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FOCUS

Sleep, train, jump, repeat. Barshim has work cut out

Qatari star high jumper returns to Doha after five months on the road that also saw him win the world title in London

By **Mikhail Bhat**
 Doha

Mutaz Essa Barshim is well aware of his stature as Qatar's top track and field athlete.

So when the high jumper walks out into the arrivals hall at Doha's Hamad International Airport, he soaks in the adulation, waves at the cameras, greets the officials who have gathered to welcome him, and sports a wide smile while he does it all.

And yet all he wanted to do in that moment was get back home and sleep in his own bed. "I haven't done that in more than five months," he says.

But before that, he reflects on a season where he hasn't lost any competition he has participated in. Specifically, on the London World Championships, where he won his first outdoors world title last month.

"It was a great experience, great atmosphere. It is the biggest competition in track and field. Of course, there are Olympic Games, but only track and field it is the biggest event out there. The stadium was full, high pressure, high quality of field across disciplines... So you just need to stay focused and get the job done," he says.

The 26-year-old speaks volumes about the pressure factor. It pushes most great athletes, it pushes him.

"There is always pressure. But this pressure is to do better. It's a different kind of pressure, not like you don't have a place to sleep, or food to eat. That's the kind of pressure that will break you down. But pressure in sport, you can deal with it. If you channel it right and you can feed off that energy in performances," he says.

At London, even after he had won the title ahead of Danil Lysenko and Syria's Majd Eddin Ghazal, and in subsequent attempts at Diamond League events in Birmingham and Zurich, Barshim kept on going in the quest for Javier Sotomayor's 2.45m world record, one of the longest standing records in athletics.

And while he touched 2.40m



(From left) Former athletics and swimming official Yousuf al-Saie, 400m hurdles athlete Abderrahman Samba, 400m runner and 2017 World Championships bronze medallist Abdalelah Haroun, high jump coach Stanislaw Szczyrba, high jump world champion Mutaz Barshim and javelin thrower Ahmed Bader at Hamad International Airport in Doha yesterday. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekkayil

twice this season — in Birmingham and Eberstadt — he is satisfied with his season.

"2.40m in a championship season is good. What counts are the medals and the titles this year. You get the titles, and then you have the rest of the season and other seasons to go for the records. Next season, we have the world indoors in March, and so my next aim is that. But I don't think there are any major championships in summer, and that's when you can focus on records and individual goals," he says.

At just 26, his coach Stanislaw Szczyrba feels Barshim will only progress further. "The best age for a high jumper is 28, 29, 30. So he is on his way to the top. He is physically and mentally stronger now," the Polish/Swedish coach says.

With so many expectations, how does one hope to better an unbeaten season next time round?

"Of course there is pressure (to



Barshim speaks to the media after his arrival in Doha yesterday.

better this season next year). But what's also true is that I add pressure on myself. I don't wait for anyone else to do that. It's not as if I am in this sport because I must or

someone is putting pressure on me. I am here because I love doing what I do. It is my choice. I always expect better from myself every time I walk out on the field," the Qatari says.

So there's pressure that Barshim feeds off, and then there is a competitive field. While he soaked in all the pressure, some of his biggest rivals, the likes of Ivan Ukhov, Bohdan Bondarenko, Gianmarco Tamberini, were absent from the big stage.

"It (a good field) is not a need, but it's better if you have a strong field. I perform best when I am under pressure. That's when you are pumped enough to get higher level performances, higher jumps. Competitiveness pushes good athletes. But it's not a must," he says.

But what's a must for the star athlete is his time off. "I have a month off and then we start preparing again for the next competition in January. It's been a long season and I need to give my body some time to recover," he says.

And then, the 'Pride' of Qatar is off to oblige the next lot of people for photographs. Arms around their shoulders, smile, et al.

Stan's leap of faith for Barshim

By **Mikhail Bhat**
 Doha

When he first came to Doha, Stanislaw 'Stanley' Szczyrba had only planned on coaching the Qatar national team, specifically Rashid al-Mannai, for a few months. Eight years later, as he sees Mutaz Barshim walk out to a thunderous applause at the Hamad International Airport, something inside the Polish/Swedish coach moves. Perhaps the thought, that all this would never have happened, had it not been for...

"I didn't come for Mutaz. It was for Rashid. Mutaz was one of those 18-year-olds, who had jumped 2.14m till then. That's nothing," Szczyrba says. "I spot talent. It's what I do after all these years. Many people have come to me, saying this athlete is great, that athlete is great. But I have just shook my head and said 'no'.

"Because of Rashid they brought me to Qatar. Otherwise I had no plans. I had a really big group in Sweden. One can be satisfied with 2.20m but we were already jumping higher than that." The coach points at Barshim, who is obliging every request for a photograph, and says, "Today, he is doing more than 2.40m."

Even that's an understatement. Barshim is the first high jumper to jump 2.40m-plus for five straight years, starting 2013.

But the progress from 2.14m in 2009 to a world champion eight years later, has been long and winding, and rewarding at the same time for the coach. "He had the urge to do better but what he didn't have was correct movement and techniques. I taught him to control those movements. He has shown he is good at grasping these techniques and get better," Szczyrba says.

But it wasn't all hunky dory when Szczyrba first came to Qatar in 2009. "I had told myself, let's go to Doha for three months and see how it goes. After three months of training, I decided to test him (Barshim), and it was really, really bad. But I don't know why, I asked him if he could touch the roof in the room, which was pretty high, and he just took off, and I was amazed at what he did. From that day to today, I want to stay in Doha because I want to work with this guy," he says.

And work is not finished yet Szczyrba says. "He is only 26. The best age for high jumper is 28, 29, 30. So he is on his way to the top."

"I have worked so many years as coach. But I have talent as coach today... he gave me."

CELEBRATION

Haroun: taking on the world with his smile and stride

By **Mikhail Bhat**
 Doha

Abdalelah Haroun has a way to disarm you, with his wide smile. The Qatari 400m athlete is as warm off the track as he has proven to be hot on it.

At the 2017 IAAF World Championships in London last month, the 20-year-old had Steven Gardiner of Bahamas for company on the lane to his right, with South African sensation Wayde van Niekerk just a couple of lanes up the order.

Haroun found enough focus, and strength to pick up Qatar's first medal at the championships, finishing behind Van Niekerk and Gardiner, with a season's best time of 44.48 seconds.

"It feels so good, the medal is a different feeling... nothing like I have experienced before, at such a big world stage," Haroun told *Gulf Times* yesterday.

"Winning a medal at the world championship has been a dream, and it feels great that I have done that."

And while a dream may have come true, that of winning a medal for Qatar, the smiling 20-year-old has no plans on stopping there.

"We have a good team backing us. All of us have been working hard. We won two medals this time... hopefully next event we are able to win five... six... medals," he said.

What was the experience like running with the likes of Van Niekerk, Gardiner, Isaac Makwala of Botswana, some of the biggest names in the discipline?

"World championships always see tough

competition. Not just the big names but everyone who makes it to the final has gone through the grind and made it to the finals. Final is final. It's the top. To win a medal with that kind of field, it is great," he said.

The former world junior champion only had great things to say about his experience at the Worlds.

"World Championships, London, Outdoors, crowds, it all came together... it is a different feeling," he said as his smile got wider.

Haroun will be travelling next week to begin preparations for the coming season, which will also see the World Indoors Championships in Birmingham, United Kingdom, in March.

"But before that, I have some time for my family and friends. I have some time for myself," he said.



Qatar's Abdalelah Haroun at the Hamad International Airport yesterday. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

PREVIEW

Excitement as QNB Stars League kicks off Friday

Al Duhail, formerly Lekhwiya meet promoted Qatar SC on first day of action



Al Sadd players celebrate their Sheikh Jassim Cup triumph last week, serving notice that they will pose a serious threat to Duhail's title defence in the QNB Stars League.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

After a long preseason, the QNB Stars League returns to action on Friday evening with all 12 sides in the league looking to make a positive start to the season ahead.

The first match of the season will see Al Gharafa, who are now under the leadership of former Al Khor coach Jean Fernandez, take on Al Ahli who will be managed by veteran Spanish coach Joaquin Caparrós making his first foray outside Europe.

Last season, Al Ahli surprised Al Gharafa with a 4-2 win on opening day, and Caparrós will certainly be aiming for more of the same with his new charges.

Umm Salal take on Al Kharaitiyat in the second game of the season, and both sides will be looking to continue their good form in which they ended the last campaign. Both clubs have also elected to stick with their coaches for the new campaign in Mahmoud Jaber for the Or-



ange Fortress and Ahmad al-Ajalni for the Thunders.

Both sides will be hoping that their playmakers can start the season strongly, with Umm Salal turning to Syrian international Mahmoud al-Mawas and Kharaitiyat hoping that Moroccan playmaker Anouar Diba can pull the strings for their sides.

Friday's QSL action will conclude when the newly formed Al Duhail meet promoted Qatar SC at Duhail stadium. Both Lekhwiya and El Jaish merged in the summer to form Duahil, and have a readymade squad to challenge for the QNB

Stars League crown.

Head coach Djamel Belmadi will be hoping that defender Lucas Mendes will be able to bring defensive stability to the new side. As for Qatar SC, they have hired experienced coach Gabriel Calderón who has worked extensively in the region. The Argentinean will have to use all his knowledge to produce a shock result against Al Duhail.

Saturday will see three games take place. First up will see newly promoted Al Markhiya will take on last season's Qatar Cup winners Al Sadd, in what promises to be a stern test for Yusef Adam and his inexperienced side.

Understandably the side has undergone plenty of changes in the professional ranks, and Adam will be hoping that Burkina Faso international Alain Traoré can hit the ground running for his new team. Al Sadd, meanwhile, are primed for a title push in what will be playmaker Xavi's last ever season as a professional footballer.

Later on in the evening Al Arabi take on Al Sailiya in what promises to be an

interesting game for the much changed Arabi team. New coach Kais Yâakoubi will be aiming to start strongly and will be putting plenty of faith in new signing Ibrahim Khalafan who is returning to his childhood club.

As for Al Sailiya, they have elected to stick with the majority of their squad for this season. However, Nadir Belhadj, formally of Al Sadd, has returned to the QNB Stars League and will be raring to go to make a positive impact with his new side.

The final match of the round will see Al Khor take on title challengers Al Rayyan. The Knights have turned to French coach Laurent Banide to guide the side this term, and after a couple of years battling relegation they will be hoping for a positive start to the campaign against Rayyan.

Al Rayyan have strengthened significantly in the close season. Moroccan striker Abdulrazak Hamdullah is the most eye-catching signing of the summer and will be charged with firing Rayyan to title glory.

SPOTLIGHT

FA reject Mane appeal against ban

AFP
London

Liverpool's Sadio Mane had his three-match suspension for a red card received for a high challenge on Manchester City's Ederson upheld yesterday, after the Football Association rejected his claim of excessive punishment.

Senegal winger Mane was sent off after catching goalkeeper Ederson in the face during City's 5-0 win in the Premier League at Eastlands on Saturday.

Ederson had raced out of his area to head clear a high bouncing ball when he was knocked to the ground.

He was carried off on a stretcher after receiving treatment on the field for around eight minutes.

"Sadio Mane's three-match suspension, which was effective immediately, remains in place after his claim of excessive punishment was rejected following

an Independent regulatory commission hearing," said a statement issued by the FA.

"The Liverpool forward was dismissed for serious foul play during the game against Manchester City on Saturday."

After the match, Mane apologised to Ederson via Facebook, saying: "I hope and wish Ederson a quick recovery. I am so sorry he was hurt during our accidental collision on the pitch and am sorry for him that he could not complete the match because of it."

"I pray he heals fast and is back playing very soon!"

Former Benfica keeper Ederson was examined further by City's medical staff but did not suffer concussion and returned to the bench, wearing a dressing, before the end of the game.

The Brazilian later tweeted: "Hi, everyone - I am well. What a fright!"

"It was an important win for us. We are strong. Thanks for all your messages of support."

EPL

West Ham win 2-0 to give Bilic a perfect birthday gift



West Ham United manager Slaven Bilic reacts during his team's match against Huddersfield Town on Monday.

Reuters
London

West Ham United claimed their first points of the season by beating promoted Huddersfield Town 2-0 on Monday, giving some breathing space to under-fire coach Slaven Bilic who could finally celebrate his birthday.

A deflected strike by Pedro Obiang in the 72nd minute and a goal from Andre Ayew five minutes later, when he stabbed home a loose ball from close range after a corner, were enough to end Huddersfield's unbeaten start to the season. West Ham were playing their first home game of the campaign after having to travel for their opening three matches because the stadium they moved into last season had been used for the world athletics championships in August.

"I've felt the pressure for a whole year now. It is maybe not logical for me to be under pressure after three games but it is modern football," said Bilic who

"We had a gameplan and from the first moment we were on the front foot. We stopped them from creating anything. We got our reward, a little bit lucky for the first goal but overall we deserved it"

was 49 on Monday. "I am happy for the lads and for the club. We started with three away games and three defeats and this was a must-win game."

"We had a gameplan and from the first moment we were on the front foot. We stopped them from creating anything. We got our reward, a little bit lucky for the first goal but overall we deserved it."

"It is my birthday today and this is a great, great present for me," added the delighted Croatian.

The win took West Ham off the bottom of the table and up to 18th place, still in the relegation zone, while Huddersfield stay sixth with seven points from their four games.

BOTTOMLINE

A look at the coaches in QNB Stars League



Djamel Belmadi, coach of Al Duhail Sports Club.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The New QNB Stars League season, is set to start on Friday evening and all twelve coaches will be going over their final preparations with their sides.

This season a total of six clubs have gone with new managers for the campaign. Al Ahli signed experienced Spanish coach Joaquin Caparrós in the summer. This is the first time Caparrós has coached outside Europe, and will be hoping that all of his experience can help turn around the fortunes of Qatar's oldest side.

Al Gharafa have also turned to experience in the form of Jean Fernandez as their new coach. The French tactician is no stranger to the QSL having previously managed Al Khor for two seasons. With Fernandez departing, Al Khor have signed fellow French coach Laurent Banide who has managed extensively in the region.

Al Arabi have also got a new coach this campaign, and have recruited Tunisian tactician Kais Yâakoubi. He had previously enjoyed a stint with a host of sides in Tunisia and most recently managed Al Wakrah.

Understandably the newly promoted sides have also elected for new coaches as they battle to beat the drop. Qatar SC moved for

Argentine supremo Gabriel Calderón who has worked extensively in the region, while Muaiter have decided to go local with their coach, picking up the vastly experienced boss Yusef Adam.

The remaining six sides in the league have chosen to keep their coaches from the previous season. After finishing the campaign well, Umm Salal retained to keep the services of Egyptian coach Mahmoud Jaber who signed a contract extension in the summer. Likewise, Al Kharaitiyat enjoyed a strong second half to the campaign, and Tunisian boss Ahmad al-Ajalni has also been given an extension with the side.

Al Sailiya have continued with long-term coach Sami Trabelsi. The Tunisian coach is heading into his fifth season in charge of the Peregrines and is comfortably the longest serving coach in the QSL.

After being formed this summer, Al Duhail retained the services of Djamel Belmadi. The Algerian will be charged with ensuring that the side does not go empty handed this term.

Finally, fresh from winning the Sheikh Jassim Cup, Al Sadd will head into the new campaign with Portuguese coach Jesualdo Ferreira.

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan have also kept their faith in Danish boss Michael Laudrup. All twelve coaches will be hoping that they can start their season on a positive note when the QNB Stars League starts on Friday evening.

Hamroun wants to win league for Xavi

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd attacker Jugurtha Hamroun believes that his side can make a creditable title push and ensure that Xavi ends his professional career by lifting the QNB Stars League shield come the end of the season.

"The philosophy of the club has not changed. We are looking to win everything we play in this season, we will give our best. The league is our major target this season," Algerian winger Hamroun said a few days after his team won the season-opening Sheikh Jassim Cup with a convincing 4-1 win over Duhail.

"We have kept our squad together and added real quality in Boualem Khoukhi and Yasser Abubakar. They have proven of how good they are

at their former clubs and they will help us this season," noted Hamroun when asked about the new arrivals at Al Sadd. Along with proven quality, Al Sadd can also rely on some of the best youth talent in Qatar something that the Algerian attacker is not underestimating this season.

"We won the Sheikh Jassim Cup this season with a young squad. They will be important for us in the competitions we play in and I'm sure they will step up."

Hamroun stressed that the whole club is targeting the league for their club captain Xavi who is set to call time on a glittering career at the end of the season.

"That will be fair to win the league for Xavi. He is our leader on the pitch, and we will give our best to give him this present at the end of the season."

SPOTLIGHT

Champions League to test Klopp's progress

Liverpool reached two finals in Klopp's first seven months as manager, losing on penalties to Manchester City in the League Cup at Wembley, and suffering a more decisive 3-1 defeat by Sevilla in the Europa League in Basel



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp during a training session yesterday.

AFP
Liverpool

When Jurgen Klopp arrived at Liverpool in October 2015, he made a promise: "If we sit here in four years, I think we (will) win one title," he said.

Next month will mark the second anniversary of Klopp's appointment, the halfway point of that four-year cycle.

There has undoubtedly been progress in that time; a team who were 10th in the Premier League when he arrived finished fourth last season.

Whether they are significantly closer to winning a major trophy is more open to debate.

Liverpool reached two finals in Klopp's first seven months as manager, losing on penalties to Manchester City in the League Cup at Wembley, and suffering a more decisive 3-1 defeat by Sevilla in the Europa League in Basel.

That European adventure was an unexpected bonus.

Expectations at Anfield are higher

now, but Liverpool look far from a complete team as they prepare to face Sevilla once more, this time in the Champions League.

The best and worst of the 2017 Liverpool were shown when they beat Hoffenheim in last month's play-off to reach the Champions League group stage.

Klopp's side showed an attacking verve that could threaten the best in Europe.

Close-season signing Mohamed Salah has formed a quick understanding with Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino.

Salah and Firmino both scored in the home leg, while Mane was heavily involved in two of the goals.

It is a wealth of attacking talent, and they still have Philippe Coutinho to come back following his failed attempt to engineer a move to Barcelona.

Defensively, though, Liverpool were weak in both legs against Hoffenheim; they could easily have conceded more than three goals in the tie.

Liverpool were defensively suspect last season, and those difficulties have continued into the new campaign.

Klopp signed Loris Karius from Mainz

to be his first-choice goalkeeper, then dropped him midway through last season. Ragnar Klavan, another Klopp buy, from Augsburg, replaced Lovren for last Saturday's 5-0 thrashing at Manchester City.

However, the extent of the defeat should be put into the context that they had matched City and were trailing 1-0 when Mane was sent off.

"We have to take the first 20 minutes of Saturday's game, and how we played before the international break, and take it into the next game," said goalkeeper Simon Mignolet.

"Of course, we can't neglect the performance after that, but we have another game in midweek when we can prove ourselves."

At times, it feels as if Klopp has spent two years, and a lot of money, recreating the Liverpool team who almost won the Premier League under Rodgers four seasons ago.

They are thrilling going forward, an accident waiting to happen defensively. The question is whether Sevilla are ready to punish them.

Much has changed at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium since Unai Emery guided them to a third successive Europa League title with victory over Liverpool two seasons ago.

Emery went to Paris Saint-Germain, and his successor Jorge Sampaoli left at the end of last season for the Argentina job.

Eduardo Berizzo arrived in May from Celta Vigo and has spent heavily, bringing in Colombian forward Luis Muriel from Sampdoria and Nolito from Manchester City to supplement last season's top scorer Wissam Ben Yedder.

Midfielder Ever Benega has returned from Inter Milan, with departing centre-back Adil Rami replaced by Dane Simon Kjaer.

The creativity of Pablo Sarabia and Joaquin Correa remained, helping Sevilla make a strong start in La Liga, garnering seven points from three matches.

Berizzo, though, is wary.

"Liverpool are a great team and Saturday's defeat doesn't take anything away from them," he said. "Moreover, they'll be like a wounded animal."

TOP GUNS

Prudent Real remain Champions League favourites



Real Madrid's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and Real Madrid's Costa Rican goalkeeper Keylor Navas attends a training session at the Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid yesterday.

AFP
Madrid

Such is Real Madrid's confidence in creating more Champions League history that while others have spent hundreds of millions trying to catch up, the back-to-back European champions were happy to cash in.

Real made a profit of over 75mn euros (\$90mn) in the transfer market thanks to the departures of Alvaro Morata, James Rodriguez and Danilo.

Yet they remain very much the side to beat as the Champions League returns having ended a near three-decade long wait for a team to retain the trophy.

"We are the champions so everyone faces us with extra motivation," warned former Real striker Emilio Butragueno, now the club's director of institutional relations.

Madrid coped with that challenge admirably last season, dismissing Bayern Munich, Atletico Madrid and Juventus in the latter stages.

Their quest to become the first side since Bayern in the mid-seventies to win three in a row starts with a more modest test in the form of APOEL Nicosia at the Santiago Bernabeu today.

Tougher tasks lie in wait in the form of Borussia Dortmund and Tottenham Hotspur in Group H.

Dortmund even beat Madrid to top spot in the group stage last season. But Real have mastered the art of saving their best for when the competition really gets going for the contenders in the knockout stages in the new year.

"We have a stupendous squad but this is a competition that takes you to the limit in all aspects," added Butragueno.

"You can have a big squad with all the resources, but when the moment of truth arrives you need to not have injuries, for your players to be in optimum

form and have luck. There are so many factors."

Real's strength in depth was used intelligently by coach Zinedine Zidane to win the club's first La Liga and European Cup double for 59 years last season.

It is also why one of the richest clubs in the world didn't feel the need to go wild in a hyper-inflated transfer market following Neymar's world record 222 million-euro move to Paris Saint-Germain.

Instead, Real continued their policy of snapping up the best young talent in Spain in Theo Hernandez and Dani Ceballos to add to the likes of Isco and Marco Asensio.

Despite a slow start to their campaign in La Liga, Zidane already seems to be playing the long game this season.

The Frenchman rested a host of first-team regulars including Luka Modric, Isco and Gareth Bale on their return from international duty for a disappointing 1-1 draw against Levante on Saturday.

"I am not going to revolutionise what I want to do with this team due to one bad game," Zidane insisted afterwards.

Real will be bolstered for the visit of the Cypriot champions in midweek by the return of Cristiano Ronaldo.

The World Player of the Year's absence due to a five-game domestic ban for pushing a referee has exposed the one flaw in Real's squad in a lack of back-up to Karim Benzema.

Having not replaced Morata, Bale was forced to act as an auxiliary striker against Levante after Benzema went off injured.

Yet even an enforced rest for Ronaldo could ultimately work in Real's favour come the end of the campaign.

The Portuguese scored 10 goals from the quarter-finals on last season as Zidane's rotation policy left him far fresher and freer of injuries than in previous years.

Spurs fight to end Wembley woe

AFP, London: Frustrated by a series of miserable experiences at Wembley, Tottenham Hotspur host Borussia Dortmund today desperate to finally vanquish the ghosts that haunt them at the national stadium.

When Mauricio Pochettino's side kick off their Champions League campaign against the Germans, it won't be just priceless Group H points that are up for grabs.

For Tottenham, Wembley is in danger of becoming the bogeyman that wreaks havoc on their ambitions to challenge for silverware at home and abroad.

The north London club have been forced to relocate to Wembley while White Hart Lane is being rebuilt.

But Spurs have now played 12 matches at Wembley since the famous old arena was revamped — winning just twice and suffering eight defeats.

Tottenham's struggles at Wembley came into harsh focus last season in the Champions League when they won just one of their group matches there.

CSKA Moscow were the only team they could beat as defeats against Monaco and Bayer Leverkusen sent them crashing out.

Even playing against Gent in the Europa League at Wembley proved a painful experience as the Belgians claimed a draw that eliminated Tottenham in the last 32.

Remarkably, there was still more Wembley woe in store

for Spurs before the end of the season as they lost the FA Cup semi-final to Chelsea 4-2.

The contrast between their form at Wembley and White Hart Lane is stark.

Last season's second-place finish in the Premier League was built on a brilliant unbeaten record in front of their own fans, which saw them win 17 and draw two of their 19 home league games.

Yet as soon as they pitch up at Wembley, Tottenham's invincibility evaporates.

They've done their best to make Wembley feel like home, draping the stadium in the club's livery, hanging posters with Spurs slogans, and employing a drummer to lift the noise levels.

But after the more intimate atmosphere of White Hart Lane, where the fans were much closer to the pitch, Wembley hasn't been conducive to generating the intensity Tottenham thrive on.

Facing Chelsea in their first home game this season, Tottenham fell behind to Marcos Alonso's goal before Michy Batshuayi's late own goal drew them level.

Not for the first time at Wembley, Tottenham couldn't keep calm at the other end and Alonso won it after a mistake from goalkeeper Hugo Lloris with two minutes left.

It was the first time Tottenham had lost a home league match since Southampton beat them 2-1 in May 2016.

BOTTOMLINE

Rampant City ready to march on

AFP
The Hague

Pep Guardiola's rampant Manchester City will be keen to keep the momentum going as they open the hunt for Champions League glory against a diminished Feyenoord in Rotterdam today.

After mauling Liverpool 5-0 in the Premier League on Saturday, City now travel to face the Dutch champions — who face a daunting prospect after a 15-year absence from the group stage of the competition.

Eyes in particular will be on City playmaker Kevin De Bruyne, whose sublime form played a major part in the Liverpool drubbing and who is sure to sniff out and exploit weaknesses in Feyenoord's midfield and defence.

Feyenoord may have beaten Heracles 4-2 in a Dutch top-flight match over the weekend, but their opponents came dangerously close to scoring more goals — a fact no doubt that



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (L) talks with fitness coach Lorenzo Buenaventura (R) during a training session at the City Football Academy in Manchester yesterday.

will play on coach Giovanni van Bronckhorst's mind.

The Rotterdam club faced a further blow up front after leading striker Nicolai Jorgensen came off with a leg muscle injury 21 minutes into the Heracles game.

The 26-year-old Danish international — last year's Eredivisie top scorer with 21 goals in 32 games — will not play in the City match which opens their Group F campaign, Feyenoord announced on Monday.

With Jorgensen out, former Dutch skipper and Arsenal midfielder Van Bronckhorst will now have to draw on every ounce of Premier League experience if he is to try and outfox Guardiola's team.

City have spent more than £200mn (\$264mn, 219mn euros) over the summer strengthening their squad after losing to Monaco in the last 16 last season.

De Bruyne told British media on Monday: "The guys who have come in have a very physical quality, they are very strong, very pacy. They make the pitch big, that is a quality of them and it is difficult for the other teams."

Meanwhile, Feyenoord winger Steven Berghuis said he expected it to be a tough night for the hosts, European Cup winners in 1970.

"It's going to be tough to stay standing against this club (Manchester City)," Berghuis told daily tabloid De Telegraaf. "The only thing we can do is to try to make them pay a price

and play a game with lots of energy."

The odds overwhelmingly favour a City win, although the last time they visited Dutch soil they lost 3-1 to Ajax in the group stage in 2012.

The match will be played at the daunting De Kuip (The Tub) stadium in front of thousands of fanatical Feyenoord fans called "The Legion".

Some hardcore Feyenoord supporters have built up a reputation as troublemakers, getting involved in skirmishes with the law and fans of other clubs.

In February 2015, drunken Feyenoord fans trashed Rome's famous Piazza di Spagna ahead of a Europa League clash.

Earlier this year, police arrested dozens of Feyenoord supporters who rioted after losing to local club Excelsior, preventing them from become Dutch champions on the day.

Although no trouble is expected on Wednesday, Rotterdam police said they "will be ready to deal with various situations, should it be needed."



SPOTLIGHT

IOC readies to crown Paris, Los Angeles as hosts

Today's vote marks the conclusion of a mostly good-natured bidding campaign notable for the number of cities who withdrew from the race citing waning public support



Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo (L) and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti chat ahead of an International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in Lima. For the first time in history, the Olympics will confirm two Summer Games host cities at the same time today, when Paris is handed hosting rights for 2024 and Los Angeles wins 2028.

AFP
Lima

The International Olympic Committee will crown Paris and Los Angeles as hosts for the 2024 and 2028 Olympics here today, delivering a welcome feel-good factor amid a gathering storm of corruption allegations.

For the first time since the awarding of the 1984 Olympics, when only one city was in the race, the traditional frenzy of last-minute lobbying, politicking and schmoozing will be strikingly absent in Lima.

In a historic move, the IOC brokered an agreement that will see Paris handed the 2024 Games with Los Angeles awarded 2028, an outcome that all sides are declaring as victory in a "win-win-win" deal.

IOC members will ratify the agreement following 25-minute presentations by Paris and Los Angeles, the last two cities left in the race for the 2024 Olympics.

"It's a big win and we are here to really enjoy it," said Paris 2024 bid co-chief Tony Estanguet, reflecting the triumphant mood amongst the French delegation as today's vote neared.

Los Angeles 2028 officials meanwhile insisted they are satisfied with the deal which means the Californian city will have to wait 11 more years before it stages the Olympics for a third time.

The city will receive roughly \$100mn more than Paris in IOC funding for the games, a financial sweetener that delivers "a frankly much better economic result", according to 2028 bid chief Casey Wasserman.

"We think the result is extraordinary," Wasserman told AFP. "We'll be celebrating on Wednesday night and through the weekend in LA for sure."

IOC chief President Thomas Bach, the driving force behind the double award, described the candidacies of Paris and Los Angeles as a "golden opportunity."

"For the IOC it would have been a huge mistake not to seize this golden opportunity," Bach said Monday.

Today's vote marks the conclusion of a mostly good-natured bidding campaign notable for the number of cities who withdrew from the race citing waning public support and concerns over budget.

Hamburg, Rome, Budapest and Boston

all fell by the wayside during the competition, reflecting the political difficulties in persuading voters that staging the Olympics is worth the multi-billion-dollar price tag.

IOC chief Bach first signalled publicly that the double-award of an Olympics could be on the agenda in December last year, lamenting that the bidding process produced "too many losers."

As the bidding battle for 2024 unfolded, and as the field thinned to leave Los Angeles and Paris as the last bids standing, the IOC's determination to lock in two high-quality cities for the next two summer games became apparent.

Los Angeles and Paris, whose bids emphasise a high-level of venue readiness, both wowed the IOC's Evaluation Commission during back-to-back visits in May. In July, the IOC announced it would award the staging rights for the 2024 and 2028 Olympics at the same meeting in Lima.

The drama-free conclusion also guarantees the IOC will not have to confront the explosive fall-out from the vote for the 2016 Olympics, which detonated spectacularly last week when investigators in Brazil swooped on the country's

Olympics chief Carlos Nuzman.

Nuzman stands accused of plotting to bribe IOC members into awarding Rio de Janeiro the 2016 Games at a 2009 vote in Copenhagen.

Former IOC member Nuzman was taken in for questioning with his passport confiscated and a search of his house unearthing around \$150,000 worth in cash in various currencies.

Brazilian police later said they are probing "an international corruption scheme" aimed at "the buying of votes for the election of (Rio) by the International Olympic Committee as the venue for the 2016 Olympics."

The charges swirling around Rio's bid revive memories of the Salt Lake City bribery scandal, which led to 20 IOC members being either kicked out of the Olympics' ruling body or pleading guilty to accepting bribes for votes.

French investigators meanwhile have already announced they are investigating the 2013 vote in Buenos Aires which awarded the 2020 Olympics to Tokyo, following reports of secret payments into a Singapore-based bank account linked to the son of disgraced former world athletics chief Lamine Diack.

ASSURANCE

No hint of threat to 2018 Winter Olympics – Bach



IOC President Thomas Bach

AFP
Lima

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach downplayed security fears surrounding the 2018 Winter Olympics on Monday following the recent escalation of tensions on the Korean peninsula.

Bach told reporters in Lima he was confident there would be no threat to the Games, which take place in Pyeongchang, South Korea, from February 9-25.

Pyeongchang is 80 kilometres (50 miles) from the border with North Korea, which has stoked anxiety with a recent nuclear test and a string of missile launches.

"There is not even a hint that there is a threat for the security of the games in the context of the tensions between North Korea and some other countries," Bach told a press conference.

Bach said the IOC had been in contact with the governments on the peninsula and said there was "no doubt being raised about the Olympic winter games in 2018."

He said that the wording of an Olympic truce to be put before the United Nations in November – a common tradition ahead of each Olympics – was currently being discussed.

"We hope that these discussions to which we contribute will be successful so that a resolution can be approved," Bach said.

The IOC was also offering support to ensure the participa-

tion of athletes from North Korea, Bach added.

"We are also keeping the door open for athletes of the DPRK," he said. "This is our political neutrality."

Bach said meanwhile that he was unaware of any nervousness on the part of other nations about sending their athletes to South Korea.

Last week, Swiss IOC official Gian-Franco Kasper said he feared some teams might not participate in South Korea out of security fears.

"I don't see this right now because there is a clear commitment," Bach said. "We hope we're appealing that diplomacy and peace will prevail on the Korean peninsula."

Bach's comments followed a presentation to the IOC Executive Board earlier Monday by Pyeongchang chiefs.

Lee Hee-Beom, the president of the 2018 Winter Games organising committee, later said he was confident of delivering "perfect security" for the Games, admitting no contingency plans had been drawn up.

"There's no plan B, as the Olympics are based on an Olympic truce," Lee told reporters.

"We will have a perfect security and safety Olympic Games."

Lee, like Bach, also anticipated that North Korean athletes will venture across the border to participate.

"So far we believe North Korean athletes will be there in Pyeongchang," he said.

OPPORTUNITY

LA to benefit from more time to prepare for Games

Reuters
Lima

Los Angeles will benefit from having longer to get ready for the 2028 Summer Olympics after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to award the hosting rights to two Games at its session vote this week, mayor Eric Garcetti said.

Past Olympic hosts had seven years to prepare from when they were awarded the Games to their staging, compared to LA's 11.

Many host cities, including Athens 2004 and Rio de Janeiro last year, struggled to get ready in time for the Olympics and had to race to complete the venues, leading to higher costs and allegations of corruption in awarding contracts quickly.

"It gives us the opportunity to think about every resident in Los Angeles," Garcetti told Reuters Television on Monday.

"Many times every city is working so hard... to build the infrastructure, they can't think about the environment, they can't think about the economy,

they can't think about the health of their people."

"In the last six weeks I have been excited about a decade, 10 years to think about that, to re-imagine that and to deliver that."

LA, which initially wanted the 2024 Games, unexpectedly got the 2028 Olympics as the IOC changed the bidding process in mid-race this year after several cities pulled out, scared off by the size and cost of the world's biggest multi-sports event.

The IOC in July decided to award the next two editions to the two cities left in the 2024 race, with Paris getting the 2024 edition and LA the Games four years later. The IOC had said it did not want to create any "losers" in this process. IOC president Thomas Bach will visit LA at the end of the week, four days after the IOC session in Lima ratifies the decisions for 2024 and 2028 on Wednesday.

An IOC evaluation report published late on Monday said the city met all the criteria to host the Olympics, adding that Los Angeles had kept its 2024 Games master plan that saw hosting athletes at the UCLA university campus.

BOTTOMLINE

IOC lawyers in touch with Brazil over graft claims

Reuters
Lima

Lawyers for the International Olympic Committee on Monday contacted Brazilian judicial authorities to request any evidence regarding the involvement of Rio de Janeiro Olympics chief in alleged corruption, IOC chief Thomas Bach said.

Brazilian investigators said last week politicians and IOC member Carlos Nuzman, the head of the national Olympic committee and subsequent Rio Games chief, had arranged a \$2mn bribe to bring the 2016 games to Rio de Janeiro, despite the city having the worst conditions to host the event.

Police in Rio raided the home of Nuzman after prosecutors accused him of conspiring with former state Governor Sergio Cabral, already convicted in a separate corruption case, to buy the games.

"Since this morning our lawyers have been in contact with Brazilian judicial authorities," Bach told reporters in Lima. "Once evidence is provided we will act."



The legacy of South America's first Olympics, which ended just over a year ago, has been muddied by allegations of graft.

Nearly every infrastructure project connected to the Games is under investigation and prosecutors allege major construction firms bribed politicians and others to win contracts worth billions of

dollars for the event.

The alleged votes-for-cash affair was triggered by an ongoing French investigation with former international athletics chief Lamine Diack and his son Papa Massata Diack seen as leading figures in the affair.

Diack, a former IOC member, has al-

ready been stripped of his honorary IOC membership. In a statement earlier on Monday the IOC repeated claims from French prosecutors investigating the affair that Diack was under suspicion of having run a votes-for cash scheme "over the designation of host cities for the biggest global sporting events."

Both Diack and his son have rejected the allegations. Massata Diack told Reuters last week said the claims were "the biggest lie in the history of world sport."

Bach said there was "no collective responsibility" for the IOC and the Olympic body would act, as it had in the Diack case, once it had evidence.

"It was a couple of days after evidence was provided against Diack that the IOC executive board took action and he lost his IOC honorary position (in 2015)," Bach said. "There are allegations concerning Mr Nuzman. He is not even charged so far. This needs to be clarified and then action will be taken."

"Once evidence is there then we will act and the (IOC) ethics commission will be in a position to make recommendations in this respect."

NFL

Minnesota Vikings home Cook-in' spoils Peterson's return

'You can't say enough about him. He is a great player. I expect him to only get better'



Minnesota Vikings running back Dalvin Cook (No 33) is tackled by New Orleans Saints linebacker AJ Klein during the first quarter of the NFL game at US Bank Stadium. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Los Angeles

The season-opening spotlight was supposed to be on longtime Vikings star Adrian Peterson's return to Minnesota, but rookie running back Dalvin Cook stole the show with an explosive performance on Monday.

The 22-year-old looked like a seasoned veteran in his National Football League debut as he rushed 22 times for 127 yards in the Vikings 29-19 win over the New Orleans Saints in the first game of the 2017 regular season for both teams.

"You can't say enough about him," Vikings quarterback Sam Bradford said of Cook. "He is a great player. I expect him to only get better."

That spoiled the return of running back Peterson, who signed with the Saints as a free

agent in the off season.

With former league MVP Peterson sitting on the sidelines for much of his New Orleans' debut, Cook seized command as his 127 yards was 24 more than Peterson's Viking debut, and almost double what Peterson gained last season in Minnesota.

The knock on Cook heading into the season was his inexperience as a pass protector and a tendency to fumble. But the second-round draft pick in 2017 showed none of that on Monday in front of a crowd of 66,000 at US Bank stadium.

The former league MVP Peterson spent his first 10 seasons with the Vikings, but is now a complimentary player in New Orleans.

After getting the first two carries of the game, for last year's number one NFL offense, Peterson went silent. He finished with just six carries for 18 yards.

"It was a little different, but

once I got out there, it was more fun," Peterson said. "I wish I could have gotten more snaps, but it was an interesting going up against those guys."

Vikings defensive end Everson Griffen added: "We stopped him and didn't let him get going."

Bradford threw for 346 yards and three touchdowns, and wide receiver Stefon Diggs scored two touchdown receptions in the first half.

Bradford completed 27 of 32 passes with no turnovers. Adam Thielen caught nine passes for 157 yards, and tight end Kyle Rudolph added a touchdown reception for Minnesota. Saints quarterback Drew Brees was 27 of 37 for 291 yards and one touchdown.

Settled for field goals

The Saints kicked field goals before Brees connected with tight end Coby Fleener for an eight-yard touchdown with 1:56 left in

the game. New Orleans finished with 344 yards of offense.

"Obviously we settled for too many field goals offensively, and then all of the sudden, got into catch-up mode," Saints coach Sean Payton said.

"I thought early on, defensively, we did some good things and then there was a series that breaks it open in the second quarter. I felt like when we got into the second half, we were having trouble stopping much of anything."

Elsewhere, the Chargers opened their season against Denver in their first game since moving from San Diego to Los Angeles with a 24-21 loss to the Broncos.

Meanwhile New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady said the three extra days off made it worse for the defending Super Bowl champions to get over their season-opening loss.

Brady said it was harder to move on after last Thursday

night's 42-27 setback to the Kansas City Chiefs.

"It's probably easier when you're getting right back to work," Brady said during his weekly interview on sports radio WEEI in Boston.

"It actually kind of (stunk) having three extra days to think about it and rewatch the game."

The Houston Texans may be without five players for Thursday's game against the Cincinnati Bengals because they are in the concussion protocol.

Following Sunday's 29-7 loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars, inside linebacker Brian Cushing, wide receiver Bruce Ellington and all three tight ends on the active roster - CJ Fiedorowicz, Ryan Griffin and Stephen Anderson - were examined for possible concussions

RESULTS

Vikings	29	Saints	19
Broncos	24	Chargers	21

SPOTLIGHT

League files appeal of Elliott's injunction

AFP
Los Angeles

The National Football League filed a notice of appeal on Monday in an effort to reverse a US judge's injunction that blocks a six-game suspension of Dallas Cowboys running-back Ezekiel Elliott.

The league filed an appeal of the Fifth Circuit Court injunction of Elliott's ban that permitted him to take the field Sunday in the Cowboys season opening regular season game.

The runningback was found to be in violation of the personal conduct policy by the NFL and his appeal through league arbitration channels was denied. But just over 48 hours before the start of Sunday's contest against the New York Giants, Elliott and the players' union scored a victory when a Texas judge granted a temporary injunction.

The NFL quickly indicated it would review all legal options, and officially filed the appeal. Elliott said Sunday night that he hopes the matter gets resolved quickly and in a fair manner. "Just relieved for the fact that I finally get a fair trial," Elliott said.

"I finally get a chance to prove my innocence and just happy that I'll get to be with the guys for as long as permitted and not miss time and not having to be away from them. "It's definitely been a tough last 14 months. At times it's gotten so hard you start to lose faith."

Elliott has been appealing against the August 11 sanction issued by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell following a probe which alleged the player assaulted former girlfriend Tiffany Thompson in 2016.

However, the appeal hearing revealed that the NFL's lead investigator in the case had written a memo raising questions about Thompson's credibility and had later recommended no sanction be issued.

The investigator's memo and recommendation of no punishment were later ignored as Elliott was slapped with a six-game ban.

The investigator who wrote the memo - the only NFL official to interview Thompson in the case - later revealed she had not been asked to attend a meeting between the league's vice president of investigations Lisa Friel and Goodell.

Elliott - the fourth overall pick in the 2016 draft - was the star running back of the NFL last year, powering to 1,631 yards in his rookie season.

Cardinals runningback Johnson has dislocated wrist

Arizona Cardinals running-back David Johnson may need surgery after he suffered a dislocated wrist in Sunday's 35-23 loss to the Detroit Lions, the NFL team said Monday.

Coach Bruce Arians said that the initial prognosis for Johnson is the same as it was for rookie running back TJ Logan, who was expected to miss 12 weeks after suffering a dislocated wrist in early August.

If the 25-year-old Johnson goes on injured reserve list, he would miss eight weeks of the 2017 season. Johnson left Sunday's loss in Detroit in the third quarter to receive medical attention. He was diagnosed with a dislocated wrist after undergoing an X-ray exam.

Johnson was hurt while making a 24-yard reception. He returned on Arizona's next possession but fumbled on his next carry, which was recovered by the Lions.

Legend Bryant unveils NBA China academy plans

Los Angeles Lakers legend Kobe Bryant announced plans yesterday for China's first NBA basketball school, a development the 18-time All-Star says will improve the game in the country. The NBA Basketball School-Mission Hills Haikou will be open to male and female players from junior up to professional level after its completion in 2019 and could help unearth the next Chinese basketball star.

Along with football, basketball is the most popular sport in China and Bryant said the new facility - construction begins later this year - will be a boon to the Chinese game. "The Chinese youth will benefit from a complete approach to player development that combines NBA-quality coaching with NBA-level training," said the retired five-time NBA champion.

"I believe this partnership will lift the game of basketball to a higher level in China."

The 39-year-old was in the city of Haikou, on the southern Chinese island of Hainan, to unveil the project.

Mission Hills Group will design and build the school and its six indoor courts, but it will be operated by NBA China.

The NBA already has three training academies in China for top male and female prospects.

NBA China chief executive David Shoemaker said in a Mission Hills press statement: "This groundbreaking NBA Basketball School in Haikou further builds upon our commitment to developing young basketball talent in China."

"We are delighted that Mission Hills Group shares our vision and are thrilled to have the opportunity to contribute to the government's pledge to grow a sporting culture in Hainan Province."

Hainan, sometimes referred to as China's equivalent of Hawaii, already hosts a Barcelona football academy, also in partnership with Mission Hills.

MLB

City Royals fall to Chicago White Sox 11-3

By Rustin Dodd
The Kansas City Star

There are many reasons the Royals, a team just 22 months removed from a World Series championship, sit one game under .500 after an 11-3 loss to the Chicago White Sox.

Their offense ranks 12th in the American League in runs scored, weighed down by a feeble bottom of the lineup. Their starting pitching has been shredded by injuries and fatigue; their bullpen gutted by an offseason trade that has yet to bear fruit.

And yet, there were two moments in the sixth inning Monday night at Kauffman Stadium, two plays that illustrated a .500 team playing to form.

First, there was third baseman Mike Moustakas, hobbled by a nagging knee injury, who could not plant his right leg on a throw

and airmailed a baseball to first base.

And then there was centre fielder Lorenzo Cain, battling a sore quad, who could not complete a simple double play, botching a throw back to the infield after Chicago's Avisail Garcia found himself more than 100 feet off first base.

The miscues gifted the White Sox two extra outs. Moments later, Chicago's Adam Engel cranked a three-run homer off reliever Brandon Maurer into the fountains in left-centre, a capstone on a six-run inning.

The two mistakes were not the only factors in another rout, of course. Starting pitcher Jason Hammel was hounded for five runs in 3 1/3 innings, his shortest outing since April 30.

The Kansas City offense managed just three runs against rookie starter Reynaldo Lopez, a 23-year-old who entered with a 4.84 ERA.

But perhaps the sixth inning signalled why a spirited charge this month seems so unlikely, why the Royals (71-72) feel more removed from the playoffs than the three games that separate them from Minnesota in the American League wild-card race.

Moustakas is ostensibly playing on one good leg. He is still sitting on 36 homers after clubbing just one in his last 22 games. On Monday, the pain appeared to surface on two errant throws to first. The first came on a potential double play in the fourth in which Moustakas stepped on third base and spiked a throw to first.

The other came after the White Sox had struck for a run in the sixth on a single by Yoan Moncada and a triple by Jose Abreu.

Left fielder Nicky Delmonico hit a routine grounder to third. Moustakas flubbed the throw, appearing tentative on his right leg. Garcia followed with an RBI single before Omar Narvaez

lined out to centre on a hit-and-run. Garcia did not pick up the baseball in the air and rounded second on the play. But Cain could not garner much authority on the throw, heaving an off-line toss that shortstop Alcides Escobar failed to cut off. Garcia scampared back to the bag. The situation would only deteriorate more.

The Royals lost just a half-game to Minnesota, which was off on Monday.

They will seek to even the series with Chicago on Tuesday in a rare 12:15 p.m. start. (Thank you, U2 concert at Arrowhead Stadium.) Rookie Sam Gaviglio will make his second start following a solid effort against the Twins last week. Kansas City cannot afford many more outings like the one on Monday.

Hammel, who had gone at least six innings in seven of his last eight starts, was pillaged for two runs in the first inning and another in the second.

He lasted just 3 1/3 innings, yielding 10 hits and two walks.

The offense, meanwhile, was mostly quiet. First baseman Eric Hosmer recorded a single in the second inning, extending his streak of nine hits in nine straight at-bats.

It would end in the bottom of the fourth, just one hit shy of tying Joe Randa's franchise record.

Brandon Moss clubbed a solo homer to right in the bottom of the fifth, giving the Royals four players with 20 homers for the third time in franchise history. By the end, the feat did not mean much.

RESULTS

San Francisco	8	LA Dodgers	6
Colorado	5	Arizona	4
White Sox	11	Kansas City	3
Texas	5	Seattle	3
Pittsburgh	7	Milwaukee	0
Cleveland	11	Detroit	0
NY Yankees	5	Tampa Bay	1
Toronto	4	Baltimore	3



Chicago White Sox's Avisail Garcia and Tim Anderson congratulate Adam Engel behind Kansas City Royals catcher Salvador Perez and Engel hit a three-run home run in the sixth inning. (Kansas City Star/TNS)



RUGBY

Kaino back with All Blacks, unlikely to play Springboks

'He has been out of the game for a little while and he's got to show us he is in the right sort of condition to come back. But it's great having him back'



Reuters
Wellington

Loose forward **Jerome Kaino** returned to training with the All Blacks yesterday but was unlikely to be selected for their Rugby Championship match against South Africa on Saturday.

The two-time World Cup winner, who had not been selected in the matchday squad, left the team on the day of the first Rugby Championship match against Australia in Sydney last month to deal with a personal issue.

Liam Squire played the first two games of the Rugby Championship against Australia, while Vaea Fifita made his first start against Argentina last Saturday in New Plymouth. Kaino has played one provincial match for Auckland since he left the team.

"He came in yesterday. We've had ongoing conversations with him and it's a matter of bringing him back in," All Blacks assistant coach Ian Foster told reporters

about Kaino's appearance at training in Auckland.

"He has had one (provincial) game, and we're keen for him to have another.

"He has been out of the game for a little while and he's got to show us he is in the right sort of condition to come back.

"But it's great having him back."

The 34-year-old, a virtual constant first-choice selection when available for the All Blacks since 2008, could face a battle to reclaim his test spot after Squire and Fifita have stamped their own marks on the team.

Squire has a more hard-edged element to his game similar to Kaino, while Fifita impressed with a stunning performance in New Plymouth where he scored an try from more than 35-metres out as he outpaced the Pumas' backline.

Lock Sam Whitelock, however, said Kaino's presence with the team back in Auckland had been a welcome one given the 81-test veteran's experience.

"He brings that harder edge to the environment," Whitelock said.

"Whether it be walking through lineouts, or doing the physical stuff, it's good to have that older, experienced guy that demands we compete."

Fifita sat out training on Tuesday with a sore shoulder, but pundits in the rugby-mad country have said they expect the more experienced Squire to be recalled against a physical Springboks pack at North Harbour Stadium.

Foster, however, was not giving anything away ahead of the team announcement on Thursday.

"They were both pretty special in what they did," he said.

"They're both learning still, and there are areas in both their games where they've still got to get some greater clarity on the roles we need them to do.

"But it was great seeing them both go out on the park and express themselves with their athleticism."

Springbok fly-half Lambie joins Racing 92

South Africa fly-half Patrick Lambie is joining French Top 14 side Racing 92, the Parisian-based club announced yesterday. The 26-year-old moves to French rugby's elite division after being released from his joint SA Rugby and Coastal Sharks contract. He will begin this new chapter in his rugby career at Racing 92 on November 1 in a deal stretching to 2021, subject to passing a medical.

Lambie, who has turned out 56 times for his country, was ruled out of the Springboks' three-match Test series against France in June because of recurring concussion injuries.

He holds a special place in the hearts of Springbok fans after landing a monster penalty kick to give South Africa victory over arch-foes New Zealand in Johannesburg three seasons ago – the last time they beat the All Blacks.

South African Rugby confirmed his move to the 2016 Top 14 champions on Twitter. "Pat Lambie has been granted an early release from his dual contract in SA and will join Racing92 in France, but still eligible for the Boks."

"Patrick felt that he wanted a different challenge in his career" explained Springbok coach Allister Coetzee. "He has been loyal to the Springboks and has had done very well for his country.

"It is a big loss for us but we want to wish him well with the next chapter of his career.

However 'having played 56 Tests for the Springboks already' he is still eligible for future selection."

Racing said their versatile new recruit would allow coaches Laurent Labit and Laurent Travers "to continue to rotate their squad" in line with the policy of deploying youngsters from the club's academy.

MOTORSPORT

Jaguar to launch Formula E support series in 2018

Reuters
London

Jaguar is to launch an all-electric support series of races to accompany the Formula E championship late next year, the British-based carmaker said yesterday.

The world's first production-based electric series, revealed at the Frankfurt Motor Show, will start up alongside Formula E's fifth season and feature cars based on Jaguar's I-PACE performance SUV.

Jaguar Land Rover's first battery electric model is due to go on sale in late 2018. The company, owned by India's Tata Motors, has said all its new cars will be available in an electric or hybrid version from 2020.

Up to 20 cars will take part in 10 races, each lasting half an hour, that will be held on the same circuits and weekends as Formula E in cities around the world including Hong Kong, New York and Paris.

Jaguar also has a team com-

peting in Formula E, whose fourth championship starts in Hong Kong in December and ends in Montreal in July 2018.

"With the launch of the Jaguar I-PACE eTROPHY we have strengthened our commitment to battery electric vehicles, international motorsport and Formula E," said Jaguar Racing chairman Gerd Mauser in a statement.

He expected the series to serve as a 'ladder' for young drivers into Formula E.

Formula E is increasingly of interest to major manufacturers, with Formula One world champions Mercedes and Le Mans 24 Hours winners Porsche due to enter season six in 2019/20.

Other manufacturers already involved in the electric series include BMW and Audi as well as Renault, Citroen and India's Mahindra.

European car bosses at the Frankfurt auto show were beginning to address the realities of mass vehicle electrification, and its consequences for jobs and profit.

SPOTLIGHT

Lions captain Warburton out for four months with neck problem

AFP
London

British and Irish Lions captain Sam Warburton is set to miss the first four months of the European season following the recurrence of a neck injury, it was announced yesterday.

The statement from the Cardiff Blues, the Wales flanker's club, means Warburton will miss Wales's end of year home Tests against Australia, Georgia, New Zealand and South Africa.

The Blues said that Warburton had "exacerbated" the injury in training this week.

Warburton, 28, had yet to make his first appearance of the season after a post-Lions break before returning to training, having led the combined British and Irish Lions side to a drawn series away to New Zealand, the reigning world champions.

"Sam Warburton will undergo surgery following a recurrence of a long-standing neck injury," Cardiff said.

"The Cardiff Blues flanker, who led the British and Irish Lions to a drawn Test series with New Zealand in the summer, exacerbated the injury in training this week.

"He has undergone scans and has been reviewed by a consultant, who confirmed the

management plan. "It is likely that Sam will miss a period of up to four months," the statement added.

Warburton has been capped 74 times by Wales and has led the Lions on their last two tours, including their victorious trip to Australia in 2013.

Had he been fit, Warburton would likely have been a mainstay of Wales coach Warren Gatland's side for the November and December Tests.

But his absence paves the way for Ospreys and Lions back-row Justin Tipuric to take over at openside flanker in Warburton's absence.

The Blues said Warburton had "exacerbated" the injury in training this week

Wales face Australia in Cardiff on November 11, before home internationals Georgia and New Zealand precede their final Test of 2017, against South Africa on December 2.

One encouraging piece of news is that, if the current prognosis holds, Warburton should be fit for Wales's Six Nations opener against Scotland on February 3.

But Warburton's absence is another blow to Cardiff, who recently saw fellow flanker Ellis Jenkins sidelined for up to 12 weeks with a hamstring injury.

CYCLING

Froome to compete at road world time trials

AFP
London

Four-times Tour de France winner Chris Froome will follow up his first Vuelta a Espana victory by competing in the team and individual time trials at the road world championships starting in Norway at the weekend.

British Cycling head coach Iain Dyer said in a statement on Tuesday that the 32-year-old would take one of Britain's two places for the individual time trial. Dyer added that he expected the 31 kilometre course in Bergen, with a 3.4km climb up Mount Floyen to the finish, to play to the rider's strengths.

Froome had said after becoming the first Briton to win the Vuelta last weekend, and also the third man to complete a Tour-Vuelta double in the same year, that he aimed to compete for Sky

in Sunday's team time trial and then "it's probably time for me to put my feet up".

The men's elite individual time trial is on the following Wednesday. Froome, who will not take part in the road race in Bergen, won the Olympic time trial bronze at last year's Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Mark Cavendish, the 2011 road race champion who broke his shoulder during the Tour de France in July, and Geraint Thomas, also injured in the Tour, will be absent after withdrawing from selection. But Lizzie Deignan, the 2015 world champion, will be in the women's road race after having her appendix removed last month.

"There are some notable omissions from the squad," said Dyer. "We are coming to the end of a long season for the road riders and injury and illness becomes inevitable so their decisions to withdraw themselves

from selection are respected."

Froome – fresh from wrapping up a Tour de France and Vuelta a Espana double – believes winning all three Grand Tours in the same year would "take some doing" but "nothing is impossible".

Froome, 32, completed victory in the Vuelta on Sunday to become only the third man to achieve a Tour-Vuelta double in the same year and the first since Bernard Hinault in 1978.

No rider has ever pulled off a Giro-Tour-Vuelta treble and while Froome feels it is unlikely, he does not believe it is unachievable. "I wouldn't say it's impossible," the British rider, a four-time Tour de France champion, told BBC Radio Four on Monday.

"Nothing's impossible, but certainly it would take some doing."

He was more circumspect about his chances of surpassing Belgian great Eddy Merckx's record of 11 Grand Tour victories. "A completely different era,"

said Froome, who finished second in the Vuelta three times (2011, 2014 and 2016) before finally securing the red jersey.

"Eddy Merckx's time of racing, he was able to win every single kind of race on the calendar. The sport has transformed since his time."

Froome's double triumph came after a challenging period for Team Sky. Bradley Wiggins, Froome's former teammate, was revealed to have obtained permission to use a powerful corticosteroid before the 2011 and 2012 Tours – the latter of which he won – and the 2013 Giro.

Wiggins and team principal Dave Brailsford said the rider's use of the drug, which was sanctioned by Cycling's authorities, was necessary for medical reasons. Sky are also under investigation by UK Anti-Doping over a mysterious package that was delivered to Wiggins during the 2011 Criterium du Dauphine.



Team Sky rider Chris Froome of Britain celebrates on the podium after winning the Vuelta Tour of Spain after the last stage of the cycling race between Arroyomolinos and Madrid. (Reuters)

DAVIS CUP

Team spirit fires Kyrgios up again

'To take home the trophy would be probably a dream come true for me'

Reuters
Melbourne

Two weeks after declaring he lacked any dedication to tennis, Nick Kyrgios has pledged to fire up for Australia's bid to reach the Davis Cup final.

Australia play Belgium in the semi-final in Brussels this weekend, looking to secure their first trip to the decider since their 2003 win over Spain.

An injury-hampered Kyrgios bowed out of the opening round of the U.S. Open with an assortment of fines, a smashed racket and a tantrum, while burnishing his reputation as the tour's most talented slacker.

"I'm not dedicated to the game at all," he told reporters at Flushing Meadows, describing an off-court regimen of milkshakes, ice creams and walk-up basketball games.

"There are players out there that are more dedicated, that want to get better, that strive to get better every day, the one-percenters. I'm not that guy."

Following on from his admissions of video game marathons at a previous tournament, it was another confessional to elicit groans back home where exasperated fans still hope the 22-year-old can knuckle down.

In Davis Cup, they can at least be confident of something approaching a full-blooded performance from Kyrgios, who loves the team aspect of the

competition and played a leading role in Australia's quarter-final victory over the United States in April.

Kyrgios's commitment to the tournament has grown in importance since Bernard Tomic, the country's other half-hearted talent, has crashed out of the top 100 through a combination of missing tournaments and not training very hard.

"Davis Cup has done wonders for me this year," Kyrgios said.

"It's really made me find that love again for just being with the guys and having some fun, knowing that tennis isn't all bad, knowing that you can have some fun with it."

Kyrgios will spearhead Australia's charge against a strong Belgium team featuring world number 12 David Goffin.

The last time Australia reached the final, Lleyton Hewitt, the current team captain, was in his prime and fittingly, he will oversee the country's best chance of adding to its 28 titles in over a decade.

Former world number one Hewitt, a revered Davis Cup servant in Australia, has been credited for bringing out the best in Kyrgios.

"Rusty' (Hewitt) has helped me a lot," said Kyrgios.

"I think he's the best captain we've ever had. I know that everyone on our team would run through a brick wall for him."

"To take home the trophy would be probably a dream come true for me."



Nick Kyrgios aims to give Australia Davis Cup glory despite 'lack of dedication'.

French skipper warns of 'dangerous' Serbia

France captain Yannick Noah has warned against under-estimating a Serbia team short of its top stars in this weekend's Davis Cup semi-final. France, seeking a 10th Davis Cup title but first in 16 years, are strong favourites to prevail in Lille to secure a final against either Belgium or Australia. That is largely because the Serbs must make do without former world number one and 12-time Grand slam winner Novak Djokovic, Viktor Troicki and Janko Tipsarevic. But Noah said: "Even if Serbia doesn't have its highest ranked players they've got nothing to lose and so they can prove very dangerous."

"There will be difficult matches, lost sets, I hope the least possible number of matches lost. The aim is to win three points and that's never easy," added the 1983 French Open winner. "It's up to us to pull off a feat which the public should be aware is not just a formality, we are not in Lille to play an exhibition match."

The hosts are led by Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (18th in the ATP rankings) and Lucas Pouille (22nd) in the singles, and Pierre-Hugues Herbert and Nicolas Mahut in the doubles. Noah's reserve is Adrian Panarino, who was called up to replace injured Gael Monfis. Noah's opposite number Nenad Zimonjic lines up world number 80 Dusan Lajovic, Laslo Djere, Filip Krajinovic and himself in the doubles. Serbia, featuring Zimonjic and the absent Djokovic and Troicki, won their sole Davis Cup title in 2010, beating France in Belgrade 3-2.

SPOTLIGHT

Absence of top players hurt men's US Open: Wilander

Reuters
New York

A rather disappointing men's US Open tournament highlighted the absence of several top players on the tour, including past champions Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray and Stan Wawrinka.

Briton Murray, the 2012 Flushing Meadows champion, pulled out of the tournament days before it started, leaving a big hole in the bottom half of the draw.

As a result, South African Kevin Anderson made his way to the final but he was never in contention against world number one Rafa Nadal, who clinched his 16th grand slam title.

"First we need to realise how extremely lucky we've been to have these (top) players almost always playing the majors and now we realise how important it is for grand slams to have everybody healthy," former world number one Mats Wilander, at the US Open as an analyst for Eurosport, told Reuters.

"And they should get together with the ATP and the ITF (International Tennis Federation) to try and figure out a schedule where players can stay healthy throughout the year."

Murray pulled out because of a hip injury and Swiss Wawrinka and Serbia's Djokovic have ended their seasons altogether because of injuries. The trio had had won four of the six previous men's singles titles in New York.

"The best players in the world need to be playing the best tournaments, because it makes the level higher and this

year with five out of the (usual) top 10 out of the tournament, you could think you were going to feel the effect," said Wilander. "Often you don't feel a couple of players missing out but here it was noticeable."

NO DANGER

On his way to the final, Nadal did not face a player ranked in the world's top 20 and was never in danger against Anderson, a player he had beaten in all of their four matches.

Japan's Kei Nishikori and Canadian Milos Raonic also missed the tournament through injury while Roger Federer, whose preparations were troubled by a back injury, admitted he was not ready enough to be a credible title contender.

Looking ahead, however, Wilander believes that 2018 will be an interesting year.

"We're going to have three, five players very hungry so I would think that it will be extremely interesting to see," the Swede, the 1988 US Open champion, said.

The women's draw provided more thrills, with Maria Sharapova beating world number two Simona Halep on her return to the grand slam scene after a doping ban and new faces emerging.

"It was a good tournament, better than the men's. Exciting, more good matches and a lot of good stories," said Wilander.

"Four Americans in the semis, that's great for women's Tennis because in America women's Tennis has always been at a high level and they need to keep it up there."

It was the first time four American women had reached in the last four at the US Open since 1981.

Nadal speaks out against Catalan independence

Spanish tennis world number one Rafael Nadal has criticised plans for an independence referendum called by Catalonia's pro-separatist government for October 1. The referendum is deemed illegal by the Spanish government and the country's Constitutional Court.

"I think what is happening on October 1 ought not to take place because, from my point of view, everyone should respect the law," Nadal told Spanish newspaper El Mundo yesterday. "The laws are what they are and one can't skip the laws because you want to skip them. I can't run a red light because that traffic light doesn't seem right to me."

Nadal, 31, is a national hero in his homeland having landed a 16th career Grand Slam at the US Open on Sunday. However, Nadal, who grew up and lives on the Balearic island of Mallorca, is also a Catalan speaker. This year the centre court at Barcelona's Royal Tennis Club that hosts the Barcelona Open was renamed the Rafael Nadal Court. "I feel very close to the Catalans and I feel very Spanish as well," Nadal added.

"I don't understand Spain without Catalonia. I don't want to understand or see it. I believe that together we ought to be able to understand each other and I think we have to make an effort to reach an understanding because I think we are, without any doubt, stronger together than separated. "Spain is better with Catalonia and Catalonia is better with Spain from my point of view."

FOCUS

Japan's Date bows out in tears after 'double bagel'

AFP
Tokyo

Japan's Kimiko Date, the grande dame of women's tennis, bowed out of the sport after being thrashed 6-0, 6-0 by Aleksandra Kronic at the Japan Women's Open yesterday.

The former world number four, who turns 47 later this month, was simply no match for a Serbian opponent who at 24 is young enough to be Date's daughter.

Kronic took just 49 minutes to inflict the dreaded "double bagel" on Date in a lopsided first round encounter in Tokyo.

Date tried gamely to mix up her shots in the second set but to no avail as Kronic, ranked 67th in the world, blasted winners past her at will.

Kronic continued to swing away from the baseline and put the former Wimbledon semi-finalist out of her misery with a huge forehand which Date could only dump into the net.

"It's finally over," a tearful Date told fans, many of whom were themselves sobbing.

"I feel sad mostly, I guess, but also really grateful for what tennis has given me," said the eight-time WTA Tour singles champion, who took a 12-year hiatus from professional tennis after

quitting at the peak of her powers in 1996.

Date, a wiry 1.63 metres (5ft 4in), underwent two knee surgeries since appearing at the 2016 Australian Open, but defied the odds to return to action in May this year.

The Kyoto native, presented with flowers and a trophy in an emotional ceremony after the match, has also been nursing a sore shoulder and it showed against Kronic.

"A lot of things were going through my head this morning but during the match I was just trying everything I could to win a game," said Date after taking just 13 points off her opponent.

"I just didn't have it physically. It feels strange to be retired but I have to accept it. At the end I was relieved I hadn't made my shoulder worse."

'Nervous wreck'

Date, whose game is a throwback to a time when tennis was more about lobs, dinks and clever use of spin than power-hitting, showed brief glimpses of her former pomp.

However, after warming up to Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff", Date was largely anything but and lacked the power to trouble Kronic, who after embracing Date told her she had started the match as a nervous wreck.

"I want to apologise," she said

after completing the whitewash. "I don't like that I had to be the one but Kimiko has had a great career."

"I was a mess at the beginning," added Kronic, who next faces American Alison Riske.

"When I go back to the locker room, I'll probably cry."

Date broke several tennis records, most notably at the Korea Open in 2009 when she became the second-oldest player in the modern era - after Billie Jean King - to win a WTA singles title.

Despite playing on until the ripe old age of 46, Date still fell some way short of her idol Martina Navratilova, who retired a month shy of her 50th birthday in 2006.

Date insisted she had no desire to become a coach in the future.

"No, I'm definitely not cut out for that," she laughed. "But I don't feel like I did when I first retired and didn't want to go near a tennis court again. I think I'll stick to just watching."

Elsewhere, Poland's Magda Linette beat local player Risa Ozaki 6-1, 7-5 to set up a meeting with third seed Elise Mertens of Belgium.

Frenchwoman Kristina Mladenovic, the tournament's top seed, had her first-round match with Croatian Jana Fett pushed back to Wednesday because of rain.



Japan's Kimiko Date receives a memorial plate from WTA during a ceremony after her last match of her career against Serbian Aleksandra Kronic in the first round of the Japan Open in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Pakistan celebrates international cricket revival with victory

'I came here early to watch the teams come but that was not possible due to security so I only watched them in the ground and it made my day'

AFF
Lahore

Pakistan yesterday took a giant step towards reviving international cricket at home with a 20-run victory over the World XI in a match before excited crowds amid tight security.

The Twenty20 match, accorded international status by the International Cricket Council, is only the second time Pakistan has hosted an international match since militants attacked the bus of the visiting Sri Lankan team in March 2009, killing eight people and injuring seven players and staff.

Long before the match started at 7:00PM (1400GMT), around 9,000 police officers and paramilitary forces were deployed to the area, cordoning off the team's hotels and stadium.

But the large security presence did little to temper the enthusiasm of fans in the cricket-mad country.

"I came here early to watch the teams come but that was not possible due to security so I only watched them in the ground and it made my day," said spectator Azfar Ali.

Pakistan, sent into bat by World XI skipper Faf du Plessis, notched 197-5 with Babar Azam hitting a rapid 52-ball 86. His career best Twenty20 score had ten boundaries and two sixes.

Azam added 122 for the second wicket with Ahmed Shehzad (39) as Pakistan built on the loss of opener Fakhar Zaman for



Pakistan player Babar Azam receives man of the match award from ICC director Giles Clarke during a ceremony after the first Twenty20 international match between the World XI and Pakistan in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

eight. Shoaib Malik smashed a 20-ball 38 with two sixes and four boundaries to give the final touches to the innings.

The World XI started off well with Tamim Iqbal hitting 18 with three boundaries and Hashim Amla smashing three boundaries and a six in his 17-ball 26 but left-arm pacer Ruman Raees dismissed both in the

same over to put the brakes on their innings.

Skipper Faf du Plessis hit four boundaries and a six while Darren Sammy smashed three sixes – both scoring 29 – but were unable to see their team through.

For Pakistan, paceman Sohail Khan and leg-spinner Shadab Khan finished with two wickets apiece.

The second game is today and the third on Friday – both in Lahore.

Pakistan hopes the series will help end their international isolation, with Sri Lanka due to play a Twenty20 in October followed by three Twenty20 internationals against the West Indies in November.

Six Pakistani players – Azam,

Ashraf, Zaman, Shadab, Raees and Hasan Ali – played their first international match on the home soil.

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan
Fakhar c Amla b Morkel8
Ahmed c Sammy b Cutting ...39
Babar Azam c Miller b Tahir. 86
Shoaib Malik b Perera..... 38
Sarfaraz c Paine b Perera 4
Imad Wasim not out15
Fahim Ashraf not out 0
Extras: (lb1, w6) 7
Total: (for five wkts, 20 overs)197

Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Zaman), 2-130 (Shehzad), 3-142 (Azam), 4-161 (Ahmed), 5-182 (Malik)

Bowling: Morkel 4-0-32-1, Perera 4-0-51-2, Cutting 4-0-38-1 (1w), Tahir 4-0-34-1 (1w), Elliott 2-0-17-0, Sammy 2-0-24-0

World XI
Tamim Iqbal b Raees18
Amla c Wasim b Raees 26
T. Paine c Raees b Khan 25
F. du Plessis c sub b Shadab. 29
D. Miller c Ahmed b Shadab.... 9
G. Elliott c Wasim b Khan 14
T. Perera run out 17
D. Sammy not out29
B. Cutting not out0
Extras: (lb6, w4)10
Total: (for seven wkts, 20 overs)177

Fall of wickets: 1-43 (Iqbal), 2-48 (Amla), 3-101 (du Plessis), 4-108 (Paine), 5-123 (Miller), 6-145 (Elliott), 7-173 (Perera)

Bowling: Wasim 4-0-22-0, Khan 4-0-28-2 (1w), Hasan 4-0-44-0, Raees 3-0-37-2 (1w), Ashraf 1-0-7-0, Shadab 4-0-33-2 (1w)

Result: Pakistan won by 20 runs

Pakistan hails return of international home games

Pakistan yesterday celebrated the return of international cricket on home soil as its top players prepared to meet a World XI in a stadium sealed off by thousands of police and troops.

Apart from five limited-overs games against minnows Zimbabwe in 2015, Pakistan have not hosted top-level international cricket since militants attacked the bus of the visiting Sri Lankan team in March 2009, killing eight people and injuring seven players and staff.

Since then Pakistan have been forced to play most of their "home" games in the United Arab Emirates – with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) complaining they have incurred losses of around \$120 million.

The PCB is now hoping the three World XI Twenty20 games are staged successfully, paving the way for Pakistan to host Sri Lanka for one T20 international next month followed by three T20s against the West Indies in November.

The World XI is led by South African skip-



Spectators cheer as they watch the first Twenty20 international match between the World XI and Pakistan in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

per Faf du Plessis and includes players from Australia, England, the West Indies, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Sarfaraz Ahmed will lead the Pakistan side and is among just five cricketers on the roster who have played a home

international match – alongside Shoaib Malik, Ahmed Shehzad, Imad Wasim and Sohail Khan. Ahmed said his squad were eager to play on home soil before a capacity 25,000 crowd at Lahore's Gaddafi stadium. "We are super-excited," said

Ahmed. "A lot of players will be playing at home for the first time so the excitement is reaching its climax."

Around 9,000 police officers and paramilitary forces were deployed to the area, cordoning off the team's hotels and stadium. But the large security presence did little to temper the enthusiasm of fans in the cricket-mad country. Hundreds of people were seen walking toward the stadium hours ahead of the match, which begins at 1400 GMT, passing through metal detectors and undergoing body searches.

"We should call it Pakistan's Cricket Day," said Amina Salahuddin, wearing a green Pakistan T-shirt.

"We started off at 10am but it's worth the pain and wait."

Former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram said he hopes more cricket will come the country's way soon.

"We have suffered a lot," Wasim told AFP. "I am so excited that it feels like I am going to play my first match."

SPOTLIGHT

Australia will have advantage in India, says Clarke

AFF
New Delhi

Former skipper Michael Clarke said yesterday the Australians would likely upstage hosts India in the upcoming one-day series thanks to their stints with the Indian Premier League.

The Steve Smith-led side, which lost the Test series 2-1 to India earlier this year, will play five ODIs, with the first in Chennai on Sunday.

Smith captained the Pune franchise in the last edition of the cash-rich IPL, arguably the world's most popular Twenty20 tournament.

Players like David Warner, Aaron Finch, Glenn Maxwell and Pat Cummins have had successful IPL stints and Clarke said the team should have no excuses in the shorter format.

"It's not just the wicket you are batting on or the ground you are playing, it's the heat, the food you eat, the hotel you are staying at," Clarke told reporters. "(With) these players now being involved in the IPL, India is like a second home because you spend so much time here.

"Yes, it's a shame we don't have Mitchell Starc or Josh Hazlewood available unfortunately due to injury. Those two will be missed.

"But this Australian team has no excuses. They know the conditions really well... and this is a massive series for us," he said, predicting a 3-2 win for the visitors.

Clarke saw a "carrot right there" for the Australians, who will topple South Africa from top

spot in the ODI table if they beat India 4-1.

The cricketer turned commentator also praised Virat Kohli's fearless captaincy that has helped India dominate with their aggressive approach.

India not only regained their number one Test spot under Kohli last year but recently blanked hosts Sri Lanka 9-0 across all three formats.

"I think this team has certainly got that aggression in them... they are led by an aggressive captain. Seems to me that Virat is not scared to lose and that's a great advantage," said Clarke.

Indian batting great VVS Laxman, who was also present at the event, said he did not foresee any controversy in the ODI series.

In the Test series Kohli had expressed his displeasure after Smith looked up to his dressing room while deciding whether to review his lbw dismissal in the Bangalore match, and a war of words erupted between the two captains.

"They are not only two modern-day captains but two modern-day greats. In such a short span of time the impact these two players have had on international cricket is just amazing," said Laxman, who made a match-winning 281 against Australia in the epic 2001 Kolkata Test.

"And I think when you are playing international cricket it's not necessary to be friendly on field... I am sure both will go all out and be aggressive and win the matches for their team... They are both trendsetters according to me," he said.

Laxman picked India to win with a 4-1 scoreline.

OPINION

To prolong career, this rest is required: Shakib



AFF
Dhaka

Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan, the world's leading all-rounder, yesterday defended his decision to play in limited-overs games while skipping Test cricket, saying he needs a break from the longest format to extend his career.

Shakib will sit out two Test matches during the upcoming tour of South Africa after asking his board for a six-month break from Tests. The 30-year-old will however be available for the three one-day internationals and two Twenty20 games during his country's first tour of South Africa since 2008.

"I get surprised when people ask me why I don't take a break from one-day or Twenty20 internationals or from the foreign T20 league," he told reporters.

"When I play foreign T20 leagues I feel hardly any pressure. For me they are a kind of holiday. Of course, they give me some experience. Financial side is also important.

"But in Test match, I have to bat and bowl and contribute in all four innings. The team also expects me to do that. It's not good if I cannot give my hundred per cent."

Shakib is a regular at franchise-based Twenty20 tournaments around the world, and earned \$712,000 from four Twenty20 competitions in 2016,

according to Bangladesh's Daily Star. He has played every Test for Bangladesh since missing two games against the West Indies in 2014 because of a suspension.

His request for the Test break came amid concerns over player fatigue, as well as criticism that players are prioritising earnings over representing their countries. Shakib said the break from Test cricket would help him "refresh" and prolong his career.

"The biggest reason is I think I have still plenty of cricket left," Shakib said. "If I want to play that amount of cricket and play it well, I think this break is essential for me. I can play now if I wish. But I have to decide whether I want play five to six more years or just one to two years. I personally feel if I continue this way, I would not be able to play more than one or two years."

"I don't want to play just for the sake of playing. That is why, I think if I get this break, I can refresh myself, more mentally than physically, and play five or six years without any tension."

He thanked the Bangladesh Cricket Board profusely for granting him the break.

"If I go to South Africa after two Test matches, I will get a break of about a month. I haven't got this kind of a break in the last three or four years," he said.

Shakib starred in Bangladesh's maiden Test win over Australia last month, claiming 10 wickets in the match and scoring 84 in one innings.

SELECTION

West Indies look to recalled Gayle for inspiration

AFF
Belfast

The recall of Chris Gayle to the West Indies ODI squad, for the first time since the 2015 World Cup, has dominated the countdown to the upcoming five-match series against England.

But Gayle – one of the biggest draws in the game – is likely to make his first appearance against Ireland today.

Gayle arrived with the 15-man squad in Northern Ireland on Monday after the West Indies board announced an amnesty which has also seen the return of Marlon Samuels and Jerome Taylor.

Previously players had to be available for the corresponding domestic tournament before being selected for limited-overs internationals or Test cricket.

Samuels last played in October 2016, but was dropped for the tri-

series against Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe the following month, but while Gayle played in the one-off T20 game against India in July, his next ODI will be his first since the 2015 World Cup. Taylor's last ODI was in July 2016.

"The panel welcomes back Chris Gayle and Marlon Samuels, who will both add value to our batting and help with the nurturing of the young batsmen in the team," said chairman of selectors Courtney Browne.

The selectors will also hope the experienced pair – Samuels is 36 and Gayle celebrates his 38th birthday on the day of the second ODI against England next week – can help West Indies qualify for the next World Cup.

But unless they beat Ireland and then win four of the five games against England they will find themselves in the qualifying tournament next March, along with Ireland, Afghanistan and hosts Zimbabwe.



Only two qualifiers will join the top eight in the rankings at the end of this month at the 2019 finals in England. After his selection, Gayle confirmed he wanted to play in the finals.

"The fans were happy to see me back on the field representing West Indies," said Gayle.

"Hopefully, things can get better. Hopefully I can play a few more games."

"I definitely want to play the 2019 World Cup."

"Things are beginning to open up a little more now between players and the board. It's looking good, and we've to try and build from this to get the best players out on the field."

Only six of the Test squad that has just completed the three-match series in England are staying on for the white-ball action – which also includes a one-off T20 against England on Saturday – but Roston Chase is the only player dropped from

the squad that lost 3-1 to India in the home series in July.

If the weather allows – and the West Indies arrived in Belfast in rain and more is forecast for the next 48 hours – they should gain a morale-boosting win against the newest Full Member, who have failed to win any of their last nine games.

It is also the beginning of the end of John Bracewell's two-year reign as Ireland coach. The New Zealander steps down in December and will be succeeded by former South Africa and Sri Lanka coach Graham Ford, who was appointed on a three-year contract last week.

Ford will not be at the match but the players know their performances will be scrutinized by the new coach and, with the likelihood of facing West Indies in the World Cup qualifiers, long-serving captain William Porterfield, who has a virtual full-strength side, said: "We want to lay down a marker."