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FOOTBALL

Mbappe embarks on new adventure with PSG

AFP
 Paris

Kylian Mbappe takes centre stage today as the French league returns from the international break with Paris Saint-Germain taking on Metz where they will unleash their latest marquee recruit.

The 18-year-old starlet joined PSG on a season-long loan from champions Monaco in a deal that includes the option to buy Mbappe for a fee rising to 180mn euros (\$215mn), the second most expensive transfer in history.

"It's a great pleasure to join this club, it's one of the best in the world," Mbappe said as he was unveiled at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday.

"It's extremely ambitious and wants to become the best. It's putting everything in place to make that goal more



Mbappe (L) with Neymar during a PSG training session yesterday.

than possible and that's important to me." The France international is set to make his PSG debut away at rock-bottom Metz today with Unai Emery's side chasing a fifth successive win to maintain their perfect start to the season.

Metz are the only team without a point in Ligue 1 this term and need no introduction to Mbappe who scored a hat-trick against them in a 5-0 Monaco victory last February.

Emery confirmed Mbappe was ready

for selection, and an injury to Angel Di Maria while on World Cup duty with Argentina could prompt the Spaniard to thrust the teenager into a fearsome front three alongside world-record signing Neymar and Edinson Cavani.

"These are players who for the most part have won everything already, it's going to be a rewarding experience," Mbappe said of his new teammates. "I have a lot to learn and a lot to prove."

Di Maria is set to miss several weeks with a thigh problem, while Italian midfielder Marco Verratti remains suspended with several of PSG's South American contingent only expected back on Thursday.

Monaco, level with PSG at the top, will attempt to extend their record 16-match winning run away to Cote d'Azur rivals Nice, whose third-place finish last season is swiftly fading from memory.

The title holders raided Serie A to

draft in Montenegro striker Stevan Jovetic and Senegal forward Keita Balde from Inter Milan and Lazio respectively to try and fill the void left by Mbappe.

Monaco also have an in-form Radamel Falcao to call upon, the Colombian has scored a league-leading seven times in four outings and earned his country a vital World Cup qualifying point in Tuesday's 1-1 draw with Brazil.

Nice have lost three times already this season, only once less than all of the 2016-17 campaign, and were trounced 3-0 by top-flight newcomers Amiens last time out.

Unbeaten Bordeaux face Marcelo Bielsa's Lille today, while Lyon host Guingamp on Sunday with consecutive draws having somewhat stalled their early-season charge.

Greece international Kostas Mitroglou will have to wait for his Marseille debut as he is still a fortnight away from a return from a thigh strain picked

up in pre-season with former club Benfica. Marseille were dealt a harsh reality check with a 6-1 thrashing by Monaco in their previous match and will look to regain momentum when Rennes visit the Stade Velodrome.

Saint-Etienne, third in the table, entertain Angers as Oscar Garcia's side look to rebound from their 3-0 defeat at PSG before the pause for international matches.

Fixtures (all times GMT)

Today
 Lille v Bordeaux (1700), Metz v Paris Saint-Germain (1845)

Tomorrow
 Nice v Monaco (1500), Caen v Dijon, Montpellier v Nantes, Strasbourg v Amiens, Troyes v Toulouse (all 1800)

Sunday
 Saint-Etienne v Angers (1300), Lyon v Guingamp (1500), Marseille v Rennes (1900)

TENNIS/US OPEN

Del Potro shatters Federer's dream of Nadal showdown

For 36-year-old Federer, it was a first Slam loss of 2017 after he had captured the Australian Open and Wimbledon titles to take his career tally to 19

AFP
 New York

Juan Martin del Potro sensationally gatecrashed the US Open again on Wednesday, stunning five-champion Roger Federer and shattering hopes of a first New York showdown between the Swiss legend and Rafael Nadal.

The Argentine giant, who won his only Grand Slam title in the city in 2009 by beating Federer in the final after seeing off Nadal in the semis, triumphed 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 in front of a spellbound Arthur Ashe Stadium crowd.

The 28-year-old will once again face world number one Nadal in the semi-finals today, a stunning achievement for a man who had saved two match points to beat sixth seed Dominic Thiem in the last 16.

Nadal, who will keep his world number one status following third seed Federer's exit, had earlier defeated Russian teenager Andrey Rublev 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 in just 97 minutes.

It will be a sixth US Open semi-final for Nadal and 26th at the majors while Del Potro, the 24th seed, will be playing in just his fourth last-four match at the Slams.

For 36-year-old Federer, it was a first Slam loss of 2017 after he had captured the Australian Open and Wimbledon titles to take his career tally to 19.

"I served really good. I hit my forehand as hard as I could and I played a great match. I deserved to win," said Del Potro who will be in his first Slam semi-final since Wimbledon in 2013.

"This feels like my home court. I played Rafa here in 2009 too. Hopefully I can get the same result on Friday."

Del Potro, whose career was almost ended last year after undergoing four wrist surgeries, wrapped up the first set thanks to a break in the 11th game secured with a blistering crosscourt pass.

Federer, who had a 16-5 winning record over Del Potro ahead of the quarter-final, levelled the tie after breaking for a 3-1 lead in the second.

However, the match turned in the third set tiebreak when Del Potro saved four set points before a weary and error-riddled Federer dropped serve again to trail 3-2 in the fourth. Victory was Del Potro's eight minutes short of three hours with a deep



Juan Martin del Potro of Argentina in action against Roger Federer of Switzerland on Wednesday.

forehand as Federer was left to survey the wreckage of 41 unforced errors.

"It's hard to explain, I didn't play that badly," said Federer.

Meanwhile, world number one Rafa Nadal provided Russian teenager Andrey Rublev with a tennis lesson, racing into the semi-finals of the US Open with a ruthless 6-1 6-2 6-2 win.

The 19-year-old, who grew up idolising Nadal and had the Spaniard's poster pinned up on his bedroom wall was smiling from ear-to-ear as he posed for pre-match photos on Arthur Ashe Stadium court with his hero.

That would be the highlight of an eye-opening afternoon for the Russian youngster as Nadal showed no mercy during a one hour, 37 minute thrashing.

"I knew a great new generation coming and Andrey is one of these players that have a great future and I wish him all the best," said Nadal, after clinching his spot in his 26th grand slam semi-final.

"It was a good match and obviously it

was Andrey's first quarter-finals and of course he played with some more mistakes than usual but for me it was an important victory winning the last two matches in straight sets."

Once the match started it did not take long for Rublev's grin to disappear. It was replaced by scowls and frustration as the 53rd-ranked Russian angrily yelled at himself for missed shots and occasionally slapped at his leg with a clenched fist.

Nadal, still stinging from a third-round upset by 18-year-old Canadian Denis Shapovalov in Montreal in August and with a spot in the semi-finals and a possible showdown with rival Roger Federer on the line, was fully focused on the task at hand.

While fans were still filing into Arthur Ashe, Nadal was wrapping up a clinical first set in 23 minutes.

Rublev offered some resistance to start the second but it was brief, Nadal breaking to go up 3-2 and again to close out the set. A relentless Nadal broke to open the third

and when Rublev double faulted to hand him yet another break at 4-1, the dejected Russian simply bent over and let his racket drop.

But Rublev was not done scolding himself, dropping into his chair during the changeover then hammering away at his foot with his racket.

Nadal will take an 8-5 record over Del Potro into the semi-final where the winner will face either Kevin Anderson or Pablo Carreno Busta for the title.

"Juan Martin is a top player. When he's playing well, it's difficult to stop him. Probably the forehand is maybe the fastest on the tour," said Nadal, who is chasing his second major of the year to add to his French Open.

Rublev, bidding to be the youngest man in 17 years to reach the semi-finals, had no complaints over his loss to Nadal.

"He gave me a lesson: 1, 2, and 2," said the Russian, who lost 16 of the last 19 points of the opening set and finished with 43 unforced errors.

SPOTLIGHT

Federer and Nadal destined never to meet in New York



Federer (L) and Nadal



Reuters
 New York

Some things just are not meant to happen.

From the moment the draw was made for the US Open, all the talk was about the potential for the first clash between Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal at Flushing Meadows.

It is a statistical anomaly that finally looked like ending after Nadal crushed Russian teenager Andrey Rublev to reach the last four. But yet again, hopes of a New York clash between two of the greatest players of all time were dashed, this time by the giant hands of Juan Martin del Potro as he claimed a 7-5 3-6 7-6 (8) 6-4 victory that few saw coming.

"I didn't even think about it, as I lost that match, that it's not going to happen," Federer said.

"Of course it is a pity but, you know, Juan Martin deserves it more. I feel I have no place in the semis and he will have a better chance to beat Rafa, to be honest. "The way I played or playing right now, it's not good enough

in my opinion to win this tournament. It's better I'm out and somebody else gets a chance to do better than me."

Such was the anticipation of fans looking forward to the potential clash between Federer and Nadal, the cheapest tickets for today's semi-finals were on offer at well over \$700 on the official ticketing website when the match began. By the time Del Potro had clinched victory to reach his first grand slam semi-final since 2013, they had crashed below \$200.

When Del Potro won the title in 2009, he beat Nadal in the semi-finals and Federer in the final to clinch his only grand slam to date.

After three wrist surgeries, he almost quit the sport but is back in the last four and believes he can repeat his 2009 feat.

"I played (Nadal) in 2009 too, the same as Roger and hopefully I can repeat the result," he said.

"We look older but he's having an amazing season, number one in the world but with this amazing support anything can happen."



SPOTLIGHT

I didn't deserve to win, Federer says after US Open exit

'It's better I'm out and somebody else gets a chance to do better than me'



Roger Federer waves goodbye to fans after being beaten by Juan Martin del Potro in the quarter-finals of the US Open on Wednesday night. At bottom, his mother and wife react during the match.

AFP
New York

Roger Federer, foiled once again one match from a first-ever US Open match against Rafael Nadal, said he just didn't deserve to beat Juan Martin del Potro in the rematch of their epic 2009 final.

The Swiss third seed and 19-time Grand Slam champion was sent packing by Argentine 28th seed Del Potro 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 on Wednesday in Arthur Ashe Stadium. The South American meets Spain's top-ranked Nadal today for a berth in Sunday's final.

"I feel I have no place in the semis and he will have a better chance to beat Rafa, to be honest," Federer said.

"The way I played or am playing right now, it's not good enough in my opinion to win this tournament. It's better I'm out and somebody else gets a chance to do better than me."

On the same court where Del Potro ended Federer's five-year title run and 40-match win streak, the reigning Australian Open and Wimbledon champion said, "Juan Martin fought like a lion."

And the ruined possible first-ever New York matchup between Federer and Nadal, which had been a focus of attention headed into the match, was an afterthought to Federer in the wake

of a comprehensive loss.

"I didn't even think about it, as I lost that match, that it's not going to happen," Federer said. "I'm dealing with just trying to understand what happened and just to overcome this in the next few hours, days, weeks, whatever it is. I'll be fine.

"Of course it is a pity, but Juan Martin deserves it more."

Federer said in some ways he wasn't disappointed because he knew his game was weaker than it looked, having been aided by playing three rivals in a row who are a combined 0-40 against him.

"If I ran into a good guy, I was going to lose, I felt," Federer said. "I don't

want to say I was in negative mindset, but I knew going in that I'm not in a safe place.

"Might have depended too much on my opponent, and I don't like that feeling. I had it throughout the tournament, and I just felt that way every single match I went into."

Federer made 41 unforced errors, nine more than his rival, and some of them were woefully off target and well off the court.

"I tried until the very end," Federer said. "And smashing certain stuff in the net that I normally wouldn't, smashing forehand volleys into the back fence, I mean, that stuff sucked. You know,

honestly, it was terrible."

Federer's 60 winners were 12 more than Del Potro, whose blistering serves and electric forehand winners took their toll.

"He came up with the goods when he needed to and I helped him a little bit sometimes too maybe," Federer said. "But he was better today, especially on the big points."

As for his four squandered set points in the tie-breaker, Federer said, "I don't think those four points made all the difference. I missed too many balls."

The 36-year-old Swiss said that he isn't too crushed after two Slam titles about the disappointing defeat.

"It should hurt, and it does, rightfully so, but I think my perspective at this age and with the season I've had is easier to grasp faster, so I'll be fine quickly," Federer said.

"Sure, I would have liked to do more here, especially with the year that I had. It has been tough, you know, so it's all right."

A back injury from a Montreal final loss to 20-year-old German Alexander Zverev still hindered Federer at the Open.

"I just think it slowed down my rhythm and whatever it was throughout the tournament, because I was never really able to turn it on completely," Federer said. "I played OK, but I never felt like I got to the great level I can play at, but that's OK."



CANDID

Del Potro says he is 'not in best condition' to face Nadal



Juan Martin del Potro celebrates his win over Roger Federer on Wednesday.

AFP
New York

Juan Martin del Potro admits he will not be physically 100% fit to face world number one Rafael Nadal in Friday's potential blockbuster US Open semi-final.

The 28-year-old Argentine has been plagued by injuries since he won his only Grand Slam title in New York in 2009, beating Roger Federer in the final and Nadal in the semi-finals.

He gatecrashed the tournament again on Wednesday when he defeated Federer in a gripping quarter-final 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 to reach his fourth Grand Slam semi-final.

"Against Rafa, it will be a much harder match. I am not in good condition," said Del Potro, who had needed five exhausting sets and saved two match points to beat Dominic Thiem in the fourth round.

"But it's a semi-final so anything can happen. I have to be ready to face Rafa in my favourite tournament."

"I will try to exploit the atmosphere and if I play my best I can be a danger to him."

Del Potro's 2009 US Open final five-set win ended Federer's five-year reign as champion and his 40-match win streak.

He had also crushed Nadal in the semi-finals, losing just six games. He was just 20 at his time and had the world at his feet.

However, he went on to undergo four wrist surgeries, missed 10 Grand Slams and, at one stage last year, his world ranking slumped to 1,045.

That left him even contemplating retirement before a run to the Olympic final in Rio — beating Nadal in the semi-finals — helped reinvestigate his passion for the sport.

Despite his doubts, he is used to playing exhausting semi-final epics — at Wimbledon in 2013, he lost to Novak Djokovic in 4hr 43min, the longest Slam semi-final ever played.

His Roland Garros semi-final defeat to Federer in 2009 was also a five-setter.

"Against Rafa, he is a lefty so he will come after my forehand," added Del Potro.

Nadal will take an 8-5 record over Del Potro into the semi-final, where the winner will face either Kevin Anderson or Pablo Carreno Busta for the title.

"Juan Martin is a top player. When he's playing well, it's difficult to stop him. Probably the forehand is maybe the fastest on the tour," said Nadal, who is chasing his second major of the year to add to his French Open.

Federer, who raced into the interview room after his defeat, praised Del Potro, saying, "Juan Martin fought like a lion."

"I feel like the way I'm playing right now it's not good enough to win this tournament. It's better I'm out and somebody else gets a chance to win."

Pliskova ready to move on from brief spell as world number one



New York: Karolina Pliskova brushed off losing her number one ranking, but said she failed to live up to her own high expectations at the US Open where she exited in the quarter-finals on Wednesday.

Pliskova was beaten 7-6(4) 6-3 by American CoCo Vandeweghe to end her hopes of clinching a maiden grand slam title.

The big-serving Czech had previously said that being number one came with additional pressure to perform at the tournament, where she lost in the final last year to Angelique Kerber.

"I don't care," she said when asked her feelings on relinquishing the rankings top spot she held for eight weeks to Spaniard Garbine Muguruza.

"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 never quite found her groove at Flushing Meadows this year as her ferocious serve lacked its usual bite.

The typically reserved 25-year-old even saw her temper boil over during her match on Wednesday when she threw her racquet violently to the court in disgust after hitting a forehand long to hand the first set to Vandeweghe.

"I think overall now I can say I was not playing my best tennis this tournament," she said at a news conference.

"Still made it to quarter-finals, which is pretty good. Just happy that this tournament is over now," she added with a smile.

She said she will take away lessons from the tournament including learning how to win when not playing her best and how to cope with pressure.

"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 a final of a grand slam. So it was totally different," she said.

"Maybe I'm going to feel better on the next grand slams." Reuters

Make American Tennis Great Again, mission accomplished

Reuters
New York

For years the United States Tennis Association (USTA) has been working on a plan to 'Make American Tennis Great Again' and on Wednesday it all came together with American women completing a sweep of the US Open quarter-finals.

For the first time since 1981 when Tracy Austin, Chris Evert, Martina Navratilova and Barbara Potter waved the Stars and Stripes, Americans grabbed all four semi-finals berths, guaranteeing one of them will hoist the trophy tomorrow.

For years critics have bemoaned the decline of the sport in the United States with ageing stalwarts Serena and Venus Williams grimly hanging on until the next generation arrived.

The sweep may be the most promising sign yet that American tennis, at least on the women's side, has turned the corner and the Williams sisters can rest easy knowing the torch has been passed.

It has been a long wait but Madison Keys (22), Sloane Stephens (24), CoCo Vandeweghe (25) are

Sidelined for almost a year after undergoing foot surgery last summer, Stephens was ranked outside the top 950 just six weeks ago while Keys missed the first two months of year recovering from wrist surgery

now delivering on their promise and tomorrow one of them could grab a first major if Venus Williams does not add a third US Open title to her collection.

Four players from the same country reaching the semi-finals is a rare feat.

Not since the 1985 Wimbledon championships when Navratilova, Evert, Zina Garrison and Kathy Rinaldi were the last four has any country swept the semi-finals of a women's slam.

"I can't tell you how many times I have sat in this chair and had to hear how horrible tennis is in America," said Keys, following her 6-3 6-3 win over Estonia's Kaia Kanepi on Wednesday that completed the US sweep.

"So this feels really good. The fact that there is going to be two all-American semi-finals, two people in the finals in Saturday, and Sam (Querrey) obviously had a great tournament.

"There is lots of young up-and-comers. I think there is a lot of good American tennis to come."

No one is prepared to compare Keys, Stephens and Vandeweghe to Navratilova, Evert and Garrison but the three women have all earned their US Open success.

Sidelined for almost a year after undergoing foot surgery last summer, Stephens was ranked outside the top 950 just six weeks ago while Keys missed the first two months of year recovering from wrist surgery.

Dropped by her coach after a first round loss at the French Open, Vandeweghe turned to Australian Pat Cash and the partnership has proven a winning one.

"It's a process, everyone has their own path," said Rinaldi, now the US Fed Cup captain and the USTA's lead national coach.

"The culture has just been so great, the pushing the healthy competitiveness and with Venus and Serena leading the way and being such tremendous role models, they have led the way it is just really exciting to see it come together."

FOCUS

Lyon heroics give Australia crushing win over Bangladesh

Off-spinner scalps six as visitors chase down 86-run target to level series 1-1



Australian cricketers congratulate teammate Nathan Lyon (third from left) after the dismissal of Bangladesh's Sabbir Rahman during the fourth day of the second Test at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Nathan Lyon spun Australia to a series-levelling win over Bangladesh yesterday with a 13-wicket match-haul in the second and final Test.

Chasing 86 for victory on a deteriorating Chittagong pitch, the visitors lost their top three batsmen before completing a seven-wicket win in the final session of the fourth day.

Glenn Maxwell, who hit the winning six to take his score to 25, and Peter Handscomb, on 16, helped Australia bounce back from their loss in Dhaka last week.

Bangladesh had been on a high after their historic first Test win over Australia. But Lyon brought them back to earth with a bump this time.

The off-spinner, who received the man of the match award, set up the win for the Steve Smith-led side after returning career-best match figures of 13-154.

Lyon claimed a third successive six-wicket haul to dismiss Bangladesh for 157 in their second innings. He took his series tally to 22 wickets, the most by an Australian bowler in a two-match contest.

Opener David Warner also stood out with two successive centuries in the series including 123 in Australia's first innings that helped secure a crucial 72-run lead.

"We played some good cricket at times. To restrict them to what we did in the first innings was great. There wasn't a great deal in the sur-

face for Lyon, but he was remarkable," Smith said of Lyon's 7-94 that helped restrict Bangladesh to 305 in the first innings.

"I think he took 22 wickets for the series so that was a really good effort.... But credit to Bangladesh they really made us fight throughout the series," he added.

The hosts lost their grip after bowling out Australia for 377 in their first innings without adding a run to the overnight total.

But Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim believed the home batsmen were not good enough after electing to bat first.

"Credit to Australia. The wicket was pretty good to bat on, we missed out in the first innings. That's what cost us. We should've got 350 at least," said Mushfiqur.

"Win or lose, there are a lot of areas of improvements. Our batsmen made things tough for themselves, hopefully we'll learn," he added.

Mushfiqur managed a top score of 31 off 103 balls in Bangladesh's second essay. But none of the other batsmen could cope with a pitch that brought joy to Lyon.

HIGHS AND LOWS

Bangladesh started the day on a high, dismissing number 11 batsman Lyon in the second over of the day.

But Lyon returned to pick up regular wickets as Bangladesh slipped to 83-5 at lunch.

A 54-run sixth-wicket stand between Mushfiqur and Sabbir Rahman steadied the innings briefly but an unrelenting Lyon got Sabbir

stumped for 24.

Mushfiqur fell to fast bowler Pat Cummins after being caught behind, leaving his side in dire straits.

Cummins and Steve O'Keefe, who combined with Lyon to wipe off the tail in the final session of play, took two wickets each.

With meagre room for manoeuvre in the fourth innings, Bangladesh had early success when Mustafizur Rahman dismissed Warner, who shared the man of the series award with Lyon, for eight.

Spinners Shakib Al Hasan and Taijul Islam then took the wickets of Steve Smith for 16 and Matt Renshaw for 22 to leave Australia at 48-3.

But Handscomb and Maxwell then dug in and saw Australia home with their unbroken 39-run stand.

Australia now travel to India where they will play five one-day internationals and three Twenty20 matches between September 17 to October 13.

SCORECARD

BANGLADESH 1st inn 305 all out

AUSTRALIA 1st inn

M. Renshaw c Rahim b M. Rahman 4

D. Warner c Kayes b M. Rahman 123

S. Smith b T. Islam 58

P. Handscomb run out 82

G. Maxwell c Rahim b Hasan 38

H. Cartwright c Sarkar b Hasan 18

M. Wade lbw b M. Rahman 8

A. Agar b Shakib 22

P. Cummins lbw b Hasan 4

S. O'Keefe not out 8

N. Lyon c Kayes b M. Rahman 0

Extras (b8, lb3, w1) 12

Total (all out; 119.5 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), 10-377 (Lyon)

Bowling: Hasan 38-6-93-3, M. Rahman

20.5-2-84-4 (w1), Shakib 31-3-82-1, T

Islam 21-1-78-1, Hossain 6-2-14-0, Haque

2-0-6-0, S Rahman 1-0-9-0

BANGLADESH 2nd inn

T. Iqbal st Wade b Lyon 12

S. Sarkar c Renshaw b Cummins 9

I. Kayes c Maxwell b Lyon 15

N. Hossain c Smith b O'Keefe 5

Shakib Al Hasan c Warner b Lyon 2

M. Rahim c Wade b Cummins 31

S. Rahman st Wade b Lyon 24

M. Haque c Cummins b Lyon 29

M. Hasan not out 14

T. Islam b Lyon 4

M. Rahman b O'Keefe 0

Extras (b12) 12

Total (all out, 71.2 overs) 157

Fall of wickets: 1-11 (Sarkar), 2-32

(Iqbal), 3-37 (Kayes), 4-39 (Shakib),

5-43 (Hossain), 6-97 (S. Rahman), 7-129

(Rahim), 8-149 (Haque), 9-156 (T. Islam),

10-157 (M. Rahman)

Bowling: Cummins 11-3-27-2, Lyon 33-11-

60-6, O'Keefe 22-2-6-49-2, Agar 5-1-9-0

AUSTRALIA 2nd inn (target 86)

M. Renshaw c Rahim b Shakib 22

D. Warner c Sarkar b M. Rahman 8

S. Smith c Rahim b T. Islam 16

P. Handscomb not out 16

G. Maxwell not out 25

Extras 0

Total (3 wickets, 15.3 overs) 87

Fall of wickets: 1-13 (Warner), 2-44

(Smith), 3-48 (Renshaw)

Bowling: M. 5-1-16-1, Shakib 6-1-35-1, T.

Islam 4-0-26-1, Hossain 0-3-0-10-0

SPOTLIGHT

Jersey, Vanuatu promoted to WCL Division 4

Jersey and Vanuatu will meet in the final of the ICC WCL Division 5 tomorrow after semi-final wins on another action-packed day of cricket in South Africa.

The competition marks the start of their 2023 World Cup qualifying bid, and Vanuatu and Jersey will now fight for the trophy after seeing off Italy and Qatar respectively.

Victory also sees the two sides earn promotion to ICC WCL Division 4, regardless of the outcome tomorrow.

Elsewhere, there were wins for Germany and Guernsey against Cayman Islands and Ghana respectively as the competition heats up ahead of its final day.

Qatar arrived into the match on a high after booking a semi-final place on Wednesday, but it struggled when put into bat and lost influential captain Inam-ul-Haq for just five in the second over to Anthony Hawkins-Kay. Mohamed Tanveer (5) then departed just four overs later, while Qalandar Khan (4) survived ten overs before falling to Ben Stevens.

None of Qatar's top five batsman reached double figures as Jersey's in-form quick bowlers performed superbly - relishing the seamer-friendly conditions. But Tamoor Sajjad changed the game for Qatar, playing freely and striking the ball with menace and intent. He hit eight fours and three sixes in his knock of 79, before he eventually fell to Cameron Bodenstein - who finished with two for 17 from his 5.3 overs. Hawkins-Kay was the pick of the bowlers for Jersey and finished with four for ten, as his team dismissed Qatar for 152 in 46.3 overs.

Jersey's run-chase started steadily as Peter Gough and Nat Watkins put on 83 for the first wicket. Gough finished on 71 not out, while Watkins (37) and Jonty Jenner (33) made telling contributions. Qatar did not enjoy the same seamer-friendly conditions

as Jersey, although Iqbal Hussain, Mohamed Nadeem and Sajjad all impressed. The trio all finished with one wicket each, but their failure to remove Gough made the difference as he provided the backbone to the innings in a seven-wicket victory.

Jersey captain Charles Perchard said: "We are very happy. We have put in a lot of hard work before this tournament and for it to come off and help us reach Division 4 is a massive feeling."

"We are looking forward to getting into training and building on our success here."

Qatar skipper Ul-Haq said: "We have to try hard to stay in the division. We will fight for each other and re-group."

There were scenes of jubilation at Willowmoore B, where Vanuatu beat Italy by six wickets - thanks in large part again to Patrick Matuataava. Vanuatu won the toss and elected to field, but that did not look like the right choice when Damian Crowley (65) and Peter Petricola (60) steered Italy to 137-2. But the spin of Jelany Chilia got Vanuatu back in the game, and he finished with three for 32. Matautaava, Callum Blake and Andrew Mansale all chipped in with two wickets each as Italy were dismissed for 183.

Vanuatu started positively in reply, with Jonathon Dunn (39) and Joshua Rasu (35) building the innings nicely. But Matautaava, who scored a century on Wednesday to secure a semi-final spot, took over again - hitting 83 off 60 balls with 11 fours and two sixes to see them home by six wickets.

Elsewhere, Guernsey put the disappointment of missing out on a semi-final place behind it with a 23-run win against Ghana.

The last match of another exciting day to finish came at Willowmoore A where Germany chased down Cayman Islands to win by five wickets. **(ICC)**



Jersey players celebrate a wicket during their match against Qatar yesterday. Jersey will now face Vanuatu in the ICC World Cricket League Division 5 final tomorrow. (Twitter/ICC)

BOTTOMLINE

Butt, last man out in Pakistan, hopes for new era

AFP
Lahore, Pakistan

Salman Butt clearly remembers the way he was dismissed against Sri Lanka in Lahore in 2009 - the last batsman out in the last Test in Pakistan, before a terror attack on the visiting team's bus scared off touring sides.

Butt, now 32, was run out in the last over of the day for 48. The next morning, on March 3, militants ambushed the Sri Lankan bus, killing eight people and wounding seven Sri Lankan players and staff.

Eight years on, and with a conviction for spot-fixing behind him, Butt is hoping for a new era for Pakistani cricket, starting with next week's visit of a World XI to play at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium.

"I remember that Test vividly because on day two we were replying to a 600-plus Sri Lankan total and I had a good opening partnership of 110 with Khurram Manzoor but in the last

over of the day I was run out for 48 in a disappointing manner," Butt told AFP.

"The next day we had to continue our innings so in the morning we set off from the hotel for play but after a few minutes the bus changed its route and we returned to the hotel. Later we were told about the incident, that was really shocking."

"Those events changed the whole scene of Pakistan cricket and the isolation has impacted a great deal with both players and fans deprived of international cricket, but I hope the efforts of the PCB and improved security will end this isolation."

Pakistan have not hosted international cricket - barring a short limited-overs series against Zimbabwe in 2015 - since that day.

But hopes are rising that Pakistan's isolation is nearing its end as security continues to improve in the strife-hit nation.

'BAD PHASE'

"Those were heartbreaking circum-

stances," Butt told AFP.

"It's a wonderful feeling when you play before your home crowd and Pakistan's crowds stand out in top three in the world, so finally it's coming back and everyone is happy."

Former Zimbabwe batsman and England coach Andy Flower has assembled a World XI with players from seven countries led by South African skipper Faf du Plessis, with all three matches set to take place in Lahore.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) hopes the series will go off without a hitch as the country prepares to host Sri Lanka for one Twenty20 international next month and another three T20s against the West Indies in November.

Butt says the fans have been the real losers, deprived of watching top-tier cricket on their home soil.

"The fans of this generation could not see their stars before their eyes and it impeded their progress," said Butt, who led Pakistan at a neutral-venue series against Australia in 2010.

Following the attack, Pakistan was

forced to play its home matches in United Arab Emirates, leaving a generation of players like Asad Shafiq, Ahmed Shehzad, Umar Akmal and Azhar Ali without the experience of competing in a home Test match.

That also prevented Pakistan's most successful captain, Misbah-ul-Haq from captaining in a Test on home soil.

With cricket set for a return to Pakistan, Butt is also hoping to mount his own comeback, with selectors considering him for future Tests.

In 2010 Butt's career was almost destroyed when he was hit with a five-year ban and prison sentence, along with pace bowlers Mohamed Asif and Mohamed Amir, for deliberately bowling no-balls as a part of a spot-fixing sting in the Lord's Test against England.

"I have overcome that bad phase and now doing my best in domestic matches to regain my place in the Pakistan team," said Butt.

"I have full faith in my abilities and hard work and hope my sufferings also end sooner than later."



FOCUS

Holder leads Windies recovery against England

Hosts slump to 46 for 4 in reply to visitors' seemingly mediocre 123 all out

AFP
London

West Indies captain Jason Holder starred in a dramatic fightback as wickets tumbled on a remarkable first day of the third and deciding Test against England at Lord's yesterday.

When bad light eventually ended play, England had slumped to 46 for four in reply to West Indies' seemingly mediocre 123 all out – a deficit of 77 runs – with the three-match series all square at 1-1.

Dawid Malan and Ben Stokes were both 13 not out after towering pace-man Holder had taken two for 18 in six overs.

It seemed England would have the upper hand when Stokes returned Test-best figures of six for 26 in 14.3 unchanged overs either side of tea.

But never before had a Test at the 'home of cricket' started so late in the English season and the 19 overs England faced Monday was time enough for a collapse of their own in still heavily overcast conditions on a green-tinged pitch affected by a fungal infection.

England rapidly declined to 24 for four in a match that would surely have been halted a lot earlier for bad light before the advent of floodlights at Lord's.

Mark Stoneman was caught behind for one off Kemar Roach before fellow left-handed opener Alastair Cook (10) fell in similar fashion.

Tom Westley then saw his prospects of an Ashes tour place fade when he was plumb lbw to Holder for eight – his fifth successive single-figure score in Test cricket.

Holder struck at the start of his next over to have opposing captain and star batsman Joe Root well caught for just one by Kieran Powell in the slips.

Malan, on his Middlesex home ground, survived the hat-trick.

Earlier, Stokes's figures surpassed his previous Test-best of six for 36 against Australia at Trent Bridge in 2015.

James Anderson, who helped Stokes on his way with a brilliant slip catch, was left one shy of becoming the first England bowler to take 500 Test wickets after a return of two for 31 in 16 overs.

The West Indies had batted superbly to chase down a target of 322 in winning the second Test at Headingley last week.

But runs only came freely when Powell (39) and Shai Hope (29), fresh from his twin hundreds at Headingley, were



West Indies' Jason Holder (right) successfully appeals for the wicket of England's Tom Westley on Day One of the third Test in London yesterday. (Reuters)

combining in a third-wicket partnership of 56 after Holder won the toss.

Anderson, wicketless in the second innings at Headingley, had Kraigg Brathwaite – who made 134 and 95 in Leeds – dropped on three in the slips by Cook and then caught behind for 10 to leave West Indies 18 for one.

After a 40-minute rain break, Kyle Hope was out for a duck when, trying to withdraw his bat to Anderson, he was well caught by diving wicket-keeper Jonny Bairstow.

Anderson had taken two wickets for no runs in 12 balls and West Indies were 22 for two.

Kyle Hope's exit brought in younger brother Shai Hope, who made 147 and 118 not out – his first two Test hundreds – at Headingley.

After lunch, Anderson pressed hard for the elusive 500th wicket but it would not come and Root took him out of the attack. A later spell saw Anderson repeatedly beat Devendra Bishoo's outside edge without reward.

Instead it was Toby Roland-Jones,

who took two for 32 on his Middlesex home ground having been dropped at Headingley, and Stokes who shared the remaining West Indies wickets.

Roland-Jones claimed the prize scalp of Shai Hope, who scored 28 runs in boundaries, when he cut one away from the right-hander and had him caught by Cook.

Stokes, given just five overs by Root in the second innings at Headingley, produced the delivery of the day to square up Roston Chase (18) and clip the top of his off stump before polishing off the tail in a spell of three for none in six balls.

SCORECARD

WEST INDIES 1st Inn

K. Brathwaite c Bairstow b Anderson	10
K. Powell c and b Stokes	39
K. Hope c Bairstow b Anderson	0
S. Hope c Cook b Roland-Jones	29
R. Chase b Stokes	18
J. Blackwood b Roland-Jones	1
S. Dowrich c Cook b Stokes	1
J. Holder b Stokes	9

D. Bishoo not out	13
K. Roach c Anderson b Stokes	0
S. Gabriel b Stokes	0

Extras (lb1, nb2) 3

Total (all out, 57.3 overs, 252 mins) 123

Fall of wickets: 1-18 (Brathwaite), 2-22 (K Hope), 3-78 (S Hope), 4-78 (Powell), 5-87 (Blackwood), 6-100 (Chase), 7-101 (Dowrich), 8-119 (Holder), 9-123 (Roach), 10-123 (Gabriel)

Bowling: Anderson 16-7-31-2; Broad 12-5-24-0; Roland-Jones 11-4-32-2; Stokes 14.3-6-22-6 (2nb); All 4-0-13-0

ENGLAND 1st Innings

A. Cook c Dowrich b Roach	10
M. Stoneman c Dowrich b Roach	1
T. Westley lbw b Holder	8
J. Root c Powell b Holder	1
D. Malan not out	13
B. Stokes not out	13

Extras 0

Total (4 wks, 19 overs, 77 mins) 46

Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Stoneman), 2-15 (Cook), 3-19 (Westley), 4-24 (Root)
Bowling: Roach 8-3-21-2; Gabriel 5-17-0; Holder 6-18-2

SPOTLIGHT

Very happy with rotation policy, says Kuldeep Yadav

IAN S
Colombo

After wrapping up the Sri Lanka tour on a high, chinaman Kuldeep Yadav yesterday welcomed the new rotation policy by the Indian cricket team, which he felt will provide a good chance to try out new combinations in the lead up to the 2019 World Cup.

After thrashing the hosts 3-0 in the Tests, the Kohli-led side followed up by completing a 5-0 clean sweep in the five One-Day Internationals (ODI). The visitors also outclassed the hosts in the lone one-off Twenty20 International (T20I) to wrap up the tour on a confident note here on Wednesday.

Crediting the experimentation policy, the 22-year-old Kuldeep, who picked up two scalps in the T20I, said: "I am very happy with the policy, you have to give credit to captain and coach because the World Cup is coming and they wanted to try out everyone."

"Everyone has to contribute, especially when the captain and coach decide to rotate players. As a player, you have to perform in every game, it's a pressure game," the Kanpur-born was quoted as saying by the International Cricket Council (ICC) website.

With Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja left out of the limited

overs squad, it all depended on the likes of Kuldeep and fellow wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal to make the most of the given chances in Sri Lanka.

While left-arm orthodox Axar Patel was at the helm of spin-unit affairs for the tour, Kuldeep and Chahal stood out to form a lethal duo in the middle overs.

Commenting on his partnership with Chahal, Kuldeep said: "It was good bowling with him. If two leg-spinners are playing then there are more opportunities to take wickets."

Kuldeep praised his captain for not only shouldering the responsibility but also for giving bowlers the freedom to bowl to their fields.

"He is a leader. He just leads from the front and gives you everything you want on the field," Kuldeep said.

"When I am bowling, he comes to me and asks me about what field I would like. That's what a bowler wants from the captain."

"He gives bowlers freedom and Virat bhai has given me tremendous support through the Tests and ODI series and now too. So I am very happy with this kind of team unity and the leader," he added.

Kuldeep also lauded the way Kohli carries himself on the field, saying: "While fielding, it is a motivation to see him go about his art with so much determination. Once you watch someone like him work so hard, you are also inspired."



India's Kuldeep Yadav (left) celebrates the wicket of Sri Lanka's Dilshan Munaweera with teammates in the Twenty20 match in Colombo on Wednesday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

Holding hopes WI resurgence is not just a blip

Reuters
London

Former pace great Michael Holding hopes West Indies' stunning victory over England at Headingley does not turn out to be just "a blip" in their steady decline as a Test force.

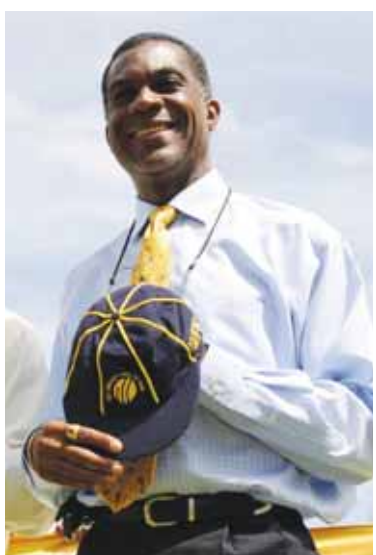
Jason Holder's young team rebounded from a humiliating defeat at Edgbaston, where they lost 19 wickets in a single day, to claim a five-wicket victory that squared the series going in to the third Test.

It was their first Test win in England for 17 years and should they prevail over the next five days it would clinch a first series victory here since the 4-0 rout in 1988.

That West Indies team were one of the greatest ever assembled with a blistering attack of Courtney Walsh, Curtley Ambrose and Malcolm Marshall allied to the batting of Viv Richards, Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes.

They featured in a film *Fire in Babylon* screened at the London Cinema Museum on Tuesday where Holding was part of a Prostate Cancer UK cricket event (<http://gerknowingmore.org>) raising awareness of a increased risk of the disease among black men.

The days of West Indian domination



"will not return in my lifetime" Holding told Reuters in an interview, but he said what happened at Headingley, where Shai Hope scored a century in each innings, had at least given hope to those who had "lost faith".

"I'm dying to see what happens. It should be interesting and I'm hoping that what happened in the last match was not a blip," said Holding, nicknamed "Whispering Death" during a 12-year Test career in which he bagged 249 wickets.

"The hope is it's something the

West Indies could build on but who knows? People say they've turned a corner but they've turned 40 corners. It's not the first time we have seen a performance that we didn't expect but it hasn't progressed.

"I had no inkling that they were going to turn it around. I was getting ready for some more embarrassment."

Hope's superb contribution of 147 and an unbeaten 118 proved key but Holding warned against building up the 23-year-old.

"Hope surprised me. I knew very little about him and before that match he was averaging 16. But I was pleasantly surprised, not just the way he batted but the way he looked at the crease. He could be a good player."

"But it's too early to talk about building a side around him. Let's not get carried away."

"It would be a huge deal for the Windies to win the series. Not many gave them a chance to win a match, let alone a series. Even if they do lose there mustn't be any repeat of Edgbaston otherwise Headingley will be forgotten."

Holding says England will want to put the record straight at Lord's having let West Indies off the hook, not by declaring their second innings but by not putting the visitors into bat.

"I couldn't believe England batted first at Headingley after taking 19 wickets in a day in the first Test," he

said. "Joe Root won the toss and had the chance to send them in and remind them of that nightmare, but he decided to bat. It wasn't complacency, just these days stick to a formula."

"But it helped the Windies regroup. If you are fighting a war you are better off fighting as a group rather than individuals and when it's just two of you out in the middle batting it can be lonely."

While Holding says victory was welcomed in the Caribbean he remains sceptical about the West Indies administrators' ability to harness new talent – saying the experience of some former greats is going to waste.

"The problem is that these days everything is about what qualifications you have, what certificate you have," he said.

"Curtley Ambrose, a great fast bowler, nobody can tell me he doesn't know about fast bowling but yet he was removed as the West Indies fast bowling coach because he didn't have the certificate. To be a coach you have to do it by the manual."

"Even if Sir Garfield Sobers turned up today he wouldn't get the job without the right certificates."

"A lot of us former cricketers try to help on their own islands but they are not going to be employed by the West Indies Cricket Board because they don't ticks the boxes."

Muralitharan declines comment on Sri Lanka's cricket fiasco

IAN S
Kolkata

Sri Lankan spin legend Muttiah Muralitharan yesterday refused to comment on India's just-concluded tour of Sri Lanka, saying he has "no reaction" to give after the islanders gave a horrible account of themselves, losing 9-0 over three Tests, five ODIs and one-off T20 international.

"Reaction? No reaction. As far as India-Sri Lanka series is concerned, I have nothing to say," Muralitharan told reporters here.

India lorded over the hosts on all fronts in the past one and half months, becoming the first visiting team to whitewash a home side 9-0 in a tour comprising of all three formats.

Muralitharan, meanwhile, is in the city for Vision 2020 programme by the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) aimed at helping state cricketers perform better in the domestic season starting with the Ranji Trophy. Along with Indian batting great VVS

Laxman, the ace Sri Lankan offie spent an entire day with the likes of Manoj Tiwary and company.

"It's going really well. The team is preparing for the Ranji Trophy and U-23 tournaments," Muralitharan said. Bengal will take on defending champions Gujarat in practice games ahead of the Ranji season. Muralitharan said it will be helpful for the players to get game-time and for them as well to see who is in form and who is not.

"It is helpful to play practice matches before any tournament as we can see who are the in-form players," he said.

The 45-year-old, who has taken 800 Test wickets and has 534 ODI scalps, refused to comment on left-arm twaker Pragnan Ojha who has not been given a No Objection Certificate (NOC) by the CAB and is yet to join Bengal practice. "I am here to coach these guys. I don't know what happened between them (CAB and Ojha). I can't comment on that. Bengal have replacements for Ojha. He is an experienced bowler but we have other good young bowlers."

MLB

Red Sox go slugging in the rain to beat Toronto Blue Jays

Sox push their lead to four games in AL East with 22 left to play

By Jason Mastrodonato
Boston Herald (TNS)

This is more like it. This is what the Red Sox are supposed to be doing to the lowly Toronto Blue Jays.

Playing through drizzle for most of the game, the Red Sox slapped around Jays starter Joe Biagini and once again hopped on the back of Doug Fister on their way to a 6-1 win last night.

The game started on time, despite heavy rain in the forecast all night, and it wasn't until the fifth inning that it started to come down consistently. The grounds crew had to tend to the pitcher's mound several times.

But no matter who the Blue Jays put out there, the Red Sox had no problem hitting the ball as they won the series finale and took two of three from the last-place Jays.

"It was special, that's for sure," said Jackie Bradley Jr., who had three RBI. "Being able to mentally tough out that long (19-inning) game (Tuesday) night and to come back, I feel like we had some momentum coming into today. Just try not to think about the weather and just go out and compete and perform your best."

Fister put the Red Sox in a 1-0 hole in the first inning — something he's done several times, though it hasn't stopped him from throwing four straight gems — and a Red Sox team that needed 19 innings to score three runs one night earlier had five runs by the time the fourth inning ended.

The Sox put 16 guys on base on Tuesday but scored just three times. What did the offense do differently in this one?

Luck, maybe, and some well-placed fly balls.

"I think we came out with good energy," manager John Farrell said. "When we run the bases and have success like that, I think there's an energy that we draw from that. And I think at the same time it gives that guy on the mound, the opposition, a lot more to contend with. So there might have been some deeper counts, some walks that were mixed into that and an occasional base hit."

After Mitch Moreland drew a walk to start the fourth, Xander Bogaerts stuck his bat out just far enough to slice an outside fastball down the right-field line for an RBI triple. Rafael Devers then blooped a shallow fly to left for another RBI.

Bradley might have taken the prettiest swing of the series later in the inning, connecting on a high-and-outside fastball and pulling it over



Boston Red Sox's Andrew Benintendi (Centre), Jackie Bradley Jr. (left) and Mookie Betts celebrate their win over the Toronto Blue Jays at Fenway Park in Boston, Massachusetts, on Wednesday. (USA TODAY Sports)

the right-field bullpen for a two-run homer. It was his first extra-base hit since returning from the disabled list.

"I just think it was a changeup, maybe caught it out front a little bit," Bradley said of his 15th homer of the year. "A fastball maybe I'd hit it to centre or left. It was away, but maybe the elevated changeup, the speed of the ball dictated me catching out front. I usually take those to left."

Credit Eduardo Nunez for manufacturing a run in the first inning. He singled and stole second, tagged up on a shallow fly ball to right field and then scored on a groundout.

That's what the Red Sox had been doing against these Jays, a group that had looked disinterested in playing defense for the greater part of a month and continues to give up 90-foot freebies.

The Sox entered the series with 24 stolen bases against the Jays, the most

of any team against a single opponent this year. They stole once on Tuesday, then four more last night.

"It's a vital part of our game for sure," said Bradley, who stole his eighth of the season. "That's going to help us manufacture runs in close games, late games, put pressure on defenses and hopefully continue to move people over."

The return of the offense was a happy sight for the Fenway crowd, but the fans seemed much more interested in cheering on Fister as he threw another beauty. This time he went seven innings and allowing just four hits.

Looking masterful with a sharp sinker, Fister fired his fourth straight start of at least seven innings while allowing five hits or less in each of them. In seven starts since rejoining the rotation in place of David Price, Fister has a 2.79 ERA.

"He's pitching really special," Bradley said. "It's been fun to play behind him."

The Yankees were rained out yesterday, so the Sox pushed their lead to four games in the AL East with 22 left to play.

RESULTS		
Arizona	3	LA Dodgers 1
Houston	5	Seattle 3
St. Louis	3	San Diego 1
San Francisco	11	Colorado 3
Cleveland	5	Chicago W Sox 1
Atlanta	5	Texas 4
Kansas City	13	Detroit 2
NY Mets	6	Philadelphia 3 (6
innings)		
Boston	6	Toronto 1
Washington	8	Miami 1
Chicago Cubs	1	Pittsburgh 0
Oakland	3	LA Angels 1
Texas	12	Atlanta 8
Minnesota	10	Tampa Bay 6
Cincinnati	7	Milwaukee 1

SPOTLIGHT

NFL's Michael Bennett alleges racial profiling by Las Vegas police

Reuters
Las Vegas

US pro football player Michael Bennett accused police in Las Vegas on Wednesday of racially profiling him, saying officers handcuffed him on the ground, pointed a gun at his head and jammed a knee into his back because he is African-American.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police said later that Bennett, a Seattle Seahawks defensive lineman, had been detained for about 10 minutes after he ran out of a nightclub where officers had responded to reports of an active shooter.

"I see no evidence that race played any role in this incident," Las Vegas police Undersheriff Kevin McMahon told a news conference.

Bennett said on Twitter he was headed back to his hotel on August 26 after a boxing match between Floyd Mayweather and Conor McGregor when he heard what sounded like gunshots and joined others in running away. Bennett said police singled him out and ordered him to the ground.

"As I laid on the ground, complying with his commands not to move, (the officer) placed his gun near my head and warned me that if I moved he would 'blow my ***** head off,'" Bennett wrote.

McMahon said Bennett told officers at the scene he understood why he was detained and had "no problems" with them, except for the one officer who pointed a gun at his head.

The 6-foot, 4-inch, 274-pound Bennett said a second officer jammed a knee into his back so hard it made it dif-

icult for him to breathe before he was handcuffed. He was released after officers realised his identity, he said.

"Las Vegas police officers singled me out and pointed their guns at me for doing nothing more than simply being a black man in the wrong place at the wrong time," said Bennett, who is considering legal action.

McMahon said the arresting officer did not activate his body cam and police would review surveillance video from the nightclub as part of their investigation.

Bennett said he had retained a California civil rights attorney to investigate and may file a civil rights lawsuit.

Officials with the Seahawks could not be reached immediately for comment.

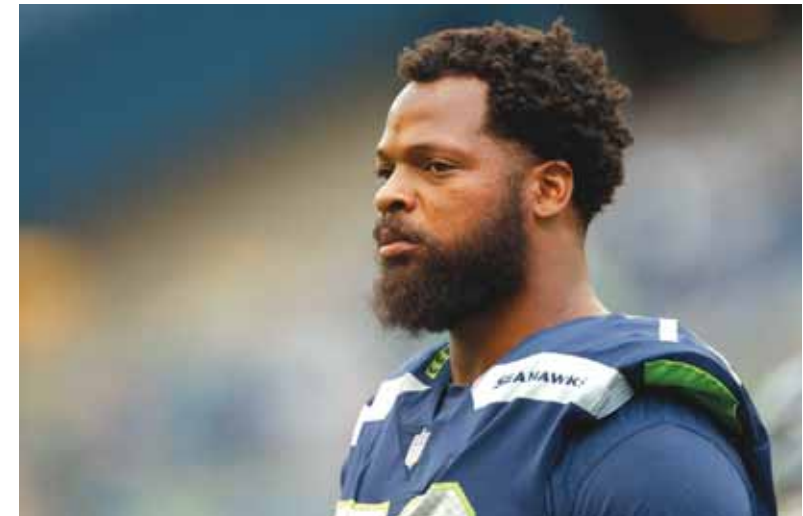
Bennett later told reporters that his encounter with police was "a traumatic experience for me and my family".

"Do I think every police officer is bad? No, I don't believe that. Do I believe there are some people out there who judge people on the colour of their skin? I do believe that," he said.

"I'm just focused on trying to push forward and keep continuously championing the quest for justice for people," Bennett said.

Bennett recently declined to stand for a pre-game playing of the national anthem in the aftermath of violent clashes in Charlottesville, Virginia, between white nationalists and counter-protesters, according to CNN.

Colin Kaepernick, a former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers known for his activism, tweeted his support for Bennett on Wednesday. "This violation that happened against my Brother Michael Bennett is disgusting and unjust," he wrote.



Seattle Seahawks star Michael Bennett accused police in Las Vegas of racism and excessive force after a gunpoint confrontation following the recent Floyd Mayweather-Conor McGregor boxing bout. (AFP)

Elliott ready to play on Sunday, Cowboys coach says

Dallas Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott "seems very focused" a day after getting the news he is eligible to play in Sunday's season opener against the New York Giants even though an arbitrator upheld his six-game suspension. Elliott was on the practice field on Wednesday for the only padded practice of the week, but his eligibility to play beyond week one remained in question. "He seems very focused, locked in on meetings, the walk-through," Cowboys coach Jason Garrett told reporters. "We'll have a good practice today. He's done an excellent job in his preparation." Elliott's six-game suspension for violation of the NFL's domestic-violence policy was upheld by league arbitrator Harold Henderson on Tuesday. The second-year running back will be allowed to play on Sunday because of the timing of the announcement. The NFL Players Association previously filed a restraining order seeking to block any suspension for Elliott, and a US District Court judge is due to rule on the injunction. The NFLPA's case is centred around the 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' September 17 game at Denver. On Monday, the NFL filed a motion to have the NFLPA's restraining-order request dismissed. 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 August 11 after a 13-month league investigation.

Dolphins-Bucs game moved to Nov

The hurricane-affected NFL season-opener between the Miami Dolphins and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers will be rescheduled for November, the league confirmed Wednesday. The match at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami was due to take place on Sunday but had been cancelled as powerful Hurricane Irma bears down on the region. League chiefs had studied the feasibility of playing the game on Friday or at a neutral venue but in the end opted to stage it on November 19, when both teams had a bye week. "I don't think you could have asked all the people that have to travel on both teams to say, 'Hey, leave your families in a hurricane and let's go play a game in Pittsburgh or Philadelphia.' I just don't think that's feasible," Buccaneers coach Dirk Koetter said of a potential venue switch. The change of date means Miami and Tampa Bay will play 16 consecutive games without a mid-season break. "Sixteen straight?" Miami wide receiver Jarvis Landry said. "It's a long season. Let's be honest about it, the stretch after our bye week is one of the toughest, if you want to be real about it, it's probably the toughest in the NFL. That bye week could give us an opportunity to get guys healthy. In this league you're going to get banged up week in and week out, so that bye week for us comes at an appropriate time. To keep it there would be huge, but I know this is an unfortunate situation and it's out of our hands."

BOTTOMLINE

No evidence of Brady concussion: league

AFP
Los Angeles

A joint probe by the NFL and the NFL Players Association found no evidence Tom Brady suffered a concussion during the 2016 season, a statement said Wednesday.

A review of Brady's medical records by the league and player's union conducted with the quarterback's blessing uncovered no sign of concussion.

Brady also did not report or show any symptoms of concussion.

The probe was carried out after Brady's wife, Gisele Bündchen, told CBS television earlier this year that the New England Patriots star had suffered multiple concussions over the years.

"The NFL and NFLPA have conducted comprehensive evaluations of the Concussion Protocol as it applied to Tom Brady during the 2016-17 season," a statement by NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy read.

"This review included an examination of all game film from every Patriots' game last season, every report from the Unaffiliated Neurotrauma Consultants and Booth ATC Spotters assigned to those games and Mr. Brady's medical records, which were produced pursuant to a release signed by Mr. Brady.

"This review identified no evidence of any deviation from the Protocol by



In this February 5, 2017, picture, Tom Brady of the New England Patriots reacts after defeating the Atlanta Falcons to win Super Bowl 51 in Houston, Texas. (AFP)

the Patriots' medical staff or the Unaffiliated Neurotrauma Consultants assigned to Patriots' games or any indication that Mr. Brady sustained a

concussion or reported signs or symptoms consistent with having sustained a concussion."

Brady would not comment on his

medical history when quizzed by reporters in early August, his first session with the media since last season's Super Bowl.

"I don't want to get into things that happened in my past, certainly medical history and so forth. I really don't think that's anybody's business," the 40-year-old Brady said.

"I'm not sitting here worried about last year or five years ago. There are other people that do worry about that — my wife, or my parents, or my sisters, people that love me and care about me. But I do the best I can do to be prepared to play — mentally and physically — and I give the game everything I can."

Brazilian supermodel Bündchen confided on CBS in May she was concerned about her husband's long-term health.

"I just have to say, as a wife, as you know (the NFL) is not the most, let's say, unaggressive sport. Football, he had a concussion last year," she said.

"He has concussions pretty much every — I mean we don't talk about it. But he has concussions and I don't really think it's a healthy thing for your body to go through."

"You know, that kind of aggression all the time, that cannot be healthy for you. I'm planning on having him be healthy and do a lot of fun things when we're like 100 I hope."

The Patriots were scheduled to open the 2017 season last night against Kansas City Chiefs at the Gillette Stadium.



CYCLING

Armee wins Vuelta 18th stage, Froome extends lead

'Everything has to come together and I managed to win because I had a really good last 15km'



Lotto Soudal's Belgian cyclist Sander Armee celebrates on the podium after winning the 18th stage of the 72nd edition of 'La Vuelta' Tour of Spain cycling race, a 169km route from Suances to Santo Toribio de Liebana, near Potes, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Santo Toribio de Liebana, Spain

Chris Froome extended his Vuelta a Espana lead over Vincenzo Nibali to 1min 37sec as Belgium's Sander Armee claimed the 18th stage. Armee edged out Alexey Lutsenko and Giovanni Visconti in a time of 4hr 09min 39sec for the 169km ride from Suances to Santo Toribio de Liebana as the general classification favourites allowed an early 20-strong breakaway group to fight for the stage win.

"Today in the breakaway with 20 guys we had a big gap and I knew I was one of the 20 guys who could win the stage," said Armee.

"Everything has to come together and I managed to win because I had a really good last 15km. I was really strong there."

Over 10 minutes back on Armee, Froome staved off a series of attacks in the chasing group with the help of his Sky teammates before accelerating himself in the final 600m to leave Nibali trailing.

The Briton picked up 21 seconds on the Italian to stretch his overall lead with just two competitive days of racing to go before Sunday's parade around central Madrid.

Froome is now a huge favourite to become just the third rider ever to win the Tour de France and Vuelta in the same year, and the first since the Vuelta was moved to after the Tour in the

cycling calendar back in 1995.

"As soon as I made an acceleration on the last climb, Wout Poels was straight on the radio saying 'Nibali is dropped, keep going', and I think that was exactly the result we were looking for today," said Froome.

The four-time Tour winner had lost 42 seconds to Nibali on Wednesday as he paid for his efforts in winning the only individual time trial of the race a day earlier. However, Froome made amends as only Alberto Contador and Michael Woods could stay with his attack on a category three climb to the finish.

"Yesterday was a tough stage for me and it feels great to extend my lead again by 21 seconds to Nibali," added Froome. "I certainly think a lot of guys paid

for making such a big effort yesterday and Nibali was one of those."

In his final race before retirement, Contador remains fifth overall but edged four seconds closer to a place on the podium, 1min 17sec behind Wilco Kelderman. Fabio Aru, the 2015 Vuelta champion, gained 12 seconds on the Froome group to move up to eighth overall.

Another undulating route awaits in Friday's 149.7km 19th stage from Caso to Gijon before Saturday's decisive mountainous queen stage that finishes with a climb up the Alto de l'Angliru.

Dutchman Boom takes Tour of Britain lead
Dutch rider Lars Boom took

the overall lead in the Tour of Britain after winning yesterday's stage five time trial.

The Lotto NL-Jumbo rider, who won the race in 2011, timed 19min 2sec around the 16-kilometre route in the coastal town of Clacton-on-Sea in southeast England.

Team-mate Victor Campenaerts of Belgium was second in the time trial, six seconds slower. He is eight seconds behind Boom overall, in second place.

The highest-placed Briton is Team Sky's Geraint Thomas, who is ninth overall after coming eighth on Thursday.

Today's 187km sixth stage will run from Newmarket to Aldeburgh. The race ends in Welsh capital Cardiff on Sunday.

RUGBY

Australia on potentially hostile turf for home Springboks Test

Reuters
Sydney

Australia will have the unfamiliar experience of heading into potentially hostile territory for a home Test match when they take on a resurgent South Africa side in the Rugby Championship in Perth tomorrow.

Western Australian rugby has been in open rebellion since the Western Force were kicked out of Super Rugby and the chance to make some kind of point to the Australian Rugby Union at the team's home stadium will be too good an opportunity to pass up.

Australia coach Michael Cheika is hoping the protests will be limited to the wearing of T-shirts in Force blue and suggested the Wallabies could be an agent of conciliation to the Perth public.

"There's been a lot of talk amongst the team around what Saturday is going to mean, in perhaps a symbolic sense from us as the team to the people over here," Cheika told reporters in the city yesterday.

Australia could certainly do with a win after sinking to fifth in the world in the wake of a loss to Scotland at home in June and back-to-back defeats to the All Blacks to open the Rugby Championship.

It is not all gloom on the pitch, however, with a fine performance in the narrow 35-29 defeat to the world champions in their last outing in Dunedin offering plenty to build on.

Cheika was forced to make two changes to his starting side and chose to make two more to a pack he thinks the Springboks will try and bully.

Stephen Moore's decision to be at the birth of his child gives Tatafu Polota-Nau the start

at hooker and offers 20-year-old Jordan Ulesse the chance to make his test debut off the bench after just 28 minutes of Super Rugby.

With Western Force winger Dane Haylett-Petty ruled out for the rest of the year with a bicep tear that will require surgery, Reece Hodge will stand in.

The Springboks could hardly be in a better place, riding high at number three in the world having rebounded from their appalling 2016 to win all five tests so far in 2017.

Coach Allister Coetzee made just two changes to the side that beat Argentina 41-23 in Salta two weeks ago, bringing Ross Cronje back at scrumhalf after injury and giving Pieter-Steph du Toit a run at lock in place of the rested Franco Mostert.

"Even though we travelled to three continents in 10 days, this group has the desire to get better, and learn from previous experiences," said Coetzee.

"The performance in Salta was not perfect, but we are looking forward to the next opportunity to improve as individuals and as a team."



Allister Coetzee

Mayweather-McGregor gate receipts short of record

Floyd Mayweather and Conor McGregor's money-spinning superfight failed to break the record for gate receipts at a Las Vegas Boxing bout, figures released by the Nevada State Athletic Commission revealed.

The controversial August 26 fight raked in \$55,414,865.79, well short of the \$72,198,500 generated by Mayweather's 2015 "Fight of the Century" against Manny Pacquiao at the MGM Grand. The Mayweather-McGregor bout, staged at the T-Mobile Arena, sold 13,094 tickets, well short of the venue's 20,500 capacity. The Mayweather-Pacquiao fight sold 16,219 tickets. A total of 137 complimentary tickets were given away for Mayweather-McGregor, won by Mayweather in a 10th-round technical knockout. Face-value ticket prices for Mayweather-McGregor were among the most expensive in history, with cheapest seats going for \$500 and the most expensive for as much as \$10,000.

Although the fight failed to challenge the Mayweather-Pacquiao gate total, it becomes the second highest-grossing gate in Las Vegas history, surpassing the \$20 million generated by Mayweather's 2013 defeat of Canelo Alvarez. The bout is also set to be one of the richest fights in history if the most bullish predictions of pay-per-view television sales are met. Some predictions have suggested the fight could threaten the 4.6 million buys generated by Pacquiao-Mayweather. Official numbers have not been released although executives from cable network Showtime Sports said they expected the bout would at least be second.

FOCUS

New-look All Blacks offer Pumas chance to shine

AFP
Wellington

Argentina will put their Rugby credibility on the line in New Plymouth this weekend against an All Blacks experimenting with their line-up.

Now in their sixth year of the Rugby Championship, much more was expected of the South Americans than just three wins from 29 matches. They have never beaten New Zealand.

Two years ago, things looked good for Los Pumas when they made the World Cup semi-finals and with the bulk of their squad joining the Jaguares to play Super Rugby the following year.

But in two games against the All Blacks last year they appeared to have taken a step backwards - conceding a total of 93 points.

Both sides have made seven changes for tomorrow's clash. While the All Blacks are looking to build depth, Argentina are in search of a glimmer of confi-

dence. Coach Daniel Hourcade tried to put a positive spin on the disappointing history against New Zealand when he named his side yesterday.

"For us to play against the All Blacks is always a huge motivation and you end up with positive things, because facing the best makes you grow," he said.

But Hourcade could be forgiven for wondering what to do next. Easing up on Argentina's traditional bruising forward game in favour of a more open, running style has not paid the desired dividends.

When Los Pumas do play tight, captain Agustin Creevy is able to muster a powerful unit that has caused the All Blacks problems in the past, but he will be without one of his finest lieutenants this weekend with 78-Test veteran Juan Manuel Leguizamón dropped.

Enforcer Tomas Lavanini was also not required despite being cleared of further punishment after being sent off against South Africa a fortnight ago when he collected two yellow cards.

In all there are four forward changes and three in the backs with Hourcade saying he chose his best line-up, which includes the return of Nicolas Sanchez to partner Tomas Cubelli in the halves.

If the All Blacks have concerns about their misfiring performances against Australia they were not showing it.

Instead, coach Steve Hansen did not hesitate to rest Sam Whitelock, Liam Squire, Aaron Smith, Ryan Crotty and Rieko Ioane who represent 201 Tests-worth of experience.

Sam Cane goes to the bench and Ben Smith goes on holiday - between them worth a further 110 Tests.

Up steps an injury-free Nehe Milner-Skudder for his first appearance since the 2015 World Cup final and a natural fit for the high-paced game Hansen is developing.

The experienced Israel Dagg and TJ Perenara also reinforce the backline along with Anton Lienert-Brown, while Luke Romano, Ardie Savea and the

bruising Vaea Fifita are added to the forwards.

Milner-Skudder's previous eight Tests have all been on the right wing but with Julian Savea out of favour he has put his hand up for the left wing role.

"He wants to give it a crack," Hansen said.

"This Test match is all about us taking opportunities. It's an opportunity for our players to grow individually and collectively as a team."

Hansen is keen to develop a flawless, fast game but the All Blacks could not fully deliver in their first two matches against Australia.

New Zealand went off the boil in the last 30 minutes of the first Test, conceding four tries after leading the Wallabies 54-6, and lacked accuracy and handling throughout the second which the All Blacks edged 35-29 with a last-gasp try.

But against an Argentina side already beaten 37-15 and 41-23 by the Springboks, there would appear to be room to hone their skills.



All Blacks coach Steve Hansen.

BUNDESLIGA

Mueller grumbles from Bayern's bench

'I don't know what qualities exactly the coach wants to see from me'



Thomas Müller is struggling for a place in Bayern's starting line-up under Carlo Ancelotti.

AFP
Berlin

Bayern Munich play Hoffenheim away tomorrow with the spotlight on whether out-of-favour Germany star Thomas Müller plays for the defending Bundesliga champions.

The 27-year-old World Cup winner is struggling for a place in Bayern's starting line-up under Carlo Ancelotti, but impressed for Germany on Monday, creating two goals in a 6-0 rout of Norway in a World Cup qualifier.

Bayern resume after the international break in second place in the table on goal difference behind Borussia Dortmund, who face Freiburg away.

Dortmund, Bayern, Hamburg, who host RB Leipzig today, and Hannover, who play Wolfsburg in a derby tomorrow, are the only teams with 100 per cent records after the opening two rounds.

Frustrated Mueller

Mueller fumed on Bayern's bench when Carlo Ancelotti dropped him from the starting side in the 2-0 win at Werder Bremen a fortnight ago.

"I don't know what qualities exactly the coach wants to see from me," moaned Mueller.

His frustration was clear after training with the first team in the build-up, only to be replaced by Thiago Alcantara in the starting lineup. By his own admission, Mueller struggled for form in the Bayern shirt in 2016/17, but Thiago blocks his path to the attacking midfield role behind striker Robert Lewandowski.

To compound Mueller's problems, new signing James Rodriguez is now back from injury and also battling for Bayern's Number 10 shirt. With nine months to go before the World Cup, Mueller's plight has not gone unnoticed by the national team's hierarchy.

"I wish that someone in the club would say, 'he must play',"

admitted Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff.

But Bayern are taking a hard stance. "No player has a guarantee of a regular place, it's not written in any contract, not even (Bayern captain) Manuel Neuer," Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge told Sky.

"There is only one man who decides who plays - the coach, Carlo Ancelotti."

Bayern defender David Alaba is out with an ankle injury suffered while on international duty with Austria.

Female ref debut

History is set to be made on Sunday when Bibiana Steinhaus becomes the first female referee in one of Europe's top leagues when she takes control of Hertha Berlin against Werder Bremen at Berlin's Olympic Stadium.

The 38-year-old police officer has been refereeing since 1999 and has officiated 81 matches in Germany's second tier since 2007.

Berlin boss Pal Dardai has said he will make a decision about whether Salomon Kalou faces Bremen with the 32-year-old having failed to score in his three Hertha games this season.

The Ivory Coast forward is just back from a two-legged World Cup qualifier against Gabon and has a habit of not playing well after returning from international duty.

"I will look deep in his eyes and know where he is ready to play on Sunday against Bremen or whether he is too tired," said Dardai.

Dortmund's near-record run
League leaders Dortmund have won their last 12 matches against Freiburg and star striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has scored six times in the six games he has won against the south-west German club.

He has scored twice in his last two appearances at Freiburg. Only Bayern have a longer winning streak in the Bundes-

liga, having won their last 14 games against Werder.

Liverpool winger Ryan Kent could make his Bundesliga debut after signing a one-year loan deal with Freiburg.

However, according to *Sport Bild* magazine, 17-year-old forward Jadon Sancho will not feature with Dortmund saying the English teenager is not yet ready following his move from Manchester City.

Fixtures (all times 1330 GMT unless stated)

Today
Hamburg v RB Leipzig
Tomorrow
Freiburg v Borussia Dortmund, Borussia Mönchengladbach v Eintracht Frankfurt, Augsburg v Cologne, Mainz v Bayer Leverkusen, Wolfsburg v Hannover 96, Hoffenheim v Bayern Munich (1630)
Sunday
Hertha Berlin v Werder Bremen, Schalke v Stuttgart (1600)

LA LIGA

Valverde banks on debutant Dembele to make instant impact against Espanyol

Reuters
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde will be banking on new signing Ousmane Dembele to fill the gap left by Neymar's departure as he looks to overcome off-pitch difficulties when the Catalans take on Espanyol tomorrow.

Barcelona have enjoyed a winning start in La Liga and despite all the off-field drama, Valverde is determined that they make it three wins out of three when they face his former club. Valverde had a two-year spell as an Espanyol player between 1986 and 1988, reaching the 1988 UEFA Cup final, and later guided Barcelona's city rivals to the 2007 UEFA Cup final, where they also lost on penalties, during a two-year tenure as coach.

So fond are Espanyol of their former striker that he has a gate named after him at their stadium but on Saturday they will be hoping to take advantage of institutional instability at Barcelona to end their torrid run at the Nou Camp.

Barca have won their last eight La Liga derbies at the Nou Camp dating back to 2009, including 4-0, 5-1 and 5-0 victories in their last three meetings, although there is some hope in Espanyol of ending that dismal run.

Barcelona had a frustrating

transfer window, failing to sign top target Philippe Coutinho after losing Neymar to Paris St Germain for a world record fee of 222 million euros (\$266 million), and there have also been calls to hold a vote of no confidence against president Josep Maria Bartomeu.

There is also unease at Barca over the future of talisman Lionel Messi and captain Andres Iniesta, who are both out of contract next summer and have yet to sign new deals.

"We haven't had a good time at the Nou Camp recently, it's always difficult and we have really struggled to win there, even to pick up a point, but I believe we can get something positive this time," said Espanyol midfielder Victor Sanchez.

"Right now everyone is talking about what is happening off the pitch at Barcelona, and we hope we can take advantage of that." Barca are one of only three teams in La Liga to win both their opening games, beating Real Betis and Alaves 2-0 without hitting top gear but are set to be boosted by the debut appearance of striker Dembele on Saturday.

The France international, 20, joined from Borussia Dortmund as a direct replacement for Neymar, becoming the second most expensive player of all time at 105 million euros, rising to up to 147 million including incentives, despite only playing professional football for two seasons.

SPAL hit the big time with Inter match

Unusual in many ways, unglamorously-named SPAL will know that they have definitely hit the big time when they visit Inter Milan on Sunday for their biggest game yet since returning to Serie A after a 49-year absence.

The only team ever to have competed in Serie A using an acronym as their name, Sunday's visit to one of Europe's most imposing stadiums will cap a remarkable rise for SPAL who only five seasons ago were playing in the fourth tier.

It is not just the name which is unusual about the team based in Ferrara, a historical walled city of around 130,000 people situated between Bologna and Venice.

The club, full name Societa Polisportiva Ars et Labor, was founded by Salesian priests in 1907 and is one of the oldest in the country. After being wound up and relaunched twice, mostly recently in 2013, to wipe out debts, SPAL won promotion from Serie B with an all-Italian squad, another rarity nowadays in the country. Another small piece of history has already been made this season thanks to forward Marco Borriello, whose goal in the 3-2 win over Udinese means he has scored for a record-equalling 12 Serie A clubs.

Although little-known among the younger generations of Italian fans, SPAL were a regular fixture in Serie A during the 1950s and 1960s but fell on hard times after being relegated in 1968. The crisis years saw SPAL languishing in the lower divisions until the turning-point in 2013 when the club was re-founded and merged with neighbours Giacomense.

Under new leadership, they quickly moved up to the third tier and things got even better after Leonardo Semplici took over as coach in December 2014, guiding them to successive promotions in 2016 and 2017 to take them back to the top flight.

Whether they can establish themselves is a different matter. The modest Paolo Mazza stadium holds only around 13,000 people, even after being upgraded, and they spent only 4.5 million euros (\$5.39 million) on transfers during the close season, compared to 86 million euros for Sunday's opponents Inter. But their start has been above expectations with a goalless draw away to Lazio followed by a dramatic 3-2 win over Udinese.

"Normally, we would expect to lose the three points against Inter. We know they are stronger than us but we will try to put our ideas into practice and, with humility, to make it into an enjoyable match," said Semplici, formerly in charge of Fiorentina's youth divisions. "It's especially emotional for me, who started at the bottom, to be able to face Inter coach Luciano Spalletti," he added.

FOCUS

Rodgers looks to Celtic young guns for help

AFP
Glasgow

Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers will return to his roots as he looks to his youth players to help his side through a busy month domestically and in Europe.

The Scottish champions return to action today following the international break when they travel to take on Hamilton at New Douglas Park.

It is a measure of the success of Rodgers' side that a large number of his players were involved in the recent World Cup qualifiers with six of the Scotland starting XI in the wins against Lithuania and Malta being drawn from the Hoops squad.

However, with seven games in 22 days - including the first Old Firm clash of the season as well as tough Champions League fixtures against Paris Saint-Germain and Anderlecht - the Celtic

boss will look to utilise his squad in order to keep his top stars fresh.

The Northern Irishman has already shown he isn't afraid of giving youth its chance in the first team. Last month against Kilmarnock Rodgers fielded a side with a starting line-up that had an average age of under 23 and included five graduates of Celtic's youth academy.

Rodgers takes a keen interest in the youth set-up at Parkhead having started his career as a youth coach at Reading before joining Chelsea as youth manager. And Celtic's own head of youth football, Chris McCart, says it is Rodgers' background that ensures young players will always get a chance at the Glasgow giants.

"It definitely helps that he was a youth coach. He's got empathy with every academy coach whether they are doing seven a side football, or five a side and no matter what age group," McCart said of the Celtic boss.

"He started off as an under nine coach, worked his way through and educated himself in different areas away from football.

"He is putting a lot of work in and is now starting to select the ones he thinks are ready and is prepared to put them in at vital times.

"The manager has been clear in communicating his philosophy, and he wants a similar pattern running all the way from the academy to the first team. He wanted a connection and let the youth coaches know they could knock on his door. It's happened a lot and they feel comfortable with that."

Rodgers' counterpart at Rangers, Pedro Caixinha, will get back to his day job again after delivering a series of lectures at the University of Lisbon during the international break.

The 46-year-old was talking to students attending a special postgraduate course for football coaches devised by Professor Antonio Veloso and Man-

chester United manager Jose Mourinho.

The Rangers fans will be hoping the Portuguese manager is able to communicate his ideas to his own players after the Ibrox club's shaky start to the season. The Gers host Dundee on Saturday having taken just seven points from their opening four games.

Elsewhere, Craig Levein faces a tough task as he starts his second spell in charge of Hearts with a match against an Aberdeen side that are the only team left with a 100 per cent record in the top flight.

Fixtures (1500 unless otherwise stated)

Today
Hamilton v Celtic (1945)
Tomorrow
Hearts v Aberdeen, Motherwell v Kilmarnock, Rangers v Dundee, Ross County v Partick Thistle, St Johnstone v Hibernian



SPOTLIGHT

EPL to close transfer window before season

AFP
London

English Premier League clubs voted yesterday to shut the 2018 close-season transfer window before the start of the 2018-19 campaign.

Following complaints by managers that transfer activity disturbs their preparations, clubs will not be able to register new players after 1600 GMT on the Thursday before the season starts.

The transfer window in Eu-

rope's other major leagues runs until August 31, meaning clubs outside England could buy players from English top-flight teams after the new Premier League deadline.

"Premier League clubs have today agreed to a rule amendment that will see the summer transfer window in any year end at 17:00 on the Thursday before the start of the season," the Premier League said in a statement.

"This is for Premier League clubs only and has no bearing on other leagues and competitions."

Europe's other major leagues - Spain's Liga, Italy's Serie A,

the German Bundesliga and France's Ligue 1 - now face a decision about whether to fall into line with England.

The move was announced following a meeting of club officials and is not believed to have been agreed unanimously

Juventus CEO Giuseppe Marotta says Serie A's 20 clubs are in agreement to "set the end of the transfer window on July 31" in Italy.

"The transfer window is exhausting," he said recently. "It's become a circus."

But the German league (DFL) said there was no clear consensus among the Bundesliga's top clubs. "The theme of the transfer window - regardless of the decision of the Premier League - was on the agenda of today's general meeting of sports representatives of the Bundesliga and the second Bundesliga at the DFL, and it became clear that there is no definitive opinion among the clubs," said a DFL spokesman.

The Premier League's move was announced following a meeting of club officials and is not believed to have been agreed unanimously.

Wenger approval
Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger gave his backing to the decision before it was announced.

"Even in the games, you sit there before the games and even in players' minds they have no clarity," he told reporters at his weekly press conference.

"Are they in? Are they out? Are they half in? Are they half out? Are they tapped up in the afternoon of the game by people who want to get them out? It's not the way to work and it's uncomfortable."

"Every single manager in the

league would agree that it's time to kick that out before the season starts and not continue to have players in the dressing room who are half out and half in."

England's Football League - the second, third and fourth tiers - is not affected by the move.

Premier League clubs spent a record £1.4 billion (\$1.8 billion, 1.5 billion euros) on new players during the 2017 close-season window.

The window closed last Thursday, three weeks after the new season had started. Chris Hughton, manager of newly-promoted Brighton and Hove

Albion, welcomed the decision. "That is good news," he said. "Most managers would say the same. You have a hectic enough time as it is preparing for the season."

Earlier this week, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin gave his support to making the close-season player trading period shorter.

Transfer windows were introduced by world governing body FIFA in 2002.

In Europe they generally run from the start of June to the end of August, with a shorter mid-season window in January.

PREVIEW

Liverpool out to make title statement at Manchester City

'I didn't fancy Liverpool before the season started but they've made some decent buys'

Reuters
London

Liverpool could hardly be in higher spirits as they set out on the short trip to Manchester City tomorrow hoping to make a strong case for their Premier League title prospects.

Pep Guardiola's City and neighbours Manchester United, together with champions Chelsea, have already been installed as the trio most likely to contest the title, but optimism is surging on Merseyside after a free-scoring August.

A 4-0 thrashing of a complacent Arsenal side before the international break means Jurgen Klopp's side have seven points from nine during an opening period in which they also safely negotiated a Champions League playoff against Hoffenheim.

What is more, Liverpool's transfer window business has been hailed as some of the best amongst the leading clubs.

Egyptian forward Mohamed Salah was rated by number-crunchers at the CIES Football Observatory as the bargain of the summer after arriving in a deal worth a reported 36 million pounds (\$47.01 million) from Roma and a goal on his debut plus strikes against Hoffenheim and Arsenal have quickly endeared him to Anfield's faithful.

The deadline-day signing from Arsenal of Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain - a player Klopp believes can become a Liverpool great - adds more firepower to an attack already boasting Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino and which will soon be further boosted by the return from injury of Adam Lallana.

The rising stock of midfielder Jordan Henderson, who has captained England twice in the past week, and a superb goal for teenager Ben Woodburn on his Wales debut means the continued uncertainty surrounding Philippe Coutinho and his desire to join Barcelona is a manageable distraction. No wonder pundits are taking Liverpool seriously.



Liverpool's Roberto Firmino scores a goal against Arsenal on August 27. (Reuters)

"I didn't fancy Liverpool before the season started but they've made some decent buys and kept Coutinho which is a boost for them," former Manchester United great Ryan Giggs conceded this week. "After the business they've done I've probably changed my mind and they will be in the mix."

ARSENAL DEMOLITION

Liverpool have a strong record against City - winning four of the last six league clashes between the sides - and last lost to them in the league three years

ago. Last season, Klopp's side took 20 points from their matches against Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur, City, United and Arsenal - more than any other club - and the recent demolition of Arsenal maintained their form against the big clubs.

City, who also have seven points, have match-winners everywhere though, even if they will be without former Liverpool forward Raheem Sterling who was sent off for over-celebrating a last-gasp winner against Bournemouth last time out.

While Sterling's absence will be a blow, Guardiola's options are so numerous that Sergio Aguero was only a substitute against Bournemouth and he is likely to return.

Defensive worries remain despite a huge summer outlay and 50-million-pound right back Kyle Walker will return from suspension with the unenviable task of trying to stop the rampaging runs of Mane - a battle that could determine which of the two title rivals will be celebrating.

Leaders Manchester United, who have a 100 percent record

and are yet to concede a goal while scoring 10, travel to Stoke City for Saturday's late kickoff.

Promoted high-flyers Huddersfield Town, who have also kept three clean sheets and are level on points with Liverpool and Manchester City, play at bottom side West Ham United on Monday. Arsenal, who have lost their last two games, should avoid slumping to three defeats in a row when they host Bournemouth on Saturday. Champions Chelsea are at Leicester City on the same day.

FOCUS

Wenger brushes off talk of crisis at faltering Arsenal

Reuters
London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has brushed off suggestions that the north London club are in the midst of a crisis three games into the season and called for perspective after their 4-0 defeat by Liverpool in their last Premier League game.

The defeat was Arsenal's second in a row, but the manager backed his team to respond when they host Bournemouth in the league tomorrow.

"I could never understand what a crisis is," Wenger told a news conference on Thursday. "It is important to focus on what is in front of you. Every single defeat is a crisis, yes?"

"I love and believe in my players and we need our fans behind the team... We will win back the points we have dropped away from home. It is vital to take some perspective."

Wenger also backed striker Alexis Sanchez to get back to his best after his proposed move to Manchester City failed to materialise on transfer deadline day.

Sanchez stayed after Arsenal was unable to sign a replace-

ment in time and the manager said he was confident the Chile international was fully committed to the team's cause.

"I have no doubt about Alexis' mind and mentality," Wenger added. "He needs to come back to full fitness which he was not at Liverpool... he's strong mentally and hopefully he will back to his best."

Wenger reiterated his calls for the transfer window to be shut before the season begins across Europe, saying allowing uncertainty over the futures of key players to spill over into the start of the season was hurting the game.

"Players have no clarity," he said. "They could be tapped up in the afternoon of the game. It is uncomfortable and not the way to work," he said.

"Every manager would agree that it should be kicked out before the first game. Then you wouldn't have a player half in the dressing room and half out."

Midfielder Santi Cazorla has returned to light running for the first time since having surgery on his right ankle.

The Spain international has not played since October and is not expected to feature for the first team before Christmas.



WORLD CUP

Australia to face Syria in qualifier in Sydney

Reuters
Sydney

Sydney's Olympic Stadium will host the second leg of Australia's World Cup qualifier against Syria in October and also the home tie in the inter-continental playoff if Ange Postecoglou's side make it that far.

The Socceroos failed to qualify automatically for next year's finals in Russia after they could only sneak a 2-1 win over Thailand in their final match in Melbourne on Tuesday. Saudi Arabia then beat Group B winners Japan 1-0 in Jeddah later on Tuesday to clinch the second automatic spot, consigning Australia to the third-placed playoff against Syria.

"We are all disappointed that we did not achieve direct qualification from our group but we are confident we can still make it to Russia," football Federation Australia Chief Executive David Gallop said in

a statement yesterday. "It's just a longer, harder road but we are focused on supporting Ange, his support staff and the playing group."

"We are experienced in the challenges of being on the road for away games but being at home brings our players in from the four corners of the globe and we expect it to be a big occasion for the football family and the nation."

The first leg of the final round of Asian qualifying will be played on Oct. 5, with the second leg in Sydney on October 10. Syria have been playing their "home" World Cup qualifiers in Malaysia because of the security situation in the war-torn country.

The winner then faces the fourth-placed side from the North and Central America CONCACAF region, which is currently the United States with two matches remaining, in a two-legged playoff in November. Australia have featured in the last three editions of the World Cup finals.

Tottenham's Wanyama out for weeks with knee injury

Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Victor Wanyama will miss tomorrow's Premier League trip to Everton and his team's first Champions League game of the season against Borussia Dortmund next week with a knee injury, his club said. Wanyama was injured in training and missed Spurs' last league match against Burnley. He withdrew from Kenya's squad for their recent friendly international with Mozambique and Tottenham said yesterday he would be out for a "few weeks".

Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino is also unlikely to risk new signing Serge Aurier against Everton, as the Ivory Coast international will only return to the club from international duty later.

"We need to assess (Aurier) because he will arrive this afternoon in a few hours... because he played Tuesday and travelled today to France, Paris, and now he's travelled from France to London," Pochettino told a news conference. "We need to see how he is. But you can imagine for him it will be very tough to play... We need to assess him today and tomorrow."

Pochettino also said defender Toby Alderweireld was happy at the club and ruled out the Belgium interna-

tional moving away in January after the player's agent called on Tottenham earlier this week to offer his client improved terms.

"(Alderweireld) was talking with me in my office this morning and he's so happy, he wants to make it clear he is fully committed with the club," the manager said. "He's happy with his contract, two years plus one. It's not an issue. I recognise some rumours in the last few days. But he is so relaxed, so calm. His idea is to try to play here... there's no reason to move."

The Argentine urged his players to bounce back strongly from the disappointment of drawing 1-1 with Burnley in their last league match. "Always our ambition is to win," Pochettino said. "It's true that in the last game at Wembley we were disappointed with the result. Now we have an opportunity to get three points."

"We have a lot of respect for Everton. They have a great manager and great players. They signed a lot of players during the transfer window. It's a new Everton but it's still the same philosophy and course it will be a very tough game."

Meanwhile Everton manager Ronald Koeman said he

was "very disappointed" by striker Wayne Rooney after the former England captain was charged with drink-driving last week.

Rooney, who has impressed on the pitch since returning to boyhood club Everton in the summer after 13 years at Manchester United, has been bailed to appear at Stockport Magistrates' Court on September 18.

Speaking for the first time about the incident, Koeman read a short statement, saying: "I'm very disappointed by the situation. We have spoken last Tuesday." Koeman refused to discuss any disciplinary action the club might decide to take against the 31-year-old, but said he would be available for selection against Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League at the weekend. Rooney has scored twice since returning to Goodison Park. Koeman said midfielder Ross Barkley who has a hamstring injury would be out for two months. A proposed transfer deadline day move for him to Chelsea failed to materialise. "Ross was open to a move and there was an agreement between Chelsea and Everton," Koeman said, saying Barkley had explained to him why he decided against the move to Stamford Bridge.