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Al-Attiyah survives mayhem to lead in Kuwait



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United can reach League top four, says Mourinho

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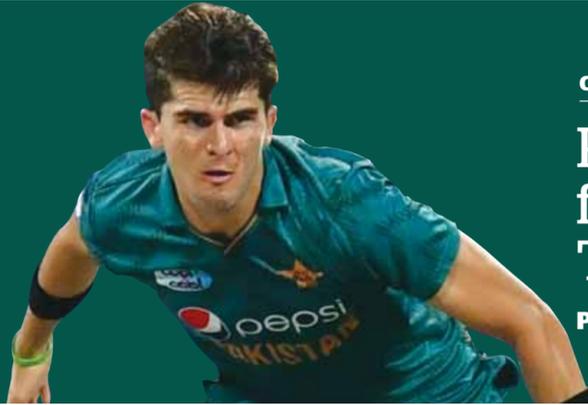
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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Pakistan beat NZ for 11th straight T20 series win

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48TH ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS DOHA 2018

Biles vaults to title No 13

American wins her first Worlds Vault gold; Derwael is first female Belgian gymnast to win world title

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

It's inconceivable that Simone Biles had not won a Vault Worlds title before yesterday. Of course, she had clinched gold at the Rio Olympics but a victory in her favourite apparatus had eluded her till now at the world championships. In the previous years, she had to settle for two silvers and a bronze.

Yesterday at the Aspire Dome though, Biles broke the jinx as she cruised to victory and fittingly the gold in Vault also made her the most decorated world champion in gymnastics history with 13 titles.

Having come to Doha with ten world titles, Biles has added three

and Germany's Elisabeth Seitz (14.600) to become the first female Belgian gymnast to win a world title.

Back to Biles, she will be in action in two more apparatus today, the last day of the Doha Worlds. If she does manage to add two more medals in Balance Beam and Floor Exercise - which most likely she will - then the Texan will become the first woman to make the podium in every event at Worlds since Yelena Shushunova of the Soviet Union in 1987. She would also tie retired Russian Svetlana Khorkina for the most world medals for a woman with 20.

After a fall on the Vault during her All-around title win on Thursday, Biles decided to go for a much simpler routine for the individual final yesterday. She ditched her signature Vault, and went for one which has a lesser difficulty level.

Yet she performed one which was too good for seven other finalists and finished with a score of 15.366, more than eight-tenths higher than silver medallist Shallon Olsen of Canada. Alexa Moreno of Mexico was further back with 14.508, as she took bronze ahead of 43-year-old Uzbek Oksana Chusovitina, who was competing in her 16th world championships since first taking part in 1991.

An hour later, Biles came second to Derwael on Bars, her weaker apparatus of the four. Biles was 14th on Bars in Rio and had previously made final at Worlds, finishing fourth in 2013. "I've come a long way (on the bars) and I'm really pleased with the performance I put out today," Biles said. "I really put the work and the effort in to bring that event up to the same standard as the others. I think I'm off to a good start and hopefully it gets the ball rolling for tomorrow," she added, making her intent clear of finishing the meet in style.

Derwael said she had to come up with something special to beat Biles. "It was one of my best routines that I've done here so far. I



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



Winner Simone Biles (centre) of the US, silver medallist Shallon Olsen (left) of Canada and bronze medallist Alexa Moreno of Mexico pose during the medals ceremony for the women's Vault event yesterday.

felt a lot of stress before mounting the bars, but once I got into my rhythm, I could feel, 'Yeah, it's going great,' and continued like that. Then, when I stuck my landing, it was just a relief," the 18-year-old said.

Meanwhile, Eleftherios Petrounias won the men's Rings title for the third successive time, despite carrying a shoulder injury to Doha. The Greek postponed a surgery so that he could make it a hat-trick of titles, and the deci-



Belgium's Nina Derwael won gold in women's Uneven Bars.



Winner Artur Dalaloyan (centre) of Russia, silver medallist Kenzo Shirai (left) of Japan and bronze medallist Carlos Edriel Yulo of the Philippines with their medals for the men's Floor Exercise.

points, ahead of Zanetti (15.100) and Italy's Marco Lodadio (14.900).

The Pommel Horse title came down to a tiebreaker. Xiao Ruoteng, who on Wednesday lost his All-around bid via tiebreak, this time took gold over Olympic champion Max Whitlock of Great Britain. Both tied for 15.166, but the Chinese took the gold thanks to higher execution score.

"Max is a superstar, but he made some little mistakes, so I think I was a little better than he," said Ruoteng. "Apparently the judges preferred my performance. It's my honour that the judges admired it. (I was thinking), 'Amazing, I'm the best!'"

Men's All-around champion Artur Dalaloyan clinched his second gold in Doha, after the Russian came first in Floor Exercise. Dalaloyan unseated three-time world champion Kenzo Shirai with a 14,900-point routine after the Japanese had taken the lead with 14.866. Philippines' Carlos Yulo made history when he won

his country's first Worlds medal, after finishing third to take bronze.

FINALS RESULTS

Men's Floor Exercise

1. Artur Dalaloyan (RUS) 14.900
2. Kenzo Shirai (JPN) 14.866
3. Carlos Edriel Yulo (PHL) 14.600

Women's Vault

1. Simone Biles (USA) 15.366
2. Shallon Olsen (CAN) 14.516
3. Alexa Moreno (MEX) 14.508

Men's Pommel Horse

1. Xiao Ruoteng (CHN) 15.166
2. Max Whitlock (GBR) 15.166
3. Lee Chih Kai (TPE) 14.966

Women's Uneven Bars

1. Nina Derwael (BEL) 15.200
2. Simone Biles (USA) 14.700
3. Elisabeth Seitz (GER) 14.600

Men's Rings

1. Eleftherios Petrounias (GRE) 15.366
2. Arthur Zanetti (BRA) 15.100
3. Marco Lodadio (ITA) 14.900

SPOTLIGHT

2018 Worlds have delivered Qatar's message of peace: Ali al-Hitmi

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 48th FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships Doha 2018, the first-ever to be staged in the Middle East, has succeeded in delivering the message of peace and Qatar's capabilities to the world, said Ali al-Hitmi, the Executive Director of the Organising Committee of Doha Worlds and President of the Qatar Gymnastics Federation.

"We would like to thank HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the Organising Committee of Doha Worlds, for his full support.

"The ten-day long Doha Worlds will conclude today with great success, and the flag of the championships as hosts shall be passed on to Germany, who will be the hosts for the 2019 edition to be held in Stuttgart.



"We have succeeded in providing an exceptionally well organised event which has exceeded expectations and the specified criteria. We hope that we have set a new benchmark for Stuttgart to follow and to aim and achieve the standard.

"We are thankful to all for the praise showered on the championships in Doha, whether it was the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) or from officials of the participating countries or even the athletes. The international accolades are proof of our success in delivering our message to the world

that Qatar is a nation which believes in peace and safety of all. A capital destination for sport and is capable of hosting major international tournaments in the best possible way," he added.

Al-Hitmi also complimented his team for the top show. "The success of the tournament reflects the efforts made by the Organising Committee to deliver the championships in keeping with Qatar's reputation of hosting top sporting events," he said.

On the closing ceremony, to be held today after the competitions are over, al-Hitmi said, "The closing ceremony will mark the handover of the flag, as well as a number of highlights, including a documentary about the event and what has been presented over the course of the days of the competition will mark the culmination of the World Championships in Doha.

"We hope it would be fitting for what has been an exceptional event, one of pride and unique in many ways at the state-of-the-art Aspire Dome."

FOCUS

Tournament seems like a miracle to me, says FIG president Watanabe

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) president Morinari Watanabe termed the on-going 48th Artistic World Championships Doha 2018 as a "miracle" while speaking to journalists soon after the thrilling women's All-around competition at the Aspire Dome on Thursday.

"These world championships have emerged as somewhat unique given the competition that we are seeing. I first came to Qatar in 2006 and the event here at the Aspire Dome now in 2018 seems like a miracle to me," said Watanabe.

The 59-year-old, who became the 9th president of FIG in January 2017, and its first Asian head opined that the level of gymnastics seen at the Doha Worlds is out of the ordinary. "This has been one of the better world champi-



onships. The standards at the Doha Worlds are something special.

"What we saw in the men's All-Around was a tie which was the first time since the new rules have been introduced. The women's All-around competition too was a thrilling competition. No doubt, this is special," he said.

Watanabe, who is also the first from

the Japanese world of sport to head an international sports federation, also congratulated gymnast Mai Murakami on her silver-winning effort in the women's All-around event. "Murakami was also very good and everyone is happy with her show," he said.

On the current format of world gymnastics competition and whether he would support suggestions of a change, Watanabe proposed to be a new member of the International Olympic Committee during the 2018 Youth Olympic Games and who headed a roundtable meeting of FIG delegations on Tuesday said, "This is after 2021... the federations will decide."

Having drawn cheers appearing dressed in traditional Arabic attire - the 'thobe' - during the opening ceremony of the Doha Worlds, Watanabe was open to the championships returning to this part of the world again.

"It is not for me to decide, but if Qatar and other Arab nations want, why not," he said.

FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Qatar's al-Attiyah survives mayhem to lead in Kuwait

Mere four FIA cars completed the day's route as Qatari closes in on MERC title

By A Correspondent
Arifjan, Kuwait

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah emerged relatively unscathed from one of the most action-packed days in the recent history of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) to hold an outright lead of 8min 03.9sec in the 25th Kuwait International Rally yesterday.

The first loop of three of the day's six timed special stages in the deserts south of Kuwait City decimated the field and a mere four FIA cars and one entrant running in the National Rally completed the entire day's route.

"It was not easy today," said al-Attiyah. "It was difficult to see the lines with the conditions and we missed the track a couple of times. There were no lines so I needed to concentrate hard. We had a flat tyre and a little scare when I thought the clutch was slipping, but I have a big lead to conserve on Saturday and it's looking good for the championship."

Kuwaiti driver Meshari al-Thefiri remains firmly on course for a fourth MERC 2 or Group N showroom title. He and Qatari navigator Nasser al-Kuwari overcame a minor scare before service and a drive shaft failure on the last stage to finish the day in second position.

Lebanon's Henry Kahy and Jordanian navigator Musa Djiyerian survived the carnage around them to hold an unlikely third overall in a two-wheel drive Skoda Fabia. The points earned guaranteed the 2018 MERC 3 title for 'Henry the Third of Kuwait' and his delighted navigator.

Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah, the former Qatar Motor and Motorcycling Federation (QMMF) president and FIA vice-president, continued his impressive return to competitive action and looked to be heading for third overall at the end of the day. But the Qatari suffered a cruel mechanical issue on the last stage and slipped into Rally 2 territory.



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah in action during the Kuwait International Rally yesterday.



Former QMMF president and FIA vice-president Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah suffered a mechanical issue on the last stage yesterday.

"It has not been easy and I am taking my time getting used to the car and the stages. It has not

been easy to see the route with the light and we lost our way in one stage for a few seconds. I have pushed in places and am enjoying it so far," he said.

The Kuwaiti pairing of Jasim al-Muqahwi and Tamer al-Mutairi were the only crew to complete the day's action in the National Rally category.

Vojtech Staff's MERC title challenge was hanging by a thread after the Czech driver badly damaged his Skoda Fabia R5 on the fourth stage and slipped from second to fifth overall. His crew face a race against time to repair the R5 in time to start today's stages under Rally 2 after the Czech had stopped again after losing his way on the fifth special.

After SS4, Staff said: "I don't know what happened. The visibility was not good and we hit this hole and the car rolled."

The rate of attrition was high on the first loop of three stages with all but six of the FIA entrants and two of the National Rally cars retiring prematurely. Drive shaft issues accounted for Rashed al-Nuami and Ihad al-Shorafa, engine woes plagued Shabi Shaban and electrical gremlins sidelined Abdullah al-Ruwahi. Fuel feed issues caused by a blown fuse robbed Khaled Juma of a potential fourth place after the regroup.

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). Zain Kuwait is the main sponsor.

The remaining six special

stages take place in the southern deserts today. Two loops of three specials is again on the cards with crews tackling the 11.88km of Bnader from 10.00hrs and moving on to the 13.03km of the Julai'a test at 10.33hrs and the 17.42km of Arifjan from 11.11hrs.

After a return to Kuwait Motor Town for a midway regroup and service, the specials are repeated, with the podium finish at Kuwait Motor Town scheduled for 16.30hrs.

POSITIONS AFTER SS7

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Matthieu Baumel (FRA) Ford Fiesta R5 1hr 04min 29.9sec
2. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 1hr 12min 33.8sec
3. Henry Kahy (LBN)/Musa Djiyerian (JOR) Skoda Fabia 1hr 29min 14.2sec

EQUESTRIAN

Pressure for podiums at all-time high at LGCT Doha Finals

By Sports Reporter
Doha

British rider Ben Maher will be crowned champion of the 2018 Longines Global Champions Tour at the finals in Doha next week, while seven of the world's top riders will be locked in an incredible battle for second place.

In the overall LGCT Rankings, just 28 points separate second-placed rider Alberto Zorzi (237 points) and Christian Ahlmann (GER) (209 points) in eighth - and with 40 points for a win there is everything to play for for the riders in between.

Third in the rankings is world number 1 and 2017 LGCT champion Harrie Smolders of the Netherlands, just three points away from Zorzi on a score of 234, and fourth is Germany's Daniel Deusser just a further point away on 233 overall. Briton Scott Brash holds fifth with a tally of 225, two-time LGCT Grand Prix winner Nicola Philippaerts of Belgium sits in sixth with 219 and two-time LGCT title holder Edwina Tops-Alexander of Australia is on 212 overall.

Doha will also provide the last chance for individual riders to qualify for the Longines Global Champions Tour Super Grand Prix at the GC Playoffs in Prague this December, with all eyes on who will take the final golden ticket to the 16 rider showdown.

Smolders will return to the state-of-the-art Al Shaqab arena next week, and knows the

importance the finals hold: "It all comes down to Doha. If I look at the scores at the moment, it is very, very close from second to eighth place, with any of those riders able to finish on the podium. I definitely want to take my chances."

As the top international horses and riders prepare to leave for Al Shaqab - a member of the Qatar Foundation - pressure has reached fever pitch as athletes look to secure their place in the 2018 LGCT rankings and vie for a share of the 1 million euro season bonus.

From Mexico City to the sands of Miami Beach, Shanghai's bright lights, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the sparkling harbour of Monaco and every major capital city in-between, the 2018 LGCT season has been an electric mix of top sport and breathtaking destinations - all culminating in an edge-of-the-seat final in the Qatari capital.

On top of this intense line up, spectators will be treated to appearances from plenty of former champions and home heroes. Last year's victor, Qatar's Bassem Hassan Mohamed will return to Al Shaqab where he made history by becoming the first home rider to take an LGCT Grand Prix win there. He'll be joined by compatriot Sheikh Ali bin Khalid al-Thani, who in an earlier interview said: "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."



Qatar's Bassem Hassan Mohamed was the winner of the 2017 edition of the event in Doha.

Ricciardo ready to race again after Mexico gloom

A perkier **Daniel Ricciardo** made clear yesterday that he was ready for the last two races of the Formula One season after suggesting in Mexico last weekend that he could give up on his Red Bull.

The usually upbeat Australian, who is leaving for Renault at the end of the year, did not hide his disappointment after starting on pole position only to suffer his eighth retirement in 19 races.

Declaring his car to be 'cursed', he said his situation felt hope-

less and "I don't see the point of doing the next two races".

Yesterday Ricciardo took to Instagram to reassure his 1.7m followers and 'address a few things from Mexico'.

"First ones first, I will be doing the last two races," he said.

"That's what I'm about. It's been obviously massive highs and lows this year, more lows unfortunately so it's been frustrating, I won't lie. I owe it to myself and all the guys that work their butts off to give it two more cracks before we see



each other off. So I will be there. I just needed a few days off, really. It feels good."

Ricciardo, who is being replaced at Red Bull by Toro Rosso's Frenchman Pierre Gasly, has won twice this year

as has Dutch teammate Max Verstappen.

The team saw Mexico, where Verstappen won, as their best chance of the final races with only Brazil next week and then Abu Dhabi remaining. Red Bull are sure of third place in the constructors' championship and cannot catch Ferrari in second.

HAAS LOSE APPEAL AGAINST GROSJEAN EXCLUSION

The Haas Formula One team lost yesterday a bid to overturn

a stewards' decision that excluded French driver Romain Grosjean from sixth place at the Italian Grand Prix in September. The governing FIA's International Court of Appeal upheld the original decision. The court said a detailed explanation would be issued at a later date. The US-owned team expressed disappointment with the outcome. "We simply move forward and look to the final two races of the year to continue to fight on track," said team principal Guenther Steiner in a statement.

MOTOGP

'I'm on fire': Rins tops practice despite bike blaze

AFP
Sepang, Malaysia

Suzuki's Alex Rins clocked the fastest time in practice yesterday ahead of the Malaysian MotoGP - riding on a bike that had gone up in flames just a day earlier.

Already seen as having only an outside chance of winning tomorrow's Grand Prix, the Spaniard's result was even more surprising as it came after a fuel leak set his motorbike ablaze on Thursday in a pit lane.

The fire caused only minor damage to the vehicle's elec-

tronic components, and it was quickly repaired.

"I'm on fire," joked Rins, after powering to a quickest lap of 1min 59.608 sec in the afternoon session, 0.089 ahead of second-placed Andrea Dovizioso, who topped the morning's timesheets.

"I was surprised because it's not usual," he conceded when asked about racking up the fastest time on a fire-hit bike, but he added: "For sure I am happy."

Honda's Marc Marquez, who was crowned world champion in Japan last month, had the third quickest time, 0.093 off the pace, while Yamaha's Valentino Rossi

was fourth.

Italy's Dovizioso is chasing his third victory in a row at the Sepang International Circuit as he seeks to clinch the runner-up spot this season, but faces a tough challenge from compatriot Rossi.

But it was Rins, currently in 10th place in the world championship standings, who was fastest yesterday.

He had used a different bike in the morning session and got the sixth fastest lap. It was only when he switched back to his main bike - the one hit by the fire - that he topped the timesheets in the afternoon.

There was disappointment for Marquez, as the Spaniard looked to be heading for the fastest time in the afternoon before a late surge from Rins put him in the lead.

It was a tough day for Ducati's Jorge Lorenzo, who is returning to competitive racing after missing the last three MotoGPs due to a wrist injury.

He finished bottom of the timesheets and was more than three seconds adrift of the fastest time.

Conditions remained dry during both practice sessions, with monsoon rains - common this time of year in Malaysia -

only starting to fall later in the evening.

Dovizioso is hoping to repeat his stellar performances of 2016 and 2017, when he stormed to victory in rain-hit races - although he has admitted that dry conditions could work against him on the day.

He is currently second in the world championship standings, with Rossi just 15 points behind.

Team Suzuki Ecstar's Alex Rins (left) and Yamaha Tech 3's Hafiz Syahrin take a corner during the second practice session for the Malaysian MotoGP in Sepang yesterday. (AFP)



SOUTH AFRICA'S TOUR OF AUSTRALIA

Aussies, Proteas clash for first time since scandal

Reuters
Melbourne

An Australia team still feeling reverberations from the Cape Town ball-tampering scandal will face their demons against South Africa in a one-day series starting in Perth tomorrow.

The teams meet for their first international clash since the ill-tempered Test series wrapped up in Johannesburg in April with Australia's reputation in tatters and three of their players sent home in disgrace.

While seven months have passed, Australian cricket has struggled to move on from the Newlands nightmare, and the release of a culture review this week re-opened the wounds.

The Longstaff report blamed Cricket Australia in part for the events in South Africa, and fierce reaction to its contents ul-

timately led to chairman David Peever resigning on Thursday.

As the board scrambles to rebuild its credibility, Aaron Finch's Australia will hope to restore some faith in the national team with wins against the Proteas in the three-match series.

The on-field behaviour of both teams will be closely scrutinised given the overt hostility that blighted the Test series, which South Africa won comfortably 3-1.

The tour was plagued by multiple incidents of misconduct and the bad blood spilled over into a stairwell altercation between David Warner and Quinton de Kock on the fourth day of the first Test in Durban.

Along with former captain Steve Smith and Cameron Bancroft, Warner remains banned for his part in the ball-tampering scandal, which saw Bancroft caught on camera trying to hide a piece of sandpaper in his trousers while fielding.



South Africa captain Faf du Plessis expects a frosty reception from Australian crowds.

While there will be no chance of another flare-up between Warner and wicketkeeper De Kock, Proteas captain Faf Du Plessis expects a frosty reception from Australian crowds.

"We are not expecting anything less. Zunaid our security officer has been working hard in the gym," he remarked last month.

Australia enter the series with a dismal recent record, having won only two of their last 13 one-day internationals, a run that includes a 5-0 whitewash away to England.

Only seven months out from a World Cup being hosted in England and Wales, the world champions have slumped to sixth in the rankings.

Leaving aside the distractions of the Longstaff review, Australia suffered an injury scare yesterday, with Finch leaving the field with a bruised finger after being rapped on the glove by a Mitchell Starc delivery during training.

He was later cleared to play after a scan.

Fourth-ranked South Africa may be in better relative health but are also rebuilding and are without two of their most experienced players in injured batsman Hashim Amla and all-rounder JP Duminy.

The games in Perth, Adelaide and Hobart are likely to be decided by the bowlers, however, with the quicks on both sides likely to dominate.

Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins have recovered from injury to join Starc in Australia's strongest attack, while Dale Steyn will lead Kagiso Rabada and rising talent Lungi Ngidi in a formidable fast bowling unit for the Proteas.

SPOTLIGHT

Dhoni 'very integral' part of team, says captain Kohli



Reuters
Mumbai

India captain Virat Kohli has said Mahendra Singh Dhoni continues to play a key role in their limited-overs team despite the wicketkeeper-batsman being omitted for upcoming Twenty20 matches against West Indies and Australia.

India's chief selector M S K Prasad said Rishabh Pant and Dinesh Karthik had been drafted in for six T20s this month as the side look to identify a backup wicketkeeper to Dhoni.

While the decision to omit Dhoni raised questions about the long-serving wicketkeeper's future in the shortest format of the game, Prasad said the 37-year-old was merely being rested.

Kohli, speaking to reporters on Thursday after his side secured a 3-1 victory over West Indies in their five-match one-day international series, gave short shrift to questions regarding Dhoni's future.

"I think the selector has already addressed this if I'm not wrong," he said.

"And he's been spoken to first-ly... So, I don't see any reason why I should be sitting here and explaining that. I think the selector has come out and explained exactly what happened.

"I think people are putting too much variables into this situation, which is not the case I can assure you of that," Kohli said.

By sitting out the T20s, Dhoni was giving an opportunity to younger players to get much-needed experience, Kohli said.

"He's still a very integral part of this team and he just feels that in the T20 format, someone like Rishabh can get more chances," he added. "It has got nothing to do with anything that other people are thinking and I, as captain, can certainly assure you of that."

Dhoni announced his sudden retirement from Test cricket midway through an Australia series in 2014, with the Boxing Day match in Melbourne being the last of his 90 appearances in the longer format.

He has continued to compete in limited-overs internationals but local media have questioned whether he will be around for next year's one-day World Cup in England and Wales when Dhoni will be 38.

He remains supremely fit and his glove work is still of the highest quality but opinion is divided over whether age has diminished his batting.

Dhoni was once considered India's best finisher and no target was deemed out of reach with the boundary-hitting right-hander at the crease. He has scored 1,487 runs from 93 T20 internationals, at a strike-rate of over 127.

Pant, 21, has been making his mark with the bat and selectors could be planning ahead for not only next year's World Cup but the World Twenty20 the following year in Australia.

PAK VS NZ, 2ND T20I

Pakistan beat NZ for 11th straight T20 series win

Afridi scalps three before Hafeez sees through the 154-run chase

AFP
Dubai

Pakistan lived up to their billing as the world's best Twenty20 team with a six-wicket victory over New Zealand in Dubai yesterday to clinch the three-match series 2-0.

Mohamed Hafeez added 34 quickfire runs to help Pakistan overhaul the 154-run target in 19.4 overs at Dubai stadium, pocketing their 11th consecutive series and eighth successive T20 match.

New Zealand were lifted to 153-7 by Corey Anderson and Colin Munro who made 44 each after Kane Williamson won the toss and opted to bat on a slow-paced pitch.

Pakistan won the first match by two runs in a last-ball finish in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

Hafeez, who hit Adam Milne for the winning boundary, and Shoaib Malik (10) came together with 50 needed off the last five overs. Hafeez hit two towering sixes off leg-spinner Ish Sodhi in the 17th over to bring the target down to 23 in the last three overs.

Hafeez hit two sixes and a boundary in his 21-ball innings.

Since Sarfraz Ahmed took over as captain in September 2016, Pakistan have beaten England (1-0), West Indies (3-0 and 3-1), a World XI (2-1), Sri Lanka (3-0), New Zealand (2-1), West Indies (3-0), Scotland (2-0) and Australia (3-0).



Pakistan's Mohamed Hafeez (right) and captain Sarfraz Ahmed celebrate their victory over New Zealand in the second Twenty20 International game in Dubai yesterday. (AFP)

They also won a tri-series against Zimbabwe and Australia this year.

Earlier, New Zealand were again derailed in the middle overs.

Munro, who has the best strike rate of 163 amongst current Twenty20 players, lifted spinner Imad Wasim for six off the very first ball of the match as New Zealand raced to 50 without loss in just 5.3 overs.

But just like the first match their innings fell apart once Glenn Phillips (five) and Munro departed in the seventh

over as Pakistan's bowlers, led by pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi, pulled back the scoring rate.

Munro hit four boundaries and two sixes off 28 balls before he was stumped off spinner Hafeez as his miscued shot trickled behind the stumps to Sarfraz who claimed a stumping with the batsman out of his crease.

Colin de Grandhomme (four) and Ross Taylor (three) fell in quick succession before Williamson (37) and Anderson added 42 for the fifth wicket.

Anderson hoisted Hasan Ali for two boundaries and a six

in the 17th over to help New Zealand add 52 in the last five overs.

Shaheen finished with brilliant figures of 3-20 in his four overs.

The third and final match will be played in Dubai tomorrow.

BRIEF SCORES: New Zealand 153 for 7 (Corey Anderson 44 not out, Colin Munro 44; Shaheen Shah Afridi 3-20) lost to Pakistan 154 for 4 (Babar Azam 40, Asif Ali 38, Mohamed Hafeez 34 not out; Adam Milne 2-25) by six wickets

Hafeez, Imad back in Pakistan's ODI squad for NZ series

All-rounders Mohamed Hafeez and Imad Wasim staged a comeback yesterday in Pakistan's 15-member squad for the three-match one-day series against New Zealand. Hafeez, 38, who is a veteran of 200 one-day internationals, missed out on Pakistan's one-day series in Zimbabwe in July this year and was also left out of the Asia Cup in September. But he showed good form in the 3-0 Twenty20 series win against Australia and in the first Twenty20 match against New Zealand — both in the United Arab Emirates — to force his way back in the side. Wasim has not been part of the one-day squad since Pakistan's series against Sri Lanka in October last year, and has been plagued by fitness problems. The first two one-day internationals will be played in Abu Dhabi on 7 and 9 November, with the third in Dubai on 13 November.

Pakistan batsman Shehzad's doping ban extended for breach

Pakistan batsman Ahmed Shehzad's four-month doping ban has been extended by six weeks because he played club matches during the period of ineligibility, the country's cricket board (PCB) said yesterday. The PCB banned Shehzad for violating anti-doping regulations after he tested positive for a prohibited substance in May and his suspension was scheduled to end on Nov 10. On Oct 19, the PCB served a notice to the 26-year-old due to him playing during his suspension for the Lahore-based Muslim Gymkhana Cricket Club, which is affiliated with the board. Shehzad apologised in his response to the PCB, but said he was unaware of the rules and did not breach them intentionally. The PCB had the option of imposing a new ban of four months on the cricketer, but decided to extend his original sanction by six weeks due to Shehzad's "immediate admission of fault", "honesty" and the matches he participated in being "friendly" club games.

BOTTOMLINE

Australia's Symonds opens up on how 'monkeygate' led to downward spiral

AFP
Sydney

Former all-rounder Andrew Symonds says the infamous "monkeygate" scandal with India a decade ago drove him to drink as he opened up yesterday on how his life started spiralling out of control.

The big-hitting Australian accused spinner Harbhajan Singh of calling him a "monkey" in the 2008 New Year Test in Sydney.

Singh, who denied any wrongdoing, was suspended for three matches, but the ban was overturned when India threat-

ened to quit the tour in what was a low point in India-Australia cricket relations.

Ten years on and Australian cricket is again reeling from the behaviour of its players after the cheating scandal in South Africa and a review this week that slammed both Cricket Australia and the culture of the team.

Symonds, who was born in England with one of his parent's of West Indian background, continues to insist Harbhajan called him a monkey "probably two or three times".

"From that moment on that was my downhill slide," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. He said his guilt over the way



the process played out took a heavy toll after his teammates were "dragged in" to back up his account of being racially abused. "I started to drink heavily as a

result of it and my life was starting to dissolve around me," Symonds said.

"I felt the pressure and the weight of dragging those mates of mine into the cauldron of this cesspit that should never have got to this sort of point where we felt guilty. I was dealing with it the wrong way. I felt guilty that I'd dragged my mates into something I didn't think they deserved to be involved in."

Symonds' Cricket Australia contract was withdrawn in June 2009 after he was sent home from the World Twenty20 following the latest in a series of alcohol-related indiscretions. He claimed at the time he

had been diagnosed as a binge-drinker, not an alcoholic.

Symonds claimed yesterday it was not the first time Harbhajan had abused him.

"I'd spoken to Harbhajan the series before in India, he'd called me a monkey before in India," he told the ABC.

"I went into their dressing room and said, 'Can I speak to Harbhajan for a minute outside please?' So he came outside and I said, 'Look, the name-calling's got to stop or else it's going to get out of hand.'"

Despite the animosity the pair eventually made up and played together in the Indian Premier League.

FOCUS

Bangladesh eye Test redemption in Zimbabwe series



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (right) shares a light moment with teammate Abu Jayed during a training session yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Bangladesh are looking to boost their Test record in a two-match series against Zimbabwe despite missing big names Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal.

Bangladesh have lost seven of their last eight Tests and failed to get past 200 runs in any of their last six innings. They were skittled out for 43 in their first of two defeats in West Indies in July.

The world's ninth-ranked Test team took a further hit with injuries to Tamim and captain Shakib, who underwent a finger operation in September.

Batsman Mohamed Mithun is likely to make his Test debut in the first match starting Saturday at the Sylhet International Stadium, which will be hosting its first five-day game.

"We did not do very well in West Indies. Still there is plenty of room to improve. We have home series against them (West Indies) ahead of us," stand-in skipper Mahmudullah Riyad told reporters yesterday.

"I think these two matches are a good opportunity for us. The important thing is that it's an opportunity for young players to perform."

Zimbabwe skipper Hamilton Masakadza is also looking for better performances after a 3-0 loss in the one-day international series in Bangladesh.

"We don't play a lot of longer-version cricket. We really see the important value of it. We are looking to come out firing," said Masakadza.

"Bangladesh have had an in-different past in the longer version so for a start in the series, different things are required from each team."

SPOTLIGHT

Muguruza through to Zhuhai Elite trophy semis

AFP
Zhuhai

Former world number one **Garbine Muguruza** survived three match points against second seed Anastasija Sevastova to clinch a place in the semi-finals of the WTA Elite Trophy in China yesterday.

The two-time grand slam winner from Spain won her final round-robin match – effectively a playoff for a semi-final spot – 6-7, 6-2, 7-6.

However, she had to overcome a scare in the tenth game of the deciding set as Sevastova failed to capitalise on three match points.

The 22-year-old from Latvia took a nip-and-tuck first set in Zhuhai after a tie-break, but Muguruza, also 22, comfortably won the second.



The decider was a thriller for the fans at the Hengqin International Tennis Center, who witnessed some nail-biting tennis as the players fought toe-to-toe.

But world number 17 Muguruza took control in the final tie-break, producing some fantastic shots to win it 7-1 after over two hours and 45 minutes on court.

She joins Australia's Ashleigh

Barty, Germany's Julia Goerges and the USA's Madison Keys in Saturday's semi-finals.

Keys lost yesterday evening to China's Wang Qiang 6-1, 3-6, 1-6, but as the American took the match to three sets, she progressed to the last four.

Despite being knocked out, Wang celebrated her match victory with the home fans, hitting tennis balls into the crowd.

Earlier France's number one

Caroline Garcia missed out on a semi-final spot despite beating Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets.

The 22-year-old won 6-4, 6-4 but because she lost more than seven games to the Belarusian, Barty scraped through the round-robin group following her win over Garcia on Thursday. A straight-sets win, or even a loss in three sets, would have been enough for 20-year-old Sabalenka, but the tournament's youngest player joins Garcia in being eliminated from the tournament.

"I don't know how to describe it," Garcia told reporters.

"After yesterday's match I wanted to win today, but I was not really thinking about qualifying for the semi-final."

Barty's 6-3, 6-4 win over Garcia means the French star ended up bottom of the group of three. "I'm happy with the win,"

she said. "I was solid; it was much better than yesterday. It's still a win but it's a disappointment to finish third."

The crowd witnessed a tense encounter between third seed Sabalenka and eighth seed Garcia, with both players showing signs of frustration at times.

Garcia needed to hold her nerve to take the first set. Serving at 5-4 up, she faced three break points at 0-40 down, but managed to claw back to clinch the set.

She continued that momentum into the second set, immediately breaking Sabalenka's first service game, and it felt like the world number 18 could qualify for the semi-finals.

However, that chance was snatched away as Sabalenka crucially won a service game to make it 5-4, although Garcia sealed the match in the following game.

GOLF

Eyeing world's top ranking, Rose takes lead in Turkey



AFP
Belek, Turkey

Justin Rose boosted his drive to return to world number one spot by seizing a two-stroke lead on day two of the Turkish Airlines Open.

Rose and Denmark's Thorbjorn Olesen were tied for the lead playing the last hole but Olesen bogeyed while Rose holed an eight-footer for a birdie on the Regnum Caya course.

Rose, who has moved to 12-under par after two rounds of 65, is the defending champion while Olesen, who won in 2016, shares second on 10-under par.

Also tied for second is England's former Masters champion Danny Willett (65) along with his compatriot Tom Lewis (63).

Rose held the world number one ranking briefly in September and would return to top spot by successfully defending a tournament for a first time in his 20-year pro career.

"When I won here last year I had played catch-up for much of the first three days and other guys are capable of doing that this

year," he said.

"I've now shot two 65s but then you can always have somebody from the chasing pack do the same thing.

"For me it's about keep moving forward this week. Even par is not really going to get it done, so you have to have the mentality of keep moving forward."

Remarkably, Rose is now 71-under par for 14 rounds competing in Turkey over the years commencing with his victory in the inaugural 2012 Turkish Airlines World Grand Final.

Olesen, who won at the nearby Montgomerie course in 2016, said he was happy with his round but feels he can do better.

"I was very pleased the way I played the first 11 holes and thought I gave myself so many good chances," he said.

"I actually missed quite a few there. But sort of a struggle coming in unfortunately, but 4-under is still a good score."

Willett boosted hopes also of capturing a first victory since his 2016 Masters triumph with a second day showing that included seven birdies and just the one bogey.

TENNIS

Khachanov routs Zverev in Paris

Federer gets standing ovation on winning return to the French capital

Reuters
Paris

In-form Russian **Karen Khachanov** pulled off one of the big surprises of the Paris Masters when he outplayed tennis's top young gun Alexander Zverev 6-1 6-2 to power into the semi-finals yesterday.

Khachanov, at 22 another of the sport's brightest prospects, took ruthless advantage of the 21-year-old German's physical struggles as Zverev, battling with shoulder trouble, needed a medical time out in the first set at 4-1 down.

Nonetheless, the Muscovite deserved all the credit for the quality of his power game as he broke the world number five's serve six times in 70 minutes to set up a last-four meeting with either Jack Sock or Dominic Thiem, who were playing later.

Zverev looked frustrated at his serving woes and being pushed around by the world number 18. At the end of a one-sided first set, he complained to Khachanov about the over-zealous reactions of the Russian's camp at court-side.

"When you are losing, maybe you get frustrated from some calls from somebody in the crowd and maybe he was pissed, I don't know, that somebody from my box screamed on my mistake and that was the reason," Khachanov told Sky Sports afterwards.

"But then we're good friends outside the court and everything is fine," Zverev, who has qualified



Roger Federer shakes hands with Italy's Fabio Fognini after winning their third round match in Paris.

for the ATP Tour Finals for the second year running, offered his point of view.

"I told him my shoulder is hurting and that his uncle, or something, that he's going a bit crazy," he said. "And I told him to tell him to keep it down a little bit because he was going a little bit too much over the edge."

"I was never going to win the match, so it was just I told him to

calm down a little bit."

Zverev had defeated Khachanov in their previous two meetings, including a fluctuating five-setter also in Paris in June at the French Open, but the Russian dominated from the outset this time.

"It was really tough for me to lose that match in Paris," said Khachanov, who had been leading two sets to one at Roland

Garros.

"So I was fully prepared, I've been playing some good tennis in the last couple of months and believing in myself so I didn't expect to be that easy in the score. But I played really well."

With two indoor hard court tournament triumphs to his name already this year, Khachanov will now move up to at least a career-high number 13 in the

world next week.

Meanwhile, Roger Federer reckoned that he felt the love of the French public sweep over him when made a long-awaited return to competitive action in Paris on Thursday to launch his bid for a 100th career title.

Federer, who has not competed in Paris at either the French Open or indoor Masters since 2015, received a standing ovation after making a winning comeback in Bercy following his late decision to compete after his 99th triumph in Basel on Sunday.

Before and after defeating Fabio Fognini 6-4 6-3 to move into the quarter-finals, the 37-year-old looked touched by the reception in the arena and responded by "saluting" them in a post-match on-court address.

"I hope you have understood that the French public missed you very much," one reporter told him after his hit-and-miss but eventually comfortable win, to which Federer responded: "It was wonderful to have such a welcome from the French public. "The standing ovation at the end was wonderful as well. I wanted to thank them, to salute them. It was something that is important to me. I did win, so I had the mike, I could talk to the public."

"I've had very intense moments at the French Open (where he won in 2009) and here (where he won the 2011 Masters). Everybody knows that I'm very pleased to do my comeback here, but it is also hard to prove it on the court."

OPTIMISM

Japan can chop down All Blacks, says captain Leitch

AFP
Tokyo

Japan captain **Michael Leitch** said yesterday that the Brave Blossoms were capable of pulling off a shock victory over a weakened All Blacks team today.

The New Zealand-born skipper evoked the spirit of Japan's astonishing 34-32 win over South Africa at the 2015 Rugby World Cup on the eve of today's clash with the All Blacks in Tokyo.

"When you look at the number of Test matches collectively in the team, it's not so much and their Test match experience is not so much there," said Leitch, pointing to a second-string New Zealand squad that includes eight new caps.

"There is an opportunity to pressure the leadership group. If we are going to take the All Blacks down, then it is going to be tomorrow!"

The world champions have met Japan three times in the past, racking up a combined 282 points, including a World Cup record 145-17 demolition of the Brave Blossoms in 1995. But All Blacks coach Steve Hansen has made wholesale changes to the team that beat Australia 37-20 last weekend, sending his big-hitters to Europe early to prepare for Tests against England, Ireland and Italy.

His new-look squad has just 178 Tests between them and Leitch believes Japan could take advantage.

Japan, once the whipping boys of the World Cup, went on to record further victories against Samoa and the United States at the 2015 tournament under former coach Eddie Jones after stunning two-time champions South Africa.

They have ticked over solidly since under former All Black Jamie Joseph, but Leitch also praised the influence of assistant John Plumtree, who has been helping the 2019 World Cup hosts as defence coach since last October.

RUGBY

Jones puts faith in Farrell for Springboks clash

AFP
London

Eddie Jones believes "spiritual leader" Owen Farrell's aggression will serve England well when an injury-hit side face South Africa in their opening November international at Twickenham today.

Farrell, who led England in the absence of regular skipper Dylan Hartley during a 2-1 series loss in South Africa in June, finds himself in the unusual position of co-captain alongside the hooker, now fit following a concussion injury that ruled him out of the tour.

As if that were not enough, goalkicker Farrell has been switched to the pivotal position of fly-half for just the third time since Australian coach Jones' reign as England boss started two years ago following the team's first-round exit on home soil at the 2015 World Cup.

Farrell has spent a large part of his England career at inside centre, with childhood friend George Ford at fly-half.

But Farrell, a stand-off with English champions Saracens, will be in the play-making role this weekend, while Danny Cipriani – England's No 10 when they beat the Springboks 25-10 in Cape Town in June last time out – has not even made the cut for Jones' training squad.

Farrell will have Ben Te'o alongside him



in a midfield featuring Henry Slade, with Ford and powerhouse centre Manu Tuilagi both on the bench.

"We know what George and Owen can do," said Jones. "I wanted to see the difference it makes playing Owen at 10 with bigger centres."

"Owen's a good decision-maker and he has a very good tactical kicking game. He's bit of a spiritual leader in our side so being close to the action will help in that regard."

Farrell is the son of former England dual code international Andy Farrell and Jones added: "He's from good stock and he's an aggressive competitor."

"We need that against South Africa, definitely. "Since the June series, the Springboks have recorded a superb 36-34 win away to world champions New Zealand

land in Wellington, while their last match saw them narrowly lose 32-30 to the All Blacks in a return Rugby Championship fixture in Pretoria last month.

"It showed how far this team has come and the work we have been putting in," said Springbok wing Aphiwe Dyantyi of those results against New Zealand.

"There is still a lot to be improved on, especially myself and collectively as a team."

South Africa will be without fullback Willie le Roux and scrum-half Faf de Klerk today because the influential duo play for English clubs who are not obliged to release them for a Test falling outside World Rugby's designated window for November internationals.

GATLAND ANXIOUS

Warren Gatland says he is feeling anxious as he enters the final stage of his 12-year stay as Wales coach, which he hopes will culminate in a World Cup final appearance in Japan in a year's time.

Gatland has already said he will leave the job following the global showpiece, having spent his time in charge turning Wales into contenders for top honours.

The visit of Scotland, a rare friendly meeting with a Six Nations rival in November, would usually be considered relatively low-key.

Yet this close to the World Cup, there is much to play for and plenty for the

coaching staff of both sides to learn.

"I'm bricking myself about the next year because I want it to be a good year," Gatland was quoted as saying by the Welsh Rugby Union.

"I am focused on doing the best job I can. I want to leave these shores with my head held high."

"That makes the next 12 months pretty important, especially the goal at the end of it."

DESERVING CARBERY

Coach Joe Schmidt believes "fierce competitor" Joey Carbery deserves his rare start for Ireland in their opening match of the November international series against Italy at Soldier Field today as he tests the depth of his squad in Chicago.

Carbery, 23, has started just three of his 12 previous Tests as he sits behind Johnny Sexton in the pecking order for the number 10 jersey, but Schmidt is full of praise for what the New Zealand-born pivot brings to the team and how he has settled at new club Munster this season.

"Joey's an affable character and a fierce competitor so it's not overly surprising that he's fitted in well at Munster, especially because he knew so many of the players before he went there," Schmidt told reporters.

"His running game is a strength as is his work ethic, so that's always a good starting point."

NBA

Celtics hand Bucks first loss of season

'We knew we could take their best shot and ended up winning the game'



Kyrie Irving of the Boston Celtics and Malcolm Brogdon (right) of the Milwaukee Bucks battle for a loose ball during the second-half of their NBA game in Boston. (AFP)

AFP
Los Angeles

The Boston Celtics drained a franchise record 24 three pointers en route to knocking off the last undefeated team in the NBA on Thursday with a 117-113 win over the Milwaukee Bucks.

Kyrie Irving scored 28 points and Gordon Hayward tallied a season high 18 for the Celtics, who snapped the Bucks seven-game win streak to start the season.

"We stayed resilient and won the game," said Boston's Marcus Morris, who finished with 17 points.

"We knew we could take their best shot and ended up winning the game. We let 'em have it."

The Celtics, whose previous record for three-pointers was 19, finished one short of tying the NBA record of 25, set by the Cleveland Cavaliers on March 4.

RESULTS

Boston	117-113	Milwaukee
Sacramento	146-115	Atlanta
Oklahoma	111-107	Charlotte
Denver	110-91	Cleveland
Philadelphia	122-113	Clippers

13 seconds left. But that was as close as the Bucks would get as the Celtics iced the victory from the foul line.

There was an extended time out midway through the first quarter, when World Series winning Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora carried the championship trophy onto the basketball court.

Fans roared when Cora led the players out of the tunnel continuing a celebration that started Sunday with a series-clinching victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers. Elsewhere, Joel Embiid had 41 points and 13 rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers improved to 5-0 at home with a 122-113 win over the Los Angeles Clippers.

"It's great," Embiid said. "It's just about being aggressive and staying within the concepts of the system."

Embiid now has six games with a least 30 points and 10 rebounds.

Australia's Ben Simmons added 14 points and 11 assists and Markelle Fultz provided a spark late in the third quarter

and finished with 12 points, nine rebounds and five assists. "He's tough, he's skilled, he can shoot, he basically can do everything," Clippers coach Doc Rivers said of Embiid. Embiid scored an emphatic dunk over Boban Marjanovic with 99 seconds remaining that gave Philadelphia a 117-109 lead.

"He was just dominant," Philadelphia coach Brett Brown said.

Lou Williams scored 26 points for the Clippers, and Danilo Gallinari had 25. Tobias Harris finished with 24 points.

In Atlanta, De'Aaron Fox set career highs with 31 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds for his first career triple-double, and the Sacramento Kings beat the Atlanta Hawks 146-115 for their fifth consecutive win. Buddy Hield scored 27 points and Nemanja Bjelica had 19 for the Kings.

After leading by only five points at half-time, the Kings outscored the Hawks 46-23 in the third. Fox had 21 points in the period.

NFL

Little-known QB leads 49ers in rout of Raiders

Reuters
New York

Nick Mullens made a splashy NFL debut under the national-television spotlight on Thursday night, throwing three touchdown passes and directing the host San Francisco 49ers to a 34-3 demolition of the rival Oakland Raiders.

In a game that featured two of the NFL's three remaining one-win teams, the 49ers (2-7) ended a six-game losing streak in the San Francisco Bay Area clubs' final scheduled meeting before the Raiders (1-7) move to Las Vegas.

Mullens, who began the season on the 49ers' practice squad, connected with Pierre Garcon from 24 yards out in the first quarter, Kendrick Bourne from 4 yards in the second quarter and George Kittle from 5 yards in the third quarter en route to a 16-for-22, 262-yard performance.

Mullens got the start after C.J. Beathard was declared unable to go due to thumb and wrist injuries after Thursday's pregame warmup.

The 49ers lost star quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo to a season-ending knee injury earlier in the year.

The Raiders, who lost their fourth straight and remained winless on the road (0-4), drove 56 yards in 10 plays on their first possession of the game, but a sack and a holding

penalty after the visitors had reached the San Francisco 13 forced a 37-yard field goal by Daniel Carlson for a 3-0 lead.

The 49ers dominated from there, going up 7-3 less than three minutes later after Mullens went 3-for-3 on a 75-yard drive, completing his first NFL pass to Marquise Goodwin for 11 yards and his first TD pass to Garcon at the 6:47 mark of the first quarter.

Mullens' scoring pass to Bourne and a 39-yard field goal by Robbie Gould made it 17-3 at halftime, before the 49ers blew the game open in the third quarter, scoring on Kittle's TD catch and a 52-yard run by Raheem Mostert.

Gould's second field goal, a 25-yarder with 3:59 remaining, capped the scoring.

Kittle led all receivers with four catches for 108 yards, while Mostert was the game's top rusher with 86 yards on seven carries.

The San Francisco defense, meanwhile, harassed Oakland's Derek Carr into seven sacks on a 16-for-21 night.

After throwing for three touchdowns in the Raiders' loss to Indianapolis on Sunday, Carr had no TD passes and just 171 passing yards.

Carr was pulled early in the fourth quarter with the game out of hand, with A.J. McCarron mopping up.

The 49ers outgained the Raiders 405-242 in a game that had no turnovers.

Ex-NBA star has dog seized from hand luggage in Australia

Former NBA player Lamar Patterson had his French bulldog seized by Australian customs officials who found the animal stashed inside the athlete's hand luggage.

Patterson, who recently signed for the Brisbane Bullets, had the pooch - called Kobe - in his carry-on when he arrived in Australia on Thursday.

"Bioscience officers at Brisbane Airport have seized a dog that arrived on a flight from the United States undeclared and without an import permit," the department of agriculture said in a statement. The case is reminiscent of the Johnny Depp "war on terrier" saga, when the Hollywood star and his then-wife Amber Heard fell foul of Australia's strict quarantine laws in failing to declare pets Pistol and Boo on arrival on a private jet in 2015.

Heard escaped with a fine and a good behaviour bond, but a war of words erupted between Depp and then-Australian deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce, who threatened to have the dogs destroyed.

National Broadcaster ABC reported that Patterson flew on internal US flights that allowed Kobe onboard, before taking a Qantas flight from Los Angeles to Brisbane where the dog went unnoticed.

The agriculture department said the basketballer was fined Aus\$420 (US\$300) and Kobe was sent back to the US.

"The dog has been directed for export from Australia and is scheduled to depart today."

Under strict Australian laws designed to keep disease at bay, dogs entering from the United States must be declared and have to spend at least 10 days in quarantine.

NHL

Rangers find range in shootout, edge Ducks

Reuters
Anaheim, California

Mats Zuccarello and Mika Zibanejad each scored in the shootout to give the visiting New York Rangers a 3-2 victory over the Anaheim Ducks on Thursday night.

Alexandar Georgiev, making just his third appearance of the season in goal as Henrik Lundqvist got a rare night off, had 28 saves as the Rangers won for the seventh time in nine games against Anaheim.

The Ducks elected to go first in the shootout, and Pontus Aberg fired a shot over the net. Zuccarello then followed and beat Anaheim goalie John Gibson with a shot between the pads.

Georgiev stopped Ryan Getzlaf's wrist shot to start the second round, and Zibanejad then sealed the win for the Rangers with a wrist shot past Gibson's glove side.

Brett Howden had a goal and an assist, and Kevin Hayes also scored for New York, which improved to 3-0 in shootouts this season, including a 4-3 shootout victory at San Jose on Tuesday.

Rickard Rakell had a goal and an assist, and Jakob Silfverberg scored for Anaheim, which lost its seventh straight game.

Getzlaf added two assists, and Gibson had 22 saves for the

Ducks. Hayes gave New York a 1-0 lead at the 1:42 mark of the second period with his third goal of the year, jumping on a loose puck in the shot and firing a shot past Gibson's left shoulder.

It snapped an 0-for-9 streak on the power play for the Rangers. Silfverberg tied it with a power play goal midway through the period, tapping in a midair rebound of a Rakell shot from just outside the crease.

Howden put the Rangers back in front less than two minutes later, cutting to the net and slapping in a pass from Jimmy Vesey inside the right post for his third goal of the season.

Anaheim had a chance to tie it early in the third period, but Georgiev stopped Silfverberg on a point-blank attempt.

Gibson was pulled with 2:01 remaining and Rakell tied it with 25.3 seconds remaining, one-timing a pass from Getzlaf from the bottom of the left circle for his third goal of the season and sending the game into overtime.

Right wing Patrick Eaves played his first game since November 13, 2017 for Anaheim after being sidelined with a misdiagnosed illness and then a shoulder surgery.

Meanwhile Wayne Simmonds scored a goal against his former team and Claude Giroux added a breakaway goal in the third period as the visiting Philadelphia

Flyers defeated the Los Angeles Kings 5-2 on Thursday to win consecutive games for the first time this season.

Ivan Provorov, Oskar Lindblom and Robert Hagg also scored goals for the Flyers, who have won the first two games on their four-game trip through the NHL's Pacific Division. Philadelphia beat the Ducks 3-2 in Anaheim on Tuesday.

Simmonds, a second-round selection by the Kings in 2007, had a quick reply once Los Angeles tied the game 1-1 midway through the second period. A mere 49 seconds after Jeff Carter had scored a goal for the Kings, Simmonds answered in front of the L.A. goal off a feed from Lindblom.

Simmonds scored his team-leading seventh goal of the season, but just his first over the last five games. He last scored a goal Oct. 20 against the New Jersey Devils.

After the Kings failed to score on a two-man advantage for 1 minute, 35 seconds in the opening period, the Flyers took a 1-0 lead on a goal from Provorov at the 17:35 mark.

Dale Weise, after first fanning on a shot, delivered a centring pass to Provorov from the side of the Kings' net, and the defenseman buried the puck past Los Angeles goalie Jack Campbell.

Lindblom scored a goal at 14:05 of the second period that

had a bit of controversy attached. Lindblom could be seen kicking the puck in the Kings' goal with his left skate, but on replay it was determined that the goal counted because the puck ended up deflecting off the stick of the Kings' Sean Walker before crossing the goal line.

Lindblom's goal, which gave the Flyers a 3-1 lead, was his third of the season.

Kings left wing Ilya Kovalchuk cut the Flyers' lead to 3-2 when he scored at 18:41 of the second period.

Kovalchuk's initial shot was saved by Flyers goalie Brian Elliott, but the left winger regained control off the rebound and scored to the short side.

Kovalchuk's fourth goal gave him a Kings team-leading 10 points.

Giroux's fourth goal of the season came at 14:27 of the third period and gave the Flyers a 4-2 advantage.

Hagg scored his third of the season into an empty net from behind his own blue line at the 16:49 mark of the closing period.

The Kings, who have lost seven of their last eight games, were without goalie Jonathan Quick, who had surgery to repair a torn meniscus and will miss at least four weeks.

Campbell had 26 saves in goal for the Kings. Elliott had 25 saves in the victory.



Anaheim Ducks centre Rickard Rakell (right) moves the puck against New York Rangers right wing Mats Zuccarello during the second period at Honda Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

LA LIGA

Solari challenges Bale to shine after 'Clasico' criticism

'Bale is under the spotlight, and I hope he shows us his enormous talent'

Reuters
Madrid

Real Madrid's interim coach Santiago Solari has urged Gareth Bale to answer his critics and show more consistency for the stumbling European champions after underperforming in last week's humiliating 5-1 defeat to Barcelona in the 'Clasico'.

Bale, Real's record signing, has been in the firing line this week for a limp display in the thrashing at the Nou Camp.

The result led to coach Julen Lopetegui being sacked after a fourth league defeat in five games, which has left the team ninth in La Liga.

The Wales forward is yet to step up and become the club's talismanic figure since Cristiano Ronaldo left for Juventus, and he was criticised above all for failing to press opponents and do defensive work as Barca ran riot late in the second half.

"Bale is under the spotlight, and I hope he shows us his enormous talent," Solari told a news conference ahead of Real's La Liga game at home to Real Valladolid today.

"We want to enjoy him every day, he's a fantastic player."

Bale has good memories of facing Valladolid at the Santiago Bernabeu, having scored a hat-trick in a 4-0 win against them in his debut season for Madrid.

Valladolid, owned by former Real and Brazil striker Ronaldo, are one of the surprise packages of this La Liga season and are undefeated in their last six outings, currently sitting three places above Madrid in the standings.

Solari, who oversaw a 4-0 win over third division side Melilla in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday with impressive displays from youngsters such as Vinicius Jr and Alvaro Odriozola, also warned Real's more senior players that their place in the team was not guaranteed.

"There are no unquestion-



Real Madrid's Gareth Bale. (Reuters)

able players here because there will always be injuries or players who are performing below their level," he said.

"We have players here who have survived a lot of battles and have won them but we also have a lot of young players who have a

lot of talent."

Solari will be forced to lean on his squad against Valladolid due to a spate of injuries in defence, with Raphael Varane, Dani Carvajal and Marcelo all unavailable, while striker Mariano Diaz has also been ruled out.

A Champions League winning midfielder with Real in 2002 and a former Argentina international, Solari has been coach of the club's reserve team, Castilla, since 2016.

If Real do not name a successor to Lopetegui by Nov. 12, the

Argentine will automatically become Real's coach until the end of the season.

The Spanish football federation's regulations state that an interim coach can only be in charge for a maximum of two weeks.

SPOTLIGHT

Four Balkan countries consider 2030 World Cup, Euro 2028 bids

Reuters
Varna, Bulgaria

Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Romania are considering a joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup and the European championship two years earlier, Balkan countries' officials said yesterday.

No Balkan nation has hosted the World Cup while the former Yugoslavia, which broke up in 1991, hosted the four-country European Championships in 1976. "I think it is worth discussing the proposal of (Greek Prime Minister Alexis) Tsipras," Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov told a news conference during a summit between Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Serbia in the Black Sea city of Varna.

Tsipras said the four countries would discuss the possibility of becoming candidates for a major sporting event within 10 years.

"Just as Bulgaria and Italy hosted the world volleyball championship (in September), the four countries - Serbia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria - (can) bid to host the world (soccer) championship in 2030," Borissov said.

The English Football Association has already announced plans to conduct a feasibility

study into a joint bid for the 2030 tournament along with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The Football Association of Ireland said it will join them in exploring the potential bid.

A South American tri-nation bid involving Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay has already been announced for 2030. The bid is designed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the first World Cup, which took place in Uruguay in 1930. Morocco, which has made five unsuccessful bids to host the tournament including 2026, has also said it would try again for 2030. Algeria and Tunisia are considering joining Morocco in a joint North African bid. World governing body FIFA are not expected to vote to decide the 2030 hosts before 2022, when the World Cup is headed to Qatar.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said the Balkan quartet will also bid to host the European championship in 2028, adding it would give them a chance to improve their stadiums and sports infrastructure. A Bulgarian government spokeswoman confirmed that a joint bid to host the tournament in 2028 has been discussed.

The 2026 World Cup will be hosted jointly by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Warnock expects emotional atmosphere for Leicester visit

Cardiff City fans plan to unveil a giant flag with the Thai emblem to honour Leicester City owner Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha when the teams meet in an emotional Premier League clash today, manager Neil Warnock said. Warnock said yesterday the Thai tycoon's death in a helicopter crash last weekend had made the match at the Cardiff City Stadium lose its significance, but would bring fans from both teams closer.

"Things like this unite supporters," Warnock told a news conference yesterday.

"It is going to be a difficult time for both teams and supporters. I think our fans have been fantastic - they have done a giant flag with the Thai emblem to be passed around and it will be quite emotional

for our fans."

Vichai was one of five killed in the crash near the King Power Stadium after Leicester's last league match on Saturday, a 1-1 draw with West Ham United. Leicester manager Claude Puel paid an emotional tribute to Vichai on Thursday and said it had been one of the hardest weeks in the history of the football club.

Puel said Leicester's players were devastated by the accident and the team wanted to honour their chairman on the pitch against Cardiff. Warnock said he had prepared his team for the match, but was unsure what would happen on the pitch.

"Football pales into insignificance when you see what's happened and how important life is," Warnock said.

FOCUS

Bolt leaves Central Coast Mariners after trial

Reuters
Melbourne

Olympic sprint champion Usain Bolt has finished his football trial at Central Coast Mariners and will leave the club after failing to agree commercial terms, the A-League side said yesterday.

The Jamaican's mission to secure a professional contract in Australia at the age of 32 dominated pre-season and proved a marketing boost for the sleepy Central Coast region north of Sydney.

However, his performances in training and trial matches over the last two months did little to remove doubts about the eight-time Olympic gold medalist's chances of making the grade. Mariners owner Mike Charlesworth said the Mariners had been "thrilled" to have worked with the popular athlete.

"Despite the fact that we could not come to an agreement that would continue Usain Bolt's football journey with the Central Coast Mariners, we've been thrilled to have the Olympic champion sprinter and world record holder as part of our Club for these past eight weeks," he said in a joint statement with Bolt.

The Mariners said they had worked with Bolt and his agent Ricky Simms to engage with external partners in a bid to strike a commercial deal.

"Despite several promising potential partners, both Bolt and the Central Coast Mariners have amicably concluded that they will not be able to settle on a suitable deal in a timely manner," the statement added. Bolt thanked the club and wished them well for the new season.

"I would like to thank the Central Coast Mariners owners, management, staff, players and fans for making me feel so welcome during my time there. I wish the club success for the season ahead," he said.

Bolt drew thousands of fans to Mariners' pre-season games that would normally struggle to draw a few hundred, and his two goals in a match against a local amateur side generated headlines worldwide.

However, it was not enough for the Mike Mulvey-coached club to produce a contract before the season started last month. With the league's next registration period not opening until January 3, that left Bolt as little more than a high-profile cheerleader.

Football Federation Australia CEO David Gallop also said he would not dig into the A-League's marquee fund to secure a contract with Bolt.

Mariners CEO Shaun Mielekamp was diplomatic when asked whether Bolt's departure was a matter of financial terms or his quality as a footballer.

"It's more of a timing issue in all fairness," he told reporters yesterday, speaking of Bolt as a "fast" learner.

"I suppose there is an air of regret that this huge opportunity wasn't able to be maximised.

"It was such a crazy moment that everyone got a brilliant chance to enjoy the ride that happened... To have our club on the world stage and world media was something that we will forever be grateful for."



Olympic sprinter Usain Bolt celebrating scoring a goal for A-League club Central Coast Mariners in his first competitive start for the club against Macarthur South West United in Sydney on October 12. (AFP)

EPL

Sarri expects fit-again Hazard to play a role against Palace

AFP
London

Maurizio Sarri expects Eden Hazard to feature against Crystal Palace tomorrow after the Chelsea star recovered from the back injury that sidelined him for two weeks.

Hazard had missed Chelsea's last three games but he was fit enough to train with his team-mates in the latter part of this week. Blues manager Sarri is confident Hazard will be involved when Palace visit Stamford Bridge, but he is still waiting to decide whether the Belgian playmaker will start or come off the bench.

"Yesterday Eden had a large part of training with the team," Sarri told reporters on Friday.

"Maybe he will not be ready to play for 90 minutes at the moment because it was his first training in the last two weeks. But probably he will be able to play for 40, 45 minutes. So for us it's important."

Whether Hazard will start on Sunday remains to be seen as Sarri added: "I don't know, I want to speak with him first."

Hazard's presence would be a major boost for Chelsea after his blistering start to the season. The 27-year-old has scored eight times for Chelsea,

with his superb solo strike in a League Cup win at Liverpool ranking as a contender for goal of the season.

Chelsea sit in third place in the Premier League, two points behind leaders Manchester City, after a fine start to the campaign.

Ahead of the Palace clash, Sarri has taken the intriguing decision to make Gary Cahill his official club captain, even though the centre-back has barely featured this term.

Cahill had previously admitted he could have to leave Chelsea for regular first-team Football, but Sarri has endorsed his Blues future by reappointing him as skipper after canvassing his squad's opinion.

"The captain is Cahill, and if he's not on the pitch it's (Cesar) Azpilicueta," Sarri said. "Our captain is Cahill because Cahill was the captain last season and I have spoken with his mates, and everybody told me that he was really a very good captain."

Asked whether appointing Cahill as captain means he will definitely stay at Chelsea at least until the end of the season, Sarri said: "I don't know. It depends on him, I think."

"He played very often in the last seven, eight matches. It depends on him, on the club I think, but for me Cahill is very important on the pitch but also off the pitch."



COMMENT

United can reach Premier League top four, says Mourinho

'When you are outside the top four I don't think you should speak about the title'

AFP
Manchester

Jose Mourinho believes Manchester United can still secure a top-four finish in the Premier League, saying an unkind fixture list is partly to blame for their early season struggles.

United are languishing in eighth place in the table, five points from a Champions League qualification position, as they prepare to visit Bournemouth today. But the manager believes his team have been hindered by a series of difficult back-to-back away fixtures, citing the fact they must travel to Manchester City in the Premier League on November 11, four days after a Champions League trip to Juventus, and that they visit Liverpool in December after a European away game against Valencia.

He did not mention that United have also had back-to-back home games three times across all competitions already this season and have only played two of the current top six in their opening 10 league games. Mourinho, in his pre-match press conference, said he believed the picture at Old Trafford would be rosier at the beginning of the New Year.

"I always say that in the end of the season you play 19 matches at home and away and it doesn't matter when but the reality is that the way the fixtures are coming, sometimes they have an influence in the moment. "We had a double fixture away in September. Now we have a double away league fixture at Bournemouth and Manchester City.

"We will have Juventus away before we go to Manchester City, and we will have Valencia away before Liverpool. "In this part of the season, we play away against possibly the three biggest candidates for the title, in Liverpool, Chelsea and Manchester City, so the calendar was not nice to us.

"But I think by the end of December, which is the end of the first half of the Premier League season, we are not going to be in the position we are now. We will be in a better position."

Mourinho has refused to rule out a challenge for the title but says the first priority must be to climb into the top four. "When you are outside the top four I don't think you should speak about the title," he said. "When you are in the top four, which I believe we are going to be, you can look up, see the distance, look to the fixtures, to the calendar."



He declined to reveal whether striker Romelu Lukaku would be recalled at Bournemouth, having been dropped after going eight games without scoring.

The manager also said he was "100 percent not guilty" of using foul language after being cleared by an independent panel of a FA charge. Mourinho was accused of improper conduct for remarks he allegedly made in Portuguese after their 3-2 win over Newcastle on October 6.

He has avoided a touchline ban after the charge was found "not proven", although it is understood that the FA is considering an appeal. However, Mourinho said the reason United went to such lengths to contest the charge, putting forward detailed linguistic analysis and citing precedents of other football figures swearing during matches, was because he was convinced of his innocence.

"You know the reason why I ask the club and lawyers to appeal was because I was 100 percent sure that I was not guilty of these charges but you never know how it ends," he said.

Emery is a top manager: Klopp

Liverpool's Jurgen Klopp says Arsenal boss Unai Emery has proved himself as a top manager as the two coaches prepare to go head to head for the first time since the 2016 Europa League final.

Emery, then in charge at Sevilla, got the better of Klopp in the final in Basel, with his side coming from behind to win 3-1, and subsequently won the French league title with Paris Saint-Germain. The Spaniard's arrival at Arsenal as a replacement for Arsene Wenger earlier this year was not met with universal approval from fans after some underwhelming results in the Champions League with a star-studded PSG squad.

But Klopp believes Emery has won enough in his career - three successive Europa League titles and five major trophies at PSG - to warrant the respect his current 13-match unbeaten run deserves.

"All people in football knew how good he is but I am not sure all Arsenal fans were over the moon at first when they heard it would be Emery," said Klopp. "But that's England a little bit, you want the poster boys. Unai was in France and before that in Spain in a smaller club, so you can go a bit under the radar.

"Not for all the people in football, though. I saw yesterday that he won eight titles in two or three years. That's pretty big." Klopp, whose side are level on points with Manchester City at the top of the Premier League, dismissed the suggestion that Emery produced a tactical masterclass to get the better of his side in the second half of their Europa League final encounter.

"You're giving managers a bit too much credit if you think we have that much influence. He couldn't defend (against) us in the first half. We had to help with that by

missing our chances," he said. "They won, we lost, that's already history," he added. Klopp's record against Arsenal since arriving in England is impressive. He has never lost against the Gunners, with three wins and two draws from five matches.

The fixture has a history of high scores, with the past nine Premier League matches bringing 42 goals. "It doesn't look like that will change. They score a lot of goals and are really good offensively," said Klopp.

"We have to see how this game will develop. With two very offensive-orientated teams it can often happen. It doesn't have to - we saw in the Manchester City game (a goalless draw) that, but it is possible at least."

Klopp will still be without midfielders Jordan Henderson and Naby Keita, who are not likely to be in contention for a recall until next weekend.

PREVIEW

Iran's Persepolis plot Japan ambush in Asian CL final

AFP
Tokyo

Iran's Persepolis insist the tag of underdogs will mean nothing when they travel to Japan's Kashima Antlers in the first leg of the Asian Champions League final this weekend.

The Antlers start as favourites today as they look to keep the continental title in Japanese hands after Urawa Reds won it for a second time last year. But Persepolis believe they can spring an upset against a team who famously reached the 2016 Club World Cup final, where Real Madrid needed extra time and a Cristiano Ronaldo hat-trick to sink them.

"Our players are physically and mentally prepared for the challenge," Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic told the *Tokyo Times*. "We have the ambition and I trust my players," added the Croatian, whose side are hoping to become Iran's first Asian champions since PAS Tehran in 1993.

"I am waiting for the best moment of my life," Persepolis, the record 11-time Iranian champions, squeezed into their first Asian final after beating Qatar's Al Sadd 2-1 on aggregate last month.

Oiwa Go's Kashima, who are comfortably Japan's most successful club domestically with eight J-League titles, are targeting Asian glory as they struggle to keep pace with table-topping Kawasaki Frontale. The Antlers completed an astonishing comeback to edge Suwon Bluewings 6-5 on aggregate to reach their first

Asian Champions League final and will again bank on mercurial Brazilian Serginho to provide the spark against the visitors.

Japan's national coach Hajime Moriyasu believes Kashima need to give themselves a decent platform in order to beat Persepolis, who will pose a real threat in the return leg at the cavernous Azadi stadium in Tehran.

"Persepolis are a very strong side and have every chance of winning the title," he said, according to the Asian Football Confederation website.

"Obviously I'd love Kashima to win but a good home win will be vital. If they can get the right result I'm confident they can lift the trophy, even though that away leg will be very difficult."

Persepolis, who won the 1990-91 Asian Cup Winners Cup, will have to get past veteran Kashima goalkeeper Kwoun Sun-tae first.

The South Korean is looking to become the first player to win the Asian Champions League three times after lifting the trophy with Jeonbuk Motors in 2006 and 2016.

His opposite number, Persepolis keeper Alireza Beiranvand, is an equally tough nut to crack and he proved it in the second leg of the semi-final, producing a wonder-save to keep out a late header from Spain and Barcelona legend Xavi and safeguard victory.

"It would be a big honour for me and my country if I can win the title," said the Iran international. "It's one of my wishes in life and I would enjoy it for years to come."



Persepolis' Croatian head coach Branko Ivankovic (left) and Kashima Antlers' head coach Oiwa Go.

Ronaldo starts against Cagliari

Cristiano Ronaldo will lead Juventus's attack against Cagliari in Serie A today as coach Massimiliano Allegri said he would not be distracted by next week's blockbuster against Manchester United. Juventus will look to keep their unbeaten streak in Serie A against the Sardinians in Turin four days before taking on Jose Mourinho's United in the Allianz Stadium.

"I've asked the guys to just win the game," Allegri told a press conference ahead of today's game as Juventus sit top of Serie A, six points ahead of Inter Milan

and Napoli. Ronaldo - who has scored seven goals in ten games - is sure to start up front with Allegri still to choose between Paulo Dybala, Mario Mandzukic and Douglas Costa to play alongside the Portuguese star. Defender Giorgio Chiellini and winger Federico Bernardeschi have both been ruled out but Sami Khedira and Mandzukic are back in the group. "It won't be easy, it never is easy to win and we all saw that against Empoli where we struggled, because we started well and then fell asleep," said Allegri.

SPOTLIGHT

'City can survive without injured De Bruyne'

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Pep Guardiola insists Manchester City can survive without Kevin De Bruyne after the inspirational Belgian playmaker was ruled out for up to six weeks due to a knee injury.

De Bruyne sustained ligament damage to his left knee in the closing stages of City's League Cup victory over Fulham at the Etihad Stadium on Thursday.

It was just the second start this season for De Bruyne, who injured ligaments in his right knee during the first week of the campaign, forcing him to the sidelines for the next two months.

The latest problem will keep him out for "five to six" weeks but, while City boss Guardiola is upset about De Bruyne's absence, he is confident that it will not prove too damaging to the Premier League leaders' bid to win silverware.

"We are a stronger team with Kevin than without him. But we

have to live without him and we have to be there when he comes back, that's all we can do," he told reporters yesterday.

"I was so sad. I didn't see him after the game. The doctor said he was sad - today he was less sad and the next day he'll be strong again.

"He'll spend the time with his new boy and his family. Hopefully after the international break, there'll be two or three more games and after that he'll be back.

"By then hopefully we'll be in the knockout stages of the Champions League when he comes back and up there in the Premier League.

"That will help us in the last part that he will be fresh in mind and body and help us reach our targets."

Even though De Bruyne's period of convalescence will include an international break, he is still facing the prospect of missing seven games for his club, including the Manchester derby and a trip to Chelsea.

And the question remains whether Guardiola might have

been advised to take De Bruyne off before the 86th minute against Fulham, when he was injured in a collision with Tim Fosu-Mensah.

NO MESSI MOVE

"Football is football, it's a dynamic game, a lot of contact and it sometimes happens," Guardiola said.

"This kind of injury is unlucky, I think he's so strong and he's recovered so well, the other was more dangerous than this one. He'll recover well.

We have an excellent department. I'm more concerned about when it's muscular injuries, that's more concern. When it's a trauma he's unlucky with that situation."

Guardiola has also responded to reports in Spain linking City, once again, with a move for Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi.

And, while City's vast financial wealth would obviously mean such a transfer would be possible, Guardiola insists he will never attempt to sign the Argentine icon from his former club.

"I said many, many times since I came here, when I left Barcelona, Bayern and now City, that never have I asked Lionel Messi to join Bayern Munich or here," he said.

"I never went to both clubs and said I want this player. Never. I know how important he is to Barcelona.

"Myself I have never spoken, never made the first step - and I'd never do that. I've said one thousand times about that."

Guardiola has also repeated his intention to persuade Spanish teenager Brahim Diaz to sign a new contract with City after he scored twice against Fulham, his first senior goals for the club.

Talks are ongoing with the 19-year-old who is understood to be concerned about the lack of first team opportunities in City's star-studded team.

"We want him. It's a market and it's what it is. We go to other clubs and buy players, we try to take care of them, we try to give them the best education and facilities and we try to do everything," he said.



Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (right) speaks with manager Pep Guardiola as he leaves the field after picking up an injury during the English League Cup, 4th round football match between Manchester City and Fulham in Manchester on Thursday. (AFP)

SQUASH

Farag eases past German Rosner to win Qatar Classic

'THE ATMOSPHERE WAS BEYOND MY IMAGINATION'



Qatar Classic winner Ali Farag of Egypt receives his trophy from Nasser al-Kheleifi, President of the Qatar Tennis and Squash Federation. Runner-up Simon Rosner and tournament director and federation Secretary-General Tariq Zainal are also seen. At bottom, Farag celebrates after winning the final point. **PICTURES:** Jayan Orma

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Egyptian Ali Farag, the 26-year-old from Cairo, delighted a partisan crowd at the Khalifa Tennis & Squash Complex as he defeated Germany's World No 5 Simon Rosner in straight games to win the 2018 Qatar Classic – to mark his second PSA World Tour Platinum title victory.

Farag's defence of his maiden Platinum title win, the US Open, was crushed by Rosner last month when the pair met in semi-finals of the 2018 edition of that event, but the World No 2 earned his revenge with a near faultless display to down Rosner 11-9, 11-7, 11-5.

It was the German who began the stronger of the two, getting the better of Farag in the opening exchanges to open up a quick lead. But it was short-lived as Farag began to nullify Rosner's mid-court dominance to level the opening game, and from that point on he went from strength to strength to complete the win after 46 minutes.

"At the beginning I saw how crowded the venue was and the screams of the crowd were crazy which made me nervous – it took me a little while to calm my nerves down," said Farag.

"The atmosphere was beyond my imagination. Nothing I've played before was like that but mid-way through the



first game I managed to settle and get into my game plan.

"I tried to make sure that first game was long and that I wasn't giving away any cheap points. I was behind and I didn't think I would win that game, but coming through to win it made a huge psychological difference I think.

"At the US Open against Simon I became too passive, and if you do that he will kill you on court. You have to find

that balance and I was able to do that from the second half of the first game all the way to the end today so I am very happy.

"I'm very happy with the win, and with my week and how I backed up match after match. And I'm really proud with the way I handled the whole week."

Speaking after the match, Rosner said: "He was the better player today. I made a few errors – I hung in there, I tried very

hard and everything I could, but he was just too good – but he deserves the win. I don't have any regrets, getting in another final is huge for me. Obviously, you want to get those wins, but at the same time, you should be happy with what you have achieved.

"I have good memories from this court, last year I made the semis, this year a finalist, who knows, maybe a winner next year."

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Al Sadd bounce back in style, rout Umm Salal



Pedro Miguel celebrates scoring for Al Sadd against Umm Salal yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd got back to winning ways with a 5-1 victory over Umm Salal in Week 11 of the QNB Stars League at the Al Sadd Stadium yesterday.

Pedro Miguel (20th minute), Hassan al-Haydous (29th), Xavi Hernandez (55th) and Akram Afif (69th and 87th) scored the goals for Al Sadd.

Yannick Sagbo scored the consolation goal for Umm Salal in the 33rd minute.

Al Sadd raised their points tally to 20 from nine matches. They now have six wins and played two games less due to their AFC Champions League commitments.

It was a blow to Umm Salal, who aim to break into the top four. They remained on 15 points.

Al Sadd controlled the game with 62 per cent possession. The Wolves forced 14 corners compared to Umm Salal's just one.

Akram took his tally to 10 in the top scorers' list with 10 goals.

It was rare that tournament top scorer and Algerian striker Baghdad Bounedjah (16) did not get into the scoring act. He gave the assist for al-Haydous' goal and Akram's first goal.

Umm Salal were in the game effectively in the first half when they reduced the margin.

After Pedro's goal came off an assist by Xavi and al-Haydous scored, Sagbo pulled one back with an opportunistic strike off a cross from the right by Mah-

mond al-Mawas.

It was Sagbo's eighth goal this season.

Before half-time came to an end, al-Haydous came up with a cracker of a shot only to be blocked by Umm Salal goalkeeper Basel Zaidan.

Al Sadd continued in the second half from where they left off. While Xavi and Akram twice found the target, Bounedjah was unlucky to do so on a few occasions.

In an earlier match, Al Shahania held Al Gharafa to a goalless draw. Al Gharafa moved to 15 points and Al Shahania 12.

It was the third drawn encounter for both Al Gharafa and Al Shahania.

The Cheetahs have four wins and as many defeats against their name, whereas Al Shahania have registered three victories and five losses.

Al Gharafa enjoyed a possession of 53 per cent in the first half, which they increased marginally to 55 per cent at the final whistle. Both teams tried hard to make a breakthrough, but their efforts went in vain.

Al Gharafa missed Abdulaziz Hatem through an injury, while Al Shahania were without their ace Argentinian striker Luciano Vazquez who received his marching orders during their 1-1 draw with Umm Salal in the previous round.

The second half too did not see a drastic improvement as Al Gharafa found it hard to break a resolute Al Shahania defence.

Al Gharafa's Dutch star Wesley Sneijder scored a goal in the 59th minute, but it was ruled offside.



A piece of the action from the Al Gharafa-Al Shahania match.

BOTTOMLINE

Valuable lesson learned for Qatar, says Pinheiro

AFC
Bogor, Indonesia

Qatar coach Bruno Pinheiro believes Qatar's 3-1 defeat to South Korea in the semi-finals of the AFC U-19 Championship Indonesia 2018 on Thursday has taught his side a valuable lesson.

With midfielder Jeon Se-jin to the fore, three first-half goals saw the Koreans dominate proceedings early on, before Qatar recovered after the break to reduce the deficit through Lee Jae-ik's own goal with over half an hour to play.

It proved to be a case of too little, too late for the West Asians though, with Pinheiro declaring that the result and the manner of the defeat would only serve to strengthen Qatar going forward – especially at next year's FIFA U-20 World Cup in Poland.

"There is little doubt that our opponents had great quality," he said.

"On the day, Korea Republic were better than us. Having said that, the result was not necessarily because we did something wrong, rather it was down to the fact that they were such a good team.

"Overall, this tournament has been a suc-



cess. I am really satisfied with what the players did and, I believe we learn when we lose.

"We certainly learned something against South Korea, in as much as when your opponents are at such a good level, you cannot be afraid to manage the rhythm of the game, not be afraid to press the ball. I do not like to 'park the bus', I like to attack and that is our style.

"I believe we have learned a good lesson for the World Cup where we will have to compete with some very good teams."

The Qataris had impressed throughout the group stage, before going on to beat Thailand in the quarter-finals. However, after seeing his side exit the tournament, Pinheiro was left to reflect on the fine line between success and failure synonymous with knockout stage football.

"I do not think we played poorly against Korea Republic," the Portuguese tactician said.

"There were just 20 minutes in the first half when our opponents were better than us. During that period, they scored three times, otherwise it was a very balanced game.

"That was our mistake. We started the match well, but we gave the Koreans far too much space. We were able to rectify a few things at half-time, and after the break we scored and played well. Unfortunately, it was too late."