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GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

Dropping Man
City star Sane is a risk for Germany

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ATHLETICS

Barshim up for a 'fight' for supremacy in Oslo

By Sports Reporter
Doha

"I would rather lose jumping 2.45m than winning with 2.30m for example," Mutaz Barshim had said ahead of the Diamond League season-opener in Doha earlier this year.

Like any champion the Qatari high jumper is hungry for quality competition that in turn also pushes him to do better.

And that's exactly what Barshim, who turns 27 later this month, is going to get when he lines up at the Oslo Diamond League event today.

The world champion and the 2017 Male World Athlete of the Year cleared 2.40m at home in May, becoming the only athlete to have hit the mark for six straight seasons, before winning in Eugene with 2.36m.

Close on his heels was world indoor cham-

pion Danil Lysenko with 2.32m. Lysenko has indoor efforts of 2.37m and 2.36m this year, and would have blown away the cobwebs in his outdoor debut in Eugene.

"I came here to fight," Barshim said ahead of today's Bislett Games. "I am greedy, I want everything. I always speak to my coach before a competition and say, 'coach if you could give me one piece of advice what would it be?' but tomorrow he just said, 'go and jump, jump high,' so hopefully I will do that."

With not many major championships lined up for this season Barshim said his goals were very clear – records.

"I'm on the right approach to this and hopefully it will go this year," he said. "There aren't too many championships to focus on so my goal coming to every meet is records. I want to go higher this year. I'm coming to do my best."

For all you know, the man, who has come

closest to Javier Sotomayor's 25-year-old record of 2.45m, goes high enough to prove the Cuban right, who earlier this year said "only Barshim could break my mark".

Also in action today is Barshim's compatriot Abderrahman Samba, who has screamed out of the blocks so far this year and has cracked 48 seconds on each of his three outings in 400m hurdles. The most recent of those came in Rome last week, where Samba came from behind to win in an Asian record of 47.48.

Samba will be up against world champion Karsten Warholm, who has shown a particular liking for Bislett Stadium, having announced his arrival here last year when he set a national record of 48.25.

In Rome, Warholm was quick in the first 300 metres but conceded the lead to Samba. Yasmani Copello of Turkey and Kerron Clement, the reigning Olympic champion, are also in the line-up.



TENNIS / FRENCH OPEN

Rain cuts short Rafa fightback, Muguruza crushes Sharapova

Spanish third seed, who was the champion in Paris in 2016, swept aside the Russian 6-2, 6-1 in an hour and 10 minutes

AFP
Paris

Rafael Nadal was locked in a French Open quarter-final tussle with Argentinian Diego Schwartzman when rain ended play yesterday, after Garbine Muguruza thrashed Maria Sharapova to reach a last-four showdown with top seed Simona Halep.

World number one Nadal lost his first set at Roland Garros in three years, and when bad weather first interrupted the match the 10-time champion was in serious trouble with Schwartzman up a break in the second.

The players briefly returned to the court, giving the 32-year-old Spaniard enough time to reel off three straight games, but the rains came again for a second and final time when he was serving for the set.

The match will resume today with Schwartzman leading 6-4, 3-5 (15-30).

The winner of the match will play either third seed Marin Cilic or Schwartzman's compatriot Juan Martin del Potro.

Their last-eight match was level at 6-6 (5/5) in a first-set tie-break on Court Suzanne Lenglen after Del Potro had earlier missed five break points.

Nadal had won 37 consecutive sets at Roland Garros since his 2015 quarter-final defeat by Novak Djokovic, but dropped serve three times to the enterprising Schwartzman in an exciting opener.

The 25-year-old took his third set point with a rasping forehand up the line, after being made to wait when a spectator fell ill in the stands.

Nadal made 14 unforced errors and struck just four winners in a poor first set, before having both of his wrists strapped by the trainer.

Schwartzman, who had never even reached a Grand Slam quarter-final until last year's US Open, broke first in the second set as Nadal uncharacteristically



Spain's Garbine Muguruza returns the ball to Russia's Maria Sharapova (right) during their women's singles quarter-final match on day eleven of the French Open at Roland Garros in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

blew a 40-15 lead, capped by two wild forehands.

The Court Philippe Chatrier, which was half-full during Muguruza's dismantling of Sharapova earlier in the afternoon, was packed with a crowd living every point when rain started to fall.

Play continued though, with the set following a similar pattern to the first, as Nadal broke back before dropping his serve to 15.

The players were forced off the court for 40 minutes, but when they returned Nadal levelled for 3-3 and let out a trademark roar of 'vamos!'

The Spaniard, who won five straight games after a rain delay to beat Alexander Zverev in the

Rome Masters final last month, managed three in a row this time before play was ended for the day.

MUGURUZA CRUSHES SHARAPOVA

Muguruza condemned Sharapova to her heaviest Grand Slam defeat in more than six years and will face top seed Simona Halep for a place in the final against either Sloane Stephens or Madison Keys.

The Spanish third seed, who was the champion in Paris in 2016, swept aside the Russian 6-2, 6-1 in just an hour and 10 minutes.

Her semi-final with Halep will also decide the world number one spot next week.

Current number one Halep made the semi-finals for the third time by battling past Germany's Angelique Kerber 6-7 (2), 6-3, 6-2.

Sharapova, playing at Roland Garros for the first time since 2015, suffered her most one-sided defeat at the Slams since a 6-3, 6-0 loss to Victoria Azarenka in the 2012 Australian Open final.

"I am very pleased to be in another final in Paris," said Muguruza who has yet to drop a set in the tournament and claimed her first win over Sharapova in four meetings.

"I was up against a great player so I had to make sure I brought my best tennis."

Sharapova made 27 unforced

errors, was broken six times and served six double faults in only her fifth loss from 25 Grand Slam quarter-finals.

"To have had the victories that I have had, to have the results that I have, obviously moving a step in the right direction," said the five-time Grand Slam champion who had made the last-eight in Madrid and semis in Rome in the run-up to Paris.

"But today was certainly not one of those steps."

Two-time runner-up Halep came back from a set down for the second time in the tournament to see off 12th seed Kerber, who was bidding to become the first German woman in the last-four since Steffi Graf in 1999.



Argentina's Diego Schwartzman became the first man to take a set off Spain's Rafael Nadal at Roland Garros in three years. (AFP)



WORLD CUP

Dropping City star Sane is a risk for Germany

Forward has not repeated his league form for Germany and Brandt offers more tactical flexibility

By Martin Laurence
The Guardian

There have been a number of surprising omissions from World Cup squads this summer – Mauro Icardi, Radja Nainggolan, Joe Hart and Jack Wilshere among them – but Joachim Löw's decision to leave Leroy Sané at home has undoubtedly been the biggest. The PFA Young Player of the Year and Premier League winner enjoyed a superb season for Manchester City, with his absence from the Germany squad shining further light on the remarkable talent at the reigning champions' disposal.

Faced with the choice of Sané and Julian Brandt for his final spot out wide, Löw went with the Bayer Leverkusen youngster. "That was a very close decision between him [Sané] and Julian Brandt," said the head coach. "Draxler, Reus and Müller are set. Leroy is a huge talent. He will be back again from September. He had not arrived in international matches yet. It was a very close decision. If it was a 100 metre race, it would have been a photo finish. There are certainly easier days in the life of a national team head coach than the day where I have to send players home. The disappointment was huge, as you would expect. It's as if you are stood at the check-in desk for your flight to Moscow, but are then prevented from boarding."

None of the players picked instead of Sané can match his statistics for the season just finished. The City forward scored 10 goals and set up 15, meaning he had a direct hand in 25 goals – more than any player under 23 in Europe's top five leagues. In comparison, Brandt scored a respectable nine goals in the Bundesliga but registered just three assists; Marco Reus scored seven goals in 11 appearances for Borussia Dortmund but did not pick up a single assist; and Julian Draxler had a direct hand in just nine league goals at PSG where he was in and out of the team. In addition, Sané's average of 3.2 successful dribbles per 90 minutes was substantially more than Draxler (2.4), Brandt (1.7) and Reus (1.3) achieved and his ability to get in behind opposing defenders is something Germany may miss.

That being said, Löw made the decision with the philosophy of the national team in mind. Dribbling is not as important to Germany as picking a pass through the opposition. Brandt was



Leroy Sane scored 10 goals and set up 15 more in his 27 appearances for Manchester City this season but has not fired for Germany. (AFP)

also favoured as he has more experience of playing from the right flank – where Müller is the only other option in the squad. Both players are the same age, 22, but the Leverkusen winger has earned more international caps (15 to Sané's 12) and, while Brandt has not exactly set the world alight at international level, he has at least scored for his country – unlike Sané.

Sané has impressed for City but he hasn't come close to replicating his league form for Germany, who do not use the width of the pitch the way Pep Guardiola's team do. Manchester City

employed the same tactic over and over again this season as they racked up 106 league goals. Kevin De Bruyne or David Silva would pick a pass between the opposing full-back and centre-back for their wingers to collect, cut in and roll the ball across the six-yard box for a tap-in.

That tactic helped Sané post exceptional figures, with his assist tally almost entirely dependent on that blueprint. Sané hugged the touchline before bursting behind his full-back, but Germany do not play that way. With Sané's best traits underused by the na-

tional team, he is not the same threat. In general play he doesn't have the same technical ability as those players chosen ahead of him.

Sané offers something the squad lacks: electric pace and unpredictable movement, which would be a weapon from the bench at the very least. However, his performances on the international scene haven't stacked up to those of Marco Reus – who has missed the last two major tournaments through injury but is fit again – and Julian Draxler, who is something of a favourite of the coach given his ability to switch positions with

Mesut Özil if necessary.

Germany should have little problem escaping a group containing Mexico, Sweden and South Korea but variety will become more important in the latter stages of the tournament, their natural habitat – they have reached the semi-finals, at the very least, in their last six major tournaments. If the reigning champions fail to reach the last four, Löw should expect to field plenty of questions about whether it was a mistake to overlook a player who has been in blistering form for his club, if not his country, over the last year.

Russia says ready to thwart WC security threats

Moscow: Russia said yesterday it was ready to thwart any threats to the World Cup, which kicks off in Moscow next week, as a massive security effort ramps up. The security "measures are really unprecedented... They are based on our experience with such events and we have also studied international experience," said Alexei Lavrishchev, head of security operations in the FSB domestic security service.

At least 600,000 international visitors are expected to travel to Russia for the World Cup, which will see matches played in 11 cities from June 14 through July 15. Russia hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, which went off without a hitch.

"Today, there are no threats we have detected against the participants and visitors to the World Cup," Lavrishchev told a news conference. "Nevertheless, after the long years of preparations we have created a clear security plan and we are ready to avert and overcome any security threats..." he said.

Security measures have been stepped up in the cities hosting matches, with some business activities limited and the mayor of at least one city urging residents who don't plan to attend the games to go to their country homes. Anton Gusev, the interior ministry's point man for the World Cup, said all of Russia's various police and security forces have been mobilised to ensure safety. He declined to provide a number of police and security forces staff that have been assigned to the World Cup.

Russia has more to worry about than violence breaking out among football fans. Islamic State and the Al Qaeda have made numerous threats against the country since Moscow intervened in the Syria conflict. FIFA, the world football governing body, has said it has full confidence in Russia's ability to ensure security for the World Cup.

The host nation will kick off the action against Saudi Arabia on June 14 in the 80,000-capacity Luzhniko stadium in Moscow, the historic crucible of Soviet and Russian sport, which will also host the final.

SPOTLIGHT

Uzbekistan get behind top referee

AFP
Tashkent

When the World Cup kicks off in Russia next week, football lovers in Uzbekistan will be roaring on a remarkable referee rather than their national team. Ravshan Irmatov, 40, is something of a contradiction in international football and an unlikely hero in the central Asian state.

Going into the tournament in Russia where at least two million Uzbek migrants live, Irmatov has officiated more World Cup matches than any other referee in history. He is widely regarded as one of the top referees in the game.

Yet the country he represents has never graced the sport's most prestigious event. "They are getting closer all the time. This time they just missed out," the softly-spoken Irmatov said as he warmed up for a clash between the Uzbek league's third and fourth-placed sides. "Our people love football and our new president has made developing football a priority. I am confident we will see Uzbekistan at the World Cup soon, perhaps at Qatar in 2022."

It would not be surprising if Irmatov, who was the youngest referee at his first World Cup in South Africa in 2010, made it to that tournament, too. Little-known in Europe prior to 2010, where he tied a record for the most matches refereed in a single tournament (five), Irmatov had already been named Asia's best referee two years running by the Asian Football Confederation.

He has now earned that honour a total of five times and has refereed the final of the World Cup twice, but still looks back on the opening match in South Africa, where he also refereed a semi-final, with special fondness.

"To be the youngest referee in the tournament and get selected to officiate a match people have been waiting for for four years was unbelievable. I felt like I was walking in a dream. I had to pinch myself," he said.

Wherever Irmatov goes in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital of 2.5m people, he finds



Uzbek referee Ravshan Irmatov has officiated more World Cup matches than any other referee in history. (AFP)

himself accepting requests to pose for pictures and sign autographs. It is a celebrity that seems ill-suited to a man who exudes hard work and humility.

At a recent match pitting FC Bunyodkor against a team from the historic city of Bukhara, the announcement over the PA system of his name was greeted by a volley of enthusiastic applause. During the tournament in Brazil in 2014, the hashtag #IrmatovBest trended on Twitter, as Uzbek users showered praise on their compatriot and lobbied – unsuccessfully as it turned out – for him to officiate the final.

But Irmatov's arrival on the world refereeing circuit was only made possible thanks to an injury that ended his playing career and a surprise induction into the world of officiating during a youth match in Tashkent.

"My father was in charge of a youth team and I was helping him. During one of their games, the designated referee did not arrive. My father gave me a whistle and said 'Do as best as you can,'" he recalled. "I didn't have any yellow or red cards but it somehow clicked for me. I found that I got a lot of

pleasure from refereeing."

Uzbek interest in the tournament in Russia will be especially keen given the huge numbers of Uzbek citizens who live and work there and the relatively low cost of flights between the two countries. For Irmatov, the dream of making it to Russia with his officiating team began the moment the Brazil World Cup wrapped up.

"We had to sacrifice a lot, work hard in every training session with one goal: to get to Russia," said Irmatov. "Of course the fact that so many of our people will be there and will travel there means that it is a special opportunity to bring joy to our supporters."

But even if their focus will be firmly on the man wearing black shorts, Irmatov will be doing what he can to stay out of the limelight.

"A referee should not be going out onto the pitch trying to be the man of the match," he said. "First and foremost our job is to preserve the image of football. As long as you respect the spirit (of the sport) and protect footballers from injuries, they will respect you, too."

FOCUS

Controversy took toll on Germany star Gundogan

AFP
Berlin

After being booed by Germany fans last weekend, **Ilkay Gundogan** admits being affected by the criticism he and Mesut Ozil received in the wake of their controversial meeting with Turkey president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"Some of the reactions hit me, especially the personal insults," Manchester City star Gundogan told reporters at Germany's World Cup training camp in northern Italy. "I understand that not everyone had to like it. I'm always open to criticism, everyone has their own opinion, that's why we have freedom of expression. That's what I stand for, and that's exactly why I feel privileged to be born and raised in Germany, but I also don't want to be insulted."

Germany kick-off their World Cup campaign against Mexico in Moscow on June 17 having also drawn Sweden and South Korea in Group F. However, 'die Mannschaft' is winless in their last five games after losing 2-1 at Austria on Saturday, when Gundogan and Ozil were booed early on by travelling German fans in Klagenfurt.

Gundogan hopes things improve in Leverkusen on Friday when the world champions aim for a moral-boosting win in a friendly against Saudi Arabia, who play Russia in the World Cup opener on June 14. "You're used to being whistled by opposing



fans, but when your own fans do it, that's hard to live with – let's see how it is in Leverkusen," said Gundogan.

Last month, he and Arsenal midfielder Ozil unwittingly stirred up tensions between Ankara and Berlin by posing for pictures with Erdogan during his three-day visit to Britain ahead of the Turkey elections on June 24.

German Football Association (DFB) president Reinhard Grindel said the pair had allowed themselves to be "manipulated" and there were even calls to drop them from the World Cup squad. Yildirim Demiroren, the boss of the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) fired back that Grindel's comments were "slandorous" and had heightened tensions with Turkey and Germany both vying to host the Euro 2024 finals.

German politicians laid into the footballers, especially after Gundogan presented Erdogan with a Man City shirt, signed "to

my president", which was immediately pounced upon by Germany's political right.

"Why does Gundogan play for the German national team, if he recognises Erdogan as his president?" tweeted AfD politician Beatrix von Storch.

However, Gundogan says the criticism was unfair to both him and Ozil, who has stopped commenting on the controversy. "In recent years, we have done a lot to promote integration in Germany," said Gundogan, also referring to Ozil.

"We don't just have the Turkish side in us because of our parents and our families. We were born and raised in Gelsenkirchen. The city has a very high share of immigrants. It was therefore a deep blow for me that it is presented in such a way that we are not integrated and would not live by German values. We were there because Turkish-born footballers from the Premier League were invited to a foundation event and the photo was taken there."

Gundogan and Ozil even met Germany's president Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Berlin in the wake of the controversy before holding clear-the-air talks with Grindel and senior German FA (DFB) figures. "The experience (the fall-out) wasn't easy, as, because of our Turkish roots, we still have very strong connections to Turkey," said Gundogan.

"But that doesn't mean that we have ever said that Mr Steinmeier is not our president or Mrs Merkel is not our Chancellor. It was never about making a political statement."

SPOTLIGHT

England have racism plan but walk-off unlikely: Southgate

England defender Danny Rose has told his family not to attend the World Cup because he fears they may be racially abused in Russia

Reuters
London

England have a plan to deal with any cases of racism that emerge at the World Cup, manager Gareth Southgate said yesterday after fullback Danny Rose said he had told his family not to come to Russia for fear of racism.

But he said it was unlikely to involve walking off the pitch. "The players, like everyone else, don't really know what to expect," he said. "We have had conversations explaining that. We are all hopeful that it will go well, but we are having conversations in case (racism) happens. We have a plan in place. We have personal support, team support and official protocol in place," Southgate told a news conference.

Rose, who suffered personal racial abuse when he played for England's under-21s in Serbia in 2012, told the *Evening Standard*: "I've told my family I don't want them going out there because of racism and anything else that may happen."

Southgate said that the players and staff had discussed the issue but suggested that, if there were incidents, leaving the field was not likely to be an option. "In an idealistic world people would say to walk off the pitch but that means we would be thrown out of the tournament, which... many people would agree with."

"I don't think the players would want that because they have worked all their lives to play at a World Cup."

It's important to get the balance right but it will be tough to please everybody. I think everyone knows how tight-knit a group we are," he added.

The England manager, who said his team were "the most diverse" to be sent to a World Cup said he had sympathy for Rose over the issue. "I wasn't aware of the conversation he had had with his family. Everything else he has said he talked to us about because we had a meeting with the players a few nights ago."

"For the benefit of the other players I asked him to share his experiences in Serbia. What was clear was that he felt let down by the authorities, and that was sad to hear. He is part of our team and part of our family for the next few months, so we intend to protect our players. No one knows what is going to happen in Russia but he felt there could be something his family experiences and he thought that might distract from his football."

"I sympathise 100%. He has had a



England manager Gareth Southgate (second right) and captain Harry Kane during a training session yesterday. (Reuters)

personal experience of that. I asked him in front of the group because it might be helpful for the younger members of the group to hear that. He talked about the fines that seem to have not had any impact. We have this situation because of a lack of education, generally speaking. We are decades into having a multi-racial society and we are far from perfect. And other nations are sadly still not at the same stage that we are," he added.

The England manager said he hoped his team would serve as an example of multiculturalism working. "The biggest impact we can have is as one of the most diverse squads to have left England, and the way that they all get on, and hopefully, that message will come through."

ENGLAND TO ROTATE WORLD CUP SQUAD AGAINST COSTA RICA

England will ring the changes for today's friendly against Costa Rica in Leeds with Southgate warning against complacency and keen to give his entire squad playing time before the World Cup. England beat Nigeria 2-1 at Wembley on Saturday and will face a tricky test against fellow-qualifiers Costa Rica, who reached the quarter-finals four years ago in Brazil.

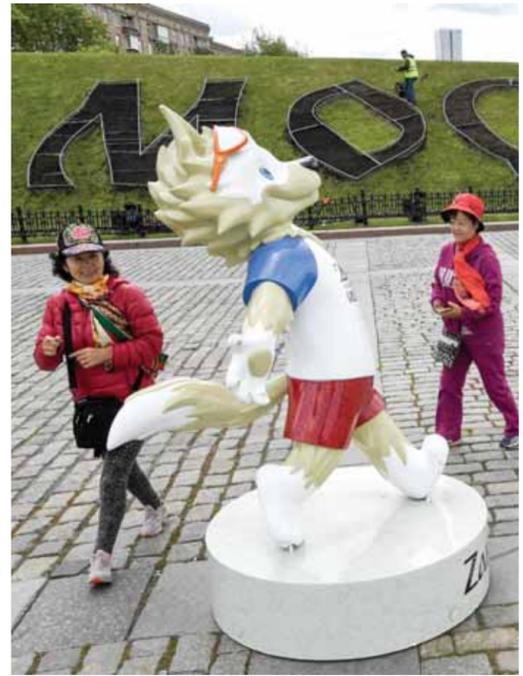
One change to his side that Southgate confirmed yesterday is that Stoke City goalkeeper Jack Butland will start ahead of Everton's Jordan Pickford, who has been handed the number one shirt. "For sure Jack Butland plays in goal," Southgate said.

"We will make a lot of changes and Trent Alexander-Arnold will get a debut. One of the keys of us getting through these two matches was to try and make sure every member of our squad gets... game time. You want to know who is in form and any time a player has 10 minutes or 90 minutes on the field they have an opportunity to make a statement in the way they play," he added.

While England's World Cup lineup has begun to take shape in Southgate's mind, he said there remained some openings for players who can make an impression. "There are definitely places up for grabs for the first game of the tournament," said Southgate, adding he had full confidence on youngster Alexander-Arnold.

FOCUS

Russia throws off isolation as it gears up for the World Cup



Tourists pose for pictures with a statue of Zabivaka, the official mascot for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Moscow yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Moscow

Russia throws open its doors for the World Cup in a week's time, with superstars Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi performing in a country sharply at odds with some of the participating countries.

The month-long celebration of the world's most popular sport has been haunted by fears over racism and violence as well as diplomatic spats. But Vladimir Putin has left no stone unturned making sure the biggest event Russia has seen since Moscow's 1980 Summer Olympic seduces a sceptical world. Twelve sparkling stadiums in 11 cities spanning the European portion of the world's largest country are ready after getting their last licks of paint.

The host nation will kick off the action against Saudi Arabia on June 14 in the 80,000-capacity Luzhniki stadium in Moscow, the historic crucible of Soviet and Russian sport, which will also host the final. Brazil's Neymar has recovered from a long-term injury to join Argentina's Messi and Portugal's Ronaldo to fight for the right to lift the trophy on July 15.

Almost every second person on Earth tuned into the last edition of the spectacular in Brazil in 2014. That tournament saw the hosts suffer a traumatic 7-1 beating by Germany in the semi-finals that left a nation obsessed by football in shock.

Eventual champions Germany and Brazil again top a list of favourites that also includes Spain and past winners Argentina and France. Russia's chances of doing something special are modest.

The hosts are the second-lowest ranked team of the 32 in the final and are riven by internal squabbles and injuries. Putin counters that Russia will come out tops simply by pulling off the most expensive World Cup ever staged while struggling under the weight of international sanctions. "The organisers," said Putin when asked to pick this year's likely winner.

The West's penalties are a response to an ever more aggressive foreign policy Putin has pushed in the eight years since securing the hosting rights over England in a vote tainted by bribery charges. Russia has annexed Crimea from Ukraine and defied the West by unleashing a bombing campaign in support of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

The US intelligence community believes Moscow meddled in America's 2016 presidential election. Its British counterpart says Russia used a nerve agent in England to try and kill former double agent Sergei Skripal.

A doping scandal that got Russia banned from the Olympics and forced its athletes to compete under a neutral flag at last

winter's Pyeongchang Games completed a picture of relations in utter tatters. Yet Putin has emerged from all this looking as strong as ever.

The Kremlin also does little to hide its pleasure at seeing the effective failure of efforts by some in England and eastern Europe to organise a diplomatic boycott of Putin's party. England will not be sending diplomats or royalty to the opening ceremony in protest over the Skripal case.

Sweden and Iceland along with a few others may follow suit by keeping their prime ministers and heads of state home. But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said he expected to see a "heavy traffic of guests at the highest level" coming to matches. Russia's problems do not end in the high-brow world of international relations. The bloody beating English fans got at the hands of nearly 200 Russian thugs at Euro 2016 in France has plagued preparations as much as any dispute with the West.

Neo-Nazi hooligans who organise mass fights in forests and chant racist slurs at players have lorded over Russian stadiums for years. The anti-discrimination network Fare said Russia's football federation was making matters worse by punishing those who reacted to racist abuse "while ignoring the perpetrators".

Security services have either locked up or checked in on hundreds of hoodlums to make sure they do nothing to tarnish Russia's image in the coming weeks. The scare tactics have worked. Some football gang members say they will be skipping town once the games begin to avoid getting rounded up. "However, we do not have as much confidence in the prevention of non-violent racist incidents (at the World Cup), despite the many well-intentioned reassurances," Fare said in a report issued last week.

Yet the world's focus in the final week before kickoff will not be on politics or Russia's underworld but things like Neymar's right foot. Brazil's latest heir apparent to Pele sparked national panic by undergoing surgery on a broken bone near his toe on March 3.

The 26-year-old's return could not have been more triumphant as he scored a fine goal in a 2-0 defeat of Croatia on Sunday that left even coach Tite stunned. Argentina's troubled preparations took another knock when their friendly in Israel due on Saturday was cancelled, drawing the fury of the Israeli organisers.

And Russia will be watching with curiosity as Egypt's emerging superstar Mohamed Salah recovers from a left shoulder injury. The two nations will likely vie with Saudi Arabia for the second knockout qualification spot in a group that includes two-time World Cup winners Uruguay. An early exit would spell disaster for Russia - still waiting to make their first last 16 of a World Cup since Soviet times.

BOTTOMLINE

Russia laments winless streak days before WC

AFP
Moscow

The question confronting Russian football fans ahead of the World Cup is whether the host nation's team can actually get any worse.

On Tuesday, Russia extended their winless streak with a 1-1 home draw against Turkey. It meant Stanislav Cherchesov's side have failed to chalk up a single victory in eight months. Cherchesov, a former Russian international goalkeeper, has five wins, six draws and nine defeats since taking over in August 2016, but his recent record is even less impressive.

Tuesday's draw meant he is Russia's first manager ever to fail to win in seven consecutive games. Cherchesov insists that gaining experience ahead of the World Cup, which Russia opens against Saudi Arabia in Moscow on June 14, was more important than the results.

"Russia will perform well," he insisted after the match with Turkey. "You will see the 'ideal' Russian team on June 14."

Russian media and fans do not share his confidence. "Everything's bad," declared the front page of *Sport Express* daily, which said the national side's play had dampened the mood of fans in the country. "With such a performance from our national team our chances look pretty low," school teacher Daniil Pospelov, who watched the Turkey match from a Moscow pub, said. "We need to learn how to attack constructively to get a result regardless of whether the opponents' team make mistakes or not."

However, Vitaly Mutko, who was once the head of Russian Football Union but temporarily stepped down after he was linked to state-sponsored doping pro-



Russia coach Stanislav Cherchesov (right) is under pressure after a string of losses. (Reuters)

grammes, was not disturbed by the result. "It's not a problem that the squad haven't won a single match within a year," *Sport Express* quoted Mutko as saying.

"Don't forget who the opponents have been - Argentina, Spain, Brazil, France. I believe our team is moving in the right direction," he added.

Meanwhile, Cherchesov, a brusque and stubborn man known as a tough disciplinarian, also managed to find some positives in his team's performance compared to their previous friendly last week, a 1-0 defeat to Austria. "I think we've made a qualitative leap ahead by comparison to the match with Austria," he said.

However, the attempts to put a brave face on a sorry business angered many former Russian internationals. "I don't grieve for Cherchesov and his plans,"

former Manchester United star and Russian international Andrei Kanchelskis told *Sport Express*. "For me his ideas are ridiculous and unreal. I'm worried about our footballers. I just cannot grieve for the ridiculous coaching team that destroys our football."

Cherchesov's ability to coach Russia to the 2018 World Cup was already put in question in March last year after his squad hit a new low with a 2-0 defeat to Ivory Coast, who failed to qualify for the tournament. Russia's spirited squad were whistled off the pitch by furious fans in the southern city of Krasnodar after the loss. "I'm bitterly disappointed," Russian coach Valery Nepomnyashchy, who guided Cameroon into the 1990 World Cup last-eight round and now coaches Baltika Kaliningrad in the Russian second

tier, said afterwards. "The team showed obvious lack of creative moves and sharp passing. There was no balance between the attack and defence."

Since then, Russia's team have shown little progress. They failed to make it out of the group stage as hosts of the eight-team Confederations Cup last summer, beating football minnows New Zealand 2-0 in the opening game and losing to Portugal and Mexico.

They did beat South Korea, helped by two own goals in Moscow in October, but since then have lost to Argentina, Brazil, France and Austria and drawn with Spain, Iran and now Turkey. After facing Saudi Arabia in Group A at Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on June 14, Russia face Egypt in St Petersburg on June 19 and Uruguay in Volgograd on June 25.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Uncertainty around Conte, Abramovich clouds Chelsea future

Chelsea announced they had shelved plans for a new 60,000-seater redevelopment of Stamford Bridge

AFP
London

With their Premier League rivals already strengthening for next season, Chelsea risk losing further ground as uncertainty swirls over the future of manager Antonio Conte and even owner Roman Abramovich. A fifth-placed finish just a year after winning the league in Conte's first season in charge meant many expected the FA Cup final to be the Italian's last match in charge, despite beating Manchester United 1-0 to end the season on a high.

However, more than two weeks on, no decision has been made on Conte's future, with speculation that former Paris Saint-Germain boss Laurent Blanc and Maurizio Sarri, who was recently replaced by Carlo Ancelotti at Napoli, have been lined up as possible replacements. The apparent drift has been linked to a reported delay in the renewal of a British visa for Russian billionaire Abramovich, who has bankrolled Chelsea's success since taking over the club in 2003.

It follows a diplomatic crisis between London and Moscow over the poisoning of a former Russian double agent and calls from some for sanctions that would hurt super-rich Russians sheltering their wealth in London. Abramovich has been granted Israeli citizenship and taken up residence there, according to Israel's ambassador to Russia. Chelsea announced last week they had shelved plans for a new 60,000-seater redevelopment of Stamford Bridge due to an "unfavourable investment climate".

Since Abramovich's takeover, Chelsea have been England's most successful club, winning five Premier League titles, a first-ever Champions League, the Europa League and five FA Cups in 15 years. However, where they could once outspend their competition, Chelsea have been gazumped by Manchester City's Abu Dhabi backed wealth and Manchester United's booming commercial revenues. A lack of resources and control over what is spent on the squad have been Conte's consistent complaints in a season marked by clashes with the club's hierarchy. And cost-



A lack of resources and control over what is spent on the Chelsea squad have been Antonio Conte's consistent complaints with the club's hierarchy.

cutting is at the heart of the uncertainty engulfing Chelsea at the moment, with the West Londoners reluctant to pay Conte a reported £9m (\$12m, 10m euros) in compensation for the final year of his contract. The same goes for attempts to lure Sarri to Stamford Bridge. Despite Ancelotti's appointment, Sarri has not been released from his contract, which runs until 2020, meaning Chelsea would need to meet his eight-million-euro release clause unless a deal can be struck with Napoli. Blanc has emerged

as a leading candidate should Conte be dismissed. The former French captain has been unemployed since leaving Paris Saint-Germain two years ago. French sports daily L'Equipe said yesterday that Blanc was in prime position for the Stamford Bridge job after meeting with Abramovich's close aide and Chelsea director Marina Granovskaia.

France and Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud was aware of the speculation surrounding former France coach Blanc, but said: "I hear what's being said, but

it's all just speculation, we don't know anything. We'll see. He (Blanc) knows me. But it was Antonio Conte who brought me to Chelsea. Antonio Conte is still under contract, so I wouldn't allow myself to talk about a new coach."

However, whoever takes charge next season faces a huge task just to get Chelsea back into the Champions League, let alone making the Blues champions of England once again. Chelsea finished 30 points behind Manchester City last season. Among the chasing pack, Man-

chester United have already signed Brazilian international midfielder Fred and Champions League finalists Liverpool have bolstered their midfield options for next season with Fabinho and Naby Keita. Tottenham will move into a new 62,000-capacity stadium next season having tied down Mauricio Pochettino to a new five-year contract, while even Arsenal have a headstart on Chelsea for their season's planning, having hired Unai Emery as Arsene Wenger's successor at the Emirates.

FOCUS

Palestinians hail Argentina and Messi for calling off match in Jerusalem

Reuters
Ramallah

Palestinian football officials praised Argentina and its star Lionel Messi yesterday for calling off a friendly match against Israel that Israeli officials had planned to move to Jerusalem. Argentina's final World Cup warm-up against Israel was originally slated to be held in the Israeli coastal city of Haifa but was moved to Jerusalem at the urging of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

Argentina striker Gonzalo Higuain announced on Tuesday it was cancelled. "The Israelis tried to use Messi and those stars from Argentina, and I would like to thank them and appreciate their decision, which I think was on the right track," Palestinian Football Association President Jibril Rajoub told a news conference yesterday in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

At the entrance to the news conference was a placard saying "From Palestine, thank you Messi" with Argentinian and Palestinian flags, under a big photo of Rajoub posing with the Barcelona ace. It was a change of tone from Rajoub, who on Sunday had called for Palestinians to burn replica Messi shirts and photos if the Argentinian played in Jerusalem.

Israel's Football Association accused the Palestinians of crossing a "red line" by inciting anger towards the Argentinian players in order to scupper the match. It said it would complain to football world governing body FIFA about Rajoub's comments, which it described as "physical and brutal threats".

The Palestinians opposed the decision to hold the match in Jerusalem, accusing Israel of seeking to use the fixture, and especially the presence of global star Messi, to underpin Israel's claim to the Holy City.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem its capital, while Palestinians want the eastern part of the city as capital of their own state.

Most countries say Jerusalem's status must be left to be resolved in future peace talks, although US President Donald Trump reversed American policy last year to recognise the city as capital of Israel. Palestinian football officials say they would have had no issue if the match were held as planned in Haifa, but it should not have been moved to Jerusalem.

ROUND-UP

Arsenal close to signing on PSG's Adli

The Guardian
London

Arsenal are close to signing the 17-year-old midfield prospect Yacine Adli from Paris Saint-Germain. They have offered him an initial three-year contract, although it contains options, after he rejected professional terms at PSG - much to the French club's dismay.

Unai Emery, the new Arsenal manager, is helping to complete the deal. Emery left PSG at the end of this past season and one of his final acts was to give Adli his first-team debut. He brought him on as an 83rd-minute substitute in the last game, against Caen. Emery - together with Arsenal's head of recruitment, Sven Mislintat - is trying to persuade Adli that his development will be best served at Arsenal.

Adli is tall, technically gifted and forward-thinking. Capped at under-16, under-17 and under-18 level by France, he can play in central midfield or on the flank. He is considered to be among the best young players in France.

Arsenal announced the first recruit of Emery's tenure on Tuesday - the free-agent signing of the 34-year-old Switzerland right-back Stephan Lichtsteiner from Juventus. The club are also in talks with Borussia Dortmund over the 29-year-old centre-half Sokratis Papastathopoulos.

MAN UNITED SIGN PORTO DEFENDER DALOT ON FIVE-YEAR CONTRACT

Manchester United have announced the signing of the defender Diogo Dalot from Porto on a five-year contract. The Portugal Under-21 international revealed he simply could not turn down the chance to join United and work under compatriot José Mourinho.

"Joining Manchester United is an unbelievable opportunity for me," Dalot said. "I have grown up in Porto's Academy and I am so thankful for everything they have done for



Teenager Yacine Adli, who is close to joining Arsenal from Paris Saint-Germain, can play in central midfield or on the flank. (Reuters)

me. But the chance of coming to the biggest club in the world is something I just couldn't turn down. I'm excited about working with José Mourinho and learning everything I can from such a successful coach. I am looking forward to playing alongside the fantastic players in the squad."

LIVERPOOL INTERESTED IN SHAQIRI AFTER STOKE'S RELEGATION

Liverpool are among the Premier League clubs interested in signing Xherdan Shaqiri following Stoke City's relegation. The Switzerland international has a release clause in his contract - understood to be set at about £12m-£13.5m - that can be activated after the club lost their Premier League status.

Shaqiri, a £12m arrival from Internazionale in 2015, has made clear he has no interest in playing in the Championship but would "love to stay in England".

Shaqiri's availability and affordability has

alerted a host of clubs in Europe and the Premier League, with Tottenham Hotspur and Southampton - the latter managed by Mark Hughes, who signed the winger for Stoke - among those linked with the 26-year-old. Liverpool also have an interest in the former Bayern Munich player, with Jürgen Klopp looking to strengthen in key areas, although that has not advanced to activating Shaqiri's release clause.

Liverpool were close to signing Shaqiri from Bayern in the summer of 2014 and were the player's preferred option at the time. The winger, however, later claimed Bayern blocked his transfer to Anfield, with his playing time at the Allianz Arena limited under Pep Guardiola, he joined Internazionale six months later. Klopp has added the Monaco midfielder Fabinho to his squad this summer for £43.7m and wants the highly rated Lyon captain, Nabil Fekir, ideally before the World Cup.

SPOTLIGHT

Croatian court convicts Mamic of corruption at Dinamo Zagreb

AFP
Zagreb

Croatian football strongman and former Dinamo Zagreb chief Zdravko Mamic was sentenced yesterday to six-and-a-half years in prison over multi-million-euro abuse of power and graft. Two international stars - Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric and defender Dejan Lovren - appeared as witnesses during the trial in Osijek providing details of their transfers from Dinamo. The players' evidence came under official scrutiny. Croatia captain Modric was charged in March for alleged false testimony over the details of his 2008 transfer from Dinamo to Tottenham Hotspur. Lovren, questioned over his 2010 transfer from Dinamo to French side Lyon, was also investigated.

Mamic, 58, was not present at the tribunal in the eastern town of Osijek for sentencing. He travelled to neighbouring Bosnia on Tuesday claiming he was not on the run but wanted to avoid "frustration" at the court and "find peace".

But after the verdict was handed down Mamic said he would not return to Croatia until it becomes final. "I will stay here... and fight from here. I don't trust Croatian institutions," he told a press conference in Medjugorje, a southern Bosnian town famed for alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary. "I wouldn't like to be in the skin of people who 'packed me' all this," he said, threatening



a "response... unseen in this territory".

Mamic is considered the most powerful figure in Croatian football and his trial, that opened in April 2017, was a further problem for a sport already struggling with hooliganism and poor infrastructure. He was tried along with three others - his brother and former Dinamo Zagreb coach Zoran Mamic, former club director Damir Vrbancic, and a tax inspector.

According to the indictment, the corruption cost Dinamo more than 15m euros (\$18m) and the state 1.5m euros as cash was embezzled through fictitious deals related to player transfers. Judge Darko Kruslin found all four defendants, none of whom was present yesterday, guilty.

"Zdravko Mamic is sentenced to a total prison sentence of six years and six months," Kruslin said. The verdict is not final, but, under Croatian law a person sentenced to more than five years in jail must go to prison immediately. Vrbancic, also a top Croatian

Football Federation official, and Zoran Mamic were sentenced to three years and four years and 11 months in jail respectively. The tax inspector was jailed for four years and two months. All four defendants pleaded not guilty.

The trial was held in Osijek because Mamic allegedly has close ties with some judges in Zagreb. Mamic's connections extend into many spheres of Croatia's public life. Meanwhile, champions Dinamo voiced "shock and outrage" over the verdict and voiced their firm belief in the defendants' innocence.

Bosnia cannot extradite Mamic as he is its national. But, Bosnian Security Minister Dragan Mektic explained that if Zagreb demands Mamic could serve his term in the Balkan country.

In the past Mamic repeatedly argued that the probes against him were politically motivated. Most Croatian football fans see him as the real boss of the football federation and believe its formal chief Davor Suker is merely Mamic's puppet.

NHL

Vegas looking to welcome lady luck back for game five

'We're going to work hard and have some fun. We'll see what happens'

Reuters
Las Vegas

Lady luck is everything in Las Vegas and the Golden Knights will be hoping she is back riding with them as they fly home to face the Washington Capitals in a must win game five of the Stanley Cup Finals today.

Following three straight defeats, including a 6-2 Game Four thrashing on Monday, the Golden Knights limp home trailing the best-of-seven series 3-1 and the clock about to strike midnight on what has been a fairytale inaugural season.

Coming from a city that was built on luck the Golden Knights felt like they had none of it in a game four clash they dominated for long stretches, outshooting the Capitals 30-23.

Hit posts, missed wide open nets and a goaltender with a hot hand all conspired to leave the Golden Knights on the brink and the Capitals in position to hit the Stanley Cup jackpot with one more victory.

"I thought last night's game we played real hard, we played real well," said Vegas coach Gerard Gallant on Tuesday as his team prepared to return home. "Probably with a couple of breaks, we could have been up 2-0 early in that first period."

"First 10 minutes, I thought we played well. We hit two goal posts. (Braden) Holtby made a couple of good saves. We missed an open net."

"That's hockey. I don't know what to tell you."

The odds say the Golden Knights are now a Stanley Cup longshot. Only once in 33 tries has a team with a 3-1 series lead failed to hoist the Cup and that was in 1942 when the Detroit Red Wings blew a 3-0 advantage to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

But the expansion Golden Knights are a team that have defied the odds right from the beginning, putting themselves in position to become the first franchise in one of North Ameri-



Vegas Golden Knights fans stare at the scoreboard showing the Golden Knights road game watch party for game four of the 2018 NHL Stanley Cup Final at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. (Getty Images/AFP)

ca's major sport leagues to claim a championship in their first year of operation. Back on home ice the Golden Knights will be a tough out for the Capitals who are also seeking their first Stanley Cup.

In three series before reaching the Finals, Vegas lost only once at home - to the San Jose Sharks in the second round.

Their only other loss was in Game Two of the Finals which provided the starting point for Capitals three-match winning streak. "We're going to play in

our building. The pressure's off us," said Gallant. "We're going to work hard and have some fun. We'll see what happens."

"Let's face it. We started the season, and there was no expectation for our hockey club."

"Did the expectations change going into the playoffs? Sure they did because we had a great regular season and won the Pacific Division."

"Again, it was about coming to play and enjoying our time and working hard and giving ourselves a chance to win."

NBA

76ers owners meet to ponder GM Colangelo's fate

Reuters
New York

Bryan Colangelo's future might be determined soon.

According to an ESPN report, the Philadelphia 76ers ownership group, led by CEO Scott O'Neill, met Tuesday night to review findings of an investigation into the actions of Colangelo, the team's general manager, and Colangelo's wife.

League sources told ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski that the matter might be resolved soon.

Colangelo's troubles began last week when *TheRinger.com* reported the existence of five Twitter anonymous accounts that had leaked information about the 76ers and taken shots at the team's coach and some of the players.

The accounts also tweeted favourable opinions about Colangelo while denigrating Philadelphia's former GM, Sam Hinkie. The original article produced circumstantial evidence that Colangelo was behind the burner accounts, but subsequent media reports pointed the finger at his wife, Barbara Bottini.

According to ESPN, the law firm retained by the 76ers to investigate the matter interviewed Colangelo and his wife separately on Sunday and Monday. Colangelo, a two-time NBA Executive of the Year, denied knowledge of four of the five Twitter accounts.

"Like many of my colleagues in sports, I have used social media as a means to keep up with the news," Colangelo said in a statement after the initial report was published.

"While I have never posted anything whatsoever on social media, I have used the @Philal234567 Twitter account referenced in this story to monitor our industry and other current events. This storyline is disturbing to me on many levels, as I am not famil-

iar with any of the other accounts that have been brought to my attention, nor do I know who is behind them or what their motives may be in using them."

One of the accounts reportedly passed along private medical information about then-Sixers center Jahlil Okafor plus gossip about other players, including star big man Joel Embiid. Embiid said he got a call from Colangelo, refuting the report. "Gotta believe him until proven otherwise," Embiid told ESPN last week. "If true, though, that would be really bad."

Raptors reportedly interview Jaskievicus

The Toronto Raptors have gone overseas in their coaching search, reportedly interviewing Sarunas Jasikevicius, a former star guard in the EuroLeague and a celebrated coach there, in recent days.

According to a report from ESPN, Raptors president Masai Ujiri, travelling to Italy for an NBA pre-draft camp, met with Jasikevicius in Europe. Jasikevicius joins a short list of reported candidates to replace Dwane Casey, fired in Toronto after seven seasons. The Raptors won a franchise-record 59 games in the regular season but were swept by the Cleveland Cavaliers in the Eastern Conference semi-finals.

The Raptors are still seriously considering assistant coach Nick Nurse and Spurs assistants Ettore Messina and Ime Udoka, according to ESPN. Jasikevicius, who played a combined 138 games in four NBA seasons, three with Indiana and one with Golden State, averaged 6.8 points, 1.6 rebounds and 2.9 assists in 18.3 minutes.

He guided his Lithuanian team, Zalgiris, to the EuroLeague Final Four this season. Jasikevicius went to college in Maryland and played for Basketball Hall of Fame coach Gary Williams.

Colts DE McCain denies battery charges

Indianapolis Colts defensive end Chris McCain said Tuesday that he has no knowledge whatsoever of misdemeanor battery charges filed against him in California this week. McCain, who signed a one-year deal with the Colts as an unrestricted free agent after the San Diego Chargers did not re-sign him, insists he doesn't know the accuser and has not been contacted by police. "She is lying," McCain told the *Indy Star* of accuser Arpi Davtyan. The paper reports that McCain is accused of spitting on Davtyan and grabbing her neck, according to documents filed this week, and that he'll be arraigned on July 13 in Los Angeles. The charges reportedly stem from an altercation on January 7, but McCain says he was blindsided.

MLB

Dodgers hit three homers in shutout of Pirates

Reuters
Pittsburgh

Joe Pederson, Yasiel Puig and Cody Bellinger hit homers, and five Dodgers pitchers held the host Pittsburgh Pirates to seven hits, all singles, in Los Angeles' 5-0 win Tuesday.

Dodgers starter Ross Stripling (4-1) gave up four hits, struck out seven and walked none in five innings. Relievers Scott Alexander, Josh Fields, Pedro Baez and Daniel Hudson each pitched an inning to complete the shutout.

Los Angeles (30-30) won its fourth in a row and reached 500 by winning 14 of 18 games since May 17. The Pirates (30-30) have lost three straight and fell to .500 for the first time this season. They are 4-13 since they were a season-best nine games over .500 on May 17. It was the second straight shutout loss for Pittsburgh, which fell 5-0 Sunday at St. Louis.

Pittsburgh starter Joe Musgrove (2-1) gave up four runs, three of them earned, and six hits in five innings. He struck out five and walked one.

Musgrove started off strong, striking out the side in the first.

Matt Kemp led off the Dodgers' second with a single to left, and Pederson followed with his fourth homer, to right, for a 2-0 lead. It was his third homer in three games. It was also his third homer in his first three career

at-bats against Musgrove; the first two came in the 2017 World Series when Musgrove was with the Houston Astros.

In the third, Kemp brought in another Los Angeles run. His sacrifice fly made it 3-0 after Pittsburgh shortstop Sean Rodriguez dropped the ball for an error on what could have been a double-play ball. Puig led off the fourth with a homer to center, his seventh, for a 4-0 Dodgers lead.

Tyler Glasnow replaced Musgrove for the start of the sixth and gave up Bellinger's two-out homer to center, making it 5-0. The blast was Bellinger's ninth of the year. That gave Los Angeles 12 homers in its past four games. The start of the game was delayed by rain almost an hour.

Scherzer logs 2nd immaculate inning

Max Scherzer became the first pitcher in the major leagues to win 10 games as he struck out 13 in eight innings, and Matt Adams homered as the Washington Nationals defeated the visiting Tampa Bay Rays 4-2 Tuesday night.

Scherzer improved to 10-1 and has won nine straight decisions. His only loss came on April 4 at Atlanta. Scherzer gave up two runs on five hits without a walk.

The right-hander also entered the record books with the second so-called immaculate inning of his career - needing only nine pitches in an inning to strike out all three batters faced. He became the fifth pitcher to register

multiple immaculate innings. Sandy Koufax accomplished the feat three times, and others to do it twice were Randy Johnson, Nolan Ryan and Lefty Grove.

Patrick Corbin spoiled the comeback of Madison Bumgarner with 6 1/3 strong innings, delivering Arizona a victory at San Francisco. Making his first start of the season and hoping to extend the Giants' winning streak to six, Bumgarner (0-1) limited the Diamondbacks to two runs in six innings. He was pitching in the majors for the first time since breaking a bone in his left hand when hit by a line drive in spring training.

Corbin (6-2) allowed just one run and four hits. He walked two and struck out seven, helping Arizona win for the sixth time in eight games. Brad Boxberger allowed a run in the ninth but nailed down his 14th save.

RESULTS

Nationals	4	Tampa Bay	2
Angels	1	Royals	0
Diamondbacks	3	Giants	2
Dodgers	5	Pirates	0
Indians	3	Brewers	2
Red Sox	6	Tigers	0
Braves	14	Padres	1
Orioles	2	Mets	1
Twins	4	White Sox 2 (Game 1)	
White Sox	6	Twins 3 (Game 2)	
Yankees	7	Blue Jays	2
Rockies	9	Reds	6
Phillies	6	Cubs	1
Rangers	7	A's	4
Mariners	7	Astros	1
Marlins	7	Cardinals	4



Los Angeles Dodgers right fielder Yasiel Puig hits a solo home against the Pittsburgh Pirates during the fourth inning at PNC Park in Pittsburgh. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

RUGBY

All Blacks to use triple Barrett play against France

'Statistics show that they're the best defensive team in world rugby at the moment, and history has shown us what can happen when they flick the switch on attack'



Jordie Barrett has been named in Steve Hansen's All Blacks squad with his two brothers.

AFP
Auckland

Jordie Barrett will start at fullback for New Zealand in the first Test against France in Auckland on Saturday while a slimmed-down Karl Tu'inukuafe will cement a rapid rise with a debut off the bench.

The inclusion of the 21-year-old Barrett in the team named yesterday will see long-serving fullback Ben Smith move to the right wing leaving no room for Waisake Naholo.

Barrett's selection, along with his brothers Beauden and Scott, will be the first time three brothers will have started in the same All Blacks team.

Waikato Chiefs prop Tu'inukuafe, 25, is the sole new face in the first All Blacks match

squad of the year with coach Steve Hansen, already wrestling with a raft of injuries, taking no risks against the French.

"Statistics show that they're the best defensive team in world rugby at the moment, and history has shown us what can happen when they flick the switch on attack," Hansen said.

Scott Barrett replaces the injured Brodie Retallick as the locking partner for new captain Sam Whitelock.

Along with Retallick, Sonny Bill Williams has also been ruled out of the series while Sam Whitelock, Ryan Crotty and Sam Cane have been named to start after being sidelined by injury in recent weeks of Super Rugby.

Whitelock's brother Luke will pack down at the back of the scrum with Kieran Read not expected to return to rugby until next month following surgery on

his back at the end of last year.

'Spectacular rise'

Tu'inukuafe only made his Super Rugby debut two months ago.

He missed selection when the All Blacks squad was initially named but was called up when Tim Perry was injured during their first training camp.

A few years ago, Tu'inukuafe weighed 170kg (375lb) and was given an ultimatum by his doctor to either exercise or get used to a life of health problems.

He took to rugby, slimmed down to 135kg and played a season of club rugby in France before returning to New Zealand where he was given a start by the Chiefs when their front row stocks were decimated by injuries.

"It has been a spectacular rise for Karl," Hansen said.

"His selection is well deserved and we look forward to watching him play his part on Saturday night. He and his family can be very proud about what he is about to achieve."

The All Blacks have a seasoned front row of Owen Franks, Joe Moody and Codie Taylor while Liam Squire rounds out the forwards at blindside flanker.

The regular pairing of Aaron Smith and Beauden Barrett start in the halves with Anton Lienert-Brown joining Crotty in the centres while Rieko Ioane completes the back three with Ben Smith and Jordie Barrett.

"Whilst rugby is a complicated game, we've worked hard at simplifying those complexities this week so that we can go out and play with real confidence, high energy and genuine intent on the weekend," Hansen said.

"The players have worked

hard on getting clarity of role and are up for the challenge that this French side brings."

The All Blacks and France have played 58 times, with the All Blacks winning 45 Tests and the French 12. The French are the last team to beat the All Blacks at Eden Park with a 23-20 win in 1994. In 40 Tests since then at the Auckland stadium, the All Blacks have won 38 and drawn two.

New Zealand (15-1): Jordie Barrett, Ben Smith, Anton Lienert-Brown, Ryan Crotty, Rieko Ioane, Beauden Barrett, Aaron Smith, Luke Whitelock, Sam Cane, Liam Squire, Scott Barrett, Sam Whitelock, Owen Franks, Codie Taylor, Joe Moody

Replacements: Nathan Harris, Karl Tu'inukuafe, Ofa Tuungafasi, Vaea Fifita, Ardie Savea, TJ Perenara, Damian McKenzie, Ngani Laumape.

SPOTLIGHT

World Rugby dismisses World Cup appeals by Romania, Spain

AFP
Paris

World Rugby yesterday dismissed appeals by Romania and Spain against their disqualification from the 2019 Rugby World Cup.

Russia were awarded a place at the 2019 World Cup in Japan after World Rugby sensationally disqualified Spain, Romania and Belgium on May 15.

Russia had finished third in European qualifying for the World Cup, but head to the tournament after Romania, who originally won the section, second-placed Spain and fourth-placed Belgium were all docked points for fielding ineligible players.

World Rugby set up an independent disputes committee to hear the two appeals by Romania and Spain, the conclusion of which was released yesterday.

"World Rugby welcomes the conclusion of the independent disciplinary process relating to the European qualification process for Rugby World Cup 2019 and is determined to avoid a repeat of these unfortunate circumstances in the future," the sport's governing body said in a statement.

World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont stressed it was "important that the game learns from what were an unfortunate set of circumstances to prevent this from happening again".

There would now be "a full review of eligibility processes operational within the game with the objective of ensuring universal best-practice and compliance".

Interestingly, World Rugby said it would also "explore the viability of a universal eligibility database of players who have been 'captured' by an international team, supplementing significant support already given to unions by World Rugby in assisting with eligibility enquiries".

In addition, the body said it would now oversee the appointments of match official at all stages of future Rugby World Cup qualifiers. The controversy kicked off when Spain's rugby federation (FER) demanded a rematch of their loss to Belgium, which ultimately allowed Romania to qualify at their expense for next year's showpiece in Japan.

The FER pointed to several errors by the referee, Romanian Vlad Iordachescu, during an 18-10 defeat in Brussels in which the official had to be protected from irate Spanish players as he left the field.

World Rugby set up a disputes committee to examine Spain's complaints.

But in a surprise outcome the committee found that Spain, Belgium and Romania had all fielded ineligible players during qualifying matches for the World Cup.

Subsequently, Spain were docked 40 points with Romania and Belgium penalised 30 each - five points for every match in which an ineligible player appeared.

It meant that Russia won the group despite winning only half of their eight qualification matches, while Germany who lost six of theirs, were second and head into the play-offs.

All three sanctioned teams were fined from £50,000 to £125,000.

'Shields brings something extra to England'

Controversial England selection Brad Shields has added an extra element to the squad on their tour of South Africa, new team mate Chris Robshaw said. New Zealand-born Shields has opted to pursue an international career with England, for whom he qualifies through his parents, in a move that has drawn considerable criticism, even from World Rugby vice-chairman Agustín Pichot.

The Wellington Hurricanes flanker was granted a special release by New Zealand Rugby to join England's squad for the three-test tour before he moves to Wasps later this year.

"We've only got to know him over the last day or so but he is hungry to learn," Robshaw said of Shields at a news conference ahead of Saturday's first test in Johannesburg. Shields, 27, arrived in South Africa directly from New Zealand, a day after the rest of the touring party came in from London.

"He has brought something new and is trying to soak it all in, whether it's line-outs, scrum play or whatever it be, so he is ready," Robshaw added.

"That's what you want from players, that hunger and excitement to be involved." Robshaw was captain of the England squad that last toured South Africa in 2012 where they lost the series with two test defeats and a draw. The second test at Ellis Park was a 36-27 win for the Springboks.

CYCLING

Kwiatkowski back in yellow as Sky dominate Dauphine TTT

AFP
Louhans, France

Sky dominated the team time trial on the third stage of the Dauphine du Criterium yesterday, rolling at a record average of 57kmh (35mph) with a tailwind over the flat 35km course.

Sky's Polish rider Michal Kwiatkowski, victim of a crash on Tuesday, regained the race leader's yellow jersey and now leads three teammates in the overall standings: Italian Gianni Moscon (at 3sec), Spaniard Jonathan Castroviejo (9) and Welshman Geraint Thomas (21).

Celebrations Wednesday were a far cry from the end of the previous day which saw Kwiatkowski crash in the closing kilometres and the race leader was pleased he suffered no ill effects. "It's a wonderful feeling to win as a team. We rode a perfect stage, technically and tactically, on the entire course," the Pole said.

"I'm so happy that I got no major issues after the crash yesterday. If I could have picked up



Poland's Michal Kwiatkowski, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, celebrates on the podium after Great Britain's Sky cycling team won the third stage of the 70th edition of the Criterium du Dauphine cycling race, a 35-kilometre team time trial between Pont-de-Vaux and Louhans, central eastern France, yesterday. (AFP)

one stage win in the Dauphine, I'd like it to be the TTT.

"It's a wonderful feeling to win as a team. We rode a perfect stage, technically and tactically, on the entire course."

The Sky outfit finished a whopping 37sec ahead of second-placed BMC, with Lotto in third, at 52sec, and Australian team Mitchelton in fourth (56). Thomas called Team Sky's ef-

fort "fluid and fast".

"It's probably one of Team Sky's best time trials ever," he said. "Now we have four hard stages ahead of us and we'll see how it goes. But we'll defend the

jersey. We've got several cards to play but it'll still be difficult to win, that's for sure."

Today's 181km fourth stage runs from Chazey-sur-Ain to Lans-en-Vercors and features a gruelling climb of the Col du Mont Noir and steep ascent into Vercors.

RESULTS

1. Sky 36min 33sec
2. BMC at 37sec
3. Lotto 52
4. Mitchelton 56
5. Quick-Step 1:01
6. Trek 1:26
7. AG2R La Mondiale 1:29
8. Movistar 1:31
9. Lotto NL 1:32
10. Groupama-FDJ 1:33
11. Dimension Data 1:41
12. EF Drapac 1:44
13. Bora 1:45
14. Astana 1:48
15. Katusha 1:49
16. Bahrain 2:04
17. Vital Concept 2:20
18. Fortuno-Samsic 2:25
19. Cofidis 2:28
20. Emirats 2:28
21. Wanty 3:10
22. Sunweb 3:19

FOCUS

Hill to captain Wales in first Argentina Test

Reuters
Cardiff

Lock Cory Hill will captain Wales in Saturday's first Test against Argentina, with head coach Warren Gatland making eight changes to the side that beat South Africa last weekend. Hill, one of the two co-captains on the tour, will lead the national team for the first time against the Pumas. Wales play their second test against Argentina on June 16.

Beard will join Hill in the second row with Scarlets' Wyn Jones coming in at loosehead prop and Davies in at openside flanker

"We have made a number of changes for Saturday as we want to give as much opportunity to the squad as possible during this campaign," Gatland said in a statement.

"There is a lot of exciting youth in this squad and Saturday is a chance for them to continue building their experience on the test scene and to put a marker down."

Adam Beard will join Hill in

the second row with Scarlets' Wyn Jones coming in at loosehead prop and James Davies in at openside flanker. Jones' Scarlets team mates Gareth Davies and Rhys Patchell are in at scrumhalf and flyhalf, respectively, with Hadleigh Parkes at inside centre. George North, who played at centre in Wales' 22-20 win over South Africa, is on the wing, alongside Josh Adams and Hallam Amos in the back three.

Wales team: 15. Hallam Amos (16 Caps) 14. Josh Adams (2 Caps) 13. Scott Williams (55 Caps) 12. Hadleigh Parkes (7 Caps) 11. George North (74 Caps) 10. Rhys Patchell (8 Caps) 9. Gareth Davies (32 Caps) 8. Wyn Jones (9 Caps) 7. Elliot Dee (8 Caps) 6. Dillon Lewis (3 Caps) 5. Adam Beard (2 Caps) 4. Cory Hill (16 Caps) (captain) 3. Seb Davies (5 Caps) 2. James Davies (1 Cap) 1. Ross Moriarty (21 Caps)

Replacements: 16. Ryan Elias (3 Caps) 17. Rob Evans (25 Caps) 18. Tomas Francis (31 Caps) 19. Josh Turnbull (8 Caps) 20. Aaron Wainwright (*Uncapped) 21. Aled Davies (9 Caps) 22. Gareth Anscombe (16 Caps) 23. Owen Watkin (5 Caps).

WI VS SL, DAY 1, 1ST TEST

Sri Lanka limit hosts West Indies to 153-5 at tea

Fast-medium bowler Lahiru Kamara claims two wickets on the first day

AFP
Port of Spain

Shai Hope failed to take full advantage of two moments of good fortune as Sri Lanka limited the West Indies to 153 for five at tea on the opening day of the first Test of a three-match series at the Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad yesterday.

Fast-medium bowler Lahiru Kamara accounted for the elegant right-hander for 44 to claim his second wicket for the day but it was namesake seamer Lahiru Gamage who was left reeling with opportunities lost.

Without adding to his score of 29 at the interval, Hope chased a wide delivery and edged a catch to wicket-keeper Niroshan Dickwella only to be reprieved by a no-ball call.

Within minutes Gamage had another wicket celebration cut short as he earned an LBW verdict against but the batsman's request for a television replay review of the decision revealed a thin inside-edge and the dismissal was reversed.

Hope and Roston Chase extended their fourth-wicket partnership to 54 when Kamara's persistence with a short-pitched line of attack brought about Hope's demise via a gloved leg-side catch to Dickwella.

As expected, Rangana Herath played a bigger role at the bowling crease in the day's second session and the most successful left-arm spinner in Test history responded with the wicket of Chase for 38 via a sharp catch by Angelo Mathews at slip when the batsman edged an attempted cut.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Shane Dowrick and captain Jason Holder then batted with extreme caution to the interval, resulting in just 54 runs being added over the two hours. They face a challenging task in the final session to justify Holder's decision to bat first at the start of the day.

Earlier, Devon Smith's return to international cricket after more than three years ended in disappointment.

Opening the batting with Kraigg Brathwaite, the 36-year-old left-hander watched his partner depart



Lahiru Kamara (centre) of Sri Lanka celebrates the dismissal of Shai Hope (not pictured) of West Indies with his teammates on Day One of the first Test at Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, Trinidad, yesterday. (AFP)

in just the third over of the match, caught behind off experienced seamer Suranga Lakmal.

Smith, who last represented the regional side against England in his native Grenada in 2015, would have been especially keen to make an impact.

But his ambitions were undone by sharp work from Dinesh Chandimal as the Sri Lankan captain's throw to the wicketkeeper from midwicket found

the opener just short of his ground after he was called through for a single by new batsman Kieran Powell.

Powell sought to impose himself on a Sri Lankan attack comprising three seamers and two spinners. He and Hope put on 40 for the third wicket and looked to be getting on top of the tourists' bowlers when Kamara struck his first blow.

Keen to expose the West Indians' vulnerability to short-pitched bowling on the line of the body, which was quite noticeable in their last series in New Zealand six months earlier, Kamara unsettled both batsmen with his hostility on a placid pitch.

Yet it was a full-pitched delivery which accounted for Powell, the upright left-hander being bowled off the inside-edge for 38 by a ball which swung sharply back into the batsman.

After their departure, Pooja Vas-trakar chipped in with 20 runs before departing off a run-out in the ninth over.

SPOTLIGHT

Langer 'surprised' if SA crisis prompted cricket chief to stand down

AFP
London

Australia coach Justin Langer paid tribute to the "outstanding" James Sutherland yesterday, saying he would be "surprised" if the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa had played any part in the Cricket Australia chief executive's decision to leave his post.

Sutherland, who has been chief executive for 17 of his nearly 20 years with CA, announced earlier yesterday he would be standing down.

He added he had given 12 months' notice but would continue in his role until a suitable replacement is found.

Sutherland came under pressure to quit in March when former captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and batsman Cameron Bancroft attempted to alter the ball in the third Test in South Africa.

They were all sent home in disgrace and banned from state and international cricket over one of the biggest scandals to engulf the sport, while then-coach Darren Lehmann resigned and was replaced by Langer.

Sutherland resisted a clamour for his resignation and he insisted yesterday the scandal had "no bearing" on his decision, a view endorsed by Langer.

"His leadership has been outstand-

ing over the last 18 or 19 years. I always remember (former Australia coach) John Buchanan saying you judge a champion by their longevity and he's had a long time in the job," said Langer, speaking at Lord's, where Australia were training ahead of an ODI series in England.

"He (Sutherland) has done a brilliant job for Australian cricket," the former Australia opening batsman added. "He'll be missed, he's an outstanding person and he'll be really missed at the top of Australian cricket."

Pressed on whether the ball-tampering incident had played part in Sutherland's decision, Langer replied: "I don't think so."

"He's been in the job a long time. If you go through the corporate world, there's very few CEOs (chief executive officers) who have been there as long as he has. In a sense he's been an outlier to be there for so long."

"He's done a brilliant job, the recent TV rights deal, he's set a great foundation and I'd be surprised if that (the South Africa crisis prompting Sutherland's decision) was the case."

Australia, the 50-over world champions, will be taking on an England side who are currently top of the one-day international rankings. They face Sussex at Hove today before another warm-up match against Middlesex at Lord's on Saturday. The first ODI against England will be at The Oval on June 13.

FOCUS

Bangladesh stun India in women's Asia Cup

IANS
Kuala Lumpur

India suffered their first ever defeat at the hands of Bangladesh in any format as the six-time champions were hammered by seven wickets in the Women's Asia Cup cricket tournament at the Kinrara Academy Oval here yesterday.

This was also the first loss of the women-in-blue in the tournament since 2012.

Fargana Hoque and Rumana Ahmed's unbeaten 52 and 42-run knocks helped Bangladesh chase a below par target of 142 with seven balls to spare.

Opting to bat after winning the toss, India started the proceedings on a poor note, losing openers Mithali Raj (15) and Smriti Mandhana (2) with the scorecard reading 26.

After their departure, Pooja Vas-trakar chipped in with 20 runs before departing off a run-out in the ninth over.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and

Deepti Sharma then contributed with 42 and 32 runs respectively while Mona Meshram remained unbeaten on 14 to help India reach 141 for 7.

Bangladesh's leggie Rumana Ahmed bagged three wickets conceding 21 runs.

In reply, Bangladesh also lost couple of wickets for 45 runs.

But Fargana and Rumana denied India any further inroads, forging a match-winning 93-run third-wicket partnership to help their side register their second win in the tournament.

Bangladesh had earlier beaten Pakistan in the tourney.

For India, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Poonam Yadav and Vastrakar bagged one wicket each.

Despite the loss, India were atop the points table with two wins from three games while Bangladesh is placed fourth.

The Harmanpreet-led side will next face Sri Lanka today.

In other league matches, Pakistan defeated Sri Lanka by 23 runs while Thailand beat Malaysia by nine wickets.

SPOTLIGHT

Hanan lift Gulf Incon-Metabo Ramadan Cricket Trophy

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hanan XII emerged Division I champions for the second straight year in the 24th Gulf Incon-Metabo Ramadan Cricket Tournament 2018 defeating CCRC team by 58 runs at old Ideal Indian School Floodlit Cricket Grounds.

CCRC put Hanan in to bat first and it initially seemed like a good decision when the latter lost one of their openers in the first over itself. However, Aswar, the other opener, blazed away to stabilise Hanan and scored 25 runs in his allotted 12 balls with three sixes and one four.

Hanan had lost Hameed and Saddam too by end of the sixth over with the score at 69 for three. Rauf and Imran accelerated from the seventh over onward, adding 41 runs in the next three overs. Rauf scored 41 runs off 16 balls with four sixes and one four, and Imran scored 34 runs in 11 balls with four sixes and a boundary.

Hanan scored 94 runs in the last 6 overs to post 163 for the loss of 7 wickets in their allotted 12 overs.

For CCRC, Hassan Sardar took two wickets giving away 29 runs in his allotted 2 overs. Abbas and Nixon took a wicket each.

In reply, CCRC had a shaky start, losing three wickets at the end of two overs with the score at 16. CCRC kept losing wickets at regular intervals, before their innings was halted at 105 in their allotted 12 overs losing 10 wickets. Hasan Sardar with 28 and Nixon with 20 were the only batsmen who offered resistance to Hanan bowling.

Suraj of Hanan bowled brilliantly, taking four wickets for only 17 runs in the allotted 2 overs. Husni and Faslan took 2 wickets each, while Adil and Aswar took a wicket each.



Captains of winners Hanan XII and runners-up CCRC pose with their respective trophies, Gulf Incon's Senior Sales and Marketing Manager Sajjad Ahmed Khan, Qatar Veterans Cricket officials and other dignitaries during the prize distribution ceremony for Division I of 24th Gulf Incon-Metabo Ramadan Cricket Tournament 2018 at old Ideal Indian School Floodlit Cricket Grounds.

Hanan XII's Rauf was adjudged Man of the Finals. Rauf's teammates Hameed, Husni and Aswar were presented the Best Batsman of the Tourna-

ment, Best Bowler of the Tournament and Best All-rounder of the Tournament awards respectively. Sherif of CCRC was presented with the Best Wicketkeeper of

the Tournament award. Gulf Incon's Senior Sales and Marketing Manager Sajjad Ahmed Khan, Credit/Inventory Controller Rajkumar

Selvarajan, Product Manager (Tools and Equipment) Vincent Wimaldas, Metabo Field Specialist Tuan Afaham Burah and Qatar Veterans Cricket offi-

cials were present during the prize distribution ceremony. Complimentary lucky draw and refreshments were arranged for all spectators.

SPOTLIGHT

FIFA selects Aspetar's Dr Geertsema for 2018 WC

By Sports Reporter
Doha

FIFA has selected Dr Celeste Geertsema, Sports Medicine Physician at Aspetar, Qatar's orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital, to be a FIFA venue medical officer for the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia. From June 8 - July 8, Dr Geertsema will provide medical care for the FIFA delegation and oversee the medical facilities and doping control processes.

This selection makes Dr Geertsema the

first female FIFA venue medical officer at a FIFA World Cup tournament. Previously, Dr Geertsema became the first-ever female team physician at the 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa, when she went there as part of the New Zealand national team delegation. She was also selected as the FIFA venue medical officer at the 2011 and 2015 FIFA Women's World Cups and FIFA General Medical Officer for the Under-17 Women's World Cups in 2012, 2014 and 2016. More recently, she was a Games Group member at the Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, responsible for protecting the athletes' health.

Commenting on her appointment, Dr Geertsema said, "This appointment represents further proof, if any was needed, that Aspetar employs some of the best specialised sports medicine practitioners and researchers in the world. Providing such a broad and distinguished roster of talent under one roof is unique and makes Aspetar one of the leading sports medicine institutions in the Middle East, if not the world."

Exposing Aspetar staff to such events equips them with unparalleled experience in servicing major events, which is particularly important for Qatar as the

country readies itself to host the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships Doha 2019 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar.

Similarly, representing Aspetar's business and its expertise at major international sports events helps to expand the hospital's network and cement its reputation as a FIFA and International Olympic Committee (IOC)-accredited Research Centre of Excellence. This falls in line with the hospital's vision of becoming a global leader in sports medicine and exercise science by 2020.

PROGRESS

Construction on Lusail Stadium in full swing

'Every day the site is changing, which is building excitement within the team on-site and among the visitors'

Construction at Lusail Stadium, the proposed host venue for both the opening match and final of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar, is progressing rapidly, according to the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), the organisation responsible for delivering the infrastructure required to host the tournament.

Work on the substructure of the 80,000-seat stadium has surpassed 75 percent and the west stand, which contains the VVIP, VIP and media tribunes, among other elements, is visibly rising up from the ground to reach an imposing elevation of more than 70 metres.

The installation of the west stand's precast elements, which will support the bleachers on which fans will sit, has also now commenced.

Tamim El Abed, the SC's Lusail Stadium Project Manager, explained the ongoing works.

"We began work on-site at the end of 2016 and you can see the progress we have made in that short space of time," said El Abed. "Now that work on the substructure is nearing completion, you will really start to see the superstructure rise up from the ground. Every day the site is changing, which is building excitement both within the team on-site and among the many visitors we welcome each month."

Away from the main stadium location but still within the Lusail Stadium precinct, the SC has now completed work on accommodation for 3,500 workers, replete with a supermarket, barbers, volleyball and basketball courts, and an Internet café.

Work on Lusail City, which surrounds Lusail Stadium, is also progressing rapidly. Encompassing residential, commercial, hospitality and retail space, Lu-



sail City is expected to house more than 200,000 residents and welcome 170,000 people for work once completed. Residents have even begun to move into some of the apartments along the Lusail Expressway. The Lusail Light Tram, which

is run by Qatar Rail, is nearly complete, with a track that runs directly through the Lusail Stadium precinct.

El Abed concluded: "The whole atmosphere around the stadium is one of a city coming to life. You can see the Lu-

sail Metro Station a short distance away, which will one day bring thousands of fans to the area on matchday. It's an exciting time to be a part of this project and I hope the people of Qatar are looking forward to what's in store." (SC)

FOCUS

Al Sadd renew Ferreira's contract

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Top QNB Stars League club Al Sadd renewed the contract with veteran Portuguese coach **Jesualdo Ferreira** for yet another season.

The contract renewal of the coach is sure to lend more stability to the side that has qualified for the AFC Champions League quarter-finals, where they are drawn against Iran's Esteghlal.

At the domestic level, Al Sadd finished as runners-up in the QNB Stars League as well as Qatar Cup, and lost in the semi-final of Emir's Cup. The Wolves had to be content with the season-opening Sheikh Jassim Cup victory.

Ferreira, who took over Al Sadd in December 2015, has guided them to triumphs in the Qatar Cup, Emir's Cup and Sheikh Jassim Cup.

Al Sadd had recently renewed the contract with Spanish midfielder star Xavi Hernandez for two more seasons.

HANDBALL

Qatar team gears up for Asian Games

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Defending champions in handball, Qatar, will hold a training camp in Spain from June 19 to July 1, in preparation for this year's Asian Games. The multi-sport event will be held in Indonesia from August 18 to September 2.

Qatar, who won the title four

years back by defeating South Korea in the final, will be looking to carry forward the same form which helped them clinch the Asian Handball Championship at the start of this year.

In January, Qatar clinched their Asian handball title for a third consecutive year when they fought back to overcome rivals Bahrain 33-31 in a keenly-contested final in Suwon, South Korea.

CRICKET

Ponting to join Australia coaching staff in England

AFP
London

Australia great **Ricky Ponting** will join the backroom staff of head coach Justin Langer during the team's tour of England.

Former Australia captain Ponting, one of the outstanding batsmen of his generation, was already due to be in Britain to commentate on the five-match one-day international series against 2019 World Cup hosts England that starts on June 13 and a subsequent Twenty20 international.

But Wednesday's announcement by Cricket Australia will see Ponting joining forces with Langer, an old teammate, again after the pair coached Australia's Twenty20 team against Sri Lanka on home soil in 2017.

Ponting also assisted former Australia head coach Darren Lehmann, who quit following the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in March, for the Twenty20 tri-series against England and New Zealand earlier this year.

As a batsman Ponting averaged over 42 in 375 ODIs, with an excellent strike rate above 80.

His 41 hundreds in the format included a brilliant 140 not out in

a 2003 World Cup final win over India in Johannesburg.

Ponting had first won the World Cup in 1999 before enjoying back-to-back triumphs as captain in 2003 and 2007.

More recently, the 43-year-old Tasmanian has coached the Delhi Daredevils in this year's edition of the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament.

Langer was delighted to be able to tap into Ponting's expertise, saying: "Ricky is one of the greats of the game, and since he was already in England doing some commentary we saw it as a great opportunity to have him join our team for this important series."

"We have played a lot of cricket together and coached alongside each other previously, and he will also know many of the players already through his work with the team over the past two summers and his BBL (Big Bash League) commitments," he added.

"Ricky's knowledge of the game is second-to-none, and we know that his experiences, tactical expertise and leadership will be invaluable for this group, as we start to build a team capable of winning a World Cup in these conditions in a year's time."

Ponting will join up with the squad on June 10 and fit in his work with World Cup-holders Australia around his broadcasting duties.

MOTOGP

Lorenzo switching to Honda to replace Pedrosa

AFP
Paris

Honda unleashed a thunderbolt in the MotoGP paddock yesterday when they announced that triple world champion Jorge Lorenzo would be joining them in place of another Spanish star Dani Pedrosa.

"Honda Racing Corp is pleased to announce the signing of three-times MotoGP World Champion Jorge Lorenzo," the team said in a press release. "The Spanish rider will join the Repsol Honda Team for the next two years."

Lorenzo will form an impressive duo with a third Spaniard, Marc Marquez. Pedrosa revealed on Tuesday that he was leaving Honda.

"From 2019, Lorenzo will become teammate to four times MotoGP World Champion Marc Marquez: two great champions with great talent and high hopes that will make a stronger team and contribute to the development of HRC," the team said.

Media reports say Lorenzo's Honda contract is worth 4.0 million euros (\$4.7 million) a season.

Lorenzo enjoyed great success in a decade with another Japanese team, Yamaha, winning 44 races and was world champion in 2010, 2012 and 2015.

The 31-year-old has been less triumphant since moving to Ducati at the start of last season. His victory at Mugello on Sunday was his first for the Italian team in 24 races and came amid rumours that Ducati were thinking of discarding him.

Lorenzo is only 10th in the MotoGP standings after six races, 54 points behind



Ducati's Jorge Lorenzo (centre) celebrates winning the Italian MotoGP race on the podium alongside teammate and second-placed Andrea Dovizioso (left) and third-placed Yamaha rider Valentino Rossi on Sunday. (Reuters)

the leader, Marquez. Pedrosa is 12th, 12 points further back.

Pedrosa, who is 32, has won 31 Grands Prix and finished championship runner-up three times.

Ducati immediately announced that Danilo Petrucci would replace Lorenzo. Petrucci, 27, has raced for the satellite

Pramac Racing team since the 2015 season and will partner fellow Italian Andrea Dovizioso at Ducati for 2019 on what is currently a one-year agreement.

"It goes without saying that for me, being part of the factory team is a dream come true," said Petrucci.

"It's a great honour to become an offi-

cial rider for the Ducati Team, especially for someone like me who started in Ducati as a production motorcycle test rider."

Meanwhile, the Tech 3 team announced that it was extending the contract of 24-year-old Malaysian rider Hafizh Syahrin, who is 16th in the standings, for a season.