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Yasir targets Aussie legend Grimmett's landmark



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GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

Ronaldo notches 100th CL win as Juve advance to last 16

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QOC CHIEF ATTENDS ANOC MEETING



Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, Second Vice-President HE Dr Thani al-Kuwari and Secretary General HE Jassim Rashid al-Buenain attend the general assembly meeting of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) in Tokyo yesterday.

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Boundedjah powers Al Sadd to 2-1 victory over Al Khor

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Baghdad Boundedjah was twice on target as Al Sadd defeated Al Khor 2-1 in the QNB Stars League at the Al Khor Stadium yesterday.

The match was rescheduled from Week 5 due to Al Sadd's engagements in the 2018 AFC Champions League, where they lost out to Iran's Persepolis on aggregate in the semi-finals.

Boundedjah scored Al Sadd's goals in the 16th and 86th minutes, while Wagner Ferreira found the target for Al Khor in the 70th minute.

Al Sadd moved to 29 points with their ninth victory, while Al Khor stayed on eight points, having crashed to their ninth defeat. Boundedjah took his personal tally to 21 goals on top of the scorers' chart.

After Al Khor showed early enthusiasm, Al Sadd dominated the proceedings in the first half, in which they enjoyed 70 per cent of possession.



Baghdad Boundedjah (in yellow) vies for the ball with Al Khor's Hamad Mansour.

Al Sadd continued to miss influential midfielder and Spanish star Xavi Hernandez due to a muscle injury. Fellow Spaniard Gabi Fernandez was a doubtful starter, also through an injury, but he started and controlled The Wolves' midfield.

Boundedjah led the Al Sadd attacks through the centre, ably

supported by Hassan al-Haydous through the right. For Al Khor, Diogo Farias spearheaded the offence.

Al Sadd created more opportunities and they were not to be denied for long. Boundedjah placed home a cross from the right by al-Haydous.

The hosts were unlucky to miss a penalty when Diogo's shot from the spot was collected by Saad al-Dossari. The penalty was awarded when Boundedjah fouled Wagner inside the box.

After Hamed Ismail's shot was parried by Al Khor goalkeeper Mohammed al-Bakri, Akram Afif sent the ball narrowly wide of the post towards the end of first half. The game really came to life in the second session, with Al Khor upping the ante.

They succeeded in equalising as Diogo made amends for his penalty lapse by crossing the ball for Wagner to score.

Just when it looked like a 1-1 draw came Al Sadd's winner, with Boundedjah heading in substitute Jung Woo-Young's cross from the left as al-Bakri had left his charge.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar's Abdelkarim Hassan is AFC Player of the Year

'The true heroes are my teammates both for club and country. And I must also thank our fans'

AFC
Muscat

In a major honour for Qatar and Qatari club football, Al Sadd defender Abdelkarim Hassan was declared the AFC Player of the Year at the Asian football body's annual awards gala in Muscat yesterday evening.

Abdelkarim, 25, played a stellar role in Al Sadd's brilliant campaign in the AFC Champions League in which the club qualified for the semi-finals before being beaten by eventual champions Kashima Antlers.

"The true heroes are my teammates both for club and country. This award is added motivation for us to give our best each time we enter the field. And I must also thank our fans who continue to serve as an inspiration for all of us," Abdelkarim said after receiving his trophy from AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa.

The 25-year-old admitted even he did not expect to win the award as he was up against Kento Misao and Yuma Suzuki, who were part of the Kashima Antlers team which won the AFC Champions League.

"I hope after winning to get a chance to play in Europe, I have the mentality to play in European leagues," he said.

Hassan added: "Being nominated with two Japanese players was an honour, and I did not expect to win."

This is the second time a Qatari footballer has bagged the top AFC award. Former star Qatar striker Khalfan Ibrahim had won the award way back in 2006 as an 18-year-old. Khalfan was a member of Al Sadd's Champions League winning side in 2011.

"I feel proud to have emulated Khalfan Ibrahim," said Abdelkarim. "Obviously he is one of Qatar's greatest football players."

Meanwhile, China's Wang Shuang clinched the top accolade in the women's category.

Wang, who joined her illustrious China PR compatriots Ma Xiaoxu and Bai Jie in winning the award, said: "I would like to thank the AFC for this remarkable award. It really



Qatar and Al Sadd's Abdelkarim Hassan (R) receives his AFC Player of the Year award from AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa in Muscat yesterday.

means a lot to win this. I want to thank my country, the Chinese Football Association and my national teammates for putting their faith in me and always encouraging me to dream big."

AFC President Sheikh Salman said: "We celebrate and applaud all our winners tonight who have worked tirelessly to raise the bar each year. Asian football continues to attain world-class achievements, and this is a testa-

ment to our players, teams and Member Associations.

"We congratulate them all and all those nominated, and we thank our host the Oman Football Association and the Omani govern-

ment for staging a truly memorable celebration in this wonderful city of Muscat."

Kashima Antlers' Go Oiwa who guided his side to their maiden AFC Champions League title earlier this month was duly rewarded with the 2018 AFC Men's Coach of the Year award, while AFC Women's Asian Cup Jordan 2018 winning coach Asako Takakura confirmed her legendary status in women's football with her sixth AFC Women's Coach of the Year award.

Iran's status as a global force in world football was further underlined after Ali Asghar Hasanzadeh, who was part of the IR Iran side which finished third in the 2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup, landed his fourth AFC Futsal Player of the Year accolade.

Former AFC Acting President Zhang Jilong was bestowed with the Continent's highest accolade - the AFC Diamond of Asia Award - in recognition for his incredible service and leadership over the last four decades to Chinese and Asian football.

AFC ROLL OF HONOUR

- AFC Diamond of Asia:** Zhang Jilong (CHI)
- AFC President's Special Recognition Award:** Futoshi Ikeda (JPN)
- Wild Boars FC (THA)
- AFC Member Association of the Year:** Inspiring: Japan Football Association
- Developing:** DPR Korea Football Association
- Aspiring:** Mongolian Football Federation
- AFC President Recognition Award for Grass-roots Football:** Inspiring Member Association: Chinese Football Association
- Developing Member Association:** Football Association of Singapore
- Aspiring Member Association:** Palestine Football Association
- AFC Futsal Player of the Year:** Ali Asghar Hasanzadeh (IRN)
- AFC Coach of the Year:** Women: Asako Takakura (JPN)
- Men: Go Oiwa (JPN)
- AFC Women's Player of the Year:** Wang Shuang (CHI)

SPOTLIGHT

Mourinho brash as Fellaini late show secures United knockouts spot in Champions League

AFP
Manchester

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho boasted about his Champions League record after Marouane Fellaini's injury time winner fired his side into the last 16 with a 1-0 win over Young Boys at Old Trafford.

The three-time European champions sealed their place in the knockout stages with a slice of fortune when Fellaini controlled the ball with his hand before firing into the far corner, provoking Mourinho to throw a box of water bottles to the ground in a mixture of joy and relief.

"For some of my lovers, for those who like stats, 14 seasons in the Champions League, 14 times qualify through the group phases," said Mourinho on his personal record as boss of Porto, Chelsea and Real Madrid as well as United.

"Never one of my teams stays

behind the group phase. The season I didn't play Champions League, I won the Europa League."

But there was little for Mourinho to brag about from another laboured performance as United were on the verge of failing to score for a third consecutive European home game for the first time ever.

"The most important thing is to qualify," said Mourinho, who has had to withstand a barrage of criticism this season for United's poor results and insipid attacking football.

In keeping with United's struggles under Mourinho, it could have been even worse but for the brilliance of goalkeeper David de Gea, who produced a stunning save from Ulisses Garcia's deflected effort to deny Young Boys midway through the second-half.

"From my position, David's save — only one save in the whole game — but it looks a phenomenal save," said Mourinho.



Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho and Young Boys coach Gerardo Seoane react after Marouane Fellaini's injury-time winner against Young Boys on Tuesday.

"A save that the best goalkeeper in the world does and gives his team the possibility to win the match."

Mourinho made the bold decision to leave Paul Pogba and Romelu Lukaku on the bench and Alexis Sanchez out of his squad as his made six changes from a drab goalless draw with Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Marcus Rashford was given his chance to start as centre-forward, but Mourinho was less than impressed with the 21-year-old just five minutes in when he dinked his finish over the bar with just goalkeeper David von Ballmoos to beat.

"This is the type of game where if you score in the first minute normally you go for a different kind of performance, but it is still very difficult for us to score," responded Mourinho when asked about his exasperated reaction when Rashford missed.

"If I saw my manager react like that, I would be absolutely livid!" said former England

striker Gary Lineker of Mourinho's response.

An initial flurry of excitement quickly died down as again Mourinho's men laboured to break down the Swiss champions, who they beat 3-0 in Bern back in September thanks to a Pogba double.

Mourinho's patience finally ran out as he summoned Pogba and Lukaku from the bench for the final quarter.

But it was De Gea who came to the Red Devils' rescue at the other end moments later with a remarkable save to claw Garcia's deflected shot off the line.

Christian Fassnacht then blazed over another glorious opportunity to give the visitors a famous win.

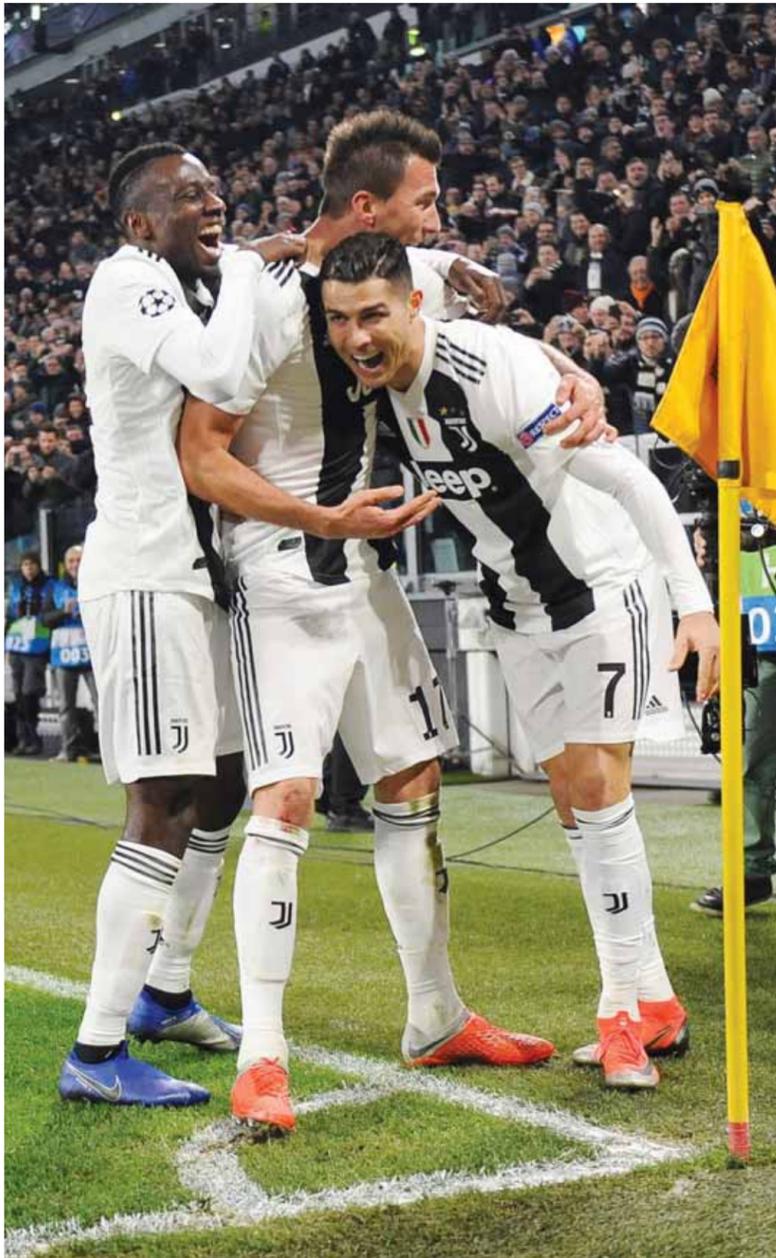
They were made to pay when Fellaini, was fortunate to not be seen controlling Lukaku's flick-on with his hand, fired the winner into the far corner.

"For me it was not handball," insisted Fellaini. "I controlled the ball, if it touched my hand it was not on purpose."

LANDMARK

Ronaldo notches 100th CL win as Juve make last 16

The Italian team are looking for their third European title and first since 1995



Juventus' Mario Mandzukic celebrates with Cristiano Ronaldo and Blaise Matuidi after scoring against Valencia on Tuesday.

AFP
Turin

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri hailed the impact Cristiano Ronaldo was having on the Italian champions as the Portuguese star became the first player to achieve 100 Champions League wins in Tuesday's 1-0 success over Valencia that clinched their passage to the knockout rounds.

"Ronaldo gives us a sense of security and confidence," said Allegri of the beaten finalists in two of the last four editions of the elite European competition.

"The team is essentially the same as last season. We've grown, become faster in playing the ball, but then of course, there is Cristiano Ronaldo.

"This team is constantly improving — they're passing and putting play together more quickly."

Ronaldo — who joined Juventus last summer from Real Madrid — is targeting a sixth Champions League title to add to his four with the Spanish team and one with Manchester United.

The Italian team are looking for their third European title and first since 1995.

Last season they exited in the quarter-finals to Ronaldo's Real Madrid.

The 33-year-old played a key role against Valencia providing the assist on 59 minutes which Croatian Mario Mandzukic tapped in for his third goal in as many matches.

Juventus had needed just a point to ensure qualification.

Their win combined with Manchester United's late 1-0 win over Young Boys at Old Trafford means Valencia crash out of the competition.

Allegri's side will now have to wait to see whether they top Group H when they play their final group game mid-December in Bern against Young Boys.

Ronaldo came out firing on all cylinders after his controversial red card during his first Champions League game for Juventus in Valencia back in September, which Allegri's side still won 2-0.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner had two chances within the first three minutes to add to his record tally of 121 Champions League goals.

Valencia had their best chance before the break when Mouctar Diakhaby's header off a corner was punched out with one hand by Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny.

Just before the hour mark, Ronaldo broke free of Valencia defender Gabriel and with some fancy footwork fired low across the face of the goal leaving Mandzukic to finish off.

Valencia thought they had scored the equaliser two minutes later but Diakhaby's header was ruled to have come off his hand.

Valencia goalkeeper Neto kept out a late goal-bound header from Ronaldo, who rose to meet Paulo Dybala's out-swinging corner.

"You can see how united we are including the forwards," said Juventus captain Giorgio Chiellini.

"All three of them — Ronaldo, Mandzukic and Dybala, really put themselves about today. If we scrap like that, with the skill we have in the side, it makes everything much easier.

"We have to turn the page now — we'll start thinking about the Champions League again in February. We must focus on Serie A because we have a tough month ahead," added the defender as the league leaders target an eighth consecutive domestic title.

"The match was decided by great play by Cristiano," said Valencia coach Marcelino Garcia, "but our team gave everything, showing great spirit against one of the best teams in Europe."

COMMENT

Bayern rout Benfica to qualify, ease pressure on Kovac



Bayern Munich's Manuel Neuer makes a save against Benfica during their Champions League match on Tuesday.

AFP
Munich

Bayern Munich romped to an emphatic 5-1 home win against Benfica on Tuesday to qualify for the Champions League last 16 and ease the pressure on coach Niko Kovac.

Arjen Robben and Robert Lewandowski both scored twice before Franck Ribery completed the rout at the Allianz Arena after Gedson Fernandes had pulled one back for Benfica.

Kovac's team shrugged off lacklustre league form — winning just two and losing three of their last eight Bundesliga games — with a convincing display.

"These goals were important not just for me, but for the team," said Robben.

"We played well, found the right tempo, attacked well and we did not concede much.

"It's a convincing win and that's exactly what we needed at the moment."

The victory eases the pressure on Kovac, who now needs another win at Werder Bremen on Saturday in the league.

"We all know how it works in football, but we win together and we lose together, the coach is one of us, we work intensively together every day," added Robben.

This is the 11th season in succession Bayern have reached the last 16 of the Champions League.

While Bayern sit just fifth in the Bundesliga, they are flying in Europe, having now chalked up four wins and a draw in the Champions League's group stage.

They need just a point at Ajax in a fortnight to win Group A, while the best Benfica can hope for is third and a place in the Europa League knock-out phase.

Bayern were unrecognisable from the team which leaked goals in a 3-3 draw with Bundes-

liga strugglers Fortuna Duesseldorf on Saturday.

They went ahead after just 13 minutes when Robben produced a stunning piece of skill for his 30th Champions League goal.

There was nothing on when the Dutch veteran darted through three defenders on the right wing, cut inside another and hit the top left corner with a superb shot.

The 34-year-old doubled Bayern's lead by wrong-footing Benfica defenders German Conti and crashing his shot past Odysseas Vlachodimos on 30 minutes.

The third goal followed six minutes later when Lewandowski rose highest for a corner and steered 50th Champions League goal into the net via the post.

Bayern went into the break at 3-0, but they could have been five up as Vlachodimos twice had to palm shots away by Thomas Mueller and Lewandowski.

However, the defensive errors which have blighted their recent performances returned to haunt Bayern straight after the break.

Benfica boss Rui Vitoria brought on Portugal international Gedson Fernandes for the second half and the teenage midfielder took just 48 seconds to score.

Gedson sprinted onto a through pass and finished off a counter attack by slotting past Manuel Neuer to stun the hosts.

Bayern restored their three-goal cushion just five minutes later when Lewandowski again headed home another Kimmich corner.

Ribery capped a gala night with an exchange of passes with David Alaba to slam home Bayern's fifth 13 minutes from time and claim his first Champions League goal for more than three years.

South Korean teenager Woo-yeong Jeong, 19, came on for his senior Bayern Munich debut in the dying stages.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Real go through top as Bale fires them to win over Roma

Roma squandered several chances, the best of them falling to Cengiz Under, who was guilty of missing from six yards

AFP
Rome

Real Madrid's magic touch in the Champions League remains undimmed after Gareth Bale inspired a 2-0 win over Roma on Tuesday that ensures they will go through top of the group.

Bale scored one and then provided the cross that led to another as Lucas Vazquez wrapped up a clinical 2-0 win at the Stadio Olimpico.

Roma squandered several chances in the first half, the best of them falling to Cengiz Under, who was guilty of a shocking miss from six yards, with the goal gaping.

Federico Fazio's mistake then gifted Bale the opener and Roma faded thereafter, allowing Madrid to erase memories of their shock defeat to Eibar last weekend by finishing top of Group G.

"It was important to bounce back quickly," Real coach Santiago Solari said. "We are very happy."

Both teams knew they had already qualified thanks to Viktoria Plzen's win over CSKA Moscow in the early kick-off, making this a golden chance to secure first place.

Madrid seized it, showing once again their immunity in the Champions League, where the team's problems in domestic competitions are seemingly



Real Madrid forward Gareth Bale and Toni Kroos celebrate after Bale opened the scoring against Roma at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Tuesday.

RESULTS CHECK

Group E At Athens AEK Athens 0 Ajax 2 (Tadic 68-pen, 72)	Group G At Moscow Cska Moscow 1 (Vlasic 10-pen) Viktoria Plzen 2 (Prochazka 56, Hejda 81)
At Munich Bayern Munich 5 (Robben 13, 30, Lewandowski 36, 51, Ribery 77) Benfica 1 (Fernandes 46)	At Rome Roma 0 Real Madrid 2 (Bale 46, Vazquez 59)
Group F At Lyon Lyon 2 (Cornet 55, 81) Manchester City 2 (Laporte 63, Aguero 83)	Group H At Turin Juventus 1 (Mandzukic 59) Valencia 0
At Sinsheim Hoffenheim 2 (Kramaric 17, Zuber 40) Shakhtar Donetsk 3 (Ismaily 14,	At Manchester Manchester United 1 (Fellaini 90+1) Young Boys 0

never transferred. They have gone more than eight hours without a goal and two weeks without a permanent coach but Santiago Solari still leads Real into the knock-out stages as group winners with one game to spare.

"We like playing against the best — it brings out the best in us," Bale said. Solari might have felt relief after the disastrous display at Eibar on Saturday while the pressure mounts for Roma coach Eusebio di Francesco. They have won only one of their last five Serie A games, and Antonio Conte was watching on in the crowd.

"We're playing against a side of champions," di Francesco said. "The only dif-

ference was they scored with their first chance."

There have been a fair few winners from Solari's time at the helm but Isco is not one of them. After not starting any of the new coach's first five games, he failed even to make the bench in Italy.

"It was a sporting decision, nothing else," Solari said. "It is up to all players to be at 100 per cent for the coaches to pick them." A breathless first half was dominated by Roma but Madrid had the first chance. Vazquez plucked Bale's cross out of the sky and cut back for Luka Modric, whose deflected shot was well saved by the foot of Robin Olsen.

PREVIEW

Sevilla among three Spanish sides seeking Europa progress

DPA
Berlin

Record winners Sevilla, crosstown rivals Real Betis and Villarreal aim to keep the Spanish flag flying in the Europa League by reaching the knock-out stages on the penultimate matchday today.

Sevilla require only a draw at Standard Liege to reach the last 32, so do Betis against Olympiacos depending on the result of the other game in their group while Villarreal are through if they win in Scotland at Rangers.

Six of the last nine titles in Europe's second-tier event have gone to Spain, with Atletico Madrid and Sevilla winning three each — giving Sevilla a total of five overall as they also lifted the trophy in 2005 and 2006.

Seven clubs have already qualified for the knock-outs, including the English duo of Arsenal and Chelsea and Germany's Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen. Sevilla go to Liege with the confidence of Spanish league leaders and joint leaders in Group J on nine points with Russia's Krasnodar.

Liege have six and need a victory to stay alive while Turkey's Akhishat are out on zero ahead of their trip to Krasnodar.

Sevilla coach Pablo Machin has remained modest throughout the successful run, saying after the latest league win against Valladolid: "Let's enjoy being top and appreciate what we are achieving."

Villarreal meanwhile languish in 14th



Sevilla's Portuguese forward Andre Silva (C) celebrates after scoring against Real Valladolid FC in a La Liga match on November 25.

place in La Liga ahead of their Rangers date but hope that a weekend 2-1 over Betis to end a run of five games without success is a sign of better times to come.

"We hope the win against Betis is a turning point for our season. The important thing now is to keep the momentum going with a win in Glasgow," midfielder Santi Cazorla said.

Villarreal cannot afford to drop points in tight group G where all four teams

are still alive. They top the group on six points but Rangers and Spartak Moscow have five each and Rapid Vienna, who go to Moscow in the other game, four.

Betis are also top of their group F on eight points, with AC Milan — who host eliminated Dudelange in the other game — and Olympiacos on seven each. They have scored stunning away victories at Barcelona in La Liga and at AC Milan in the Europa League but now want to finally

win at home again for the first time in all events since a 3-0 over Dudelange in early October.

But coach Quique Setien said: "We are a team in the making, we still lack some things. I have a lot of confidence in this team, they are growing, we have a good performance rate." Milan will be hoping for a draw in Sevilla while they are big favourites against Dudelange, with coach Gennaro Gattuso planning a two-man strike force of Gonzalo Higuain and Patrick Cutrone.

"Gonzalo will play and I hope that Patrick recovers as we will try to play with two hitters because it is a game we must win at all costs," Gattuso said. Things are complicated in Group I where all four teams are still alive. Leaders Genk (seven) are at Malmo (five) who are joint second with Sarpsborg who host Besiktas (four).

Other clubs who can clinch their place in the last 16 include former champions Zenit St Petersburg, last season's semi-finalists Salzburg and Dynamo Kiev. Topping a group is also important because winners will avoid the four best teams dropping down from the Champions League in the last 32 draw, and have the return leg of that stage at home. No wonder Arsenal manager Unai Emery, who guided Sevilla to their title treble 2014-2016, is unlikely to bring out reserves only at Ukraine's Vorskla even though the Gunners then face Tottenham in the league on Sunday.

"For us the Europa League is very important. We want to finish first in the group," Emery said.

FOCUS

PSG claim to be world's 'hottest club'

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain may still be playing catch-up with Europe's traditional giants on the field, but they claim to have already become "the hottest club in the world".

That is the boast made by Russell Stopford, the 47-year-old Briton who joined the club last year as their Chief Digital Officer, having previously worked at Manchester City and Barcelona.

In an age where clubs seem to be as keen to grow their brand and increase their digital fanbase as they are to win trophies and generate income, there is no doubt that PSG have been transformed this decade under Qatari ownership.

PSG have more than 62mm followers across the major social media networks of Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

PSG, the reigning French champions, had four consecutive runs to the quarter-finals of the Champions League before losing in the last 16 in each of the last two seasons, to Barcelona and then Madrid.

However, a defeat against Liv-

erpool yesterday could even condemn PSG to a group-stage exit this season, which would be disastrous for a club who spent more than 400mn euros (\$451.6mn) to sign Brazilian star Neymar and prolific teenage forward Kylian Mbappe last year.

Liverpool — last season's runners-up — carry an aura having lifted the European Cup five times and been English champions 18 times since being founded in 1892. In contrast, PSG were only founded in 1970. Yet they seem to be adapting better to the demands of the digital age — Liverpool's social media followers lag behind their opponents at under 55mn.

"Social media is a new phenomenon and the hottest club in the world is Paris Saint-Germain."

That's why we are growing so far," Stopford told AFP.

PSG have Twitter feeds in seven languages, including English, Arabic and Portuguese, but also Indonesian.

"When we create contents in these different languages, it gives the opportunity to connect directly with our fanbase," says Stopford.

"It is also bringing the fans closer to the club, so they can feel part of Paris Saint-Germain."

BOTTOMLINE

Ireland footballing icon Keane hangs up boots

AFP
Dublin

Irish football legend Robbie Keane brought the curtain down on over two decades as a player yesterday saying his career had exceeded all his hopes when he was a "football-mad boy growing up in Dublin".

The 38-year-old — his country's record goalscorer on 68 well clear of Niall Quinn who is next with 21 — is to focus on his new duties as assistant manager to new Ireland handler Mick McCarthy.

Keane, who replaces Roy Keane (no relation) in the role after the lat-



ter and manager Martin O'Neill were fired last week, captained Ireland for a decade.

"Today, after 23 wonderful years, I am formally announcing my retirement as a professional footballer," Keane said in a statement.

"From Crumlin United around the world to the likes of Milan, London and Los Angeles, I could never have imagined the path my football life would take.

"It has exceeded all the hopes I had as a football-mad boy growing up in Dublin."

Keane, unlike his near namesake, enjoyed good relations with McCarthy in the latter's first spell in charge of the national side.

He was one of their stars at the

2002 World Cup — which infamously saw their one world class player Roy Keane sent home after launching a tirade of abuse at McCarthy — where the Irish went out on penalties in the last 16 to Spain.

Keane also enjoyed a highly successful, if peripatetic, club career which ended with a period as player/manager at Indian outfit ATK, in the season that finished in March.

In all, Keane scored 126 goals in 349 Premier League matches, 91 of them for Tottenham Hotspur, although he also had spells with Coventry, Leeds United and Liverpool in the elite league.

"Leaving home at 15 years of age to pursue my professional career in England seems a lifetime ago now,"

said Keane.

"I was a street footballer full of hope armed with huge ambitions and a determination to succeed."

"All I needed was that one chance."

Keane had especially warm words for his long service to his country on the pitch — winning 146 caps and aside from the 2002 World Cup appearing also in two European Championships.

"Playing and captaining my country has been the highlight of my career," said Keane.

"I enjoyed every moment of the most incredible journey with the Ireland team over an 18-year period and as I have said many times before, words cannot express how proud I am to be Irish."

SPOTLIGHT

Clarrie who? Yasir targets Australian legend's record

AFP
Dubai

Pakistan leg-spinner Yasir Shah does not know much about Clarrie Grimmett but is aware that he has a strong chance of shattering a record set by the Australian 82 years ago.

Yasir tormented New Zealand on his way to a match haul of 14-184 to help Pakistan achieve a series-levelling win by an innings and 16 runs in the second Test in Dubai on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old now has 195 wickets in 32 Tests and needs just five more in the third and final Test starting in Abu Dhabi from Monday to become the quickest bowler to reach 200 Test wickets.

In fact, he will take the record if he can pick up those wickets any time in his next three Tests as Grimmett - also a leg-spinner

- took his 200th wicket in his 36th Test against South Africa in 1936. Yasir admits the record is in his mind but knows little about the holder of it.

"Grimmett? I don't know much about him," said Yasir. "He played so many years ago, but I know about the record because his name comes first whenever I see the list."

"I want to beat that record." Since taking seven wickets on debut against Australia in 2014, Yasir has been a key figure in Pakistan's Test team. He took 12 wickets in that 2-0 series win over Australia in United Arab Emirates in 2014 and followed that with 15 against New Zealand in a 1-1 draw the same year.

That was followed by 24 wickets against Sri Lanka in 2015 and ten wickets in a match to beat England at Lord's a year later. He took 21 and 25 wickets respectively in series wins over the West Indies. Yasir reached 100

wickets in 17 Tests, second only to Englishman George Lohmann who reached the target in 16 matches during a Test in Johannesburg in 1896.

"I am very happy to have contributed to the team's wins," said Yasir. "That is my job and I realise that responsibility to take wickets and get my team more and more wins."

Yasir's figures in Dubai are the second best match return ever for Pakistan in Test cricket, bettered only by former captain and current prime minister Imran Khan who took 14-116 against Sri Lanka in Lahore in 1982.

"I have equalled Imran Khan and that's a big honour for me," said Yasir. "My name will come with his and that's great and I await his message."

Yasir admitted the loss of his mother just days before the New Zealand series had made him anxious. "It was tough coming here," said Yasir. "I was very

tense. You are nothing without your mother. When I used to go out for the match I would call her to pray for me to get five wickets and she would reply that 'why not 10 or 15, why just five?'

"I would like to dedicate this feat to my mother."

Pakistan's head coach Mickey Arthur said that Yasir's 14-wicket haul in the second Test against New Zealand featured some of the best leg-spinning ever seen.

"We knew he had a big performance inside of him," said Arthur of Yasir, who now has 195 wickets in 32 Tests.

"That first innings, I think there was a spell of about half an hour of the best leg-spin bowling you will ever see. Fourteen wickets in a Test match is superb. 'Yasir is very comfortable mentally, and he knows what an important cog he is in our Test line up,'" Arthur said.

"He got his rhythm going and we felt he was really good."



Pakistan's Yasir Shah with his Man-of-the-Match award after beating New Zealand in the second Test in Dubai. (AFP)

FOCUS

Former teammates clash over Australia's non-aggression pact

'You don't need to be best mates with everyone. Australian cricket, I think, needs to stop worrying about being liked and start worrying about being respected'



Michael Clarke (right) and Simon Katich fire up over team culture.

Reuters
Sydney

Michael Clarke and Simon Katich famously clashed physically in the dressing room when they were test players and this week they have become embroiled in a verbal disagreement over Australia's commitment to be less aggressive on the pitch.

Clarke joined a chorus of former players who have criticised the new ethos propagated in the wake of March's ball-tampering scandal, saying Australia's chances of success would be compromised if their aggressive streak was tempered.

"You don't need to be best mates with everyone. Australian cricket, I think, needs to stop worrying about being liked and start worrying about being respected," former Australia captain Clarke told Macquarie Sports Radio.

"Play tough Australian cricket. Because whether we like it or not, that's in our blood."

"If you try and walk away from it, we might be the most liked team in the world, we're not going to win (anything). We won't win a game. Boys and girls want to win."

Katich, a former test opener, has been touted as a candidate to join the Cricket Australia (CA) board in the wake of a highly critical cultural review that forced the resignation of

chairman David Peever. Among the findings of the Longstaff Review was that on-field abuse of opponents had been "normalised" and a culture of "winning without counting the cost" had been fostered in the Australian game. Katich thought Clarke had missed the point.

"What's been forgotten in all of this is we blatantly cheated and the reason we're at this point now, and what led us to this point, and we talk about the line that was talked about for so long," he told SEN radio.

"The point is, we were caught for blatantly cheating and we have to rectify that as soon as possible to earn back the respect of the cricketing public in Australia and worldwide."

"We've been a disliked team for a number of years through that on-field behaviour and it obviously came to a head in Cape Town."

"They can still play the Australian way in terms of playing competitive and playing fairly, but not going over the top and going across the rules like they did in Cape Town."

Captain Steve Smith and his vice captain David Warner were banned for a year, while batsman Cameron Bancroft was suspended for nine months by Cricket Australia for the attempts to tamper with the ball in a test against South Africa in Cape Town.

Eddings made permanent CA chairman

Earl Eddings was named the new permanent chairman of Cricket Australia (CA) by the board yesterday, four weeks after taking up the post on a temporary basis when David Peever was forced to resign. A director on the board for the 10 years, Eddings would serve until next October's annual general meeting when the post would be filled by a candidate nominated after consultation with the state associations, cricket Australia said. Eddings takes on the role at a difficult time for the game in Australia after last year's bitter pay dispute with the players was followed by a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in March that rocked the sport. Peever resigned a little more than a week after being re-elected for a second three-year term, bowing to public pressure in the wake of a scathing review of the board's governance and culture.

"There's no question this year has been a challenging one for cricket and for cricket Australia. Our aim is to ensure management are empowered to rebuild trust and

strengthen the game," CA director Jackie Hey said in a statement. "Earl's involvement over the past decade provides continuity in a time of change and enables the board to maintain strong relations with the ICC (cricket's governing body), other member countries and our valued partners."

The Longstaff report, which was not released until after Peever's second term was secured, found the board partially culpable for the events in Cape Town which led to bans for Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft. The report also said CA was perceived as "arrogant" and "controlling" by stakeholders and had nurtured a culture of "winning without counting the costs".

"Cricket is only what it is in Australia because of the commitment of our people, the fans and the thousands of volunteers around the country," Eddings said. "I am honoured to serve in this position and am committed to making cricket stronger and a game that we can all be proud of."

TWENTY 20

Ex-Aussie captain Smith to play in Bangladesh league

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh Premier League side Comilla Victorians on Tuesday announced the signing of former Australian captain Steve Smith for the upcoming edition of the Twenty20 tournament.

Victorians coach Mohamed Salahuddin told AFP that Smith would join the team mid-January for the second phase of the BPL as a replacement for Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik.

"He will come after (the) first four matches in (the) Dhaka phase and join the team in (the northeastern city of) Sylhet," he said. "Shoaib Malik won't be able to play for the whole tournament. He will play in the first round and Steve will join after that."

Australia's ex-vice captain David Warner will also play in the BPL - which runs from January 5 to February 8, 2019 - having signed for the Sylhet Sixers.

Smith and Warner were handed year-long international bans for their roles in a ball-tampering scandal that rocked Australian cricket in March.

The BPL will be Smith's third



T20 league outing - after Canada's Global T20 and the Caribbean Premier League - since the ban was imposed.

He also recently signed up for the Pakistan Super League, which will be played in February and March. Victorians coach Salahuddin was ecstatic with the Smith signing.

"The balance of the team will be better. I needed an experienced batsman in the team. We needed a batsman who would understand the game situation and control the game," he said.

The BPL, which started in 2011, was hit by allegations of match-fixing in its early years.

After a suspension, the tournament resumed in 2015 and has since been staged without serious controversy.

Weather hits India preparations for Australia Test series

The start of India's only warm-up match for the Test series against Australia was delayed by torrential rain yesterday, with the four-day clash against a Cricket Australia XI looking unlikely to get underway before today. Storms battered the New South Wales coast yesterday morning, flooding streets, railway stations and homes as the extreme weather caused commuter chaos, grounded flights and left hundreds of homes without electricity. Play was impossible at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where the tourists are scheduled to play a non-first class tour match against an understrength representative side featuring just one international, D'Arcy Short. The test series begins in Adelaide on December 6, with further matches in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney over the following month.

COMMENT

Coach Bayliss wants Stokes to avoid ban

Reuters
London

England coach Trevor Bayliss is hopeful that Ben Stokes' "exemplary" conduct since an altercation outside a nightclub last year can help the all-rounder avoid a ban ahead of the side's tour of the West Indies starting in January.

Stokes and batsman Alex Hales face a disciplinary hearing early next month after the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had charged the pair with bringing the game into disrepute following the September 2017 incident in Bristol.

"I hope he (Stokes) is available for our next game. I think he's learnt a lesson since that time. The way he's conducted himself since he's come back into the fold has been exemplary," Bayliss told reporters.

"The hearing coming up

hasn't affected him, I haven't heard it mentioned once around the changing room."

The pair could face any of a range of penalties from a warning to the termination of their contracts. Stokes, who was cleared of affray in August, played an important role with bat and ball as England completed their first 3-0 test series sweep in Sri Lanka on Monday.

"You can throw the ball to him, you can put him in any situation with the bat, you can put him where the ball is coming in the field. For me, he's the first picked," Bayliss added.

"His averages may not be the greatest in each of his positions, but you add those three disciplines together, it adds up to one hell of a player."

England take on West Indies in three tests, five one-day internationals and three Twenty20 internationals from January to March.

NBA

Raptors rally against Grizzlies for 6th straight win

Lowry scores 15 in second half as Raptors overcome 17-point deficit for victory

Reuters
New York

Kyle Lowry scored 24 points, including 15 in the second half, and the visiting Toronto Raptors overcame a 17-point deficit to defeat the Memphis Grizzlies 122-114 Tuesday night.

Kawhi Leonard added 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Raptors, who won their sixth game in a row.

Fred VanVleet was 6-for-6 from the field for 18 points off the bench — 14 in the second half — for the Raptors. Serge Ibaka contributed 16 points.

Marc Gasol led Memphis with 27 points, and Mike Conley added 20 points.

NUGGETS 117, LAKERS 85

Paul Millsap had 20 points and 11 rebounds, Jamal Murray scored 20, and host Denver routed Los Angeles.

Malik Beasley also had 20 points to establish a career high, and Nikola Jokic had 14 points, seven rebounds and seven assists for the Nuggets. Denver has won four straight after dropping six of its previous seven.

The Lakers were 5 of 35 from behind the 3-point arc and shot just 39.1% overall. Kyle Kuzma, who led Los Angeles with 21 points, was 1-for-7 from long range, and LeBron James missed all four of his 3-point attempts. James finished with 14 points and seven rebounds.

PACERS 109, SUNS 104

Domantas Sabonis scored 21 points and grabbed 16 rebounds to lead Indiana to a win at Phoenix.

With the game tied at 104 with under a minute to play, Bojan Bogdanovic, the league's top 3-point shooter, cashed in from the corner to give the Pacers a 107-104 lead. After Devin Booker just missed a 3-point try, Darren Collison was fouled and made two free throws to clinch the game for Indiana with 12 seconds left.

Six players scored in double figures for the Pacers, who also got 21 points from Doug McDermott. T.J. Warren paced the Suns with 25 points, and rookie DeAndre Ayton recorded his 12th double-double with 18 points and 12 rebounds.

HAWKS 115, HEAT 113

Rookie Trae Young had a double-double with 17 points and 10 assists as Atlanta edged host Miami.

Trailing by two points, the Heat had the ball after a timeout with 14.4 seconds left in the fourth quarter. However, Dwyane Wade, coming off a 35-point game, passed up an open jumper on the left wing and got the ball to Josh Richardson, whose 3-point attempt missed off the front rim to end the game.

Miami, which has lost six consecutive home games, was led by Richardson, who scored nine of his 22 points in the fourth quarter. Atlanta won its second straight game overall and also snapped a seven-game road losing skid.

PISTONS 115, KNICKS 108

Blake Griffin scored 30 points, and Detroit continued its success at home at New York's expense.

Griffin produced his sixth 30-point game of the season as Detroit shot 47.5%, controlled the paint by a 56-38 margin and posted its fourth straight home win. Reserve Stanley Johnson and starter Reggie Jackson contributed 21 points apiece as the Pistons also won for the seventh time in their past nine games overall.

Rookie Allonzo Trier led the Knicks with 24 points and 10 rebounds off the bench, but New York saw a three-game winning streak end.



Toronto Raptors guard Kyle Lowry (7) shoots in the first half against the Memphis Grizzlies at FedExForum in Memphis, Tennessee, on Tuesday. (USA TODAY Sports)

FOCUS

Ex-lottery pick Fredette wants second NBA chance

Reuters
New York

Former NBA lottery pick Jimmer Fredette vowed to "succeed" if given a second chance to play in the league, USA Today reported Tuesday.

Fredette, 29, has played the past two years in China with the Shanghai Sharks after an inauspicious career in the NBA with four different teams. Fredette is the reigning Most Valuable Player of the Chinese Basketball Association after averaging 37.6 points per game for the Sharks, including a 73-point outing in early 2017.

"I want to have another opportunity in the NBA because there is some unfinished business for me there," Fredette told USA Today. "After this season is over, I want another NBA chance. This time, I'll succeed.... I know

that if I get a chance, I will take advantage of it and be successful and help a team win."

Fredette, a 6-foot-2 guard, was the unanimous national player of the year in college basketball in 2011 after shattering NCAA scoring records. He is the all-time leading scorer in BYU and Mountain West Conference history. Further, he holds five other MWC records as well as 11 BYU records.

However, the wunderkind's game did not translate well to the NBA; he averaged just 6 points per game in five NBA seasons.

Fredette was drafted 10th overall by the Milwaukee Bucks in 2011 and subsequently traded to the Sacramento Kings.

After two-plus seasons with the Kings, Fredette played briefly for the Chicago Bulls, one full season with the New Orleans Pelicans, and just two games with the New York Knicks in 2016.

MLB

Tigers reach deal with Moore: reports

Agencies
New York

The Detroit Tigers have agreed to a one-year deal with left-hander Matt Moore, according to multiple reports on Tuesday.

The deal will be worth between \$2.5mn and \$3mn guaranteed, according to MLB.com.

Moore, 29, is coming off a porous campaign in which he went 3-8 with a 6.79 ERA in 39 appearances (12 starts) for the Texas Rangers.

Moore's best season was in 2013 when he went 17-4 with a 3.29 ERA in 27 starts and made the American League All-Star team for the Tampa Bay Rays.

He missed most of the following two seasons after undergoing Tommy John surgery.

The Rays traded Moore to the San Francisco Giants during the 2016 season. Moore's 15 losses in 2017 tied for most in the National League. He went 12-20 with a 5.12 ERA in parts of two seasons with the Giants before he was traded to the Rangers.

Moore is 54-56 with a 4.56 ERA in 179 career appearances (149 starts) over parts of eight seasons.

GIANTS WILLING TO DEAL ACE BUMGARNER: REPORT

Madison Bumgarner, a pillar of the World Series championship teams in San Francisco, could be traded by the Giants.

Giants' president of baseball operations Farhan Zaidi is open to offers for the Cy Young-winning southpaw, according to MLB.com's Jon Morosi, as San Francisco begins the process of



Madison Bumgarner.

restocking its farm system. According to the report, the Milwaukee Brewers, Philadelphia Phillies and Atlanta Braves have had dialogue with Zaidi about prying Bumgarner away from the Giants. Morosi adds the Braves have recently stepped back from the pursuit of a trade.

Bumgarner, 29, is entering the final year of his contract and owed a relatively paltry \$12mn for 2018. By comparison, Max Scherzer (Nationals), David Price (Red Sox) and Clayton Kershaw (Dodgers) can all earn over \$30mn for next season.

Bumgarner, a four-time All-Star, guided the Giants to three World Series (2010, 2012, 2014) and was named 2014 Most Valuable Player. He has a career 2.11 ERA in the playoffs with an 8-3 record.

In an injury-shortened 2018 season, Bumgarner made 21 starts and posted a 3.26 ERA. He turns 30 in August.

The Giants' farm system includes only one prospect in the top 70 according to MLB.com ratings.

NHL

Golden Knights rolls an 8 in Blackhawks blowout

Reuters
New York

Cody Eakin and Shea Theodore each had two goals and an assist, and Alex Tuch added a goal and an assist as the visiting Vegas Golden Knights scored a franchise-record eight goals while cruising to their fourth straight victory, 8-3 over the Chicago Blackhawks on Tuesday night.

William Karlsson, Ryan Reaves and Daniel Carr also scored goals and Deryk Engelland had a career-high three assists for Vegas, which has outscored its past four opponents 19-5.

Tomas Nosek, Max Pacioretty and Ryan Carpenter had two assists apiece for the Golden Knights.

Marc-Andre Fleury made 21 saves for his 13th win of the season for the Golden Knights to move into a tie with Toronto's Frederik Andersen for the NHL lead.

Dylan Strome had a goal and an assist, and Gustav Forsling and Erik Gustafsson also scored goals for Chicago,

RESULTS

NSabres	3-2	Sharks
Golden Knights	8-3	Blackhawks
Hurricanes	2-1	Canadiens
Penguins	4-3	Jets
Senators	4-3	Flyers
Coyotes	4-3	Wild
Avalanche	3-2	Predators
Oilers	1-0	Stars
Ducks	3-1	Lightning
Kings	2-1	Canucks

past Fleury. However, Vegas successfully challenged that the Blackhawks were offside, and a video replay confirmed that Artem Anisimov had entered the zone too soon.

Tuch made it 2-0 when Crawford turned over the puck on a clearing pass. Tuch fired a wrist shot past the Blackhawks goalie's blocker side for his eighth goal of the season and third in three games.

Eakin scored his first goal of the game off a nifty backhand pass from Pacioretty, deking Crawford down and then easily scoring on a backhand for a 3-0 lead at 16:14 of the first period.

The Blackhawks cut it to 3-1 when Forsling's long wrist shot from the right point caromed in off Karlsson, who was standing to the side of the net. However, Karlsson came right back a power-play goal six minutes later.

Strome, acquired from Arizona on Sunday, scored his fourth goal of the season in his Chicago debut to make it 4-2, but Vegas answered with goals by Reaves and Eakin and two more by Theodore to blow the game open.



Patrick Kane (right) of the Chicago Blackhawks hits the ice trying to control the puck against Shea Theodore (left) of the Vegas Golden Knights at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois, on Tuesday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Coughlin blames Jaguars' fall on NFL points craze

Defense-first approach that worked in 2017 has Jacksonville out in the cold this season

Reuters
New York

From the doorstep of the Super Bowl to the depths of the AFC South, the Jacksonville Jaguars are looking for answers as the 2018 season slips away.

Executive vice president of football operations Tom Coughlin has a few ideas on the causes that sparked Jacksonville's spiral to 3-8. The Jaguars enter Week 13 on a seven-game losing streak.

"We're a whistle (away, or) we're in the Super Bowl. And that's my position, OK? So tell me, everyone out there, what they're going to do in that circumstance about your football team," Coughlin asked rhetorically during a radio interview, making reference to linebacker Myles Jack being ruled down after a fumble in the 24-20 loss to the New England Patriots in the 2018 AFC Championship game. "Aren't you going to fill other pieces in and try to be as good as you can be? And we tried, didn't we? Well, the nature of the game got us, so we go back to the drawing board. But I'll put the gloves on with anybody that wants to talk about what [moves the team made]."

The Jaguars made a few decisions in personnel, which falls under Coughlin's direct purview, that are open to second-guessing. For one, the defending division champions retained quarterback Blake Bortles with a three-year, \$54mn extension when they could have simply allowed him to play the final year of his deal in 2018 before tending to the contract.

Bortles was benched in favour of Cody Kessler for this week's game against the Indianapolis Colts.

Jacksonville signed wide receiver Donte Moncrief to a one-year, \$9.4mn contract and he has 34 receptions this season.



Jacksonville Jaguars running back Leonard Fournette (centre, bottom) runs the ball in for a touchdown during the first half against the Buffalo Bills at New Era Field in Orchard Park, New York, on Tuesday. (USA TODAY Sports)

The Jaguars invested a first-round pick in defensive tackle Taven Bryan. Not only has Bryan disappointed with 12 tackles and zero sacks, the Jaguars were already abundantly stocked at the position.

Coughlin admits those moves were made with a certain style of play in mind. The grinding, defensive-first approach that worked

effectively in 2017 has Jacksonville out in the cold this season.

"I still believe all that, but I also recognise the rule changes," Coughlin said. "I also recognise what the public wants, and I mean, it's obvious. These games, can you believe some of these college games - 59-56? But in watching those games, obviously there's tremendous skill.

There's tremendous ability. "I believe in a certain way of playing the game. And certainly what the direction that the league wants the game to go in, and all those things are up. Points are up. Everything is up, but our formula a year ago was play great defense, run the ball and do a superb job of play-action pass. Obviously I still be-

lieve in that very much but you have to - if you're going to rush the football you've got to have the explosive plays. You've got to put the ball down the field. There was a time when our big plays were all kinds of big plays. And it was this style of offense still being played. But that's the formula that you still have to get to in my opinion."

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Suspension could cost Fournette up to \$7mn

Reuters
New York

If Leonard Fournette's one-game suspension is upheld, the Jacksonville running back could miss out on a lot more than one game check. According to Pro Football Talk's Mike Florio on Tuesday, multiple league sources say Fournette's contract contains "sufficient language to support an argument that the suspen-

sion voids the remaining guarantees in Fournette's four-year rookie contract, wiping out a \$7mn obligation that extends over 2019 and 2020." Additionally, Florio reports that the team does not have to make that decision after this season. In other words, Jacksonville can bring Fournette back for the 2019 season at the \$2.9mn he is owed, then decide after that season whether to pay him the \$4.1mn he is owed for 2020. The ability to void the guaran-

tees would give the Jags the flexibility to release Fournette with no salary-cap ramifications (seemingly unlikely) or trade him since a next team would not be tied to \$7mn in guarantees. ESPN's Adam Schefter has reported that Fournette's appeal would be heard Tuesday. He was suspended one game following a fight with Buffalo Bills defensive end Shaq Lawson on Sunday. Both players were ejected, though Fournette was

the only player disciplined by the league. Fournette's second season has been marred by injuries and certainly has played a role in the Jags' woeful 3-8 record this season. Fournette has played in parts of only five games this season, rushing for 314 yards and four touchdowns on 90 carries. Last season, he rushed for 1,040 yards on 268 carries and scored 10 total touchdowns, helping the Jaguars to the AFC

title game. Fournette would be able to challenge any decision to void guarantees in his contract. Florio also pointed out that this scenario is why Chicago rookie linebacker Roquan Smith held out until mid-August. He was concerned over language in the contract that would have allowed the Bears to void guaranteed money should Smith be suspended by the NFL under its new helmet rules.

MOTORSPORT

Alonso returning to Daytona next year

Reuters
London

Twice Formula One champion **Fernando Alonso** will return to Daytona in January for another tilt at the Rolex 24 Hours endurance race, Wayne Taylor Racing said on Tuesday.

Alonso competed last year with United Autosports, a team owned by McLaren boss Zak Brown, before going on to win the 24 Hours of Le Mans with Toyota.

He said farewell to Formula One at Sunday's season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

"Returning to the United States is always special. The atmosphere created by the fans is unique throughout an incredible weekend," said the Spaniard. "I really hope to fight for the win, as well as having fun..."

Toyota world endurance driver Kamui Kobayashi will join the 37-year-old, who is scheduled to race the Indianapolis 500 in May, at the Jan. 26-27 race along with Wayne Taylor regulars Jordan Taylor and Renger van der Zande.

HAAS OPTS AGAINST APPEAL OVER FORCE INDIA DECISION

Formula One team Haas will not appeal a decision by Abu Dhabi Grand Prix stewards to dismiss their protest over the official recognition of rivals Force India, the American outfit said on Wednesday.

Haas had argued that Force India, who went into administration in July and re-emerged under new ownership in August, had breached the rules and that



the cars of Sergio Perez and Esteban Ocon should not be allowed to race in the season.

However, the North Carolina-based team was unsuccessful in their protest, as stewards at the season-ending race cleared Force India and recognised them as a new constructor whose cars were eligible to compete.

"@HaasF1Team has elected not to appeal the decision of the FIA Stewards (UAE Document 20 - Haas Protest Decision) following the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, Nov. 22-25 2018," the team said on its Twitter account.

Haas finished fifth in the constructors' championship on 93 points, two places above Force India, who lost all of the points they accumulated before the Belgian Grand Prix in August.



Force India driver Sergio Perez competes during the qualifying session in Abu Dhabi on Saturday. Haas had argued that Force India, who re-emerged under new ownership in August, had breached the rules and that the cars of Sergio Perez and Esteban Ocon should not be allowed to race in the season. (AFP)

NFL

Sizzling Saints visit improving Cowboys

Reuters
New York

The New Orleans Saints (10-1) have won a league-best 10 consecutive games.

The Dallas Cowboys (6-5) have climbed back to the top of the NFC East with three consecutive victories, and owner Jerry Jones has called the Thursday night game against the Saints the Cowboys' "Super Bowl."

Are you ready some football? Quarterback Drew Brees, in his 18th NFL season, certainly is as he attempts to keep the Saints' momentum rolling.

"I can't say it's no big deal, I mean (to) go back to the home state," said Brees, a native of Austin. "That's where I'm from. I remember waking up every Sunday morning watching the Cowboys after church, so that was a big deal growing up, and that was obviously a heyday for them and with (Troy) Aikman and the 'Boys. So yeah there's a little something to it."

The Saints need to keep winning to capture the significant prize they are seeking - the No. 1 seed in the NFC and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. They are tied with the Los Angeles Rams at 10-1 but hold the tiebreaker due to their 45-35 head-to-head victory on Nov. 4.

New Orleans leads the league in scoring at 37.2 points per game, which is a full three points per game higher than the franchise single-season record set in 2011. Brees has completed a league-high 76.4% of his passes and thrown for 29 touchdowns against two interceptions.

Running back Alvin Kamara has rolled up 1,225 yards from scrimmage and 15 touchdowns in the first 11 games, and wide receiver Michael Thomas (86 receptions) is second in the NFL in catches, trailing only Minnesota's Adam Thielen (93).

The Saints have averaged 151 rushing yards and have scored 17 rushing touchdowns in their past nine games.

"Yeah, they've won 10 games in a

row," Dallas coach Jason Garrett said. "It's hard to do that in the NFL. In all three phases of their team... their guys show up, they've got playmakers all throughout their team, they know how to use them and they're just playing at an extremely high level."

The Cowboys have righted their ship after a 3-5 start, improving behind running back Ezekiel Elliott, who has rushed for 394 yards on 68 attempts and three touchdowns in the three victories. Dallas quarterback Dak Prescott has been helped by the midseason trade acquisition of wide receiver Amari Cooper, who has 349 receiving yards in four games with the Cowboys.

The Dallas defense is allowing just 19.4 points a game.

Saints safety Kurt Coleman said Cooper has been significant to the Cowboys' offense.

"They wanted a No. 1 wide receiver because he opens up the offense," Coleman said. "You can't crowd the box. Amari is making big plays and keeping the box light."

New Orleans Saints
quarterback Drew Brees.



F1

Podium domination by top teams is unacceptable: Brawn

'I don't mean to cause offence by referring to the 'other' championship, it's just a way of describing the situation and their battle was certainly thrilling. However, it's hard for the fans to truly get excited about a battle for eighth place'



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton (second right) celebrates on the podium after winning the Azerbaijan Grand Prix as Force India's Sergio Perez (right) and Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen (left) look on. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

The top three teams' domination of the Formula One podium over the past two seasons is unacceptable and has to change, the sport's managing director for motorsport Ross Brawn said yesterday.

Force India's Sergio Perez was the only driver outside Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull to finish a grand prix in the top three in this year's 21 races, the Mexican ending up third in Azerbaijan in April. Canadian Lance Stroll, for Williams, was in the same position at the same Baku circuit in 2017, when the season had 20 races. "Two podiums from a total of 123 is unacceptable, especially when it comes with an ever increasing technical and financial divide," Brawn said in a Formula One season review after last Sunday's closing Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

"It's a problem we are tackling together with the (governing) FIA and the teams, because the future

of Formula One depends on it," added the Briton, who was previously a technical director of Ferrari and principal of Mercedes. Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull are also the only teams to have won a Formula One race since the current V6 turbo hybrid engines were introduced in 2014.

Sunday was the 100th grand prix of that era and Lewis Hamilton, now a five times world champion, has won 51 of them for Mercedes. Hamilton also won 11 races this year, leading 458 of the season's 1,264 laps.

German driver Nico Hulkenberg, who races for the Renault works team and was 'best of the rest' in seventh place overall this year, has now started 156 grands prix without once standing on the podium. Brawn said seven of the 10 teams were effectively racing in their own championship.

"There are various solutions on the table and we must all accept that we can't go on like this for too much longer," said Brawn.

"I don't mean to cause offence by referring to the 'other' championship, it's just a way of describing the situation and their

battle was certainly thrilling. However, it's hard for the fans to truly get excited about a battle for eighth place."

The top three places in the constructors' championship were decided before the season-ender, with Mercedes winning both titles for the fifth year in a row. The rules are being tweaked for 2019, with aerodynamic changes aimed at making it easier for drivers to follow cars and battle on track, ahead of a more substantial overhaul planned for 2021.

The top teams are already working hard to limit the impact on performance, however, and have far bigger budgets to play with than the smaller teams.

"The downforce is basically being set back by a year or more, and we have to compensate," Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said at the weekend.

"But there is a bunch of really, really clever people who are looking at the regulations and trying to find ways of having a lot of downforce on the car and I'm curious to see whether those cars are really going to be slower next year or not."

More than 100 women apply for 'W Series'

More than 100 applicants from around the world have sought to join a new all-female motor racing series aimed at getting them into Formula One, where no woman has competed since 1976. Organisers yesterday issued a long list of 55 for the W Series, which is set to launch in May with 18 drivers racing 1.8 litre Formula Three cars for a \$1.5 million prize fund.

The drivers, whose ages range from 17 to 33 and include some familiar names to fans who follow the various junior series, now face on and off-track tests with former grand prix racers David Coulthard and Alex Wurz among the judges.

Spain's ex-Lotus and Renault Formula One development driver Carmen Jorda, a 30-year-old who also sits on the governing FIA's women's commission, was one of those to go on to the next phase.

Amna al-Qubaisi, 18, the first female racing driver from the United Arab Emirates who has competed in Italian Formula Four and will test a Formula E car in Saudi Arabia next month, was another. So too was Britain's Jamie Chadwick, 20, who in 2015 became the first female driver to win a British GT championship and this year became the first woman to win a round of the British Formula Three series, finishing eighth overall.

Indian racers Mira Erda, 18, and Sneha Sharma, 28, also made the long list.

The W Series organisers say they hope to provide a platform for women to develop their skills before taking on male drivers further up the motorsport ladder.

The first race is scheduled for Hockenheim, Germany, on May 3 and the overall series winner will collect \$500,000, with prize money down to 18th place.

BOXING

Trainer Roach never left his team, says Pacquiao

AFP
Manila

Manny Pacquiao said Tuesday that veteran trainer Freddie Roach never left his orbit, despite a public split, and was helping the Filipino boxing legend get ready for his upcoming bout in Las Vegas.

Pacquiao was training in Manila ahead of the January 19 showdown against Adrien Broner, a fight that may be a prelude to a long-spectulated rematch with Floyd Mayweather. The Roach-Pacquiao reunion comes after the men abruptly parted ways, breaking up one of boxing's most famous double-acts, following the Filipino's defeat to Jeff Horn in 2017.

Roach was reported to have been upset by his dismissal, but agreed to return after late-night talks with the fighter last week.

"I tell people even in America that Freddie never left Team Pacquiao," Pacquiao, 39, told reporters after hitting the mitts. "He is still involved in the training."

Pacquiao, the only fighter to

win world titles in eight different weight divisions, got a boost to his storied, but slowing boxing career, after stopping Argentina's Lucas Matthysse in July in Kuala Lumpur.

Just over six months later he will be back in the ring, this time against Broner, a 29-year-old American, for his first US fight since 2016.

"I am already excited. (After) more than two years I am coming back to Vegas to fight," said Pacquiao.

Speculation remains high that the Broner bout could be a warm-up for a sequel to 2015's "Fight of the Century", that Pacquiao lost to Mayweather on points.

Undefeated Mayweather said in September he was ready to fight Pacquiao, but no definite plans have emerged since.

Last week the Filipino champ told reporters he and Mayweather have talked about fighting again, but said he would see after the Broner match.

Pacquiao did not address the speculation on Tuesday, saying only about any future matches: "I can fight anybody. We are not picky when it comes to our opponents."

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

India hammer South Africa 5-0 in opener

IANS
Bhubaneswar

India started their 2018 Hockey World Cup campaign on a thunderous note, hammering minnows South Africa 5-0 in the opener at the Kalinga Stadium yesterday.

Three field goals and two penalty corners helped World No 5 India register a comprehensive win in the second match of the evening.

The Indians toyed with the South African defence in the first quarter as they mounted numerous attacks on the opposition goal and to their

credit succeeded on two occasions to take a comfortable 2-0 lead early on. Simranjeet Singh scored two goals (43rd and 46th minute), while Lalit Upadhyay (45th minute), Akashdeep Singh (12th minute) and Mandeep Singh (10th minute) slammed a goal apiece to fashion India's win.

World number five India are eyeing to reclaim the World Cup after 43 years, a title which they won only once way back in 1975 in Kuala Lumpur.

The hosts will next face World No 3 Belgium in their second pool match on December 2. Belgium also pipped Canada 2-1 in the opening match yesterday.



India and South Africa players vying for the ball during their Hockey World Cup match in Bhubaneswar yesterday. (IANS)

GOLF

Tiger hunting more Majors in 2019

AFP
Nassau, Bahamas

Rejuvenated Tiger Woods will head into the New Year excited knowing he's won six of his 14 Major Championship titles on three of the four 2019 host venues.

Former world number one Woods made a successful return to golf this year after missing most of the previous two seasons through injury.

While Woods finished his season with a dramatic, emotional win in the Tour Championship in Atlanta in September, he fell short in the season's Majors, tying for sixth at the British Open and finishing runner-up at the PGA Championship.

Next year however Woods' Major campaign will feature three stops on courses where he was won before.

As well as four victories in the Masters at Augusta National, Woods has also won at Pebble Beach, venue for the US Open, and Bethpage Black in



New York's Long Island, which is hosting the PGA Championship.

"The Major venues for next year do excite me as I have won on three of the four," Woods told AFP. Woods said his performances in the final two Majors of

2018 suggested he was close to winning his 15th big one.

"What I did in the last two major championships, I gave myself a chance to win both of them and I was right there," Woods said in Albany, where he was speaking

ahead of this week's Hero World Challenge.

"That's ultimately what we want to have happen. Now it's about trying to get everything to peak together like I did for those two weeks to do it again four more times. That's the trick. "As you look at anyone who's ever played this game, that is the most difficult thing to do in this game."

"That's why most people haven't won a lot of major championships, because it's so hard to do."

"Fortunately, I was able to do it 14 times and hopefully more in the future."

Woods meanwhile said his enthusiasm to represent the United States in team events was undiminished despite an unhappy return to duty at the Ryder Cup in September.

The 42-year-old said he is determined to be a playing captain when he skips the USA in the Presidents Cup in Royal Melbourne.

Woods would become the first "playing" captain since the inaugural event in 1994 when Hale Irwin captained the victorious

USA side.

"Yes, I would like to captain the side and there has been that precedent already been set, 1994 when Hale Irwin was captain," said Woods. "If I make the team on points, yes, I'll play."

Woods meanwhile defended his participation in last week's head-to-head \$9 million winner-take-all contest against Phil Mickelson last week in Las Vegas, which was criticised as a cash-grab by some critics.

"I think we've got some positive feedback overall," Woods said of the encounter, which was won by Mickelson.

"Obviously, there's some things we can do as far as interaction and as far as play. I wish we both would have played better, but neither one of us putted well that day and there were some tough hole locations out there."

"So, maybe going forward, just don't quite have the greens so fast or the pins so difficult, but also as short as the golf course was playing, we should have made at least seven, eight birdies a piece. We just did not."

Coach Tiger coming to your living room next year

Tiger Woods next year will begin producing weekly golf instructional videos and give fans a glimpse into his life on the PGA Tour as part of a new partnership with Discovery's GOLFTV, the network said on Tuesday. The live and on-demand video streaming service will collaborate with Woods on a wide range of programming to offer fans an authentic look into the life, mind and performance of one of the game's all-time greats, the network said. The 14-time Major champion said he was excited for the new endeavor, which he hoped would generate enthusiasm for the game among a new, younger audience.

"I want to talk to golf fans and golfers everywhere, directly, and straight from me," Woods said. "That's important to me. Talking about what we care about: what's happening on the course, how to play better, how can I shoot lower scores tomorrow, how can I beat my friends?" The 42-year-old said sharing his knowledge of the game through training videos was his way of giving back to people who

share his love for the game. "Getting the chance to do instruction is exciting," he said. "I've always been focused on my own game and this experience can help players everywhere. Whether you're a long-time player or a beginner, there are some things that help us all play better."

"If I can help the next generation enjoy the game more and play better, that's pretty special."

The PGA Tour and pay TV operator Discovery Inc in October announced the creation of GOLFTV, a live and on-demand video streaming service that will give golf fans access to nearly 150 tournaments annually when it launches on January 1. The partnership with GOLFTV comes at an ideal time in Woods' career. After years of setbacks due to multiple back surgeries, the American had a comeback season this year that culminated with a win at the Tour Championship in September, his first PGA Tour win in five years and his 80th overall.

HORSE RACING

Lupie blazes to Muraikh Cup win, Qatari jockeys shine

'He is a very good horse. I thought he wasn't race fit because there was a break. But he jumped well, and he finished really well'

By **Mikhail Bhat**
Doha

A fantastic ride by Marco Casamento saw Injaaz Stud's Lupie sprint to the Muraikh Cup victory on the Al Rayyan Park dirt, even as four Qatari jockeys notched up wins yesterday.

Riding for Mohamed Riyaz, Casamento held back the six-year-old early on in the 1100m race for Class 2 Thoroughbreds, even as another Injaaz horse My Sharona set the pace.

Going into the home straight, Casamento let Lupie go, and the horse steadily moved ahead on the outside to go past the Jassim Mohamed Ghazali-trained My Sharona, with JP Guillambert in the saddle, and held on for a victory with a length to spare.

Ahmed Kobeissi-saddled Notalot edged out Ibrahim al-Malki-trained Victory Laurel by a short head for the second spot, while My Sharona had to settle for fourth.

"He is a very good horse. I thought he wasn't race fit because there was a break," Casamento told *Gulf Times* after the win, referring to Lupie's return to races after a 10-month break.

"But he jumped well, and we waited for the right time and he finished really well. Good run."

This is Casamento's first season in Qatar, and he has already notched 11 top three-finishes including three wins. "It's my first time here and it's been nice so far," said Casamento, who rides in Germany during the European season.

Another rider who has already surpassed his tally of victories from last year is Qatari apprentice jockey Rashid Ali al-Marri.

Al-Marri notched up his fifth win of the season astride Mansoor Mesfer al-Hajri in the Purebred Arabian Handicap event for horses rated 90 and below.

Al-Marri had his six-year-old ride stay midfield even as Ghazali-saddled Saher Elleil Al Sulaimi set the pace up front under Guillambert.

Coming off the final bend, al-Marri moved his mount on the outside and pulled away steadily for a comfortable lead and then held on to win by one and a half lengths, ahead of Alban de Mieuille-trained Dtese and Ghazali's Al Ghawja.

Saleh Salem al-Marri led a one-two along with Rashid in the penultimate race of the day, the Class 3 Thoroughbred Handicap, in which Ghazali saddled his second winner of the day - Roman Legend.



Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Racing manager Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi (third from right) with the winners of the Muraikh Cup after Lupie won the 1100m race at Al Rayyan Park yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim



Marco Casamento rides Injaaz Stud's Lupie to victory in the Muraikh Cup yesterday.



QREC Grandstand and Protocol head Saad al-Hajri (right) with the winners of the Purebred Arabian Novice Cup after Jabal Aramoon won the 1900m race yesterday.

Saleh and Roman Legend went up on the inside to join the duel between Rashid and his mount, Elkhart, and Jean Baptiste Hamel-ridden Rich History in the final furlong of the 1900m race, before edging them out by half a length for a fine win.

Faleh Bughanaim, who was recently awarded the Qatari Jockey of the Year on the Qatar Olympic Committee's Sports Excellence Day, is third in the jockeys' championship so far this season riding his seventh winner yesterday, when Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani schooled Tijan won the six-furlong Thoroughbred Handicap

event for horses rated 70-90.

Qatari apprentice jockey Meteb Ali al-Marri helmed Hamad Ateeq al-Marri-trained Reem Brooq for the first time, but guided the five-year-old filly to her maiden victory on her 23rd outing in the 1700m Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate event.

Mohamed Khaled Elahmed-trained Khat Al Nar raced to his second straight course-and-distance victory with Anas al-Seyabi riding the Subaiya Awad Ibrahim-owned gelding to an easy four-and-a-half-length victory in the six furlong Local Thoroughbred Handicap event

for horses rated 75 and below.

After a couple of low-key runs, Ghazali-saddled Abu Samrah notched his second career win in the 1900m Local Thoroughbred Graduation Plate event under Harry Bentley.

Zuhair Mohsen's ward Jabal Aramoon registered his first victory in Qatar topping the card opener - Purebred Arabian Novice Cup.

RESULTS

Race 1: 1. Jabal Aramoon (Gerald Avranche), 2. Baker De Saularie (Stephan Ladjad), 3. Hamee (Shakir al-Balushi), 4. Ehwez

(Tomas Lukasek). Won by: Nk, 1 ¼, 4 ¾. Time: 2:16.31. Owner: Ali Khalfan Mohamed al-Suwaidi. Trainer: Zuhair Mohsen.

Race 2: 1. Reem Brooq (Meteb Ali al-Marri), 2. Sharifa Azzam (Tomas Lukasek), 3. Sharifa Bu Thaila (Gerald Avranche), 4. The Shark (Anas al-Seyabi). Won by: ¾, 2 ¼, 3 ¾. Time: 1:53.64. Owner: Brooq Stud. Trainer: Hamad Ateeq al-Marri.

Race 3: 1. Abu Samrah (Harry Bentley), 2. Al Ayyar (Rashid Ali al-Marri), 3. Al Ajdal (Faleh Bughanaim), 4. Saar (Gerald Avranche). Won by: ½, 4 ½, 16. Time: 2:06.77. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

Race 4: 1. Khat Al Nar (Anas al-Seyabi), 2. Akram (Shakir al-Balushi), 3. Admiral (Jimmy Quinn), 4. Khoud (Gerald Avranche). Won by: 4 ½, 1 ¾, ¾. Time: 1:13.77. Owner: Subaiya Awad Ibrahim. Trainer: Mohamed Khaled Elahmed.

Race 5: 1. Haddaj Dukhan (Rashid Ali al-Marri), 2. Dtese (Ronan Thomas), 3. Al Ghawja (Harry Bentley), 4. Saher Elleil Al Sulaimi (JP Guillambert). Won by: 1 ½, 3 ¼, No. Time: 2:01.21. Owner: Mansoor Mesfer al-Hajri. Trainer: Mansoor Mesfer al-Hajri.

Race 6: 1. Tijan (Faleh Bughanaim), 2. First To Post (Jimmy Quinn), 3. Hope Cove (Harry Bentley), 4. Lawless Louis (Jean

Baptiste Hamel). Won by: 1 ½, Hd, Nk. Time: 1:12.56. Owner: Nasser Owaida Salem al-Hajri. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.

Race 7: 1. Roman Legend (Saleh Salem al-Marri), 2. Elkhart (Rashid Ali al-Marri), 3. Rich History (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 4. Musical Terms (Harry Bentley). Won by: ½, ¼, 8 ¾. Time: 2:02.27. Owner: Mansoor Ebrahim al-Mahmoud. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

Race 8: 1. Lupie (Marco Casamento), 2. Notalot (Saleem Golam), 3. Victory Laurel (Eduardo Pedroza), 4. My Sharona (JP Guillambert). Won by: 1, Shd, Nk. Time: 1:05.38. Owner: Injaaz Stud. Trainer: Mohamed Riyaz.

AVC ASPIRE BEACH VOLLEYBALL QATAR MASTER 2018

Cherif-Ahmed start on a winning note

By **Sports Reporter**
Doha

Qatar's Cherif Younouss and Ahmed Tijan started their AVC Aspire Beach Volleyball Qatar Master 2018 campaign on a winning note yesterday.

At the Aspire Park yesterday, the World No 10 pair defeated Thai pair of Kittu Duangjinda and Surin Jongklang 21-7, 21-11 in their opening Pool A match.

The Asian Games gold medalists took only 24 minutes for their straight-set win as they collected 11 points in a row in the opening set. Younouss controlled the net with power-packed kills and superb blocks, while Tijan produced solid defence at the back court.

"We're going match by match. We're not thinking about far too long. This is the last event of the year and this is the last piece for our cake. We'll try to do as good as possible to grab it," said Younouss.

The No. 1 Qatar team will face Oman's Ali al-Shibli and Hood al-Jalaboubi today before the knock-out phase begins. Younouss and Tijan were the only Qataris to win their first match,



Qatar's Cherif Younouss and Ahmed Tijan celebrate a point during their AVC Aspire Beach Volleyball Qatar Master group match against Thailand's Kittu Duangjinda and Surin Jongklang yesterday. PICTURE: Jayaram

while 'B' team of Assam Mahmoud and Tamer Abdelrasoul lost to Iranians Rahman Raoufi and Abdolhamed Mirzaali after winning the first set. Nasser Ahmed al-Meer and Hamad al-Kuwari were outclassed by

Thailand's Banlue Nakprakhong and Sedtawat Padsawud 17-21, 7-21. Later, Mahmoud and Abdelrasoul went down fighting to Kazakhstan's Sergey Bogatu and Dmitriy Yakovlev 0-2. Australians also warmed up

well before the knock-out phase with both their teams clinching their crucial group battles. Cole Durant and Damien Schumann stunned former 2014 Asian Games and Asia champions Alexey Sidorenko and Alexandr

Dyachenko 17-21, 21-19, 15-12, while three-time Asia champion Chris McHugh, teaming up with Zachery Schubert defeated Sergey Bogatu and Dmitriy Yakovlev 21-16, 21-18 in 39 minutes.

Iranians Arash Vakili and Bahman Salemiinjeboroun, the Asia runners-up to Younouss and Tijan, won both their pool matches. They first defeated Oman's Nohu Jalboubi and Mazin al-Hashmi 21-14, 21-19 and then they took 37 minutes to beat Japanese Takahashi Takumi and Yoshiumi Hasegawa 21-7, 21-17.

RESULTS

Group stage
Cherif/Ahmed (Qat) beat Kittu/Surin (Tha) 21-7, 21-11 (24 min)
Gottsu/Ageba (Jpn) beat Ali/Hood (Om) 21-11, 21-8 (28 min)
Durant/Schumann (Aus) beat Sidorenko/Dyachenko (Kaz) 1:01 (hours)
Raoufi/Mirzaali (Irn) beat Assam/Tamer (Qat) 18-21, 21-17, 15-12 (57 min)
Vakili/Salemi (Irn) beat Mazin/Nohu (Om) 21-14, 21-19 (32 min)
Banlue/Sedtawat (Tha) beat Nasser/Hamad (Qat) 21-17, 21-7 (28 min)
McHugh/Schubert (Aus) beat Bogatu/Yakovlev (Kaz) 21-16, 21-18 (39 min)

SPOTLIGHT

Carlsen retains World chess crown

AFP
London

Three-time Chess champion **Magnus Carlsen** yesterday successfully defended his world title after demolishing US hopeful Fabiano Caruana in a winner-takes-all finale.

The 27-year-old Norwegian won three successive rapid-Chess tiebreakers in a display of intuition and guile that overwhelmed the 26-year-old American in London.

The fearless performance will go a long way to cementing his claim to be history's greatest player - a title some still award to Soviet-Russian legend Garry Kasparov.

Kasparov himself appeared in awe of Carlsen's display in a format that has seen many grandmasters before him wilt under the mental strain.

"Carlsen's consistent level of play in rapid Chess is phenomenal," Kasparov tweeted. "We all play worse as we play faster and faster, but his ratio may be the smallest ever, perhaps only a 15 percent drop off. Huge advantage in this format!"



The games marked a complete departure from the string of draws played out in their original 12-match series which began on November 9.

Yet those tense tugs of war were a testament to the prodigious skills of the American Italian.

The first US contender since Bobby Fischer beat the Soviet Union's Boris Spassky at height of the Cold War in 1972 is the game's second-ranked player.

Caruana has spent most of his career in Carlsen's shadow but is rated only three points below the Norwegian's leading 2,855 points.