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Real suffer shock defeat as Man United stutter again

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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Six-wicket Tahir, Steyn's 60 lead South Africa to victory

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FOOTBALL / UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Neymar turns on style with hat-trick in PSG stroll

Cavani, Di Maria, Mbappe also score in 6-1 win over Red Star Belgrade as PSG bounces back from a loss at Liverpool

Agencies
Paris/Moscow

Neymar continued his return to top form with a hat-trick in a sublime display to lead Paris Saint-Germain to a 6-1 rout of Red Star Belgrade in the Champions League yesterday.

The world's most expensive player admitted on the eve of this game that he still did not feel back to 100 percent after the foot injury which required surgery and saw him miss the last three months of last season.

But he tore a hapless Red Star apart with two goals in the space of two first-half minutes at the Parc des Princes, the first a delightful curling free-kick, before completing his hat-trick from another stunning free-kick late on.

Edinson Cavani, Angel di Maria and Kylian Mbappe also scored as PSG bounced back from a 3-2 defeat at Liverpool two weeks ago to register their first points in Group C.

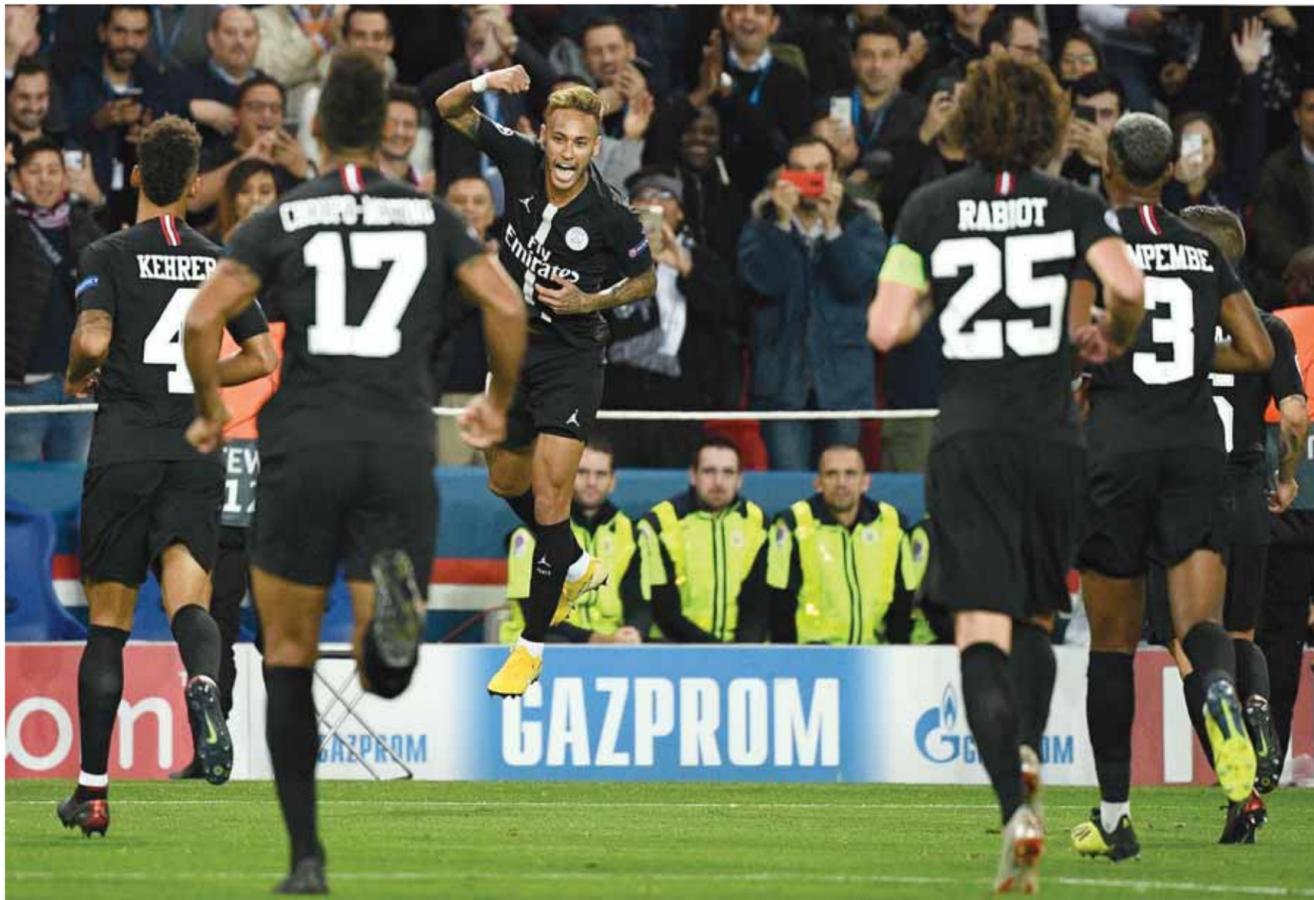
They have a double-header to come next against Napoli, and the Italian side will surely offer a sterner test than Red Star, the 1991 European Cup winners who had been unbeaten in 34 games before arriving at the Parc des Princes and being utterly outclassed.

The Serbians grabbed a consolation goal through Marko Marin in the second half, but they could not cope with the home side's front four, a quartet who cost PSG almost \$300m euros (\$610m) in transfer fees alone.

Such was the imbalance between the teams that PSG were never likely to be troubled despite playing this game with one end of the Parc des Princes closed, a punishment following incidents in the defeat against Real Madrid back in March.

FREE-KICK DOUBLE

Neymar had already drawn plen-



Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar (centre) celebrates his third goal during their UEFA Champions' League match against Red Star Belgrade at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

ty of attention from opponents before he won the free-kick which led to the opening goal in the 20th minute, the Brazilian getting up to curl a fine strike past Canadian goalkeeper Milan Borjan from 25 yards.

The French league leaders

scored again two minutes later as Neymar found Mbappe before meeting the return pass with a lovely cushioned finish.

That was Neymar's ninth goal in nine games this season between Ligue 1 and Champions League.

The former Barcelona forward may not yet be back to the same level as before his injury, but he certainly looks in the mood again, with his performance here also notable for a brilliant nutmeg on Milos Degenek that created another shooting opportunity just

before half-time.

PSG had already scored twice more by that point, with Cavani finding the net on 37 minutes with the aid of a deflection after some brilliant footwork and Di Maria guiding a Thomas Meunier cross past Borjan in the 41st

minute.

Neymar produced some more magic in the build-up to PSG's fifth goal 20 minutes from the end, finding Juan Bernat, who squared for Mbappe to get his name on the scoresheet.

Red Star supporters were given

something to celebrate as Marin, the former German international winger whose career lost its way after a move to Chelsea, blasted into the roof of the net for a consolation goal in the 74th minute.

But Neymar had the last word, curling another free-kick high into the net to complete his hat-trick nine minutes from time, taking him into double figures for the season.

PSG coach Thomas Tuchel then immediately substituted his star player, who walked off to a standing ovation.

LOKOMOTIV DERAILED

Schalke 04 midfielder Weston McKennie scored with a header two minutes from time to give the Bundesliga side a 1-0 win at Lokomotiv Moscow in a rain-soaked match yesterday.

Schalke's first victory in Group D, in a disappointing game littered with misplaced passes, left them with four points from two games while the Russian champions have yet to get off the mark. Porto (one point) were hosting Galatasaray (three) later yesterday.

Lokomotiv, whose 71-year-old coach Yuri Semin is in his fourth stint at the club, edged the first half and Dmitiri Barinov had their best chance with a low shot from the edge of the area which was turned away by Ralf Faehrmann.

That proved to be Lokomotiv's only shot on target.

Schalke, who have lost five of their opening six Bundesliga matches, improved after the break and carved out several openings.

One neat move down the left ended with Breel Embolo slipping the ball to Mark Uth whose shot went straight at goalkeeper Guilherme. Uth also flashed a low shot centimetres wide of the post in the 85th minute.

They finally broke through in the 88th minute when 20-year-old American McKennie out-jumped three defenders at a corner to head in.

HORSE RACING

Countdown for Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe begins

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Before the world richest turf race - Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (Group 1) - gets underway at a newly-renovated Longchamp on Sunday, many associated events, under the partnership between Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC), and France-Galop, will commence today in Paris.

The Purebred Arabian Sales organised by Arqana will open the programme today. The sale will be for horses in training, broodmares, foals, yearlings, two-year-olds, stallions and endurance horses.

Twenty-four hours later, meeting at Saint-Cloud will kick-start racing action.

Saint-Cloud will also host rac-



es for Purebred Arabians while the world's premier global event for Arabians, the Qatar Arabian World Cup (Group 1 PA), will be run just before the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe race at Longchamp, in demonstration of Qatar's commitment to promoting pure Arabians as part of Qatar's heritage.

Saturday will be the first day of the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triom-

phe race meeting at the newly-renovated Longchamp, after the last two editions were hosted in Chantilly.

Dozens of thousands of racegoers and millions of TV viewers worldwide are expected to enjoy this global event, a very special renewal of the Arc.

JAPAN'S MAIN GOAL

Winning the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe has been a goal for Japanese horse racing community for long.

This year's edition will be the 17th time since 1969 that a horse from Japan will take yet another shot to win the greatest race in the world.

This sporting challenge is cherished in Japan, a nation with a huge love for horseracing. A large contingent of fans from the Land of the Rising Sun is expected at Longchamp to cheer home

their champion, Clincher, at the 2400m feature on Sunday.

Japanese media has provided intensive coverage of the Arc every year and this year's renewal of the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe is expected to be no different, especially as they have not yet landed the coveted title despite entering many favourites and tough runners in the previous editions.

Even as Clincher went around at the training centre in Chantilly yesterday, he had a large media delegation waiting.

At a press conference held later in the day, dozens of Japanese media representatives posed their questions Clincher's jockey Yutaka Take, who expressed his hope to win the long-awaited title for his countrymen. Clincher's trainer Hiroshi Miyamoto was also present along with other Chantilly-based trainers.



Trainer Hiroshi Miyamoto and jockey Yutaka Take oversee Japanese horse Clincher's training session in Chantilly yesterday.

SECOND ODI

Six-wicket Tahir, Steyn's 60 lead SA to victory

AFP
Bloemfontein, South Africa

Dale Steyn made a triumphant return to one-day international cricket, starring with bat and ball as South Africa beat Zimbabwe by 120 runs in the second one-day international at the Mangaung Oval yesterday.

Playing in his first ODI in two years, Steyn top-scored with a career-best 60 in a South African total of 198, then took the first two wickets as Zimbabwe were bowled out for 78, giving South Africa a winning 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Leg-spinner Imran Tahir took six for 24, including a hat-trick, as Zimbabwe collapsed.

Steyn's batting rescued South Africa from a precarious 101 for seven but it was his fast bowling that probably impressed coach Ottis Gibson the most.

He bowled with plenty of pace and his figures of two for 19 in six overs scarcely reflected the problems he caused for the Zimbabwe batsmen on a pitch of uneven bounce.



South Africa's Imran Tahir celebrates after taking the wicket of Zimbabwe's Kyle Jarvis during the second ODI in Bloemfontein yesterday. (AFP)



South Africa's Dale Steyn celebrates his half century during the second ODI against Zimbabwe in Bloemfontein yesterday. (AFP)

Steyn said a stint with English county Hampshire had enabled him to start the South African season in good form. "I've been playing cricket and I feel

cricket-fit," he said. "The wicket was quite tough but it was nice that the opening bowlers had bowled out quite a lot of overs," he said

of a 75-run eighth wicket stand with Andile Phehlukwayo (28).

Steyn hit eight fours and a six in an 85-ball innings. His previous best one-day international score was 35 against India in Jaipur in 2009/10.

Steyn struck with his seventh ball when he trapped Solomon Mire leg before wicket and followed up by dismissing Craig Ervine, who endured a torrid time against the veteran fast bowler before being caught at short midwicket.

"I had a nice breeze behind me and there was pace in the wicket. The wicket was a little up and down. If you run in on a wicket like that things will happen," he said.

Tahir ripped through the Zimbabwe batting when the fast bowlers were rested, trapping Brendan Taylor leg before in his first over, then dismissing Sean Williams, Elton Chigumbura and Peter Moor with successive deliveries before wrapping up the innings.

"The pitch wasn't ideal," said South African captain JP Duminy.

"The way Dale applied himself was exceptional and to see him bowling as quickly as he has is a really good sign for us."

Scorecard

SOUTH AFRICA		ZIMBABWE	
D. Elgar c Taylor b Chatara	4	S. Mire lbw b Steyn	2
A. Markram c Taylor b Tiripano	35	H. Masakadza lbw b Ngidi	27
R. Hendricks b Jarvis	1	C. Ervine c Phehlukwayo b Steyn	3
H. Klaasen c Mire b Chatara	1	B. Taylor lbw b Imran Tahir	10
K. Zondo st Taylor b Mavuta	21	S. Williams st Klaasen b Imran Tahir	9
C. Jonker b Mavuta	25	P. Moor lbw b Imran Tahir	5
J. Duminy lbw b Jarvis	5	E. Chigumbura c Hendricks b Phehlukwayo	0
A. Phehlukwayo c Taylor b Chatara	28	D. Tiripano not out	12
D. Steyn b Tiripano	60	B. Mavuta b Imran Tahir	0
Imran Tahir lbw b Williams	1	K. Jarvis b Imran Tahir	1
L. Ngidi not out	14	T. Chatara c Steyn b Imran Tahir	3
Extras (lb2, nb1, w10)	13	Extras (lb2, w4)	6
Total (47.3 overs)	198	Total (24 overs)	78
Fall of wickets: 1-7 (Elgar), 2-9 (Hendricks), 3-26 (Klaasen), 4-49 (Markram), 5-85 (Jonker), 6-92 (Zondo), 7-101 (Duminy), 8-176 (Phehlukwayo), 9-177 (Tahir)			
Bowling: Jarvis 10-2-26-2 (1w), Chatara 9-1-42-3 (2w), Tiripano 8.3-1-37-2, Mavuta 10-0-48-2 (1nb, 5w), Williams 10-0-43-1 (1w)			
Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Mire), 2-26 (Ervine), 3-43 (Taylor), 4-43 (Masakadza), 5-58 (Williams), 6-59 (Chigumbura), 7-59 (Moor), 8-59 (Mavuta), 9-64 (Jarvis), 10-78 (Chatara)			
Bowling: Steyn 6-0-19-2, Ngidi 7-1-26-1, Phehlukwayo 5-1-7-1, Imran Tahir 6-0-24-6 (2w)			

PREVIEW

India tries teenage opener to fix top order

Shaw to join Rahul at top of the order as Agarwal, Vihari and Siraj miss out

AFP
New Delhi

Skipper Virat Kohli said yesterday India are looking to 'cement' the team's misfiring top order as teenage opener Prithvi Shaw was named in the final 12 for the first Test against the West Indies.

The world's number one Test side suffered from inconsistent top order during their overseas tours of South Africa and England, losing 1-2 and 1-4 respectively.

The two-match West Indies series starting in Rajkot today gives India an opportunity to work on their problem areas ahead of the all-important tour of Australia starting next month.

"I think the top order getting cemented with these two Test matches, that's what we are looking at," Kohli told reporters.

"These guys are new, so they will take a bit of time to get into it. But they definitely have the skill set," he said.

"They should look at it as an opportunity and not think of pressure, because they're very young, and it's a great chance for them to cement their place and play for a long time."

The 18-year-old Shaw, who was chosen ahead of uncapped Mayank Agarwal and one-Test old Hanuma Vihari from the 15-man squad, is expected to open the batting alongside Lokesha Rahul.

Shaw has accumulated 1418 runs in 14 first-class games including seven centuries and made a strong showing for Delhi Daredevils in the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament.



India player Prithvi Shaw looks on during a training session ahead of the first Test against West Indies at the Saurashtra Cricket Association stadium in Rajkot yesterday. (AFP)

Left-handed opener Shikhar Dhawan managed just 162 runs in eight innings in seaming English conditions and was subsequently dropped ahead of the West Indies series.

"We know as a team and everyone on the outside also knows the areas we need to improve on, and definitely if you look at sides that win Test matches contributions at the top and contribu-

tions in the lower order are more crucial," said Kohli. "Because whatever happens in the middle is connected to either the top order or what the lower order does."

"We will like to take this series as a benchmark we want to set and keep repeating those things," Kohli said.

"As a side, you want to see three or four tests so that you have ample time to test your skills and test out the areas that you need to improve on.

"But having said that, we have to utilise the time that we have and make the most of these two test matches that we have in front of us... try and solidify the areas we need to go ahead as a test side."

REJUVENATED

Kohli, who was criticised for sitting out the Asia Cup won by the Rohit Sharma-led India in the UAE, said rest in between long tours will be key for keeping players fit ahead of the World Cup in 2019.

"I am feeling rejuvenated again. It was mental and physical both because of the intensity of the two tours, both South Africa and England," said Kohli.

"I definitely needed the break because my back went once in South Africa then it went again (in) England. Looking at the World Cup I think these things are very important to consider, to give players ample rest and opportunity to train well and come back stronger."

INDIA TEAM: Virat Kohli (captain), Lokesha Rahul, Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav, Shardul Thakur.

TEST SERIES

Langer confirms Finch, Head debuts against Pakistan

Reuters
Dubai

White-ball specialist batsman Aaron Finch and South Australia captain Travis Head will make their Test debuts in the series-opener against Pakistan in Dubai on Sunday, Australia coach Justin Langer has confirmed.

Both players scored half-centuries in Australia's drawn tour match against a Pakistan A side, convincing Langer to award them their first caps in the five-day format.

"There was never any doubt over those two for me, I thought they were certainties to play," Langer said of his first Test side as Australia coach after the former opener took over from Darren Lehmann in May.

Despite the pair making certain of selection, doubts remain in other areas of captain Tim Paine's team, with opener Matt Renshaw picking up a head injury after being struck by the ball during the tour game that ended on Tuesday.

"I think Matthew Renshaw will be physically fine - the one thing he's got is he hasn't played much cricket," Langer told reporters in Dubai.

"He went on the Australia A trip, he got a hamstring strain... he hasn't spent much time in the middle. That's going to be

the issue for him. "It's going to be an instinct call. We've got to weigh up what he's done in the past. He's obviously a very good young player. We've got to work out whether he's spent enough time out in the middle to be ready for a test match."

Renshaw's possible absence could pave the way for South Africa-born Marnus Labuschagne, who came in at number six against Pakistan A and scored an unbeaten 39 in Australia's only innings. The 24-year-old, who can also bowl part-time legspin, was a surprise inclusion in the 15-man squad but played a key role in Queensland's Sheffield Shield triumph earlier this year.

"We've seen in the history of Australian cricket a lot of people take their opportunities through injury," Langer said.

"I thought Marnus fielded brilliantly but was really good with the bat (against Pakistan A), bowled a few overs. He's certainly put a strong case forward for selection as well."

Australia are likely to opt for a second paceman to support left-armed Mitchell Starc and uncapped Queensland quick Michael Neser may get the nod over workhorse Peter Siddle, with Langer impressed by his spells against Pakistan A. "He has a red-hot dip every time he plays, he's a good fielder, he's brilliant around the team," Langer said of 28-year-old Neser.

Cricket Australia boss Sutherland replaced by insider Roberts

Cricket Australia (CA) yesterday named insider Kevin Roberts - who spearheaded an ill-fated attempt to slash players' pay last year - to lead the troubled organisation in the wake of the ball-tampering scandal. Roberts was appointed chief executive officer and on October 25 will formally replace James Sutherland, who announced in June he was stepping down after 17 years at the helm. Roberts takes over with CA still under fire over the cheating scandal and divisions between players and administrators still raw from the pay dispute. "The game and Cricket Australia have faced some difficult times recently, but we will bounce back," the 46-year-old said. Sutherland won plaudits during his long tenure for negotiating a lucrative new television rights deal and popularising the Big Bash League, day-night Tests and women's cricket. But he faced a career-ending crisis in March when former captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and batsman Cameron Bancroft attempted to alter the ball in the third Test in South Africa. They were all sent home in disgrace and handed lengthy bans, with then-coach Darren Lehmann resigning and Sutherland eventually choosing to walk

after coming under sustained pressure. His replacement Roberts is a former opening batsman for New South Wales who moved into business when his cricketing career failed to take off. He worked for a range of sporting companies including adidas, 2XU and Canterbury before joining Cricket Australia in 2012, first as a board director, then as part of the executive management team. Roberts was lead negotiator for Cricket Australia in last year's pay dispute, when the organisation was accused of using hardball negotiating tactics in a bid to cap its remuneration costs. The brinkmanship saw top players left off contract for a month and resulted in the cancellation of an Australia A tour to South Africa before Cricket Australia eventually backed down.

The dispute cemented a view within the game that Roberts is the favoured protégé of Cricket Australia chairman David Peever, a polarising figure with a reputation for union busting in his former life as a mining executive. The promotion of an internal candidate to replace Sutherland will also raise questions about Cricket Australia's commitment to changing the organisation's culture in the wake of the ball-tampering affair.

FOCUS

ICC warns England, Sri Lanka players of match-fixing

AFP
Colombo

Cricket's world governing body said yesterday players would be briefed about the risk of approaches from "corrupters" during England's upcoming tour of Sri Lanka amid fears of match-fixing.

The International Cricket Council's anti-corruption chief Alex Marshall said Sri Lanka was the subject of corruption inquiries but the England tour itself was not under question.

"However, I will take the opportunity to brief both the teams over the coming days to ensure they remain alert to the risks from would be corrupters," Marshall said in a statement.

TV news channel Al Jazeera broadcast a documentary in May showing a groundsman and a

player allegedly discussing possibilities of altering the pitch at Galle where England will play their first Test against the hosts from November 6.

England will play five one-day internationals, three Tests and a one-off T20 between October 10 and November 27.

Galle groundsman Tharanga Indika and professional cricketer Tharindu Mendis allegedly speculated about fixing the pitch to ensure a result in under four days in the Test against England.

Both men have been suspended by Sri Lanka Cricket, pending the outcome of an ICC investigation. A third man, provincial coach Jeevantha Kulathunga, was also suspended.

Marshall said ICC investigators were currently in Sri Lanka, but declined to elaborate.

"I can confirm that we have, at their request, provided a detailed briefing to the Sri Lankan

President, Prime Minister and Sports Minister," Marshall said.

Sri Lankan players and umpires have been accused of match-fixing in the past.

Jayananda Warnaweera, a former curator at Galle, was suspended by the ICC for refusing to cooperate with a corruption inquiry. His three-year ban ends in January.

No big-name Sri Lankan player has ever been convicted of corruption but several stars have alleged match-fixing and spot-fixing.

Sports Minister Faiszer Mushtapha promised tougher laws and a special police unit to deal with match-fixing after the Al Jazeera documentary made sweeping allegations of corruption.

He said existing laws were inadequate to deal with match-fixing and other forms of cheating.

Strauss steps down as ECB director of cricket

Andrew Strauss announced yesterday that he is standing down as England's director of cricket following a period of compassionate leave. Strauss's wife Ruth was diagnosed with cancer during the Ashes in December 2017 and he took a break from his position earlier this year after she began a new course of treatment. The former Test captain, who had been in the post for three-and-a-half years, has told the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) that he will not be returning to his role. He will take on a "flexible" position with the governing body. Andy Flower, who has been standing in since May, will continue to hold the reins until December while recruit-

ment of a permanent successor takes place. "Taking time out this summer to support my wife and kids, as Ruth goes through treatment for cancer, has given me the chance to fully consider what's right for England and what's needed at home," said the 41-year-old. "The role in cricket requires total focus and commitment to deliver the best results, yet right now I need far more flexibility than could ever be possible in my position in order to support my family. "Next year is potentially the most important the game has had in this country, with the World Cup on home soil and a home Ashes series, and we have an incredible opportunity to do something special."

SPOTLIGHT

We are motivated to showcase Qatar, its people through artistic gymnastics: Dr Thani al-Kuwari

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, second vice-president of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and vice chairman of the Organising Committee for the World Artistic Gymnastics Championships Doha 2018, is confident of Qatar showcasing a unique and unprecedented hosting of the first gymnastics world championships in the Middle East.

With hectic preparations under way for the championships, which will be staged at the Aspire Dome from October 25 to November 3, Dr al-Kuwari spoke about the Organising Committee's efforts.

Excerpts:

Are the preparations for Doha 2018 well in place ahead of the opening day?

First of all, we would like to thank HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, Chairman of the Qatar Olympic Committee and the Organising Committee of the championship, for providing

his full support. The work being done is to ensure top-most level of success and to show the real picture of the country's distinctive organisational abilities in hosting major sporting events.

Doha Worlds will see a record participation of over 700 gymnasts for the first time. Does this put pressure on you as organisers?

The preparations are going on at a hectic pace and with the aim of hosting a distinctive version of the championships. We are well ahead of time. These are unprecedented numbers that world gymnastics hasn't seen before. Qatar has organised major world championships like the World Cup 2015 which achieved unprecedented organisational successes and we are looking forward to continuing in the same vein.

What message does the Organising Committee seek to send to the world?

The Organising Committee is putting in great efforts to be absolutely ready at all levels. There are only a few days remaining before the championships, so we



are intensifying our efforts to be ready to receive delegations, and we will ensure all the comfort to all participants from all over the world. We will show that

Qatar is living development and progress at all levels, and that what some seek to promote is unfounded and that those who will come to Qatar will see on the

ground what we live in progress, prosperity and civilization.

Are there any requirements from the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) on the regulatory process?

We are committed to the specific requirements of FIG. The Organising Committee has been sprucing up all the facilities. The state-of-the-art venue - Aspire Dome - is ready at its best. There will also be four training halls for participants and a warm-up lounge. We thank all officials from various bodies, who are cooperating to achieve success. There is also great co-operation with the international federation, and there has only been praise. FIG's confidence in Qatar only increases our responsibility.

Qatar has a long history of hosting major sports events. Does this make your mission easy?

Over the past few years, Qatar has been privileged to be at the forefront of sport with its world-class facilities, its high-quality regulatory services and the aspiration of its sporting development. The World Gymnastics

Championship 2015, the World Boxing Championship 2015, the Paralympic World Championships 2015 and the upcoming tournaments such as the 2019 World Athletics Championships, the 2022 FIFA World Cup and the 2023 World Swimming Championships. This reflects Qatar's position as a world leader and the confidence we have in the various sports federations worldwide.

What will be achieved by hosting this edition of the world gymnastics?

The first World Artistic Gymnastics Championships in the Middle East is big. Aspire's presence is also an opportunity for the promising Qatari cadres to benefit from the presence of this huge number of participants. The main element of Qatar Vision 2030 is inclusion of Qatari cadres. We are keen to take advantage of this opportunity by introducing new young players in the organisational work to create promising cadres for the future. Besides infrastructure, the investment in the human element is very important for us, for the legacy.

The tournament is receiving a great international media attention. Would you be expecting a large number of journalists to cover the event from abroad?

We welcome media professionals from all over the world to cover this tournament. The Organising Committee has provided special areas for the media. Initial figures indicate that we will receive more than 300 journalists from around the world, so we are keen to have a well-equipped media centre.

Lot of visitors are also expected for world gymnastics in Doha. There has been a big demand for tickets overseas. Would you be expecting a large audience?

The Organising Committee has kept the public in mind and focused heavily on providing facilities. We expect a large audience to attend and as such the capacity at the stadium has been enhanced to accommodate some 6,000 spectators. Tickets have been booked in advance and all efforts are being made for them to enjoy a great sporting spectacle.

TENNIS

Del Potro draws on Mascherano 'passion' to seal Finals spot

'We have to learn about his lifestyle, the passion that he puts in every game'

Agencies
Beijing

Juan Martin del Potro says he hopes to emulate the "passion" of notoriously feisty fellow Argentine Javier Mascherano after sealing his spot at the ATP Finals yesterday.

The towering Del Potro, enjoying one of the best seasons of his injury-blighted career, dismissed Russia's stubborn Karen Khachanov 6-4, 7-6(4) in Beijing to surge into the quarter-finals of the China Open.

Significantly, victory means that Del Potro has qualified for the season-ending ATP Finals for the first time since 2013, joining Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic in London in November.

It underlines the 30-year-old's return to the men's elite after years of wrist problems that threatened to destroy his career.

Mascherano, an aggressive former Barcelona defender who has close to 150 caps for Argentina, was in the Beijing arena to see his countryman and friend in action.

"We have a good relationship and we admire him, of course," Del Potro said of the 34-year-old, who now plays his football in China.

"He played a lot for our country, he played in the best teams in the world.

"Of course, we have something to learn about his lifestyle, the passion that he puts in every game. We try to do the same in tennis."

The world number four, losing finalist at the US Open last month, talked excitedly about the prestigious ATP Finals, saying he anticipates "amazing moments".

"Of course, it's a very special tournament for us. I will be excited to do well in London," said Del Potro.

Something of a gentle giant and a popular figure in the locker room, Del Potro faces Filip Krajinovic of Serbia in the last eight on Beijing's outside hard courts.

The Argentine will not be joined in the quarter-finals by Bulgaria's third seed Grigor Dimitrov, who was on the end of



Juan Martin del Potro of Argentina in action against Karen Khachanov (not pictured) of Russia during their second round China Open match at National Tennis Center in Beijing, China, yesterday. (Reuters)

a major shock.

Dimitrov totted up nine double faults in a three-set defeat to Serbian qualifier Dusan Lajovic.

Lajovic meets Britain's fifth seed Kyle Edmund in the quarter-finals.

In the women's draw, number two seed Caroline Wozniacki rounded off a polished display with an ace in a 7-5, 6-3 victory over Petra Martic of Croatia.

The Dane faces Estonia's Anett Kontaveit in the last 16.

Seventh seed Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic set up a meeting against China's top player Wang Qiang.

STEPHENS FALLS TO INSPIRED CIBULKOVA

Slovakia's Dominika Cibulkova rallied from a set down to defeat former US Open champion

Sloane Stephens 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 and reach the quarter-finals yesterday.

An error-prone Cibulkova allowed American Stephens to race into a one set lead before clawing her way back. Having dragged the match into a decider, Cibulkova found her range to close out victory in under two hours.

Cibulkova's first win over Stephens in three years, following defeats in Acapulco and at last year's US Open, earned her a last eight clash with Anastasija Sevastova.

The Latvian advanced with a comfortable 6-3, 6-2 victory over Croatia's Donna Vekic.

Local hope Zhang Shuai beat Hungary's Tímea Babos 6-1, 6-2 and faces Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber next.



Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia in action against Sloane Stephens (not pictured) of the US yesterday. (Reuters)

FOCUS

Nishikori squashes Paire to reach Tokyo quarter-finals



AFF
Tokyo

Local hero Kei Nishikori put down a marker in his quest for a third Japan Open title as he out-gunned France's Benoit Paire yesterday to reach the last eight.

The third seed, who lifted the trophy in 2012 and 2014, completed a 6-3, 7-5 victory despite late resistance from Paire to avenge a semi-final defeat inflicted by the hulking Frenchman in Tokyo three years ago.

Meanwhile, former champion Nick Kyrgios flickered into life for just long enough to dispatch Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 7-5, 7-6 (3) in the first round.

Nishikori tore out of the blocks, winning the first five games before Paire finally got on the scoreboard.

Paire tugged at his beard in despair after Nishikori snaffled the opening set but raced to a 3-0 lead in the second set before the Japanese number one rattled off five straight games.

An increasingly prickly Paire pulled off an outrageous between-the-legs volley and subsequently levelled with a backhand rocket, letting out a guttural roar as Nishikori shook his head in disbelief.

But the world number 12 almost took Paire's head off to break again for 6-5, further irritating the Frenchman, who flirted with a penalty point after kicking his racket into his chair.

Nishikori, who won the last of his 11 career titles in Memphis two years ago, closed out the match with a ferocious cross-court forehand that Paire battered wide.

"I had a few dangerous moments but I stuck to my game," said Nishikori.

"It was important to stay with him and dig in. I'm in the quarter-finals now and hopefully I can kick on from here."

DIFFERENT ANIMAL

Kyrgios appeared a little distracted at times but the controversial Aussie became a different animal after Nishioka, who won his first ATP tour title at last week's Shenzhen Open, forced a tiebreak in the second set.

Roused into action, Kyrgios unleashed a string of monstrous shots to steam through the breaker.

The 23-year-old, who has complained that playing the late season tour in Asia makes him feel depressed and lonely, fired 20 aces and sealed victory with a flamboyant backhand overhead after 73 minutes to book a place in the last 16.

Kyrgios has been fined for "tanking" matches in Shanghai the past two years but captured one of his four career titles at the 2016 Japan Open.

He faces eighth seed Richard Gasquet for a place in the quarter-finals.

Meanwhile, Wimbledon finalist Kevin Anderson survived a scare against Australian Matthew Ebden, the second seed coming through 4-6, 7-6 (1) to reach the last 16. The South African plays American Frances Tiafoe in the last 16.

Elsewhere, three-time Tokyo finalist Milos Raonic, the tournament's sixth seed, overpowered Japanese qualifier Yosuke Watanuki 6-3, 7-6 (2) to reach the quarter-finals.

Russian Daniil Medvedev awaits the Canadian after beating Slovakia's Martin Klizan 6-4, 6-3, while Australia's Alex De Minaur beat France's Gilles Simon 6-7 (1), 7-6 (5), 6-2 in first-round action.

FOCUS

Qatar Airways is global airline partner for Brooklyn Nets, Barclays Center

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Airways announced its first major partnership with an NBA team or venue, becoming the Official Global Airline Partner of the Brooklyn Nets and the team's home, Barclays Center, in Brooklyn, New York.

The multi-year agreement will provide Qatar Airways with a big exposure in the US, while strengthening the airline's global sponsorship portfolio and uniting people from around the world at a renowned entertainment venue. As part of the agreement, Barclays Center's Courtside Club will become the Qatar Airways Club, and the airline will also receive branding on all courtside seats.

Located in the heart of Brooklyn, Barclays Center is a world-

class indoor venue and is ranked in the top-five nationally in gross revenue and attendance by Billboard and Venues Today. In addition to being home to the Brooklyn Nets, Barclays Center hosts a wealth of concerts and entertainment and, in the past, has featured performances by internationally-renowned artists and legends including Barbra Streisand, The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Beyoncé, Rihanna, Madonna and Bruce Springsteen, as well as family-friendly events such as Disney on Ice and Sesame Street Live.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Akbar al-Baker said, "Qatar Airways is delighted to sign this exciting sponsorship agreement with the Brooklyn Nets and Barclays Center, a major NBA franchise and a world-renowned venue which hosts some of the most thrilling sporting and entertainment events

globally. This new partnership will provide Qatar Airways with maximum exposure to the rest of the world, echoing our belief in bringing people together. We are proud to be able to bring spectators from around the world to New York, and we look forward to celebrating together at Barclays Center."

BSE Global CEO Brett Yormark added: "We are thrilled to be the first NBA team and venue to welcome Qatar Airways as an Official Partner. It has been an ongoing priority of the Brooklyn Nets and Barclays Center to expand our reach globally, and Qatar Airways helps us bring brand awareness to a dynamic new audience."

Qatar Airways' codeshare partner, JetBlue, continues as the Official Domestic Airline Partner of the Brooklyn Nets and Barclays Center.

Qatar Airways holds an extensive global sports portfolio,

sponsoring some of the biggest teams around the world. In addition to its existing partnership with the German football club giants Bayern Munich, for which it is a Platinum Partner, Qatar Airways also recently revealed multi-year sponsorship agreements as Official Jersey Sponsor with Italian football club Roma and Argentinian football club Boca Juniors.

In May 2017, Qatar Airways had also announced a groundbreaking sponsorship deal with FIFA, which saw the award-winning airline become the Official Partner and Official Airline of FIFA until 2022.

The partnership, one of the biggest sporting sponsorships in the world, will give Qatar Airways extensive marketing and branding rights at the 2022 World Cup Qatar, with an expected audience reach of more than two billion people.



CRICKET

Warriors claim T20 Division A crown

Warriors beat Galfar Al Misnad for the title; Selex and Hadico lift Division B and C trophies

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Imrax and Adnan mixed aggression and patience to lead Warriors Club to the Division A title in a thrilling finish in the QCA Twenty20 Cricket Tournament here.

The Qatar Cricket Association hosted this tournament to provide competitive edge to teams of all divisions and continue the growth of the sport in the country.

With Praveeth and Umar bagging two wickets each, Galfar Al Misnad were kept in check by Warriors Club, allowing them to make 142 for eight. Then Imrax and Adnan produced a solid batting display to help the team complete the chase in 17.3 overs.

Imrax blasted 58 not out in 51 balls, including four boundaries and two sixes, while Adnan's run-a-ball 43 had seven shots to the fence and a six.

Earlier, Rizlan and Faisal carried Galfar Al Misnad to a fighting total. Rizlan smashed three sixes in his 21-ball 35. Faisal took 22 deliveries to reach 22, which contained four boundaries and a six. Gayan added 26 off 15 balls with a six and two fours.

Imrax was declared the Man of the Match.

In Division B, the final was a high-scoring affair as Asif Ashraf excelled to power Selex past Qatar Super Kings by four wickets with 13 balls remaining.

Batting first, Qatar Super Kings piled up an impressive-looking 181 for six as Tony Archer laid the foundation with a fine 71. He faced 33 balls, fired seven sixes and four boundaries. Ben-



Warriors Club players pose with the trophy after winning the QCA Twenty20 Cricket Tournament.

in contributed 34 with two sixes and four boundaries.

Ashraf then guided the chase with a 39-ball cameo. He rifled three sixes and eight boundaries to collect 76. Shahid missed out on a half-century, getting a 30-ball 47 with seven fours. Asif Umer added the momentum with 31 not out, including half a dozen fours. Benin and Faiz shared four wickets.

Hadico held off Gladiators Club to claim the Division C title with a close six-run triumph, despite Avtar's splendid all-round display.

Hadico made a challenging 159 for seven as Ateer and Murad turned out to be best scorers. Ateer was a bit slow as he got 39 off 36 balls with three fours. In contrast, Murad was in an attacking mode and he just took 17 balls to compile 37. His

knock had three sixes and two boundaries. Avtar was the pick of the Gladiators bowlers with three for 26.

Gladiators Club were restricted by Jagroop and Suhail, who took five wickets between them. Jagroop netted three for 25 and Suhail grabbed two for 35.

Avtar shone with the bat as well, hitting 42 in 23 balls with three sixes and as many fours. Emad hit 26 as his 19-ball innings contained four boundaries. Avtar was rewarded with the man of the match award for his fine performance.

BRIEF SCORES

Division A: Galfar Al Misnad 142 for eight in 20 overs (Rizlan 35 (21b, 4x1, 6x3), Faisal 30 (22b, 4x4, 6x1), Gayan 26 (15b, 4x2, 6x1); Praveeth 2 for 29,

Umar 2 for 25) lost to Warriors Club 143 for two in 17.3 overs (Imrax 58 not out (51b, 4x5, 6x2), Adnan 43 (43b, 4x7, 6x1); Nouman 1 for 19) by eight wickets. Man of the match: Imrax (Warriors Club)

Division B: Qatar Super Kings 181 for six in 20 overs (Tony Archer 71 (33b, 4x4, 6x7)) lost to Selex 186 for six in 17.5 overs (Asif Ashraf 76 (39b, 4x8, 6x3), Shahid 47 (30b, 4x7); Benin 2 for 34, Faiz 2 for 32) by four wickets. Man of the match: Asif Ashraf (Selex)

Division C: Hadico 159 for seven in 20 overs (Ateer 39 (36b, 4x3), Murad 37 (15b, 4x2, 6x3); Avtar 3 for 26) beat Gladiators Club 153 for 8 (Avtar 42 (23b, 4x3, 6x3), Emad 26 (19b, 4x4, 6x1); Jagroop 3 for 25, Suhail 2 for 35) by 6 runs. Man of the match: Avtar (Gladiators Club)

Qatar's al-Tamimi rises to 24th in world ranking

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Aspire Academy graduate and Qatar's number 1 squash player **Abdulla al-Tamimi** has climbed the PSA World Ranking to 24th spot as per the latest world ranking at the end of September 2018. The 24-year-old Aspire graduate moved four places up from the last ranking released in August. This is al-Tamimi's highest ever PSA World Ranking, becoming the highest ranked squash player from the Gulf region. Al-Tamimi's progress in the PSA World Ranking comes on the back of solid performances and pleasing results from recent international squash tournaments including the recent JP Morgan China Open in Shanghai. Al-Tamimi was delighted with



his rise in the world rankings and said that he will do his best to reach a higher position during the new season.

Al-Tamimi began his squash career in 2011 and broke into the world's top 70 in November 2014 and entered the top 40

after winning the Australian Open title. Al-Tamimi is one of most prominent Aspire graduates and one of the talents that the academy has developed to make the nation proud at international tournaments.

RUGBY

DRFC to host top SL clubs

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Doha Rugby Football Club (DRFC) and the Lions Rugby Football Club (LRFC), along with the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Qatar, are set to welcome two of Sri Lanka's top rugby clubs this month.

The historical games, which will serve as pre-season preparation for DRFC's 1st XV, will provide supporters with the opportunity to enjoy high-quality rugby competition. The first international club friendly will be held on Friday at the Doha Rugby Football Centre against Colombo Football Club, fourth-placed team in the last year's Sri Lankan league, while the second match is scheduled for Friday, October 19, against Sri Lanka Navy Rugby Sport Club, last season's runners-up.

Sri Lankan ambassador ASP Liyanage expressed his excitement about DRFC hosting the two Sri Lankan teams over the coming weeks. "The embassy, together with its partners, welcomes both the visiting teams. We are delighted to have them play in Qatar," he said.

"We acknowledge the significance of these fixtures, and credit the management of the LRFC and DRFC, as well as the sponsor - James Barker Used Cars - for recognizing Sri Lanka's stature as a powerful rugby nation."

Speaking about the collaboration, DRFC's Director of Rugby Brook Tremayne said, "With the current blockade imposed on Qatar, it's very difficult to provide competitive rugby opportunities to our players. These matches demonstrate our commitment to exploring new partnerships that are sustainable for our club and, in turn, Qatar rugby."

LRFC president Nimo Amit added: "The Sri Lankan rugby community is one of the biggest in Doha and it only makes sense to open dialogue with Sri Lankan clubs. We will be undertaking various initiatives over the next 12 months with these teams to bring more competition to Doha. Indeed, both Colombo and the Navy are foundation clubs and are amongst the top-rated clubs back home, and we look forward to hosting them."

Meanwhile, the Doha rugby team will be aiming to win both matches ahead of Qatar's domestic XV's club rugby competition. Though the final squad

has not been named, Tremayne said, "We are looking forward to welcoming the two Sri Lankan teams. The matches will test our players, and help us gauge our level of efficiency over the 80 minutes. Ideally, we want to build on the new season's momentum by winning both friendlies."

CH & FC who were edged out of the top three in last year's national premier league will also be looking for a positive start, despite missing three of their top players who are out on national rugby duty. However, captain Yousitha Rajapakse saw it as an opportunity for their replacements. "Having our big names out of the squad drives the team to excel with more intensity. It gives the other boys a chance to shine and consolidate their positions. We have a lot of faith in the depth of our players."

The former Sri Lankan national captain added, "We have been given a very unique opportunity to play against Qatar's top level team and we will not let it go to waste. Every game is a premier-ship match. We are committed to getting on with the job and intend to beat Doha's finest on their home soil, hopefully in front of a big Sri Lankan crowd."

BOTTOMLINE

Aspetar conference discusses management of sports medicine emergencies

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Aspetar, Qatar's orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital, in collaboration with the National Sports Medicine Programme (NSMP), held a conference entitled "Aspetar Clubs & Federations Conference - Emergencies on the field" yesterday.

Dr Abdulaziz Jaham al-Kuwari, acting chief executive officer, Aspetar said, "Aspetar always supports professional athletes in Qatar by providing unique on and off the field sports medicine services during all kinds of sports events."

"Through this conference Aspetar seeks to stay updated

with the latest developments in sports medicine emergency services on the field and implement the appropriate management and evaluation approaches," he added.

Dr Rachid Bouras, director of NSMP, Aspetar said, "This conference contributes to ensuring that sports medical practitioners in the clubs and federations have a high level of medical education to improve their skills and thus provide best medical practices and provide excellent services to athletes in Qatar and to participants in all sporting events held in the country by implementing specific protocols for the management of sports medicine emergencies on the field?"

The conference was attend-

ed by a distinguished group of Aspetar experts, including 17 lecturers from different disciplines, to cover all issues related to the management and treatment of medical emergencies in the sports fields during the game.

They also reviewed several medical emergency cases that may occur during the play ranging from life-threatening situations to injuries that may have a serious impact on the athlete's future career and health in general.

Among the topics discussed were those related to sports fields injuries and their management, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation during play, head injuries and brain concussion, as well as neck

and spine injuries. The conference also addresses the issues of fracture, torsion, dislocation, wound care and control of haemorrhagic injuries as well as discussing diseases associated with increasing temperature.

National Sports Medicine Programme, launched by Aspetar in 2009, is a pioneering and unique initiative in Qatar at developing the quality of sports medicine for all Qatari clubs and federations.

Over the past year, the National Sports Medicine Programme has provided medical care for all sporting events held in the country, which exceeded 83 sports events, with an average of 11,000 working hours, and supervised by 370 doctors and specialists.



Dr Rachid Bouras, NSMP director at Aspetar, speaking at the event.

NBA

LeBron gets ovation in Staples Center debut

AFP
Los Angeles

LeBron James received a rapturous reception in his home debut for the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday but was unable to prevent his new team from slipping to a second pre-season defeat to the Denver Nuggets.

James, who joined the Lakers in July from the Cleveland Cavaliers on a four-year deal, was given a rousing standing ovation by the Staples Center crowd as he arrived on court.

The 33-year-old delighted the crowd with some silky touches during 15 first-half minutes.

He finished with 13 points, three assists, three rebounds, two steals and four turnovers during 15 minutes on court in the first half before sitting out all of the second half.

The game ended in a 113-111 win for Denver, who had also beaten the Lakers in San Diego on Sunday in James' first game with his new club.

Earlier Tuesday, James told reporters he was still adjusting to his new envi-

ronment, and once again cautioned that the new-look Lakers squad would take time to gel.

"We've got a new group. We're not at the level that a lot of the teams are in terms of cohesiveness and chemistry," James said following morning practice.

"Every day is another opportunity for us to get better."

DURANT 'AT HOME' WITH WARRIORS, BUT UNDECIDED ON FUTURE

Kevin Durant feels at home with the Golden State Warriors but admits he has made no decision regarding his future when he enters free agency next year.

The 30-year-old two-time NBA Finals MVP told ESPN on Tuesday that while he was settled in California, he was keeping his options open for 2019.

Durant will be one of the highest-profile players to become a free agent next year, and is almost certain to attract interest from rival clubs.

Durant, who joined the Warriors from the Oklahoma City Thunder in 2016, emphasised that he was enjoying life with the reigning NBA champions, who have won back-to-back titles

since his arrival.

"It's just where I want to play ball at, where I'm most comfortable, where I feel most at home, and I feel at home here," Durant told ESPN.

"I feel like I belong here. I feel like I mix with this team, I mesh with this team well. With that being said, I really don't know what's going to happen this summer."

"But I really, really feel like a part of this team. We got two banners up there, my picture's around here somewhere so I feel like I'm a part of this thing - but at the end of the day, we're staying in the moment."

Durant's immediate focus is on helping the Warriors extend their dynasty.

The club has won three NBA championships in the past four seasons, and will start as favourites to win a fourth when the new season gets under way later this month.

"We're trying to embrace every single moment," Durant said. "I'm not saying we're going to win a championship at all, but we're just focused on having a good practice today, having a good practice tomorrow and then we'll see what happens at the end."



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (right) and forward Kyle Kuzma celebrate on the court in the first-half of the game against the Denver Nuggets at Staples Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

MLB

Rockies advance as Cubs ousted in thriller

'Paul's roots here run deep and his commitment to the organisation and the players is special'



Colorado Rockies players Tony Wolters (left) and Scott Oberg celebrate after defeating the Chicago Cubs in the 2018 National League wild card playoff game at Wrigley Field in Chicago. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

AFP
Chicago

Tony Wolters drove in the winning run as the Colorado Rockies won an extra-innings thriller to send the Chicago Cubs crashing out of the postseason with a 2-1 defeat in the National League wildcard game on Tuesday.

Wolters blasted an RBI single in the 13th inning at Wrigley Field to ensure the Rockies' advance to a divisional series against the Milwaukee Brewers on Thursday as the Cubs' hopes of a second World Series in three years came to an abrupt end.

Wolters' winning run was the final act of a gripping battle that ended just after midnight local time as the Wrigley Field crowd were left in stunned silence.

Both teams had ended up in

the wild card game after blowing leads in their respective divisional races, before losing tie-breaker games on Monday.

The early exchanges of the contest were dominated by a classic pitcher's battle between Cubs starter Jon Lester and Rockies counterpart Kyle Freeland. A slow start from Lester saw Charlie Blackmon walked at the top of the first which was followed with DJ LeMahieu's double on a line drive to left centre field.

Blackmon then crossed home plate after Nolan Arenado's sacrifice fly put the Rockies ahead.

Thereafter Lester and Freeland would dominate both line-ups with superb performances from the mound. With Freeland withdrawn after six innings and two outs of the seventh inning, the Rockies survived a scare at the bottom of the seventh when a catcher's interference call left reliever Adam Ottavino facing a

bases loaded jam.

Ottavino extricated himself however when he got Cubs slugger Jason Heyward out swinging to preserve the Rockies' slender lead.

But with the tension mounting, the Cubs hauled themselves back into the contest in the eighth inning.

Terrance Gore was the hero for the Cubs, making a crucial steal to put himself in scoring position at second before Javier Baez lashed a double to left centre field for the tying run.

Yet the Cubs were unable to build on the momentum in the ninth after getting a man on base when Wilson Contreras was walked, sending it into extra innings.

With both teams burning through their pitching resources, the deadlock was broken in the 13th when Trevor Story reached third after Gerardo Parra's line drive.

Wolters then stepped up to bludgeon a ground ball through the gap into right field to bring Story home for the winning run.

Reliever Scott Oberg then closed it out for the Rockies as Chicago's season ended in bitter disappointment.

TWINS FIRE MANAGER MOLITOR

Paul Molitor was fired as manager of the Minnesota Twins on Tuesday, though he has an offer to remain with the club in the front office.

"I would like to thank Paul for his tremendous dedication to the Minnesota Twins over his last four years as manager of this club," Twins executive vice president, chief baseball officer Derek Falvey said in a release.

"Paul's roots here run deep and his commitment to the organisation, his staff, and the players is special. I have every hope and desire that he remains

a part of this club for many years to come."

According to the release, "Molitor has been offered a position to stay with the organization in a baseball operations capacity and will consider the offer."

Molitor was named American League manager of the year just last season, and was fired with two years remaining on his contract. He posted a 305-343 record in four seasons as skipper in Minnesota.

The Twins finished in second place in the American League Central with a record of 78-84 this season. The Twins were 85-77 last season and lost to the New York Yankees in the AL wild-card game.

Molitor was a Hall of Fame player during 21 seasons with the Milwaukee Brewers, Minnesota Twins and Toronto Blue Jays. He had 3,319 career hits and was a seven-time All-Star.

GOLF

Koepka dismisses talk of rift with 'best friend' Johnson

Reuters
London

American Brooks Koepka dismissed reports that he fought with teammate Dustin Johnson following the United States' dismal Ryder Cup loss to Europe last weekend, saying that Johnson was still one of his best friends.

The *Telegraph* newspaper reported that Koepka and Johnson - nicknamed the Bash Brothers for their big hitting - clashed after they were invited to Europe's team room on Sunday following the 10.5-17.5 defeat at Le Golf National in France.

The report said Johnson's partner Paulina Gretzky had fuelled rumours of the rift when she deleted images of Koepka from her Instagram account.

French newspaper *L'Equipe* reported on Tuesday that the two men had argued on their flight to Europe ahead of the event.

"This Dustin thing I don't get. There was no fight, no argument," Koepka told reporters ahead of the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship in Scotland yesterday.

"He's one of my best friends; I love the kid to death. We talked on the phone Monday and yesterday so you tell me how we fought. People like to make a story and run with it. It's not the first time there's been a rift."

"It's not the first time there's

been a news story that isn't true that's gone out."

Koepka said the camaraderie within the US team during the Ryder Cup was fine and took aim at the media.

"The problem is you guys (the media) try to find a reason why we lost and the simple reason is we just didn't play good enough," Koepka said.

"We didn't make the putts, hit the fairways, especially me. I lost two matches and halved another one. If I won those, if Tiger Woods wins his; Dustin lost one with me and then I think lost in the singles."

"If we play how we're supposed to play we win, it's simple as, but there's nothing wrong with our team. Our team was great, (captain) Jim (Furyk) was great."

Koepka had earlier said he was heartbroken to learn that a tee shot of his which struck a spectator in France had reportedly left the woman blind in one eye. Koepka said he had a story and run with it. It's not the first time there's been a news story that isn't true that's gone out."

And he played down rumours of disharmony within the US camp.

"As far as camaraderie, it was fine, it was perfect," Koepka said. "The problem is you guys (the media) try to find a reason why we lost and the simple reason is we just didn't play good enough."

Interim boss sole candidate for AIBA Boxing presidency

Interim leader Gafur Rakhimov has been named as the sole candidate for the International Boxing Association (AIBA) presidency, setting the troubled body on a potential collision course with Olympics organisers.

The Uzbek businessman was the only candidate listed by the amateur Boxing body's election commission as eligible for the post, according to a document seen by AFP.

The International Olympic Committee said it was "extremely worried" when Rakhimov was nominated as interim president in February, and has threatened to axe Boxing from the Games due to concerns over its governance. Rakhimov's critics claim he has links to organised crime. The AIBA, which suffered a major judging scandal at the 2016 Rio Olympics, is expected to be discussed by the IOC's executive committee when it begins a two-day meeting in Buenos Aires on Wednesday.

In a separate statement, the AIBA said it had slapped life bans on its Taiwanese former president CK Wu and ex-executive director Ho Kim of South Korea. Wu was banned after a report by "forensic investigators" K2 Intelligence documented "gross negligence and financial mismanagement of AIBA affairs and finances", AIBA said. The ban will need to be ratified by member federations

at the AIBA Congress in Moscow in November, where the new president is also due to be elected.

An internal power struggle saw Wu ousted and Rakhimov - who vigorously denies US government allegations of links to organised crime - installed as interim president earlier this year. AIBA's executive committee also voted to suspend Franco Falcinelli from the committee, his role as president of the European Boxing Confederation and all other Boxing-related activities over "offending conduct", the statement said. "The executive committee felt that there was a need to once and for all to draw a line in the sand and put the bad behaviour of the past behind us," said AIBA executive director Tom Virgates.

"AIBA and Olympic Boxing have over the past year been facing major challenges due to the gross negligence and financial mismanagement of the previous leadership, and the evidence presented to the executive committee was overwhelming." IOC president Thomas Bach said in February that he was "extremely worried about the governance of the AIBA" and that the IOC retained the "right to exclude Boxing from Tokyo 2020".

SPOTLIGHT

Arsenal out to maintain winning run on long Europa League trip

An eighth successive win in all competitions would represent Arsenal's best run since 2015



Arsenal's (from left) Eddie Nketiah, Lucas Torreira, Hector Bellerin and Nacho Monreal train ahead of their Europa League match against Qarabag in Baku, Azerbaijan, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Paris

Unai Emery's Arsenal are looking to keep up their winning run when they make their longest ever journey for a competitive game to face Qarabag in Azerbaijan in the Europa League today. The Gunners have recovered from losing the opening two games under their new Spanish coach and Saturday's 2-0 win over Watford in the Premier League was their seventh victory on the bounce.

An eighth successive win in all competitions would represent Arsenal's best run since the spring of 2015, and it would leave them in a strong position to qualify for Group E after they began their European campaign by beating Vorskla of Ukraine 4-2.

Emery is likely to rest leading players for the 4,000km trip to the Olympic Stadium in Baku, which will host the final next May. Goalkeeper Petr Cech is out for up to a month with a hamstring injury, while playmaker Henrikh Mkhitaryan will not play

given the long-standing political tensions between Azerbaijan and his native Armenia.

Those issues meant Mkhitaryan did not travel with Borussia Dortmund to a Europa League game in Azerbaijan in October 2015, with the German club citing "safety concerns" at the time.

Armenian citizens are currently banned from travelling to Azerbaijan due to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, although special exceptions have been made in the past for professional athletes. However, Arsenal confirmed they did not apply for the visa Mkhitaryan would have needed to enter the country. "My work is football. I respect each person, I respect each people, I respect each culture, I respect each country. But I don't know each situation in every country," said Arsenal manager Unai Emery. "For me, he cannot play tomorrow."

The issue could have more serious ramifications for Arsenal should the Gunners reach the final of the competition, which will be staged in Azerbaijani capital Baku. Azerbaijan and Armenia have feuded over the Nagorny Karabakh region since Arme-

nian separatists seized the territory in a war that claimed some 30,000 lives in the early 1990s. A ceasefire was agreed in 1994 but the two countries remain locked in a bitter dispute with frequent exchanges of fire.

However, Qarabag coach Gurban Gurbanov claimed Mkhitaryan was merely avoiding a hostile environment by not travelling. "Until now a lot of Armenian sportsmen came to Azerbaijan but it is the choice of Arsenal that they didn't send (him)," Gurbanov said on the eve of the game. "Arsenal may be afraid that in front of 60,000 Azerbaijani fans, Mkhitaryan has some pressure and that is why they didn't send Mkhitaryan."

Premier League rivals Chelsea host Hungarian champions Vidi, who dropped into this competition after losing to AEK Athens in the Champions League play-offs. Maurizio Sarri's team won their Group L opener, beating PAOK in Greece with a solitary William goal.

Scottish champions Celtic have had a poor start to the season, although Brendan Rodgers' team did beat Rosenborg 1-0 in their Europa League

group-stage opener. The Hoops are traditionally poor on their travels in Europe – excluding qualifying rounds they have won just twice away from home this decade. That means they are likely to find life tough against Austrian champions Salzburg, who reached the semi-finals last season.

Rangers, meanwhile, face Austrian opposition too. Steven Gerrard's side, who held Villarreal away from home two weeks ago, host Rapid Vienna, with the visitors to Ibrox having just appointed a new coach. Dietmar Kuehbauer, a former Rapid player, replaces Goran Djuricin, who was sacked at the weekend. Other fixtures to look out for include AC Milan's home meeting with Olympiakos and former winners Sevilla's trip to Russia to face Krasnodar.

EUROPA LEAGUE FIXTURES

Group A: FC Zurich (SUI) v Ludogorets (BUL); Bayer Leverkusen (GER) v AEK Larnaca (CYP)

Group B: RB Salzburg (AUT) v Celtic (SCO); Rosenborg (NOR) v RB Leipzig (GER)

Group C: Zenit (RUS) v Slavia Prague

(CZE); Bordeaux (FRA) v FC Copenhagen (DEN)

Group D: Anderlecht (BEL) v Dinamo Zagreb (CRO); Fenerbahce (TUR) v Spartak Trnava (SVK)

Group E: Qarabag (AZE) v Arsenal (ENG); Vorskla Poltava (UKR) v Sporting (POR)

Group F: AC Milan (ITA) v Olympiakos (GRE); Betis (ESP) v Dudelange (LUX)

Group G: Rangers (SCO) v Rapid Vienna (AUT); Spartak Moscow (RUS) v Villarreal (ESP)

Group H: Eintracht Frankfurt (GER) v Lazio (ITA); Apollon Limassol (CYP) v Marseille (FRA)

Group I: Sarpsborg (NOR) v Genk (BEL); Malmö (SWE) v Besiktas (TUR)

Group J: Standard Liege (BEL) v Akhisar (TUR); Krasnodar (RUS) v Sevilla (ESP)

Group K: Astana (KAZ) v Rennes (FRA) (1450 GMT); Jablonec (CZE) v Dynamo Kiev (UKR)

Group L: Chelsea (ENG) v Vidi (HUN); BATE (BLR) v PAOK (GRE)

Aston Villa sack manager Steve Bruce

Aston Villa yesterday sacked manager Steve Bruce with the club languishing 12th in the Championship after just three wins in 11 games. Bruce had come under increasing pressure after Villa's poor start to the season and had a cabbage hurled at him during Tuesday's 3-3 home draw with Preston. The 57-year-old, who has won promotion to the Premier League twice with two different clubs – Birmingham and Hull – replaced Roberto Di Matteo at Villa Park in October 2016. "Aston Villa can confirm that manager Steve Bruce and his assistants Colin Calderwood, Steve Agnew, Stephen Clemence and Gary Walsh are leaving their posts," club said.

Rugani breaks rib, Khedira aggravates thigh injury

Juventus defender Daniele Rugani has a broken rib while midfielder Sami Khedira aggravated a thigh injury during the team's Champions League win over Young Boys. Juventus beat the Swiss champions 3-0 to move top of Group C after two games and extend their winning run this season to nine games in all competitions. Rugani, 24, who has been linked to a possible move to Maurizio Sarri's Chelsea, broke a rib during a league game against Frosinone a week ago. The Italy international will not be available for Juventus's next match against Udinese on Saturday.

Police dispute Mourinho claim for United late show

Police said they were not to blame for Manchester United's late arrival for their Champions League match against Valencia following criticism from manager Jose Mourinho as UEFA opened disciplinary proceedings against the club. The United team arrived late at Old Trafford, forcing kick-off to be delayed by five minutes to 8:05pm. Mourinho said United were refused an escort by Greater Manchester Police (GMP), which led to their journey from their hotel taking 45 minutes longer than usual. But police said they are no longer obliged to provide that service for every match and that the club were aware of the change in policy.

Campbell to join England U-21 staff in diversity drive

Former Arsenal defender Sol Campbell is to work in the England Under-21s coaching setup as part of the Football Association's drive to increase opportunities for black, Asian, minority ethnic (BAME) coaches in all levels of the national team. Campbell, who has criticised the lack of top-level management openings for himself and other BAME coaches, will work with England U21 manager Aidy Boothroyd in November, the FA said. "I've accepted to go with England Under-21s with Aidy Boothroyd," the 44-year-old former England international said. "It's for the friendlies against Germany at home and Italy away, which is great."

Court rejects false testimony charge against Modric

A Croatian court has rejected a charge against Croatia international and Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric of giving false testimony in a criminal trial, the court said. Zagreb municipal criminal court said the court rejected the charge, made by the Croatia state attorney in March, but gave no explanation for its ruling. The state attorney's office can appeal against the decision. Modric testified last year at the trial of a tax official and three former senior officials from the soccer club Dinamo Zagreb, including its former chief executive Zdravko Mamic, about the dates of signing the annexes to his professional contracts which regulated transfer fees.

FOCUS

Pogba says 'not allowed' to talk after Man United stalemate

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Paul Pogba said he was not allowed to talk after Manchester United failed to arrest their recent slump with a drab 0-0 Champions League draw against Valencia. Jose Mourinho's United have made their worst start to a league campaign in 29 years after an embarrassing 3-1 loss at West Ham and are already out of the League Cup.

Tuesday's stalemate at Old Trafford was their fourth consecutive match without a win. Many players avoided the post-match mixed zone interview area after the game to avoid awkward questions. Pogba was among those to go through but told reporters "I've been told I'm not allowed to talk."

The French World Cup winner, who was last week told he would not captain the side again, appeared to get under Mourinho's skin after their recent draw with Wolves by saying United should attack more.

Captain Antonio Valencia and midfielder Marouane Fellaini have both backed the manager despite the grow-

ing crisis at the club. Valencia insisted he is "fully supportive" of Mourinho after appearing to back calls for the under-fire manager to leave.

The 33-year-old 'liked' an Instagram post from a fan account which said that "recently Mourinho has made watching us a punishment" and "it's time for Mourinho to go".

But he attempted to explain and apologise yesterday. "Yesterday, I liked a post on Instagram without reading the text that accompanied the picture," the right-back wrote on Twitter. "These are not my views and I apologise for this. I am fully supportive of the manager and my teammates. Everything will calm down when we get some wins," the Ecuadoran added. "We are 100 per cent behind the manager."

The players attempted to show a united front before kick-off by breaking with tradition and taking part in a pre-match huddle. "Everyone is going in the same direction to try to improve and to do better," Fellaini said of the on-pitch huddle.

"I think we wanted to show that we are together. I think we showed improvement and we have to keep going," he added. "Everybody (was behind the

idea). I think everybody is behind the manager."

WE DON'T HAVE TECHNICAL QUALITY, SAYS MOURINHO

Meanwhile, Mourinho risked causing another rift with his United stars as he slammed his defence's lack of "technical quality". United rarely looked like scoring against their out-of-form opponents and were booed off at full-time.

Now he has taken a swipe at his back four, which against Valencia featured Antonio Valencia, Chris Smalling, Eric Bailly and Luke Shaw. "We don't have the technical quality to build from the back," Mourinho said.

"The players tried. They raised the level of their intensity in spite of the fact we don't have many with that intensity. We had probably a couple of the biggest chances to win it but I have accepted the result as a fair result."

Mourinho admitted United had focused on stopping Valencia causing them problems, even though they were at home, because his team are so badly lacking confidence at present. "We tried to do something we did well which was to stop a fast team on the counter



Manchester United's Paul Pogba gestures during the Champions League Group stage match against Valencia on Tuesday. (Reuters)

attack. We knew we wouldn't create 20 chances," he said.

"Our attacking players aren't in their best moments of confidence and individual level. We thought with three or

four chances we would score and win the game. It is a not a bad result. Not a good result, but not bad. We have two matches against Juventus to make points. It is a very difficult group, yes.

We have Newcastle (this weekend) before the league stops, then we have Chelsea and Juventus in three days. It will be good for the team if we can beat Newcastle."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Real suffer shock defeat as Man United stutter again

Bayern held by Ajax, while Man City beat Hoffenheim 2-1 and Juventus win comfortably thanks to Dybala's hat-trick

AFP
Paris

Champions League holders Real Madrid slumped to a rare defeat in the competition as they went down 1-0 away to CSKA Moscow on Tuesday night, while Jose Mourinho's Manchester United misfired again in a 0-0 draw with Valencia.

While Bayern Munich were also held by Ajax, it was a happier evening for Pep Guardiola's Manchester City as they beat Hoffenheim 2-1, and Juventus were also comfortable winners thanks to Paulo Dybala's hat-trick.

Real were not expected to struggle in Group G as they look to continue their recent dominance of the Champions League, but Julen Lopetegui's side went behind inside two minutes in Moscow following a mistake by Toni Kroos.

The German's drilled backpass turned into a gift for Nikola Vlasic, and the winger on loan from Everton fired past Keylor Navas to put CSKA ahead. Casemiro hit the post in the first half — one of three attempts that found the woodwork for the visitors — but Real were weakened by the absences of Gareth Bale and Sergio Ramos, while Luka Modric started on the bench.

CSKA held on, despite having goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev sent off in injury time, and they move above Real to the top of Group G. "I am sure we will soon be scoring again and winning again," said Lopetegui, whose team have not found the net in three matches.

It was only Madrid's third loss in the Champions League group stage this decade, but Real will nevertheless expect to bounce back next against Czech champions Viktoria Plzen, who were crushed 5-0 by Roma. Edin Dzeko scored a hat-trick for the Italian side, with Cengiz Under and Justin Kluivert also netting.

At Old Trafford, the pressure continued to build on Mourinho as United produced another insipid attacking display in their goalless stalemate with Valencia. They are now four games without a win, and Mourinho's decision to recall Alexis Sanchez — after dropping the Chilean for the weekend



CSKA Moscow's Croatian midfielder Nikola Vlasic (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League Group G match at the Luzhniki stadium in Moscow on Tuesday night. (AFP)

defeat at West Ham United — failed to pay off. "Our attacking players aren't in their best moments of confidence and individual level," moaned Mourinho. "We thought with three or four chances we would score and win the game."

Mourinho's side are second in Group H, two points behind Juventus. Juve eased to victory against 10-man Young Boys in Turin, with Dybala scoring a hat-trick to take centre stage in the absence of Cristiano Ronaldo, who was

serving a one-game ban. "We were without Cristiano, and at times it is easier with him in the side, but we have to be a great team both with and without him," said Dybala. Guardiola saw Manchester City

come from behind to beat Hoffenheim in Germany in Group F. David Silva scored three minutes from time to get the Premier League champions back on track after they started their campaign with a 2-1 home defeat against Lyon.

Ishak Belfodil had put Hoffenheim ahead after just 44 seconds, but Sergio Agüero equalised in the eighth minute before Silva's late winner. "This competition isn't always a red carpet. Manchester City is a fantastic club, but we don't have a history of having to fight and we fought for absolutely everything here," said Guardiola. "This is one of the happiest days I have had at this club as it will help us going forward."

City next face Shakhtar Donetsk, who squandered a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with Lyon in France, in a game played behind closed doors. Junior Moraes scored twice for Shakhtar, but Lyon fought back to draw with goals from Moussa Dembele and Leo Dubois.

It was a good result for Lyon, whose fans were missing as a punishment for trouble at a game against CSKA last season, and they now top the group.

Meanwhile, Bayern could not hang on to the early lead given to them against Ajax when Mats Hummels headed in Arjen Robben's cross. Young full-back Noussair Mazraoui equalised to give the Dutch side a 1-1 draw. Those sides are level atop Group E ahead of Benfica, who won 3-2 in a thriller at AEK Athens with Alfa Semedo scoring the deciding goal.

RESULTS

Group E: At Athens: AEK Athens (GRE) 2 (Klonaridis 53, 63) Benfica (POR) 3 (Seferovic 6, Grimaldo 15, Alfa Semedo 74); At Munich, Germany: Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Hummels 4) Ajax (NED) 1 (Mazraoui 22)

Group F: At Sinsheim, Germany: Hoffenheim (GER) 1 (Belfodil 1) Manchester City (ENG) 2 (Agüero 8, David Silva 87); At Lyon, France: Lyon (FRA) 2 (Dembele 70, Dubois 72) Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 2 (Junior Moraes 44, 55)

Group G: At Rome: Roma (ITA) 5 (Dzeko 3, 40, 90+2, Cengiz Under 64, Kluivert 73) Viktoria Plzen (CZE) 0; At Moscow: CSKA Moscow (RUS) 1 (Vlasic 2) Real Madrid (ESP) 0

Group H: At Turin, Italy: Juventus (ITA) 3 (Dybala 5, 33, 69) Young Boys (SUI) 0; At Manchester, England: Manchester United (ENG) 0 Valencia (ESP) 0

FOCUS

Ronaldo denies sexual assault accusation, calls rape 'abominable crime'

AFP
Las Vegas

Cristiano Ronaldo yesterday denied accusations by a former American model that he raped her in a Las Vegas hotel in 2009 and said his conscience is clear. "I firmly deny the accusations being issued against me," the Portuguese superstar tweeted in Portuguese and English.

"Rape is an abominable crime that goes against everything that I am and believe in," said the 33-year-old Juventus forward. "Keen as I may be to clear my name I refuse to feed the media spectacle created by people seeking to promote themselves at my expense," Ronaldo said.

"My clear conscious (sic) will thereby allow me to await with tranquillity the results of any and all investigations," he added on his Twitter feed @Cristiano, which has nearly 75mn followers.

Kathryn Mayorga, 34, of Las Vegas, accused Ronaldo, in a 32-page complaint filed last month with a district court in Nevada, of raping her on June 13, 2009. Las Vegas police this week said they were reopening a case filed on that date but did not identify the victim or the alleged perpetrator by name.

Mayorga's lawyers were to hold a news conference in Las Vegas last night to discuss the case. Mayorga alleges in the lawsuit that she was pressured into signing a nondisclosure agreement to keep the alleged rape secret and is seeking no less than \$200,000 in penalties and damages.

The complaint was first re-



ported by the German magazine Der Spiegel. Lawyers for Ronaldo have reportedly threatened to sue the magazine over the story. In the suit, Mayorga said she met Ronaldo, who was then 24 years old, on the evening of June 12, 2009 at the Rain Nightclub in the Palms Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. It said she accepted an invitation to join Ronaldo and others in his penthouse suite to "enjoy the view of the Las Vegas strip."

"When Cristiano Ronaldo completed the sexual assault of the plaintiff, he allowed her to leave the bedroom stating he was sorry, he was usually a gentleman," it said. The lawsuit said Mayorga reported the alleged assault to police the same day and was examined at a local hospital.

It said the assault left her with "severe emotional and bodily injuries including but not limited to anal contusions, posttraumatic stress disorder and ma-

jor depression." Under pressure from Ronaldo's "fixers," Mayorga settled the case "in exchange for a payment of \$375,000 and non-disclosure of the sexual assault," the lawsuit said.

It claimed the agreement should be voided because she was "incompetent and lacked the mental capacity to participate in negotiations and settlement of her claims due to the injuries suffered during the initial sexual assault."

The unidentified "fixers" were named as co-defendants. In an interview with Der Spiegel, Mayorga said she was inspired to come forward in part by the #MeToo movement that has exposed the sexual abuse of women by powerful men.

Ronaldo is a five-time winner of FIFA's men's player of the year award. The Portuguese striker, a married father of four, left Real Madrid this year to join Juventus for 100mn euros.

SPOTLIGHT

Mixed feelings for Ajax coach after surprise draw at Bayern

Reuters
Munich

Ajax Amsterdam coach Erik ten Hag left Germany with mixed feelings after Tuesday's unexpected 1-1 draw for his youthful team at Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

Ajax fell behind early to a Mats Hummels header but then equalised through Moroccan fullback Noussair Mazraoui to move to four points from their two Group E games and with real hopes of advancing to the knockout phase.

Ten Hag, however, was disappointed at his side not being able to become the first Dutch side to win at Bayern after they had the better of the chances. "On the one hand, I'm really satisfied but on the other, this was a game we could and should have won," ten Hag, a former reserve team coach at Bayern, told reporters after the stalemate against the misfiring German champions.

"We laid down a really good achievement, right from the start of the game. We have a good team but we need to mature a bit more, but we were full of enthusiasm and willingness."

Bayern struggled to build on their advantage and their recent slump continued as they battled to keep a vibrant Ajax at bay. "Bayern really struggled with the fact that we were constantly chasing the ball," ten Hag added.

"And where we could, we try to play good football. But it's a real pity we didn't make it 2-1, the team functioned super. This sort of game gives the youngsters more self-confidence. Now they just have to convert their chances. But this was a confirmation of what this team



Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (right) vies for the ball with Ajax's Moroccan defender Noussair Mazraoui (centre) and Danish defender Rasmus Nissen during the UEFA Champions League Group E match in Munich on Tuesday night. (AFP)

is capable of. We have quality players, who together can reach great heights."

Bayern Munich coach Niko Kovacs said his team must keep it simple if they are to regain their dominant early season form.

"We must go back to the basics, get stuck into the duels, play fewer bad passes and let the ball flow," the Croat demanded, pointing to Ajax as an example to follow.

"Our opponent showed us how to do it. Now we have to look to display our face again,

which saw us to wins in the first seven games of the season."

The draw means the usually consistent and dominant German champions have gone three games without a win after being held by Augsburg and beaten by Hertha Berlin in the Bundesliga. "It's not what we imagined, that's not what I personally imagined, and this was certainly not a good match for us," Kovacs told reporters as he criticised the performance.

"We played negatively, our opponent was first to every second ball, we just played too

many bad passes, we wanted too much, too fast in the build-up and so lose the ball and then confidence."

Bayern began their Champions League Group E campaign with a 2-0 away win over Benfica and share top spot with Ajax on four points, but their immediate concern is finding form when they host Borussia Moenchengladbach in the Bundesliga on Saturday.

Bayern are second in the standings, one point behind leaders Borussia Dortmund after six matches.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

We can turn things around: Sadd's Ismail

'We now look forward to going to Tehran and getting a good result there'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hamid Ismail insists that Al Sadd are capable of bouncing back from the 1-0 defeat to Persepolis in the first leg of the AFC Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday night. Looking to make a first final appearance since their title win in 2011, hosts Al Sadd started brightly at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium and dominated the majority of the game but spurned a number of chances to break the deadlock.

Those missed opportunities came back to haunt the Qatari side when the Iranian champions clinched a late win with an 86th-minute penalty from Ali Alipour after the forward had been upended by goalkeeper Saad al-Sheeb.

"We controlled the match right up to the penalty," said Ismail, who was declared man of the match after an impressive display.

"We felt some of their players were exhausted and so we tried to push forward to get the win but unfortunately, we ended up losing. We now look forward to going to Tehran and getting a good result there. We are used to seeing Iranian sides play an open game against us but Persepolis were playing in a defensive manner."

Al Sadd had defeated Persepolis 3-1 on home soil in the group stage before eventually finishing as Group C runners-up following a 1-0 loss in Tehran as both sides progressed. The 2011 champions are now left with the task of becoming the first side to defeat Branko Ivankovic's side at Azadi Stadium in the current campaign when the second leg takes place in three weeks' time.

"I think they may play a more open game in front of their fans in the second leg and that could turn out to be good for us; we could use that to our advantage and score the goals that we are looking for," added Ismail.

"Of course, we did not play as well as we wanted in this game but we now have a huge desire to perform at a higher level in Tehran and come back with a win. We have a good period of preparation lying ahead of us and, hopefully, Al Sadd will be in a better situation by then. What is



Al Sadd's Hamid Ismail (left) was impressive against Persepolis in the AFC Champions League first leg semi-final on Tuesday.

important is that we fully believe in our chances."

Meanwhile, Al Sadd head coach Jesualdo Ferreira refuted suggestions that his side's formation was the reason for the defeat. "We played with the same formation against Al Rayyan in the league, with three central midfielders, and got a good result," said the Portuguese. "I put Hamza Sanhaji in as an extra striker in place of full-back Hamid Ismael to try and score but we couldn't. We did our best. It wasn't a good tech-

nical game from either side. We are only thinking about getting a win in Tehran. It will be a really tough match, playing there in front of almost 100,000 fans. Persepolis will have the advantage with today's win but we are confident in our ability to return with a good result and reach the final."

Meanwhile, Persepolis assistant coach Zlatko Ivankovic was full of praise for his team's efforts. The visitors were on the back foot for most of the game, happy to absorb the pressure

from Al Sadd. However, they managed to score against the run of play after being awarded a late penalty that was duly dispatched by Alipour. "It was a very difficult game. Al Sadd had more of the possession but they didn't have much luck in our box," said Ivankovic. "Our team fought well and showed their strength. The result gives us a good chance to secure a spot in the final in Tehran."

Making the trip to Doha is even tougher when Kamal Kamyabinia and

Mohamed Ansari were out with suspensions and Hossein Mahini missing through injury. "It's difficult to come here and play Al Sadd, especially when we are suffering from injuries and suspensions," added Ivankovic.

"But we believed in ourselves, that we were able to get a good result and now we're going home with the best possible result. We always believed in the players who stepped up today to the line-up. We trusted them and they returned our trust with their performance."

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Gharafa, Arabi eye return to winning ways

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Gharafa and Al Arabi will be looking to be back to winning ways when they clash against each other in Week 8 of the QNB Stars League tomorrow. Al Gharafa had lost to Al Kharaitiyat 0-2, while Al Arabi suffered a defeat at the hands of Al Saliya exactly by the same margin. Al Gharafa are seventh in the standings with seven points from two wins and a draw, whereas Al Arabi are sixth with 12 points from four victories. Al Arabi will be keen to storm back into the top four.

As for Al Gharafa, they are coming off three successive defeats and are eager to make a turnaround in their fortunes. Al Gharafa have scored 12 goals conceding 14, whereas Al Arabi netted 11 and conceded 14.

Al Gharafa are sorely missing the services of star Dutch attacking midfielder Wesley Sneijder, who is nursing a muscle strain. But they have in their ranks Vladimir Weiss and Mehdi Taremi. Mailson de Farias and Mohammed El Neel will lead Al Arabi's challenge.

Meanwhile, tomorrow's another clash between Qatar SC and Al Kharaitiyat is sure to evoke keen interest for many reasons. Qatar SC are on four points from one victory and a draw, while Al Kharaitiyat are 11th with three points.

Qatar SC were beaten 5-1 by Al Sadd in the previous round. In contrast, Al Kharaitiyat registered their first win, against Al Gharafa 2-0, to collect their first points. Striker Abdulhadi Amin scored both their goals. Qatar SC have only their upset win over Al Gharafa in the opening week and draw with Al Khor to show for their efforts. So both teams are eyeing their second victory.

Qatar SC have scored eight goals, but conceded 16, while Al Kharaitiyat netted six and conceded 15 goals. They both are at the bottom of the table, so they are sure to go all out in order to stay away from the danger zone.

Qatar SC had replaced coach Abdulla Mubarak with Yousef al-Noobi, while Al Kharaitiyat brought in Moroccan Abdulaziz El Amri with Tunisian Nassif al-Bayawi.

SPOTLIGHT

Korean FA president praises Qatar's 2022 stadium cooling technology

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Korean Football Association President Chung Mong-gyu believes the 2022 FIFA World Cup will make a positive difference to the long-term development of football due to Qatar's use of cutting-edge technology.

The FIFA Council member said the stadium cooling technology that Qatar is pioneering will have a positive, long-lasting and far reaching effect not just in the Arab world, but across the Asian continent.

"I believe that technology will be an important element. I am aware that the advanced open air stadium cooling technology at Khalifa International Stadium has received praise from many quarters. A lot of leagues in Asia now have the backing of top corporate houses of those countries - South Korea, China, Japan, and recently India. Qatar's cooling system might be something these leagues could consider using after 2022 because a lot of matches are scheduled during summer months," Mong-gyu said.

Mong-gyu has been a vocal supporter of Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup, which he felt will play a major role in economic transformation in the region. He cited the example of South Korea, which profited from hosting the 2002 World Cup.

"The FIFA World Cup is coming back to Asia after 20 long years - this is good enough reason to support 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar. I am aware that in addition to football development Qatar, like South Korea in 2002, there are broader objectives of economic transformation within the hosting plans for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. My best wishes to the Government and people of Qatar in their endeavours. If the vision of the Government is backed up by the participation of the public, Qatar will also achieve what South Korea did," said Mong-gyu, who is also one of the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) five Vice Presidents.

Mong-gyu stressed on the importance of home support for a successful organisation of the event, and said it will be a key factor for Qatar's success as a host. "During the 2002 World Cup, the world admired the passion with which the people of South Korea supported the national team. It is always



Korean Football Association president Chung Mong-gyu.

said that had it not been for the backing of the fans the team would have struggled to qualify from the group.

"Stadiums were full for all the matches and nearly seven million fans flocked to the 20,000-odd giant screens set up across the country to watch our semi-final against Germany. I hope that we will witness similar passion in Qatar for the region's first ever FIFA World Cup," he said.

The Korean Football Association president predicted that the Asian football will have further improved by 2022 after their impressive show in the 2018 World Cup in Russia. "In Russia, South Korea created history by becoming the first Asian team to defeat a reigning world champion - and Japan almost made it to the quarter-final. Iran showed their high performance in a very tough group.

"Asian countries can also be optimistic from a historical perspective while preparing for Qatar 2022. In 2002, when the World Cup was hosted by Asia for the first time, and in 2010, when Africa hosted, teams from the home confederations shone. South Korea reached the semi-final in 2002 and Ghana featured in the quarter-final in South Africa," he noted.

Mong-gyu also shed light on how the

football infrastructure, a legacy of the co-hosting of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, been put to use by South Korea. "Most of the 2002 venues were handed over to K League clubs and some of them have staged other marquee sporting events such as the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon and the 2017 FIFA U20 World Cup Korea.

"The Jeonju World Cup Stadium, of course, will occupy a special place in Qatari hearts following Al Sadd's coronation as Asian champions there in 2011. The 2002 FIFA World Cup also created the opportunity for a generation of our footballers, who came up through the domestic system, to improve their skills by getting exposure in top European leagues. Players like Park Ji-sung, Lee Young-pyo made a mark for their European clubs. Subsequently, Lee Chung-yong, Koo Ja-cheol, Ki Sung-yueng and Son Heung-min have followed in their footsteps," he said.

Mong-gyu was optimistic of South Korea's potential to emulate their 2002 performance in 2022. "We have a good chance to do well in Qatar. Leading our attack in Qatar will be Son Heung-min. By 2022, I feel he would have scaled such heights on the European club scene which have even been beyond legends of our continent."

FOCUS

Losail Circuit Sports Club all set for another exciting season



For the fifth year in a row, the Losail circuit will host the finale of the WorldSBK from October 25 to 27.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Losail Circuit Sports Club (LCSC) is all geared up for another busy season. In the next few months, LCSC will play host to racing championships, track days, training activities to go along with karting sessions at the Losail International Circuit.

Losail International Circuit has emerged as a popular destination for the public to exercise in an outdoor facility and in a safe environment. The training days are held on Tuesday's for ladies only and on Wednesday the circuit is open for general public. The track is open both days from 5pm to 8:30pm and participants can bring their own bicycle or rent one at the track. Fans can also run, walk or even go rollerblading. For the fans of adrenaline and racing, there will be a track day for cars on the October 11 and for the bikes, the track day will be on the October 12. Both track days will be held at night. Public also enjoy the karting track, that will resume again on the 4th October from 5pm to 10pm and it will take place on Thursdays and Fridays.

October will end up with an-

other exciting round of World Superbike Championship (WorldSBK) at the Losail International Circuit. For the fifth year in a row, the circuit will host the finale of the WorldSBK from October 25 to 27 with evening races scheduled on Friday and Saturday.

Grandstand tickets start from 40QR only and all tickets provides free access to the paddock with fans having the possibility getting an access to the Grid and to the Pit Wall Canopy for WorldSBK races. All ticket holders will get an opportunity to be present at the Paddock Show to hear from the participating riders and take photos and autographs from them. For families and kids, there will be a fan area in the Paddock with merchandise tents, kids activities, pedal karts, food court and much more. Tickets can be purchased at www.lcsc.qa and during the event at the ticket booths at the LIC.

Meanwhile, the Qatar Superstock 600 and Qatar Touring Car Championship will start at the end of November with two days of official practice. The first round is scheduled for December 7. The season will comprise of five rounds and both championships will have the support of Qatar Motor and Motorcycle

Federation.

A unique initiative to the new season is the creation of the Qatar Motorsports Academy (QMA). The aim of the QMA is to train children from 8 to 16 years old to improve their riding skills in a safe environment and look for talented riders who could feature in professional fields.

QMA has training facilities inside the LCSC and the training will take place twice a week and it is open for Qatari and non-Qatari boys and girls. Dorna will be involved in the project with the program called 'Road to MotoGP' as well as the Aspire Academy.

Khalid al-Remaihi, LCSC Vice-President and General Manager said he is looking forward the start of a new season. "Our overall objective is to promote motorsport. We know that it is important to create an environment for racing enthusiasts to practice motorsport safely. Apart from racing championships and community activities that we are organising, we are very excited with the launch of the Qatar Motorsports Academy. We know the importance of focus on the young generations and we believe that by creating this academy, we will be able to provide different programs depending on the skills of each child," al-Remaihi said.