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Friday, November 2, 2018  
Safar 24, 1440 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

**Jadeja spins India to series-clinching win over Windies**

Page 3

48TH ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS DOHA 2018

# Biles falls, rises, rules

American wins record fourth All-around Worlds title despite 'uncharacteristic' performance

By Sahar Bidappa  
Doha

There is a long-running joke about how Simone Biles would win even if she falls two or three times. The American turned that joke into a reality at the Aspire Dome yesterday.

Biles had an off day by her enormous standards at the World Artistic Gymnastics Championships, as she fell twice on Vault and Balance Beam, yet the 21-year-old was good enough to clinch a record-breaking fourth All-around Worlds title.

margin of victory - 1.693 - is the largest at the Worlds since the current points system replaced perfect-10 method in 2006. Only her victory at the Rio Olympic Games, by 2.1 points, is bigger.

Biles had won four gold and a bronze in Rio and came to Doha as a ten-time world champion, and the American conceded yesterday's triumph was her toughest till date. "This one has probably been the hardest to get out of all my world championships and Olympic medals, and the scariest one. It's exciting to bring back a gold medal for the US, but for me it's a bit disappointing because that's not the performance I would hope to give," she said.

"It was a tough day. I didn't know if I was going to pull it off today, and then I started doubting myself and I tried to track back to training and see how well that went. I tried to just think of that. You should always fall back on training because I've had such a good training here," she added.

Biles has already added two more gold medals in Doha - the team and All-around - and she is in contention for four more in the individual apparatus today and tomorrow. She is the hot favourite to win in three of them, with Uneven Bars not being her best routine.

Biles currently has 12 Worlds gold, tied with Vitaly Scherbo and she is certain to pull away from the retired Belarusian today, making her the most decorated gymnast. She could also become the first woman to earn six medals at a world championships since Yelena Shushunova did for Soviet Union in 1987.

The kidney stone that had troubled Biles last week and forced her to check into a hospital seemed to have an impact on her yesterday. Or it was just the pressure of being on the verge of creating a history. Either way, Biles was jittery to begin with.

The 4 feet 8 inch from Texas began her All-round final yesterday with a Vault, that has been named after her, but she goofed up her with landing, as Hurd took the early lead. Because of the Vault's difficulty, Biles scored a 14.533, which left her in third place.

Biles, however, vaulted into the lead, after a clinical display in Uneven Bars, where she scored 14.725. But a fall on the Balance Beam, when a somersault went wrong, and some impressive performances by Murakami and Nina Derwael, cut down her lead to mere 0.092 going into the final rotation.



Simone Biles of the US goes through her routine during the women's All-around final during the 48th Artistic Gymnastics World Championships Doha 2018 at Aspire Dome yesterday. PICTURES: Thajudheen

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While Belgium's Derwael was unlucky to miss out on a medal despite a good Floor Exercise, Murakami jumped into the lead with a score of 13.666. With all eyes at Aspire Dome on her, and not to mention about the pressure, Biles seemed to have crumbled when she began her Floor Exercise with one foot out of bounds on her first tumbling pass.

But in the rest of the routine she bounced back in spectacular fashion, nailing her every move as the spectators gasped in awe at Biles' agility and strength. The

difficulty level of her routine was so high that the judges awarded her 15.000 points, sealing a remarkable victory.

On her flawless floor routine, Biles said: "I was like, 'Well, today seems to be horrible, so let's see what else can go wrong!' Then I had to get those bad thoughts out of my head. I'm used to ending on floor, so that's nothing new to me. I had to go out there and put on a good performance for myself."

Silver medallist Murakami summed up the final perfectly, when she said: "Instead of think-



Winner Simone Biles (centre) of the US, silver medallist Mai Murakami (left) of Japan and bronze medallist Morgan Hurd of the US pose during the medals ceremony for the women's All-around event at the world championships yesterday.



Russian gymnasts Artur Dalaloyan (second from left) and Angelina Melnikova (second from right) were presented with the Longines Prize for Elegance awards yesterday.

ing I could win, I was thinking 'Oh, Biles can fall!'"

The Japanese finished .066 ahead of last year's champion Hurd. "I just wanted to do four clean routines and I did and it brought the silver medal. And I wanted to finish with a smile," Murakami said.

Hurd paid the price for a poor show in Beam and slipped down to fourth before a confident finish on Floor Exercise fetched her a bronze. "Vault, Bars and Floor went really well. I'm not completely happy with beam. I had kind of a large mistake. I'm not satisfied, and I would rather it have been little better, but that's OK. It happened. I was trying to be a little too perfect," she said.

Hurd shares a good camaraderie with Biles, with the two constantly egging on each other

to perform better during their routines. "I think we play off each other's energies and keep each other having fun. It's absolutely insane that she fell twice. It definitely pushes me to be such a better gymnast, and if I can't reach her in difficulty, I definitely want to catch her with my execution," Hurd said.

**WOMEN'S ALL-AROUND FINAL (TOP 8)**

1. Simone Biles (USA) 57.491 points
2. Mai Murakami (JPN) 55.798
3. Morgan Hurd (USA) 55.732
4. Nina Derwael (BEL) 55.699
5. Angelina Melnikova (RUS) 55.698
6. Melanie De Jesus Dos Santos (FRA) 55.599
7. Chen Yile (CHN) 54.632
8. Flavia Saraiva (BRA) 54.366

**48TH ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS DOHA 2018**



Later, Biles was her harshest critic as she admonished her performance, calling it "little disappointing and very uncharacteristic". But in the annals of gymnastics, Biles is well on her way to become the greatest ever.

The 21-year-old finished with a score of 57.491, ahead of Japan's Mai Murakami and teammate Morgan Hurd, who was last year's champion in Biles' absence.

Even with the mistakes, Biles'

FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

# Qatar's al-Attiyah storms to Kuwait rally lead

By Our Correspondent  
Arifjan, Kuwait

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah cruised into a comfortable lead through the opening 2.3km super special stage of the Kuwait International Rally at Kuwait Motor Town yesterday afternoon.

The Ford Fiesta R5 driver carded a time of exactly two minutes with the backdrop of a setting sun to move into a 4.1 second lead over Czech driver Vojtech Stajf at the start of the fourth round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

Skoda Fabia R5 driver Stajf said: "This is my first time in the Middle East Championship and every event is new to me. I am here because of Nasser. We spoke in Shiraz last year at the Iran Rally and he suggested that I come and do the Middle East series. I spoke to my sponsors and we decided to give it a go. I still have a chance to win the champi-

onship and I will not stop until it is no longer possible. I will not let Nasser go to sleep...!"

Ten drivers were permitted to start the FIA event and another three Kuwaiti crews took part in a National Rally over the same route. Local driver Meshari al-Thefiri headed the MERC 2 contingent with the third quickest time of 2min 08.4sec to take a category lead of four-tenths of a second over Jordanian driver Khaled Juma into the night halt.

Former Qatar Motor and Motorcycling Federation (QMMF) president and FIA vice-president Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah made an impressive return to the series after a 20-year absence to post the fifth-quickest time of 2min 13.2sec.

Jordanian driver Shadi Shaban was the first to tackle the super special stage and posted the target time of 2min 19.3sec - his run also marked the first FIA competitive action to be staged at Kuwait Motor Town race circuit since



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah in action during the super special stage of the Kuwait International Rally at Kuwait Motor Town yesterday.

its inauguration in March.

Lebanon's Henry Kahy and Jordanian navigator Musa Djijerian remain on course for the MERC 3 title after

completing the stage in ninth place in a time of 2min 20sec. Oman's Abdullah al-Ruwahi slipped to 10th place with a misfiring Subaru Impreza.

This year's event is being organised by the Basil Salem Al-Sabah Motor Racing Club (BMRC) under the chairmanship of Sheikh Athbi Nayef Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah and in conjunction with the General Authority for Sport and the Kuwait International Automobile Club (KIAC).

Two runs through three gravel special stages are on the agenda for today. Teams open their account in the southern deserts with a run through the brand new KMT stage that spans 15.10km and gets the action underway at 10.00hrs.

The 18.22km of Nuwaiseeb (10.48hrs) and the 22.46km of the Al-Zour (11.4hrs) special are split by a remote refuelling stop before the return to Kuwait Motor Town for servicing and a regroup.

The three desert stages will be repeated in the afternoon.

**POSITIONS AFTER SS1**

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mat-

thieu Baumel (FRA) Ford Fiesta R5 2min 00.0sec

2. Vojtech Stajf (CZE)/Ladislav Kucera (CZE) Skoda Fabia R5 2min 04.1sec

3. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 2min 08.4sec

4. Khaled Juma (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 2min 08.8sec

5. Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah (QAT)/Nicola Arena (ITA) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 2min 13.2sec

6. Rashed al-Nuami (QAT)/Hugo Magalhaes (POR) Subaru Impreza 2min 13.4sec

7. Ihab al-Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX 2min 18.7sec

8. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Tarek al-Taher (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX 2min 19.3sec

9. Henry Kahy (LBN)/Musa Djijerian (JOR) Skoda Fabia 2min 20.0sec

10. Abdullah al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al-Hmoud (JOR) Subaru Impreza 2min 25.8sec

EQUESTRIAN

# My dream is to win Olympic medal for Qatar, says Sheikh Ali

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

With just over a week before the Longines Global Champions Tour finals get underway in Doha, Qatar, **Sheikh Ali bin Khalid al-Thani** reveals the pressure to perform on home soil and his dream is to "make my country proud and inspire the next generation".

With LGCT Doha hitting Al Shaqab from November 8-10, all eyes will be on the very best horses and riders in the sport as they battle for supremacy in the world's premier show jumping series.

"What motivates me every day is to be successful. I work hard, I train, I go to the gym before riding, I have a programme and a plan of where I want to be. But success to me is defined as making my country proud. To bring home medals for Qatar and to represent my country against the best of the best. My dream is to win a LGCT Grand Prix, and to bring an Olympic medal home for Qatar, particularly as a team," Sheikh Ali was quoted as saying

by the Global Champions Tour website.

Competing internationally around the world, Sheikh Ali has been flying the Qatari flag for show jumping, consistently jumping at the highest level against the top ranked riders in the world.

But as LGCT and GCL look to Al Shaqab – a member of the Qatar Foundation – in Doha, after a global circuit including cities such as Miami Beach, Shanghai, Paris, Rome and London, competing at home is different, said Sheikh Ali.

"There is more pressure for us at the event in Doha. We are motivated, you have the crowd, your family, everyone watching and you need to do well. We want to show our country what we are doing and how we are improving. Every year there is a Qatari rider in the top ten, and it was perfect last year that Bassem (Hassan Mohamed) won. The facilities are top (at Al Shaqab) – I can't talk too much about it as I am from there! But the feeling is we want to do our very best for our country and show our people and country that our team is



working hard in Europe and heading in the right direction!"

Taking a step back from the competition itself, Sheikh Ali reflects on the significance of having LGCT hosted by his country. "Qatar has a big vision for sport, not just equestrian. So in every sport, Qatar is choosing the best. For example in equestrian they are bringing the

best Tour that has ever happened – the Longines Global Champions Tour is the best there is in show jumping. If you see also in other sport we are looking to the 2022 World Cup in football, the handball final has already been hosted here, and the athletics championships (will be) run in our country."

However a big part of this drive

towards hosting premium sporting events is to inspire and engage a future generation. Sheikh Ali points to the tremendous work Al Shaqab is doing within the country's realm of show jumping, in particular with the Riding Academy aimed at motivating young riders. "We have also started a new education system in Qatar, and we try to inspire the next generation. This is how it should be. Al Shaqab are doing a really good job of educating young riders, and prepare them to move to Europe for the start of a professional career."

And when asked how Sheikh Ali deals personally with being a leading sporting figure, he replies: "I really love to inspire. I am from the Royal Family so there is attention on my name, so I have to prove that we are working hard and anyone can achieve great things. I love the sport that I do – but it all started with a love of horses. I loved horses before I loved the sport."

With his Rio Olympic horse First Devison – the pair took 6th individually, the highest result for any Qatari show jumper in history – California, Vienna Olympic and new rising star,

the nine-year-old Sirocco, who will take part at the Doha event, Sheikh Ali has serious horse-power behind him.

However he is riding the wave of innovation and evolution when it comes to show jumping, and welcomes the development in the sport. "The sport is changing. And Jan [Tops] is a visionary – he sees this and helps to grow it in the best way. Every year something on the LGCT and GCL is changing. Now we have the GC Playoffs. Before that we had no teams, and now we have the GCL for three years. You don't know what's coming up, but it's getting more and more interesting. We are very excited, and see more and more people from Qatar and around the world following us. I remember I used to go for dinner with people outside the sport who asked what I was doing – they had no idea what show jumping really was. But now, even those who are not in the sport know what it is and really get it."

And the future looks bright for show jumping in Qatar, with the 2020 Olympics clearly in the mind of Sheikh Ali and his teammates.

For the third year, they form the Doha Fursan Qatar GCL team, powered by partner Lusail, with the experienced team battling against 18 others this year in the prestigious team championship. "We are working towards a programme for Tokyo for the Qatari show jumping team so we have had to slow down a little and it's one of the reasons we decided to put [British rider] Michael Whitaker in our Doha Fursan Qatar GCL team as he has many of his own fantastic horses."

Putting Qatar at the sharp end of the sporting grid is the mission for Sheikh Ali, and is something he is extremely passionate about. "I'm really looking forward to building our team for Qatar. This is really my mission. But to do this we have to train now, and we have to prove we can do it. We did this already at the 2016 Olympics in Rio – it was the first time we were one point away from the final, and we had an individual rider finish sixth which is a big result for Qatar. We know we can do it, now it is not just about showing Qatar in a good way, it's about bringing home some medals."

HORSE RACING

# Shareesa dominant in feature; treble for De Mieulle, Ghazali

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

In a dominant display, Sheikh Khalifa bin Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Shareesa had little trouble building on her British performance to race away with a victory in The Late Rabiah Saad Al-Kaabi Cup for Purebred Arabians on the turf at Al Rayyan Park yesterday.

Pierre Deymonaz's ward was second in Newbury in a Group 1 in July and on her return to Qatar under Stephan Ladjadji, the filly was in her elements as Ahmed Kobeissi-trained Almuheet, ridden by Saleem Golam, had to be content with a second place almost ten lengths behind.

Champion Trainer Jassim Mohamed Ghazali-schooled Carab was third under Harry Bentley.

Both Alban de Mieulle and Ghazali saddled three winners on the day, including a one-two each.

While Umm Qarn's Deebah, ridden by Qatari jockey Rashid Ali al-Marri, led stablemate Semaisima, with Ronan Thomas in the saddle, for victory in the mile-long Local Purebred Arabian Handicap for horses rated 85 and below, Harry Bentley-ridden Anima Rock locked out the top two spots with Masked Defender, helmed by Marco Casamento in the Class 2 Thoroughbred Plate race for three-year-olds.

Deebah was al-Marri's second winner in as many days.

In the penultimate race of the day, Ghazali completed his treble with Injaaz Stud's Black Granite edging out Ahmed Kobeissi's Beach Samba by three quarters of a length under JP Guillambert's ride.

Umm Qarn's Sehab gave de Mieulle and jockey Ronan Thomas their second win of the day when the five-year-old comfortably raced to a victory in the Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate. The two length victory over Ibrahim al-Malki's ward, Abercrombie, was the colt's second career win, having last topped a race in December 2016.

Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani's wards locked out the top two spots in the Class 4 Thoroughbred Handicap event for horses rated 85 and below with Tomas Lukasek guiding Top Face to a victory in the miler ahead of Hajaj, helmed by Qatari jockey Faleh Bughanaim in the colours of Al Jeryan Stud. Jimmy Quinn rode Ibrahim al-Malki-schooled Severini to a third place, the colt's best finish in Qatar so far.

After 20 attempts over two seasons to notch his fourth victory in Qatar, Osama Omer al-Dafea's Primitorio held off a strong challenge by wards of Champion Trainer Jassim



Abdulrahman al-Mansour (third from left) receives the owner's trophy in the presence of Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club general manager Nasser Sherida al-Kaabi (second from right) after Shareesa won the The Late Rabiah Saad Al-Kaabi Cup at the Al Rayyan Park yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim



Jockey Stephan Ladjadji celebrates the victory on his return to the winner's enclosure astride Shareesa yesterday.

Mohamed Ghazali – Noble Masterpiece and Subhaan – under the ride of Stephan Ladjadji. JP Guillambert-helmed Noble Masterpiece was edged out by a nose at the post, while Harry Bentley rode Subhaan to complete the top three.

Earlier in the day, three Arabians shed their respective maiden status, including Hamad Ahmed al-Malki al-Jehani-trained Tabouk, De Mieulle's ward Prince Amer and Hossin Mohamed Ashour-schooled

Ghazi Al Jeryan. Ghazali and Bentley had combined yet again for a winning start to the card with Injaaz Stud's Qate'e winning on his second outing in Qatar in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate sprint.

RESULTS

**Race 1:** 1. Qate'e (Harry Bentley), 2. Majhool Al Zaeem (Anas al-Seyabi), 3. Adaaam Bu Thaila (Saleh Hamad al-Marri), 3. Mallhogg (Adnan Hawa).

Won by: ¾, 1 ¼, ¼. Time: 1:15.68. Owner: Injaaz Stud. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

**Race 2:** 1. Tabouk (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 2. AJS Al Uraiq (Stephan Ladjadji), 3. Garraffah (Ronan Thomas), 4. AJS Moaddie (Faleh Bughanaim). Won by: 2, 3 ½, 2 ½. Time: 1:49.63. Owner: Al Rabban Racing. Trainer: Hamad Ahmed al-Malki al-Jehani.

**Race 3:** 1. Prince Amer (Ronan Thomas), 2. Amir De Nonlaur (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 3. Echo De Faust (Jimmy Quinn), 4. Djumana KB (Tomas Lukasek). Won by: Shd, 3, Dh. Time: 1:49.86. Owner: Patrice Nicolet. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.

**Race 4:** 1. Ghazi Al Jeryan (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 2. AJS Al Maha (Tomas Lukasek), 3. Qaswarah (Jimmy Quinn), 4. Snafi Al Shajaa (Gerald Avranche). Won by: 2 ½, 1 ½, 1 ¼. Time: 1:36.01. Owner: Al Jeryan Stud. Trainer: Hossin Mohamed Ashour.

**Race 5:** 1. Sehab (Ronan Thomas), 2. Abercrombie (Jimmy Quinn), 3. Aziz'nafs (Gerald Avranche), 4. AJS Al Ruwais (Tomas Lukasek). Won by: 2, 4 ¾, 1 ¾. Time: 1:49.19. Owner: Umm Qarn. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.

**Race 6:** 1. Primitorio (Stephan Ladjadji), 2. Noble Masterpiece (JP Guillambert), 3. Subhaan (Harry Bentley), 4. China Club (Jean Baptiste Hamel). Won by: No, 1, Shd. Time: 1:24.92.

Owner: Osama Omer al-Dafea. Trainer: Osama Omer al-Dafea.

**Race 7:** 1. Top Face (Tomas Lukasek), 2. Hajaj (Faleh Bughanaim), 3. Severini (Jimmy Quinn), 4. Rich History (Jean Baptiste Hamel). Won by: ¾, 1 ¾, 1 ¼. Time: 1:38.27. Owner: Mohamed Khalifa al-Sowaidi. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.

**Race 8:** 1. Deebah (Rashid Ali al-Marri), 2. Semaisima (Ronan Thomas), 3. Al Malhoufa (Harry Bentley), 4. Saab Al Manal (JP Guillambert). Won by: 3, 3 ¾, ¾. Time: 1:49.60. Owner: Umm Qarn. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.

**Race 9:** 1. Anima Rock (Harry Bentley), 2. Masked Defender (Marco Casamento), 3. Beachwalk (Gerald Avranche), 4. Random Decision (Tomas Lukasek). Won by: 3 ¼, ½, 7 ¼. Time: 1:18.13. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

**Race 10:** 1. Black Granite (JP Guillambert), 2. Beach Samba (Saleem Golam), 3. Binzart (Faleh Bughanaim), 4. Skate (Stephan Ladjadji). Won by: ¾, 2 ½, Nk. Time: 1:25.79. Owner: Injaaz Stud. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

**Race 11:** 1. Shareesa (Stephan Ladjadji), 2. Almuheet (Saleem Golam), 3. Carab (Harry Bentley), 4. Lucky Sand (Jean Baptiste Hamel). Won by: 9 ½, 1 ¾, ¾. Time: 1:46.76. Owner: Sheikh Khalifa bin Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani. Trainer: Pierre Deymonaz.

SPOTLIGHT

# Appropriate for gymnastics Worlds to have come to Qatar, says Titov



Former FIG president and gymnast Yuri Titov.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The men's All-around competition at the 48th FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships Doha 2018 on Wednesday was so closely fought that the tie-break rule had to be applied to decide the winner.

It threw up a debate and prompted former FIG president, and a former gymnast of repute himself, Yuri Titov to say, "It would've been better to give two gold medals!"

Titov laughed as he said that soon after presenting the medals at the prize-presentation ceremony at the Aspire Dome.

The 82-year-old Titov, who is still sprightly, had won gold at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne with the Soviet team, besides an individual silver medal in Horizontal Bar, and bronze medals in All-around and Vault.

He later won silver and bronze medals at the 1960 Olympics in Rome, and two silver at the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

President of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) for 20 years, from 1977 to 1996, Titov stressed that specific rules had been laid for such an eventuality as it happened in the case of Russia's Artur Dalaloyan and China's Xiao Ruoteng (both of whom were tied at 87,598 points).

"The tie-break is in the rules which has been voted by the FIG congress and it says in case of a tie, you have go back to the previous apparatus and remove the least score one," he explained.

Titov said the competition among the men has been intense and close. "Not so much in the women's section because the American gymnasts are currently dominating with their skills and performance and deservedly so."

"What I've seen along with the world championships coming to the Arab world for the first time is that there has been a progression of the sport especially in men's gymnastics. Athletes from Turkey, Philippines, Brazil... you name it... have come up by leaps and bounds," he said.

Welcoming the world championships to Qatar, he said, "It's been a wonderful organisation and many people among us have come here to an Arabian country for the first time. Even me!"

"It's good and appropriate that the world championships have come to the Arab region as sport should go far and wide. It will now provide a great impetus to the youth of the Arab world as far as gymnastics is concerned," he added.

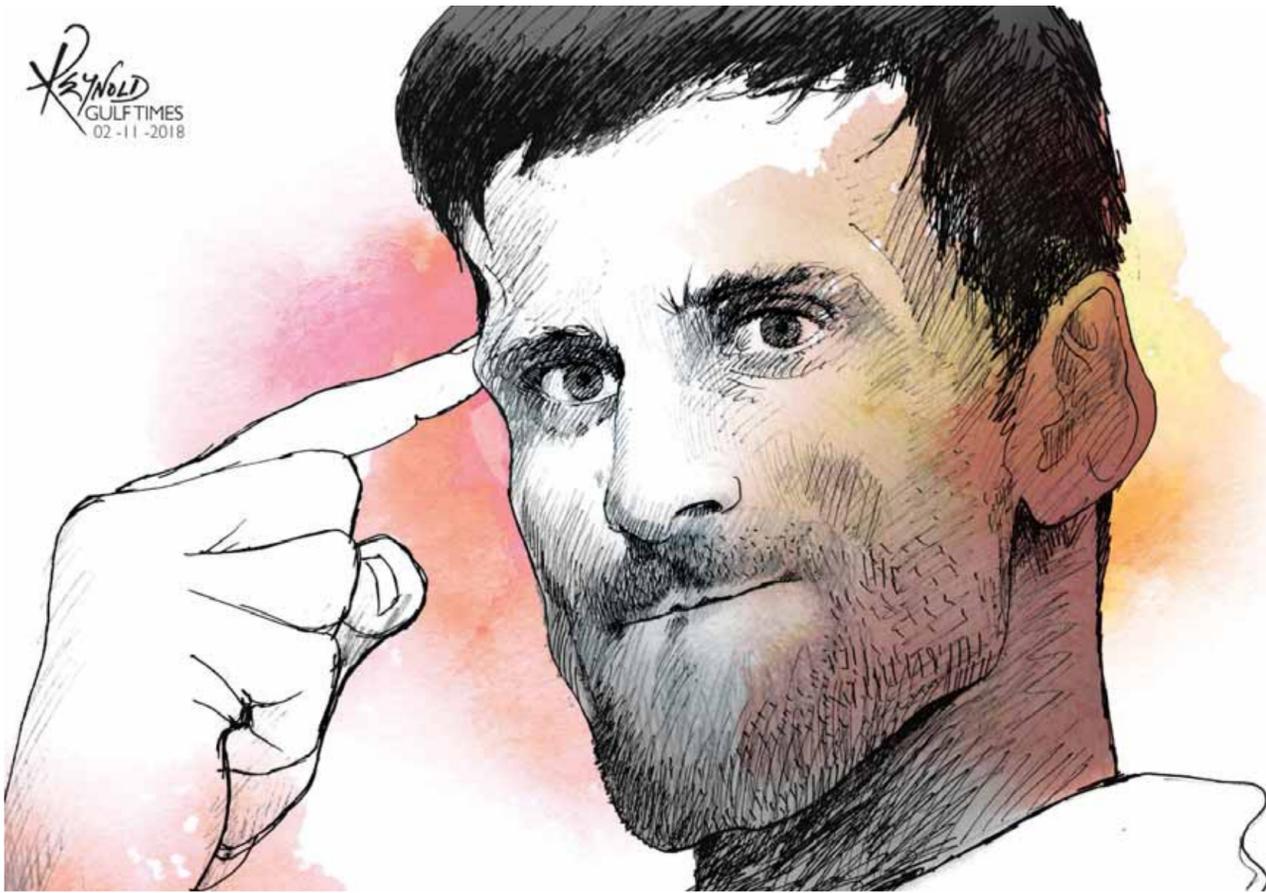
Titov has also been a member of International Olympic Committee (1995-1996). He was president of the Russian Artistic Gymnastics Federation from 2004 to 2006.



TENNIS

# Djokovic stunned by 'phenomenal achievement'

Djokovic will replace Rafael Nadal as the world's top player on Monday



AFP  
Paris

Novak Djokovic described his return to the world number one ranking as "a phenomenal achievement" yesterday as he recorded yet another personal landmark in reaching the Paris Masters quarter-finals.

Djokovic will replace Rafael Nadal as the world's top player on Monday after a two-year absence.

The 31-year-old's elevation is remarkable as it comes just five months after he slumped to 22 in the world - his lowest ranking for 12 years - when he was knocked out of the French Open in the quarter-finals.

Since then, however, he has won Wimbledon and the US Open, taking his Grand Slam tally to 14, winning 20 consecutive tour-level matches for the sixth time, and 29 of his past 30 encounters.

"Reflecting on what I've been through in the last year, it's quite a phenomenal achievement," said Djokovic after making the quarter-finals in Paris when Bosnian opponent Damir Dzumhur retired trailing 6-1, 2-1.

"I'm very, very happy and proud about



Croatia's Marin Cilic reacts during his third round tennis match against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov.

it. Five months ago, it was highly improbable considering my ranking and the way I played and felt on the court.

"I'll probably be able to speak more profoundly about it when the season is done and hopefully if I get to finish as No. 1"

Victory yesterday meant that Djokovic has also extended his sequence of consecutive winning sets to 30, passing his previ-

ous best mark of 29 from 2015.

The four-time Paris champion, who next faces Marin Cilic in the last eight today, was guaranteed a return to the ranking summit when Nadal withdrew from Paris with an abdominal injury on Wednesday.

"It's not the end of the season. Rafa obviously is struggling with injuries since the US Open. But the race is still there," added

Djokovic. "Roger (Federer) is in the race. Rafa is in the race. It depends who is going to play the ATP Finals in London. So as I said, I can't be too ecstatic about it."

Cilic, the fifth seed, secured his quarter-final ticket with a 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 defeat of Grigor Dimitrov.

Cilic fired 29 winners to advance to the last eight in the French capital for the third straight year.

The win also improved the Croat's prospects of making the ATP Finals in London starting on November 11.

"I am very close to London, to securing my spot mathematically," said Cilic, who is part of the Croatia team facing France in the Davis Cup final at the end of this month. In the next match against Novak it will be another big challenge. (It will be) great to play him again."

Cilic, who has beaten Djokovic just twice in 17 meetings, ended reigning ATP Finals champion Dimitrov's season.

Djokovic and Cilic were joined in the quarter-finals by Karen Khachanov who saved two match points against John Isner on his way to defeating the eighth-seeded American 6-4, 6-7 (9/11), 7-6 (10/8).

The Russian will next play Alexander Zverev after the German fourth seed beat Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 6-4, 6-2.

SPOTLIGHT

## Serena can still grab Slams record, says Madison Keys

AFP  
Zhuhai

American number three Madison Keys said she has no doubt Serena Williams can equal the record of 24 Grand Slam titles despite her stormy defeat in the US Open final.

Keys said Williams, who argued furiously with the umpire during her shock loss to Naomi Osaka in New York, certainly had Margaret Court's all-time mark as a target.

Williams, 37, returned from giving birth to her first child in September last year to reach the Wimbledon and US Open finals, but suffered upset losses in both to leave her stuck on 23 major wins.

"I definitely think she can do it, and I definitely think it's something that she thinks about," Keys told AFP at the WTA Elite Trophy at Zhuhai in China.

"I think she wants it and I think when Serena puts her mind to something, it usually happens," she added.

Keys, 23, started playing tennis after watching Williams and her sister Venus on television and has often cited them as an inspiration.

"She came back and she played three Grand Slams and made two finals," the world number 16 said.

"No one is ever going to be Serena and I think she's done a ton for the sport and has helped players like me a lot," she added.

She said it will be a "big loss" when Williams finally retires, but that she would remain a major figure in tennis.

"Obviously when she decides to stop playing it's going to be a big loss but I think she'll always be a part of it, and she's always going to hold all these records and still be the greatest tennis player ever."

"So I think we'll always have her in the sport even through she's not playing."

Until Sloane Stephens won last year's US Open, the last American woman to lift a major trophy, apart from the Williams sisters, was Jennifer Capriati in 2002.

But Keys said American women's tennis was in "pretty good" shape. Sixth-ranked Stephens, the current American number one, was runner-up at last week's WTA Finals.

"Sloane has obviously done really well this year, I think I'm one of the US players who's had a pretty good season this year," Keys said

### Vietnam to host F1 race in 2020

AFP, Hanoi: Vietnam will host a Formula One race in April 2020, Hanoi city officials said yesterday, becoming the third Southeast Asian nation to welcome top-flight racing as the franchise seeks to move into new markets.

The race will be hosted in the capital Hanoi, with the circuit set to be unveiled at a gala next week, the Hanoi People's Committee said in an invite to the event.

"The city of Hanoi managed to conclude the co-operation to be entitled as the official host of a race of the FIA Formula 1 World Championship (from) April 2020," the letter read.

Authorities said earlier this year they supported the idea of hosting a race, but would not dip into government coffers to pay for the event.

Mai Tien Dung, head of the government office, said in August that he hoped costs could instead be covered by potentially "huge" advertising revenues. Officials had originally considered hosting the race around Hanoi's scenic Hoan Kiem lake near the bustling Old Quarter,

but decided instead on a route near the national stadium, where the roads are wider.

Formula One's governing body, the International Automobile Federation (FIA), did not immediately reply to AFP's request for comment yesterday.

F1 race director Charlie Whiting told reporters earlier this month that he had visited the site in Hanoi and was confident the circuit would be ready in time for the 2020 season.

He said much of the race would be on existing roads but some sections would need to be built, according to Fox Sports.

"That shouldn't be a problem based on previous experience," he said.

Formula One races can be costly endeavours and are seen as financially risky for host cities like Hanoi where racing remains outside of the mainstream.

In 2017, Malaysia said it would cancel the Formula One races that it has hosted since 1999, saying the loss-making event had been hard hit by competition from neighbouring Singapore.

MOTORCYCLING

## Dovizioso chasing third Malaysia victory in a row

AFP  
Sepang, Malaysia

Ducati's Andrea Dovizioso is chasing his third Malaysian MotoGP win in a row this weekend as he seeks to be crowned runner-up to world champion Marc Marquez.

Honda's Marquez already clinched the championship in Japan last month but now the race is on to finish second in the overall standings, a position currently held by Dovizioso but with Valentino Rossi snapping at his heels.

Coming off the back of a third-placed finish at the Australian MotoGP last week, the Italian is hoping that he can repeat his past stellar performances at the Sepang International Circuit on Sunday.

Dovizioso acknowledged that Ducati typically performs well at Sepang, telling a press conference: "It's really good, this track for me."

But he was not taking victory, and the runner-up spot, for granted, and said that everything could depend on the weather conditions.

His 2016 victory - the first MotoGP he had won for seven years - and his 2017 win came in heavy downpours, and he said



that dry conditions could actually work against him.

"In the past... we did not make a lot of good results on the dry," he said.

Still, there is a high chance of rain at the weekend, with Malaysia experiencing frequent torrential downpours at it enters its monsoon season.

Marquez, who last won in Malaysia in 2014, conceded it would be tough to take on Ducati.

"It's true that normally Ducati is in a very good level here in Malaysia," he said.

"But you never know. It's not one of the best circuits but also Motegi (in Japan) was not one of the best circuits and in the end we were able to fight for the victory."

The Spaniard, who has now won five championships in motorcycling's premier class, is hoping for better luck in Malaysia after being forced out of the Australian MotoGP in a dramatic high-speed collision.

BOTTOMLINE

## Birthday joy as Goerges clinches Zhuhai semis spot

AFP  
Zhuhai, China

Defending champion Julia Goerges gave herself an early birthday present yesterday by beating Elise Mertens to book her place in the semi-finals of WTA Elite Trophy.

The fifth seed bounced back from a bruising defeat to Anett Kontaveit on Wednesday, but overcame Mertens 6-2, 7-6 in a tense round-robin tie in Zhuhai, southern China.

Goerges, who turns 30 today, was pushed all the way in the second set by her 22-year-old Belgian opponent, but the German clinched the nailbiting tie-break 7-5 at the Hengqin International Tennis Center.

"Well actually I don't feel like 30 yet," Goerges told her post-match press conference.

"With my performance to-



Julia Goerges of Germany hits a return against Elise Mertens of Belgium during their second round match of the Zhuhai Elite Trophy tennis tournament in Zhuhai yesterday.

day I gave myself the best present I good ask for for tomorrow."

The straight sets victory was enough to take Goerges to the top of the group, and the world number 14 jumped with joy on

court and punched the air in celebration.

Asked if she knew she had to win 2-0 qualify, she said: "I knew what I had to do today - to win in straight sets - and I think it was up to me to dictate

the game.

"It's never easy when you know you have to play extremely well to beat someone in straight sets, especially here, where there are only the best players in the world.

"I'm obviously very very happy that I made it in the end."

Earlier, Australia's Ashleigh Barty beat an out-of-sorts French number one Caroline Garcia to keep her semi-final hopes alive.

Ninth seed Barty broke Garcia once in each set to win the round-robin tie 6-3, 6-4 in one hour and 16 minutes.

Barty, who lost to Aryna Sabalenka on Tuesday, now has to wait for the outcome of Garcia and Sabalenka's match to see if she will progress to the semi-finals tomorrow.

"It's out of my hands," Barty said in her post-match press conference.

"I just have to sit back and

watch tomorrow. But I'm certainly pleased to have had the year we've had and really nice to finish on a positive note today."

She said she was in a "win-win situation", being able to "play with freedom", but knowing that if she lost she could still go home at the end of the season.

Garcia, 25, was crowned champion in Tianjin in October, but she was unable to bring that form into her opening match.

The world number 18, seeded eighth, said she had some back pain coming into the tournament, and felt her legs weren't moving the way she wanted on court.

"It was a very difficult match for me today and I think she played great but I wasn't feeling very good and didn't have the rhythm I wanted."

Second seed Anastasiya Sevastova beat China's Zhang Shuai in yesterday's evening game 6-0, 7-6.

NBA

# Resurgent Rose turns back clock to score 50 against Jazz

'I am doing everything just to win. I played my heart out tonight. My teammates told me before the game to just play my game and it was a hell of a night'



Minnesota Timberwolves' Derrick Rose drives the ball in the third quarter of their NBA game against the Utah Jazz at the Target Center in Minneapolis. (Minneapolis Star Tribune/TNS)

AFP  
Los Angeles

**D**errick Rose dusted off his MVP costume, dropping a career-high 50 points to power the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 128-125 win over Utah in an NBA Northwest Division showdown on Wednesday.

On US Halloween night, Rose turned back the clock with a 34-point performance in the second half as the crowd of 10,000 chanted "MVP, MVP" after the final buzzer sounded. "It was numbing," said teammate Karl-Anthony Towns, who finished with 28 points. "I never realized something like that in my life. The man was just out there floating."

Rose, who was named NBA MVP in 2011 with the Chicago Bulls, scored every way imaginable against the Jazz.

He made two clutch free throws with 13 seconds left to give the Timberwolves a three-point lead in a tightly contested fourth quarter. Just moments earlier he had scored the go-ahead basket down low

RESULTS

Indiana	107-101	New York
Golden State	131-121	New Orleans
LA Lakers	114-113	Dallas
San Antonio	120-90	Phoenix
Brooklyn	120-119	Detroit
Denver	108-107	Chicago
Minnesota	128-125	Utah

to put Minnesota ahead for good. Rose also made a key block on a Jazz three-point attempt with two seconds left to ice the win.

"This means everything," said Rose, who was making his first start of the season. "I worked my butt off, bro."

Rose's career had been beset by injuries since he won his MVP award.

"I am doing everything just to win. I played my heart out tonight. My teammates told me before the game to just play my game and it was a hell of a night," said Rose.

Donovan Mitchell scored 26 points and

Rudy Gobert added 22 for Utah. Jae Crowder tallied 18 points off the bench.

Minnesota played without all-star Jimmy Butler, and point guards Jeff Teague and Tyus Jones.

In Los Angeles, LeBron James gave the Staples Center crowd a fright when he missed the first of two free throws with two seconds left as the Lakers squeezed past the Dallas Mavericks 114-113.

"It's Halloween so we had to give the crowd a scare, I guess," said James.

The Lakers almost blew a big point lead late but managed to hold on for the win.

The game appeared to be headed to overtime but the Mavericks veteran Wesley Matthews took it upon himself to intentionally foul James on the Lakers' final possession with two seconds left. That sent the four-time MVP to the free-throw line with scored tied 113-113, but after missing the first one James made the second for the win.

James finished with 29 points for the Lakers who were up 111-98 with 3:42 to go before the Mavericks went on a 15-2 run to pull even with seven seconds left.

Luca Dončić tied it at 113-113 on a jumper, setting the stage for James' game-winning free throw.

"We had some bad moments down the stretch but this is the best way to teach them," James said of his young team.

Matthews led Dallas with 21 points and Harrison Barnes scored 19.

In Oakland, Stephen Curry had 37 points for his sixth 30-point game of the season, and the Golden State Warriors beat the New Orleans Pelicans 131-121.

Curry had seven three-pointers and nine assists, Kevin Durant added 24 points and eight assists, and Draymond Green delivered 16 points, 15 rebounds as the Warriors won their sixth straight.

Anthony Davis returned from a two-game absence with a sprained right elbow and had 17 points and 12 rebounds for the Pelicans in a rematch of a Western Conference playoff series from last season.

Klay Thompson scored 18 points with one three-pointer for the Warriors two days after setting an NBA record with 14 three-pointers in a win over the Chicago Bulls.

NHL

## Virtanen, Canucks topple Blackhawks

Reuters  
Chicago

**J**ake Virtanen scored two goals, and the host Vancouver Canucks added two more goals in the third period to beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-2 Wednesday night.

Virtanen now has three goals in two games after producing just one assist in his previous eight contests.

"It definitely gives me that confidence with the puck now, and I've gotta keep going," said Virtanen of his scoring streak during an interview with Sportsnet during the first intermission.

The injury-riddled Canucks posted their second consecutive win. The Blackhawks dropped their third in a row (0-2-1). Brendan Gaunce supplied the winning goal in the third period and added an assist, and Antoine Roussel also scored for the Canucks.

Brandon Saad and Jonathan Toews scored for the Blackhawks.

Canucks goaltender Jacob Markstrom stopped 24 of 26 shots, while Chicago's Corey Crawford blocked 24 of 28.

Chicago played without winger Patrick Kane, who is tied for first place in league scoring, due to illness.

Saad put the Blackhawks on the scoreboard first as he took a lead pass from Chris Kunitz, split Vancouver's defense and squeezed a shot through Markstrom at 6:56 of the opening period.

Virtanen pulled the Canucks even with 4:27 left in the first period thanks to a lucky breakaway. The winger was well behind the play when Saad's

botched pass eluded Brent Seabrook.

The puck came to Virtanen near centre ice, and he beat Crawford with a high shot on his glove side. The goal was the second in two games for Virtanen, who had only one point in his previous eight contests.

Toews gave the Blackhawks a 2-1 lead on a power play 1:05 into the second period. The goal came as Vancouver defenseman Michael Del Zotto's cross-checking penalty in the final minute of the first period carried over to the middle frame.

Saad was denied another goal midway through the second because he kicked in his own rebound after hitting the post on a breakaway. The goal was immediately waved off, and a video review upheld the on-ice call.

Virtanen's second goal of the night drew the Canucks even at 12:24 of the second. The right winger fired in a pass from Markus Granlund, who was being hooked to the ice at the time and drew a delayed penalty that was nullified by the goal.

Gaunce gave the Canucks a 3-2 lead at 9:24 of the third period as Toews made a rare gaffe and threw the puck to him right in front of Chicago's net. The goal was the first in the NHL for Gaunce since he notched two against the Blackhawks on Feb 1.

He played his first game with the Canucks this season after being promoted from Utica of the American Hockey League a day earlier to replace injured center Brandon Sutter (shoulder).

Roussel closed out the scoring with an assist from Gaunce at 16:33 of the third period.

### Giants great McCovey dies at 80

Willie McCovey, a Baseball Hall of Fame first baseman who starred for 19 seasons with San Francisco, died Wednesday at the age of 80, the Giants said. "It is with great sadness that we announce that San Francisco Giants Legend and Hall of Famer Willie McCovey passed away peacefully this afternoon at the age of 80 after losing his battle with ongoing health issues," the Giants said in a statement posted on their Twitter feed.

The lanky McCovey, nicknamed "Stretch" was a formidable slugger who teamed with fellow Hall of Famer and Alabama native Willie Mays as the core of a fearsome Giants offense.

He never played at the Giants' current AT&T Park, but his power at the plate is recalled there with unofficial name of "McCovey Cove" the inlet beyond the right field wall where kayakers wait to collect home run balls. He could hit a ball farther than anyone I ever played with," Mays once said of McCovey. McCovey played 22 seasons in Major League Baseball from 1959-1980.

Playing for the Giants, Padres and Athletics he compiled 2,211 hits, 521 home runs, 353 doubles, 1,345 walks and 1,555 runs-batted in.

He was the National League Rookie of the Year in 1959, the Most Valuable Player in 1969 and a six-time All-Star.

He led his league in home runs three times and in RBIs twice. He is second only to home run leader Barry Bonds (762) in home runs hit by a left-handed hitter in the National League. His 18 career grand slams are fifth all time. The Giants didn't win a World Series during his career, but they lost in seven games to the Yankees in 1962.

McCovey is survived by his wife, Estela, and daughter, Allison.

Born on January 10, 1938, in Mobile, Alabama, McCovey was one of 10 children.

He played football and basketball, but his baseball talent saw him invited to a Giants tryout camp in Florida when he was 17.

His hitting ability assured his rise to the Major Leagues, where he debuted with the Giants in 1959 - a year after they moved to San Francisco.

A fearsome hitter in his prime, McCovey was hindered late in his career by knee trouble. The Giants retired his number 44 in 1980, and the Willie Mac Award, voted on by players coaches and training staff, recognises the team's most inspirational player.

MLB

# Red Sox celebrate World Series triumph with parade

AFP  
New York

**B**oston Red Sox players and supporters celebrated the Major League Baseball team's victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series with a victory parade on Wednesday along city streets.

A day-long celebration of the Red Sox's fourth championship in the past 15 seasons - after having not won the crown since 1918 until the recent run - began with a rally inside Fenway Park, the oldest major league stadium built in 1912.

Players rode on duck boats, Boston's famed vehicles that serve as cars or boats, and displayed the championship trophy as they rode down the city streets, fans cheering and singing with delight.

"It's a dream come true for me and I'm so thankful to be here right now," said Boston's Steve Pearce, the World Series Most Valuable Player.

"It still feels so weird to hear that, World Series MVP?"

Pearce recalled pitcher Chris Sale and manager Alex Cora gathering the team together when they faced adversity to help revive their momentum on the path to the crown, beating the Dodgers four games to one in the best-of-seven World Series despite losing the longest game in Series history after 18 innings.

"When our backs were against the wall, we banded together and we got it done," Pearce said.

"We figured it out and everything suddenly got going for us. Everybody responded.

"It was what we needed. We came out the next day and responded. That's what it was all

about."

Signs in the crowd along the streets and in the ballpark included "LA: Lost Again" and "Alexa, Play New York, New York," the theme song of the arch-rival Yankees, whom the Red Sox vanquished in their first playoff series despite a home loss in game two of the best-of-five matchup.

"We lost game two to the Yankees. Everybody here was so scared," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

"Then we scored 16 at Yankee Stadium. Suck on it."

**PRICE STAYING IN BOSTON**  
The Red Sox received good news for next year's title defense as they seek back-to-back crowns for the first time since 1915 and 1916 as pitcher David Price said he will remain with the club for the final four seasons of his contract, refusing an opt-out clause

he had through Wednesday in his seven-year, \$217 million deal.

"Yeah, I'm opting in. I'm not going anywhere," Price said.

"I want to win here. We did that this year, and I want to do it again. There wasn't any re-consideration on my part ever. I came here to win. We did that this year and that was very special. Now we want to do it again."

Price went winless in his first 11 career playoff starts, then pitched the Red Sox to victory in the clinching game over Houston in the American League Championship Series and starred in games two and five of the World Series.

"He should have been the co-MVP of the World Series," Red Sox owner John Henry said.

"I can't imagine we would have wound up winning without David Price this year."



Boston Red Sox catchers Sandy Leon, Christian Vazquez and Blake Swihart during the victory parade to celebrate the Boston Red Sox World Series victory at Fenway Park. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

## FOCUS

# Wilson in at number eight for England, Farrell at fly-half

Wilson gets surprise start in new-look back row, Ford on bench to face Springboks

Reuters  
London

England coach Eddie Jones sprang a surprise yesterday by naming Mark Wilson at number eight for tomorrow's Test against South Africa as he opted for a new-look back row combination boasting only six international starts between them.

With regular number eight Billy Vunipola injured and Nathan Hughes suspended, Jones had been expected to go for uncapped Zach Mercer, who was instead named among the replacements as tough-tackling Wilson wins his fifth cap and his second start.

Brad Shields wins his third cap at blindside with four-cap Tom Curry, impressive in the 2-1 series defeat against the Springboks, keeping the number seven shirt.

As expected, Owen Farrell will start at flyhalf, with Ben Te'o, who has played only 25 minutes of club rugby this season, and Henry Slade outside him and George Ford on the bench.

Dylan Hartley, co-captain with Farrell, returns at hooker alongside props Kyle Sinckler and Alec Hepburn, who makes his first international start after two appearances off the bench.

Elliot Daly is fullback with Jonny May and Jack Nowell claiming the wing berths as Chris Ashton failed to make the matchday squad.

Manu Tuilagi, who last played for England in 2016 and who has endured a wretched four-year run of injuries, is named on the bench along with uncapped prop Ben Moon.

Currently on the last day of the team's warm-weather training camp, Jones said in a statement: "We've become very well organised in our set piece and have done a lot of good work in Portugal over the last week. We have put in a new defence system and our attack looks more organised than it was on the South Africa tour."

England lost the first two games on that trip in June, despite racing to early leads in both on the back of some scintillating play, before winning the third.

The Springboks, who were superb in beating the All Blacks in Wellington then agonisingly losing the home return in the Rugby Championship last month, will be without several key players on Saturday as the test falls outside the international window meaning clubs are not obliged to release them.

Even so, they will present the sternest of challenges to the team Jones has been forced to somewhat cobble together in the



England's Mark Wilson during a training session. (Reuters)

face of a long injury and suspension list.

"We've lost 400 caps with the loss of the Vunipola brothers, Joe Launchbury and Courtney Lawes so that experience is hard to replace but we've still managed to name a very strong bench of finishers with Jamie George and Danny Care who are outstanding players and they will lead the final charge," Jones said.

On his selection of 29-year-old Wilson, who made his debut in Argentina in 2017, he added: "He is a very good defensive player, hard on the ball, gives everything to the team and certainly against the big South Africa forwards his chop tackling will be very important."

England, who have lost five of their last six full tests, take on New Zealand, Japan and Australia after Saturday's match, all at Twickenham.

#### ENGLAND SQUAD

15 Elliot Daly (Wasps, 21 caps)

14 Jack Nowell (Exeter Chiefs, 26 caps) 13 Henry Slade (Exeter Chiefs, 13 caps) 12 Ben Te'o (Worcester Warriors, 13 caps) 11 Jonny May (Leicester Tigers, 37 caps) 10 Owen Farrell (Saracens, 61 caps) co-captain 9 Ben Youngs (Leicester Tigers, 77 caps)

1 Alec Hepburn (Exeter Chiefs, 2 caps) 2 Dylan Hartley (Northampton Saints, 93 caps) co-captain 3 Kyle Sinckler (Harlequins, 13 caps) 4 Maro Itoje (Saracens, 22 caps) 5 George Kruis (Saracens, 25 caps) 6 Brad Shields (Wasps, 2 caps) 7 Tom Curry (Sale Sharks, 4 caps) 8 Mark Wilson (Newcastle Falcons, 4 caps) Replacements 16 Jamie George (Saracens, 28 caps) 17 Ben Moon (Exeter Chiefs, uncapped) 18 Harry Williams (Exeter Chiefs, 11 caps) 19 Charlie Ewels (Bath Rugby, 6 caps) 20 Zach Mercer (Bath Rugby, uncapped) 21 Danny Care (Harlequins, 81 caps) 22 George Ford (Leicester Tigers, 47 caps) 23 Manu Tuilagi (Leicester Tigers, 26 caps).

#### Vermeulen back for Springboks pack

Powerhouse loose-forward Duane Vermeulen was picked at flanker as South Africa coach Rassie Erasmus shuffled his pack for their opening November international against England at Twickenham tomorrow. Vermeulen returns after missing the Rugby Championship while on club duty in Japan, with his regular number eight position filled by Warren Whiteley. The pair will partner captain Siya Kolisi in what is a new-look back row for a Springbok side unable to select their overseas-based players as the fixture falls outside of the designated international window.

Vermeulen was arguably the Boks' stand-out player in their 2-1 home series win over England in June, and he will be a key figure at the breakdown with Kolisi likely to play a bigger role with the ball in hand.

Vermeulen's selection sees Pieter-Steph du Toit return to lock, where he will partner Stormers team mate Eben Etzebeth, while there is no change to the front row of Steven Kitshoff, Malcolm Marx and Frans Malherbe. Handre Pollard was retained at flyhalf and Ivan van Zyl will earn a second start at scrumhalf, an area where the Boks are lacking experience without Faf de Klerk, who is unavailable, and Ross Cronje (injured).

**TEAM:** 15-Damian Willemse, 14-Sbu Nkosi, 13-Jesse Kriel, 12-Damian de Allende, 11-Aphiwe Dyantyi, 10-Handre Pollard, 9-Ivan van Zyl, 8-Warren Whiteley, 7-Duane Vermeulen, 6-Siya Kolisi (captain), 5-Pieter-Steph du Toit, 4-Eben Etzebeth, 3-Frans Malherbe, 2-Malcolm Marx, 1-Steven Kitshoff.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Morgan to make Wales debut against Scotland

AFP  
Cardiff, United Kingdom

Ospreys wing Luke Morgan will make his Wales debut against Scotland at Cardiff's Principality Stadium tomorrow.

Morgan, Wales' record try-scorer on the world sevens circuit, returned to Welsh regional side the Ospreys this season after six years playing in the abbreviated format.

Ospreys flanker Dan Lydiate, whose last international appearance was 11 months ago, was recalled to a Wales team announced yesterday, with veteran lock Alun Wyn Jones captaining a side that contains seven British and Irish Lions Test players.

Elsewhere, Cardiff Blues back Gareth Anscombe is at fly-half for only his fourth start in the No 10 shirt in 19 Tests while centre Jonathan Davies, the Lions player of the series in their drawn 2017 campaign against New Zealand returns after nearly a year out of Test action with a foot injury.

Because this match falls outside World Rugby's official window for November Tests, foreign clubs are not obliged to release any of their Wales players for Saturday's fixture.

So Wales will be without their English Premiership quartet of Liam Williams, Dan Biggar, Josh Adams and Tomas Francis.

But Gatland, now back with the Wales camp after returning to his native New Zealand last week following the death of his father, will still be fielding a hugely experienced side with nearly 650 caps between them.

"We are excited to kick off our autumn campaign on Saturday and it was great to welcome Warren back yesterday," said Wales assistant coach Rob Howley yesterday.

"Warren has been in constant dialogue with us over the past week and we have selected a very strong squad for this weekend."

#### 'POINT OF DIFFERENCE'

Former Wales and Lions scrum-half Howley added: "It is great to reward players on form and we are looking forward to seeing Luke make his debut on the wing.

"He has come through the Sevens system, he will bring a point of difference to the squad and it's a great opportunity for him."

Wales, who beat Scotland 34-7 in this year's Six Nations in Cardiff, have not lost at home to the Scots since a 27-22 defeat in 2002 when opposition coach Gregor Townsend was still playing for the Dark Blues.

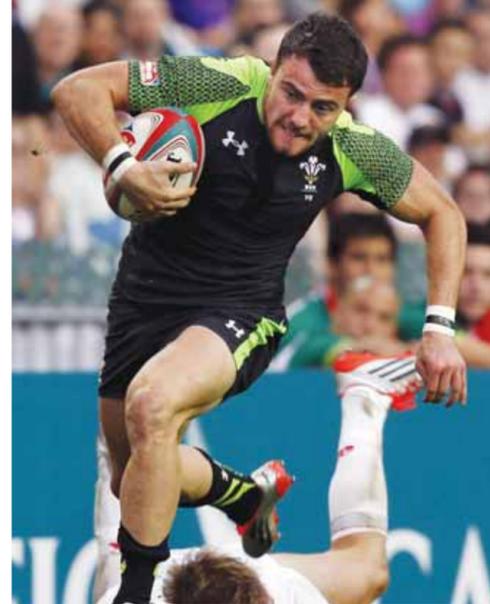
Both the Scottish Rugby Union, who announced their team on Wednesday, and their Welsh counterparts have been accused of devaluing their annual clash in the Six Nations by taking the unusual step of agreeing to play each other in November.

There were also complaints that spectators had been led into thinking a portion of their ticket money for the Doddie Weir Cup fixture would go towards raising money for the charity of the former Scotland lock, who is suffering from Motor Neurone Disease.

Initially both the SRU and the Welsh Rugby Union said the fixture was designed to "raise awareness" of MND, but on Monday, following a public outcry, both governing bodies announced they would donate a joint six-figure sum "directly from the proceeds of Saturday's fixture" to the My Name's Doddie Foundation.

#### WALES (15-1)

Leigh Halfpenny; George North, Jonathan Davies, Hadleigh Parkes Luke Morgan; Gareth Anscombe, Gareth Davies; Ross Moriarty, Justin Tipuric, Dan Lydiate; Alun Wyn Jones (capt), Cory Hill; Dillon Lewis, Ken Owens, Nicky Smith Replacements: Elliot Dee, Rob Evans, Leon Brown, Adam Beard, Aaron Wainwright, Tomos Williams, Jarrod Evans, Steff Evans.



## SELECTION

# Coles back as All Blacks name team for Japan

AFP  
Urayasu, Japan

All Blacks coach Steve Hansen saluted Dane Coles yesterday after the inspirational hooker fought back from a year out hurt to headline a second-string New Zealand side against Japan.

Hansen said Coles, 31, would have wondered whether his career was over after he suffered a serious knee injury against France last November, needing two operations.

The World Cup winner is the senior player in a match-day squad including eight new caps for tomorrow's Test with Japan after last week's 37-20 victory over Australia.

The All Blacks also called up loose forward Dalton Papalii and midfielder Matt Proctor to a new-look XV, with six more players set to make their debuts from the bench in Tokyo.

But Hansen was clearly delighted to welcome Coles back from his injury

nightmare for what will be his 57th appearance in the famous black jersey.

"It's been great to have the champ back," said Hansen at the team's hotel overlooking Tokyo Disneyland. "He's had to work really hard and he's gone through some moments in his own head where he was probably wondering if it's ever going to happen.

"That frustration is a killer," he added. "It can send you places you don't want to go. I didn't have any doubts but I'm not in his body, I'm not feeling his frustrations. But he's a player worth waiting for."

Luke Whitelock, who skipped the side against a France XV last year, will be captain for the first time in a Test against the 2019 World Cup hosts. He follows in the footsteps of brother Sam, who captained the team for the first time last year. Whitelock will also become the 70th player to skipper the All Blacks when he leads them out against Japan.

"He's a Whitelock," smiled Hansen. "He's a natural leader. He was brought



New Zealand's All Blacks head coach Steve Hansen (second right) watches a training session in Urayasu yesterday, ahead of their friendly match against Japan in Tokyo. (AFP)

up around the kitchen table talking and debating about rugby.

"While it's a young side and a relatively inexperienced group, a top performance is required," he added.

"It puts a little pressure on them but

you can see how they perform under that pressure."

Japan coach Jamie Joseph, meanwhile, named a virtually full-strength side following their 31-28 defeat by a world select XV last Friday, although

wing Lomano Lemeki has pulled out with a foot injury.

New Zealand have met Japan three times previously, racking up a combined 282 points, including a World Cup-record 145-17 demolition of the Brave Blossoms in 1995 - a match Joseph played in for the All Blacks.

But Hansen, whose core players have left for Europe early to prepare for November Tests against England, Ireland and Italy, warned his players against taking Japan too lightly.

"They will play at a hundred miles an hour," he said. "They don't want a physical contest a la South Africa or Argentina - they want to hit and run. We need to be awake and not switch off."

"Is there a risk in what we're doing? Yes," added Hansen, whose team will be chasing a hat-trick of World Cup titles in Japan next year.

"But the reward is well worth the risk. We are giving players the opportunity to represent their country to find out more about them. "We get to send

another group of players to acclimatise in an environment which is going to be full-on. We're winning everywhere."

Papalii could barely contain his glee at being selected.

"It's crazy," said the 21-year-old. "Every little kid growing up wants to be in this position, to hear your name being called up. My mum was crying and my dad was pretty speechless."

#### TEAMS

##### NEW ZEALAND

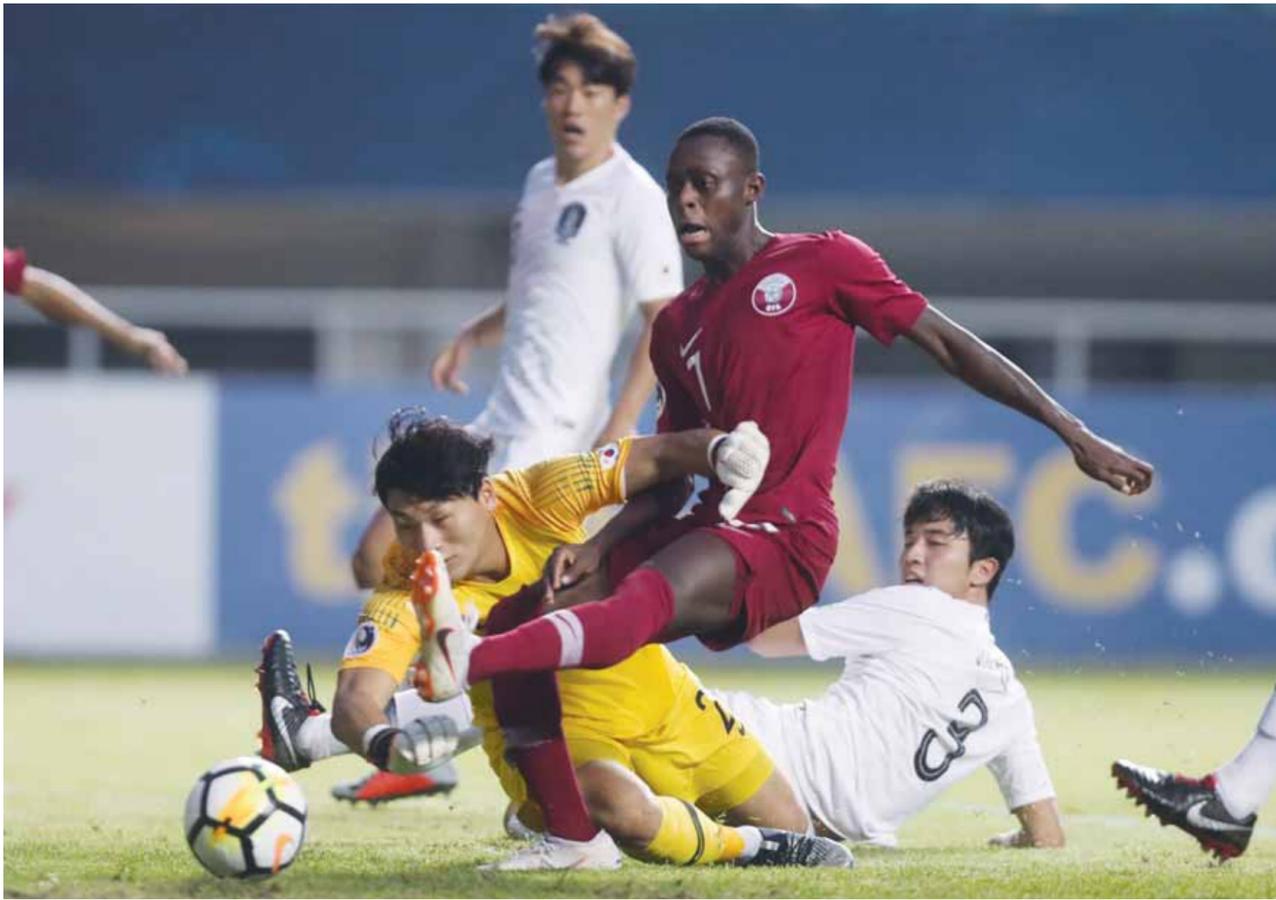
Jordie Barrett; Milner-Skudder, Matt Proctor, Ngani Laumape, Waisake Nahorangi; Richie Mo'unga, Te Toiroa Tahuriorangi; Luke Whitelock (capt), Dalton Papalii, Vaea Fifita; Jackson Hemopo, Patrick Tuipulotu; Angus Ta'avao, Dane Coles, Ofa Tuungafasi  
**JAPAN:** Ryohei Yamanaka; Jamie Henry, William Tupou, Timothy Lafaele, Kenki Fukuoka; Yu Tamura, Yutaka Nagare; Hendrik Tui, Kazuki Himeno, Michael Leitch (capt); Samuela Anise, Wimpie van der Walt; Hiroshi Yamas-hita, Atsushi Sakata, Keita Inagaki



## ASIAN U-19 CHAMPIONSHIP

# South Korea cruise past Qatar, to take on Saudi in final

Two goals from Jeon Se-jin laid the foundations for South Korea's victory



The South Korean goalkeeper feels the heat during yesterday's AFC U-19 semi-final against Qatar. At bottom, another piece of action from the match.

**AFC**  
Bogor, Indonesia

South Korea booked their place in the AFC U-19 Championship final yesterday with an impressive 3-1 win over Qatar at the Pakansari Stadium in Bogor.

A superb display and two goals from Jeon Se-jin laid the foundations for the victory, one which sees Korea Republic continue their quest to claim a 13th title at this level.

The Koreans will now face Saudi Arabia in Sunday's title showdown, leaving Qatar to reflect on what could have been at the end of a campaign which saw them — along with the other three semi-finalists — qualify for next year's FIFA U-20 World Cup in Poland.

In damp conditions, the game began brightly but without a genuine threat on goal until Khaled Mohamed drove a shot from distance into the welcoming arms of Korea Republic goalkeeper Lee Gwang-yeon on 16 minutes.

Korea Republic's response, when it



came, was decisive, an unmarked Jeon tapping home Um Won-sang's 23rd minute cross from close-range after lax Qatari defending from a throw-in.

With central defenders Lee Jae-ik and Kim Hyun-woo nullifying the threat of tournament leading goalscorer Abdulrasheed Umaru, Korea Republic duly

doubled their lead shortly after the half-hour mark.

Yet again, it was the outstanding Jeon who starred, this time the midfielder bending a delightful — albeit deflected — free-kick past Qatar custodian Shehab Mamdouh to notch his fifth goal of the competition.

On the stroke of half-time, two became three for the rampant Koreans as Um Won-sang lashed captain Hwang Tae-hyeon's pinpoint delivery past Mamdouh to round off an excellent first 45 minutes for the East Asians.

To their credit, Qatar refused to buckle after the break and they gave themselves a lifeline on 52 minutes when Lee Jae-ik turned substitute Abdulla Almurisi's drilled cross into his own net.

Um then flashed a shot narrowly wide of the far post, before Jeon's sublime cross was expertly headed to safety by Youssef Ayman as Um threatened to pounce in the 67th minute.

Despite their persistence and the best efforts of striker Umaru, Qatar, minus the red-carded Nasser Abdulsalam, struggled to make any further inroads,

and it was to be Korea Republic who came closest to rounding off the scoring through Lee Kyu-Hyuk's late free-kick which Mamdouh did well to repel.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia claimed a place in a second successive AFC U-19 Championship final, delivering a near-flawless performance to defeat defending champions Japan 2-0 at the Pakansari Stadium.

Khalid Abdullah Atawi's side will face South Korea in Sunday's decider after doing what no other side in the tournament had in blunting a Japanese outfit which had plundered 15 goals in their previous four matches.

Saudi Arabia's goals came in the first half, with Khalid al-Ghannam's stoppage-time effort following an own goal by Japan goalkeeper Tomoya Wakahara.

In a battle between the only remaining sides with perfect winning records, something had to give, and Saudi Arabia — who had never beaten Japan at the AFC U-19 Championship in 45 years of trying — quickly forced their opponents into the unfamiliar role of the team without the ball.

## QATAR CLASSIC SQUASH

# Rosner sets up title clash with Ali Farag

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

German World No.5 Simon Rosner and Egyptian World No.2 Ali Farag will go head-to-head in the final of the 2018 Qatar Classic after prevailing in their respective semi-final encounters against Peruvian Diego Elias and Egypt's Tarek Momen in the Khalifa Tennis and Squash Complex here yesterday.

Rosner, the 30-year-old based in Paderborn, enjoyed a career breakthrough here last year when he reached the semi-finals at a Platinum level event for the first time to usher in what was the most successful season of his career to date. But he went one step better this time around as he easily brushed aside a tired looking Elias, with the 21-year-old struggling both mentally and physically to back up his victory over World No.1 Mohamed ElShorbagy on Wednesday.

Elias looked flat from the off and Rosner, who finished runner-up at the last month's U.S. Open — the first Platinum event of season — was quick to grasp the opportunity and take control of the court to punish Elias at every opportunity and complete an 11-6, 11-3, 11-3 win in just 31-minutes.

"Diego had a tough match yesterday, and it's very hard to pick it up the next day," said Rosner. "He beat the World No.1 to reach his first ever Platinum event semi-final and it's a lot to

take in. "I know what he is feeling because last year, I played my first semi-final here and I literally got chopped so I feel for him.

"But for me, I'm playing my second Platinum final in a row. If you had told me that two months ago, I would probably have laughed, so I'm very happy. I will try and enjoy the moment tomorrow and play the best squash I can.

"I feel like I've gotten better round-by-round this week and hopefully I can lift it to another level again tomorrow. Making two finals in a row is very special for me but there is another match to go and obviously you want to win those matches, not just be there for the sake of it."

Farag meanwhile defeated compatriot, and 2017 tournament runner-up, Momen in a four game battle that saw them produce some sublime squash as they traded the opening games tat-for-tat whilst battling for control of the court.

But, after losing the second, it was Farag who managed to wrestle control of the court, and with it the match, to force Momen onto the back foot and accelerate away to compete the win 11-9, 6-11, 11-6, 11-4 to avenge his defeat to Momen in the final of the Channel Vas Championships last week.

"It definitely wasn't easy at any point tonight, Tarek has been playing some of his best squash recently and he proved that with the win last week when he came from 2-1 down to beat me," said Farag.



Simon Rosner of Germany lunges for the ball as Diego Elias waits during their semi-final match yesterday.



Egypt's Tarek Momen plays a shot against compatriot Ali Farag.

## QNB STARS LEAGUE

# Al Sadd look to recover from Al Ahli shock

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

Al Sadd cannot afford any more shocks if they are to make a serious push for the QNB Stars League title. Trailing Al Duhail by a whopping eight points, the Wolves have to beat Umm Salal today to keep their campaign on track with the tournament almost near the halfway stage.

A morale-shattering 4-1 thrashing by Al Ahli dealt a serious blow to their hopes. With a battery of highly acclaimed players in their ranks, it was a defeat that Al Sadd will not forget in a hurry.

Al Sadd, however, have played only eight matches as against Al Duhail's nine, but to take advantage of that they would have to beat Umm Salal, a team who are fifth in the standings with 15 points from 10 matches.

But Al Sadd's quality can never be doubted. With a line-up boasting tournament top-scorer Baghdad Bounedjah, Hassan al-Haydos, Akram Afif and Xavi, they can turn around their fortunes if



With a plethora of stars in their line-up, it is not beyond Al Sadd to bounce back in the tournament.

they keep their focus.

Umm Salal coach Laurent Banide is aware of the tough task his team faces

against Al Sadd.

"We have a tough task on our hand. We are facing Al Sadd and we are going to

play with full concentration. It is not easy to play against a strong team that lost their last game. They have some wonder-

ful players, but we know how to deal with them," said Banide.

"Each match is different and we have come out with negative results against Qatar SC and Al Shahania (both games ended in 1-1 draws). Now, we want to put up a strong performance against Al Sadd.

"Only Ismail Mahmoud is nursing an injury in our ranks. Rest all players are ready. We have a lot of solutions while playing against big teams, but I cannot reveal them," said Banide.

Umm Salal player Talal Ali said: "We do not go by Al Sadd's upset defeat to Al Ahli. It is difficult to predict the outcome of any match. However, if we win, we will not consider it as a surprise result. Our goal right from the beginning is a top-four finish and thus playing in the Qatar Cup."

Meanwhile, Al Shahania also face an uphill task against Al Gharafa.

"It is going to be a very difficult match for us, we are facing a strong team. At the same time, this game is very important for us. We will try to achieve our goals. We are equipping the players with confidence with the aim of getting a positive

result," said Shahania coach Jose Murcia.

"We know Al Gharafa, we have to be wary of them. They are strong contenders for a top-four finish as well. We have great respect for them, but we look forward towards bagging three points.

"Right now, our main focus is to boost the confidence of our players. They are playing as a cohesive group," added Murcia.

Al Shahania player Hamad al-Juhani said, "Al Gharafa are a good team with a lot of high-quality players, but we will not be a pushover side. We will give them a tough fight. We are eager not to repeat the mistakes we committed in the previous rounds. All our players are ready to play their roles."

Al Gharafa, who beat Al Khor 6-0 last week, are hoping to maintain their momentum.

"We look forward to becoming better despite the absence of some players, most notably Abdulaziz Hatem and Khalid Abdullaouf, through injuries. However, we are looking to push some young players and hope to beat Al Shahania," said Al Gharafa coach Christian Gourcuff.