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GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

'Completely different' Djokovic barrels into third round

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FIA WORLD CUP OF CROSS COUNTRY RALLIES

Five-star al-Attiyah wins Morocco rally

Qatari driver dominates from the start to win the event by over 16 minutes

By Our Correspondent
Fes, Morocco

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah stayed clear of problems through the final stage to claim his fifth successive victory in the gruelling Rally of Morocco and give Overdrive Racing and the Toyota Gazoo Racing South Africa Team a major boost as preparations continue for the 2019 Dakar Rally.

A demanding six-day event that ran with a new organising team under the leadership of former Dakar organiser and navigator David Castera featured 1,362km of tricky navigation, dunes, rocky terrain, river bed crossings and everything that the team needed to shake down its fleet of Toyota Hiluxes before January's Peruvian challenge. The success marked a hat-trick of wins for al-Attiyah with the Toyota.

Al-Attiyah and his French navigator Matthieu Baumel dominated the race from the start and overcame their fair share of minor problems and delays to earn a winning margin of 16min 41sec over the newly-crowned FIA World Cup champion Jakub Przygonski and his Belgian navigator Tom Colsoul. French crew of Cyril Despres and Jean-Paul Cottret finished third.

Al-Attiyah said: "It's unbelievable that we've been able to win our fifth consecutive Rally of Morocco. I'm so happy with our performance here and our new car has been really strong all week."

Al-Attiyah clocked the quickest time of 8min 27sec through the opening 10km Prologue stage at Fes. The Qatari beat Martin Prokop by nine seconds and Przygonski by 23. Overdrive Racing colleagues Giniel de Villiers, Vladimir Vasilyev, Bernhard Ten Brinke, Erik van Loon and Ronan Chabot were fourth, fifth, eighth, ninth and 14th. Yaser Seaidan lost 13 minutes



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and co-driver Matthieu Baumel celebrate their fifth straight Rally of Morocco win at the finish line yesterday.

on the Prologue and stopped the clocks in 21min 04sec after rolling his Toyota and Aron Domzala also suffered a minor technical issue.

After a liaison of 322km from Fes, the first of the desert sections was split into two timed parts of 103km and 91km before crews arrived in Erfoud - an oasis town situated in the Draa-Tafilalet region of eastern Morocco.

Ten Brinke clocked a time of 1hr 20min 26sec for the opening section to set a time 48 seconds than two-time Dakar winner Carlos Sainz, while al-Attiyah was ninth.

Despite damaging a suspension arm on the first section, al-Attiyah actually won the combined stage after Ten Brinke missed a route waypoint and the Qatari moved into a 24-second lead.

Al-Attiyah added: "It was not a bad day. We broke the front arm in stage one and decided to continue. We lost a lot of time

over the last 30km but we fixed it with a spare and then we needed to be really careful because it was only an emergency one. The car is new and we needed to find the weak points."

Al-Attiyah extended his advantage to 15min 05sec with the fastest time on the second stage after leading from the front throughout.

On third day, Przygonski claimed the stage but al-Attiyah maintained a lead of 13min 05sec with the second quickest time.

In the fourth stage, al-Attiyah was second quickest and extended his advantage over to 18min 12sec and headed the stage-winning Despres by 25min 57sec after the penultimate stage.

"It was a really hard stage," said al-Attiyah. "We didn't push crazy because we caught Przygonski and then we passed him in the last part of the dunes to avoid the dust. We had a good lead and I wanted to make it five in a row."

Qatar's Abdulla third in Morocco, runner-up in T2 standings

By Our Correspondent
Fes, Morocco

Adel Abdulla recovered strongly from missing two days of the Rally of Morocco with ECU issues and carded the second quickest time on the final selective section between Erfoud and Fes yesterday. But the massive time penalties that the Qatari had incurred for missing Saturday's and Sunday's routes ultimately cost him dearly and he was unable to prevent Ahmed al-Shegawi from claiming the category victory for T2 series production cross-country vehicles.

On arguably the toughest round of the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Rallies, which ran with a dynamic new organisational team spearheaded by former Dakar organiser and naviga-

tor David Castera, teams faced daunting dunes, punishing heat, rocky tracks and difficult navigation.

Al-Shegawi's success means that he has provisionally retained the FIA T2 World Championship. Abdulla, driving a Nissan Patrol Y62 as part of the QX Rally Team with French navigator Jean-Michel Polato, finished the event in third place behind the Russian driver Andrey Titov, who won the last stage in a time of 3hrs 30min 57sec. Abdulla had the consolation of finishing as runner-up in the T2 World Championship after a long campaign, which was marred on more than one occasion by cruel luck. Abdulla said: "We finished the race in third position after all the problems we had at the end of day two. There was nothing we could do about it. The ECU burned. There were no mistakes

by the team and we must just accept that. We fought hard to continue the race and we finished on the podium. This was important.

"Our rival has won the Morocco Rally (T2) and the championship is over. We tried our best to fight and win the race. What happened has happened. I wanted to do something special this year. "I thank my team, my co-driver, HE the Minister of Culture and Sports Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser al-Ali, the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and the QMMF president Abdulrahman al-Mannai, and all the people from my sponsors at Ooredoo and Nissan. Hopefully we can come back next year with more success." The FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Rallies reaches a conclusion with Baja Portalegre in Portugal at the end of October.



Qatar's Sara Masoud wins silver at Asian Para Games



Qatar's Sara Masoud celebrates after winning the silver medal in Women's Shot Put F33 event at the 2018 Asian Para Games at GBK Main Stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia. With a personal best effort of 5.45m on her third attempt, Masoud secured the silver medal. Iran's Batoul Jahangiri threw 5.68m for gold, while UAE's Sara had to settle for bronze. Masoud became the first woman athlete from Qatar to win a medal at the Paralympic Games when she won silver in the same event at Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

CRICKET / PAK VS AUS, DAY 3, 1ST TEST

Asif sparks spectacular Australian collapse

AFP
Dubai

Test debutant Bilal Asif snatched six wickets to spark a spectacular Australian collapse from 142-0 to 202 all out and put Pakistan in firm command of the first Test in Dubai yesterday.

The 33-year-old off-spinner overshadowed his more experienced team-mate Yasir Shah by finishing with 6-36 as his efforts, the third best figures for a Pakistani bowler on Test debut, derailed Australia on a pitch which started to assist spinners on the third day.

Despite being jolted by spinner Jon Holland's two key wickets of Mohamed Hafeez (17) and Azhar Ali (four), Pakistan closed the day on 45-3, having an overall lead of



Pakistan's Bilal Asif (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Australia's Usman Khawaja on third day of the first Test in Dubai yesterday. (AFP)

325 with seven second-innings wickets intact to force a win.

Opener Imam-ul-Haq was unbeaten on 23 while nightwatchman Asif was dismissed for nought, unable to guard Azhar from coming

to bat in a crucial stage.

But it was a day highlighted by Asif who triggered a memorable Australian collapse against spin in Asia to mark a long-awaited Test debut.

PAKISTAN 1st innings		AUSTRALIA 1st innings		Scorecard		PAKISTAN 2nd innings	
U. Khawaja c Imam b Asif	85	A. Finch c Shafiq b Abbas	62	N. Lyon c Azhar b Asif	6	Imam-ul-Haq batting	23
M. Marsh lbw b Abbas	12	T. Head c Sohail b Asif	0	J. Holland not out	0	M. Hafeez c Labuschagne b Holland	17
T. Head c Sohail b Asif	0	M. Labuschagne c Imam b Asif	0	Extras	(b 6, lb 7) 13	B. Asif c Head b Lyon	0
M. Labuschagne c Imam b Asif	0	T. Paine c Imam b Asif	7	Total	(all out; 83.3 overs) 202	A. Ali lbw b Holland	4
M. Starc c Sarfraz b Abbas	0	M. Starc c Sarfraz b Abbas	0	Fall of wickets: 1-142 (Finch),		Extras	(lb 1) 1
P. Siddle b Abbas	10	P. Siddle b Abbas	10	2-160 (S. Marsh), 3-167 (Khawaja),		Total	(for 3 wks; 16.2 overs) 45
				4-171 (Head), 5-171 (Labuschagne),		Fall of wickets: 1-37 (Hafeez),	
				6-183 (M. Marsh), 7-183 (Paine),		2-38 (Asif), 3-45 (Azhar)	
				8-191 (Star), 9-202 (Siddle), 10-202		Bowling: Starc 3-1-9-0, Lyon	
				(Lyon)		8-1-23-1, Siddle 2-1-3-0, Holland	
				Bowling: Abbas 19-9-29-4, Riaz		3.2-1-9-2	
				11-2-39-0, Shah 28-6-80-0, Hafeez			
				3-1-2-0, Asif 21.3-7-36-6, Ali 1-0-3-0			

"I knew that my chance would come, so I waited and waited and thanks God I have done myself proud by getting six wickets on debut, it's a tremendous feeling,"

helped me get six wickets." By lunch Australia were well-placed at 137 without loss with Usman Khawaja (85) and debutant Aaron Finch (62), but the

slump followed shortly after as the Baggy Greens lost all 10 wickets for just 60 runs.

Asif, who had previously played three one-day internationals in 2015, came into his own after pacer Mohamed Abbas removed Finch following an opening stand of 142. In a spell of 22 balls Asif took four wickets as Australia slumped to 180-5 by tea.

The second session belonged to Asif, who dismissed Khawaja, Shaun Marsh (7), Travis Head (0) and Marnus Labuschagne (0) in the space of 29 runs.

Before Asif's brilliance Abbas had forced Finch to drive straight into the hands of Asad Shafiq at short mid-on. Khawaja hit eight fours before miscuing a premeditated sweep and was caught at short leg while Finch had five boundaries and a six in his knock.

FOCUS

It's better late than never for Aussie tormentor Asif

AFP
Dubai

Ten years ago Bilal Asif had almost quit cricket by joining his father in Kuwait to work as an electrician, but a change of heart brought about by ex-Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik has paid dividends.

Yesterday, Asif became the latest spinning bete noire for Aus-

tralia, snatching 6-36 in the first Test in Dubai to trigger a spectacular collapse for the Baggy Greens, who lost 10 wickets for 60 runs as they slumped from a solid 142-0 to 202 all out.

That gave Asif third best innings figures on Test debut for a Pakistani bowler behind Mohamed Asif (7-64) and Mohamed Nazir (7-99).

The 33-year-old made his international debut when he played three one-dayers for Pakistan in

It's an old story that I went to Kuwait to help my father, but Malik advised me to return and fight hard for a place in the Pakistan team. It was a worthy return

— Bilal Asif
Pakistan spinner

Zimbabwe in 2015, but had to wait another three years for a Test role. Asif, however, said it had been

worth the wait, praising former skipper Malik for some timely advice.

BACK FROM KUWAIT

"It's an old story that I went to Kuwait to help my father, but Malik advised me to return and fight hard for a place in the Pakistan team," recalled Asif. "It was a worthy return."

The tall and energetic Asif hails from a small town of Allo Mahar Sharif, close to Sialkot in

the northeast Punjab which has produced players like batting great Zaheer Abbas, Ijaz Ahmed, Malik and Haris Sohail.

During his one-day stint in Zimbabwe his bowling action was reported as illegal, but on assessment it was cleared — another tough phase of his career.

Last year he was included in Pakistan's squad for the two-match series against Sri Lanka, but did not feature as team management thought he was still not ready.

Asif's chance finally came as Pakistan deemed him useful against Australia's three left-handers in the top order in the Dubai Test.

Asif said his success was a reward for hard work and patience.

"Being a professional cricketer, you have to be tough mentally. I always kept working hard. I didn't think whether I would get a chance or not," said Asif, who overshadowed his more illustrious spin partner Yasir Shah, who

went wicketless in Australia's 202 all out.

Pakistan, having gained a lead of 280 in the first innings, closed the third day at 45-3 in their second innings, an overall lead of 325 runs.

"I was out of the team since 2015. I was at the National Cricket Academy camp where I worked with head coach Mushtaq Ahmed. I got the reward for that hard work," said Asif, who was dismissed for a duck after being sent in at number three to see out yesterday's play.

CRICKET / ENGLAND'S TOUR OF SRI LANKA

England 'happy favourites' against Sri Lanka: Buttler

The five-match ODI series will be followed by three Tests in November

AFP
Dambulla, Sri Lanka

England are "very happy" being favourites for the one-day series in Sri Lanka but are aware that past tours have been "tricky", Jos Buttler said yesterday on the eve of the first match in Dambulla.

Sri Lanka's captain Dinesh Chandimal warned meanwhile that conditions were "very different" to England, with some "mystery spinners" who could pose problems for Eoin Morgan's batsmen.

"Very happy being favourites. It shows we've been doing good stuff and I like being favourites," Buttler told reporters, saying the team were "very confident" and aiming to be "pushing the boundaries".

The batsman added however: "We're very aware of Sri Lanka's qualities in these conditions. They have some experienced players... It's been tricky in the past for England sides to come here."

He added that being the number-one ranked one-day side ahead of next year's World Cup on home soil brought its own pressures.

"There is always pressure being number one. Once you get there, I think that's when the hard work really starts. You've got a bit of a target on your back."

"It is down to you to keep improving and try to stay there. That's the challenge and it has its own pressures. I think in the dressing room we have a good understanding... and know that we need to keep improving and pushing the boundaries."

Buttler said the World Cup was in the back of everyone's mind, but they were taking every series one at a time and hoped to build a core group of players for next year's championship.

Especially for the batters it's not easy to play... We have some mystery spinners as well. They got all the experience and talent and we have to compete with them. When the situation comes we have some game plans which we will have to execute.

— Dinesh Chandimal
Sri Lanka captain

"It's about trending in the right way and being able to build a core group of players — a squad of 15, 16, 17 guys — who we can call upon hopefully for the World Cup," he said.

Underdogs Sri Lanka are still reeling from the axing of captain Angelo Mathews after a dismal run of 30 losses in their last 40 ODIs including defeats to Bangladesh and Afghanistan in last month's Asia Cup.

Chandimal, who missed the Asia Cup and the preceding ODI series against South Africa due to injury and suspension, cautioned that home pitches had "a lot of spin".

Morgan prepared to drop himself from England side at 2019 World Cup



Eoin Morgan has said he would be willing to drop himself at next year's World Cup if he were out of form.

England, who are No 1 in the one-day international rankings less than a year from the tournament on home soil, have a number of players waiting for their chance and Morgan said he would act in the best interests of the team if he were not playing well.

The 32-year-old leads England into the first of their five-match series in Sri Lanka in Dambulla on Wednesday, as they begin the long run-in to the World Cup, and said he would not hesitate to leave himself out. "It is a brave call but we have come a long way with this team and we need to put ourselves in the best position in order to be contenders," Morgan told Sky Sports Cricket.

"If that means I am not good enough to be in the team as a captain or as a player I will be the first one to say it, I'm an honest guy. I'm more than capable of making a tough decision."

"I've dropped myself in the past to create opportunities for guys and see if they can play at international level or given them an extra chance to prove themselves. When you drop yourself as a captain it sets the tone and example of 'nobody's place is cemented'."

"We are trying to build a squad of 16 or 17 to try and win a World Cup, that's the objective. It's not an individual trying to get runs or wickets — it's a team collective everyone must be prepared to buy into."

Morgan's men suffered a miserable 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand but have been revitalised in the shorter format under Trevor Bayliss, who was appointed coach immediately after that failure, and have won their last eight bilateral series, most recently against India.

Morgan is hoping to learn more on the tour of Sri Lanka, given England lost 5-2 on their last foray in 2014. "It's a new tour, different conditions and the challenge for us, like any other winter tour, is applying our own mentality and positive, aggressive style of play," said Morgan.

"Sri Lanka could present different challenges, particularly for our batsmen up against two wrist spinners. To look at where we are at and where we were when touring Sri Lanka last time is a stark contrast. I know which team I'd rather be playing for."

(The Guardian)



Sri Lankan team captain Dinesh Chandimal (second from right) speaks with teammates during a practice session at the Rangiri Dambulla International Cricket Stadium in Dambulla, Sri Lanka, on Monday. (AFP)

"Especially for the batters it's not easy to play... We have some mystery spinners as well. They got all the experience and talent and we have to compete with

them. When the situation comes we have some game plans which we will have to execute." Chandimal said he hoped to improve the team's fielding.

"In the last few days, we worked really hard on our fielding individually and as a group," he said. "That's the biggest change we are trying to make in this series

— give priority to our fielding and give it a lot of attention."

The five-match one-day series is followed by three Tests in November.

SPOTLIGHT

Time for Africa — Senegal thrilled with winning Youth Olympics bid



(From left) Senegalese President Macky Sall, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach and mayor of Dakar Soham El Wardini pose for pictures after the host city contract signing ceremony during the 133th IOC session in Buenos Aires on Monday. (AFP)

DPA
Buenos Aires

Senegalese President Macky Sall declared it was a "historic decision" for his nation to be awarded the 2022 Youth Olympic Games and the country is eagerly anticipating the chance to host the world in four years time.

"Senegal is the first African country to host an Olympic event," he proudly tweeted overnight into Tuesday. Earlier the International Olympic Committee (IOC) members approved its staging of the Games at the 133rd Congress in Buenos Aires.

Centred around the capital Dakar, the Senegal bid beat out competition from Botswana, Nigeria and Tunisia.

"Dakar was the best value proposition for 2022," Ugur Erdener, head of the IOC evaluation commission, told delegates. "Senegal is one of the countries in the continent with more stable policies and presented the most ambitious and firm project."

Senegal will host the fourth edition of the summer youth Games. The third is currently ongoing in the Argentina capital after Singapore in 2010 and China's Nanjing in 2014.

The event acts as a sandbox for experimentation for new sports, formats and disciplines to see if they are suitable for the senior Games.

World sport has generally avoided Africa with big events. Tourist-rich South Africa gained from infrastructure built for the successful 2010 football World

Cup but critics argue expensive stadiums, little used today, are luxuries poor countries cannot afford.

In 1995 South Africa hosted the Rugby World Cup, the home team's victory easing years of racial division shortly after the end of apartheid. But soon after Cape Town finished only third in bidding for the 2004 Olympics, losing out to Rome and Athens.

The continent has only come into focus for major events on a few occasions recently and this year Morocco lost out on bidding for the 2026 football World Cup to a combined bid from the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In contrast, Africa does do well on the political side of sport with 12 of 95 IOC members coming from the region. This has not always been without scandal, though the continent is hardly alone in that — Senegal's Lamine Diack had to resign as head of the athletics governing body IAAF for money laundering and corruption in 2015.

Andrew Parsons, president of the International Paralympic Committee, is open to the idea of a full Olympics and Paralympics in the continent. But it will take time — the earliest would be 2032 with Paris (2024) and Los Angeles (2028) already pencilled in for the next games.

Instead, Parsons is pursuing the idea of hosting continental championships in several paralympic sports in Africa.

"Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt are strong countries in para-sport," he said in Berlin this August.

South Africa beat Zimbabwe by 34 runs in first T20

Agencies
East London, South Africa

South Africa beat Zimbabwe by 34 runs in the first of three Twenty20 internationals at Buffalo Park yesterday.

Chasing a competitive 161, Zimbabwe lost early wickets as Imran Tahir ripped through the batting order. Despite Peter Moor's quick 44 it simply was not enough. With yet another loss Zimbabwe will have a lot to ponder upon as they continue their losing streak in the rainbow nation.

The Proteas have made a few changes to their side by including quite a few fresh faces to their squad but that did not bear any outcome in the result of the match. In fact debutant Van Der Dussen's fifty spurred his team to go 1-0 up in the series.

Van der Dussen, 29, made 56 off 44 balls in a South African total of 160 for six after coming in with his team struggling on 11 for two in the second over. Van der Dussen and David Miller (39) put on 87 off 66 balls for the fourth wicket but South Africa were unable to dominate against a disciplined Zimbabwe bowling attack on a slow pitch.

Kyle Jarvis took three for 37 and Chris Mpofu took two for 24. Both claimed early wickets and bowled well in the death overs, with South Africa able to score only 36 runs while losing three wickets in the last four overs.

Leg-spinner Brandon Mavuta, 21, a former Zimbabwe under-19 captain, showed outstanding control, taking one for 19 in four overs. He dismissed South African captain Faf du Plessis for a hard-hit 34 off 20 balls.

SPOTLIGHT

Russian footballers face jail after 'racist' assault

Mamaev and Kokorin attacked two Russian trade ministry officials in an upscale Moscow cafe

AFP
Moscow

Disgraced Russian football players Pavel Mamaev and Alexander Kokorin could face up to five years in prison for assaulting a government official at a Moscow cafe, in a case that sparked outrage in Russia yesterday.

The assault by the players – both former Russian internationals who have courted controversy in the past – has prompted the interior ministry to open a criminal probe while the Kremlin described the incident as “unpleasant”.

On Monday, Krasnodar midfielder Mamaev and Zenit Saint Petersburg forward Kokorin attacked two Russian trade ministry officials in an upscale Moscow cafe. Video footage showed one of the officials, Denis Pak, an ethnic Korean, being hit with a chair while eating a meal.

“They started to mock (Pak’s) ethnicity” and assaulted him when he made a critical comment, Pak’s lawyer Gennadiy Udunyan told Russian state television. “He has a concussion.”

Before the cafe assault the footballers attacked the driver of a television host and damaged her Mercedes in a separate incident on Monday. The driver was hospitalised with injuries and a criminal probe was opened.

Public outrage quickly snowballed into a public shaming campaign on national television, which even published a list of Russian footballers who were convicted in the past. The Russian Premier League condemned Mamaev and Kokorin, saying they should face “severe” punishment.

“The Russian Premier League expresses its outrage and strongly condemns their (players’) rowdy behaviour,” it said in a statement. “This act not only casts a shadow over the glorious names of FC Zenit and FC Krasnodar but all of Russian football. We believe that those responsible should be punished in the most severe way. There is no place for hooligans in football!”

Kremlin-controlled state television featured a host of industry representatives and commentators angrily slamming the attack. “I think law enforcement agencies will qualify this as hooliganism and punishment for this is quite severe – up to five years in prison,” Igor Lebedev, a member of the Russian Football Union’s executive committee, said in televised remarks.

Russian Premier League club Krasnodar pledged to do everything to



Alexander Kokorin (left) and Pavel Mamaev played together for Russia at Euro 2016.

terminate Mamaev’s contract, while Zenit said Kokorin’s role in the incident was “disgusting”. “We are currently looking into how to terminate a contract with the player,” FC Krasnodar said. The club said Mamaev, 30, would have to pay “the largest possible fine” and would be barred from training with the first team for the time being. “What we saw in the video is outrageous,” it added.

FC Zenit said Kokorin, 27, would be

disciplined pending the outcome of the police investigation.

“Zenit management and fans feel nothing but disappointment that one of the country’s most talented footballers behaved in a disgusting manner,” the club said. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin – “just like the whole country” – was aware of the incident and described the video as “rather unpleasant”.

Sports commentator Dmitry Guberniev called the attack shameful. “This is racism against which FIFA wages an uncompromising fight,” he said in televised remarks. After the assault Pak and the other official, Sergei Gaisin, sought medical assistance before reporting the incident to the police. It is not the first time the players’ behaviour has raised eyebrows.

Russia’s Football Union suspended the pair in July 2016 after a video

emerged from a Monte Carlo nightclub where Mamaev and Kokorin allegedly spent \$296,000 (258,000 euros) on a champagne-fuelled party following Euro 2016, where Russia flopped.

Kokorin, who sat out this year’s World Cup with a knee injury, later apologised for his behaviour and was welcomed back into the national team. Mamaev last played for the national side at Euro 2016, when they finished bottom of their group.

Man United’s Matic pulls out of Serbia duty

Manchester United midfielder Nemanja Matic has withdrawn from Serbia’s squad for their forthcoming internationals due to injury. United confirmed Matic had returned to the club “to complete his rehabilitation”, ruling him out of the Nations League fixtures in Montenegro and Romania this week. The 30-year-old could also be sidelined for United’s Premier League clash at his former club Chelsea when they return to action after the international break on October 20. Matic made more than 150 appearances for Chelsea before once again linking up with former Blues boss Jose Mourinho at United last year.

La Liga club Huesca sack coach Franco

Bottom-of-the-table Huesca sacked Argentinian coach Leo Franco yesterday in what was La Liga’s first managerial dismissal of the season. Huesca, with just one win and two draws from their opening eight games, took on four-time capped Argentina goalkeeper Franco in June to replace Espanyol-bound Joan Francesc Ferrer ‘Rubi’. But the 41-year-old Argentine, who previously played for Huesca, has paid the price for that poor run of results since the club were promoted to the Spanish first division.

FA investigating ‘corruption’ claim in Wembley sale

The Football Association has confirmed they are investigating allegations of “systemic corruption” surrounding the controversial proposed sale of Wembley to Fulham owner Shahid Khan. Craig Kline, Fulham’s former assistant director of football operations, used a series of Twitter posts to demand the FA stop the planned sale. Kline, a university friend of Khan’s son Tony, was sacked by Fulham last year when his relationships with other senior figures broke down. But Kline has now posted three tweets on his account saying he and Tony Khan have a “paper trail” of evidence about “fraud, child endangerment and exploitation” in the game.

FIFA announces strategy to boost women’s football

FIFA announced a new global strategy for women’s football yesterday in an effort to create revenue streams and increase grassroots participation. FIFA said in a statement that it would work closely with member associations through workshops and special initiatives to “encourage female empowerment” through football. FIFA said it would look to double the number of female players to 60m by 2026 and ensure all member associations have developed “comprehensive women’s football strategies” by 2022.

Vidal unhappy with lack of playing time at Barcelona

Barcelona’s Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal says he is not happy because of his lack of playing time at his new club. Vidal joined from Bayern Munich this summer, but has had just two starts for the Catalans – and been substituted both times.

“How can I be happy if I don’t play, and me of all people?” Vidal told reporters after joining up with his national team. “I am somebody who has always fought, been at the best teams in the world, won everything and who wants to continue winning at Barcelona.” Vidal said. Coach Ernesto Valverde has opted to start young Brazilian midfielder Arthur in the team in recent matches.

Bundesliga strugglers name Weinzierl as coach

The Bundesliga’s bottom club VfB Stuttgart appointed former Schalke 04 coach Markus Weinzierl and gave him the task of trying to keep them in the top flight. Stuttgart sacked Tayfun Korkut at the weekend after taking just five points from seven league games. Weinzierl, 43, has been without a club since Schalke sacked him in June 2017 after a single season in charge. Stuttgart, who count France’s World Cup-winning defender Benjamin Pavard among their ranks, finished seventh in the Bundesliga last year in their first season back after winning promotion.

Sierra Leone files appeal against FIFA suspension

Sierra Leone has appealed against its suspension by world football’s top body on charges of government interference. After a crisis meeting with the government, the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA) sent a letter to FIFA asking it to lift the suspension so that the country can play Ghana in looming qualifiers for the Africa Cup of Nations. It said it would dispatch a delegation to FIFA headquarters in Zurich for talks. The bustup is rooted in a move by the country’s anti-corruption commission to sack SLFA president Isha Johansen and general secretary Christopher Kamara during an ongoing probe.

NATIONS LEAGUE

England can compete with Croatia’s Modric, insists recalled Barkley

AFP
Burton-on-Trent, United Kingdom

England do have the ability to compete with Croatia’s recently crowned FIFA player of the year Luka Modric, insists Chelsea midfielder Ross Barkley, who believes he can add a new dimension to the Three Lions on his international return. Barkley had to watch from afar as Real Madrid’s Modric and Barcelona’s Ivan Rakitic outclassed England’s midfield in a 2-1 World Cup semi-final win for Croatia in Moscow. Three months on, the two sides meet again in the Nations League on Friday and Barkley is just one of a host of young midfielders drafted into Gareth Southgate’s squad looking to make an impact.

At 24 and with 22 caps under his belt, Barkley is a senior figure compared to many of his new teammates. Leicester’s James Maddison, and teenagers Mason Mount and Jadon Sancho have all received their first call-ups. And Barkley believes the future is bright with England’s youth teams excelling along with the senior side’s run to a first World Cup semi-final in 28 years.

“It’ll be a challenge. You saw in the World Cup how great Modric was and Rakitic as well, who plays for a great side in Barcelona,” he said at the prospect of taking on Croatia’s midfield maestros. “We’ve got the players to compete with the big nations. We’ve got an identity now, we went to a World Cup and got to the semi-finals and we are going in the right direction.”

Barkley was part of the England squads that crashed out early at the 2014 World Cup and Euro 2016. However, he thinks Southgate’s commitment to trusting youth and attempts to mould a more technically gifted side has changed England since his last appearance over two years ago.

“We have gone in a different direction.



England’s James Maddison (left) and Ross Barkley go for a header during a training session at St. George’s Park, Burton upon Trent, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

We have added a lot of youth to the squad, we are all developing from a young age, developing into big players. We have all got the same goal, we all want to achieve success for England and we are getting close to that. I believe I can bring something different to the England team.”

Barkley earned his recall on the back of a strong start to the campaign with Chelsea after an injury-ravaged first season at Stamford Bridge that cost him the chance to go to the World Cup. “I had to accept where I was at,” he added. “I’d had a difficult season through injuries and few little niggles.”

However, while others like Mount, on

loan at second division Derby County from Chelsea, and Borussia’s Dortmund’s Sancho, have been rewarded for shunning the glamour of the Premier League’s top six to go elsewhere and play regularly, Barkley believes his decision to stay at Chelsea over the summer has been vindicated.

“I made the move because I believe in my ability and I believed no matter what I would eventually kick on at Chelsea. “I joined with a long term injury. I came through a difficult spell. I believe now that I am in the best physical shape I have ever been before and I am starting to show that. I believe I will show what I am capable of.”

RED-HOT ALCACER READY TO SEIZE CHANCE ON RETURN TO SPAIN FOLD

Madrid: Red-hot Borussia Dortmund striker Paco Alcacer said he is ready to seize the chance to grab Spain’s number nine shirt after returning to the national team following a two-year absence.

With Atletico Madrid star Diego Costa still out injured, Spain coach Luis Enrique has added Alcacer to an attacking lineup that already features Alvaro Morata (Chelsea), Rodrigo (Valencia) and Iago Aspas (Celta Vigo) for upcoming games with Wales and England.

Although expecting a battle to even start, Alcacer – who has hit seven goals in four matches for Dortmund since joining on loan following an unhappy spell at parent club Barcelona – is determined to grab his opportunity.

It might help his case that the number nine shirt, currently worn by Rodrigo, has found no permanent takers in recent years. “I’m very proud to be here, it’s the reward for all the work I’ve put in since the start of the season,” Alcacer told media from Spain’s training base at Las Rozas outside Madrid.

“I’ve always wanted to come back to the national side. The level here is really high, so I will have to match that if I even want to be picked. But I want

to contribute what I can and seize my opportunity when it comes along.”

Alcacer, 25, last played for Spain in March 2016. To date, he has scored six goals in 13 appearances. Despite being recalled by Luis Enrique, who kept him on the bench for much of his time at Barcelona, Alcacer added: “At Barcelona it was very difficult because you’re up against the likes of Luis (Suarez), Leo (Messi), Ousmane (Dembele) and Philippe (Coutinho), who are all top quality strikers.”

“Luis Enrique is a very professional coach, very direct. He explains things clearly, what he wants and what he doesn’t want.” Spain face Wales away in a friendly tomorrow before meeting World Cup semi-finalists England in the Nations League on Monday.



QATAR AT YOUTH OLYMPICS



Qatar's Mohamed al-Qashouti competes for the Australasia in the round one of the showjumping international team competition at the Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires yesterday. The 17-year-old al-Qashouti finished his round in 77.70 seconds as Australasia was in second place, with two more rounds to go. Rider were divided into six teams, namely Europe, South America, North America, Africa and Asia, as well as Australasia. The individual showjumping will begin from Friday, with medal round to be held on Saturday.



Qatar's 110m hurdles athlete Owaab Barrow trains in Buenos Aires yesterday.

FOOTBALL

Rooney calls on United players to 'stand up'

'I know Jose is getting a load of stick but I said a few weeks ago, the players have to stand up'

AFP
London

Wayne Rooney has called on Manchester United's players to stand up and be counted, saying that manager Jose Mourinho is an easy target for the club's troubles. United battled back from two goals down to beat Newcastle 3-2 at the weekend but are languishing in eighth place in the Premier League, seven points off top spot.

Following the win, Mourinho accused his critics of staging a 'manhunt' to get him sacked after a string of bad results and rifts with players including French midfielder Paul Pogba. But former United captain Rooney, who now plays for DC United in Major League Soccer (MLS), said the players had to take some responsibility for the situation.

"It's tough (at United), it has been a tough situation," he said in comments reported by Britain's *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. "The players, the manager, it has been a tough start to the season. I know Jose is getting a load of stick but I said a few weeks ago, the players have to stand up. They have to be counted and they have to be better. The manager can do so much but then it is down to the players on the pitch to produce, and probably collectively. It (the poor run) is a bit of everything coming together but Jose is an easy target. Some of the players have to be better."

The former England forward said the situation at Old Trafford was similar to when Louis van Gaal was at the helm. "He took a lot of stick but behind closed



A file photo of Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho (left) with Wayne Rooney. (Reuters)

doors I said to the players 'we have to be doing better'. Personally, I think he (Van Gaal) set us up brilliantly but we didn't produce on the pitch, so I am sure that is getting said behind the scenes."

Rooney now has nine goals in 16 matches since signing for DC United from Everton in June. The 32-year-old striker has played a part in a late-season surge that has left United two points behind Montreal for the sixth and

final Eastern Conference playoff berth with two games in hand.

MOURINHO HAS BACKING OF UNITED FANS AND CLUB, SAYS MOYES

Meanwhile, Former Manchester United manager David Moyes believes Mourinho retains the full backing of the club and their supporters. Moyes, who succeeded Alex Ferguson in 2013, was dumped by United while in

the first year of a six-year contract and his replacement, Louis van Gaal, was axed after winning the FA Cup.

But the former Everton boss said he believed United would give Mourinho time even though they are languishing in eighth spot in the Premier League. "I think the club are firmly behind the manager, and he's been a winner, Jose, throughout his career, so I don't see why that

should suddenly change," the Scot, 55, said.

"It was a great result - any team that comes from 2-0 down. But the one thing that happens at Old Trafford is the crowd get right behind you, and is always supportive of the manager and the players."

Derby manager Frank Lampard, who recently masterminded a League Cup victory at Old Trafford and played under Mourinho at Chelsea, believes that after Saturday's comeback the onus should be on the players to raise their standards.

"Sometimes things are hard and you have to make difficult decisions, try and influence people around you, influence your players to try and get the best out of them," he said. "I think he's got all those attributes so I hope that it turns around for him."

Mourinho has retained the support of the club's board before the Newcastle game, and following the win said he can "cope with the manhunt" against him. The 55-year-old added that if it "rains in London" or there are "difficulties with the agreements of Brexit" it will be his fault.

Meanwhile, ex-Premier League striker Chris Sutton believes Mourinho is not the right man to take United forward. "It's been a disastrous season for United," Sutton told BBC Radio 5 live. "What is Mourinho doing to help the situation? All he does is play the victim. All the nonsense after the game - the Brexit, he gets blamed for everything - I don't get it. Every press conference he goes in and is negative, negative, negative - obstinate, awkward. He should have drawn a line under things," he added.

FOCUS

France can emulate World Cup-Euro double, says Pires

Reuters
Mumbai



Robert Pires.

France's World Cup winning squad can emulate the side of a generation ago and back up with the European Championship in two years' time, according to former midfielder Robert Pires. The 44-year-old Pires was a member of the French side and teammate of current national manager Didier Deschamps that won the tournament for the first time at home in 1998.

They then won the Euro 2000 title and Pires said with his former captain in charge, there was no reason why the current side could not repeat the performance in the tournament that will be held across 12 cities in 2020.

"The Euro is the next opportunity for Deschamps. He has a very good team, a young team, very talented," Pires, who was in India as an ambassador for La Liga, said in an interview.

"Now everybody knows the names, the players. He can make a double of World and Euro champion. But it will be difficult because I think winning the Euro is more complicated, more difficult. But we have a good chance to win the trophy in two years."

Pires, who said he had a "good feeling" about the team's chances ahead of the tournament in Russia, recognised the similarities between his side and this generation's champions. "I had a good feeling about the team this year," Pires said.

"It was a bit similar between 1998 and this time. We had a good team, good manager, good young players. Didier Deschamps had a big role. Even in 1998, he had a big role. He was the captain. You need a player like him. Technically he's not

so good but he was a warrior on the pitch."

One of the players that Deschamps will rely on is Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba, who was instrumental in their World Cup run in Russia. However, according to British media reports, Pogba's relationship with club manager Jose Mourinho has deteriorated after the player apparently criticised the side's tactics.

Pires said Pogba should try to repair his relationship with club manager Jose Mourinho, or at least make sure it was amenable and that he performed on the pitch. "For Paul Pogba, the best is to say nothing," Pires said.

"He's a great player. If Man United paid a lot of money for him, it's because he's a good player. His relation with the manager may not be so good but he's a professional. It's very important for him to be focused on Man United, on the pitch. Now say nothing, play football and walk out - that's my advice for Paul Pogba."

While Pires had acknowledged there were similarities between the team he played in and the current French side, there was no question who was the most talented. "Sorry, no the current team was not better than us," he said. "The 1998 team was much better. We played with Zinedine Zidane and Youri Djorkaeff, the quality was very, very good."

SPOTLIGHT

Aspire Academy celebrates Global Citizenship Day in style

Aspire Academy Dormitory Green Area was awash with colours from more than 60 national flags as the Academy celebrated the 8th annual 'Aspire Global Citizenship Day', bringing more than 65 nationalities and their unique cultures together under one roof.

Aspire Academy organises the event each year to celebrate and introduce student-athletes to cultural and ethnic diversity that is paramount to the success of the academy.

To mark the event, Aspire Academy staff turned out in outfits and regalia representative of their countries of origin while showcasing some of their different countries heritage, foods, historical artefacts and other exhibits. Teachers were joined by parents and staff from different foreign embassies in Qatar at their respective national stands where they were on hand to explain their exhibitions to all who passed by.

Speaking about the event, School Principal at Aspire Academy, Jassim

al-Jaber said: "Aspire Academy is made up of staff and students who come from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds, which presents a unique learning opportunity for students. The Academy's diverse workforce exposes student-athletes to people from all over the world, helping develop well-rounded, adaptable and well-educated sports champions."

Salah al-Yafii, Head of Leadership Development at Aspire Academy School added, "Aspire Global Citizenship Day is one of the highlights of our academic year and brings an immense amount of enjoyment and satisfaction to all involved."

"The value and importance of this annual celebration to our community is immense and we learn so much more from each other. You can clearly see it is thoroughly enjoyed by everyone involved and the turnout is huge, especially from students."

"This is a fantastic initiative from Aspire, which allows our students to see

and experience different cultures from around the world. As international athletes, our students should be exposed to these type of initiatives and opportunities, so they can experience these before they travel and as they interact with people from around the world," said John Erickson, Education Technology Specialist at Aspire from the US.

Aspire students thronged to the Green Area, and one of them, Hamad al-Amri, remarked, "This initiative helps me learn about other countries and when I travel for competitions to some of these places the knowledge I already have gathered from Aspire's Global Citizenship Days comes in handy, so it's a really helpful and enjoyable event."

Adding on to the remarks one of the event organisers, Mohamed Ali Alseerooqi, Aspire Academy School Leadership Development team said, "There are more than 60 nationalities from around the world at Aspire Academy, which presents a unique opportunity for the

students and faculty to learn about and interact with different cultures and traditions, gaining valuable insights.

"This day plays a critical role in supporting our efforts to develop students who possess a well-rounded global perspective."

The concept of Global Citizenship Day is a key pillar in Aspire Academy's educational philosophy and supports the Academy's different approaches to multicultural education, education for sustainable development and international education.

The Academy's efforts to organise such an event stems from its belief in the role of educators as agents of social change, bringing new perspectives on understanding the self in relation to a global community within the holistic educational experience for the Academy's student-athletes.

This perspective follows a curriculum that attends to human values and beliefs, global systems, issues, history and cross-cultural understandings.



Aspire Academy staff and students during the 8th Aspire Global Citizenship Day.

NFL

Saints star Brees sets NFL career pass yards mark

'I just love playing the game. I didn't set out on this journey to break these records'

AFP
Washington

New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees set the NFL all-time passing yardage record on Monday, breaking Peyton Manning's old mark on a 62-yard touchdown pass in a 43-19 victory over Washington.

Brees completed 26-of-29 passes for 363 yards and three touchdowns to spark the Saints' victory, overtaking Manning for the career mark with a scoring toss to Tre'Quan Smith down the right sideline with 2:36 remaining in the second quarter.

"I will remember that one for a long time," Brees said.

"It has truly been a dream come true. Truly proud and very grateful." Brees finished the game with 72,103 all-time passing yards after moving past Manning's 71,940 and Brett Favre's total of 71,838 in the second quarter.

"I don't know if that will ever sink in," Brees said of being the career yardage leader. "I just love playing the game. I didn't set out on this journey to break these records. I just love to play this game." Brees said that his mother and grandfather, both deceased, were in his thoughts for the important roles they played in nurturing his NFL dreams.

"It's hard. There are just so many people that had a hand in it, that can share in it," Brees said. "There were a lot of people I wanted to make proud and prove right tonight, none more than them." The 39-year-old passer, in his 18th NFL campaign, now has 499 career touchdown passes, one shy of joining a select 500-touchdown NFL club whose only members are Manning, Favre and New England's Tom



New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees (9) celebrates after setting a new NFL all-time passing yardage record during a game against the Washington Redskins at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome on Monday. PICTURE: Chuck Cook-USA TODAY Sports

Brady, who reached the milestone last Thursday.

"I still feel like there's work to be done," Brees said.

Cheering supporters roared in the Superdome as Smith ran into the end zone with the historic catch, which gave the Saints a 26-6 lead and pushed Brees to 71,968 yards at that point, 28 yards beyond Manning's old mark. "All your hard work and dedication has paid off," Manning said in a pre-taped message. "Congratulations and I'm proud of you." Brees had moved to second

on the all-time list earlier in the quarter, passing Favre on a 75-yard touchdown drive earlier in the quarter.

"Proud to be passed by a guy like you," Favre tweeted.

After Brees connected on the record throw, he was mobbed by teammates and the game was briefly halted to acknowledge the moment. Brees hugged coach Sean Payton and his family on the sidelines.

Brees, who tapped his heart and pointed to the spectators in the sold-out stadium, handed

the football used on the play to a Hall of Fame official.

Mark Ingram had run for touchdowns of one and two yards and Brees flipped a 1-yard touchdown pass to Josh Hill for other Saints scoring in the first half.

Brees set the NFL all-time completions record last month with number 6,301 to break Favre's career mark.

Brees, who turns 40 in January, led the Saints to a 2010 Super Bowl victory, taking Most Valuable Player honors in a 31-17 triumph over Manning's Indi-

anapolis Colts.

Dustin Hopkins kicked field goals of 37 and 53 yards for Washington, which also had a 4-yard touchdown run from Alex Smith to pull within 26-13 at half-time. Brees and Smith also combined on a 35-yard touchdown pass and Taysom Hill ran one yard for touchdowns in the third quarter while Will Lutz added a 44-yard field goal for a 43-13 New Orleans lead early in the fourth quarter.

Kapri Bibbs added a 1-yard touchdown run for Washington for the final points.

NBA

Boston's Smart, Cavs' Smith fined for pre-season scuffle

AFP
New York

Boston Celtics guard Marcus Smart and Cleveland Cavaliers swingman JR Smith were each fined Monday by the NBA for their roles in an on-court altercation, the league announced.

Smart was fined \$25,000 for escalating an on-court incident during an altercation in which he was ejected. Smith was fined \$15,000 for initiating the confrontation.

The incident took place with 3:38 remaining in the first quarter of Cleveland's 113-102 home victory over Boston late Saturday.

Smith and Australian forward Aron Baynes of the Celtics became entangled and exchanged shoves, with Smart entering the scuffle by pushing Smith from behind.

Both Smart and Smith had to be restrained from escalating the situation. Smart was whistled for a technical foul and ejected. Smith was issued a technical foul for shoving Baynes.

The Celtics, who were ousted from the NBA playoffs by Cleveland in last season's Eastern Conference final, will not face the Cavaliers in the regular season until November 30.

The Cavaliers reached the NBA Finals in each of the past four seasons, but that was with four-time NBA Most Valuable Player LeBron James, who departed Cleveland in the offseason to join the Los Angeles Lakers.

Meanwhile, Phoenix Suns managing owner Robert Sarver fired general manager Ryan McDonough following poor results in a week of exhibition games.

The Suns, who had the NBA's worst record last season at 21-61, lost 106-102 at home to Sacramento a week ago and 115-93 to visiting Portland last Friday in pre-season NBA contests.

Phoenix also struggled past the Australian National Basketball League's New Zealand Breakers 91-86 last Wednesday.

With their season opener set for October 17 against visiting Dallas, the Suns decided they needed to make a major change before the new campaign tipped off.

"After much thought and a long evaluation of our basketball operations, I have decided to relieve Ryan McDonough of his duties," Sarver said. "Our focus in the short term is to prepare for the upcoming NBA season and to continue pursuing opportunities to strengthen our roster."

Basketball operations vice president James Jones and assistant general manager Trevor Bukstein will share interim general manager duties.

Jones, a three-time NBA champion playing alongside pal LeBron James and who never played on a club with a losing season in 14 campaigns, will oversee coaches, players and staff. Bukstein will handle player transactions.

"Over the course of the season, we will explore both internal and external options as we look to restructure our basketball front office leadership," Sarver said.

HOWARD MAY MISS WIZARDS' OPENER

Washington Wizards center Dwight Howard might not be ready to start the season on time due to a lower back ailment.

The 32-year-old journeyman left New York to head back to Washington and receive a pain-fighting injection, Wizards coach Scott Brooks said yesterday.

"Hopefully early next week, he'll be back on the court and be ready to play," Brooks said, according to the *Washington Post*. "I don't know what that means for the first game, but we're just gonna take it day by day."

The Wizards open the season with an Oct. 18 home game against the Miami Heat. Howard hasn't appeared in any preseason games due to his back problems, which flared up again Saturday in a workout with coaches, according to the *Post*.

Brooks said if Howard is unable to see any preseason action, he probably won't play in the regular-season opener. When he gets on the court for Washington, Howard will be playing for his fourth team in four seasons and the sixth team of his career.

NHL

Bergeron's hat-trick powers Bruins

Agencies
Reuters

Patrice Bergeron completed a hat trick in the third period and had an assist as the Boston Bruins won their home opener, defeating the Ottawa Senators 6-3 on Monday afternoon.

Bergeron scored twice in the first period before netting his third goal on a backhand off an Ottawa defender at 4:38 of the third period for his fourth career hat trick.

David Pastrnak had two goals and two assists, and Chris Wagner, a native of Wellesley, Mass., scored his first goal for the Bruins. Charlie McAvoy and Brad Marchand each added three assists. Ryan Dzingel scored twice for the Senators. Dzingel was a game-time decision for the contest after sustaining an undisclosed injury in practice Sunday.

ISLANDERS 4, SHARKS 0
Robin Lehner recorded 35 saves in his first start for host New York, which cruised to a victory over San Jose.

Lehner, who signed with the Islanders in July, recorded his ninth career shutout in his first start since undergoing alcohol rehab and being diagnosed with bipolar disorder following his final season with the Buffalo Sabres.

Anders Lee, Scott Mayfield, Matt Martin and Casey Cizikas all scored for the Islanders, who have opened the season with two wins in three games. New York recorded just two shutouts last

season, when it allowed an NHL-high 293 goals.

BUFFALO SABRES 4, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 2

Jack Eichel scored two goals and Carter Hutton had 35 saves to lead host Buffalo past Vegas.

It was the second straight win for the Sabres, who also defeated the Golden Knights for the first time in franchise history after losing both meetings to the expansion franchise last season. Marco Scandella and Jason Pominville also scored goals for the Sabres, and Kyle Okposo added a pair of assists.

Jonathan Marchessault had a goal and an assist, and Erik Haula, who scored the game-winner in a 2-1 shootout win at Minnesota on Saturday night, also scored a goal for Vegas.

DUCKS 3, RED WINGS 2 (SO)

Troy Terry scored the lone goal in the shootout, and goalie John Gibson made 20 saves through overtime and was perfect in the shootout as Anaheim beat Detroit in its home opener.

The Ducks celebrated the 25th anniversary of their inaugural game by winning for the third time in as many outings to start the season. The Red Wings are winless through three games to start the season for the first time since 1991-92, although two of their losses were in extra time.

Tyler Bertuzzi and Darren Helm scored for the Red Wings, and Hampus Lindholm and Jakob Silfverberg responded for the Ducks. Silfverberg's goal tied the game 2-2 at 8:29 of the third period.

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Astros and Dodgers advance in playoffs, Red Sox roll

AFP
New York

Defending champion Houston and the Los Angeles Dodgers advanced in the Major League Baseball playoffs with lopsided road triumphs Monday while the Boston Red Sox routed the New York Yankees.

George Springer smashed two solo home runs in Houston's 11-3 romp over the Cleveland Indians, while Manny Machado belted a three-run homer and a run-scoring double to power the Dodgers over the Atlanta Braves by a score of 6-2.

And Boston's Brock Holt hit for the first playoff game cycle — a single, double, triple and homer — and drove in five runs as the Red Sox hammered out 18 hits in a 16-1 humbling of the host Yankees.

"It was a fun night," Holt said. "Offensively, we were clicking on all cylinders. Tonight is a night I will remember for a long time."

Houston completed a sweep of Cleveland in the best-of-five American League division series, holding the Tribe to six runs on 13 hits over three games.

"It's awesome, a great day for us as a team," Springer said. "I'm happy to be heading home."

The Astros will face either the Red Sox or Yankees in the best-of-seven American League Championship Series



Houston Astros shortstop Carlos Correa (1) forces out Cleveland Indians third baseman Josh Donaldson (27) in the ninth inning during game three of the 2018 ALDS playoff baseball series on Monday. PICTURE: David Richard-USA TODAY Sports

with the winner advancing to the World Series. Andrew Benintendi smacked a three-run double to pace a seven-run fourth inning for the Red Sox, who led New York 2-1 and could advance by winning Tuesday. "This was a special group from day one," Holt said. "As tonight shows, we can do some special things."

The Astros outlasted the

Dodgers in a seventh-game showdown to win last year's World Series for their first championship and could yet face a rematch with Los Angeles.

The Dodgers eliminated the Braves in four games and will face the Milwaukee Brewers starting Friday in the National League Championship Series to decide the other World Series berth.

BRAVES OUSTED

In Atlanta, the Dodgers took the lead in the first inning on Machado's run-scoring double.

The Braves answered in the fourth on a two-run single to left field by pinch-hitter Kurt Suzuki. But Los Angeles reclaimed the lead at 3-2 in the sixth when pinch-hitter David Freese, the 2011 World Series Most Valuable

Player with the champion St. Louis Cardinals, smacked a two-run single to centerfield.

Machado blasted his three-run homer in the seventh for a 6-2 lead and Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen baffled Atlanta batters for the final outs.

YANKEES HUMBLD

Boston jumped ahead 3-0 after three innings before breaking open the game in the fourth.

Holt and Vazquez singled and Jackie Bradley walked to load the bases, prompting New York to remove Luis Severino for relief pitcher Lance Lynn, who walked Mookie Betts to plate another Boston run. Benintendi smacked his three-run double down the right-field line and scored on a Steve Pearce single that set up Holt's two-run triple for a 10-0 Boston lead.

No team has rallied from more than an eight-run deficit to win a playoff game in major league history and the Yankees never threatened to be the first.

Holt doubled in a run and completed his cycle with a two-run homer in the ninth.

AMERICAN LEAGUE

Houston Astros...11 Cleveland Indians...3 (Houston win series 3-0)

Boston Red Sox...16 N York Yankees...1 (Boston leads series 2-1)

NATIONAL LEAGUE

L. Angeles Dodgers...6 Atlanta Braves...2 (Los Angeles win series 3-1)

SPOTLIGHT

Muguruza to focus on rescuing disappointing season

AFP
Hong Kong

Former world number one **Garbine Muguruza** said she had put her birthday celebrations on hold as she battles to rescue a disappointing season by winning the WTA Hong Kong Open. Muguruza, who has slumped from top of the rankings in 2017 to world number 13, turned 25 Monday but said celebrations had been low key the night before her first round clash with fellow Spaniard Sara Sorribes Tormo. "It was a very simple celebration, we went to dinner with the team, but honestly, if you're competing the next day it's very hard to think about something else," she said. "I'm sure I will have more time after here to do something more fun." Muguruza cruised through 6-3, 6-1 but insisted the clash had not been plain sailing. "It's not easy to play a Spanish player - because I know her - but I'm happy I'm in the sec-

ond round."

The former French Open and Wimbledon champion, who enjoys playing at the net, added: "(Sorribes Tormo) is very talented so she managed to put me in trouble and give me difficult balls, so I think it was very competitive."

Muguruza will be joined in the second round by top seed Elna Svitolina, the world number five, who was relieved to get past big-serving Australian Priscilla Hon in straight sets in the late match. The Ukrainian is still in the hunt for WTA Finals Singapore and admitted feeling the "pressure" as the tournament favourite.

Earlier yesterday Chinese number one Wang Qiang, currently enjoying the hottest streak of her career, cruised to a straightforward 6-0, 6-2 victory over Hong Kong's Zhang Ling.

After her latest win Wang - who is even being touted as a potential successor to double Grand Slam champion and China tennis icon Li Na - said she

was playing the best tennis of her career, adding she felt more "confidence" on court.

Japan's Nao Hibino, ranked 125 in the world, bundled out 2011 US Open champion Samantha Stosur in straight sets. The Australian, who is still ranked 69, went down 3-6, 3-6. Meanwhile Australia's Daria Gavrilova backed Roger Federer after the Swiss great warned temperamental tennis star Nick Kyrgios he needed to work harder to realise his potential.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion offered the tough love to Kyrgios after the 23-year-old made yet another contentious exit from the Shanghai Masters on Monday.

Federer described Kyrgios as "a great player" but added he needed to develop a work ethic to go with his talent.

Gavrilova, the second-ranked Australian woman, said: "I'm pretty sure Roger is spot on."

She added: "(Kyrgios) is definitely one of the most talented players out there and I love watching him.

"I don't know what happened in Shanghai but ... hopefully he can make a breakthrough and win a few slams."

The Russian-born Aussie, back at the Hong Kong Open after losing last year's typhoon-delayed final, added of her compatriot: "He's different, he plays different and I guess when you come to watch him you never know what's going to happen."

Gavrilova, the world number 34 who is seeded seventh at the Hong Kong Open, booked her place in the second round after a fiery three-set victory over the Kazakh Zarina Diyas.

The Australian queried a number of debatable line calls, at one point channelling her inner John McEnroe as she yelled at the chair umpire: "You can't be serious!"

Despite last year's final ending in the early hours in front of just a handful of bedraggled spectators, she insisted she has good memories of the tournament.

"I love coming back here," she smiled.



SHANGHAI MASTERS

'Completely different' Djokovic barrels into third round

"I think I'm a completely different player than I was in first five, six months of the year. Hopefully the outcome can be different as well"

AFP
Shanghai

Imperious Novak Djokovic declared that he was "a completely different player" from the first half of this year after he beat France's Jeremy Chardy 6-3, 7-5 to roll into the Shanghai Masters third round yesterday.

The rejuvenated Serbian second seed has now won all 12 matches against Chardy and this victory was never in doubt. The 31-year-old Djokovic had to contend with a more stubborn Chardy in the second set, before the world number three's superior shot-making won through in 83 minutes. The 14-time Grand Slam champion missed six months of competition in 2017 and had elbow surgery in February.

But he has burst back to form and fitness since the summer, winning Wimbledon, the US Open and the Masters 1000 Cincinnati in a terrific run, and says he is back close to his best. Djokovic, who is eyeing Rafael Nadal's number one ranking, said: "I haven't won too many matches the beginning of the year.

"After the surgery I was not managing to play my best, and that has changed, so obviously the more you win, the more comfortable and more confident you feel on the court."

The Serb will play either Italy's Marco Cecchinato or South Korea's Chung Hyeon next - he lost to both during his darker days in the first half of the year.

"I think I'm a completely different player than I was in first five, six months of the year," he said.

"Hopefully the outcome can be different as well." In the absence of the injured Nadal, holder Roger Federer is the top seed in Shanghai and the Swiss great starts his campaign today against Russia's Daniil Medvedev.

Nikoloz Basilashvili showed that his China Open triumph at the weekend was no fluke as he brushed aside the promising Denis Shapovalov.

The Georgian, up to a career-high 23 in the world following his victory over Juan Martin del Potro in Beijing on Sunday, beat the teenage Canadian 6-2, 6-2 in just 57 minutes.

The 26-year-old Basilashvili will now have another upset in his sights when he plays fourth seed Alexander Zverev at the Masters 1000 event today.

Basilashvili's victory over an under-the-weather Del Potro at the weekend was just his second ATP title, the first coming in Hamburg in July. Del Potro,



Novak Djokovic of Serbia reacts after defeating Jeremy Chardy of France in their singles match at the Shanghai Masters yesterday. (AFP)

Respect ball kids, Federer tells fellow pros

Tennis players need to respect ball boys and ball girls. **Roger Federer** said in the wake of a row following Fernando Verdasco's rant over a sweaty towel. Spaniard Verdasco was cast as a villain on social media last week after appearing to berate a ball boy for not bringing his towel quickly enough during a semi-final defeat at the Shenzhen Open. A video of the world number 30 impatiently gesticulating and appearing to rant at the youngster swiftly circulated on social media, leading to a raft of criticism from fans and pundits.

Federer on Tuesday stopped short of criticising Verdasco - acknowledging that nerves can become ragged in competition - but he did stress the need to respect ball kids. "Sure you always want to respect the ball kids for who they are and the great job that they're doing," the Swiss said, adding "but it's not easy for each and every player to control their emotions exactly." Federer, who himself acted as a ball boy in his youth, said he felt most of the young



helpers understood the pressure players are under, but that it was vital they enjoyed a good experience at tournaments. "The ball kids are really important to us because they are also maybe the future of our game," the Swiss, in Shanghai for the

Masters tournament, said. "I was happy when I left a tennis tournament, I felt like, 'oh man, it was just all good'," he said of his time as a ball boy.

"There were no negatives, so you don't want to have them leave feeling like, oh my god, like I was not appreciated or I was not liked or it was actually a horrible thing, you know?" "So yes, it needs to be taken care of."

Not so long ago the likes of Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors would fetch their own drinks and take care of themselves at changeovers.

These days modern pampered players plant themselves in a court-side chair and gesture for drinks, ice-packs, bananas, towels, new rackets and anything else they may need. The tide, though, may be turning.

At next month's Next Gen ATP Finals in Milan - the season-ending tournament for the best Under-21 male players - players will be instructed to use a towel rack at the end of the court "to remove the onus on ball kids to handle towels"

the Shanghai third seed who was suffering with a cold and flu in Beijing, meets France's Richard Gasquet. A press conference

for the Argentine yesterday was cancelled at the last moment, however, which suggests that he could still be unwell. Austria's

Dominic Thiem became the biggest casualty so far when the sixth seed was stunned by Matthew Ebden in a thrilling three-

set contest. The Australian finally emerged 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/4) for the biggest scalp of his career.

FOCUS

Serena confirmed for 8th Australian Open title tilt

AFP
Melbourne

Seven times champion Serena Williams will be back at the Australian Open in 2019 having missed her title defence this year after giving birth, organisers said yesterday.

The 23-time Grand Slam winner, who won on her last appearance in 2017 while pregnant, will be joined in January's tournament by double Melbourne Park champion Victoria Azarenka who was forced to withdraw from the 2018 event because of a custody battle with her baby's father.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said yesterday he was expecting a full contingent of the top 100 men and women players in Melbourne next year.

"I'm delighted to announce that Serena Williams will return to the Australian Open in January," Tiley said while launching the 2019 event at Rod Laver Arena.

"We last saw Serena here in Melbourne as our champion, holding the Daphne Ackhurst Memorial Cup in 2017. Of course what we didn't know at the time was that she was already eight weeks pregnant with baby Olympia," said Tiley.

Williams needs one more Grand Slam singles victory to equal Australian Margaret Court's all-time record of 24.

"Serena loves coming to Melbourne and I know she's excited about returning in January with her family, it's definitely a very special place for her," said Tiley. "She'll also be super-focused on winning here, and equalling Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles."

Tiley said the tournament was gearing up to welcome back Azarenka and Williams - and their children.



Serena Williams poses with Australian Open 2017 trophy.

"Vika (Azarenka) is also a new mum to toddler Leo and I'm looking forward to showing her, and Serena, our new creche facilities," said Tiley. "I'm sure they'll be appreciated."

Six-time men's winners Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer, who captured his 20th Grand Slam title in Melbourne in January, look to be among the players to beat again in 2019.

Tiley was also looking forward to the return of Britain's Andy Murray, the five-time losing finalist who missed this year's tournament with injury.

"With his incredible work ethic and competitive spirit it would be foolish to underestimate him," he said of the Scot.

Tiley said prize money at the January 14-27 tournament will be increased to Aus\$60.5 million (\$42.9 million) from Aus\$55 million in 2018 - split equally between men's and women's tournaments.

The 2018 singles winners Federer and Caroline Wozniacki both picked up cheques for Aus\$4 million (\$2.83 million). The tournament will also introduce a 25-second serve clock to speed up play, after the innovation made its Slam debut at this year's US Open.

"The 25-second serve clock will be introduced for all matches," said Tiley.

Australian Open organisers working towards stand on coaching rule

Australian Open organisers are working to determine whether coaching will be allowed during the Grand Slam tournament in an effort to end the controversy that led to Serena Williams' outburst over a code violation during the US Open final. Williams was given the violation when chair umpire Carlos Ramos saw her coach Patrick Mouratoglou make a hand gesture to tell her to play closer to the net against Japan's Naomi Osaka. She was then docked a point after she later smashed her racquet and then penalised a game for calling Ramos a "thief". Coaching while the players are on court is not permitted in Grand Slam tournaments, although the WTA Tour allows it in other events at specified times.

It is prohibited in all men's matches. Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said at the time that he would urge tennis officials to affirm its position on coaching during matches and said yesterday that they were working with the governing bodies to clarify the rules. "We're getting the global governing bodies - the ATP, WTA and ITF - and the grand slams together to talk about our approach to coaching," Tiley told reporters at an event for next year's opening Grand Slam at Melbourne Park. "I think it's really important that it's consistent so fans and players don't get confused on it so hopefully in the coming weeks we are able to make an announcement on our position."

FORMULA 1

Hamilton bats for under-fire Vettel

'IT IS TO BE EXPECTED THAT BEING HUMANS WE WILL MAKE MISTAKES'



Ferrari's German driver Sebastian Vettel (C) signs an autograph for a fan at the paddock during the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix at Suzuka last week.

Reuters
London

Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton has defended Sebastian Vettel after the Ferrari driver's title hopes effectively ended in Japan at the weekend. "I feel the media need to show a little more respect for Sebastian," Hamilton wrote at the end of an Instagram story from a fashion show in Tokyo. The Briton stands on the brink of securing his fifth championship after winning six of the past seven races for Mercedes to lead

his German rival by 67 points with four races remaining. Vettel tangled with Red Bull's Max Verstappen at Suzuka while trying to pass for third place, a collision that left him fighting back from 19th to sixth after starting eighth on the grid. Both Ferrari and Vettel have been criticised for glaring strategy errors, such as selecting the wrong tyres in final qualifying in Japan, and a string of mistakes made on track in the heat of battle. Italy's *Autosprint* magazine carried a cover this week showing Vettel and the headline 'Cavallino Mancante' (Missing Horse) — a play on Ferrari's familiar

'Cavallino Rampante' prancing stallion. It described Ferrari as lost, lacklustre and victims of too many mistakes of their own making. The *Gazzetta dello Sport* had also criticised Vettel as a driver "who learns nothing from mistakes". "You simply cannot imagine how hard it is to do what we do at our level, for any athlete at the top of their game that is," said Hamilton. "It is to be expected that being humans we will make mistakes but it is how we get through them that counts."

Vettel won the first two races in Australia and Bahrain and appeared to have the faster car for much of the first half of the season. He made a big error in Germany, sliding into the barriers while leading on a slippery track, to put Hamilton back in front in July and the Mercedes driver has not looked back as Ferrari's season unravels. The death of president Sergio Marchionne in July also came as a huge blow to the Italian team, who have not won a championship for a decade. Others have pinpointed the lack of leaders with backgrounds in racing rather than sponsorship, senior man-

agement or marketing. Since Hockenheim, Hamilton has taken 168 points from a maximum 175 available while Vettel, who won his four world championships with Red Bull, has managed only 93. The Briton will become only the third driver to win five titles or more if he scores eight points more than Vettel in Texas next week. "As was the case last year, in September and October Ferrari seems to have gone off the rails," commented Ross Brawn, Formula One's managing director for motorsport and a former Mercedes team boss as well as ex-Ferrari technical director.

BOTTOMLINE

Tokyo Games savings at \$4.3bn but more to come – CEO Muto

Reuters
Buenos Aires

Several measures have cut the cost of staging the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by \$4.3bn but organisers are determined to save more money in the next two years, Tokyo Games CEO Toshio Muto said yesterday. Muto told the International Olympic Committee (IOC) efforts were being made to reduce the budget further through a series of initiatives linked with the IOC's Agenda 2020 and New Norm reform projects. The two IOC projects are aimed at dropping the cost of the Olympics to make the Games an attractive prospect for potential host cities in the future. "We have been able to save another \$2.1bn," Muto said, presenting a progress report to the IOC session. "It has been \$4.3bn dollars in savings in total. "The IOC's Agenda 2020 and New Norm (cost-reducing measures) will allow Tokyo 2020 to suppress future budget increases," Muto said. "We have reached the phase of detailed preparations." The Games budget spiralled dangerously out of control a few years after Japan was awarded the



Toshio Muto, the CEO of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics organising committee, delivers a speech during the 133rd IOC session in Buenos Aires on Monday.

event in 2013. The escalating costs meant other cities hoping to stage future Olympics were discouraged from doing so, leading to Rome, Hamburg and Budapest pulling out of the race to host the 2024 Olympics. "What we want to avoid is over-deliver and under-con-

sume," Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi told reporters. "We have another year and a half and we will systematically look at solutions that do make sense from an experience and an economic standpoint." Tokyo's overall budget, after several revisions, now stands at

\$12.6bn, of which \$5.6bn is the organising committee's budget for staging the Games. The IOC contributes some \$1.7bn in cash and services to the organising committee. Muto said savings were being made by holding shorter test events, cutting lease periods and also in construction costs. "Construction has been reduced, lease periods have been reduced, test event savings and several other items which include energy, power, telecommunications, basic facility construction which was costly but through negotiations... the specifications have been readjusted," Muto said. The IOC welcomed the savings, saying more should be done to make sure the Games budget is balanced or even profitable for organisers. "I know that you will continue to pursue savings right until the end of the closing ceremony," John Coates, who heads the IOC's coordination commission on Tokyo, said. "So the budget is balanced or with a surplus." Muto said most of the test events for the Games had been planned, with the swimming test event dates still to be decided. "It is almost finalised," he said when asked about swimming. Completion of the Olympic Aquatics Centre, which will host

swimming and diving events, was recently pushed back by two months but organisers said it will be ready well in time for the Games in July 2020. Meanwhile, the President of South Korea's Pyeongchang 2018 Organising Committee (POCOG) Lee Hee-beom announced that his organisation has achieved a surplus of at least 55mn US dollars. Lee said at the meeting of the Executive Council of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Buenos Aires that the surplus was reached through the application of cost reduction in line with the reforms of the agenda of the 2020 Olympics. "We congratulate the Organising Committee of the Olympic Winter Games Pyeongchang 2018 for the organisation of an outstanding Olympic Winter Games, which were extremely successful in all respects. In recognition of these great achievements, the IOC will contribute its share of the surplus for the benefit of sport in Korea," German Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), said. Any surplus from the organisation of the Games is normally divided between the IOC, the Organising Committee and the host National Olympic Committee for the benefit of sport and the Olympic Movement.

GOLF

Sharma dreams of upset PGA Tour win



AFP
Kuala Lumpur

India's Shubhankar Sharma said he was hoping to upset the odds at this week's CIMB Classic as he hunts the Asian merit crown along with his PGA Tour card. Sharma won February's Maybank Championship in Kuala Lumpur and he returns to the Malaysian capital on top of the Asian Tour prize money standings ahead of the dual-sanctioned event. It kicks off a swing of three big tournaments in Asia for the 21-year-old, along with next week's CJ Cup in South Korea and the WGC-HSBC Champions in Shanghai. "My immediate goal is to win the Asian Tour order of merit. But this stretch for me, no doubt, is very, very important. Obviously all three events are big PGA Tour events. You have some of the best players in the world playing," said Sharma, who failed to secure his PGA Tour card last season. "It helps that the events are in Asia and I am so much more comfortable in the conditions here. If I just play well in these three events, have consistent finishes, I feel like I'll get off to a very good start towards secur-

ing my PGA Tour card and it will obviously help my world ranking. "We have a really good chance here and if I play well, in golf, anything is possible. I feel like I can win on a given day when I'm playing really well. I just want to get back to the same level that I was at the start of the year and then things will fall into place." Two-time champion and former world number one Justin Thomas, and fellow Ryder Cup player Paul Casey, headline the \$7mn tournament along with defending title-holder Pat Perez. Thailand's Kiradech Aphibarnrat is another top challenger from Asia, after winning the 2013 Malaysian Open on the same TPC Kuala Lumpur course — and he now returns after earning a full PGA Tour card for the coming season. "When I was a kid, my goal was to be a part of the PGA Tour. It's the biggest tour in the world," the 29-year-old said. "Twenty years later, I hold a Tour card. I just can't explain how it feels, but it is such a good moment for me to play my first PGA Tour event as a member in Asia." Sharma and Kiradech are bracketed in the same flight for the first two rounds of the tournament, starting Thursday, along with South Korea's Korea's Byeong Hun-an.

SPOTLIGHT

Justin Rose backs Harrington as Ryder Cup captain

Reuters
London

Justin Rose is backing Ireland's Padraig Harrington to be Europe's next Ryder Cup captain after helping the team to a crushing victory over the United States last month. Harrington, who has won three majors and played in six successive Ryder Cups from 1999 to 2010, was a vice-captain to Thomas Bjorn and is odds-on favourite to captain at Whistling Straits in Wisconsin in two years' time. "I would say a three times major champion, clearly a European legend, for me Padraig is the frontrunner," Rose, who reached world number one this year and is now second in the rankings, told Sky Sports television yesterday. "And then you've got (Lee) Westwood... It's interesting when you try to project out who the possible captains are for the next 10 Ryder Cups." Former world number one Westwood, 45, was also one of the five European vice-captains this year. The Englishman has said he would like to captain Europe in Italy in 2022 when Rome hosts the event. Harrington told Irish national radio station RTE last week that he wanted to be a Ryder Cup captain at some stage. Still playing, the 47-year-old narrowly missed out on his first European Tour title at the Czech Masters last month, where his second-place finish was his best



placing in almost a year. Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy, a member of the victorious team in Paris and winner of four majors, has also backed Harrington, who won back-to-back British Opens in 2007 and 2008 and the PGA Championship also in 2008. "I've always thought Padraig would be a good captain in the United States. He's won a lot of golf tournaments over there, he's won a PGA Championship," McIlroy said last week. "I think the continuity in the European camp having all these vice-captains this year and preparing for captaincy down the road has been a huge foundation of why we've been so good."

SPOTLIGHT

QSSA renews partnership with Aspire and QFA

The primary objective of the Schools Olympic Program – in its ninth edition – is to unearth new talents from Qatar schools

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar School Sports Association (QSSA) has renewed its partnership with the Aspire Academy of Sports Excellence and the Qatar Football Association (QFA) Development Committee, it was announced yesterday at a press conference held at Aspire.

The press conference was attended by the Ali al-Hitmi, QSSA Secretary-General; Saeed al-Marri, Director of Football Affairs, Aspire Academy; and Captain Fahd Thani al-Zarra, Chairman of the Football Development Committee of the Qatar Football Federation in the presence of a number of officials both from the schools and academic union as well as the development committee. This tripartite partnership between the Federation, the Academy and the Development Committee is the primary objective of the Schools Olympic Program – in its ninth edition of the football competition – is to search and spot new talents.

Providing details al-Hitmi said, "We are launching this collaboration with Aspire and our affiliate development committee to further the success of the 12th edition of the School Olympic Program this year. Last year, the co-operation was excellent and the number of participants in the programme was high. It was quite remarkable that many talents were discovered and this represents an important objective of the Olympic programme.



QSSA Secretary-General Ali al-Hitmi (centre), Chairman of the Football Development Committee of the Qatar Football Federation Captain Fahd Thani al-Zarra (left) and Aspire Academy's Director of Football Affairs Saeed al-Marri at a press conference in Aspire yesterday.

"Such co-operation contributes to the development, and for us in the Organising Committee of the Olympic Program the goal is to spread the culture of sport and to make it a way of life, especially in football, the first popular game, which finds a large turnout of students.

"We hope that the programme will come out distinctly in this year's edi-

tion as well and be the starting point for us in the football competitions. I thank everyone for the great co-operation with the Federation, especially by the Aspire Academy and the FIFA Development Committee headed by Fahd Thani," he added.

Al-Hitmi also pointed out that the Olympic programme offers us a mine-

field of talent. "Schools are the real mine of talent discovery and this is done through the Olympic Games in all games and not only football and provided to us by many talented players."

On his part, Saeed al-Marri praised the partnership of QSSA and the Development Department of the Football Federation. "This partnership is distinguished and the result has been the discovery of many talented players

and their inclusion in the Academy. We hope that the new version will reveal more talent that will help expand the base of the game and contribute to the development," he said.

"There are two scouts who follow the matches to choose the best talent. We believe in the importance of school sports and in providing them with the outstanding talents that need to be dis-

covered. This is our role in the academy," he added.

Captain Fahd Thani al-Zarra stressed that the main aim of the Program was to take students out to the playfield. "We are pleased to partner with the Federation and the Academy in this important and ambitious program such as the Olympic programme, which provides us with outstanding talents that contribute to the development of football and build a distinct base for the game," he said.

"The aim is to take students out of the school environment to the playfields and make sure that they are under the eyes of the scouts either from the Academy of Aspire or from the Union.

"We are keen to send a circular to the clubs on the dates of the Olympic programme so that everyone will follow the programme and watch the matches and choose the best players and make them join them to the clubs and this is a major and important goal of the Program," he added.

He pointed that the objectives of the Program are known and thereby the discovery of talent. "It is a meaningful programme and has important output through the games and not only football. The gains through the Olympic Program are great for everyone and I hope that the start of this year is distinct and the best for all. We believe in the value of the Program and the goals it achieves as it serves sports."

The Schools Olympic Program under the Qatar Olympic Committee aims to establish a sports culture that calls for sports for health and life.

TENNIS

ITF regional coaches conference to be held in Doha from today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 2018 ITF West & Central Asia Regional Coaches Conference will kick-off with an opening ceremony at the Al Dana Club in Doha today.

Over 130 coaches, including 70 from several West and Central Asian countries and 55 other coaches from Qatar, are participating in the three-day conference which will be held until October 12.

Hosted by the Qatar Tennis, Squash and Badminton Federation (QTSBF), the conference will highlight a number of issues including the strategies and plans to develop tennis worldwide and the latest training

methods and programmes especially for young players.

The event will also focus on women's tennis and strategies to further develop the sport in the region. Belgian coach Ruben Neyens, who designs physical development programmes that keep young players interested and motivated and Emma Doyle from Australia are among the eight experts from the ITF who will be delivering a series of theoretical and practical lectures for participants at the event.

"We are very pleased to host this conference which is further highlighting our commitment to the development of tennis in the region. We are equally delighted to welcome all the participants to Doha. I have no doubt that the outcome of this conference will

have a huge positive impact on tennis in the West and Central Asian region because an event like this gives everyone the opportunity of learning new things," QTSBF Secretary-General Tareq Zainal said.

On the sidelines of the conference, participating delegations will visit several tourist sites in Qatar including Souq Waqif, which is one of the most important historical destinations that reflect the rich Qatari heritage.

Held every two years, the ITF Regional Coaches Conference for West & Central Asia form a very important element of the ITF's Coach Education Program. The events are organised in conjunction with the Regional Associations and are often supported by Olympic Solidarity.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Al Rayyan name Bulent Uygun as new coach

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Rayyan have named **Bulent Uygun** as their new coach. The Turk is expected to reach Doha soon to take over the side. Rayyan had parted ways with Argentinian Rodolfo Arruabarrena by mutual consent and handed over the reins to their Under-23 coach Yuri O de Souza following their QNB Stars League defeat to Al Khor last week.

Rayyan are presently fourth in the standings with 14 points, after Al Duhail (19), Al Sadd (17) and Al Saliya (16). Bulent is no stranger to Qatar football. He had coached Al Gharafa from the start of second phase of 2017-18 season QNB Stars League and guided the team to a creditable fourth place, thereby earning them a berth in the elite Qatar Cup. He was at Umm Salal's helm during 2013-16.

Bulent had made it big at the club and country levels as an attacking midfielder. He had captained Fenerbahce, where he spent most of his club career, apart from playing for the Turkey national team 18 times.

Uygun told Turkish newspapers that he had offers from clubs



in Saudi Arabia and Iran but choose to return to Qatar. The 47-year-old said he aims to win trophies for Rayyan.

"Rayyan is one of the most important teams in Qatar and I would like the club for giving me an opportunity to coach the team. I will try my best to win the championship in the shortest possible time. I have received offer from Iran team Traktor Sazi

Tabriz and some Saudi Arabian teams. However, since I am loved in Qatar, I wanted to go back," he said.

With Gharafa last season, Uygun played a key role in the transfer of the Dutch star Wesley Sneijder, as he led the team to fourth-place finish in QNB Stars League. Uygun also took Gharafa to semi-finals of Qatar and Amir Cup.

QATAR PLAYERS TRAIN AHEAD OF ECUADOR FRIENDLY



Qatar's national team trained yesterday ahead of two international friendlies against Ecuador and Uzbekistan. Felix Sanchez's men host Ecuador this Friday at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium and then fly to Tashkent for another international against Uzbekistan on October 16. The two matches are a part of international friendlies scheduled to give Qatar maximum match practice going into the 2019 Asian Cup to be held in the UAE next January.

FOCUS

Umm Salal's al-Yahri undergoes ankle surgery at Aspetar

Umm Salal's **Abdulaziz al-Yahri** underwent an operation at Qatar's orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital Aspetar to correct an ankle injury. Abdulaziz was out of action for some time as he was nursing the injury. He is to undergo a rehabilitation programme before returning to the field.

Meanwhile, Umm Salal are preparing for their QSL Cup Round 2 game against Qatar SC tomorrow. The match will kick off at the Qatar SC Stadium at 17:35. Umm Salal had beaten Al Arabi 1-0 in Round 1. Al Duhail, Al Kharaitiyat and Al Gharafa are the other teams in Group A.

AL SADD VS AL DUHAIL MATCH RESCHEDULED

The Qatar Stars League Management (QSLM) rescheduled the QNB Stars League Week 9 match between Al Sadd and Al Duhail, which was to be played on Sunday, 21st October.

The rescheduling was done in view of Al Sadd's AFC Champions League second-leg semi-final against Iran's Persepolis at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran on 23rd October. The new date will be announced later. It may be recalled that the QSLM had considered rescheduling of this game if either Al Sadd or Al Duhail qualified for the AFC Champions League semi-finals.

