lot. That's so difficult. The other slam that I was not in the final, I lost the match 15-13 in the fifth to be in the quarter-finals."

"So was very competitive year for me. And on clay, I won almost every match. Of course is an emotional season because I have been through tough moments in terms of injuries."

Nadal's win on Sunday was the latest chapter in an epic story of domination by the sport's superstars.

From Wimbledon in 2003, an incredible 53 of 58 Slams have now been claimed by just five men – Federer (19), Nadal (16), Novak Djokovic (12) and Andy Murray and Stan Wawrinka with three apiece.

Only Andy Roddick, Gaston Gaudio, Marat Safin, Juan Martin del Potro and Marin Cilic have broken the spell.

"We are in an era that is not nice to say, because I'm part of it, but we are in an era that some players make incredible things in this sport," said Nadal. It's difficult to win a lot of titles. We should be very happy. Probably even Roger and me and Novak, much more than we ever dreamed."

To hammer home their enduring appeal and dominance, Federer and Nadal shared the four Slams in 2017 – Federer winning the Australian Open before capturing a record eighth Wimbledon. Despite his success, catching the 19 majors of Federer is not particularly high on Nadal's list of priorities.

"I really never thought much about that. I just do my way. He does his way. Let's see when we finish," he said.

"I have 16. So three is big difference. I really don't think much about these kind of things."

"Well done for Roger that he is having an amazing season, too, and well done for me because I'm having a great season, too. Tennis is not all about the Grand Slams, so there are tournaments to come and I'm excited about this last part of the season."

It's all a far cry from the end of last year when Nadal was ranked at nine in the world and Federer was 16.

It was also a 2016 season that saw the injury-hobbled Nadal lose in the first round at the Australian Open, withdraw after two rounds of the French with a wrist problem, skip Wimbledon and exit the US Open in the last 16.

However, in 2017, Federer and Nadal have won five titles apiece and on Monday they will be back at number one and two in the world for the first time since 2011.

"I was surprised in January. Now I am not that much surprised," said Nadal.

"There are things that probably Roger and me share – that is passion for what we are doing, passion for tennis, passion for the competition and the spirit of improvement all the time."



Rafael Nadal reacts after his win on Sunday.

**RESULTS CHECK**

Results from the 14th and final day of the US Open on Sunday (All finals):

**Men's singles**  
 Rafael Nadal (ESP x1) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA x28) 6-3, 6-3, 6-4

**Women's doubles**  
 Chan Yung-Jan/Martina Hingis

(TPE/SUI x2) bt Lucie Hradecka/Katerina Siniakova (CZE/CZE x7) 6-3, 6-2

**Boys singles**  
 Wu Yibing (CHN x2) bt Alex Geller (ARG x1) 6-4, 6-4

**Girls singles**  
 Amanda Anisimova (USA x4) bt Cori Gauff (USA) 6-0, 6-2

SPOTLIGHT

# Nadal travels long road to win 16th Slam title

The win moved Nadal three shy of Federer's record of 19 Slam singles titles



Rafael Nadal of Spain returns a shot to Kevin Anderson of South Africa in the mens finals on day fourteen of the US Open tennis tournament at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. **PICTURE:** Anthony Gruppuso-USA TODAY Sports

**AFP**  
New York

Rafael Nadal reflected on his roots as a child prodigy from the island of Mallorca and on the influence of his uncle Toni on Sunday after winning the US Open title. The 31-year-old Spaniard defeated South Africa's Kevin Anderson 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 for his third US Open title and his 16th career Grand Slam crown after having taken a 10th French Open trophy in June at Roland Garros.

The triumph moved Nadal three shy of Roger Federer's all-time record of 19 Slam singles titles.

The US Open was the final Slam at which Toni, Nadal's long-time coach and inspiration, will join him, instead taking a role directing Nadal's youth academy. In his victory speech, Nadal reflected on what Toni has meant to his life in building the grit to overcome numerous knee injuries.

"It's not one lesson. Diary is in the head from 3 years old," Nadal said.

"Probably without him I'll never be playing tennis. I'm thankful I had somebody like him pushing me all the time.

## Wu wins China first boys' Grand Slam title at US Open

**New York:** Wu Yibing gave China its first boys' Grand Slam singles champion at the US Open on Sunday, hailing his triumph at Flushing Meadows as proof that his country's males were also capable of playing good tennis. China's success in tennis has previously been almost exclusively the province of its women, most notably through Li Na's two grand slam titles at the 2011 French Open and 2014 Australian Open. Wu capped a highly successful week in New York by beating Argentine top seed Axel Geller 6-4 6-4 to add the junior singles title to the boys' doubles crown he won with Taiwan's

Hsu Yu-hsiou on Saturday. "I think this is showing ourselves and showing the world Chinese boys can be good — and Chinese men," the 17-year-old told reporters. "I'm really happy to win the doubles and singles here. It's for China. It's for me. Xie xie (thank you)." Wu, who trains in China and Spain, became only the second Asian to win the title after India's Leander Paes in 1991 despite struggling to close out the match. Serving for the title at 5-2 in the second set, Wu blew six championship points before finally converting his seventh in his following service game.

"Because he gave me motivation I could get through all the problems I had in my career. I can only thank him for making me stronger." When Nadal reclaimed the world number one ranking last month, it was the first since in more than three years he had topped the list. And when Federer lost in the US Open quarter-finals to Juan Martin del Potro,

Nadal was ensured of keeping the top spot. It has been a long journey for Nadal to his latest Grand Slam glory. Nadal won an under-12 regional crown at age eight and by 12 had captured Spanish and European age-group junior titles. By 15, he had turned professional and was facing such foes on the global circuit as Anderson.

At 17, Nadal won his first match against Federer.

At 19, he won the 2005 French Open in his debut, the first of nine Grand Slam titles in 10 years he would claim on the red clay of Roland Garros, cementing a legacy as the greatest player ever seen on the surface. It was early in his career when Nadal began his habit of biting the championship trophies he wins.

Nadal added Wimbledon crowns in 2008 and 2010, an Australian Open title in 2009 and completed the career Grand Slam in 2010 by defeating Novak Djokovic in the US Open final, becoming the youngest in the Open era (since 1967) to complete the four-event career sweep. And only Nadal and Andre Agassi can say they have a career Grand Slam and an Olympic men's singles gold medal, Nadal having claimed his in 2008 at Beijing. Nadal, the sixth left-hander to win a US Open title, added another crown at Arthur Ashe Stadium in 2013, again downing Djokovic in the final.

Knee injuries took a toll throughout his career, costing him nine Slam appearances, and after he failed to even reach a Slam semi-final in 2015 and 2016 some figured his greatest moments were behind him.

FEAT

## Hingis amazed by US Open doubles win, 25th Slam title



Martina Hingis of Switzerland and Yung-Jan Chan of Taiwan hold trophy after their win against Lucie Hradecka of the Czech Republic and Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic.

**AFP**  
New York

Martina Hingis declared herself amazed Sunday after capturing her 25th career Grand Slam crown, partnering with Taiwan's Yung-Jan to win the US Open women's doubles title.

The Swiss star, who turns 37 later this month, won her 13th Grand Slam women's doubles title as she and Chan beat Czechs Lucie Hradecka and Katerina Siniakova 6-3, 6-2.

In Grand Slam events, Hingis also has won five singles titles and seven mixed doubles crowns, the most recent of those coming Saturday alongside Britain's Jamie Murray on the New York hardcourts.

"Well, I think it sinks in maybe little later. Not right now," Hingis said. "But yeah, 25 sounds pretty amazing. I'm definitely very proud."

"What I've done in my career earlier, I'm very proud of that. I was very young. It has been 20 years, been on and off."

Hingis won the 1997 US and Australian Open and Wimbledon singles titles plus the 1998 and 1999 Australian Open singles crowns.

Asked if she might consider a return to singles, Hingis gave a polite but firm rejection to the idea, saying she relies upon partners too much.

"No thanks. I'm doing just fine with the mixed and the doubles. I have a couple of great partners I can

rely on," she said.

"You can see Latisha (Chan) was amazing what she was capable of doing, especially at the net. Usually I feel like I'm the good net player, but she showed that she's got some skills, like a Ninja Warrior, chip chop, and that's the way."

Chan, 28, was overjoyed at her first Slam crown after three prior Slam final doubles losses.

"It's like a real dream come true, like living my dream," Chan said.

"It's very special for me. It was a great match. We start really strong and really aggressive and I think we got it pretty well."

The champions, who shared a \$675,000 top prize, made only two unforced errors in the match while the Czech duo made 18.

It was the third Slam doubles crown of the year for Hingis after Wimbledon and US Open mixed titles and came on the same Arthur Ashe Stadium court where she won her only US Open singles crown 20 years ago.

"It was an amazing feeling to play here in the singles final," Hingis said. "Coming back 20 years later, it has been a wonderful journey."

Hingis has also won six WTA doubles titles this season before Sunday's Slam breakthrough.

"We had definitely our chances. Semi-finals at the French. We played really well. I think we overcome really that hurdle," she said.

"We were pumped up to go all the way here."

## Gutted yet pleased, Anderson hopes to build on US Open loss

**AFP, New York:** Kevin Anderson says don't count him out just yet even after an impressive two-week run to his first Grand Slam final ended in failure by losing to Rafael Nadal in the US Open final. The big-serving 31-year-old South African fell to the top-ranked Spaniard 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 Sunday at Arthur Ashe Stadium, never managing a break-point chance in falling to 0-5 lifetime versus the 16-time Slam winner.

"I'd love to build on these two weeks," Anderson said. "It was very difficult, but I was able to find my way all the way into the finals. I'll work very hard to hopefully give myself another opportunity. Sad yet bolstered, an Anderson who has worked to be more emotional in matches was of two minds after finishing. "It's a bit of both. It's a tough loss, but it was obviously a great experience," Anderson said. "A lot of talk about enjoying the experience and stuff. It was very tough, but definitely a part of that were a few moments that were pretty special."

"There were a few lessons I learned from him. When I reflect back in the next little while, I think a lot of the good memories will definitely surface."

Anderson is pushing to display more emotion in matches, although he's a long way from the most flamboyant fist-pumpers on tour.

"Maybe it is a bit more natural for me now. When I'm going out there, it doesn't feel as forced. I'm not thinking about it as much," Anderson said.

"Tennis is very mental and I have definitely proved to myself it's something I can rely on. I've always been a tough competitor. I've always fought. This is just adding an element, something I will definitely be continuing with." Anderson had never reached a Slam semi-final before this week let alone a title match. His best prior Slam run was to the 2015 US



Open quarter-finals. Anderson was the oldest first-time Slam finalist since 33-year-old Yugoslavian Niki Pilic at the 1973 French Open.

He was the first South African in the US Open final since Cliff Drysdale in 1965 and in any Slam since Kevin Curren at the 1984 Australian Open.

At 32nd in the rankings, Anderson was the lowest-ranked finalist in US Open history, eclipsing 22nd-ranked Australian Mark Philippoussis from 1998.

With his run to the finals, Anderson will jump to 15th in Monday's new rankings despite hip, thigh, leg and elbow injuries that forced him out of four tournaments this year and a fourth-ranked French Open match against Marin Cilic.

With a now-mildly modest goal of reaching the top 10 and four of those ahead of him likely out for the rest of the year, Anderson might approach his career-best ranking of 10th from October 2015 — a number he would have reached Monday had he upset Nadal.

"The target of getting back to 10 is something I set myself a little while ago," Anderson said. "Got off to a bit of a tough start beginning of the year, but especially this summer I've really put myself in a good position."

"When I'm taking care of the stuff I need to, the ranking will take care of itself. It's great to see the jump I've made and the spots I have been able to climb, something I can be very proud of."

# Five US Open memories

### Sharapova center stage on Slam return

Maria Sharapova took centre stage on opening night as the 30-year-old former world number one returned to Grand Slam tennis for the first time since the end of her 15-month doping ban.

The Russian star, wearing a dazzling, crystal-encrusted dress, knocked out second seed Simona Halep 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

It was her 50th appearance at a major but first since the quarter-finals of the 2016 Australian Open and her first at the US Open for three years.

"Behind this little black dress and the Swarovski crystals, there is a girl with a lot of grit and she's not going anywhere," said five-time major winner Sharapova. Sharapova was eventually defeated in the fourth round by Anastasija Sevastova.

### Nobody beats Youzhny 17 times — except Federer

Explosive Russian Mikhail Youzhny laughed off his 17-0 losing record against Roger Federer, claiming that if his second-round capitulation had been a three-set match, he'd be celebrating a first win.

The 35-year-old was hobbled by cramping as the five-time champion in New York came roaring back for a 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 victory.

"I try to find positive things in this. I say OK, he's beaten me 17 times but today it was closer. I say I beat

him — in three sets." Youzhny said.

### Marathon women

American Shelby Rogers and 25th-seeded Australian Daria Gavrilova set a record of 3hr 33min for the longest women's singles match played at the US Open. Rogers won the second-round tie 7-6 (8/6), 4-6, 7-6 (7/5) on a fifth match point in a final set that lasted 90 minutes.

Their second-round tie on Court 10 went past the previous longest of the 3 hours and 23 minutes it took Johanna Konta to defeat Garbine Muguruza 7-6 (7/4), 6-7 (4/7), 6-2 in 2015.

"It was always going to be me. I was always going to be in the records for the longest match somewhere. I'm not surprised," said Gavrilova.

### Del Potro stars in Little Argentina

Spurred on by noisy supporters after two days of illness, Juan Martin del Potro saved two match points to outlast Dominic Thiem in an epic five-set thriller to reach the quarter-finals.

The 28-year-old Argentine rallied past Austrian sixth seed Thiem 1-6, 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4 in an emotional fightback.

Supporters wearing Argentina football jerseys and chanting "Ole, Ole, Ole" urged on their weary hero from the brink to a stunning endurance-test triumph, creat-

ing a Davis Cup-like atmosphere.

"I came here trying to play the best I can and then when I see this crowd cheering for me, I was trying to play better every game," said Del Potro, the 2009 champion who went on to beat Federer in the quarter-finals before losing to Rafael Nadal in the semis.

### Nadal, Stephens in final flourish

Rafael Nadal raced to a third US Open title and 16th Grand Slam with a 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 rout of South African giant Kevin Anderson. The world number one added the US title to the record 10th French Open he captured in June.

Old rival Roger Federer won the season's other two Slams at the Australian Open, beating Nadal in the final, and Wimbledon. Nadal's Grand Slam tally is just three behind Federer's record 19.

"It's a very special two weeks for me. It's unbelievable what has happened this year," he said.

Sloane Stephens took the women's title, her first Slam crown, with a 6-3, 6-0 rout of US compatriot Madison Keys.

She played an equally starring role in her post-match press conference which had reporters in fits of laughter. "Everyone has the cutest photos on the wall in here with this trophy and that's what I remember seeing most," Stephens said.

FOCUS

# Palace sack de Boer after just four EPL games

AFP  
London

Crystal Palace yesterday sacked manager **Frank de Boer** after a dismal start to the Premier League season that has seen them lose all four of their matches without scoring a single goal. The south London club, languishing in 19th place in the league, have been strongly linked with a move to appoint former England boss Roy Hodgson to replace the departing Dutch manager.

"Crystal Palace Football Club have this morning parted company with Frank de Boer," said a brief statement on the club's website. "We would like to thank Frank for his dedication and hard work during his time at the club. "A new manager will be appointed in due course and we wish Frank the very best of luck for the future." De Boer, 47, whose four games in charge are the fewest ever for a Premier League manager, said in a brief post on his Instagram account that he regretted the decision. "Very disappointed about the decision but never the less I want to thank the players, staff and

the fans for their support. Good luck for the future," he said. Palace chairman Steve Parish on Sunday took to Twitter to rally fans around the team, without giving unequivocal backing to the former Ajax and Inter Milan boss. In an exchange with supporters on social media following Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Burnley, Parish wrote: "People are frustrated, I'm frustrated, so are the management and players. We know we are better than this..." Parish also wrote: "We are 4 games in, it's a terrible start but we have to stick together." Palace have so far conceded seven goals in defeats to Hud-

dersfield, Liverpool, Swansea and Burnley. Their only win this season came against Ipswich Town in the second round of the League Cup last month. De Boer said after the Burnley defeat at Turf Moor on Sunday: "I am just focusing on what I can control and so are my staff and my players. (The future) is for other people to decide but while I'm the manager of Crystal Palace I will give 100 percent." The Eagles are the first team to lose their first four top-flight matches without scoring a goal since Preston in the 1924-25 season. De Boer had been at Selhurst Park for only 77 days

after succeeding Sam Allardyce, and while that remains longer than the shortest term for any Premier League manager - Les Reed's 40 days at Charlton - he oversaw two fewer games. The sacking caps a miserable spell for the Dutchman, who lasted just 85 days as coach of Italian club Inter despite his positive track record with Ajax, where he won four successive Eredivisie titles. Hodgson, the bookmakers' favourite to take the hotseat at Palace, has not worked in management since resigning as England manager after their elimination by Iceland at Euro 2016.



PREVIEW

# Mourinho plays down Champions League hopes

'I know it goes against us but I have to admit I love the English Christmas period of football'

AFP  
Manchester

Jose Mourinho has played down Manchester United's chances of Champions League glory, saying English domestic fixture congestion will work against the three-time European champions.

The Premier League pace-setters are set to open their campaign against Swiss champions Basel at Old Trafford on Tuesday after qualifying for the competition by winning the Europa League. Mourinho rested key players in Premier League matches towards the end of last season in order to save them for Europe, which he believed offered their best chance of Champions League qualification.

Real Madrid and Juventus, who contested last season's Champions League final, were also able to keep players fresh for Europe but still won their domestic leagues, while United finished sixth. According to Mourinho, both Real and Juve enjoyed an easier domestic schedule, pointing to the lack of a winter break in England.

"The only thing I can say is that Real Madrid last year played the last month in La Liga with the second team," he said. "They could do it. And they arrived in the Champions League final with a fresh team."

"Juventus, because they were champions in Italy three months in advance, they could play... with the second team and arrive fresh for the quarter-final, the semi-final, the final of the Champions League."

The United boss said it was impossible for English teams to do likewise because usually competition in the domestic game remained fierce until the end of the season. Mourinho said he had "no complaints" about how English football was set up and that he had the option to rest players.

**Winter break**  
"I know it goes against us but I have to admit I love the English Christmas period of football," said the United boss.

"And then there is the fact that we have to play many times two days before the big matches in Europe and then other countries protect their clubs."

Midfielder Marouane Fellaini has been struggling lately with a calf problem, and Mourinho appeared to express irritation with Belgium manager Roberto Martinez for fielding him in the recent World Cup qualifying win over Greece despite the injury.

"He had a problem in the national team and he played against Greece and after the match, he felt the problem," Mourinho said. Asked if Fellaini had the problem before the Greece game, Mourinho said: "Yes." He



Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho watches Juan Mata during a training session yesterday. (Reuters)

## Chelsea's Conte set to shuffle pack for Qarabag

Chelsea manager **Antonio Conte** indicated yesterday he will rotate his players for his side's Champions League opener against Azerbaijani newcomers Qarabag.

Today's encounter at Stamford Bridge is the second in a sequence of seven matches in 21 days for Conte's Premier League champions.

With a midweek League Cup game against Nottingham Forest coming up on September 20, after a home game with Arsenal in the league on Sunday, Conte says he has no choice but to shake things up.

"It's normal when you have to play seven games in 21 days to rotate my players. I'm very calm about this because I trust my players," Conte told reporters at Chelsea's Cobham training base.

"You are never relaxed in England because you have to play a tough league and also FA Cup and also Carabao (League) Cup."

"Now we are starting to play the Champions League. To play 60, 65 games, it's normal, but it's not easy. In my past, sometimes before a Champions League game, you rested. In England it's not easy to do this."



"When you make the decision (on selection) there is always the risk. The risk could be to play with the same players as against Leicester and then after the game, 'Why didn't you change the team that was

tired?"  
"You know very well if you win you've made the best decision, if you lose you've made the worst decision. I must be realistic, I must be calm, to make the best decision

for these seven games." Star forward Eden Hazard returned to action after a broken ankle in Saturday's 2-1 win at Leicester City, but is only expected to make the substitutes' bench for the Group C opener.

New signing Danny Drinkwater has been ruled out after injuring his calf in training on Sunday. Chelsea did not compete in Europe last season for the first time in 20 years after a lowly 10th-place league finish in 2015-16.

Conte, who won the Champions League as a player with Juventus in 1996, wants to engineer a repeat of Chelsea's 2012 triumph in the competition, but he warned it will take time.

"In the Champions League we are starting a path and it will be very important to start building something important," said the Italian, who never went beyond the quarter-finals as Juventus coach. "To win a competition, you need to work very hard, to improve over years and to grow step by step and to arrive to be like Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Juventus are now. "You don't create a big strong team easily."

added: "When the players go to the national team, they belong to the national team."

Goalkeeper David de Gea is set to be United's first-choice goalkeeper in Europe, with Mourinho

confirming he will not repeat his selection policy of last season, when back-up Sergio Romero played in the Europa League. De Gea said that it was tough for United's players to watch the

Champions League last season, with the club not involved.

He said: "It was hard to watch the Champions League games on the TV last season. For a club such as Manchester United not

to be in the games was hard but now we are back and motivated to bring Champions League games to Old Trafford. We need to play our best football to win the games."

SPOTLIGHT

## Bayern out to bounce back against Anderlecht

AFP  
Munich

Manuel Neuer says Bayern Munich are looking to bounce back from their shock Bundesliga defeat when they host Anderlecht in their opening Champions League game today.

Bayern were humbled 2-0 at Hoffenheim on Saturday to leave the defending champions in the lowly position of sixth in the German league.

Now the Bavarian giants want to atone with a convincing display against 2016/17 Belgian champions Anderlecht.

"We want to present ourselves well in the Champions League and we want to show a different face to the one against Hoffenheim," said Neuer, Bayern's captain and goalkeeper, in a press conference yesterday.

"The most important thing is that we want to dominate from the start and get the ball moving quickly."

"That, of course, goes for wanting to go 1-0 up early on, which was what was missing against Hoffenheim."

Bayern's head coach Carlo Ancelotti said France winger Franck Ribery is struggling to be fit after picking up a knock after coming on for the last 12 minutes at Hoffenheim.

Germany defender Jerome Boateng is set to play his first

match this season after a thigh injury, while Bayern have wing backs Juan Bernat and David Alaba injured, while midfielder Arturo Vidal is suspended.

Last season, Ancelotti's first in charge, Bayern were knocked out of the Champions League quarter-finals when they lost home and away to Real Madrid.

A 2-1 home defeat to Real, before losing 4-2 away, broke their record 18-match unbeaten run in Champions League home matches at the Allianz Arena.

It was the first time since 2011 that Bayern failed to make the semi-finals.

"We can do better than last year," admitted Ancelotti.

"I think our squad is stronger and the new players have improved the quality of our squad," he added with Bayern having signed midfielders Corentin Tolisso, from Lyon, and James Rodriguez, on loan from Real Madrid.

"We aren't at the same level as in the second half of last season, which I thought was very good, but we can come back and get better."

Anderlecht are mid-table in the Belgian league after losing two of their five games so far, but managed a 3-2 victory over Lokeren on Saturday.

"Anderlecht are good, they play a lot of long balls and are quick," said Ancelotti.

"We have to be careful and, after the Hoffenheim game, play some good football!"

REACTION

## Bayern boss fires back at Lewandowski

AFP  
Berlin

Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has fired back at **Robert Lewandowski** after the Poland hot-shot criticised the Bavarian giants' spending policy.

Bayern crashed to a shock 2-0 defeat at Hoffenheim on Saturday which left them sixth in the German league table - their worst position after the first three games since 2010/11.

The mood ahead of Tuesday's first Champions League match at home to Anderlecht was not helped by Lewandowski telling magazine *Der Spiegel* that Bayern should spend big to attract more world-class players.

They set a new Bundesliga record in June by signing France midfielder Corentin Tolisso from Lyon for 41.5 million euros (\$49.9m), but Lewandowski feels Bayern risk being left behind by Europe's top clubs.

Bayern's president Uli Hoenes had already described the 222 million euros Paris Saint-Germain paid for Neymar, and the signing of Kylian Mbappe in a deal which could reach 180m euros, as "madness".

So Rummenigge has taken Lewandowski's words as a thinly-veiled attack on the club. "Apparently, Robert was irritated by the Paris transfers," Rummenigge told German daily *Bild*. "He is employed by us as a footballer, he earns a lot of money and I regret his statements."



Lewandowski is under contract until 2021 and Rummenigge has accused his agent Maik Barthel of meddling in Bayern's business.

When Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang eclipsed Lewandowski to become the Bundesliga's top-scorer on the final day of last season, Barthel accused Bayern's coach Carlo Ancelotti and players of not doing enough to help him score.

"Unfortunately his adviser, Mr Barthel, is often the 'Spiritus Rector' (guiding spirit) and this was again the case," said Rummenigge. "The interview was deliberately organised by FC Bayern and his own comments harm Robert."

Lewandowski said Bayern must spend big if they are realistic about winning the Champions League for the first time since 2013, but Rummenigge sees nothing wrong with their spending policy.

"Robert does not need to worry, we have a very good squad again this season," said Rummenigge. "We have a long-standing, serious and successful philosophy and have achieved great success. We have won all national and international titles possible over the past five years."



## PREVIEW

# PSG ready to finally make CL mark

'We are a very good group, we can see that on the bench today with all the options we have'



Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar (centre) laughs with Brazilian defender Dani Alves (3rd left), French forward Kylian Mbappe (right) and Brazilian forward Lucas during a training session at the Camp des Loges in Saint-Germain en Laye on the eve of their Champions League match against Celtic. (AFP)

AFP  
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain kick off their latest bid for Champions League glory at Celtic yesterday bolstered by the big-money signings of Neymar and Kylian Mbappe.

The French giants will be hoping that their lavish close-season spending can help finally achieve their Qatari owners' dream of lifting the European Cup.

PSG responded to last season's disappointments of losing the Ligue 1 title to Monaco and their stunning Champions League last-16 defeat at Barcelona, by smashing the world record transfer fee with the 222 million-euro (\$267m) signing of Neymar from Barca.

While Qatar's billions produced four consecutive French titles from 2013-2016, that form has yet to translate to European

competition.

PSG's last, and only, Champions League semi-final appearance was in 1995, with four straight last-eight exits followed by the harrowing 6-1 second-leg loss at the Camp Nou earlier this year, having beaten Barca 4-0 in the first game.

But with the additions of Neymar and Mbappe, hopes are high that Unai Emery's men can put their continental troubles to bed.

"We are more than ready for the Champions League," said defender Thomas Meunier after a 5-1 thrashing of Metz on Friday.

"We are a very good group, we can see that on the bench today with all the options we have.

"Every footballer plays for the Champions League, and with the team we have this year, we must show the world that we want to go further than in previous years."

Teenage sensation Mbappe joined from Monaco on deadline day on a season-long loan,

with an option to buy for a fee that could reach a staggering 180 million euros. "It's too early to say (how far we can go), we haven't even played yet," said Mbappe, who scored on his debut against Metz.

"We have a good team and a lot of confidence, but we know that there's still a lot of work to do. We'll go to Glasgow to win and to start well.

"I've always said that the Champions League is a special competition, it is the competition for the big players and where we see the big players."

**'Special night' in store**

PSG will have their European credentials tested by what promises to be a spine-tingling atmosphere at Parkhead, as Celtic look to cause an upset in Group B after an underwhelming return to the Champions League group stages last season.

Brendan Rodgers' men have gone from strength to strength

since the turn of the year, and are unbeaten in their last 54 domestic matches.

"What we've learned from our first game of the Champions League last year is that we're not going to be as passive," said Rodgers.

"They're (PSG) a world away from where we're at in terms of finances but it's going to be an incredible night.

"It's the first game of the Champions League against one of the great teams now of the competition, it will be another special night at Celtic Park.

"We'll look forward to the challenge and we'll recover well and prepare well for it."

PSG's fellow wannabee members of the European elite, Manchester City, came unstuck with a 3-3 draw at Celtic Park last season, and the Scottish champions still have the potential to be a danger on home turf.

While Celtic won the 1967 European Cup with a 15-man squad

made purely of players born within 30 miles of their stadium, Paris have flung an expensive net far and wide in an attempt to emulate the likes of the 'Lisbon Lions'.

Over 50 years since Celtic's finest hour, PSG are fed up of waiting to dine at football's top table.

PSG forwards Javier Pastore and Angel Di Maria have been ruled out of the French club's Champions League opener with injuries. Celtic striker Moussa Dembele will also miss out.

Former Real Madrid and Manchester United winger Di Maria picked up a thigh injury while on international duty and PSG said on their website he will be out of action for several weeks.

His Argentinian compatriot Pastore is struggling with the long-standing calf problem that forced him out of Friday's 5-1 thrashing of Metz. Both may have been unlikely to start in Glasgow anyway.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Battle for control of Barca overshadows Juventus reunion

AFP  
Barcelona

A 5-0 derby win, an assist for 105mn euro (\$126mn) purchase Ousmane Dembele on his debut and a four-point La Liga lead over Real Madrid ought to have brought some relief to Barcelona's beleaguered board.

Yet no sooner had the celebrations died down from Luis Suarez's finish from Dembele's cross in the final minute of Saturday's thrashing of Espanyol, than cries for president Josep Maria Bartomeu to resign rang around the Camp Nou.

In the eyes of the fans, Bartomeu and his cohorts deserve no reflected glory for the players' performances as they have been in open conflict with the dressing room during a chaotic summer precipitated by Neymar's departure for Paris Saint-Germain.

Juventus' visit in the Champions League on Tuesday could have offered the chance of a new start and revenge for last season's quarter-final defeat by the Italian champions.

Instead, the battle for control of the club between fans, players and president rages on.

Even after Saturday's rout, supporters formed large queues to sign a vote of no confidence petition launched by a former presidential candidate, Agusti Benedito.

According to Barcelona-based newspaper Sport, Benedito now has over 3,000 of the 16,570 signatures from club members he needs to force a vote on Bartomeu's future.

The clash with Juventus offers another quick opportunity for Benedito to drum up support with a huge crowd expected at the 99,000 capacity Camp Nou.

**Messi future**

For all Barca's off-field problems, on the pitch they can still rely on Lionel Messi to iron out most difficulties.

The five-time World Player of the Year's hat-trick at the weekend took his tally for the season already to six goals.

However, Bartomeu's handling of Messi's future has be-

come another stick with which to beat the club's board.

On July 5, Barca announced an agreement with Messi, whose current contract expires at the end of the season, to extend his deal to 2021.

Yet, he has still to put pen to paper despite Bartomeu's insistence the wait for Messi's signature is merely a matter of time.

The club claim the case of captain Andres Iniesta, whose deal also runs out next year, is the same.

Bartomeu told Catalan daily Mundo Deportivo last week there was an agreement in principle for the 33-year-old to renew, only for the normally mild-mannered Iniesta to flatly refute that claim less than 24 hours later.

The board's decision to repeatedly attack and even sue Neymar for breach of contract has also backfired.

The ink on a club statement outlining their reasons for taking the Brazilian to court had not dried by the time a number of Barca's leading players including Messi and Suarez posted pictures online of them embracing their old teammate.

"This president is a joke," Neymar replied on Instagram last week.

The open conflict between the players and board was most clearly evidenced when Gerard Pique revealed the players knew of Neymar's intentions to leave as far back as Messi's wedding on June 30.

Senior board members claim to have not been informed until days before Neymar's departure on August 2.

Neymar's world record 222-million-euro move sparked a wild goose chase in the final few weeks of the transfer window at Barca.

Dozens of targets came and went with only Dembele and Brazilian international Paulinho arriving for grossly inflated fees. A 5-1 Spanish Super Cup aggregate thrashing by Real Madrid piled more pressure on Bartomeu.

But league wins over Real Betis, Alaves and Espanyol have only served to show how much Barca need Messi.

Bartomeu needs him to sign his new deal even more to quench the thirst for his resignation.



Juventus' forwards Paulo Dybala (left) and Gonzalo Higuain take part in a training session on the eve of the UEFA Champions League match against Barcelona in Vinovo, near Turin. (AFP)

## FOCUS

## New challenge awaits Totti

AFP  
Rome

A whole new challenge awaits former AS Roma legend Francesco Totti as he assumes the mantle of a director of the Serie A club return to the Champions League group stage today against Atletico Madrid.

The 40-year-old former player will swap his Roma shirt for a suit as he assumes the mantle of a director of the Serie A club.

As a player Totti helped Roma to a Scudetto, won a World Cup with Italy and won a European Golden Shoe.

Totti played 786 matches for his hometown club after joining as a schoolboy in 1989, scoring a club-record 307 goals, and won the 2006 World Cup with Italy.

He retired from international football after Germany 2006 to devote all his energies to his beloved club.

After retiring as a club player in May he stepped into a role as technical director.

"The first part (of my life) - being a footballer - is over and now another, equally important one as a director begins, and I hope that I will be able to do what I did on the field," Totti told Roma's website at the time.

"Football is my passion; it's everything. It's friendship, scoring goals, knowing new people. It's something which touched every important part of my body."

As Totti prepares for his new career he concedes it is still difficult for him to accept his playing days are now behind him.

The former attacking midfielder played his final game after 24 years amid emotional scenes with the capital-city side in a 3-2 win against Genoa in May.

"The football field has given me a lot and I tried to give a lot to these people, who showed me so

much love day after day.

"I start over again, on a new adventure."

"I expect a rosy, beautiful future. I'll pick a perfect role so that I am able to make this a great team and a great club."

Totti won a Serie A title with Roma in 2001 and has Italian Cup and Super Cup titles but never tasted success on the European stage as a player.

The closest the club came to winning the elite European title was losing the final on penalties to Liverpool in 1984 in the Stadio Olimpico.

**'Tactics, passion'**

Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco welcomed the news that Totti would also be starting to work towards a coaching diploma in September.

"He's already been in the changing rooms to move the pieces on the tactics board about," said Di Francesco.

"It's good that he's doing the course, because it will help him to figure out what he really wants to do."

"That's coming from someone who started out on the director side of things and then decided to be a coach in the middle of the transfer window.

"Whatever he does, he needs to do it with passion and never start feeling like he's made it."

This diploma - a compulsory first step in the path to a coaching career - would allow him to coach amateur and youth teams.

"On the one hand I would like to be a coach but for the moment I'm not thinking too much about it," said Totti.

"With my character I don't know if I would know how to manage a group."

He will soon find out as he will be on the sidelines at the Stadio Olimpico for the clash against last year's semi-finalists Atletico Madrid in their Group C opener.



NFL

# Green Bay Packers topple Seahawks, Carr shines in return

'I was disappointed they were able to be as aggressive up front as they were with their defense'

AFP  
Los Angeles

Aaron Rodgers threw for a touchdown and 311 yards as the Green Bay Packers opened their National Football League season with a 17-9 victory over the Seattle Seahawks on Sunday.

Rodgers led the offense but the Packers also put on an impressive showing on defense, shutting down star quarterback Russell Wilson in Sunday's marquee matchup.

"This really started with our defense," Green Bay coach Mike McCarthy said. "It starts on the line of scrimmage. We were in the backfield a bunch."

Wilson was limited to 158 yards on 14-of-27 passing as the Seahawks managed only 12 first downs and totalled just 225 yards.

Rodgers clinched the victory with a 26-yard bootleg pass to tight end Martellus Bennett just prior to the two minute warning.

The only negative for Rodgers was seeing his regular-season streak of passes without an interception come to an end at 251. The streak was the second-longest in team history behind Bart Starr's 294 passes in 1964.

Ty Montgomery rushed for 54 yards and a touchdown on offense for the Packers, but they couldn't have done it without a staunch effort from their defense.

The Packers limited Seattle to 12 first downs, three-of-12 third-down conversions and 225 total yards, and Green Bay had an 18:26 edge in time of possession.

"I was disappointed they were able to be as aggressive up front as they were with their defense," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said.

Green Bay have beaten the Seahawks each of the past three seasons at Lambeau Field.

Elsewhere, Derek Carr threw two touchdown passes and Giorgio Tavecchio kicked four field goals in his NFL debut as the Oakland Raiders beat the host Tennessee Titans 26-16.

In his first game since breaking his leg on Christmas Eve against Indianapolis, Carr completed 22 of 32 passes for 262 yards.

Tavecchio converted a pair of 52-yard field goals after hitting a 20-yarder on the second quarter's first play.

Like Carr, Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota was also playing his first game since suffering a broken leg on the same day but against a different team.

He scored a touchdown and completed 25 of 41 passes for



Green Bay Packers wide receiver Jordy Nelson is tackled by Seattle Seahawks cornerback Shaquill Griffin after making a catch in the third quarter at Lambeau Field. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

256 yards. Mariota rushed for his touchdown, a 10-yarder with 6:58 left in the first quarter.

In Cleveland, Ben Roethlisberger threw two touchdown passes to tight end Jesse James as the Pittsburgh Steelers edged the Cleveland Browns 21-18.

Roethlisberger completed 24 of 36 passes for 263 yards. Antonio Brown caught 11 passes for 182 yards while James finished with six catches for 41 yards.

**Johnson suffers injury**

In Detroit, Matthew Stafford threw four touchdown passes and the Detroit Lions beat the Arizona Cardinals 35-23.

RESULTS			
Arizona Cardinals	23	Detroit Lions	35
Atlanta Falcons	23	Chicago Bears	17
Baltimore Ravens	20	Cincinnati Bengals	0
Jacksonville Jaguars	29	Houston Texans	7
New York Jets	12	Buffalo Bills	21
Oakland Raiders	26	Tennessee Titans	16
Philadelphia Eagles	30	Washington Redskins	17
Pittsburgh Steelers	21	Cleveland Browns	18
Indianapolis Colts	9	Los Angeles Rams	46
Carolina Panthers	23	San Francisco 49ers	3
Seattle Seahawks	9	Green Bay Packers	17
Dallas Cowboys	19	New York Giants	3
Tampa Bay at Miami postponed			

Rookie receiver Kenny Stafford completed 29 of 41 passes

for 292 yards. Golden Tate caught 10 passes for 107 yards

and safety Miles Killebrew scored on a 35-yard interception return. Cardinals star running back David Johnson left the game late in the third quarter with a wrist injury. He was held to 23 yards rushing on 11 carries and caught six passes for 68 yards.

Also, Carson Wentz passed for 307 yards and two touchdowns as the Philadelphia Eagles defeated the Washington Redskins 30-17.

Sunday's Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Miami Dolphins game was postponed because of Hurricane Irma which made landfall in Florida on Sunday. The game will instead be played on No-

EUROBASKET

## Germany to take on Spain in quarters

DPA  
Istanbul

Germany will be the next team with the chance to dethrone the reigning champs Spain in the quarter-finals of the FIBA EuroBasket 2017 while the Slovenia vs Latvia match-up features two of the game's most exciting young players facing off.

Spain have won 12 straight EuroBasket games and are three victories from their fourth European crown in the last five competitions. But young Spanish star Juancho Hernandez doesn't see his team as the favorite in the quarter-final against Germany today.

"You see that Lithuania go out, France go out. We don't have a favourite," the Denver Nuggets forward said.

"You have to see what happens. It's 40 minutes and both teams have a chance to win. We need to be ready and focused." Germany and Spain have played some big games in the past. The Germans won in the quarter-finals enroute to the 1993 title as well as beating the Spanish in the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2002 quarters and EuroBasket 2005 semi-finals before finishing third and second, respectively.

Spain did beat Germany for the European bronze in 2001 and knocked them off in the 2007 European quarters.

"We can beat anyone here if we do everything right," German star Dennis Schroeder said. "We can respect Spain because they have won so many titles. But we cannot be scared of them."

The other today's quarter-final has Slovenia taking on Latvia with a match-up of two of the game's most excit-

ing young stars. The 18-year-old Slovenian sensation Luka Doncic is a candidate for the number one pick in the 2018 NBA Draft while the 22-year-old Kristaps Porzingis has been everything Latvian fans could have hoped for in his senior national team debut. Slovenia shoot for their second European semi-final following 2009 after losing in the quarters in 2005, 2007, 2011 and 2013.

Latvia are in the final eight for the third time in the modern post-Soviet era following 2001 and 2015 - finishing eighth both times. One could argue, meanwhile, that it's a surprise that three of the four teams in the bottom half of the bracket have reached the quarter-finals.

Greece lost their top star Giannis Antetokounmpo just before the tournament and finished fourth in Group A but then took down the 2013 and 2015 finalists Lithuania to move into the final eight.

The 1987 and 2005 champions Greece will face off tomorrow against the 2007 winners Russia, who came into the tournament under the radar but have been guided tremendously by Aleksei Shved with the rest of the team playing their roles to perfection.

The final spot in the semi-finals will go to either Italy or Serbia. The Italians are missing a number of big names and also have five players making their senior national team debuts this summer.

But the two-time European champions beat Finland in the round of 16 and are one win from their first semi-finals since 2003.

Serbia, for their part, are in the top eight for the fifth straight time and also finished second at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2014 and 2016 Olympics.

### Move over cricket, basketball has big plans in Australia

Australia's "sleeping giant" National Basketball League launches its 40th season next month with ambitious plans of supplanting cricket as the sports-mad country's number one summer game.

NBL owner Larry Kestelman, who is looking to cash in on the record number of Australians starring in the NBA, said there had never been a better time for the sport.

"The sleeping giant of Australian sport is awake and we are coming. We want to be Australia's number one summer sport and one of the biggest sports in the country," he said at the season launch yesterday.

"We have an opportunity to take basketball in Australia to the next level. To inspire a new generation of fans of the game. A game for all Australians."

Kestelman said the recent announcement that three NBL teams - Sydney Kings, Melbourne United and Brisbane Bullets - would play in next month's NBA pre-season showed the Australian league was considered one of the best in the world.

Sydney will play Utah Jazz on October 2, Melbourne play Oklahoma City Thunder six days later and Brisbane take on Phoenix Suns on October 13 to coincide with the start of the NBL season.

"There are about one million Australians playing the sport, we have a record number of Australians playing in the NBA and strong national teams in the Boomers (men's) and the Opals (women's)," he said.

Among Australians starring in the NBA are Aron Baynes (Boston Celtics), Matt Dellavedova (Milwaukee Bucks), Dante Exum (Utah Jazz), Joe Ingles (Utah Jazz), Patty Mills (San Antonio Spurs) and Ben Simmons (Philadelphia Sixers). The NBL season tips off on October 5, when Adelaide 36ers playing Melbourne United.

MLB

# Judge, Sanchez shine as Yankees rout Rangers

By Erik Boland  
Newsday

An offense that took nearly eight innings to wake up Saturday was ready from the word go Sunday.

Taking advantage of some truly hideous pitching, the Yankees got four hits and four RBIs by Didi Gregorius and two homers apiece from Gary Sanchez and Aaron Judge in pounding the Rangers, 16-7, at Globe Life Park.

The Yankees (77-65) are 4-2 on a nine-game trip that continues Monday night against the Rays at Citi Field because of Hurricane Irma, crept within 3 games of the AL East-leading Red Sox.

The Yankees tied their season high in runs and hits (18), including the homers by Judge (Nos. 40 and 41) and Sanchez (Nos. 29 and 30), five doubles and a triple.

Six of those hits came in a six-run fourth as the Yankees drove right-hander A.J. Griffin from the game and pushed a 3-1 lead to 9-1.

Brett Gardner's two-run triple and Judge's solo homer highlighted the inning. Judge became only the second rookie, joining Mark McGwire, to hit 40 homers in a season and became the 11th Yankee to reach the plateau. His three RBIs gave him 90.

"Pretty surreal. Never as a kid did I think that I would be in the same sentence with those guys," Judge said. "It's quite an honour. It's pretty humbling."

Gregorius went 4-for-4, including a double. His two-out, two-run single in the fifth made it 11-3. Austin Romine added three hits and scored three runs and Sanchez scored four times.

Judge's second homer of the day - which sailed over the Yankees' bullpen in left-centre and was estimated to have travelled

463 feet - made it 12-4 in the sixth. That one went two feet farther than the second homer by Sanchez, a drive to centre field. In his first at-bat as a Yankee, catcher Erik Kratz, acquired August 31 from the Indians, cracked a two-run double in the ninth to make it 16-6.

Rookie left-hander Jordan Montgomery provided the only negatives on the day, lasting only 3 1/3 innings and allowing three runs, three hits and four walks. After being given the 9-1 lead in the fourth, Montgomery walked the first two batters of the bottom half. Ryan Rua's one-out RBI double made it 9-2, and Joe Girardi brought on Chad Green to stifle any hopes of a rally.

Green brought a 1.55 ERA since June 18 into the game but wasn't quite as dominant as usual, allowing one run and four hits in 2 1/3 innings. He did strike out four, giving him 96 in 63 innings, and was credited with the

victory. The Yankees gave Montgomery a quick lead. After Griffin retired Gardner and Chase Headley, Sanchez hammered a 1-and-1 fastball to left to make it 1-0.

Robinson Chirinos extended his on-base streak to 24 games in the second, hitting a one-out homer to right to tie it at 1. But it was all Yankees after that.

RESULTS			
Cleveland	3	Baltimore	2
Colorado	8	LA Dodgers	1
LA Angels	5	Seattle	3
Arizona	3	San Diego	2
Oakland	10	Houston	2
NY Yankees	16	Texas	7
Milwaukee	3	Chicago Cubs	1
Kansas City	11	Minnesota	3
St. Louis	7	Pittsburgh	0
White Sox	8	San Francisco	1
Atlanta	10	Miami	8 (11 innings)
Washington	3	Philadelphia	2
Tampa Bay	4	Boston	1
Cincinnati	10	NY Mets	5
Toronto	8	Detroit	2



New York Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge hits a home run against the Texas Rangers during the sixth inning at Globe Life Park in Arlington. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports



## RUGBY

# All Blacks expect huge test from resurgent Boks

'It's time to focus on the next one... They're still the best side in world rugby'



New Zealand's Damian McKenzie celebrates his try with teammate TJ Perenara in the second half of the Rugby Championship match against Argentina in New Plymouth, New Zealand, on Saturday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Wellington

New Zealand are expecting a vintage challenge from a resurgent South Africa side in their top-of-the-table Rugby Championship encounter in Auckland next weekend.

All Blacks-Springboks clashes are always among the highlights of the Test season but the rivalry lost some of its edge last year after the world champions won 41-13 at home and 57-15 in Durban.

South Africa have rebounded from their miserable 2016, however, and go into Saturday's match at North Harbour stadium only three points behind the All Blacks after a 23-23 draw with Australia at the weekend.

"We all know the way the South Af-



New Zealand coach Steve Hansen.

ricans play," All Blacks lock Brodie Retallick told local media yesterday.

"We've seen the last couple of weeks how physical they've been, especially

up front. As always, they're big boys and they like to come at you.

"Every Test is special, but from what we've seen so far in the Rugby Championship, they've had two great wins over Argentina and they'll be a little bit frustrated with the draw against Australia in Perth.

"They'll be coming here with a bit of anger, and with the skill and physicality they're playing with, I'm sure it's going to be a good spectacle."

South Africa coach Allister Coetzee said at the weekend he was disappointed with the draw, if proud of the way his side battled back from 10 points down early in the second half to remain unbeaten in six Tests this year.

He was also encouraged by the way Argentina managed to put pressure on the All Blacks in the first 60 minutes of their defeat last weekend in New Plymouth.

"I don't see any weaknesses in the All Black side," Coetzee told reporters in New Zealand yesterday.

"I think they are vulnerable but you still have to be at your best to exploit that.

"They have obviously stepped up when they have needed to. You cannot afford to lose concentration or focus. In the last 20 minutes they can easily score 20 points."

All Blacks coach Steve Hansen has been experimenting with his side so it remains to be seen if the Springboks will have to contend with rookie flanker Vaea Fifita, who burned the Pumas defence to score a try in his first Test start last Saturday.

"We've got some pretty quick loosesies in this team, but that was just awesome to see him go out and take his opportunity like that," said All Blacks centre Ryan Crotty.

## Beton sweeps KCA to claim PIBAQ's premiere crown



Beton players celebrate their win with the trophy in the PIBAQ's Ambassador Cup Premiere Division, having beaten Kids Come Along 86-74 in the final. Mythical 5 for the Premiere Division are Anthony Isip of 3 Stars and A Sun, Jojo Longalong of Lucky Seven, Khim Calo of Kids Come Along, Nino Gelig and Rodel Mallari of Beton. The MVP of the Season was Gelig while Arnold Calo of Kids Come Along was chosen as the Most Defensive Player. (Ronnie Castro)

## SPOTLIGHT

## 'Nervousness' ahead of Japan World Cup: Gilpin

AFP  
Singapore

Japan's hosting of the 2019 Rugby World Cup has created "nervousness" about whether big crowds will turn up but national pride will carry the day for the Japanese, World Rugby's chief executive said yesterday.

It will be the first time the tournament will be held in Asia and outside of the sport's traditional strongholds, but Alan Gilpin said he expects audiences to fill up the stadiums.

"It's not just the first World Cup in Asia, it's the first World Cup outside of the traditional rugby strongholds. So that definitely presents some challenges," he told a conference in Singapore.

"It creates some nervousness. Will we have sold-out stadiums, will we have the same level of audience engagement, the same engagement we had in previous world cups? The answer is yes, we will."

Gilpin said 2017 is a "critical year" for Japan as it ramps up the campaign to promote the tournament, to be held

in 12 cities across the country over six weeks.

But Japan already has a base to build on as after they pulled off a major shock by upsetting South Africa in the 2015 World Cup, boosting Japanese interest in the sport, he said.

"National pride will drive much of the media coverage of the tournament so we will need the media to stay engaged with us for six weeks," Gilpin said at the All That Matters conference.

"I think they will turn up in their droves not just to watch Japan but to watch the World Cup in their home city. They're great sports fans and great fans of big events," he said, adding that the Japanese will "put themselves under pressure" to make the event a success.

World Rugby hopes to use the 2019 tournament to promote the sport in Asia, where football has an overwhelming dominance, Gilpin said.

A year later Japan will also host the 2020 Olympic Games, where Rugby Sevens is one of the events.

Gilpin said Rugby Sevens will be at the vanguard of promoting the sport in Asia as it is simpler compared to 15-a-side rugby union.



World Rugby chief executive Alan Gilpin speaks at the All That Matters conference in Singapore yesterday. (AFP)

## MOTOGP

## Dutch rider van der Mark replaces Rossi for Aragon

Reuters  
London

Dutch superbike rider Michael van der Mark will replace injured Italian great Valentino Rossi for the Aragon round of the MotoGP world championship in Spain on Sept. 24, Yamaha said yesterday.

Rossi broke his leg in a training accident on an off-road bike at the end of August and missed the San Marino Grand Prix at Misano in eastern Italy at the weekend.

Yamaha did not replace the 38-year-old nine times world champion for that race.

"Rossi is making good progress with his rehabilitation process. However, it is expected that he will not be able to compete again before the Grand Prix of Japan at the Twin Ring Motegi, held from October 13-15," Yamaha said in a statement.

Van der Mark, 24, will have Rossi's usual pit crew working with him at the 14th round of the season at the Motorland Aragon circuit.

The Dutch rider will be making his debut in the premier class and has never ridden a MotoGP bike before. He previously competed in seven 125cc (now Moto3) races in 2010 and the 2011 Dutch Moto2 round.

He is also a three times winner of the Suzuka eight hours endurance race and has raced at the Spanish circuit seven times previously with World Superbikes and other support series.

Yamaha's managing director Lin Jarvis said the team was obliged to enter two bikes for the race and had decided to seek a replacement within the company's own pool of contracted riders.

"It is never easy to step in to replace another rider and even more difficult to replace Valentino Rossi, but we believe that Michael has all the credentials and experience to do a good job," he added.

Honda's Spanish rider Marc Marquez, the reigning champion, and Italy's Andrea Dovizioso, for Ducati, are tied at the top of the championship after Sunday's race at Misano with five rounds remaining.

Rossi is fourth overall and 42 points adrift.

## QSL awards club licenses ahead of new season

QNA  
Doha

The Qatar Stars League's club licensing committee awarded club licenses to the nine clubs for the 2017-2018 season. The club licensing committee assessed the areas of sporting, infrastructure, personnel, legal, financial and business criteria in order to award the club license to Al Ahli, Al Arabi, Al

Duhail, Al Gharafa, Al Kharaitiyat, Al Khor, Al Rayyan, Al Sadd, Al Saliya, Al Shahania, Al Shamal, Al Wakrah, Al Markhiya, Mesaimmer, Muaither, Qatar Sports Club and Umm Salal for the new season. The licenses are valid for the 2017-2018 season. The club licensing committee will meet again next month to consider applications from member clubs for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) club licenses for entry into 2018 AFC club competitions.

## CYCLING

# Froome still rides under radar despite epic feats

'He dominates, he leads the field... it's possible to win the three grand tours'

Reuters  
London

French great Bernard Hinault believes Chris Froome could target a sweep of all three Grand Tours next year — a feat previously assumed to be mission impossible in cycling.

That is what it might take, however, if Froome is to finally force himself into the wider consciousness of a British public still strangely nonplussed by his pedalling prowess.

"Froome is definitely the champion of his generation," Hinault, who did the double in 1978, said in *The Times*. "He dominates, he leads the field. He adapts his style depending on his rivals."

Hinault thinks Froome could end all the arguments if he took on the Giro, Tour and Vuelta next year. "I even think it's possible to win the three grand tours," he said.

Froome has already said a fifth Tour de France is his priority next season but left the door open for cycling equivalent of the "grand slam".

"A fifth Tour would be the golden prize. But at the same time, who knows?" he said. "It is a risk, definitely, because you are always going to be on that knife edge physically."

On Sunday Team Sky rider Froome was confirmed as the winner of the Vuelta — reckoned to be tougher this year than the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France — becoming the first Briton to complete the race in the red jersey.

It came just 49 days after standing on top of the podium in the yellow jersey in Paris, having claimed a fourth Tour de France title to become the first man since Spain's Miguel Indurain to win three in a row.

Froome is only the third rider to win the Tour and Vuelta in the same year but the first to do so since the Vuelta was moved to later into the furnace-like Spanish summer.

To do it involved a total ride of 6,862km over 73 mountain summits and 165 hours in the saddle.

Yet despite his superhuman efforts Froome's achievement will not resonate around Britain in the same way Andy Murray's two Wimbledon titles or Mo Farah's world and Olympic golds did.

"I'm not going to hold my breath," Froome said when asked whether he might make the shortlist for the BBC's



Team Sky rider Chris Froome reacts at the end of the last stage of Vuelta a Espana in Madrid, Spain, on Sunday. (Reuters)

prestigious Sports Personality having been overlooked last year.

Froome's natural modesty and the fact that the respect of those within cycling — fellow riders and fans who follow the sport closely — counts more to him than celebrity status means he is unlikely to lose sleep.

#### NATURAL SHOWMAN

Yet it is curious that Britain has not taken the Kenya-born cyclist to its heart like Belgium-born Bradley Wiggins when he became the first Briton to win the Tour in 2012.

Showman Wiggins was not shy of the spotlight and knew how to celebrate, whereas father-of-one Froome comes across as the kind of guy who would settle for a quiet glass of wine and night in.

Question marks about Team Sky's reputation following a UK Anti-Doping investigation into a "jiffy bag" delivered to Wiggins at the 2011 Dauphine remain, with Wiggins's former teammate Froome inevitably dragged into the debate despite no suggestion of any wrongdoing on his part.

In fact, French fans, some of whom

threw urine at him at the 2015 Tour in response to suggestions he was doping, have been won over by Froome's class, on and off the bike.

Froome just gets on with the business of riding his bike longer and harder than anyone else.

And while his head-bobbing style upsets the purists and the smothering tactics of the relentless Team Sky domestiques attract scorn, Froome has to be regarded alongside the all-time greats and possibly above Alberto Contador despite the Spaniard's seven Grand Tour wins.

## CRICKET

# Smith sees no spin threat for Aussies in India

Reuters  
Mumbai

The Australian one-day side are better equipped to handle spin in the forthcoming five-match series in India, captain Steve Smith has said.

Earlier this year, spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja shared 46 wickets between them to bowl India to a 2-1 series victory against Australia, who also tasted their maiden Test defeat against a spin-heavy Bangladesh last month.

India have rested Ashwin and Jadeja for the first three ODIs and Smith believes the wickets in the shorter format will not be as helpful to the slower bowlers.

"I think the one-day group has played spin pretty well for a while. Obviously we are still learning in the Test format," Smith said after his arrival in Chennai, which will host the first ODI on Sunday.

"We have come from a challenging tour from Bangladesh. The guys are learning and trying to improve. So, hopefully they can continue to do so."

"(I am) not sure the one-day wickets will present quite as much spin (as) perhaps some of the Test wickets. But we have to wait and see and adapt to the conditions accordingly."

Sparks often fly whenever they clashed against India but the Australia

skipper was confident the upcoming series will be played in 'good spirit'.

"It's always a hard-fought contest playing against India and we're excited by the challenge of playing over here," the 28-year-old said.

"Looking back to the last one-day tour of India, I wasn't on it in 2013, but it was a big run-fest from memory with pretty flat wickets and big totals."

"We'll see what we're presented with but it could be the same again."

Smith was hopeful leg-spinner Adam Zampa will have a big impact on the series with his knowledge of the Indian conditions having played in the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament.

"He has got a pretty good record over the last a year or two," Smith said. "He has got some experience playing in these conditions in IPL. So, we know what to expect from Zampa."

"And if he gets his opportunity, hopefully he can have some success on this tour."

Kohli's men have been on a roll in Tests and are just back after subjecting Sri Lanka to a tour whitewash by winning all nine matches there.

"We have been following the India-Lanka series in bits and pieces," he said. "They are playing some really good cricket. It's a good challenge for us."

"It's always tough playing India in India. They are very good ODI side. Just seeing the side they have announced, it looks like a strong side. We are excited by the challenge of the series."



Australian cricketer Steven Smith gestures during a training session ahead of the India-Australia cricket series in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

## BREAK

# Bangladesh's Shakib to sit out of upcoming Tests

AFP  
Dhaka

Bangladesh's Shikib Al Hasan, the world's leading all-rounder, will sit out of two Test matches during a tour of South Africa this month after asking for a break from the longer format, selectors said yesterday.

The 30-year-old has played every Test for Bangladesh since missing two games against the West Indies in 2014, but earlier yesterday requested a six-month sabbatical from the game "to refresh his body".

Bangladesh will also play three one-day internationals and two Twenty20 games in South Africa during their first tour to the country since 2008. Shakib earlier said he would be available for other formats.

But the Bangladesh Cricket Board's decision to accept the request means Shakib will also miss the two-Test series against Sri Lanka at home in December-January.

"We still cannot think of a team without Shakib. But he wanted a break and it was granted," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin while announcing the team at a press conference in Dhaka.

"He was playing for a long time in all formats. So he needed a rest. Of course,

without him we will be on the back foot, still we have to manage it."

He added that Shakib would be welcome back into the team whenever he wished.

The news comes amid concerns over player fatigue, as well as criticism that players are prioritising earning money over representing their countries.

In Shakib's absence, Bangladesh selectors recalled batsman Mahmudullah, who missed the recent home series against Australia due to poor form.

"We included Mahmudullah because he can do well abroad, where the ball comes first on to the bat. He is a senior batsman and an experienced batsman," Abedin said.

Pace bowler Rubel Hossain and Subashis Roy also returned to the side while the selectors dropped batsman Nasir Hossain.

The first Test will be held at Senwes Park, Potchefstroom from September 28 to October 2 while Mangaung Oval, Bloemfontein will host the second Test from October 6-10.

**SQUAD:** Mushfiqur Rahim (capt), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Liton Das, Mahmudullah, Sabbir Rahman, Mehedi Hasan, Shafiqul Islam, Tajjul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Rubel Hossain, Subashis Roy, Mominul Haque.



## BOTTOMLINE

# Fresh Hope for Windies after England Tests

AFP  
London

Given West Indies' decline as a Test force has been 20 years in the making, it may be unwise to say that Saturday's 2-1 series loss in England means they have "turned a corner".

"I've heard it so many times and it's always the same old story," said fast bowling great Michael Holding, a key member of West Indies' all-conquering teams of the mid 1970s and early 1980s.

"Have we turned the corner? We've turned about 40 corners since the year 2000," added Holding, now a television commentator.

The lack of first-class infrastructure once disguised by a seemingly unending supply of world-class talent that saw the likes of Gordon Greenidge, Desmond Haynes, Malcolm Marshall and Joel Garner — and they were just from Barbados alone — bestride the world game, eventually hurt West Indies' Test fortunes.

More recently, the rise of lucrative Twenty20 events including the Caribbean Premier League — this year's edition clashed with the Tests in England — has meant players can earn huge sums of money without having to first play in the five-day game.

West Indies arrived in England without the likes of Chris Gayle and Marlon Samuels who, as a result of a thaw in a bitter dispute between Caribbean cricket chiefs and senior players, will be featuring in the upcoming one-day leg of the tour.

They duly lost the series opener, the



West Indies' Shai Hope was the top scorer on either side with 375 runs. (Reuters)

inaugural day/night Test in Britain, by an innings and 209 runs inside three days at Edgbaston.

Yet within days they had bounced back to win the second Test at Headingley by five wickets — their first Test match victory in England since 2000.

#### RAY OF HOPE

Shai Hope led the way in Leeds by scoring two hundreds — his first Test centuries — only to suffer a nine-wicket defeat, again inside three days, at Lord's.

Before the first Test, Hope averaged a modest 19.57 and had scored just 372 runs in 10 previous Tests.

By the end of the series, in which he

was the highest scorer on either side with 375 runs, his average had shot up to 31.12.

It wasn't just the weight of runs represented primarily by his 147 and 116 not out at Headingley that was impressive but the way Hope scored them too.

The 23-year-old showed plenty of composure against the swinging ball as well as stylish shot-making ability, qualities that were both in evidence during a second-innings 62 at Lord's that was probably worth double given the tough batting conditions.

Kraigg Brathwaite, only a year older at 24 than Hope, came within five runs of twin Headingley hundreds and the

pair's partnerships in Leeds suggested they could be the cornerstones of the top order.

Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel, for all the latter's no-ball problems, formed a solid new-ball pairing although Jason Holder, for all his admirable qualities, may be more of a fourth seamer than a first change bowler.

Holder warned that only senior batsmen Darren Bravo and Gayle, among those currently out in the cold, wanted to return to the Test arena.

"But apart from Darren I don't think there's anybody else who's interested in playing Test cricket that we can really call upon or the so-called big names people are looking for," Holder said after Saturday's loss at Lord's.

"Chris has probably hinted that he would like to play if he's fit enough."

West Indies, still a lowly eighth in the world Test rankings, travel to fellow strugglers Zimbabwe next month with all-rounder Holder heartened by their displays in England.

"Hopefully we can learn from this, we have New Zealand at the end of the year which could be similar conditions and similar type of bowlers, so it should be good chance to take what we've learnt here into that series," he said.

"But first we've got Zimbabwe, in a few weeks' time, so hopefully we can really kick on from there," he added.

"Obviously Shai was outstanding in this entire series and we must not forget Kraigg's contribution as well, he really did a hell of a job, especially at Headingley."

"I think we've shown improvement. We've definitely shown that, especially in our bowling."

## FOCUS

# Pakistan tour 'more than cricket' for Faf and Flower

'We are here to play their part in the safe and steady return of international cricket in Pakistan'

AFP  
Lahore, Pakistan

The World XI's tour of Pakistan is more than just a game, captain Faf du Plessis and coach Andy Flower said yesterday, amid high hopes it will revive international cricket in the country.

South Africa's du Plessis told reporters in Lahore it was a "huge honour" to be playing the highest-profile event in cricket-mad Pakistan since a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in 2009.

Pakistan has not hosted top-level international cricket — barring five limited-over matches against minnows Zimbabwe in 2015 — since that attack, which killed eight people and injured seven players and staff.

"It's not every day you get an opportunity to play in something that is much more than just about yourself and your own team or your own country," du Plessis said.

World XI coach Andy Flower, who toured Pakistan in 1993, 1996 and 1998 with Zimbabwe, said he and his team were "privileged" to be there.

"We, as the World XI, would also like to offer our sympathy and condolences to all those who have lost their loved ones in terrorist acts in Pakistan," he said.

"These cricketers are here to play their part in the safe and steady return of international cricket in Pakistan, so that the enthusiastic and diehard fans and followers of Pakistan cricket can once again start watching their stars in their own backyard."

Officials have said there will be "foolproof" security for the three-match Twenty20 series starting today in Lahore.

Both the hotel and stadium will be cordoned off, with 9,000 police and paramilitary staff deployed.

Shops and restaurants around the venue will be shut while spectators will have to pass through multiple security checkpoints.

Du Plessis said he was confident in the security arrangements.

"You do think about that sort of thing, but as soon as we spoke to the people who were in control of the security... as a player all you want was that peace of mind and they gave it to us."

Once the players boarded the plane,



International World XI cricketers Hashim Amla (second from right), David Miller (second from left) and Grant Elliott (right) prepare for bat as team coach Andy Flower (centre) looks on during a practice session at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

he said, their fears vanished as they began to look forward to taking part in what he described as a "huge turnaround in world cricket".

#### STILL FAR TO GO

Since the 2009 attack Pakistan has been forced to play most of their "home" games overseas.

But security has dramatically improved in the last two years, signalling hopes for the slow revival of international sport.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Najam Sethi said the World XI's arrival was a great day for Pakistan, though he admitted there was still a long way to go.

International Cricket Council head Giles Clarke said it was "still a long road and a lot of work".

But he said events such as the final of the popular Pakistan Super League

in Lahore earlier this year had made the World XI tour possible.

"Everybody had the courage and the confidence to play here (after that) and that was essential for this series," he said.

Sethi thanked the World XI players for agreeing to the tour, and said that these matches could revive cricket in the country.

Sri Lanka are set to make a hugely symbolic return to Lahore as part of a full series against Pakistan in October. Pakistan also hope West Indies will play three T20s in the city in November.

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmad (right) and World XI captain Faf du Plessis hold the Independence Cup trophy during a press conference at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)



## World cricket to benefit from sport's development in Pakistan: ICC

IANS  
Dubai

International Cricket Council (ICC) Chairman Shashank Manohar yesterday welcomed the return of international cricket to Pakistan ahead of the Independence Cup taking place in Lahore this week.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) World XI will play three day and night Twenty20 matches with reigning Champions Trophy winners Pakistan at Lahore's Gaddafi stadium on September 12, 13 and 15.

International teams have refused to tour Pakistan since the 2008 terrorist attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in 2008. Pakistan later hosted Zimbabwe in October 2015.

"This is a good day for world cricket as the PCB hosts a World XI in Lahore for three T20 international games. It has been a long and tough journey as the PCB, Pakistan players and fans have been starved of the opportunity to stage, play and watch international cricket in their own country," Manohar said.

"I am hopeful that today marks the start of the safe and steady return of international cricket to Pakistan."

Manohar said the boost to Pakistan's cricket is a big factor for international cricket.

"The ability of Pakistan to play international cricket at home is crucial to the long term health of the game in Pakistan and one of the main reasons why the ICC established the Pakistan Task Force under the leadership of Giles Clarke, to explore, in partnership with the PCB, how we can get international cricket back to Pakistan safely and on a regular basis," Manohar said.

"I send both teams and the PCB the very best wishes from the whole cricket family for a competitive series that the passionate fans in Pakistan can enjoy. I sincerely hope that this week's games mark the start of a steady flow of international cricket to this great cricket nation!"

## SPOTLIGHT

## Pakistan hopes World XI series will herald return of international cricket

Reuters  
Lahore, Pakistan

Pakistan will host a World XI cricket team for three T20 matches starting today and hopes the series will herald the return of international cricket to the country eight years after a militant attack on a Sri Lankan team bus.

The star-studded series to take place under tight security will be closely monitored by other cricket boards and

if all goes well Pakistan expects to host Sri Lanka and West Indies this year, Pakistan cricket board chairman Najam Sethi said.

Pakistan has only hosted one international series since militants attacked the bus in Lahore in 2009, wounding six players and killing two civilians and six security officials.

In March, calls for the return of international cricket picked up steam after the final of the domestic T20 Pakistan Super League, featuring high profile foreign players such as World

Cup winner Darren Sammy, was held in Lahore.

"It's a great opportunity to showcase Pakistan," Sethi told Reuters, adding that these matches could revive cricket in the country. "This is a momentous occasion."

Over 6,000 police officials and paramilitary officers have been deployed around the stadium, according to provincial government spokesman Malik Mohamed Ahmad Khan.

"A foolproof security plan has been devised for the protection of the teams

and spectators," he said.

Attacks in Lahore have become less frequent in recent years but security remains high as Pakistani Taliban and other militants groups remain active. A Taliban suicide bomber killed 25 people in July in an attack that appeared to target Lahore's police force.

The streets of Lahore were swathed in posters of the visiting players and advertisements for the matches. Long queues formed at vendors across the city and many fans were turned away as tickets sold out.

"I am very excited," Lahore resident Qasim Ali Shah told Reuters.

"I have bought a ticket, an expensive one, and will go to watch the match tomorrow."

Local television channels had pre-match footage on a constant loop, showing players arriving for practice at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium.

For young fans and many players on the team itself it is one of the first times they can experience a high-profile match on home turf.

Pakistan's cricket board has shouldered the expense of hosting matches in Dubai since the 2009 attack and lost considerable revenue in fees and other expenses.

"Dubai has proven to be a very expensive venue and my sense is we will cut our costs by 50 percent when it comes back to Pakistan," Sethi said.

Cricket board spokesman Amjad Bhatti said an estimated 90 percent of tickets had been sold.

"I wanted to watch all of the three matches but could not get tickets," said aspiring cricketer Rameez Sindhu.

## Qatar cricket team returns after impressive showing in South Africa



Qatar cricket team players and officials pose at the Hamad International Airport in Doha yesterday after their return from the ICC World Cricket League Division 5 tournament, where they finished third, in South Africa recently. PICTURES: Anas Khalid