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FOOTBALL

## Korea reach World Cup, Syria into play-offs

AFP  
 Tehran

**O**mar al-Soma's stoppage-time equaliser extended war-torn Syria's World Cup fairytale yesterday, as South Korea booked their spot to reach the tournament for the ninth straight time.

Syria were 2-1 down against Iran and heading out, but in the third added minute Mardek Mardkian slid a pass to al-Soma, who finished through goalkeeper Alireza Salimi's legs.

The 2-2 draw was enough to give Syria third place in Group A and a spot in the Asian play-offs against either Australia or Saudi Arabia, who face Japan later in Group B.

South Korea spurned several late chances before settling for a 0-0 draw in Uzbekistan, grabbing the second automatic qualifying spot in Group A as their



Syria's players celebrate at the end of their FIFA World Cup 2018 qualification football match against Iran at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran yesterday.

heartbroken hosts missed out.

But there was jubilation in Tehran as Syria, who have been playing home games in Malaysia to avoid the civil war raging in their country, continued to defy the odds.

Syria's goals from Tamer Mohamad and al-Soma were the first conceded in the final round by already qualified Iran, who were playing in their fortress Azadi Mohamed scored in the 13th minute before Iran equalised through Sardar Azmoun, who chested in a rebound on the stroke of half-time and then put the hosts ahead in the 64th minute.

Al-Soma's heart-stopping goal had one Syrian team official in tears before the players hugged and celebrated at the final whistle.

"God willing we will continue the journey... the qualifications have started again," said al-Soma. "The players were heroes on the pitch from the first minute until the last minute."

Mardkian said: "We played with an united spirit, for Syria, for the Syrian people, for the kids, for all the people."

He added: "We're thinking about the play-off and there's more work to do... We hope to achieve what is worthy of Syria's name."

In Tashkent, South Korea's Hwang Hee-Chan hit the post early on before Azizbek Khaydarov also rattled the woodwork in the 21st minute in what was otherwise a tepid first half.

After the break, Kim Min-Woo's curling shot nearly opened the scoring following an intricate move around the box, as South Korea repeatedly pierced the Uzbek defence.

Veteran striker Lee Dong-Gook spurned a golden opportunity in the 86th minute when his free header came off the bar. Although the draw was enough for the Koreans, they will want improvements before the World Cup next June and July.

DISAPPOINTMENT

## World Cup woe for China despite win

Syria's draw in Iran and Uzbekistan's goalless stalemate with South Korea meant that China's 2-1 victory over Qatar was ultimately futile

AFP  
 Doha

**C**hina's faint hopes of qualifying for next year's World Cup finals in Russia finally ended yesterday, despite securing the victory they needed in Qatar with just 10 men.

Syria's draw in Iran and Uzbekistan's goalless stalemate with South Korea meant that two late goals to secure a 2-1 win in Doha were ultimately futile in China's desperate bid to snatch a play-off place for next year's tournament.

As well as coming from behind, China also took the lead after their captain Zheng Zhi had been sent off.

But despite being knocked out, China's coach Marcello Lippi said his team had made real progress for the future after taking 11 points from their last six games.

"When I was first appointed nobody told me to get to the World Cup," said the Italian at a press conference afterwards.

"They asked me to build up a very strong team.

"We were unlucky, we didn't get the results we deserved," added Lippi, who received applause from Chinese journalists as he left the press room.

China began the match brightly.

They dominated early on and should have scored as early as the second minute when Xiao Zhi missed a free header from just six yards.

They squandered several other chances before Qatar made any impression, but the game remained goalless at half-time.

However, the deadlock was broken immediately in the second half and against the run of play, it was Qatar who took the lead.

Striker Akram Afif sidefooted home in the 46th minute, after good work from Ali Al-Moez.

The game became more stretched as China pushed men forward for an equaliser and Afif should have scored a second soon after, but was denied by goalkeeper Zeng Cheng.

The visitors equalised in the 74th minute when Xiao Zhi powered home from close range, to give China a glimmer of hope.

That appeared to end just six minutes later however when Zheng was red-carded after he fouled Afif, who was clean



Chinese fans cheer their team during their match against Qatar in Doha yesterday. At bottom, Qatar's Akram Afif (L) is congratulated by Karim Boudaif after he scored for his team.



through on China's goal.

But just two minutes later substitute Wu Lei scored to give China the lead and set up a dramatic finale.

Results elsewhere though meant that China had failed to qualify for Russia, and they finished fifth, one point off of the play-off position, secured by Syria on a night of high-drama in AFC Group A.

While Lippi remained confident about China's future, it was another sobering night for Qatar.

Defeat meant they finished bottom of the group, a desperate end for a country anxious to qualify for its first World Cup finals before they host in 2022.

Despite the sad end to the tournament, coach Felix Sanchez said there were enough young players coming through to give Qatar hope.

"We have a lot of very young players, we will keep working with them," he said.

Meanwhile, Fahad Al Muwallad's second-half winner took Saudi Arabia to their fifth World Cup and consigned Australia to the play-offs as they beat Japan 1-0 in Jeddah yesterday.

The half-time substitute smashed a fierce shot into the top corner on 63 minutes to secure Group B's second automatic qualifying spot for the Saudis, ahead of Australia on goal difference.

### Results

**Group A**

**At Tehran**  
 Iran 2 (Sardar Azmoun 45, 64) Syria 2 (Tamer Mohamad 13, Omar Al Soma 90+3)

**At Doha**  
 Qatar 1 (Akram Afif 47) China 2 (Xiao Zhi 74, Wu Lei 83)

**At Tashkent**  
 Uzbekistan 0 South Korea 0

**Group B**

**At Melbourne**  
 Australia 2 (Juric 69, Leckie 86) Thailand 1 (Pokkiew 82)

**At Amman**  
 Iraq 1 (Ayman Hussein 29) UAE 0

**At Jeddah**  
 Saudi Arabia 1 (Fahad Al Muwallad 63) Japan 0

### Iraq snuff out UAE's hopes with 1-0 win

**Amman:** Ayman Hussein's first-half header gave Iraq a 1-0 victory over United Arab Emirates yesterday, ending their slim hopes of reaching next year's World Cup in Russia.

The Emiratis needed to win by a convincing margin to have any chance of a play-off spot, but it was Iraq who showed more purpose and determination to clinch only their third win in 10 matches.

It was a disappointing outing for Edgardo Bauza-coached UAE, who upset regional giants Saudi Arabia last week and had held out hopes of reaching only their second World Cup. But in front of an empty stadium in the Jordanian capital Amman, they failed to get their game

going, allowing the Iraqis to hold sway over them for most of the match. Iraq created a number of chances, keeping the UAE goal under pressure right from the start and eventually finding the net through the 21-year-old Hussein, who leapt high to head Waleed Saleem's cross into the net on 29 minutes.

Iraq could have consolidated their lead several times in the second half but UAE goalkeeper Khalid Essa pulled off a string of saves, including twice in quick succession in the 52nd minute from Hussein and Bashar Resan. The UAE had a great chance to equalise in the 70th minute but Tareq al-Khaddeim's shot was saved by Iraq goalkeeper Mohamed Gassid.

SPOTLIGHT

### Saudis fail to arrange transport for Japan players



Japanese players wait for taxis outside Jeddah airport.

Reuters  
 Jeddah

**J**apan's players had to scramble to training in taxis ahead of their World Cup qualifier against Saudi Arabia after their team bus failed to show up at their hotel.

The hosting federation bears responsibility for a visiting team's logistics but the Samurai Blue, who have already booked their ticket to Russia, put a positive spin on the inconvenience ahead of their match in Jeddah, which they won yesterday.

"I don't think I've ever shared a taxi with team-mates (to the training ground), not even in my youth-team days," defender Tomoaki Makino said in comments published by Kyodo news agency. "But there are a lot of expe-

rienced players in our team and you have to enjoy this kind of situation. You can't let it wind you up."

Japan Football Association officials told Kyodo that the bus was stuck in traffic caused by the end of the Hajj pilgrimage.

Coach Vahid Halilhodzic and his players eventually made it to Al-Ahli Saudi FC's home stadium where practice began 20 minutes late.

Japan goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima said his team remained focused despite the snag.

"It was an enjoyable trip and there's nothing wrong with experiencing (something like that) for the first time," he said.

"Whether or not it was intentional, I don't know, but there is no point in getting stressed out about it. We just have to keep our focus on the task at hand."



## NEW DEAL

# Simeone to complete unfinished business at Atletico Madrid

The Argentine has renewed his contract till 2020 at Atletico, where he has been in charge since 2011

AFP  
Madrid

**D**iego Simeone's love affair with Atletico Madrid is set to continue for another three years after the Argentine renewed his contract till 2020 yesterday.

Since taking charge in 2011, Simeone, 47, has transformed the club's fortunes, turning Atletico from perennial underachievers to serial contenders both domestically and in the Champions League.

However, having lost in agonising fashion twice to local rivals Real Madrid in two Champions League finals, Simeone has turned his back on lucrative offers elsewhere for the challenge of making Atletico champions of Europe for the first time in their history.

Simeone has already delivered five trophies, the highlight of which was ending Real and Barcelona's hegemony of Spanish football with a first La Liga title for 18 years in 2013/14. Yet, the Champions League has continued to allude Los Rojiblancos with Real their conquerors in all four seasons since Simeone led them back into European football's premier competition.

Atletico were seconds away in the 2014 final before Sergio Ramos's injury-time header forced extra-time and Real ran out 4-1 winners. Two years later, penalties were needed to separate the two in Milan in a defeat so painful Simeone described it as a "death". Simeone was tempted to walk away last summer.



Diego Simeone has already delivered five trophies at Atletico Madrid, including a first La Liga title for 18 years in 2013/14.

Having initially agreed a contract to 2020 back in 2015, he asked for the deal to be cut by two years till 2018.

That appeared to open the door for an exit with another of his former clubs Inter Milan, freshly flushed with cash

thanks to a Chinese takeover, among those interested. Yet, Simeone now seems set to add stability to a new era for Atletico as they move this season to the new 68,000 capacity Wanda Metropolitan stadium.

"The journalists continually ask me if I am going to stay and yes I am going to stay," Simeone told his adoring public as Atletico bade an emotional farewell to the Vicente Calderon at the end of last season. "And do you know why I am go-

ing to stay? Because this club has a future and that future is all of us."

Although still unable to match the financial muscle of Real and Barca, continued success on the field and the stadium move have allowed Atletico to stop having to sell their best players as in the early years of Simeone's reign.

Antoine Griezmann, Koke and Saul Niguez have all themselves recently signed new contracts. Despite a ban on registering new players in the recently closed transfer window, Atletico have already completed a deal for Spanish international Vitolo to arrive in January.

Meanwhile, Spanish media have reported Diego Costa's return to the club from Chelsea was one of Simeone's demands when negotiating his new deal. Costa, who was Atletico's top scorer when they won the title in 2013/14, hasn't played for the English champions this season due to a fallout with manager Antonio Conte and was left out of the Chelsea's Champions League squad on Monday.

That is doubly good news for Atletico as they face Chelsea in a tough Champions League group also featuring Roma and a tricky trip to Azerbaijani champions Qarabag. Costa would also then be free to play for Atletico in Europe should they make it to the last 16 and the Spanish international complete his expected return in January.

His extra firepower could be the final missing piece for Atletico and Simeone to end their long and arduous wait to lift the Champions League come May in Kiev.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Messi deal 'signed' by agent, claims Barca president



AFP  
Barcelona

**B**arcelona's under-fire president Josep Maria Bartomeu launched a counter-attack on his critics yesterday by insisting a four-year contract extension for superstar Lionel Messi has been signed by the player's agent and father, Jorge Horacio Messi.

Barca announced an agreement with the five-time World Player of the Year in July, but Messi himself is yet to put pen to paper amid rumours he is unhappy with the running of the club. Messi's current deal expires in 2018 meaning he could leave Barca for free next summer.

"It is all agreed and signed," said Bartomeu in an interview with Barcelona-based daily Sport. "There are three contracts: one with Messi's foundation, that is

signed by the president of the foundation and the player's brother; a contract with Leo Messi's image rights, that his father and administrator of his company have signed; and the work contract that Leo's father has signed."

When pressed on the delay in Messi signing the deal, Bartomeu claimed both the player and club's hectic start to the season was to blame and that it would be resolved within a month. "There are no problems. All that is left is the protocol of the signature. We are calm," he added.

Bartomeu and his board have received fierce criticism for their handling of the recently closed transfer window as Paris Saint-Germain enticed Neymar away from the Catalan giants for a world record 222m euros (\$263.7m).

A vote of no confidence motion has been launched by former Barca presidential candidate Agusti Benedito that could oust Bar-

tomeu if it receives enough support from the club's members in the coming weeks.

However, Bartomeu described the loss of the Brazilian as an "opportunity" for Barca to build their team around the midfield rather than a superstar front three of Neymar, Messi and Luis Suarez. "The trident was very good but it had its consequences. It is an opportunity to return to the collective football in the middle of the field, which traditionally was Barca's strength. It is an opportunity, with a new coach, a new project. We need to stop being pessimistic!"

Neymar's departure sparked a haphazard shopping spree from Barca, who landed 20-year-old French winger Ousmane Dembele for an initial 105m euro fee from Borussia Dortmund and Paulinho for 40m from Chinese club Guangzhou Evergrande.

However, Barca missed out on a host of other targets, including Liverpool's Philippe Coutinho

## FOCUS

## Mentor Cruyff's flame still burns bright: Jonk

AFP  
Manchester, United Kingdom

**T**he late Dutch legend Johan Cruyff's philosophy of attacking football is still relevant despite the emphasis placed on results by club owners, former Netherlands international Wim Jonk said. The 50-year-old was asked by a dying Cruyff to keep the flame of 'Cruyff Football' burning.

And he said the young Ajax side that lost to Manchester United in last season's Europa League final exemplified this as they were largely players he and the Dutch master had imbued with his beliefs when Jonk was in charge of the club's Academy.

"There is a future for Cruyff's philosophy," said Jonk after speaking at the Soccerex Global Convention. "It was a special moment the Europa League final because we (him and Cruyff) trained all those players. That was for me great to watch because I knew at the end of our time in charge of the Academy this success will come. "It was a very good thing as (then Ajax coach) Peter Bosz believed in Cruyff. You could feel it in the stadium as well as the players were enjoying playing that way and the crowd were loving watching them play in that style."

He says Bosz, now with Borussia Dortmund, has to varying degrees of success implemented Cruyff's key principles.



Former Dutch footballer and co-manager of Cruyff Football, Wim Jonk speaks during a panel discussion at the Soccerex Global Convention in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

These included always playing the ball forwards, trying to recover the ball within three seconds rather than losing 50 metres, and the 'third man' which sees one player on the ball, another looking for space and then a third one running from behind to take the pass.

Jonk admits even the likes of Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola — who as Barcelona boss deployed a lot of what he learned under Cruyff when he was a player under the Dutchman at Barca — and Ronald Koeman at Everton had to rein in their enthusiasm. "Guardiola when he

went to Bayern admitted to me it would be problematic as he was taking on a team that had won everything," said Jonk. "However, he still tried to implement some of Cruyff's principles which was very special. Koeman is a very realistic coach, he wants to bring in young players but also he is not taking too many risks because these days 3-4 games you could be gone and that is a problem especially as owners have different visions."

"It depends on whether one takes a short term approach or a long term approach," said Jonk, capped 49 times and

a member of the hugely-talented Dutch side that lost on penalties to Brazil in the 1998 World Cup semi-finals.

Jonk, who at club level won the UEFA Cup (the predecessor of the Europa League) with Ajax and then Inter Milan, says managers also face a problem in the teams they inherit.

"Cruyff's principles depend on the players especially when you work with 26 or 27 year-olds," said Jonk, who was brought to Ajax as a player by Cruyff who then promptly left to take over Barcelona.

"You have to change the mentality of how they see the game and what is in their DNA. You have to find the right players to play that style and revel in the pressure to take it to the next level. The players at Barcelona knew what was required as it was in their system. Also in a team you need players who are special passers of the ball and can defend spaces like (Lionel) Messi or (Franck) Ribery."

Jonk, who along with Cruyff parted company with Ajax in 2015 after a disagreement with the board over implementing the great man's philosophy, says his mentor displayed the same positivity when he was dying of cancer which finally claimed him in March 2016.

"He did not talk much about his illness he was always positive," said Jonk. "For him there was no 'I am going to die', he was always positive on the phone saying 'I will get up again!'"

## OPINION

## Wenger wants January transfer window scrapped

Reuters  
London

**A**rsenal manager Arsene Wenger believes the January transfer window must be scrapped as it leads unsettled players to focus on their next move rather than playing for their clubs.

Arsenal forward Alexis Sanchez and Liverpool playmaker Philippe Coutinho were among several players who failed to secure their desired transfers in the close-season window that ended on Aug. 31 and could try again in January.

Wenger believes that want-away players and fringe squad members will not be fully committed to their clubs as they try to negotiate their next transfers. "The players who do not play for the players who are tapped up in October they already start again to think: 'Where do I go in January? That's not a club to be on board with a football club...'"

## European clubs rule out further changes to Champions League

**Geneva:** Europe's biggest clubs do not want any more changes to the Champions League in the next few years, they said yesterday, promising to avoid a repetition of the 'soap opera' which surrounded the competition last year.

UEFA last year announced significant changes to the competition for the 2018-21 cycle, rearranging the group-stage slots in favour of the four top-ranked leagues — in effect Spain, England, Germany and Italy — at the expense of the smaller ones.

The decision came amid reports that the biggest clubs had held talks over the creation of a so-called Super League if they did not get their way, and was criticised by some of Europe's smaller leagues who said they had not been consulted.

Andrea Agnelli, who was appointed chairman of the European Club Association (ECA) on Tuesday after Karl-Heinz Rummenigge stepped aside, said he did not envisage further changes for the subsequent 2021-24 cycle.

"I am comfortable in stating that the majority is in favour of the Champions League as it is, and also for the 21-24 cycle, and that will give it some stability going forward," Agnelli, the chairman of Italian champions Juventus, told reporters. "We are not expecting a soap opera going forward as the Champions League cycle is pretty much set for 2021-24."

Although Agnelli's comments may put paid to further talk of a breakaway, they could also frustrate those who were hoping that last year's changes could be reversed. Agnelli said he agreed with UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin that the rich-poor divide in European football needed to be addressed, although not at the expense of further growth of the biggest clubs.

"We want a competition that is interesting and we want to see games that reach the last minute with the result in the balance," he said. "Stronger teams becoming stronger is not an issue but there are elements that need to be addressed."

Agnelli said he was not concerned about possible overspending by clubs in the transfer market during the summer, despite Paris St Germain smashing the record by splashing out 222m euros on Brazilian forward Neymar.

He also suggested that UEFA's break-even rule known as Financial Fair Play needed to be re-written, having achieved its initial goals of cutting overdue bills and overall losses.

Wenger told *beIN Sports*. "We are here to entertain people and you can do that with people who are really on board together, to achieve something together and not every minute that it doesn't go well to think: 'Where can I go next?'"

Several Premier League managers had previously voiced their support for the close-season window to be shut before the start of the league campaign in August. Wenger said that having a single annual transfer window at the end of the season would ensure complete focus from players during the campaign and restore the decency of the sport.

"I believe that we have to bring some decency. We all complain that it has become too much a business, but we can do something about it. We have that responsibility in the game," he added in the interview. Arsenal return to Premier League action on Saturday, hosting Bournemouth, having had a disappointing start with one win and two defeats.



WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

# Germany hit Norway for six, England survive Slovakia scare

Germany will have to wait until their next match, away to the Irish on October 5, to seal automatic qualification to Russia

AFP  
Paris

Germany fired six past Norway while England fought back after an early scare to beat Slovakia in European World Cup qualifying on Monday night. Timo Werner scored a double in Germany's 6-0 rout of the Norwegians in Stuttgart to leave Joachim Loew's world champions with a perfect eight out of eight record atop Group C.

But with second-placed Northern Ireland beating the Czech Republic 2-0 in Belfast, Germany will have to wait until their next match, away to the Irish on October 5, to seal automatic qualification to Russia.

Werner, booed by his own fans in Germany's 2-1 win in Prague against the Czechs last Friday, came off to a standing ovation this time after netting in the 21st and 40th minutes.

After struggling to beat the Czechs, this was a far more polished performance, with Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil's 10th minute opener sparking the rout. Paris Saint-Germain star Julian Draxler netted the second with Werner's brace putting them four goals up at the break. Schalke midfielder Leon Goretzka grabbed Germany's fifth with Werner's replacement, the 32-year-old veteran Mario Gomez, rounding off a productive night.

It was the perfect antidote after Friday's laboured trip to Prague marred by a group of 200 right-wing German fans chanting Nazi-era slogans.

"That showed the beautiful side of football," said head coach Loew, who had said Friday's scenes in Prague "shamed Germany", following Werner's ovation after his two goals. "It was a huge amount of fun to play here and we played our part in that with some great



Germany's Julian Draxler (second left) celebrates after scoring a goal with teammates Thomas Mueller (left) and Mesut Ozil during the FIFA World Cup 2018 qualification match against Norway in the south German city of Stuttgart on Monday night. (AFP)

combinations and goals." The Northern Irish guaranteed themselves at least a place in the play-offs thanks to Jonny Evans' second international goal eight years after his first and his West Bromwich Albion teammate Chris Brunt's 41st minute

freekick. "I thought I might have been offside," Evans admitted. "I thought I'd head it anyway and see what happens. I saw it go into the net and I don't remember much after that!"

Manager Michael O'Neill praised his men after yet another solid defensive

display. "We're in a great position now. We're guaranteed second place and seven clean sheets out of eight is a phenomenal record."

At Wembley, England were stunned when Stanislav Lobotka gave Slovakia a third-minute lead after a costly error

by Marcus Rashford. But the 19-year-old atoned in style when setting up the equaliser for Eric Dier and then netting a sumptuous 20-yard winner in the second half.

Victory sent England five points clear of Slovakia in Group F – Gareth South-

gate's side need only two points from their last two games against Slovenia and Lithuania to seal qualification. "To come from behind against a side with very good footballers, particularly in midfield, we had to show character," said Southgate. "Marcus Rashford showed, like the rest of the team, great character. He made the mistake for their goal, but he kept persevering."

Scotland kept alive their hopes of a play-off place with a 2-0 home win over Malta, the goals coming from Christophe Berra and Celtic striker Leigh Griffiths. Gordon Strachan's team are alive and kicking on the road to Russia in fourth place, on 14 points.

Elsewhere on Monday night, Poland held on to the Group E summit, beating Kazakhstan 3-0, with Denmark going second on the strength of a 4-1 win in Armenia.

**WORLD CUP 2018 QUALIFYING RESULTS EUROPEAN ZONE GROUP C**

**At Baku:** Azerbaijan 5 (Ismailov 20, 57, Abdullayev 25, Cevoli 71-og., Sadygov 81) San Marino 1 (Palazzi 73)

**At Belfast:** Northern Ireland 2 (Evans 28, Brunt 41) Czech Republic 0

**At Stuttgart, Germany:** Germany 6 (Ozil 10, Draxler 17, Werner 21, 40, Goretzka 50, Gomez 79) Norway 0

**GROUP E**

**At Yerevan:** Armenia 1 (Koryan 6) Denmark 4 (Delaney 16, 82, 90+3, Eriksen 29)

**At Warsaw:** Poland 3 (Milik 11, Glik 74, Lewandowski 86-pen) Kazakhstan 0

**At Podgorica:** Montenegro 1 (Jovetic 75) Romania 0

**GROUP F**

**At London:** England 2 (Dier 37, Rashford 59) Slovakia 1 (Lobotka 3)

**At Ljubljana:** Slovenia 4 (Ilicic 25-pen, 61-pen, Verbic 82, Birsic 90) Lithuania 0

**At Glasgow, Scotland:** Scotland 2 (Berra 9, Griffiths 49) Malta 0

SPOTLIGHT

## England's Alli says offensive gesture was 'joke'

AFP  
London

England's **Dele Alli** said he was having 'a joke' with teammate Kyle Walker after he was caught on camera raising his middle finger during Monday's 2-1 win over Slovakia.

"Just to clarify, the gesture tonight was a joke between me and my good friend Kyle Walker!" Alli wrote on Twitter after the game. "Apologies for any offence caused! Great win Znite!"

Television footage of the World Cup qualifier at Wembley showed Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Alli make the gesture in the 77th minute of the game, but it was not clear at whom it was aimed. Pictures and video footage of Alli's gesture were widely shared on social media, but manager Gareth Southgate played down the incident.

In a recent precedent, Lionel Messi was given a four-game ban for swearing at an assistant referee during a World Cup qualifier between Argentina and Chile in March, although his suspension

was overturned on appeal. "Kyle and Dele were mucking about and Dele's made a gesture towards Kyle. I don't know what the angle picked up by the camera is, so I don't know if that is clear (who it was aimed at). The pair of them have a strange way of communicating! But that's what they've said when it's been raised."

Alli, 21, has had a number of run-ins with the football authorities and has faced calls to curb his fiery temperament. He missed the Premier League title run-in in 2015-16 after punching West Bromwich Albion's Claudio Jacob and was sent off for a dangerous foul on Gent's Brecht Dejaegere during a Europa League game last February.

Marcus Rashford was England's saviour against Slovakia, atoning for an error that gifted Stanislav Lobotka an early opener by setting up Eric Dier's equaliser and then netting a fine 59th-minute winner. England now require just two points from their last two games, at home to Slovenia and away to Lithuania, to qualify for next year's World Cup in Russia.



FOCUS

## Werner cements status as top striker

AFP  
Stuttgart, Germany

With six goals in eight internationals, Timo Werner seems to be the answer to Germany's quest for a world-class striker, yet the fleet-footed forward remains unpopular with some German fans. The 21-year-old, a classic striker, netted twice in Monday's 6-0 thrashing of Norway, but Germany must wait until their next World Cup qualifier, against Northern Ireland in Belfast on October 5, to secure their Russia 2018 place.

Werner came off to a standing ovation in Stuttgart, a far cry from the jeers and verbal abuse he suffered at the hands of German fans in Prague last Friday. "That meant a lot to me, because this is my home town," said Stuttgart-born Werner after his double against Norway.

"I grew up here and I am pleased I could score twice to pay back the fans. Things were different, in terms of the emotion and attitude, compared to the Czech Republic match, we took it seriously from the first minute today.

"I believe we have got more used to the system, which the boys have been using for a while. Personally, I am delighted to have scored so often, it's been a lot of fun. I never thought it would turn out like this for me and I am so happy about it."

Werner has filled the void created when



Germany's Timo Werner (centre) rise above the Norwegian defence to head in his side's fourth goal during the World Cup qualification match on Monday night. (AFP)

Germany's all-time top-scorer Miroslav Klose retired after the 2014 World Cup. Klose, who now coaches Germany's strikers, netted 71 goals in 137 games to finally beat Gerd Mueller's phenomenal record of 68 goals in 62 matches for West Germany between 1966-1974.

Now Werner is walking in the footsteps of those legendary strikers, finally solving the issue Germany had 12 months ago when midfielder Mario Goetze played up front with limited success. "Of course, we

have too few options in this central position, which is a fundamental problem," a worried Thomas Mueller said a year ago.

"It would be conducive for German football if in the next few years players come along who are amongst the best in the world." Yet nine months before the World Cup starts in Russia, Mueller's wish has come true.

It was the Bayern Munich forward who set up Werner for both of his goals on Monday. A deft flick allowed Werner to

tap home Germany's third before Mueller's pin-point cross was headed home just before the break.

Werner was the top German scorer in the Bundesliga last season with 21 goals in 31 games. However, he has a bad reputation amongst German fans – branded a cheat after diving to earn a penalty in a German league win against Schalke 04, which has haunted him since December.

It was the reason why a group of German hooligans jeered him in Prague on Friday. Germany's head coach Joachim Loew was unimpressed with the whistles and jeers Werner has endured for both club and country. "These insults against Timo are extremely painful. It's not fair and it's not funny. He made a mistake and recognised that," said Loew. "I now call for the public to treat him like a full-time player of the national team."

Against Norway, Werner was applauded off on 66 minutes and replaced by veteran Mario Gomez. The 32-year-old Gomez proved he will not yield his place without a fight by netting Germany's sixth goal on Monday and his 31st in 71 matches in the famous white shirt.

Gomez was full of praise for Werner: "He's a great lad and a great player. I don't compare myself to him as we're different types of players." Yet there is no doubt that Werner's all-action style suits the high-tempo game Loew wants better than the burly Gomez who has often only been a threat for Germany when in the box.

## DRAW MOVES NIGERIA CLOSER TO WORLD CUP

**Johannesburg:** Nigeria survived a late Cameroon onslaught to draw 1-1 in Yaounde on Monday and move closer to qualifying for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Moses Simon put Nigeria ahead on 30 minutes and substitute Vincent Aboubakar equalised from a 75th-minute penalty at Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo to spark a rally by the hosts.

Unbeaten leaders Nigeria moved to 10 points from four matches in Group B and a home win over Zambia on October 7 will clinch a sixth World Cup appearance. Dropping two points in Yaounde eliminated seven-time World Cup qualifiers Cameroon as only group winners go to Russia and they trail Nigeria by seven points with two matches to play.

The draw came three days after Nigeria thrashed African champions Cameroon 4-0 in Uyo – a result that prompted losing coach Hugo Broos to make four changes. Among those dropped were striker Aboubakar and winger Christian Bassogog, whose second-half introduc-

tions lifted the "Indomitable Lions" and put pressure on the "Super Eagles".

Simon scored with a close-range shot past goalkeeper Fabrice Ondoa after a low cross eluded several defenders.

A collision between Arnaud Djoum and Nigeria goalkeeper Ikechukwu Ezenwa led to the spot-kick, and Aboubakar scored with a shot into the middle of the net. Cameroon had another penalty appeal rejected by the Gambian referee as they pushed for a first win in the "group of death" that includes Algeria and Zambia, who were playing last night.

Ezenwa came to the rescue six minutes from time with a double save, the second particularly being brave as he dived at the feet of Djoum and was injured. But for much of the match it looked like the central Africans were going to suffer a first World Cup qualifying defeat at home since losing to Congo Brazzaville in October 1976.

The "Super Eagles" Nigeria were more

threatening going forward, thanks to crisp passing, good off-the-ball movement and dazzling individual skills. Nigeria have dedicated the qualifying campaign to goalkeeper Carl Ikeme, who is battling leukaemia in England.

The disease was discovered when he went for a routine pre-season medical at second-tier club Wolverhampton Wanderers three months ago. "Carl is constantly in my thoughts, those of the other coaches, the players and the officials," said Germany-born Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr.

Libya shaded Guinea 1-0 in Tunisia despite playing the last quarter a man short after Mohammed Al Gadi was red-carded following his second caution. The Ivorian referee was the busiest man on the pitch in Monastir, showing one red and 10 yellow cards during the clash of Group A also-rans.

Amid the indiscipline, Hamdou Mohamed scored the only goal on 36 minutes by controlling a long ball with

his thigh and rifling a shot past goalkeeper Naby Yattara. Tunisia lead the group with nine points, three more than the Democratic Republic of Congo, ahead of a top-of-the-table clash in Kinshasa last night. Guinea and Libya have three points. Libya were forced to play in Tunisia for security reasons.

**WORLD CUP AFRICA ZONE QUALIFYING RESULTS GROUP A**

**At Monastir, Tunisia:** Libya 1 (Mohamed 36) Guinea 0

**Note:** match switched from Libya for security reasons

**GROUP B**

**At Yaounde:** Cameroon 1 (Aboubakar 75-pen) Nigeria 1 (Simon 30)

**GROUP E**

**At Brazzaville:** Congo Brazzaville 1 (Illoy-Ayyet 43) Ghana 5 (Boakyie 23, 85, Partey 26, 45+2, 69)

**Note:** group winners qualify for 2018 World Cup in Russia



SECOND TEST

# Warner, Handscomb give Aussies impetus

Visitors were 225-2 at stumps in their first innings, trailing Bangladesh by 80 runs



Australian batsman David Warner (left) plays a shot as Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim (right) and Mominul Haque look on during the second day of the second Test at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Chittagong, Bangladesh

An unbeaten century stand between David Warner and Peter Handscomb led Australia's strong reply against Bangladesh on day two of the second and final Test in Chittagong yesterday. The visitors were 225-2 at stumps in their first innings, trailing by 80 runs after Bangladesh were bowled out for 305.

Warner was on 88 with Handscomb on 69 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Skipper Steve Smith hit a gritty 58 off 94 balls before being bowled by left-arm spinner Taijul Islam as the visitors slipped to 98-2.

The left-handed Warner and Handscomb then put on 127 to thwart the Bangladesh bowling attack, which failed to take a wicket in the final session of play. Handscomb, who recorded his fourth Test fifty in just his 10th game, took regular drinks breaks as he battled exhaustion and dehydration in the final half-hour.

"Really gutsy, obviously it's pretty hot out there, we saw that yesterday and you have to work really hard for your runs,"

Australia coach Darren Lehmann told reporters. "...Very special day and hopefully tomorrow they can kick on," the 47-year-old former batsman added.

The swashbuckling Warner played a sedate innings, having hit just four boundaries during his 170-ball stay at the crease so far. Warner rode his luck with two reprieves. He was dropped at short leg on 52 and then Mushfiqur Rahim missed a stumping when he was on 73, with Taijul and Mehedi Hasan being the unlucky bowlers.

"You don't want to miss any chances do you? We missed a couple early in their innings, one of the things I do know over here is you've got to take every chance," said Lehmann. "So we had a couple of let-offs which is handy for us but when we get our chance tomorrow we've got to keep making sure we're scoring at a nice rate and when you come to bowl again, make sure you take all those chances."

Warner's opening partner Matt Renshaw departed early, dismissed by fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman for four before the lunch break. The left-hander tried to tickle a sliding delivery down the leg side but wicketkeeper Rahim took a stunning catch.

Warner was then involved in a 93-run second-wicket partnership with Smith as the pair steadied the innings. Smith, who registered his 21st Test half-century, was done in by an arm ball from Taijul that sneaked through the bat-pad gap to hit the middle stump.

Earlier, Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon claimed seven wickets to help bowl out the hosts, who resumed the day on 253-6, in the first session. Lyon returned impressive figures of 7-94 including Rahim's prized scalp for 68.

"I think we fell short by 100-150 runs, looking at the wicket," Bangladesh all-rounder Nasir Hossain, who scored 45, said of his team's first innings total. "We are slightly on the back foot. A lot can however change in an hour in a Test match... we are not thinking about the result at this stage," Nasir added.

Bangladesh lead the series 1-0 after registering their first-ever Test win against Australia last week. The home team tightened security after the visitors' team bus was hit with a stone following the end of play on day one.

**SCOREBOARD**  
**BANGLADESH 1 INNINGS (OVERNIGHT 253-6)**

Mushfiqur Rahim b Lyon	68
Nasir Hossain c Wade b Agar	45
Mehidi Hasan run out (Warner)	11
Taijul Islam c Smith b Lyon	9
Mustafizur Rahman not out	0
Extras (b5)	5
<b>Total (all out, 113.2 overs)</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-13 (Tamim), 2-21 (Imrul), 3-70 (Soumya), 4-85 (Mominul), 5-117 (Shakib), 6-222 (Sabbir), 7-265 (Mushfiqur Rahim), 8-293 (Nasir Hossain), 9-296 (Mehedi Hasan), 10-305 (Taijul Islam)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Cummins 22-5-46-0, Lyon 36.2-7-94-7, O'Keefe 23-0-79-0, Agar 23-9-52-2, Maxwell 4-0-13-0, Cartwright 5-1-16-0	

**AUSTRALIA 1 INNINGS**

M. Renshaw c Rahim b Mustafizur 4	
D. Warner not out 88	
S. Smith b Taijul 58	
P. Handscomb not out 69	
Extras (b4, lb2) 6	
<b>Total (2 wickets, 64 overs) 225</b>	
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-5 (Renshaw), 2-98 (Smith)	
<b>To bat:</b> G. Maxwell, H. Cartwright, M. Wade, A. Agar, P. Cummins, S. O'Keefe, N. Lyon	
<b>Bowling:</b> Mehedi 20-2-53-0, Mustafizur 10-0-45-1, Shakib 15-0-52-0, Taijul 15-1-50-1, Nasir 1-0-4-0, Mominul 2-0-6-0, Sabbir 10-0-9-0	
Toss: Bangladesh	

FOCUS

## West Indies' Shai Hope tipped as future 'great'

AFP  
London

West Indies batsman Shai Hope could become a modern "great", coach Stuart Law said yesterday ahead of the Test series decider against England. The tourists' 23-year-old batsman starred in their shock five-wicket victory in the second Test last week, becoming the first player in Headingley's history to hit a century in both innings of a match.

West Indies — who were once the most feared team in world cricket — were widely written off after they crashed to defeat by an innings and 209 runs in the first Test at Edgbaston. But they now have the chance to win their first Test series in England since 1988 after Hope's first two centuries in Test cricket — 147 in the first innings and an undefeated 118 in the second innings. "He's a rock, isn't he?" said Law, who recalled a telling conversation with Hope before start of play on the final morning in Leeds. The coach of the Caribbean side suggested to the player that the tourists,

chasing 322 for victory, could bat until tea, then see if there was still a shot at pushing for victory.

"He looked at me and I said 'What's wrong with that?'" said Law. "He looked at me (again), shook his head and shrugged his shoulders — and I said 'OK, what's your plan?' 'We're going to win' (he said). That's God's honest truth... (and) he went out and won the game."

The Australian added: "I think the fact he wasn't over the top in his celebrations just means he's hungry, he's driven. He doesn't want to stop where he's at now, he wants to keep going. I think that's a great sign. He's a tough cookie. He's pretty good now, but he's got the potential to go great."

Law retained faith in his charges despite their first-Test trouncing. "I've seen these guys at close quarters — I've talked to them," he said. "Just the responses they give you, there's immense confidence there. There's probably a couple that doubted their ability to cope at this level but I hope those doubts are now well and truly put to bed and they can start flourishing." The third and final Test starts at Lord's tomorrow.



West Indies batsman Shai Hope trains at the Lord's cricket stadium in London yesterday. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

## England need Ashes momentum, says fast bowler Anderson

AFP  
London

England bowler James Anderson says his side already have half an eye on the upcoming Ashes series ahead of this weekend's third and final Test against West Indies. England and West Indies face a series decider at Lord's after the tourists bounced back from a first-Test pasting at Edgbaston to record a five-wicket triumph at Headingley last week.

With England's next Test match a series-opener against Australia at The Gabba in November, Anderson says it is vital his side end the summer on a high. "You're always trying to win Test match series," he told Sky Sports News yesterday.

"It's very important to try to build momentum and with this team going forward I think we really need to get some momentum going as it's an important winter for us. We've done some good things over the few months, or maybe 12 months, but not quite got that consistency going yet and that's something that we're really striving for."

Having been taken by surprise at Headingley, Anderson says England will be primed for action at Lord's. "It was disappointing for us after such a performance at Edgbaston," he said.

"We thought we could build on that and close out the series at Headingley. As bowlers we were confident we could bowl them out, but full credit to the West Indies — I thought they played fantastically well that last day. I thought the West Indies came back very strong, which we expected them to do, and we didn't play at our best at all, which is really frustrating for us as we are trying to build momentum. But it makes for an exciting Test match here, a decider. That



England seamers James Anderson (right) and Stuart Broad share a joke during the nets session at the Lord's cricket stadium in London yesterday. (Reuters)

extra pressure will find out a bit more about people's character and things like that so it should be an exciting week."

Anderson is just three wickets short of 500 in England Tests, but he says he will not allow himself to be distracted by personal milestones. "It's obviously nice. The fact I've played for long enough to get this close

to 500 is something that I'm very proud of," he said.

"But to be honest, I do try to put it to the back of my mind. I've got a job to do this week. We desperately need to win this Test match to win the series so I'm going to be focused completely on doing my job for the team when we get out there."

## Bangladesh tightens security after rock hits Australian team bus

**Dhaka:** Security was tightened around the Australian cricket team in Bangladesh yesterday after a bus carrying the team was hit by a rock, which could have been thrown up by another vehicle, Cricket Australia (CA) said yesterday.

The incident happened on Monday as the players were travelling back to their hotel after the first day's play in the second and final test against Bangladesh in Chittagong's Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

"En route back to the hotel last night a window on the Australian team bus was broken. No one was injured in the incident," CA security manager Sean Carroll said in a statement.

"Team security personnel are currently in discussion with local authorities while they investigate the cause, which is believed to have come from a small rock or stone," he said. Carroll said Bangla-

desh authorities were taking the incident seriously and security had been increased along the route on which the team travels between the ground and its hotel.

Bangladeshi authorities, however, suggested the incident could have been an accident. Chittagong division police commissioner Mohammad Iqbal Bahar said another vehicle escorting the team bus could have kicked up a loose rock, which hit the bus window.

"We inquired into it yesterday. Construction works are going on along the route and one of the escorting vehicles sent the rock flying into the window of the team bus," Bahar said. Australia postponed their 2015 tour of Bangladesh because of security fears in the South Asian nation, and also withdrew from the under-19 World Cup there last year for the same reason.

SCHEDULE

## England to host India in 2018

AFP  
London

England will host India in a five-match Test series in 2018, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday.

The teams will play three Twenty20 matches in July, followed by three one-day internationals and then Tests at Edgbaston, Lord's, Trent Bridge, the Rose Bowl and The Oval.

England's schedule for the next year also includes meetings with Pakistan, Australia and Scotland.

It will be only the second time

India, the world's number one Test side, play a five-Test series in England since 1959. England's summer will begin in May with two Tests against Pakistan at Lord's and Headingley.

They have a one-off one-day game against Scotland in Edinburgh on June 10, followed by five one-day internationals and a T20 match against Australia later that month.

**ENGLAND SCHEDULE 2018**

<b>PAKISTAN</b>	May 24-28: 1st Test, Lord's
June 1-5: 2nd Test, Headingley	
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	June 10: ODI, Edinburgh
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>	

June 13: 1st ODI, The Oval  
June 16: 2nd ODI, Sophia Gardens  
June 19: 3rd ODI, Trent Bridge  
June 21: 4th ODI, Chester-le-Street  
June 24: 5th ODI, Old Trafford  
June 27: T20, Edgbaston

**INDIA**

July 3: 1st T20, Old Trafford	
July 6: 2nd T20, Sophia Gardens	
July 8: 3rd T20, County Ground	
July 12: 1st ODI, Trent Bridge	
July 14: 2nd ODI, Lord's	
July 17: 3rd ODI, Headingley	
August 1-5: 1st Test, Edgbaston	
August 9-13: 2nd Test, Lord's	
August 18-22: 3rd Test, Trent Bridge	
August 30-September 3: 4th Test, Rose Bowl	
September 7-11: 5th Test, The Oval	



BASEBALL

# Martinez belts four homers in D-backs' victory

'Shocked, no. I don't think someone goes up there not trying to hit the ball hard. I was just happy it went over (the fence)'



Arizona Diamondbacks right fielder JD Martinez (28) celebrates his solo home run hit in the seventh inning against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Dodger Stadium. PICTURE: Gary A Vasquez-USA TODAY Sports

AFP  
Los Angeles

JD Martinez tied a major league record with four home runs in a game as the Arizona Diamondbacks won their 11th straight by pounding the Los Angeles Dodgers 13-0 on Monday night.

Martinez became the second player this season and just the 18th in Major League Baseball history to achieve the milestone.

"It's one of those things. When you're seeing the ball well and you hit the ball," said Martinez, who joined the Diamondbacks in July via a trade with the Detroit Tigers.

Cincinnati Reds' Scooter Gennett also hit four homers on June 6 against the St. Louis Cardinals.

Martinez was four-for-five with six RBIs in front of a crowd of 47,200 at Dodger Stadium. He hit his 34th home run of the year in the ninth off pitcher Wilmer Font after also going long in the fourth, seventh and eighth innings.

Martinez hit his four home runs off four pitchers — Rich Hill, Pedro Baez, Josh Fields and Font.

He said he was trying not to think too much about making history with his at-bats against the struggling Dodgers.

"Shocked, no," he said. "I don't

think someone goes up there not trying to hit the ball hard. I was just happy it went over (the fence)."

The 30-year-old Martinez flirted with the magic number four once before in 2015 when he hammered three home runs in a game. That experience helped him Monday, he said.

"I got to my last at-bat (in 2015) and I started thinking about it and that's when it didn't happen," he said.

"In this at-bat, I came up and said, 'You know what? Just go up here and try to have a good at-bat. Keep doing what you've been doing all day. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be.'

"There's no point in forcing it. 'Have a good at-bat! That's what I was telling myself.'"

Martinez's homer surge was just part of an all-around strong game for Arizona.

Pitcher Robbie Ray had a career-high 14 strikeouts. The Diamondbacks hit six home runs in the rout, handing the Dodgers their ninth loss in 10 games.

The Diamondbacks have scored five or more runs in eight consecutive games.

**INDIANS 5, WHITE SOX 3**

Jose Ramirez and Carlos Santana homered as the red-hot Cleveland Indians ran their season-high winning streak to 12 games with a 5-3 victory over the Chicago White Sox.

Trevor Bauer (15-8) allowed two runs on three hits in 6-1/3 innings for Cleveland.

Chicago starter James Shields (2-6) exited in the seventh inning with a right knee contusion. He allowed four runs in 6-1/3 innings.

Rymer Liriano hit a two-run homer for the White Sox.

**YANKEES 7, ORIOLES 4**

Starlin Castro homered and drove in three runs, leading New York past Baltimore.

Castro hit a two-run homer in the fifth inning off Baltimore starter Dylan Bundy (13-9) and added an RBI single in the sixth. Didi Gregorius also hit a two-run homer for the Yankees.

Wellington Castillo, Chris Davis and Tim Lincecum homered for the Orioles.

**REDS 5, BREWERS 4**

Billy Hamilton homered with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, lifting Cincinnati over Milwaukee.

Hamilton won the game by hitting a 1-1 pitch from Josh Hader (1-3) over the left-center field fence.

Ryan Braun hit a solo homer and Orlando Arcia hit a three-run homer for Milwaukee.

**PIRATES 12, CUBS 0**

Josh Bell homered and drove in four runs as Pittsburgh routed Chicago,

which lost ace Jake Arrieta to an apparent right hamstring injury.

Arrieta lasted just 2-1/3 innings before grabbing his hamstring in pain after a pitch. He attempted one more pitch under the eye of trainers before again grabbing his hamstring and removing himself from the game.

Bell hit a two-run homer in the first inning off Arrieta (14-9) and added an RBI single in the fifth. Pittsburgh's Chad Kuhl (7-10) scattered four hits in seven innings.

**ROYALS 7, TIGERS 6**

Eric Hosmer homered and drove in three runs as Kansas City held off Detroit.

Melky Cabrera added a two-run double while Salvador Perez and Alcides Escobar hit solo homers for Kansas City.

Nicholas Castellanos drove in four runs for Detroit.

**METS 11, PHILLIES 7**

Jose Reyes sparked a three-run third inning with a solo homer and contributed an RBI single during a six-run fourth as New York beat Philadelphia.

Reyes extended his hitting streak to 10 games by going 2-for-3 with a walk.

Kim Hyun Soo hit a two-run double while Freddy Galvis and Odubel Herrera hit RBI singles in the ninth for Philadelphia.

GOLF

## Thomas holds off jittery Spieth to win Dell Championship



Justin Thomas of the United States poses with the trophy after winning the Dell Technologies Championship at TPC Boston on Monday in Norton, Massachusetts.

AFP  
Norton

Justin Thomas fired a final round five-under 66 to win his fifth tournament of 2017, outduelling fellow American Jordan Spieth on the back nine at the Dell Championship on Monday.

The two Americans battled hard down the stretch until Spieth saw his hopes dashed on the fairway at 18 when his approach sailed right and landed in a large bunker. His next shot travelled clear across the green as he finished with a bogey six on the hole.

Thomas completed the second tournament of the PGA Tour playoffs with a 17-under 267 total for a three-shot victory which propelled him into second place in the FedExCup standings behind Spieth.

"I have had a great year, just two more events to finish it off," said Thomas.

Spieth's bungle on 18 allowed Thomas, who was in the group behind, the luxury of taking a victory stroll up the fairway on 18 which he easily parred.

Spieth's self-destruction at the Dell came one week after he blew a five-stroke lead in the final round and lost to Dustin Johnson in a playoff at The Northern Trust to open the postseason.

Spieth, who shot a 67, finished solo runner-up at 14-under 270 while Aussie Marc Leishman fired a 70 to place alone in third, four strokes back of Thomas.

Spain's John Rahm (68) and England's Paul Casey (70) tied for fourth at 12-under 272 at the par-71 TPC Boston.

Thomas, who won the PGA Championship last month, erased a two-shot deficit over the final nine holes for his Tour-leading fifth win of the season.

Thomas bogeyed No. 11 but closed with a pair of birdies and five pars to pull away from Spieth.

"Yeah, it was a good day. It was a patient day," said Thomas.

"It just was a great week because I felt like I didn't have my best stuff at the start of the week and that's just something I've gotten so much better at, and I'm proud of myself more than anything."

Spieth had a bogey at the 12th and a birdie at No. 13 before making bogey at Nos. 14 and 18. He got off to a strong start with three birdies and an eagle over the first four holes.

"I've been striking the ball well. I didn't think anything was going wrong," Spieth said.

"I got unlucky on 12, and from there, the one on 14 was just a bad swing, and that one really hurt. I brought it back on 13. Fourteen was the difference-maker for me."

Leishman saw the lead disappear with five bogeys on the back side, including three straight beginning at No. 10.

"I got things going just the way I wanted to on the front and then a bad tee shot on 10. There was some tough holes out there," he said.

Kevin Na (66), Patrick Reed (66), Pat Perez (67) shared sixth place with Phil Mickelson, who shot 68.

World No. 1 Johnson stumbled to a 73 and finished in a tie for 18th.

The top 70 players on the playoff points list now advance to the BMW Championship, set for September 14-17 at Conway Farms Golf Club in Illinois.

Then the top 30 players following the BMW Championship will qualify for the Tour Championship at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, beginning September 21.

SPOTLIGHT

## Hadwin makes International team for Presidents Cup

Reuters  
Toronto

Canadian Adam Hadwin clinched the final automatic spot on the International team for this month's Presidents Cup in New Jersey, while Kevin Chappell secured the last berth on the United States side yesterday.

The International team, selected off the world rankings, will be dominated by Australians and South Africans, each with three representatives.

Hadwin retained 10th spot in the International rankings after nobody played well enough at the Dell Technologies Championship at TPC Boston to pass him.

Chappell, however, barely edged Charley Hoffman for the 10th spot on the US team, though Hoffman will probably merit consideration for one of the two captain's picks that Steve Stricker will announce today.

Veteran Phil Mickelson, who has never missed a Presidents Cup since the event started in 1994, is also likely

to figure in Stricker's plans.

International captain Nick Price has considerably less obvious options. Argentine Emiliano Grillo and Japanese Hideto Tanihara are among those who might catch Price's eye.

The Americans have lost the biennial match play event only once and will start hot favourites again at Liberty National in Jersey City on Sept. 28 with Dustin Johnson, Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas three of the top four players in the world.

**AUTOMATIC SELECTIONS:**

**United States** — Dustin Johnson, Jordan Spieth, Justin Thomas, Rickie Fowler, Daniel Berger, Brooks Koepka, Kevin Kisner, Patrick Reed, Matt Kuchar, Kevin Chappell

**International** — Hideki Matsuyama (Japan), Jason Day (Australia), Adam Scott (Australia), Louis Oosthuizen (South Africa), Charl Schwartzel (South Africa), Marc Leishman (Australia), Branden Grace (South Africa), Jhonattan Vegas (Venezuela), Kim Si-woo (South Korea), Adam Hadwin (Canada)

BOTTOMLINE

## N. Korea concerns hit Winter Olympics sales

AFP  
Seoul

Online ticket sales for next year's Winter Olympics opened in South Korea yesterday, with organisers admitting far fewer places had so far been sold than previously implied, and concerns growing over North Korea's nuclear antics.

The 2018 Pyeongchang Games will take place in a country with a limited winter sports tradition and far from the core markets of Europe and North America — making local attendance crucial to ensuring the grandstands are full. But in the first phase of South Korean sales earlier this year, organisers allocated 162,000 tickets in an application lottery — just over a quarter of their 600,000 target.

Worse still, they admitted Tuesday that only 52,000 of those tickets had

actually been sold. "It's true that the first-phase sale was rather disappointing," said Song Hun-Seok, media service chief at the Pyeongchang Organizing Committee (POCOG).

At the time the country was reeling over the sprawling corruption scandal that saw president Park Geun-Hye impeached. "We will make efforts to create a greater Olympic buzz with various build-up events" including performances and street campaigns, said Song.

There are 1.18mn seats available for the two-week event next February.

Of those, 70% have been allotted to South Korean residents, with 30% going to overseas fans and sponsors through separate processes.

In all, POCOG said, 229,000 spots had been sold up to July 17, the latest figures available, including 177,000 to overseas fans.

That amounts to less than 20% of the total, with little more than five months to the opening ceremony.

Popular events such as ice hockey and figure skating have sold well, but there is lack of enthusiasm for snow events, where South Korea is weak.

Gunilla Lindberg, head of the IOC's Coordination Commission, said last week that she was "very pleased" with the progress of preparations, but that more buzz needed to be created to drive ticket sales and there were questions over some of the venues' post-Olympics use. Online and mobile sales on a first come, first served basis began Tuesday in South Korea.

Full-price tickets available on the website ranged from as little as 20,000 won (\$18) for early rounds of cross-country skiing and bobsleigh, up to 900,000 won for top-tier seats at the men's ice hockey final — although availability for that event was described as "low". Opening and closing ceremony tickets could also be had, at 1,500,000 won and 950,000 won for the best category seats respectively. Officials sought

to play down fears over the weapons ambitions of neighbouring North Korea, which carried out its sixth nuclear test at the weekend and tested two intercontinental ballistic missiles in July that appeared to bring much of the US mainland into range.

"Regardless of the jitters over the North's nuclear drive, we'll continue making preparations to ensure the Olympics will be a success," POCOG spokesman Sung Baikyoo told AFP. "We've been under constant threats from the North and the atmosphere here is much calmer than it may look to foreign eyes," he said.

The South has successfully staged several international sporting events over decades despite military tensions on the peninsula, including the 1988 Seoul Olympics — which took place only months after a mid-air explosion killed all 115 people on board a South Korean plane, with Seoul blaming a terror attack by the North.



## FORMULA ONE

# Hamilton says heart has led his surge to top of championship

'I've found more in the last three or four races. I think Silverstone was a real empowering weekend and from then it's sparked a forest fire within me - and that's hopefully reflected in my driving'

AFP  
Monza, Italy

Lewis Hamilton attributes his surge to the top of the Formula One drivers world championship to an increased level of "heart and passion" since winning the British Grand Prix in July.

The 32-year-old Briton, whose victory in Sunday's Italian Grand Prix lifted him three points clear of Sebastian Vettel of Ferrari, has won three of the last four races to become leader for the first time this year.

As Ferrari retreated from their home race to lick their wounds after being outclassed by a Mercedes master-class that saw Valtteri Bottas finish second, Hamilton admitted he felt he now has the momentum.

"To come through these last races - they've been real solid races - I think I've felt more heart and passion within myself," said Hamilton, who claimed a record-breaking 69th career pole on Saturday and then his 59th win on Sunday.

"I've found more in the last three or four races. I think Silverstone was a real empowering weekend and from then it's sparked a forest fire within me - and that's hopefully reflected in my driving and the way I'm working with my guys."

"To be leading, whilst it's only a couple of points, I'm grateful for it. By no means do I feel comfortable and I will apply myself the same that I have these past three or four races. Earlier on in the year, it was obviously 20 points gap, or whatever, between myself and him, so now I'm going to see if we can have that feeling for a while."

He added that his success had come after a "real constant search and battle for perfection, which is what's been needed to overhaul the Ferraris because they've been exceptional all year long."

He added that he had felt recharged and ready after the European summer break in August.

"I timed it just perfectly where I came off and made sure I recharged the batteries and that's what they are, they're fully charged and ready to go!"

#### 'Drive with my heart'

"It's like an ERS pack. Towards the end of the season, you're running on the low end of the battery pack, whereas I'm



Winner Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (2R) and second placed Mercedes' Finnish driver Valtteri Bottas celebrate with team members after the Italian Formula One Grand Prix at the Autodromo Nazionale circuit in Monza on September 3, 2017. (AFP)

### McLaren hoping to secure Renault power

The McLaren team were still hoping to secure a supply of Renault engines next year as part of a complex web of deals that would keep Honda in Formula One. The team's French racing director Eric Boullier told reporters following Sunday's Italian Grand Prix that McLaren, frustrated by three years of disappointment with Honda, were trying to keep the Japanese manufacturer in the sport. "It is complicated because you want to do the best for F1 as well - it is not only about McLaren. Whatever will happen - and it is a good collaborative work with all the parties in the paddock - we all try to make the best of the situation, but I will not comment more than this." It has been an unconfirmed open secret in the F1 paddock that McLaren is seeking to switch from Honda engines to another sup-

plier. Many observers believe that McLaren is hoping to land a Renault supply and move Honda to Toro Rosso, currently running with Renault power, but after several meetings in the Monza paddock no announcement was forthcoming at the weekend. Meanwhile the Ferrari Formula One team and tobacco company Philip Morris International announced the renewal of one of the longest-running and least obvious sponsorships in sport. A Ferrari statement gave no details about the amount or time frame of the deal. The partnership has been running for more than 40 years, surviving a ban on visible cigarette advertising that led other teams to kick the lucrative habit and look for revenues elsewhere. Philip Morris's Marlboro brand was last seen on Ferrari's grand prix cars in 2007. The team race in a

predominantly red and white livery, the same as Marlboro's traditional branding although the Italian sportscar manufacturer has always been associated with the colour red. Ferrari team principal Maurizio Arrivabene previously worked for Philip Morris International while Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne is on the tobacco company's board of directors. The European Union's health commissioner asked Ferrari back in 2007 to end tobacco sponsorship of the team, saying it undermined the goal to end cigarette advertising at sporting events. In 2010 a "bar code" livery was removed from the Ferrari cars after complaints that it represented subliminal advertising for Marlboro. Ferrari said it did so to end speculation and had never intended the code to be associated with the brand.

operating at the top end now and it's a good feeling.

"Whilst I feel I always drive with my heart, my heart is the engine and the power and the force behind what I do... My mind is really like the rudder and I feel like it's really steering me in the right direction in terms of how I prepared."

As Hamilton celebrated his and Mercedes' supremacy by skateboarding in Monte Carlo,

four-time champion Vettel attempted to put on a brave face after a disappointing result in front of a record 93,000 impassioned tifosi. His boss, Ferrari chief executive Sergio Marchionne, described the performance gap between Mercedes and his team as "embarrassing", acknowledging the pain felt when Daniel Ricciardo, who started 16th on the grid, overtook Kimi Raikkonen to take fourth place.

"Emotions run high and when you have a bad day you can't hide it, so I can understand his feelings," said Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff.

"For me it looks like Ferrari have taken a step back this weekend. I think we were very solid, but they have not performed in the way everybody expected."

Mercedes know that their glorious end to the European season may not signal they have truly

regained the momentum and expect a Ferrari fight-back in Singapore, the first of three upcoming races in Asia.

"To be leading the championship - whilst it is only a couple of points - I am grateful, but by no means do I feel comfortable," added Hamilton, who is scheduled to take part in a tyre-testing day at Le Castellet in the south of France on Thursday. "But I want to stay here..."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Red Bull boss wants Formula One engine allocation increased

Reuters  
London

Red Bull boss Christian Horner has called for Formula One drivers to be allowed more engines per season to reduce the rash of starting grid penalties that reached farcical levels at the weekend.

Mercedes's championship leader Lewis Hamilton, who took a record 69th pole position at the Italian Grand Prix, was the only driver at Monza on Sunday to start from where he had actually qualified.

Behind him, nine of the 20 drivers took penalties for engine and gearbox changes.

Drivers are allowed four power units, divided into six component parts, per season before penalties are incurred. Next year's allocation will be reduced to three while the calendar expands from 20 to 21 rounds.

"For me that should be number one on the agenda for the next strategy meeting," Horner told reporters.

"I tried to get it changed at an earlier meeting in the year but there was no support for it. I would hope that would now perhaps be different with teams incurring and starting down the barrel of further penalties between now and the end of the year."

The engine restrictions were introduced as a cost-saving measure, and to reinforce the sport's energy-efficient credentials, but Horner said that objective was not being achieved.

"It's not saving the cost because the engines are going on a world tour anyway, they're being used and you're just incurring penalties as a result. Perhaps we need to get back to a more equitable balance,"

he said.

"Maybe five engines is the right number rather than four going to three."

Some, including Formula One's managing director for motorsport Ross Brawn, have suggested changing the penalty system.

"I hate the fact that we're having to affect the racing because of the technical issues," Brawn said ahead of Monza.

But others operating on tight budgets, such as Force India, are against easing the restrictions.

"In the old days, before we had a set number of engines per driver, you could use one engine per race and that cost a lot of money," said Force India's chief operating officer Otmar Szafnauer.

The spate of penalties puzzled even paddock insiders at Monza.

Horner was one of them, with Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Daniel Ricciardo qualifying second and third fastest but collecting 20 and 25 place grid drops respectively before starting 13th and 16th.

Ricciardo finished fourth in the race, with Verstappen 10th. Without the penalties at least one could have expected to be on the podium.

"Even going to the grid we were trying to work out whether we were going to be 12th or 13th because (Force India's Sergio) Perez had picked up a penalty but he'd picked it up before or after somebody. It's too confusing," said Horner.

"I think it needs a serious look at to see whether there's a better way of penalising a manufacturer... as opposed to messing around with the grid."

"I think it will only get worse. It would be a shame to see this championship decided on grid penalties."

### Porsche not ruling out F1 return as engine supplier

Porsche has not ruled out a return to Formula One as an engine supplier, the German car manufacturer's financial chief said yesterday. "F1 could be one of the right places," Lutz Meschke told Motorsport.com.

"As you know Formula E is very important for us now, and F1 is always a good topic to think about. And I think we are in quite good discussions regarding the new engine."

Asked if the current plans for a twin-turbo V6 with less technology could attract Porsche to F1, Meschke said: "Absolutely. We have to cut costs in F1, and it's a good way to reach this target." Meschke also confirmed that "discussions are around being a supplier", with no plans to form a works team.

Porsche already has a commitment to Formula E with a works-backed team from the 2019/20 season.

FT's commercial boss Sean Bratches told Motorsport.com that the sport's new owners Liberty Media would be delighted to have Porsche on board in 2021.

"Ultimately we're trying to create a platform and environment where more engine manufacturers and brands and teams come into this sport and make it a compelling business proposition to do so," Bratches told the website.

"As the individual who kind of runs marketing and branding at F1 the inclusion of Porsche, which is a heritage racing brand in our sport, would be highly valued."

Porsche has not been involved in F1 since 1991. It was engine supplier for McLaren when Niki Lauda (1984) and Alain Prost (1985, 1986) were crowned world champions driving McLaren-TAG-Porsche cars.

## RUGBY

# Tycoon announces rebel Indo-Pacific competition

Reuters  
Melbourne

Billionaire mining tycoon Andrew Forrest has said he will set up a rebel competition spanning the Indo-Pacific region after Australia's Western Force lost their court appeal to remain in Super Rugby yesterday.

Forrest has underwritten the Force's legal fight to remain in Super Rugby but angrily declared the side would live on in his new tournament, which he claimed would challenge the primacy of the southern hemisphere's incumbent competition.

"This is the beginning of the new Force, this is the beginning of the new Indo-Pacific competition and I am delighted to be an instigator of it," Forrest told reporters in Perth yesterday.

"I will be releasing details immediately of the initial administration structure and can assure all of you that discussions have

commenced within our own state and country to ensure this competition starts and starts strong."

After expanding quickly in the past six years and opening new markets in Japan and Argentina, Super Rugby has become vulnerable.

The 18-team format of the past two seasons has been jet-tisoned and its governing body SANZAAR agreed earlier this year to cut three teams amid declining ratings and crowds.

Two of South Africa's teams have been cut and are now playing in Europe's Pro14 league.

The cash-strapped Australian Rugby Union committed to cutting either the Force or the Melbourne Rebels in April but legal challenges delayed their final decision to axe the Perth team until last month.

#### UGLY DIVORCE

RugbyWA, the sport's governing body in Western Australia state, had vowed to fight for Force's survival through the

courts with the support of Forrest, one of the country's richest men.

The state's premier has also threatened to sue the ARU over public funds spent on the Force's home stadium, while federal lawmakers have called for enquiries over the team's axing.

Pundits have called on Australia to leave Super Rugby altogether, claiming it fails to represent the nation's interests.

Forrest offered the ARU A\$50 million (\$40 million) in financial support to save the Force but the governing body turned it down, saying they had committed their course and the offer came too late.

Yesterday, Forrest reiterated his call for ARU chairman Cameron Clyne to follow CEO Bill Pulver in resigning over the crisis.

Clyne declined to comment on Forrest's proposed breakaway competition but shifted the blame onto RugbyWA for failing to provide a strong business case to keep Force in Super Rugby



Andrew 'Twiggy' Forrest.

compared to Victoria state's commitment to retain the Melbourne Rebels.

"At that point in time, it was an inferior package to what Vic-

toria put through and we had to make a decision, so we made that decision," Clyne told reporters in Sydney.

The Force had sought to stave

off their axing by arguing at arbitration they had signed an alliance agreement with the ARU that guaranteed them Super Rugby until the end of the current broadcasting deal in 2020.

The ARU contended that, with the competition contracting, a new broadcast agreement would be in place for 2018.

The NSW Supreme Court backed the arbitrator's decision, saying that as owners of the Force, the ARU were entitled to withdraw the team.

"It is to be remembered that ARU owns the Force... and can do with what it likes, even destroy it," Justice David Hamerschlag said in his case notes.

#### NEW COMPETITION

Forrest said he had engaged a prominent lawyer to consider an appeal to the High Court, but made clear his priority was to push on with the new competition, which he saw involving six teams initially and involving "key countries" across the Indo-

Pacific.

"I'm asking every Western Force player to stay strong to allow me the time to be fully briefed... I'd like to start (the competition) with an international game which is yet to be announced," he added.

Emotional former Wallabies loose forward and long-serving Force captain Matt Hodgson wept during the media conference with Forrest and said the players would stand firm.

"You're here 12 years, serving a state, serving a country. They take it away," he said after breaking down in tears.

He added that he would be surprised if local fans turned up to support the Wallabies in Perth on Saturday when they host South Africa in a Rugby Championship match.

Rather than wear Wallabies gold, those who did turn up might be wearing the Force's blue colours, or "probably black."

"A day of mourning for not only Western Australians but for rugby in general," he said.



TENNIS

# Is it quick or slow? Players divided over US Open court speed

'...Of course if you ask me what I prefer, I prefer these conditions (hot) than indoor'



A general view as an American flag waves in the wind over Arthur Ashe Stadium during the match between Roger Federer of Switzerland and Philipp Kohlschreiber of Germany on day eight of the US Open at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

Reuters  
New York

The speed of the Arthur Ashe Stadium court at the US Open has been hotly debated over the past few days but among the players, there seems to be no consensus.

Brad Gilbert, the former player and ESPN analyst, is convinced the surface is slower than in previous years, something that, in theory, should benefit the likes of Rafael Nadal.

But players tend to be notoriously bad judges of court speed. "I don't know," Nadal said on Monday. "I feel the court is in good conditions to play good tennis. Of course if you ask me

what I prefer, I prefer these conditions (hot) than indoor?"

Spain's Pablo Carreno-Busta, who played on Ashe for the first time on Sunday, said he thought the court surface was similar to the outside courts.

American Coco Vandeweghe said court speed was rarely something she pays attention to and Czech Petra Kvitova even went the other way. "I do feel that the courts are little bit faster maybe than the past years or last year," Kvitova said on Sunday after her win over Wimbledon champion Garbine Muguruza.

David Brewer, the US Open tournament director, said the speed on Ashe is the same as the outside courts and that overall, the speed is exactly the same as in previous years. "Ashe is not

slower," Brewer told Reuters. "We do measurements with our own proprietary tools prior to the tournament and then again after the tournament.

"We do that each year and we've done that for about a dozen years now. Our data tells us that the CPR - the Court Pace Rating - is just like any other court on the site right now."

Brewer, who added that not one player or coach had mentioned anything to him about the surface speed, said the DecoTurf courts at Flushing Meadows, which are resurfaced every year, are generally medium-fast.

Each court speeds up a little during the tournament as the top level of acrylic paint, which contains sand, is worn away by the volume of matches.

Confusion about the speed of courts is not unique to the US Open. At the Australian Open this year, tournament officials insisted the courts were no faster than the previous year. However, as some courts were re-laid earlier than others, they played faster initially, before they eventually all evened out.

Brewer said all the courts at this year's US Open were re-surfaced within a 30-day window, depending on construction schedules, and said Ashe was re-laid at roughly the same time as the majority of others.

From the type of balls used to the weather - which was unseasonably cool in the first week and thus made the ball travel slower through the air than in hot temperatures - there are several fac-

tors that can affect conditions. "Players have their own subjective values of any number of things," Brewer said.

"It could (be that) they changed their string tension for the day to they had a bad night's sleep or it is really humid today and it plays a little differently. All that stuff comes into it."

Even Gilbert, speaking on the eve of the tournament on an ESPN conference call, admitted that weather played a big role.

"I do know one thing, that the court can drastically change... even if it's a slower court, if it's 100 degrees, the court is going to play quicker. If it's 50 degrees at night, it plays considerably slower, and the balls can react to the conditions."

BOXING

## Joshua to face Pulev in Cardiff in October

AFF  
London

Britain's Anthony Joshua will defend his IBF and WBA world heavyweight titles against Bulgaria's Kubrat Pulev at Cardiff's Principality Stadium on October 28, the two fighters announced yesterday.

Joshua, 27, had been pursuing a Las Vegas rematch with Wladimir Klitschko, who he beat at Wembley in April, only for the Ukrainian to announce his retirement.

Instead, Joshua (19-0) will face IBF mandatory challenger Pulev beneath a closed roof in Cardiff, paving the way for him to make his United States debut next year.

"October 28 can't come soon enough," Joshua said in a press release issued by Matchroom Boxing.

"I have been eager to get back in the ring since Wembley and now we are confirmed and ready.

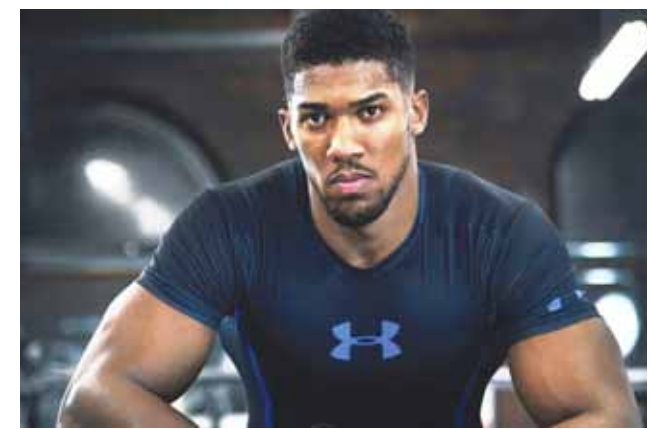
"I'll be locked away focusing on fight number 20 for the next eight weeks. I am excited to experience the atmosphere in a sold-out Principality Stadium and aim to give the fans a spectacular night."

Joshua's promoter, Eddie Hearn, said a crowd of 80,000 was expected for the fight.

Pulev, 36, lost his only previous world title fight to Klitschko inside five rounds in November 2014.

"We will not hug and hold, we will not run. We will stand and fight," vowed Pulev (25-1).

"His style fits mine perfectly and in boxing, styles make fights. My preparation will be very intense and I will be perfectly ready when I enter the ring so that he will have no chance to beat me."



SPOTLIGHT

## 'Doping doctor' jailed for nine months

AFF  
Caen, France

Former Cycling medical adviser Bernard Sainz, alias Dr Mabuse, 74, was sentenced to nine months in prison yesterday for inciting amateur riders to cheat with drugs.

Deputy prosecutor Josephine Lecardeur said eight witnesses had implicated Sainz as being the kingpin in a doping network.

Lecardeur had asked for a six-month prison term and 20,000-euro (\$22,600) fine. The court in the northern port city of Caen opted to increase the jail term.

"This court is a put-up job. It is as if they wanted to prevent alternative medicine therapists from having a sports clientele," Sainz told France Bleu radio, adding he would appeal the sentence.

Sainz - known as 'Dr Mabuse' after the 1922 film de-

picting a fake doctor - was sentenced to two years in prison in 2014, with 20 months suspended, for inciting doping and illegally working as a doctor.

He was initially convicted on charges of incitement to doping and illegally practising medicine during and after the 1998 Festina affair at the Tour de France during which police found a stash of performance-enhancing drugs in a team car, throwing the sport into turmoil. In 2013, he was also fined 3,000 euros for horse doping.

"I have this diabolical caricature of godfather, but what is concrete? Nothing," Sainz, who has no bank account in his name, insisted before the court in July.

But Caen presiding judge Christophe Subts found otherwise, noting that Sainz owned a country house, employed service staff and enjoyed a lifestyle well beyond what a 700-euro a-month pension could afford him.

CYCLING

# Froome wins time trial for commanding lead

AFF  
Logrono, Spain

Chris Froome claimed his second stage win of the 2017 Vuelta a Espana to extend his overall race lead on Vincenzo Nibali to 1min 58sec with victory in the individual time trial yesterday.

Froome beat out Wilco Kelderman and Nibali in a time of exactly 47 minutes for the 40.2km 16th stage from the Navarra motor racing circuit to Logrono.

"It's an absolutely amazing feeling to extend my lead now and to be in this position," said Froome. "It's a great position to be in now, it's a good buffer, but the race isn't over."

The Briton, who is aiming to become only the third rider in history to win the Tour de France and Vuelta in the same year, now has just four competitive stages to defend his lead before Sunday's traditional parade around Madrid.

However, Nibali's impressive showing in finishing 57 seconds behind Froome on the day maintained his hopes of a second Vuelta win with a second strenuous climbs, including Saturday's queen stage up the Alto de L'Angliru, still to come.

Kelderman's second place,

just 29 seconds back on Froome, moved the Dutchman 27 seconds ahead of Russia's Ilnur Zakarin into third overall.

Zakarin was fourth with Alberto Contador moving up to fifth in the general classification in his final race before retirement with fifth on the stage. "I've had a good time trial and the most important thing is I think I have good legs for what remains of the Vuelta," said Contador.

"Although the podium is a long way off, we'll keep trying day-by-day to see if we can achieve it."

Froome started slowly on the tarmac of the motor racing circuit more used to hosting events on four wheels than two as the Sky rider was 23 seconds down on Kelderman at the first check point after 13 kilometres.

Yet, the four-time Tour de France champion surged through the second sector to lead by seven seconds by the second check point and continued to extend his lead all the way to the finish line as Kelderman faltered. "I was just riding it at the speed I felt best," added Froome.

"I wasn't really getting that many time checks from the car so I didn't really know where I was. Actually I presumed it wasn't good news if I wasn't getting the time checks, so I was a bit worried halfway through.

"Only coming into the last six or seven kilometres I found out that I was on track to fight for the stage.

"(It was a) really big relief and obviously super, super happy to be in this situation."

Today's 16th stage sees the race return to the mountains with a steep hors category climb to the finish of the 180.5km ride from Villadiego to Los Machucos.

"Tomorrow is going to be brutal," added Froome. "Los Machucos from what I can see is a wall and a big, big GC battle for sure."

Ewan sprints to second Tour of Britain stage win

Australia's Caleb Ewan secured his second victory in this year's Tour of Britain by winning yesterday's third stage to reclaim the overall leader's green jersey. The Orica-Scott rider repeated his victory in the race's opening stage by pipping Norway's Edvald Boasson Hagen in a dramatic sprint finish in Scunthorpe, northeast England. Philippe Gilbert (Quick-Step) launched an attack with a kilometre of the 182km course remaining, only to be reeled in with around 200 metres to go. The ensuing sprint pitted Ewan against Boasson Hagen (Dimension Data) and Alexander Kristoff (Katusha Alpecin).



Sky's British cyclist Christopher Froome celebrates retaining his red jersey on the podium after winning the 16th stage of the 72nd edition of La Vuelta Tour of Spain cycling race, a 40.2km individual time trial from Circuito de Navarra in Los Arcos to Logrono, yesterday. (AFP)



TENNIS/US OPEN

# Epic Del Potro beats fever and Thiem to set up Federer match

Top seed Rafael Nadal claims his 50th win at the US Open and will meet Russian teenager Andrey Rublev in quarters



Juan Martin del Potro of Argentina celebrates after defeating Dominic Thiem of Austria in their fourth round US Open match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre. (Getty Images/AFP)



Roger Federer of Switzerland celebrates his win over Philipp Kohlschreiber of Germany in their fourth round US Open match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre. (Getty Images/AFP)

AFP  
New York

Juan Martin del Potro shrugged off sickness to save two match points and defeat Dominic Thiem in a five-set US Open epic on Monday to book a quarter-final showdown with five-time champion Roger Federer.

Argentina 24th seed Del Potro claimed a heroic 1-6, 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4 victory over the sixth-seeded Austrian on a rocking Grandstand court, describing it as night he would remember forever.

Del Potro famously defeated Federer in the 2009 final for his only career Grand Slam title before his career was almost torpedoed by a succession of wrist surgeries.

Federer, the third seed, eased into the last-eight with a 6-4, 6-2, 7-5 win over Philipp Kohlschreiber, taking his record over the German veteran to 12-0.

Elsewhere, top seed Rafael Nadal claimed his 50th win at the US Open and will meet Russian teenager Andrey Rublev.

In the women's event, Es-

## Pablo Carreno Busta into semi-finals

Spanish 12th seed Pablo Carreno Busta, who has not dropped a set at the US Open, advanced to his first Grand Slam semi-final yesterday by defeating Argentine 29th seed Diego Schwartzman 6-4, 6-4, 6-2. Carreno Busta, the first player to face four qualifiers in any Grand Slam, booked a Friday semi-final against the winner of a night match between South Africa's Kevin Anderson and American Sam Querrey, whose first Slam semi-final in was July at Wimbledon.

tonia's world number 418 Kaia Kanepi also reached the quarter-finals, just the second qualifier to make the last eight.

But the day belonged to Del Potro, who celebrated his win, which came off a Thiem double fault, by stretching out his arms, head facing the night sky, as his legion of fans, many dressed in the light blue colours of Argentina's famed football and Pumas rugby teams, celebrated wildly.

"Oh my God," said Del Potro,

who had been 2-5 down in the fourth set.

"I was sick the last two days. I came here trying to play the best I can and then when I see this crowd cheering for me, I was trying to play better every game. I will always remember this."

Federer has a 16-5 advantage over Del Potro but they have split their last six meetings.

The 36-year-old Swiss maestro didn't face a break point against Kohlschreiber with his biggest challenge having to take a medical time-out off court at the end of the second set.

"I needed a rub on my back... or bottom and I didn't want to do it in front of you guys," he explained. World number one and 2010 and 2013 champion Nadal, who could meet Federer for the first time in New York in the semi-finals, crushed Ukraine's Alexander Dolgoplov 6-2, 6-4, 6-1.

The 31-year-old Spaniard goes on to face Russian 19-year-old Rublev, who stunned Belgian ninth seed David Goffin 7-5, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to become the youngest quarter-finalist since Andy Roddick in 2001.

"I played a solid match with

not many mistakes," said Nadal, the reigning French Open champion. Rublev, ranked 53, has won 13 of his last 17 matches after breaking the top 100 for the first time in June.

"Rafa is a real champion. I will try to do my best - I have nothing to lose," said Rublev.

Meanwhile, the 32-year-old Kanepi, a former world number 15 whose career was almost ended by illness and a crippling injury, downed Russia's Daria Kasatkina 6-4, 6-4.

She will next face either Ukrainian fourth seed Elina Svitolina or Madison Keys of the United States.

It will be Kanepi's sixth quarter-final at the majors and second in New York after also reaching the last eight in 2010.

"It's very tough to believe where I am now after all that has happened. I didn't expect it," said Kanepi, who is playing in the main draw of an event for the first time this year.

Top seed Pliskova will face American 20th seed CoCo Vandeweghe, who made the last eight for the first time by beating Lucie Safarova of the Czech Republic 6-4, 7-6 (7/2).

## Eight years on, Federer has Del Potro record to set straight

Eight years after losing to Juan Martin del Potro in the US Open final, Roger Federer locks horns again with the giant Argentine in New York still convinced he should have won the match which ended his five-year reign as champion.

Del Potro was just 20 years old when he downed the Swiss legend 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 but Federer believes that he was the dominant force in that 2009 showdown.

"The only time when he was really better, in my opinion, was the fifth set. Obviously that was good enough to beat me that day," said Federer on Monday after seeing off Philipp Kohlschreiber 6-4, 6-2, 7-5 to set-up today's quarter-final with Del Potro.

"I felt like that I left that match with a lot of regrets. Probably feels like one of those matches I would like to play over again. 'Feel like I would probably win it somehow because I should have been up maybe two sets to love.'"

Federer leads Del Potro 16-5

in their head-to-head record although his win in Miami this year represented the first time the pair had met in four years. Despite his disappointment at losing the 2009 championship match, Federer admits that having also defeated Rafael Nadal in the semi-finals, Del Potro was overall a worthy winner.

Federer had already won the French Open, to complete the career Grand Slam in 2009, before going onto to win a sixth Wimbledon. He also became a father for the first time.

"Making the finals here was actually a good run. But it ended my five-year reign in New York," he said.

Federer believes that had Del Potro remained fit he could have become world number one after that breakthrough. For Del Potro, beating Federer should have meant he had the world at his feet.

Sadly, it was his wrists which proved the problem as he went on to undergo four surgeries. After his 2009 triumph, he was to miss a total of 10 Grand Slam

tournaments. At one stage last year, his world ranking, once as high as four in the world, slumped to 1,045 and he even considered retiring. Federer said he was happy to see the likeable Del Potro back on tour and the feeling is mutual. "I admire him, too. Everybody loves him," said Del Potro.

"It's going to be an interesting match to play. It will be the first time after eight years again in the central court of this tournament."

"I know how to play if I want to win, but always is a pleasure to play the greatest guy in history."

Now the 28-year-old hopes to recover in time for Wednesday's clash having needed to save two match points to defeat Dominic Thiem 1-6, 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4 in the fourth round on Monday. He even admitted he had come close to quitting the match as a fever had left him with breathing difficulties. "I feel tired, but we cannot do magic," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

# Evergreen Nadal settles for timeless, not forever young

AFP  
New York

Rafael Nadal wants to be forever young, but the world number one will probably have to settle for tennis immortality.

The 31-year-old Spaniard advanced to his 32nd Grand Slam quarter-final and seventh US Open last-eight on Monday by defeating Ukraine's 64th-ranked Alexandr Dolgoplov 6-2, 6-4, 6-1 for his 50th Open match win.

The 15-time Grand Slam champion, who had not made the US Open last eight since capturing the 2013 title, will next face Russian 19-year-old Andrey Rublev, the youngest quarter-finalist since Andy Roddick in 2001.

Rublev could become the youngest US Open semi-finalist since Australian Lleyton Hewitt in 2000 and the youngest Slam semi-finalist since Nadal at the 2005 French Open on the way to his first major title.

"Of course if I can come back to 19, I take it," Nadal said. "A lot more years to enjoy the tour, a lot more years to enjoy the life. Of course, better be 19 than 31."

"I always wanted to be young. Even when I was 8 years old, I was not very happy, when it was

my birthday, to be 9. Still the same. I am 31 and I am not happy when my birthday going to be 32.

"I am happy being young, no? I don't want to get older. For the moment, I didn't find the way to stop that watch."

In a year where Nadal appears to be turning back the clock, he has won his record 10th French Open title and fallen to Roger Federer in the Australian Open final.

Nadal would, however, like to ease the load on his ageing body and future stars by not playing so much on hardcourts like those he is cruising to victory upon in New York, although he says they give him less trouble now than Wimbledon grass.

"Is a little bit easy to play here than on grass," Nadal said.

"But at the same time, I feel this surface is much more aggressive than grass or clay. For the hip, for the knees, for the ankles, for the back."

Nadal warns it could hamper the longevity of Rublev and other rising young stars.

"Is true that the players are playing longer, but at the same time, young players are playing a lot on hard and I don't know if that's going to be very healthy for the future," Nadal said.

"Is something that is difficult

to change, because is true that the tournaments on this surface are probably easier to maintain and probably less expensive for the organisation, but at the same time, is not for me today but is the most aggressive surface for the body."

Rublev says he has nothing to lose against Nadal, but the 2010 and 2013 US Open champion knows that is youthful bluster.

"He's young, but at the same time, he's in quarter-finals. He has a chance to be in the semi-finals for the first time and I've been there couple of times. So of course he has things to lose," Nadal said.

"And of course I have things to lose and things to win. But I tell you one thing. This sport is about victory. This is not about defeats. At the end of your career, nobody remember your defeats, your losses. People remember the victories. For everybody is everything to win."

One thing Nadal doesn't want to lose is his chance to face Federer in the semi-finals, what would be their first Grand Slam meeting in New York.

"You can ask me about that in two days if I am here with victory and I will answer you with a lot of great pleasure if that happens," Nadal said.



Rafael Nadal of Spain returns a shot against Alexandr Dolgoplov of Ukraine during their fourth round US Open match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre. (Getty Images/AFP)