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NFL | Page 5

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Page 7

TENNIS

Vandeweghe knocks World No. 1 Pliskova out of US Open

'When I won this event as junior at 16 I always dreamed of being on the main stage. It is a process and here I am'

AFP
 New York

CoCo Vandeweghe reached the US Open semi-finals yesterday, knocking Karolina Pliskova off her world number one perch as Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer plotted a dream New York match-up for the first time.

American 20th seed Vandeweghe claimed a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 win over the Czech Republic's Pliskova, whose brief eight-week stay as world number one ends with Wimbledon champion Garbine Muguruza taking over.

Vandeweghe's victory means that the US Open will have an all-American semi-final line-up for the first time since 1981 if Madison Keys defeats Estonia's Kaia Kanepi later Wednesday.

"When I won this event as junior at 16 I always dreamed of being on the main stage. It is a process and here I am. I couldn't wish for anything better," said 25-year-old Vandeweghe, who also made the semi-finals at the Australian Open, beating then world number one Angelique Kerber in the process.

Venus Williams and Sloane Stephens had already set-up an all-American semi-final.

The last time four US women were in the semis was 36 years ago when eventual champion Tracy Austin, Chris Evert, Martina Navratilova and Barbara Potter all made it.

"Let's make it four from four," said Vandeweghe.

Pliskova, who had to save a match point to beat China's Zhang Shuai in the second round, needed to fight back from breaks down in both sets to keep her challenge alive.

But a final break from the American for a 4-2 lead in the second set proved decisive and the match was hers when Pliskova buried a return into the net.

Muguruza, who won the French Open last year, ends Pliskova's eight-week reign at the top of the rankings, a position the big-serving 25-year-old admitted came with extra pressure to perform.

Muguruza has eight top 10 wins this year including victories over two reigning number ones, Angelique Kerber at Wimbledon and Pliskova in Cincinnati.



CoCo Vandeweghe of the US celebrates defeating Karolina Pliskova of Czech Republic in their US Open quarter-final at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre yesterday. (Getty Images/AFP)

Pliskova undaunted by fall from No. 1

Karolina Pliskova's eight-week run as world number one ended Wednesday with a US Open quarter-final loss, the Czech standout saying nothing has changed for her after so short a reign.

Top seed Pliskova, last year's US Open runner-up, fell 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 to US 20th seed CoCo Vandeweghe, missing another chance to capture her first Grand Slam title.

"I don't care. I don't think something is going to change if you are number two. I don't see any difference between this. So for me, no changes," Pliskova said.

"I was there for a few weeks. Maybe if you are there for one year, it's different. But like this, not."

Being among the number ones without a Slam crown to show for it in her career isn't a criticism Pliskova takes to heart. "There's always going to be somebody who says something. I just don't care about this," she said. "I didn't choose to be at this position where I am now, so hopefully I have many more chances. There is many more Grand Slams to come, so I believe I can win one."

Pliskova said she felt the pressure this week on the New York hardcourts. "I was not playing my best tennis this tournament. Still made it to quarterfinals, which is pretty good. Just happy that I at least did this," Pliskova said.

"This pressure, what I had here this tournament, it was something new for me. So I never felt like this before. I was never actually defending the final of a Grand Slam. So it was totally different. Maybe I'm going to feel better in the next Grand Slams." Pliskova's defeat before the final assured she will be overtaken atop Monday's rankings by Muguruza.

SPOTLIGHT

Venus beats Kvitova, to face Stephens in semis

AFP
 New York

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams became the oldest semi-finalist in US Open history at age 37 on Tuesday by defeating two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2).

US ninth seed Williams, seeking her third US Open crown, advanced to a Thursday matchup against 83rd-ranked compatriot Sloane Stephens for a spot in Saturday's final.

"I'm so fortunate to have won that match. It came down to the wire," Williams said. "I try to tell myself enjoy the competition, enjoy the battle and I think I was able to do that."

In the men's event, South Africa's Kevin Anderson reached a Grand Slam semi-final for the first time where he will face Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta who will also be appearing in his maiden last-four at a major.

Stephens, who missed 11 months with a left foot injury before returning at Wimbledon, matched her best Grand Slam showing by outlasting Latvian 16th seed Anastasija Sevastova 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4).

"This is just incredible," Stephens said. "When I started my comeback at Wimbledon I could never have dreamed of coming

back and having these results. It's indescribable."

Stephens has won 13 of her past 15 matches and matched her 2013 Australian Open semi-final run for best Slam effort.

Williams, who improved to 2-4 all-time against the Czech 13th seed, will return to the world top five for the first time since January 2011, a span that saw her diagnosed with the energy-sapping disease Sjogren's Syndrome.

Williams, the oldest Slam semi-finalist since Martina Navratilova at Wimbledon in 1994, won the 2000 and 2001 US crowns.

She was runner-up this year at Wimbledon and the Australian Open and could reach three Slam finals in a year for the first time since 2002.

Kvitova battled back from a five-month absence after a knife-wielding home intruder injured her left hand last December.

"I'm glad I'm still able to compete on the high level against the top players which I hope will give me some confidence to continue to play well, to know that it's still there somewhere," Kvitova said.

Sevastova, who matched her best major run from last year at New York by ousting Maria Sharapova to reach the last eight, led 3-1 in the third set before Stephens rallied.

"I just told myself to keep fighting and stay consistent," Stephens said. "I knew if I just stick with it and stayed in every point I'd have my opportunity and I did."

In the tie-breaker, Stephens took four of the last five points, three on Sevastova errors before hitting a down-the-line backhand winner ensured her win to reach the top 35 in next week's rankings.

Sevastova admitted nerves got to her in the tie-breaker, saying, "It's normal. You play for semi-finals of US Open. I'm not a robot. Sorry."

In the men's section, South African 28th seed Anderson downed 17th-seeded American Sam Querrey 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (9/11), 6-3, 7-6 (9/7) to book a berth in Friday's semi-finals. Anderson, the first South African in any Slam semi-final since Wayne Ferreira at the 2003 Australian Open, will meet Spanish 12th seed Carreno Busta, who has not dropped a set, for a place in Sunday's final.

"To play in one of the most famous courts in the world at night and to get through, it feels fantastic," said Anderson.

Carreno Busta, the first player in any Grand Slam to face four qualifiers, cruised into his first Slam semi-final by ousting Argentine 29th seed Diego Schwartzman 6-4, 6-4, 6-2.

"Incredible," Carreno Busta said. "It's something that I always dreamed about but something I never thought was going to arrive here. It's a great feeling."

With Anderson standing 6ft 8in (2.02m) and Querrey 6ft 6in (1.97m), it was the tallest matchup ever so late in any Slam.



Venus Williams of the US celebrates after defeating Czech Republic's Petra Kvitova during their US Open quarter-final at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre in New York. (AFP)

TENNIS

Kvitova unsure if she'll be Grand Slam winner again

'I'm glad that I am still able to compete on the high level against the top players'



Petra Kvitova of Czech Republic returns a shot against Venus Williams of the United States during her US Open quarter-final. (Getty Images/AFP)

AFP
New York

Petra Kvitova admitted on Tuesday that she might never be a Grand Slam champion again after losing a three-set thriller to Venus Williams at the US Open.

The 27-year-old Czech was defeated 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2) by the American veteran in the quarter-finals.

It was just Kvitova's eighth tournament back following a

five-month absence to recover from potentially career-ending injuries to her left playing hand sustained in fighting off a knife-wielding burglar at her Czech home in December.

"I'm glad that I am still able to compete on the high level against the top players," said Kvitova, the 2011 and 2014 Wimbledon champion.

"I'm not sure about the titles of the Grand Slams. Of course that's why I'm playing tennis, and that's why I wanted to be back and playing, and is a big motivation.

"But I'm still on the earth, and I know it's still a lot of work. This was a quarter-final, but I know how tough it is to get a title for a Grand Slam. It was pretty close but pretty far, as well."

Tuesday's performance was vintage Kvitova - 35 winners cancelled out by 45 unforced errors.

Nine double faults, one of which handed back a break when she led 3-1 in the decider, rubbed shoulders with saving eight of 11 break points in an impressive display of defence.

Kvitova returned to the tour in May at the French Open, where she made the second round while she also reached the same stage at Wimbledon.

A 20th career title at Birmingham was sandwiched in between, but the 14th-ranked Kvitova knows there is plenty of work ahead to get her career back on track.

"Overall, I think it's amazing. I didn't really think that I can come so far," she said.

"Was great to win in Birmingham, but I think put a little bit of pressure on me, and I just

wanted to play better and better, which I wasn't pretty ready for that.

"I'm just glad that I could show it here, that there is a way to play well again. So from my side, in a couple of days I hope that I will say, Good job. But not just now."

As far as who the US Open champion may be on Saturday, Kvitova is backing 37-year-old Williams to capture a third title in New York, 16 years after her second and most recent.

"She's a champion. I think she can win it - I hope so."

SPOTLIGHT

Fognini fears Australian Open ban

AFP
Milan

Hot-headed Italian tennis star Fabio Fognini said he would accept an Australian Open ban after being kicked out of the US Open for a sexist tirade at a female umpire.

The 30-year-old insulted Swedish umpire Louise Engzell after his first-round singles defeat against fellow Italian Stefano Travaglia.

Fognini, the world number 26, who is married to 2015 US Open champion Flavia Pennetta, had already been fined \$24,000 (20,100 euros) for the incident.

But he fears he could now face a ban from the first Grand Slam of next season in Melbourne.

"Should (the Grand Slam Board) decide to ban me from the next Australian Open, I will accept the decision, because actions have consequences, and I need to pay for what I did," Fognini told Italian Sky Sports TV.

"I am aware of the severity of my mistake, I take full responsibility for it. A decision will be made, and I'll move on, I'll turn the page, with this stain on my shoulder that will never go away."

Fognini has a controversial history of on-court behav-

iour and was handed a record fine of \$27,500 at Wimbledon in 2014. But he insisted his Flushing Meadows meltdown would be his last.

"There won't be a next time," he said.

"I know what came out of my mouth, I can't take it back, but I know I won't do it again."

"I know this is a character fault of mine. I'm already working with a mental trainer, and I thought that we were on the right track, so I can't really explain this slip-up."

"I have nothing against women, I have been called sexist, which I am not. I am a family man, I have a wife, a mother, a sister: I have always loved women, I have always respected them, and therefore I am very sorry for what I said."

Fognini said Pennetta, with whom he has a three-month-old son Federico, had been very supportive.

"Flavia is sorry for the player Fabio, because she knows how hard I work and how much I sacrifice for my career," he continued. "But she knows I am not like that in everyday life, and that's what's important."

"When Federico grows up I'll tell him that I was disqualified because I behaved badly on court. I wasn't a good example for kids, for those who may see me as an idol, since I am the best-ranked Italian player, and this hurts even more."

Kyrgios picked for Davis Cup semi, Tomic exile continues

Firebrand Nick Kyrgios will lead Australia's Davis Cup charge at this month's semi-final in Belgium with Bernard Tomic overlooked after his rapid slide down the ATP rankings.

Australia captain Lleyton Hewitt has also recalled Thanasi Kokkinakis for his first Davis Cup tie in two years after the 21-year-old talent's encouraging return to the tour from 18 months wiped out by injuries.

Kokkinakis, who played in the 2015 semi-final loss to Britain on Australia's last run to the final four, joins Jordan Thompson and doubles specialist John Peers in Hewitt's four-man team for the Sept. 15-17 tie in Brussels. Kokkinakis soared over 200 places to his current ranking of 222 after a run to his maiden ATP final at Los Cabos, Mexico, a month ago. He has also upset some big names, including Tomas Berdych and Milos Raonic since returning to the tour in June.

"Thanasi has always shown commitment to the Davis Cup team and his performances in 2017 speak for themselves," Hewitt said in a media release yesterday.

"We are so lucky to have such depth among the group and can call upon him heading into this crucial semi-final."

"We couldn't be in a better position and we're going to Belgium to try and secure that spot in the finals."

Tomic, now ranked 146 after reaching a career high of 17 at the start of 2016, skipped the quarter-final against the United States in Brisbane in April during a rough run of results. His spiral has only continued since Wimbledon where he admitted he felt "bored" playing tennis.

Tomic bowed out of the US Open with a first round defeat to Gilles Muller and is projected to slip outside the top 150 in the rankings, meaning he may have to beg Australian Open organisers for a wildcard to his home grand slam. Australia will bid for a place in the final for the first time since their 2003 defeat of Spain in the title-decider.

FOCUS

Murray likely to miss rest of season with hip injury

AFP
London

Britain's Andy Murray said yesterday he is unlikely to play again this season due to a nagging hip injury that forced him to pull out of the US Open.

Murray, recently nudged off the top of the world rankings by Spain's Rafael Nadal, has been struggling with the injury since a five-set French Open semi-final loss to Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka in June.

The 30-year-old Scot played at Wimbledon in July but lost in the quarter-finals to American Sam Querrey.

"Unfortunately, I won't be able to compete in the upcoming events in Beijing and Shanghai, and most likely, the final two events to finish the season in Vienna and Paris due to my hip injury which has been bothering me the last few months," the three-time Grand Slam champion said on his Facebook page.

"Having consulted with a number of leading hip specialists over the last week, along with my own team, we have decided that this is the best decision for my long-term future," the world number two said.

"Although this has been a frustrating year on court for many reasons, I'm confident after this extended period of rest and rehabilitation that I will be able to reach my best level again and be competing for Grand Slam titles next season."

"I will be beginning my 2018 season in



Brisbane in preparation for the Australian Open."

Murray, who has won Wimbledon twice as well as the US Open, said he was looking forward to playing in Glasgow later in the year in a charity exhibition match against Roger Federer.

The Scot, who also has two Olympic titles under his belt, did not mention the ATP Finals in London in November but is currently ninth in the race to reach the eight-man tournament and missing events will further reduce his chances.

"I have a fantastic team working alongside me to help me through this process and appreciate the support from them and all of my fans over this difficult period," Murray wrote. The men's game is currently beset by a glut of injuries to big-name players, with Wawrinka, Novak Djokovic, Kei Nishikori and Milos Raonic all missing from the on-going US Open in New York.

Murray replaced Djokovic as world number one in November 2016 and held the top spot for 41 weeks before being replaced by Nadal last month.

Connors surprises US Open fans with Harvey relief effort



Tennis legend Jimmy Connors collects donations for Hurricane Harvey relief efforts at the US Open in New York. (Reuters)

Former world number one Jimmy Connors delighted fans at the US Open this week when he appeared unannounced on a small makeshift stage to sign autographs, take selfies and collect cash for victims of Hurricane Harvey.

The 65-year-old Connors, who won eight majors including five US Opens before retiring in 1996, was all smiles as a crowd of stunned fans yelled his name and reached into their wallets for money to stuff in a large collection bin. The response was remarkable, with Connors collecting \$2,000 in 50 minutes, money the United States Tennis Associa-

tion (USTA) said it will match and then send to the Red Cross.

Connors' appearance was part of a broader effort by the US tennis governing body to help response efforts in the wake of the powerful storm, which has killed more than 60 people and caused billions of dollars in damage. On Monday, the USTA announced it would donate \$500,000 as part of initial relief efforts and would match whatever Connors, who has vowed to continue collecting cash this week, could raise. Once the waters recede, the USTA will donate additional money to restore storm-affected tennis facilities as it has in the past

following tragedies like 2005's devastating Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. American players John Isner, Madison Keys and Sam Querrey are also appealing to fans for donations in taped segments playing on screens around Flushing Meadows this week.

"Everyone in Houston affected by Hurricane Harvey is in the hearts and minds of the tennis world in New York," said USTA CEO Katrina Adams. "Our support has to be both immediate and ongoing, and we encourage everyone to contribute to the efforts to help Houston and assist those whose lives were affected by the storm."



SPOTLIGHT

PSG has 'nothing to hide' in probe: president

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser al-Khelaifi said yesterday the club had nothing to hide as UEFA investigate over alleged violations of its financial fair play rules.

Al-Khelaifi, speaking at the official unveiling of French striker Kylian Mbappe, one of the players whose signing has sparked the probe, said PSG had respected all of UEFA's rules.

"We are very confident in our position and in our recruitment," he told a press conference.

"UEFA can do as it wishes, but we have done everything in a transparent way. We haven't hidden anything and we don't need to hide anything."

PSG, owned by Qatar sovereign wealth fund QSI, broke the world transfer record to pay 222mn euros (\$264mn) for Brazilian superstar Neymar in August before signing Mbappe on loan with an option to buy the 18-year-old from Monaco for up to 180mn euros in the second largest deal in history.

The massive outlay sparked complaints from clubs in Spain and Ger-

many that they were competing with a state-backed entity.

The president of Spain's La Liga, Javier Tebas, said yesterday PSG were "laughing at the system".

UEFA announced Friday it was looking into whether PSG had broken the FFP rules that are designed to prevent clubs spending more than they earn.

Al-Khelaifi said: "We respect all of FIFA and UEFA's rules. It's not our problem if other clubs aren't happy.

"My concern is that we achieve our aims."

In a reference to the complicated deal that brought Mbappe to PSG from Monaco, the striker thanked his lawyers "who have given themselves a bit of a headache recently, but for a good cause".

Mbappe said that at the end of last season he had decided to stay with Monaco, "but certain events happened which made me change my mind".

"I discussed in depth with my family and I took the decision to join PSG," said the teenager who comes from the Paris suburbs.

He insisted he had not fallen out with the Monaco ownership and praised the club's vice president Vadim Vasilyev, but told reporters: "There were some things that happened that I will talk about, you'll hear soon."



Paris Saint-Germain's new forward Kylian Mbappe (right) with club president Nasser al-Khelaifi holds his jersey during his presentation at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

Al-Khelaifi elected to European Clubs Association Executive Committee

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) president Nasser al-Khelaifi was elected as a member of the executive committee of the European Clubs Association (ECA) at the general assembly meeting in Geneva, which saw the presence of 162 clubs representatives. Present at the meeting was Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy's (SC) secretary general Hassan al-Thawadi, along with several senior football officials, including FIFA president Gianni Infantino. Al-Khelaifi was elected as one of 11 members of the ECA executive committee. He also holds a number of positions, including the presidency of Qatar Tennis Federation and was elected in 2015 as vice-president of the AFC for West Asia. Al-Thawadi's participation in the meeting is in the framework of the excellent ties between ECA and the State of Qatar since Doha hosted the

first ECA general assembly out of Europe.

In this regard, al-Thawadi stressed SC's keenness on being present in these occasions, which, he considered an opportunity to deepen ties with European clubs and serve the march of football and public interests in general.

He added that this participation is also an opportunity to brief all the officials on the ongoing Qatari preparations for hosting a unique World Cup edition in 2022, stressing that the recent regional crisis didn't affect the World Cup preparations. He wished success to al-Khelaifi, saying that his professionalism, evident in the transformation of PSG since he led it, is an addition to the ECA. Established in 2008 and recognised by FIFA and UEFA, ECA represents the interests of 220 European clubs who are members of the association.

FOCUS

Change of heart triggered PSG move: Mbappe

'It's a great pleasure to join this club, it's one of the best in the world'

AFP
Paris

Kylian Mbappe revealed a change of heart prompted him to join Paris Saint-Germain from French champions Monaco in a deal poised to become the second most expensive transfer in history.

The 18-year-old France striker said at the end of last season he had decided to stay with Monaco, but confessed yesterday that "certain events happened which made me change my mind".

Mbappe completed a move to PSG last Thursday on an initial season-long loan as part on agreement that includes an option to buy the teenager for 180mn euros (\$215mn).

"I discussed in depth with my family and I took the decision to join PSG," said Mbappe, who comes from the Paris suburbs.

He insisted he had not fallen out with the Monaco ownership and praised the club's vice president Vadim Vasilyev, but told reporters: "There were some things that happened that I will talk about, you'll hear soon."

Mbappe, speaking as he was officially unveiled at the Parc des Princes, said it had been vital for him to stay in France despite strong interest from Real Madrid.

"It's a great pleasure to join this club, it's one of the best in the world," said Mbappe. "It's extremely ambitious and wants to become the best.



Paris Saint-Germain players Neymar (left) and Kylian Mbappe take part in a training session at Centre Ooredoo in Saint Germain-en-Laye, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

"It's putting everything in place to make that goal more than possible and that's important to me.

"It was also important to not leave France after just six months playing at the top level, and it was important to return to the city where I was born and where I grew up."

Mbappe's arrival in the capital follows the world-record signing of Neymar from Barcelona, and the Frenchman is eager to continue his

development alongside a highly accomplished cast of players.

"I come into the dressing room with the smallest prize list. These are players who for the most part have won everything already, it's going to be a rewarding experience. I have a lot to learn and a lot to prove."

After splashing out 222mn euros for Neymar, PSG concluded a complicated deal for Mbappe which prompted UEFA to announce a day later that it

was looking into whether the club had broken financial fair play rules.

But for Mbappe, whose transfer fee could rise to 180mn euros with additions, the eye-catching figures are far from his concern.

"For me, the price is what it is, it's not going to change my way of playing and it's not something that's going to worry me," he said.

"On the contrary, I think playing with these players is going to free me."

ANALYSIS

Maroons played strong against China: Qatar coach

QNA
Doha

Qatar national football team coach Felix Sanchez said his team played a strong match against China in the final round of the 2018 World Cup qualifiers despite a 1-2 defeat at Khalifa International Stadium.

Speaking during his post-match press conference, Sanchez said China started the match with high pressure against Qatar and the first 15 minutes were tough but the Qatari players relaxed after that and scored a goal before the visitors equalised and scored a second goal.

Asked about carrying on with the national team, Sanchez said he will

continue to work with the players not just for 2022 but also for other competitions, adding that the team showed a competitive spirit despite the loss.

For his part, China's coach Marcello Lippi said his side created a number of chances in the first half but the players started to feel tension and lacked organisation on the pitch. After the break, he added, the players doubled their efforts and were able to score twice.

He said China managed 12 points from six matches, which, he added, is a good result but lamented the results against Qatar in the home leg of the tie and failing to beat Syria in the eighth round of the qualifiers results that would have sent China to the finals in Russia.

PROPOSAL

UEFA chief backs EPL transfer window plans

AFP
London

UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin says he supports Premier League plans to close the transfer window before action gets under way on the pitch next season.

Clubs in England's top flight spent a record £1.4bn (\$1.8bn, 1.5bn euros) in the transfer window, capped by a final day splurge of £210mn, cementing its position as Europe's richest league.

This year the window shut on August 31 after three rounds of Premier League fixtures.

Club bosses are set to vote this week on a proposal to close the window early, a move that would leave it out of line with the standard FIFA dates.

In an e-mail to the *Times*, Ceferin said he supported the move to wrap up transfer business before the start of the next domestic campaign.

"I am aware there are serious discussions around Europe regarding the shortening of the summer transfer window and we are following them

closely," UEFA president Ceferin told the *Times*.

"In my view, it is not good when footballers play for one club when the league starts and another club when the transfer window closes. There is a lot of uncertainty for a long time. Therefore I would say that the window might be too long and I would support it being shorter."

Supporters of the plan are said to be confident of achieving the 14 votes required to force the change, which would likely lead to the Football League following suit.

The League's chief executive Shaun Harvey told the *Times*: "The one thing our member clubs have said is they do want stability in terms of the players that are available to them from the start of the season.

"Shutting the transfer window before the season starts has always found favour with our clubs. It would make sense for the dates to be aligned with the Premier League and any unintended consequences need to be thought through.

"This will be on the agenda for our club meeting on September 21."

BOTTOMLINE

Mendes summoned over Ronaldo tax evasion case

AFP
Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo's agent, Jorge Mendes, has been summoned before a Spanish court as part of a probe into alleged tax evasion by the world player of the year, judicial sources confirmed yesterday.

Mendes has been called to give evidence along with two of Ronaldo's other advisors, Luis Correia and Carlos Osorio, on October 19 in the upmarket Pozuelo de Alarcón suburb of Madrid, home to many of the city's football stars.

Ronaldo strongly denied having evaded 14.7mn euros (\$17.5mn) in tax on his image rights when he appeared in court

in a preliminary hearing on July 31.

Prosecutors accuse the Real Madrid star of evading tax via a shell company based in the British Virgin Islands and another in Ireland, known for low corporate tax rates.

In addition, they say Ronaldo only declared 11.5mn euros of Spanish-related income from 2011 to 2014, while what he really earned during that time was close to 43mn euros.

They also accuse him of "voluntarily" refusing to include 28.4mn euros in income linked to the sale of his image rights for the 2015 to 2020 period to a Spanish company.

According to *Forbes*, Ronaldo is the highest paid sports star in the world with a \$93mn (83mn euros) income between salary and endorsements in



2016-2017.

Mendes, one of football's leading agents, has already appeared in court to give evidence in a similar case against

another of his clients, Radamel Falcao.

In June, Mendes told the court he "never advised players in tax matters", and denied helping to create shell com-

panies for his clients. Monaco's Falcao is suspected of failing to correctly declare 5.6mn euros of income earned from image rights between 2012 and 2013 while he was at Atletico Madrid.

Mendes, a former nightclub manager, found himself in the eye of the storm last year in the "Football Leaks" media investigation into alleged corruption in the game.

According to newspaper *El Mundo*, who have led the Football Leaks investigation in Spain, Ronaldo also cleared Mendes of any wrong-doing in his testimony before the court.

Correia is in charge of promoting Ronaldo's image to potential sponsors, whilst Osorio is the player's lawyer. Ronaldo is just the latest of a series

of players facing tax investigations in Spain, many of them Mendes clients.

Among those in Mendes's stable, Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho, Paris Saint-Germain winger Angel di Maria and Portugal international defender Fabio Coentrao have been accused of tax fraud.

Barcelona's Lionel Messi was given a suspended 21-month jail sentence and fined two million euros for tax fraud worth 4.1mn euros in 2016.

His sentence, though, has since been replaced by an extra 252,000 euro fine.

If Ronaldo faces trial and is found guilty, he would risk "a fine of at least 28 million" euros and could potentially be jailed for three and a half years, according to the Gestha union of experts at Spain's Inland Revenue.

SPOTLIGHT

Brady, Patriots chase immortality as NFL kicks off from today

The 40-year-old superstar launches his 18th season in the NFL at Gillette Stadium

AFP
Los Angeles

Tom Brady and the New England Patriots set out on their latest quest for immortality today as the National Football League season kicks off with the Super Bowl champions once again the team to beat.

Brady, who clinched a record fifth Super Bowl with February's miraculous comeback against Atlanta, would become the oldest quarterback in history to win the title if the Patriots defend their crown in Minneapolis next year.

The 40-year-old superstar launches his 18th season in the NFL at Gillette Stadium on tonight with the traditional banner-raising opener against the Kansas City Chiefs. Yet at a time when most players of his generation are thinking about riding off into the sunset – if they hadn't already done so – Brady says there is no end in sight to a glittering career.

"I think my mid-40s is a place that I know I can get to," Brady reflected during the off-season. "Once I'm there, I can evaluate what's happening in my life and go from there. There's no question in my mind I'll be able to do it. I know what to do. I know how efficient I am. I know what it takes."

That sense of steely determination is reflected in the lengths Brady is willing to go to in order to elevate his game to the next level. During the off-season, he analysed every offensive play from the 2016-2017 campaign, including the Super Bowl, at least twice in order to pinpoint areas in need of improvement.

"That's why experience is so good, for things like that," Brady said. "I know exactly what I'm looking for now." The chilling aspect for the rest of the league to consider is that the Patriots look to have strengthened during the off-season thanks to some typically shrewd trading by head coach Bill Belichick.

While the season-ending injury suffered last month by Brady's favourite receiver, Julian Edelman, is an undoubted blow, it is offset by the return to fitness of tight end Rob Gronkowski, absent for



Tom Brady (left), who clinched a record fifth Super Bowl last season, would become the oldest quarterback in history to win the title if the Patriots defend their crown in Minneapolis next year.

most of last year.

The addition of wide receiver Brandin Cooks from the New Orleans Saints also gives Brady a potent new offensive outlet, while the arrival of Pro Bowl cornerback Stephon Gilmore strengthens the defense. The relatively smooth build-up has even prompted some to wonder if the Patriots are capable of going 19-0, a decade after falling one game short of that target with their Super Bowl defeat to the New York Giants in 2008.

Brady however is not getting distracted by the talk of an unbeaten season, knowing full well how quickly best-laid plans

can go awry. "It's a challenging season. It's a marathon. It's going to take a lot of good football to get where we need to be," he said this week.

"Football is very humbling. You may think you have it. You go out there and practice it and things go well, and then you go to a particular game and they do things that maybe you haven't worked on or thought about or talked about. We're prepared. We're confident. But you've still got to go out and do it."

The biggest threat to the Patriots' hopes of a sixth Super Bowl could come from another team led by a veteran quar-

terback, the Pittsburgh Steelers and Ben Roethlisberger. Though comfortably beaten by the Patriots in the AFC Championship game last season, the Steelers have strengthened with the addition of wide receiver Juju Smith-Schuster and outside linebacker TJ Watt, the younger brother of Houston Texans star JJ Watt.

Pittsburgh, who open their campaign against Cleveland on Sunday, will also welcome back talented receiver Martavis Bryant, who returns after missing the entirety of 2016 through suspension. "Expectations are high, and they need to be," Ben Roethlisberger said.

FOCUS

Benjamin has special motivation for 'every snap, every play'

By Joseph Person
The Charlotte Observer

Carolina Panthers receiver Kelvin Benjamin endured a lot during the off-season – some of it self-induced pain and, more recently, the hurt that comes with the loss of a loved one.

Benjamin said on Instagram he was in a "dark place" following the death of his mother in July. And though he's still dealing with the loss of the woman he called his everything, Benjamin is moving forward and looking and sounding very much a motivated, in-shape receiver on the verge of a big season. Asked if he planned to dedicate the season to his mother, Benjamin said: "I'm dedicating every snap, every play – every time I step on the field is for my mom."

Speaking to reporters for the first time since the end of last season, Benjamin talked with red-rimmed eyes about his relationship with his mother, who raised him and his three siblings on her own in Belle Glade, Fla.

Benjamin also addressed his off-season weight gain and the public flogging he took on social media as a result. The last few months have not been much fun for the former first-round pick from Florida State.

"From losing my mom (and) starting in OTAs with the weight problems and with all that – the bullying on social media. But I'm built for it," he said. "I've always been going against something like that. But I'm grinding. My mom raised me right."

The 6-foot-5 Benjamin, who's listed at 245 pounds, reported to the voluntary workouts closer to 270. He didn't delve too deeply into what caused him to gain the weight, but wasn't thrilled that it became public.

"It's OTAs, man. It's voluntary if you really want to speak on it," Benjamin said. "It's not my fault they put it out there."

After the NFL draft in April, Panthers coach Ron Rivera disputed a broadcast report that Benjamin had ballooned to 280, but conceded Benjamin was "a little heavy" and needed to lose weight.

Benjamin got the message, arriving for the start of training camp at 243. He had a strong pre-

season, pulling down eight passes for 107 yards and two touchdowns and earning the respect of teammates for his resolve.

"For him to be as functional as he is ... he shows a lot of strength mentally to come back from what he's done and what has happened in his life," quarterback Cam Newton said. "He's come back in great shape, playing with a chip on his shoulder and just playing with a purpose and that's all you can ask."

Benjamin said having friends like Newton and Joe Webb, cut by the Panthers on Saturday, helped him get through the tough times after his mom died. Benjamin said Christine Benjamin did not have a lengthy illness, and her death was unexpected.

Benjamin, two years removed from ACL surgery, said he feels great physically – much like he did during his 73-catch, 1,000-yard rookie season in 2014.

He credits his stellar preseason play in part to one of his final conversations he had with his mother. "That's why I go hard. I'm just playing for her," Benjamin said. "That's the last thing she told me on the phone when I last talked to her."

Newton predicts 2017 will be the best year for Benjamin, whom he calls "Benji." "I'm not just saying that to blow smoke," Newton said. "Everything that he's done for everything, he's positioned himself to make that come into fruition."

In the spring the Panthers exercised their fifth-year option on Benjamin for 2018, expected to be worth another \$8.5 million. Another 1,000-yard season would likely put Benjamin in line for a long-term contract, but he insists he's not "money-hungry."

With his \$7.7 million rookie contract, Benjamin's mother was able to retire. He paid for her to take vacations, and she often travelled to Charlotte to watch him play. Benjamin hoped to buy his mom a house someday. And though he won't be able to now, Benjamin said she'll stay at home in his heart.

"That was my everything, man. Through thick and thin, she raised me. She was always there for me," he said. "If I ever needed someone to talk to or had a bad game of if the media was getting on me or social media getting on me, my mom was always there."



ELLIOTT'S SIX-GAME BAN UPHELD BY ARBITRATOR

Dallas: Dallas Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott's six-game suspension for violation of the NFL's domestic-violence policy was upheld by league arbitrator Harold Henderson on Tuesday, multiple media outlets reported.

However, Elliott reportedly will be eligible to play Sunday in Week 1 against the New York Giants due to the timing of Henderson's announcement. Elliott's legal team said in a statement: "We are extremely disappointed with Mr. Henderson's inability to navigate through league politics, and follow the evidence and, most importantly, his conscious."

The NFL Players Association previously filed a restraining order seeking to block any suspension for Elliott, and a judge is due to rule on Friday, *NFL.com*

reported. The NFLPA's case is centered around its argument that the league violated its own disciplinary process under the collective-bargaining agreement.

Elliott would be allowed to continue playing while his federal case works its way through the legal system.

If denied, Elliott would begin serving his suspension with the Cowboys' Sept. 17 game at Denver. On Monday, the NFL filed a motion to have the NFLPA's restraining-order request dismissed. "The NFLPA claims that it is likely to succeed in its claim that the underlying proceeding was 'fundamentally unfair' in light of certain procedural and evidentiary rulings by the Arbitrator," the NFL's motion reads. "But this is hardly the first time the NFLPA has made this argument.

Courts around the country have consistently and squarely rejected it, along with every other attempt by petitioners to second-guess arbitration decisions upholding NFL player discipline." Elliott, who was not arrested nor charged in the case, maintains his innocence after being accused of assaulting his former girlfriend, Tiffany Thompson.

The original punishment was issued by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell on Aug. 11 after a 13-month investigation. Elliott, the fourth overall pick in the 2016 draft, led the NFL in rushing with 1,631 yards during his rookie season.

DOLPHINS OPENER AGAINST THE BUCCANEERS CANCELLED
The Miami Dolphins will not play their

season opener against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers at home on Sunday due to the potential impact of Hurricane Irma on South Florida. "In the interest of public safety in light of the current state of emergency, the NFL, in consultation with state and local officials as well as both clubs, has decided that playing an NFL game in South Florida this week is not appropriate," the league said in a statement. The NFL said it is considering other options, including playing the game on Sunday at a neutral site or in Miami later this season. The Dolphins were originally scheduled to kick off their 2017 campaign on Sunday at Hard Rock Stadium. Irma, which could be the second powerful storm to thrash the United States in as many weeks.

NBA

Johnson asked Buss to take the tampering fine out of his salary



Lakers president of basketball operations Magic Johnson (left) and general manager Rob Pelinka sit courtside at Thomas and Mack Centre for the Summer League opener against the Clippers.

By Tania Ganguli
Los Angeles Times

Since the Los Angeles Lakers were hit with a \$500,000 fine for tampering with Paul George, president of basketball operations Magic Johnson says, he has given the matter little thought except for one thing: He doesn't want his close friend and boss, Jeanie Buss, to bear the burden of the fine.

"We can't say a lot but we will correct the situation," Johnson said Monday. "It's under my watch. I apologize to Jeanie, and that was the main thing. I told her she could take it out of my salary because I don't want the Lakers to be paying that fine. ... I don't want her spending \$500,000, because she didn't do anything. That's on me."

The NBA hired an independent firm to investigate tampering charges brought by the Indiana Pacers. The firm concluded that Lakers general manager Rob Pelinka gave an illegal expression of interest to George's agent, Aaron Mintz, while George was under contract with

the Pacers. Pelinka reports to Johnson.

The league also said it had previously warned the Lakers after Johnson joked with Jimmy Kimmel on the late-night host's talk show about what communication he is allowed to have with George if they would see each other in the off-season.

"This is just on a late-night show being funny," Johnson said after touring a donation facility he helped organize with West Angeles Church to benefit victims of Tropical Storm Harvey. "But now I know I can't do that. We're OK. I haven't thought twice about it. We made a mistake. ... It's under my watch. I'm gonna make sure it doesn't happen anymore."

The fine was the largest the NBA has ever handed down for tampering, but the league could have enacted harsher penalties, including taking away draft picks or even barring George from signing with the Lakers in free agency.

The league's news release on the matter specified that its investigation found no evidence of an agreement or understanding of a deal in place between the Lakers and George.

After the league's announcement, the Lakers released a statement from Pelinka in which he expressed regret over the incident. The team also released a statement from Adam Streisand, the attorney who represented Buss in the legal battle with her brothers that resulted in her confirmation as the team's controlling owner for the rest of her life. Streisand said the Lakers "will be hyper-vigilant going forward to make sure this is never an issue again."

Through a spokesperson, Pacers general manager Kevin Pritchard said, "We accept the league's findings."

Said Johnson on Monday: "We're going to have meetings about it next week. ... I'm gonna always care about the Laker brand, the Laker fans, so I apologize to them as well. The main thing is we're going to move forward. We got 95 percent everything's going great. This is the one thing that went bad. ... This is something we can correct. Adam (Silver, NBA commissioner) is a great friend of mine. I'm glad he was able to do his job. Now I'm gonna do my job."

CYCLING

Froome's Vuelta lead slashed by Nibali as Denifi claims stage

'I paid a little bit for yesterday's effort for sure, but I am still in a fantastic position'



Sky's British cyclist Christopher Froome celebrates retaining the red jersey on the podium of the 17th stage of the 72nd edition of 'La Vuelta' Tour of Spain, a 180.5km route from Villadiego to Los Machucos in Arredondo, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Los Machucos, Spain

Chris Froome's Vuelta a Espana lead was cut by 42 seconds to 1min 16sec over Vincenzo Nibali as Austrian Stefan Denifi claimed a stunning win on yesterday's 17th stage.

Denifi attacked out of a breakaway with five kilometres to go to hold off a brave chase by Alberto Contador to win a brutal, mountainous 180.5km stage from Villadiego Los Machucos in 4hr 48min 52min.

Contador was 28sec back to aid his chances of making the general classification podium with Colombia's Miguel Angel Lopez 1min 04sec down in third.

Froome has looked assured in his bid to become just the third rider to win the Tour de France and Vuelta in the same year.

But he seemed to pay for his efforts in winning Tuesday's time trial as he cracked on the final climb and couldn't stay with Nibali. The Italian finished alongside Lopez in fourth with Froome down in 14th. "I paid a

little bit for yesterday's effort for sure, but I am still in a fantastic position," said Froome.

"Still over a minute to second place, so it's a good buffer and I'm confident about the next few days ahead."

The Briton has three more competitive stages to defend his lead before Sunday's traditional parade around Madrid with the queen stage up the Alto de l'Angliru still to come on Saturday.

"If you include yesterday, this is a five-day block now," added Froome. "I'm taking it one day at a time, knowing that stage 20 is going to be the hardest day of this block."

"Certainly any effort yesterday, today, it's all going to compound up into stage 20 in the grand finale up Angliru."

"Otherwise, I'm feeling good, optimistic about what lies ahead."

'Enjoy it to the max'

Denifi's win is by a distance the biggest in Irish team Aqua Blue Cycling's short history.

Aqua Blue needed an invite to take part in the race in their first year as a professional team and

Gaviria takes Tour of Britain's 4th stage

Fernando Gaviria held his nerve to win the Tour of Britain's fourth stage after a tense duel with Team Sky's Elia Viviani yesterday. Quick-Step Floors rider Gaviria held off Viviani and Alexander Kristoff to take the 165-kilometre stage from Mansfield to Newark.

While Colombia's Gaviria won the daily honours, Viviani assumed the overall lead from Caleb Ewan.

Ewan is level on time with Viviani with four stages remaining, but the Orca-Scott star has lost the green jersey with the Italian boasting greater

consistency.

Gaviria now sits third but trails by just six seconds, with Thursday's fifth stage a 16km time trial in Essex's Clacton-on-Sea. "I've been coming back from an injury on my left leg. Every day has been going a little bit better. Today everything felt good," Gaviria said.

Meanwhile, Brent Bookwalter of the United States was forced out of the race after an ugly pile-up. Bookwalter crashed into a car parked close to a tight corner and was forced to withdraw from the race, in an incident where several other riders also crashed.

also had to overcome the misfortune of their team bus being hit by an arson attack earlier in the event. "It's been an amazing year for our team," said Denifi.

"In the first year in pro cycling we are here at the Vuelta and winning a stage, it is perfect."

Denifi was part of an early six-man breakaway and stayed out in front of the general classification favourites despite im-

mense pressure from Contador in the final stages. The Spanish veteran didn't get the stage win he desired in his final race before retirement. However, Contador, a three-time Vuelta winner, is now just 1min 21sec down on Wilco Kelderman in the battle for the podium as he remains fifth overall. "It was a shame not to get the stage win for the team and the fans, but there are still

three hard days to come," said Contador. "I have four days left as a professional cyclist and I'm going to enjoy it to the max."

The terrain eases slightly for the 169km 18th stage from Suances to Santo Toribio de Liebana today.

Classification after Stage 17

1. Chris Froome (Britain/Team Sky) 67:44:03"
2. Vincenzo Nibali (Italy / Bahrain-Merida) +1:16"
3. Wilco Kelderman (Netherlands / Team Sunweb) +2:13"
4. Ilnur Zakarin (Russia / Katusha-Alpecin) +2:25"
5. Alberto Contador (Spain / Trek-Segafredo) +3:34"
6. Miguel Angel Lopez (Colombia / Astana Pro Team) +4:39"
7. Michael Woods (Canada / Cannondale-Drapac) +6:33"
8. Wout Poels (Netherlands / Team Sky) +6:40"
9. Fabio Aru (Italy / Astana Pro Team) +6:45"
10. David De La Cruz (Spain / Quick-Step Floors) +10:10"
11. Steven Kruijswijk (Netherlands / LottoNL-Jumbo) +10:13"
12. Esteban Chaves (Colombia / Orca-Scott) +10:46"

SPOTLIGHT

IOC prepares for 2024-28 Games vote with result foretold

Reuters
London

When the International Olympic Committee's 100-plus members sit down next week in Lima to vote on the hosts of the 2024 and the 2028 Olympics, it will be a rare case of the result long known.

Paris and Los Angeles were the two last cities left in the race for the 2024 Summer Games, with four others - Hamburg, Rome, Budapest and Boston - having pulled out amid concerns over cost and size.

With the Games having lost their sheen and cities now viewing them as a financial burden rather than a glorious opportunity, the IOC changed the bidding process and decided to award two consecutive editions at the same election.

The IOC session in Peru will therefore lack the usual dramatic moment when the name of a city is pulled out of an envelope as Paris will be awarded the Games in seven year's time and the Californian metropolis getting the nod for 2028.

No heads of state will fly into the Peruvian capital for frantic, last-minute lobbying as the IOC members will merely be ratifying a "tri-partite" agreement between the two cities and the IOC on September 13.

IOC president **Thomas Bach** said the process in the past was "creating too many losers" and the decision for the double awarding would now be "a win-win-win" for all three parties involved.

Los Angeles had to concede the 2024 Games to the French capital but will still leave Lima with an Olympic Games of its own in the bag.

Paris, which like LA has hosted the Games twice before, will no doubt be the bigger winners, having got what they set out to get.

French President Emmanuel Macron's presence at an IOC meeting in July made clear the country's strong commitment to land their first Summer Olympics since 1924 after three previous failed attempts.

The vote is hardly the big celebration the IOC would have wanted as ongoing criminal investigations into alleged corruption linked to last year's Rio Games serve as a timely reminder that all is not well within the Olympic movement.

IOC member and Games head Carlos Nuzman had his house searched on Tuesday as authorities probe claims of vote-buying dating back to before the surprise 2009 decision to award Rio the Games.

Doping at the Sochi 2014 Winter Games in Russia, graft in Rio and the suspension of other senior IOC members, including Namibian Frankie Fredericks and Ireland's Patrick Hickey, over corruption allegations in the past 12 months, have further tarnished the organisation's image.

The IOC is desperate to end this rocky bidding process with two solid and arguably more transparent partners in place for the next 11 years, a decision which they hope will restore some credibility to the world's biggest multi-sports event.



Keino to step down as Kenyan Olympic chief

Kenyan Olympic chief Kipchoge Keino said yesterday he will not stand for re-election during the General Assembly in Nairobi on September 29.

The 77-year-old double Olympic gold medallist has been at the helm of the National Olympic Committee of Kenya (NOCK) since 1999 when he took over from Charles Mukora, who resigned following the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics bribery scandal.

"I believe it is the right time to hand over the baton to someone else. I have served four terms and that's enough," said Keino, whose last term in office has ended in acrimony after four of his top officials were arrested and charged in court with stealing team uniforms and mismanaging the Kenyan athletes at the Rio Olympics in August.

Up until now Keino had insisted he would run for another term at the helm.

But the International Olympic Committee (IOC) suspended funding for sport in Kenya earlier this year after NOCK failed to hold their elections on May 5.

"We need to get new office bearers to take the sport forward. We have a very short time between now and April to prepare our national teams for the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia," Keino said.

Two-time silver medallist and former world marathon record holder Paul Tergat is so far the only candidate seeking to replace Keino in the September 29 vote.

RUGBY

Jones leaves door ajar for Solomona, Tuilagi

AFP
Manchester

Manu Tuilagi and Denny Solomona can return to the England rugby squad despite being sent home reportedly for being drunk from a training camp in August, said head coach Eddie Jones.

The 57-year-old Australian said as long as their attitude was judged to be right then they could be selected again.

Should Tuilagi, who has a history of indiscretions, and New Zealand-born Solomona, who made an immediate impression after switching codes and made his debut on the close season tour of Argentina, show enough contrition and form it could earn them a recall for the November Tests.

Heartening for Jones is Tuilagi's club coach at Leicester Matt O'Connor has said that he has acknowledged making a mistake and changed his attitude com-

pletely. "Everyone makes bad mistakes, we've all done it," said Jones who has transformed England's fortunes since taking over after the traumatic first round exit from the 2015 World Cup.

"So we will just assess them over the next period of time and if they're eligible for selection and if I meet with them - and I've met one of them already face to face (Tuilagi) - and if their attitude is right then we will pick them.

"If they're not, then we won't pick them."

Jones, who has guided England to the past two Six Nations titles beginning with the Grand Slam in 2016, said Tuilagi was on his final warning with him.

"He's only done it once with me," said Jones, who was speaking after appearing at the Soccerex Global Convention.

"Same with Dylan (referring to England captain Dylan Hartley's poor disciplinary record on the pitch).

"Everyone talks about previous records

but he's only done it once with me. "If he does it again, then he'll maybe spending a lot more time in the Midlands."

Despite Hartley having expressed his disappointment at the duo's behaviour and that they had let the squad down Jones said it was time to move on.

"These things happen. It's a poor choice," said Jones.

"They understand they made a poor choice, the team understand they made a poor choice.

"It's all over now. They've done it. They've made a poor choice, now they're moving on. Everyone wants people to do well."

Tuilagi's indiscretion embarrassingly came just days after Jones said the mid-fielder was worth persevering with, citing his try-scoring performance during a 38-21 win over world champions New Zealand at Twickenham in 2012.

Tuilagi has played Test rugby just once in the past three years because of a variety of injury problems.

Wales star Biggar to join Northampton

Wales fly-half **Dan Biggar** has agreed to join English Premiership side Northampton from the Ospreys next season.

Biggar's move to Franklin's Gardens will take effect from the summer of 2018 after he rejected the chance to extend his national dual contract with the Ospreys and the Welsh rugby Union.

The 27-year-old, who has won 56 caps and toured New Zealand with the British and Irish Lions this year, declined an option to extend the deal "under significantly improved terms", according to a joint statement from the Ospreys and the WRU. "It is extremely exciting to start a new chapter of my career with a club that shares my ambition to win trophies, which is where this club belongs," Biggar said yesterday.

"I would like to thank everyone at the Ospreys and the Welsh rugby Union who has supported and helped me throughout my career.

"I hope my passion for the shirt and people of this region has shone through in my performances, and I would love to leave on a high note with some silverware.

"I also remain fully committed to Wales and achieving the best I can every time I pull on the red shirt." Biggar, who made his Test debut in 2008, has scored 295 points for his country, putting him sixth on Wales' all-time list.

The Ospreys, who play in the Pro 14 league, and WRU were frustrated by Biggar's snub, but wished him well for the future.

"Whilst this is disappointing, as the intention is to keep our best players

in Wales, there is an appreciation that on occasions market forces will make this impractical," their statement read.

"The high level of Biggar's contribution to Wales and the Ospreys during his career to date, and his continued professionalism in this regard, is unquestioned, and all parties continue to wish him well for the future."



ICC WORLD CRICKET LEAGUE DIVISION FIVE

Top order fire Qatar to victory over Guernsey

By Sports Reporter
Doha

A strong batting performance from the Qatar top order backed by their slower bowlers saw the Inam-ul-Haq-led team beat Guernsey by three wickets in the ICC World Cricket League Division Five yesterday.

After left-arm orthodox bowler Mohamed Nadeem and leg-break bowler Tamoor Sajjad shared five wickets between them to restrict Guernsey to 231-9 in their allotted 50 overs, half-centuries by captain Inam-ul-Haq (63, 9 fours) and Qalandar Khan (56, 9 fours) set up Qatar's victory with 2.1 overs to spare.

No.3 batsman Mohamed Tanveer too added valuable 47 (6 fours) be-

fore Awaiz Malik scored the winning runs off a boundary.

Earlier, medium pacer Tanveer was the first to strike after Qatar elected to field. Tanveer had Guernsey opener Matthew Stokes caught behind by Mohamed Rizlan in the sixth over.

Josh Butler (36) then got together with Oliver Newey to stitch together a 50-run partnership before Qatar's leg-break bowler Sajjad sent back Butler in the 21st over.

Newey showed resilience with the bat scoring 80 before Sajjad caught him off his own bowling.

Ben Ferbrache (34), Tom Nightingale (31) and Jason Martin (21) were the others in the Guernsey line-up to get into double figures and help put up 231 runs on the board for the loss of nine wickets.

Qatar, who are second in Group

A with two wins and a loss, the latter against unbeaten table-toppers Italy, will face Jersey, who topped Group B with a 108-run win over Ghana yesterday, today.

Italy too posted a big 122-run victory over Cayman Islands yesterday.

A 115-ball 139 by Patrick Matautaava saw Vanuatu beat Germany by four wickets in the other match of the day.

BRIEF SCORES: Guernsey 231 for 9 (O. Newey 80; M. Nadeem 3-49, T. Sajjad 2-33) lost to Qatar (Inam-ul-Haq 63, Q. Khan 56, M. Tanveer 47; O. Newey 2-38, D. Hooper 2-38, M. Ellis 2-40) by three wickets

Qatar players celebrate the wicket of Guernsey's Matthew Stokes during their ICC World Cricket League Division 5 match. (ICC)



FOCUS

Kohli fires India to 7-wicket T20 win

Chasing 171, India ride on a 119-run stand between Kohli (82) and Pandey (51)

AFP
Colombo

Skipper Virat Kohli hit a blazing half-century as India completed their rout of Sri Lanka on this tour, winning the one-off Twenty20 by seven wickets in Colombo yesterday.

Chasing 171 for victory, India rode on a 119-run second-wicket stand between Kohli (82) and Manish Pandey (51 not out) to achieve their target with four balls to spare. The visitors remained unbeaten in their nine matches against Sri Lanka as they won the Test and one-day series 3-0 and 5-0 respectively.

"Very special, it (whitewash across formats) hasn't been done before. Credit to all the hard work that the boys have put in over the past couple of months in all formats of the game," said a delighted Kohli.

"That's evidence of the fact how hungry the players are in Indian cricket. The bench strength is coming through so beautifully...results are amazing to see as a captain," he added.

Kohli, who received the man of the match award, remained calm in a tricky chase with Pandey for company after India lost their openers for 42 runs in the sixth over.

Rohit Sharma fell to veteran paceman Lasith Malinga for nine and Lokesh Rahul was done in by a superb catch by Dasun Shanaka at short cover off Seekkuge Prasanna.

But Kohli took the attack to the opposition with 7 fours and a six during his 54-ball knock before falling to Isuru Udana with India requiring just 10 runs to win.

Pandey finished off the game with a boundary that brought his maiden T20 fifty in 36 balls.

"We knew one good partnership will get us through. So it was about staying calm in the middle...and Manish was outstanding today. That partnership was very crucial," said Kohli.



India's captain Virat Kohli celebrates his half century during the Twenty20 match against Sri Lanka in Colombo yesterday. (Reuters)

Earlier leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal played his part by claiming three wickets to restrict Sri Lanka to 170-7 after being put into bat first.

Dilshan Munaweera hit a 29-ball 53 before Ashan Priyanjan scored a run-a-ball 40 not out to lift the Sri Lankan total after a middle-order collapse.

The hosts slipped from 99-3 to 113-6

before Priyanjan put on crucial partnerships with lower-order batsmen including a 36-run unbeaten stand with number nine Udana, who hit a 10-ball 19.

"We were 15-20 runs short. We had a good start. Munaweera batted really well, but we lost momentum from overs 10-14," said a disappointed Sri Lanka skipper Upul Tharanga. "The way Virat batted

was outstanding. He was an example for everyone, especially with his energy and running between the wickets," he added.

BRIEF SCORES: Sri Lanka 170 for 7 (D. Munaweera 53, A. Priyanjan 40; Y. Chahal 3-43, K. Yadav 2-20) lost to India 174 for 3 in 19.2 overs (V. Kohli 82, M. Pandey 51 not out) by seven wickets

SPOTLIGHT

Buoyant Windies eye England series win

AFP
London

West Indies go into today's third and deciding Test at Lord's with the chance to complete a dramatic turnaround and win their first series in England in almost 30 years.

The Caribbean side last triumphed in England in 1988 when a team boasting a clutch of all-time greats including Gordon Greenidge, Viv Richards, Malcolm Marshall and Curtly Ambrose romped to a 4-0 win.

The West Indies dominated Test cricket for two decades but their decline has been precipitous and they are currently languishing at eighth in the world rankings, with just Bangladesh and Zimbabwe below them.

Having dusted down the "obituaries" after the series opener at Edgbaston — when the visitors slumped to a defeat by an innings and 209 runs — few pundits gave Jason Holder's novice West Indies side any chance of a revival in Leeds.

Yet despite being set more than 300 to win in the fourth innings following a declaration by England captain Joe Root, the tourists showed true grit to win by five



West Indies' Shai Hope takes part in a training session yesterday. (Reuters)

wickets.

Shai Hope became the first batsman in history to score hundreds in both innings of a match at Headingley, putting his side in a strong position with 147 before following up his maiden Test century with a match-clinching 118 not out in the second innings.

After the fourth day of a match of fluctuating fortunes, ex-England captain Nasser Hussain, a former Essex teammate of West Indies coach Stuart Law, said the tourists were flagging because the physical demands of a Test match were greater than that of Twenty20 cricket.

'HUMBLE PIE'

A satisfied Law said: "People make assumptions all the time."

"But he (Hussain) doesn't know the characters that are inside that dressing room — he doesn't even know me and I played with him at Essex," the former Australian batsman added.

"Not a lot of these players play T20 cricket anyway. I think it was great we sent a big humble pie to go and chomp on in the commentary box."

England even took the risk of dropping in-form seamer Toby Roland-Jones, whose three Tests this season have yielded 14 wickets, for the Headingley Test, bringing in Chris Woakes for his first Test of the home campaign after injury, seemingly to get some overs under his belt ahead of the upcoming Ashes tour of Australia.

The home side, however, have recalled Roland-Jones on his Middlesex home ground and dropped Woakes in the only

change to their side.

"Home conditions, he (Roland-Jones) obviously knows the surfaces and is bowling very well at the moment," Root told reporters at Lord's on Wednesday after announcing his team.

"It's obviously very difficult to leave somebody like Chris out, he's been a consistent performer in Test cricket for England."

"But this is a team I think is going to win this week," star batsman Root added. England still have doubts about their problem top-order batting positions with number three Tom Westley under most scrutiny after a run of single-figure scores.

"That extra pressure will find out a bit more about people's character and things like that so it should be an exciting week," said England spearhead James Anderson.

Having gone wicketless on the last day in Leeds, Anderson arrives at Lord's still three away from becoming the first England bowler to take 500 Test wickets.

"To be honest, I do try to put it to the back of my mind," Anderson said.

"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."

AUSTRALIA'S TOUR OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh strike back after Warner century

AFP
Chittagong, Bangladesh

David Warner hit his second hundred in a row before Bangladesh fought back with quick strikes on a rain-hit third day of the second Test against Australia yesterday.

The visitors were 377-9 when bad light stopped play with 13 overs remaining after rain washed out the entire first session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong.

Australia now lead by 72 runs with Steve O'Keefe on eight and Nathan Lyon, who was yet to open his account, at the crease. Bangladesh, who elected to bat first, made 305.

Mustafizur Rahman and Mehedi Hasan took three wickets each to bring Bangladesh back into the contest after Warner and Peter Handscomb put on 152 runs for the third wicket.

The left-handed Warner showed remarkable patience during his uncharacteristically sedate 123 that came off 234 balls.

This was Warner's 20th Test century and second in successive innings, having made 112 in the first match.

He was dismissed by left-arm paceman Mustafizur, who was celebrating his 22nd birthday.

The century saw Warner join a select group of 12 Australian cricketers who have scored 20 or more Test tons, with his skipper Steve Smith the most recent to achieve the feat.

"It is satisfying for myself but at the end of the day we're here to win games," Warner said after the third day's play.

"I'm doing myself and the team as much favours as I can by trying to put on runs, as everyone else is."

"At the moment we've got a lead of 72... so we've got to try and capitalise on that tomorrow morning to push forward for maybe a hundred (run lead)," he added.

Warner, who resumed the day on 88, received good support

from Handscomb, who made 82 off 144 balls before being run out by a sharp throw from Shakib Al Hasan at midwicket.

Handscomb responded to a call for a single that would have completed Warner's century but was sent back from halfway down the pitch.

Bangladesh were then frustrated as Mehedi dropped Glenn Maxwell on 10 at gully off Mustafizur.

Mehedi put down Hilton Cartwright off his own bowling on six, before making amends by having the same batsman caught at slip by Soumya Sarkar for 18 on the stroke of tea.

Mehedi removed Maxwell (38) and Pat Cummins (four) after the break and Shakib bowled Ashton Agar for his only wicket of the day.

Bangladesh's Mustafizur did not rule out the chance of a win for his side, who hold a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

"The game still has two more days left. If we can do something good, anything is possible," he said.

SCORECARD

BANGLADESH 1st inn 305 all out
AUSTRALIA 1st inn (o/n 225-2)
M. Renshaw c Rahim b Mustafizur 4

D. Warner c Imrul b Mustafizur 123
S. Smith b Taijul 58
P. Handscomb run out 82

G. Maxwell c Rahim b Mehedi 38
H. Cartwright c Soumya b Mehedi 18

M. Wade lbw b Mustafizur 8
A. Agar b Shakib 22
P. Cummins lbw b Mehedi 4
S. O'Keefe not out 8
N. Lyon not out 0

Extras (b8, lb3, w1) 12
Total (for 9 wkts; 118 overs) 377

Fall of wickets: 1-5 (Renshaw), 2-98 (Smith), 3-250 (Handscomb), 4-298 (Warner), 5-321 (Cartwright), 6-342 (Wade), 7-346 (Maxwell), 8-364 (Cummins), 9-376 (Agar)

Bowling: Mehedi 38-6-93-3, Mustafizur 20-2-84-3 (w1), Shakib 30-2-82-1, Taijul 21-1-78-1, Nasir 6-2-14-0, Mominul 2-0-6-0, Sabbir 1-0-9-0



Australia's David Warner celebrates his century on third day of the second Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)