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Hacking fallout nearly killed my wife, says Wiggins



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Warriors down Grizzlies, register eighth straight win

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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Mavuta shines as Zimbabwe shock Bangladesh

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SPOTLIGHT

Sheikh Ali, Bassem lead Qatar's hopes at GCT final

THIS IS SIXTH TIME THE STATE-OF-THE-ART AL SHAQAB ARENA WILL BE HOSTING THE FINALS OF THE GCT SERIES



Qatar rider Sheikh Ali bin Khalid al-Thani (right), event director Ali al-Rumaihi, GCT founder and president Jan Tops and Sporting Director of GCT Marco Danese at a press conference at Al Shaqab yesterday. At right, file photo of Bassem Mohamed in action.



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Bassem Hassan Mohamed will look to repeat his last year's heroics, while Sheikh Ali bin Khalid al-Thani will be eyeing his first win as the Global Champions Tour (GCT) returns to Al Shaqab from tomorrow.

This is sixth time the state-of-the-art Al Shaqab arena will be hosting the finals of the GCT series. Top riders and horses will line up for three days of action with spectators sure to be treated to showjumping of high quality.

All eyes will be on home heroes Bassem and Sheikh Ali as they compete with world class

riders to win prize money worth €1,700,000. Bassem had made history last year by becoming the first home rider to clinch GCT Grand Prix title here. While Bassem will be aiming for an encore, Sheikh Ali would be keen to win for the first time.

On the eve of the championship, Sheikh Ali said Bassem's win last year showed how Qatari riders had benefited from hosting GCT over the years.

"I have always been honoured to represent my country in this exciting and strong competition, where the elite riders will participate. Ten years ago we dreamt of hosting one round of GCT and now we have hosted the event for six years. The championship, horses and riders involved have

given a huge boost to equestrian sport in Qatar, and it showed when Bassem won here last year," Sheikh Ali said.

"The level of jumping in the championship is very high and helps in the performance of the Qatari riders. Without a doubt, bringing the best riders in the world to participate in the biggest competition will attract and inspire young people in Qatar to take up the sport," he added.

Sheikh Ali himself has benefited immensely while competing with top riders in Doha and around the world. He finished a creditable sixth at the 2016 Rio Olympics and earlier this year won silver at the Asian Games in Jakarta. "I have had great past one year. I had a good result in London

and also in the Asiad. I hope we do well here in Al Shaqab this weekend. The GCT is the number one league in the world for equestrian and we are proud that the championship is being held in Qatar," he said.

Great Britain's Ben Maher has already wrapped up this year's GCT title, but there is intense battle for second position with seven riders in contention to finish runner-up. Just 28 points separate second place rider Italy's Alberto Zorzi (237 points) and Germany's Christian Ahlmann (209 points) in eighth - and with 40 points for a win there is everything to play for.

Third in the rankings is 2017 overall champion Harrie Smolders (NED), just three points

away from Alberto on a score of 234, and fourth is Daniel Deusser (GER) just a further point away on 233 overall. Scott Brash (GBR) holds fifth with a tally of 225, two-time LGCT Grand Prix winner Nicola Philippaerts (BEL) sits in sixth with 219 and two-time LGCT title holder Edwina Tops-Alexander (AUS) is on 212 overall.

Doha will also provide the last chance for individual riders to qualify for the GCT 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.

Meanwhile, Ali al-Rumaihi, the event director, revealed that like last year the third leg of the Hathab National Equestrian series will also be held simultane-

ously with GCT.

"As was had done last year, we have also incorporated Hathab as part of GCT. Hathab is an initiative of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, president of the Qatar Olympic Committee. It is aimed at improving the standard of horse riding among Qatari youths and to grow awareness of horsemanship as part of Qatar's history and tradition," he said.

"Events such as the Global Champions Tour go a long way towards fulfilling Al Shaqab's vision of being a global and leading global centre for equine excellence and providing an engaging experience for the community. It helps to promote horsemanship, inculcate passion as well as promoting Qatar's equestrian herit-

age," al-Rumaihi added.

Besides top class competition, there are plenty of things to look forward to for spectators including pony rides, jumping castles, a variety of kids' activities, outdoor cafes and other F&B outlets. In addition, the organisers have also set up a flea market providing local entrepreneurs an opportunity to showcase and promote their products. beIN Sports will telecast the three-day championship.

Jan Tops, the founder and president of the GCT, said: "Al Shaqab is a special place and we love to be here in Qatar. The facility is just top class and so is the organisation. The riders too love come to Qatar as they know they only get best of the facilities here."

BOTTOMLINE

City sought to bypass financial fairplay rules: report

AFP
Berlin

Premier League champions Manchester City attempted to bypass UEFA's Financial Fair Play (FFP) regulations by allowing their Abu Dhabi-based sponsors to make cash injections, *Der Spiegel* alleged yesterday.

The German news magazine said it had seen internal documents in which the club's officials discussed how to wipe out a shortfall of almost €10mn (\$13mn).

The allegations are the latest in the so-called Football Leaks series.

FFP rules were introduced to curb European sides racking up huge debts and to put limits on how much clubs could lose over prescribed periods.

City were fined 60mn euros by UEFA in 2014 for breaching those rules, but the two parties reached an agreement under which

the club would get 40mn euros back if they stuck to the terms of their settlement.

Der Spiegel says City were in danger of violating the FFP rules after they sacked manager Roberto Mancini in 2013 after the club failed to successfully defend their title.

The magazine claims that in an internal e-mail, City's chief financial officer Jorge Chumillas wrote: "We will have a shortfall of 9.9mn pounds in order to comply with UEFA FFP this season. The deficit is due to RM (Roberto Mancini) termination. I think that the only solution left would be an additional amount of AD (Abu Dhabi) sponsorship revenues that covers this gap."

To evade UEFA sanctions, another City executive allegedly suggested "a backdated deal for the next two years (...) paid up front?"

Der Spiegel claimed that 10 days after the end of the season, Chumillas an-

nounced his decision - sponsorship contracts would be adjusted, with the club's main sponsor Etihad paying £1.5mn more, the Abu Dhabi tourism authority chipping in £5.5mn and investment fund Aabar £0.5mn.

Crucially, all the sponsors were allegedly asked to act as if the deal had been agreed at the start of the season.

When Chumillas asked his colleague Simon Pearce if they could change the date of payments from the sponsors, Pearce allegedly answered: "Of course, we can do what we want."

In a repeated statement they first issued last week, City said they would not comment on what they described as "out of context materials purportedly hacked or stolen from City Football Group and Manchester City personnel and associated people."

The club's manager Pep Guardiola insisted he wasn't aware of any wrongdoing.

"I'm completely honest, I don't know what happen because I'm a manager. I'm focused on what happens on the pitch, in the locker room," said Guardiola yesterday on the eve of City's Champions League clash with Shakhtar Donetsk.

"The business and how they handle this sort of situation, I am completely out."

"But I am part of the club, I am supportive of absolutely the club and we want to do what we have to do in terms of the rules."

The accusations hinge on City's insistence that the Abu Dhabi-based companies are independent sponsors and not merely tools of the Gulf state.

If clubs can show that revenues come from sponsors and not just their owners, they can make larger expenditure on players without falling foul of the FFP rules.

Some of City's European rivals, including Bayern Munich and Atletico Madrid, have complained about such practices.

Qatar's Yousuf al-Kazim elected member of Executive Office of AIBA



QNA
Moscow

Qatar's Yousuf al-Kazim, President of Qatar Boxing and Wrestling Federation (QBWF), has been elected as a member of the Executive Office of the International Boxing Association (AIBA) for the period 2018-2022 during the AIBA's recent General Assem-

bly meeting in Moscow. Al-Kazim defeated China's Zhang Jiaping 58-42 in the election. Al-Kazim's win is a great boost for the Arab bloc at the AIBA. Al-Kazim stressed that he would continue his efforts to develop boxing in the Arab and Asian region.

During these elections, the AIBA elected Uzbekistan's Gafur Rakhimov as president. He defeated Serik Konakbayev of Kazakhstan.



PREVIEW

Pakistan aim to break ODI jinx against Kiwis

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed insists his team can end an 11-match losing run to New Zealand when the two sides meet in the first one-day international in Abu Dhabi today.

Pakistan crushed New Zealand 3-0 in the preceding Twenty20 series on Sunday – their second whitewash in a week following a romp over Australia, also in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

But Sarfraz, part of the team in the last 11 one-day internationals all of which Pakistan lost, want to finally win against New Zealand.

“It’s important to break that losing streak and we need to bring improvement in our performance in one-day internationals,” said Sarfraz yesterday.

Pakistan lost the last two matches in a 3-2 series defeat in United Arab

Emirates (UAE) in 2014, before losing 2-0 in 2015, 2-0 in 2016 and 5-0 in January 2018 – all in New Zealand.

“If you look at our losses most of them were in New Zealand where conditions were different and we lost due to top order failure where we need to improve,” said Sarfraz.

Pakistan also failed to qualify for the final of the Asia Cup held in UAE two months ago, losing both their matches against arch-rivals India and going down to Bangladesh in a clash which decided the finalist.

India won the Asia Cup by beating Bangladesh.

Sarfraz said a tough opponent in New Zealand – ranked third to Pakistan’s fifth in one-day standings – will help the team build for next year’s World Cup in England.

“New Zealand is a good team of this format but we have momentum of the Twenty20 series so we must win this series and that will help towards building towards the World

Cup,” said Sarfraz.

The last two matches are in Abu Dhabi (Friday) and in Dubai (Sunday).

Pakistan then play South Africa in South Africa, Australia (in UAE) and England in England – five one-day internationals each – before the World Cup.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson played down the winning streak against Pakistan, saying it will be a new series.

“It’s a new series and a fresh start,” said Williamson. “I guess it’s a nice statistic to have but at the end of the day, come tomorrow, it’s a new series.” Williamson praised Pakistan as a limited over side.

“They are always a strong side and no matter the format,” said Williamson. “They have a lot of depth. We simply know they have been here for some time and they know these conditions and they have had lots of success. “We are in here for a tough bat-

tle.” New Zealand will welcome pace spearhead Trent Boult who missed the Twenty20 series due to personal reasons while also adding batsman George Worker and spinner Ajaz Patel (as a cover for injured Todd Astle) in the squad.

Teams (from):

New Zealand: Kane Williamson (captain), Todd Astle, Trent Boult, Colin de Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Colin Munro, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, BJ Watling, George Worker

Pakistan: Sarfraz Ahmed (capt), Fakhar Zaman, Imam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Hafeez, Babar Azam, Shoaib Malik, Asif Ali, Haris Sohail, Shadab Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Imad Wasim, Hasan Ali, Junaid Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Usman Khan Shinwari

Umpires: Joe Wilson (WIS) and Shozab Raza (PAK)



The Pakistanis have been in great form in the T20 format but face a tougher challenge when they clash with the Kiwis in an ODI series.

SPOTLIGHT

Zimbabwe send hosts Bangladesh spinning to defeat

Debutant Mavuta claims 4-21, while Raza bags 3-41 in Sylhet

AFP
Sylhet

Brandon Mavuta and Sikandar Raza shared seven wickets between them as Zimbabwe recorded their first Test win in five years with a thumping 151-run victory over Bangladesh yesterday.

Debutant leg-spinner Mavuta claimed 4-21 and off-spinner Raza’s 3-41 as hosts Bangladesh were left chasing 321 runs on the fourth day in the northeastern city of Sylhet.

Wellington Masakadza, another debutant, also shone with two wickets as Zimbabwe made quick work of Bangladesh’s lower order, dismissing the hosts for 169.

Left-arm spinner Masakadza took the final wicket of the innings, sending Ariful Haque for 38 as Zimbabwe notched their first Test win since beating Pakistan in Harare in 2013.

It is also the first time Zimbabwe have clinched an away Test victory since beating Bangladesh in Chittagong 17 years ago in 2001.

“I am ecstatic. I thought the guys went out and worked really hard to apply themselves,” Zimbabwe captain Hamilton Masakadza said in the post match presentation ceremony.

Zimbabwe sensed a win once Raza claimed three vital wickets in the opening session to reduce Bangladesh’s innings to half.

Kyle Jarvis and Mavuta



Zimbabwe cricketer Brandon Mavuta (2nd L) celebrates with his teammate Regis Chakabva (L) as Sikandar Raza (2nd R), captain Hamilton Masakadza (R) look on after winning the first Test cricket in Sylhet yesterday.

joined the act with Raza in the morning as they chipped in with a wicket apiece to leave Bangladesh 111-5 at the break.

Bangladesh resumed play on 26-0 but within half-an-hour had lost their first wicket, with others following quickly.

Play started 30 minutes early to make up for the lost time after bad light brought a premature end to day three, with Bangladesh still needing 295 runs on a wearing pitch.

The home side – whose best run chase was 217-6 against the West Indies in 2009 – started to throw wickets once Raza reviewed

a leg-before appeal against opener Liton Das.

The umpire gave Liton not out but a TV replay indicated the ball would have hit the stump after pitching outside off – ending Liton’s innings on 23.

One down, Mominul Haque dragged a Jarvis delivery onto his stumps for nine before Raza bowled Imrul Kayes for 43 to leave Bangladesh at 83-3.

Skipper Mahmudullah promoted himself to number four but could not rescue his side and perished for 16, giving a catch to substitute fielder Craig Ervine at short leg off

Raza. Raza then took a spectacular catch at cover on the stroke of lunch to hand debutant Mavuta his maiden Test wicket and send back Nazmul Hossain.

“I think the wicket was good, but we didn’t apply ourselves with the bat. We were not disciplined enough to restrict our strokes,” said Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah.

Mavuta dismissed Bangladesh’s last accomplished batsman Mushfiqur Rahim soon after play resume before Zimbabwe wrapped things up. The second Test will be held in Dhaka from November 11-15.

Scorecard

ZIMBABWE first innings 282 (S. Williams 88, H. Masakadza 52; Tajjul Islam 6-108)

BANGLADESH first innings 143 (Ariful Haque 41 not out; T. Chatarra 3-19; S. Raza 3-25)

ZIMBABWE second innings 181 (H. Masakadza 48; Tajjul Islam 5-62, Mehidy Hasan 3-48)

BANGLADESH second innings (overnight 26-0)

Liton Das lbw b Raza	23
Imrul Kayes b Raza	43
Mominul Haque b Jarvis	9
Mahmudullah c Sub b Raza	16
Nazmul Hossain c Raza b Mavuta	13
Mushfiqur c W. Masakadza b Mavuta	13
Ariful c Chakabva b W. Masakadza	38
Mehidy Hasan c Chakabva b Mavuta	7
Tajjul Islam c Taylor b W. Masakadza	0
Nazmul Islam lbw b Mavuta	0
Abu Jayed not out	0
Extras (lb5, lb2)	7
Total (all out; 63.1 overs)	169

Fall of wickets: 1-56 (Liton), 2-67 (Mominul), 3-83 (Imrul), 4-102 (Mahmudullah), 5-111 (Nazmul), 6-132 (Mushfiqur), 7-150 (Mehidy), 8-151 (Tajjul), 9-155 (Nazmul), 10-169 (Ariful)

Bowling: Jarvis 14-5-29-1, Chatarra 9-2-25-0, Raza 17-1-41-3, Williams 8-2-13-0, Mavuta 10-2-21-4, W. Masakadza 5-1-0-33-2

Result: Zimbabwe won by 151 runs. Zimbabwe lead two-match series 1-0

Toss: Zimbabwe

Umpires: Rod Tucker (AUS), Richard Kettleborough (ENG)

TV umpire: Kumar Dharmasena (SRI)

Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)

FIGHTBACK

Foakes leads England revival in first Sri Lanka Test

AFP
Galle

Debutant Ben Foakes hit a defiant and unbeaten 87, guiding England 321 for eight, after Sri Lanka claimed cheap early wickets on the first day of the first Test yesterday.

The Surrey wicket-keeper batsman, who knows this could just be a one-off chance as Jonny Bairstow regains fitness, came in with England precariously placed on 103 for five on a Galle pitch notorious for low scores.

Foakes built crucial partnerships including an 88-run seventh wicket stand with Sam Curran, who made 48, to defy Sri Lanka’s bowlers.

England elected to bat first in what was Sri Lanka’s spin leg-end Ranganatha Herath’s farewell match.

The right-handed Foakes steadied the innings reaching his half century early in the final session as the tourists lost just three wickets after lunch.

Foakes put on 61 for the sixth wicket with Jos Buttler, who was eventually caught behind off Dilruwan Perera for 38.

Left-hander Curran attacked the bowling, hitting one four and three sixes before falling two short of his fifty to spinner Akila Dananjaya.

Adil Rashid made a useful 35 in a stand of 54 with Foakes that increased the frustration for Sri Lanka’s bowlers before he became Perera’s fourth victim of the day.

Jack Leach, batting on 14, then survived some anxious moments in the final two overs to give Foakes a chance to complete a momentous debut ton on day two.

Sri Lanka’s veteran spinner Ranganatha Herath, claimed his 100th Test scalp at Galle after sending back England skipper Joe Root in the opening session.

Only two other bowlers have achieved 100 Test wickets on one ground – Herath’s legen-

dary compatriot Muttiah Muralitharan who achieved it at Galle, Kandy and SSC Colombo, and England paceman James Anderson at Lord’s.

Herath notched up the milestone when Root came down the wicket and missed after a breezy 35.

Root had also steadied England when they stumbled to 10 for 2 after debutant opener Rory Burns was caught behind off Surange Lakmal for nine and Moeen Ali was bowled next ball.

Surrey left-hander Burns had been given the tough task of replacing stalwart Alastair Cook following his retirement in September.

After Root’s dismissal, Perera skittled Keaton Jennings four short of his 50 before bowling Ben Stokes around his legs for seven as he attempted to sweep.

England
R. Burns c Dickwella b Lakmal 9
K. Jennings b Perera 46
M. Ali b Lakmal 0
J. Root b Herath 35
B. Stokes b Perera 7
J. Buttler c Dickwella b Perera 38
B. Foakes not out 87
S. Curran c Chandimal b De Silva 48
A. Rashid c De Silva b Perera .. 35
J. Leach not out 14
Extras (b1, lb1) 2
Total (8 wickets, 91 overs) ... 321

To bat: J. Anderson
Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Burns), 2-10 (Ali), 3-72 (Root), 4-98 (Jennings), 5-103 (Stokes), 6-164 (Buttler), 7-252 (Curran), 8-306 (Rashid)

Bowling: Lakmal 15-4-57-2, Perera 28-4-70-4, Dananjaya 20-2-96-1, Herath 25-4-78-1, De Silva 3-0-18-0

Sri Lanka: D. Karunaratne, K. Silva, K. Mendis, D. Chandimal (capt), A. Mathews, N. Dickwella, Dh. de Silva, D. Perera, A. Dananjaya, S. Lakmal, R. Herath

Toss: England

Umpires: Chris Gaffaney (AUS) and Marais Erasmus (RSA)

TV umpire: Sundaram Ravi (IND)

Match referee: Andy Pycroft (ZIM)

BOTTOMLINE

Sharma’s record ton helps India clinch T20 series

AFP
Lucknow, India

Skipper Rohit Sharma smashed his fourth Twenty20 international century – the most by any batsman in the format – to set up India’s convincing 71-run series-clinching win over West Indies yesterday.

Sharma hit an unbeaten 111 off 61 deliveries to power the hosts to 192-2 after being put into bat first in the second T20 at Lucknow’s newly built cricket stadium.

India then restricted the tourists to 124-9 and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Fast bowlers Bhuvaneshwar Kumar,

Khaleel Ahmed and Jasprit Bumrah, along with spinner Kuldeep Yadav, took two wickets each.

But the day belonged to Sharma. He put on 123 runs with opening partner Shikhar Dhawan – who made 43 – to pummel the West Indian bowling after paceman Oshane Thomas started with a maiden over.

Sharma, who now has 2,203 runs in 86 matches, became India’s highest run-scorer in T20s after surpassing regular captain Virat Kohli (2,102 runs) during his red-hot knock.

He is now the second highest scorer in the world behind New Zealand’s Martin Guptill, on 2,271 runs.

“Whenever you get an opportunity you do your best. Everyone who came out to watch the game will go home with a smile.

Glad that we won this game and this series as well,” said Sharma, who is leading the side in place of the resting Kohli.

“Shikhar’s natural instinct is to put pressure on bowlers. We took the time initially and when he gets going it’s not easy. I think 120-plus partnership between us was very crucial.”

The right-left combination of Sharma and Dhawan, who surpassed 1,000 T20 runs during his 41-ball knock, smashed the balls to all parts of the huge ground before the first wicket fell in the 14th over. Dhawan, who survived a dropped catch on 28, finally fell to spinner Fabien Allen as Nicholas Pooran took a diving catch at long leg.

Sharma then launched an attack as he hit eight fours and seven sixes during his entertaining blitz in front of a raucous

home crowd.

Lokesh Rahul, unbeaten on 26, had the best view when Sharma reached his century in the last over of the innings with a boundary off his opposite number in Carlos Brathwaite.

The Caribbean batting faltered in their chase after losing their openers in Shai Hope, for six, and Shimron Hetmyer, for 15, early. Ahmed bowled Hope in his very first over and then got the dangerous Hetmyer caught at long on, three overs later, with his left-arm pace.

Brief scores
India 195 for 2 (Rohit Sharma 111 not out, Shikhar Dhawan 43)

West Indies 124 for 9 (Darren Bravo 23, K. Paul 20, Kumar 2-12, Bumrah 2-20, Ahmed 2-30. **India won by 71 runs**



England’s Ben Foakes plays a shot during the first day of the opening Test match between Sri Lanka and England at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle yesterday.

FOCUS

Meet Japan's 'Ninja Boy', one who aims to stun Mayweather

20-year-old has never been beaten, boasting a 27-0 record as a professional kickboxer



Japanese kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa (right) poses during a press conference on Monday in Tokyo to announce his fight with US boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. (AFP)

AFP
Tokyo

Japanese kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa, who aims to make history by defeating boxing superstar Floyd Mayweather Jr, claims his left-hook is like a "bolt of lightning" that will "change the world".

The baby-faced southpaw with a blond quiff, who is only a few months out of his teens, was barely known outside his home country before the shock announcement of his New Year's Eve fight with the unbeaten Mayweather.

But the 20-year-old from Chiba near Tokyo is considered

something of a prodigy in Japanese fighting circles and began learning karate at the tender age of five.

Like Mayweather, he has never been beaten, boasting a 27-0 record as a professional kickboxer with 20 wins by knockout. He has four wins out of four in mixed martial arts.

Nasukawa won the world junior karate championship when he was a fifth grader and shifted to kickboxing a year later, according to his official website.

He made his professional kickboxing debut at the age of 16 and became bantamweight oriental rules world champion a year later.

Promoters RIZIN said that Nasukawa — or "Ninja Boy" as

they dubbed him — had "become one of the most popular fighters in Japan, and perhaps the best combat sports prospect the country has ever seen."

There are still no details as to under what rules the fight will be held — whether kicks will be allowed, for example — but Nasukawa claimed after the bout was announced he had "a punch that boxers don't have".

"I don't care what the rules are. I want to be the man who changes history. I'll do that with these fists, with one punch — just watch," said Nasukawa.

'GYM RAT'

Even Mayweather acknowledged that Nasukawa was "an unbelievable talent", praising his

lithe, "gym rat" physique.

"He's very special, he's fast, he's strong. I'm older now and when it comes to experience, I have it on my side. He has youth on his side and he's going to bring a lot of excitement," said the 41-year-old American.

Nasukawa now weighs 56.8 kilograms and is also giving four inches away in height to Mayweather, who won world titles in five different weight classes.

"Our weight class is different, but it means nothing to me," said Nasukawa.

According to his official site, Nasukawa is good with his hands in other areas than punching, saying he is a fan of knitting and sewing — as well as indulging

in traditional Japanese "sento" baths.

Despite his tender age, he published a biography last year entitled "Kakusei", meaning "Awakening".

However, both he and Mayweather have reportedly received some online mockery for the unusual cross-code fight.

According to US sports celebrity website TMZ Sports, US rapper 50 Cent said that Nasukawa looked like an "Uber driver".

And in a foul-mouthed tirade on his Instagram account, Irish mixed martial arts fighter Conor McGregor, who lost to Mayweather in the American's last fight in August 2017, said: "Who's this little prick next to you?"

CYCLING

Fancy Bear hacking fallout nearly killed my wife: Wiggins



AFP
London

The fallout and rumours after British cycling great Bradley Wiggins' medical records were revealed by the Russia-based Fancy Bears computer hacking group came close to killing his wife, he told *The Guardian*.

Wiggins says he would have preferred to be tried for murder than the trial by media he underwent when the details hacked by Fancy Bears revealed he availed himself of Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs).

As a result he was allowed to use triamcinolone, an otherwise banned drug, ahead of his major races in 2011, 2012 and 2013, including the 2012 Tour de France which he won in what was a stellar year for him as he also won the Olympic time-trial gold in London.

TUEs allow athletes to use otherwise banned drugs to treat recognised medical conditions.

The publication of Wiggins' TUE history was followed by a 14-month inquiry by United Kingdom Anti-Doping (UKAD) into whether a package delivered to Wiggins' Team Sky at the 2011 Criterium du Dauphine — a race he won — contained the same drug.

UKAD, however, closed the case last year without coming to a conclusion because of missing

Sky medical records. All this Wiggins says took a huge toll on his family and especially his wife Cath.

"My kids have suffered," Wiggins said in an interview published on Monday.

"We had to move schools and then all the stuff broke with Lance in 2013 (when Armstrong finally admitted to doping) and the kids started getting it."

"People have free rein to put their own facts in place."

"You watch your family suffer, and it's terrible."

"It nearly killed my wife (Cath)."

"She ended up in rehab over it. I'm at home having to deal with it."

"Because she's bi-polar she has this fear of shame, (of) people watching her all the time."

Wiggins, who also won four Olympic golds medals in track cycling, said he felt he would have enjoyed more rights if he had committed murder.

"What I should have done is murder someone because then I'd have had proper rights," he said.

"There'd have been no articles, and I'd have had a fair trial."

"I'd have been cleared or found guilty. Not somewhere in the middle where you can't find any evidence of wrongdoing."

Wiggins drew fire last Friday from world cycling chief David Lappartient for including Armstrong in his latest book "Icons".

BOXING

Wilder hones 'killer' instinct for Fury

AFP
Los Angeles

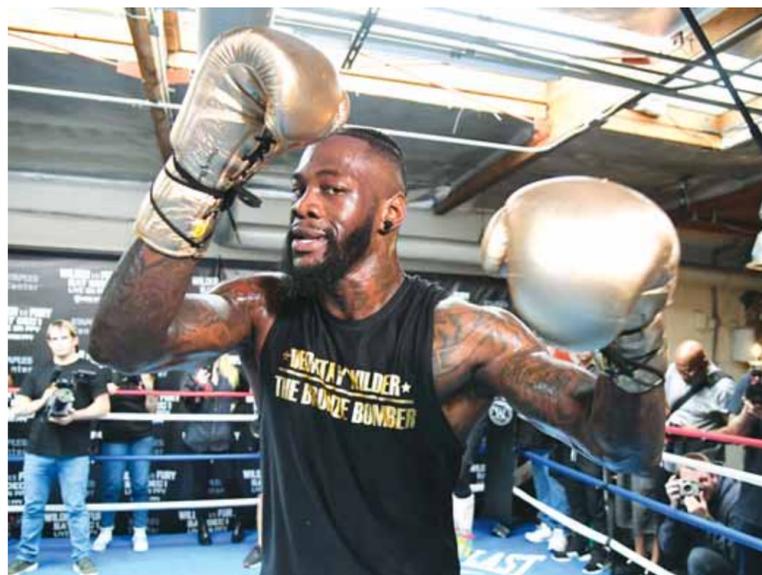
Deontay Wilder says a gruelling training camp has honed his "killer" instinct as he prepares to put his World Boxing Council heavyweight crown on the line against Britain's Tyson Fury next month.

Wilder, who is unbeaten in 40 fights with 39 knockouts, faces off against the undefeated Fury at the Staples Center in Los Angeles on December 1 in what is set to be an explosive encounter.

The 33-year-old Wilder, who is eyeing a potential future bout with IBF, WBA and WBO heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua next year, told reporters in Los Angeles on Monday he was in prime condition after his training camp.

"I'm feeling wonderful," Wilder said. "My mindset has changed, my body has changed, I feel like a killer. I'm transformed into a killer."

"I feel like I'm at my very best right now. Mentally, physically and emotionally I'm ready to go. Everything is perfect. I just want to get in the ring and show ac-



tion. Tyson Fury doesn't know what he's gotten himself into." Wilder's last outing was a bruising battle with Cuba's Luis Ortiz in March. Wilder won

that contest with a 10th round technical knockout after being forced to dig deep by the Cuban. Wilder said Tuesday he had benefited by being given a rough

ride against Ortiz.

"Luis Ortiz was the most avoided fighter in the heavyweight division and I understand why he had never gotten

the title shot before," Wilder said. "I'm the type of fighter who gives people opportunities and he was the fighter I needed to face to prove to the world what I'm all about."

Wilder meanwhile said he is confident his raw punching power will be able to overwhelm Fury's awkward but orthodox style.

"Fury has height just like me and he also brings an awkward style like myself. He's rangy, mobile and he believes he's the best in the world," Wilder said.

"They say that I have the power and he has the boxing skills. We'll see on December 1. It's a puncher versus a boxer. I think the puncher is going to box his lights out, and then I'm going to knock his lights out."

Wilder's trainer Jay Deas revealed that the camp had used smaller but more mobile sparring partners to help Wilder prepare for the athletic challenge posed by Fury.

"Fury is a tall fighter, but it's really the athleticism that makes him what he is," Deas said.

"We believe we're better off finding more athletic guys who are slightly shorter than Fury, rather than someone his height who is a statue."

New York City Marathon beats world record with 52,812 runners at finish line



IAANS
New York

The New York City Marathon broke the world record with 52,812 runners reaching the finish line, surpassing the previous record of 51,394 in the 2016 edition. In a statement issued by the organising committee on Monday, the organisation thanked the New York City Police Department for their collaboration, honouring it for "putting into service the world's largest marathon", with a ceremony where the professional winners of this year's race attended, reports Efe. The NYPD received official finish line tape from the hands of winning athletes Lelisa

Desisa (Ethiopia), Mary Keitany (Kenya), Daniel Romanchuk (United States) and Manuela Schar (Switzerland).

The winners of the children's edition of the race, Nolan Defreitas and Juliette Salazar, also participated in the award ceremony.

Desisa won the marathon for the first time, while Keitany won for the fourth time. Both of them achieved the second fastest time in the history of the open category of men and women.

The report also highlights that, at twenty years old, Romanchuk became the first American and youngest athlete to win in the wheelchair category, while Schar won the women's prize in this category for the second year in a row.

MOTORSPORT

Impressive entry list for Manateq Rally of Qatar

Three MERC, MERC 2 and MERC 3 titles were all decided at penultimate round in Kuwait last week

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) has announced that 19 teams (subject to FIA approval) have entered next week's Manateq International Rally of Qatar, the final round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

The three MERC, MERC 2 and MERC 3 titles were all decided at last weekend's thrilling penultimate round in Kuwait. Many of the teams that took part in that event at the new Kuwait Motor Town racing facility loaded their cars and equipment on a ship bound for Doha and they will be joined by a host of other drivers, including several teams making their MERC debut on the three-day Qatar event (November 15-17).

While the likes of 14-time regional champion Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his Czech rival Vojtech Staff will clash again in the overall rankings with their respective Ford Fiesta and Škoda Fabia RSs, competition in the MERC 2 or showroom category will be intense.

Further Qatari entries come from Khaled al-Suwaidi (the former winner of the Kuwait International Rally), a returning Abdullah al-Kuwari and the likes of 1993 regional champion Sheikh Hamed bin Eid al-Thani, Mohamed al-Meer and Rashid al-Mohamadi.

MERC 2 champion Meshari al-Thefiri and Essam al-Nejadi represent Kuwait. Khaled Juma, Ihab al-Shorafa and Ahmed Shaban are entered under the flag of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the new MERC 3 champion Henry Kahy represents Lebanon with his Jordanian navigator Musa Djiyerian. The surprise on the list is the impressive six-car entry from the Sultanate of Oman. Abdullah al-Rawahi has been a regular in the regional series this year, but the Top Team Oman Subaru Impreza driver will be joined in Qatar by five other crews.

Three Mitsubishi Lancers are listed for Humaid al-Waili, Jarah al-Tauqi and Saif Abdullah al-Harthy and a fur-



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (left) and Khaled al-Suwaidi will be in action at next week's Manateq International Rally of Qatar, the final round of the MERC.

ther two Subaru Imprezas for Zakariya al-Shanfari and Oman-based Shaun McGonigal.

QMMF president Abdulrahman al-Mannai said: "The team have worked

hard to encourage as many entries as we can for the final round of the Middle East Championship and we are very pleased with the outcome, especially after each of the major three categories

were decided in Kuwait. "We have a date clash with Rally Australia, as we were hoping to encourage even more competitors to come to Qatar from Europe, but it bodes well for the

future strength of the championship." The event will start and finish at Souq Waqif in downtown Doha with the ceremonial start planned for 19.00hrs on November 15.

Asian Communities tournament draw held

Doha: A total of 10 teams will feature in the 2018 Asian Communities tournament. The hugely popular tournament - organised by Qatar Football Association (QFA) - is now into its seventh year. The details of the 28-match tournament were revealed at a draw ceremony conducted at Al Bidda Tower. The teams were divided into two groups of five.

The first group includes Japan, the Philippines, defending champions Lebanon, Palestine and Bangladesh. The second group includes teams from Jordan, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Each side will play four matches before the top four sides from each group qualify to the quarter-finals.

The tournament will begin on Thursday, November 29, and the group stage matches will continue until January 18, 2019, which will be held in five stages.

The quarter-finals will be played on 24-25 January. There will be a match for the third place between the two losing teams in the semi-finals on Friday, with the winners of the same round of the championship in the final on Friday, February 8.

The matches will be played held at the Doha Stadium and Al Markhiya Club. The tournament remains hugely popular among the football loving communities living in Qatar, thanks to QFA's outreach programmes. The event set to draw huge crowds like it did in previous years.

The tournament has been a major success in all its previous versions - the first, second, third, fourth and fifth - where the number of participating teams doubled after the first edition that saw the participation of 6 teams. Indonesia won the inaugural edition in 2013.

The second team saw the participation of 12 teams as Jordan emerged champions. The following years Indonesia, Lebanon and Indian communities won the event.

SPOTLIGHT

Hundreds register for seventh edition of Aspire Torch Staircase Run

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Registration places are filling up fast for the seventh annual Aspire Torch Staircase Run (ATSR 2018) scheduled to take place on November 10 from 1:00pm-6:00pm, at The Torch hotel in Doha's Aspire Zone.

Sponsored by Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co. Nissan and De Boer, the 2018 edition of the ATSR will offer sports enthusiasts a fantastic and unique endurance challenge, with runners having to climb more than 1,300 steps to make it to the 51st floor of the famous 300m tower.

Top three who finish the race in the shortest time will receive some great prizes as well as be able to take in the spectacular views of Aspire Zone and Doha.

Registration for this year's race is open for participants eight years of age and older and will feature four categories in different age groups.

The first category to compete will be the Junior (8-11 years), followed by the U-15 (12-14 years), followed by the U-18 (15-17 years), and finally by the Senior (18+ years).

In addition, 10 employees from Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) have teamed up to take part in ATSR 2018 competition and will compete together with corporate teams from General Directorate of Civil Defence, Qatargas, Qatar Petroleum, and Qatar Civil Aviation Authority.

Alanoud Almesnad, a member of the tournament's organising committee, said: "I'm thrilled to say that over 200 participants have already registered for the

Aspire Torch Staircase Run 2018.

The event gets bigger and better every year and we're all very excited to see what this year's winning time and what the final number of participants will be."

Almesnad added: "The Aspire Torch Staircase Run offers something for everyone, whether participating in the event itself or just coming to cheer on a friend member or family who's taken up the 1,300-stair challenge.

"Aspire Zone Foundation hosts hundreds of sporting events for the local communities in Qatar each year but the Torch Staircase Run is definitely one of our most unique and one of the most fun. Good luck to all the participants."

This year AZF will allocate a dedicated area for all family members to enjoy the 2018 edition of the event. The ATSR 2018 Fun Zone will comprise of food and beverage outlets, taekwondo and kickboxing shows, fitness demonstrations, and toy horse rides for children.

Previous editions of the run generated unprecedented success on par with international tower-running competitions, including Empire State Building Run-Up in New York, USA, and Berlin Sky Tower in Germany. Over the past editions, ATSR attracted more than 900 participants from both local and expat communities alongside other tower runners from all over the world.

In 2015, ATSR was awarded an official Grand Prix status as one of the top international tower running competitions.

Interested community members can visit www.lifeinaspire.qa to register and find out more information about taking part in the run.

RUGBY

Curry to miss rest of England's November internationals

AFP
London

Flanker Tom Curry will miss the remainder of England's autumn series due to an ankle injury sustained in the victory against South Africa, coach Steve Borthwick said yesterday. The Sale Sharks back-rower limped off in the second half of a tense 12-11 win at Twickenham and after having the joint scanned, it was confirmed he will miss the Tests against New Zealand, Japan and Australia this month.

"Tom is not available against New Zealand and has been ruled out of the rest of the series as well," Borthwick said. "He's a fantastic young player and we saw that in the game-time he had against South Africa at the weekend. He's got a fantastic future ahead of him. I know that with his attitude he'll come back in even better shape than he is now."

England have otherwise been given a clean bill of health ahead of Saturday's visit of New Zealand to Twickenham - the first time they



have faced the world champions in four years. Centre Manu Tuilagi will take a full part in training this week after recovering from the minor groin strain that ruled him out against the Springboks. Forward Courtney Lawes is also available having overcome a back problem that forced him to miss the same match, while there is no concern about the bang to the hip Owen Farrell took on Saturday.

CRICKET

Taimoor excels as Qatar beat Singapore

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Taimoor's all-round show guided Qatar a comfortable five-wicket win over Singapore in the first 50-overs match of their bilateral series at the Asian Town Stadium yesterday. Taimoor picked up 3-28 off 10 overs and later scored an unbeaten 49 off 75 balls, studied with four fours and a six.

Chasing a target of 178 for a win, Qatar romped home with five wickets and 11 overs to spare. Singapore, who won the toss and opted to bat, were bowled out for 177 in 39.3 overs. Besides Taimoor, Awaiz Malik and Gayaan claimed two wickets each Malik conceding 31 and 38 runs respectively. Nadeem and Inamul Haq chipped in with a wicket each.

Rezza Gaznavi was the highest scorer for Singapore. He made 41 runs off 75 balls (9x4). The others to contribute to the total were Siddhant 33 (36b; 1x4, 1x6) and S Karthik 25 (42 balls; 2x4).

Qatar began their reply in fine fashion as opener Kamran made a fluent 38 off 27 balls with seven hits to the boundary. Captain Inamul Haq contributed a sedately made 37 (57b; 3x4) before Taimoor stepped up things with his whirlwind knock. Taimoor was named the man-of-the-match. Lady umpire Shivani Mishra of Doha officiated in the match.

BRIEF SCORES

Singapore: 177 all out in 39.3 overs (R Gaznavi 41, Siddhant 33, Karthik 25; Taimoor 3-28, Malik 2-31, Gayaan 2-38) lost to Qatar 180-5 in 39 overs (Taimoor 49 not out, Inamul Haq 37, Kamran 38) by five wickets.

FOCUS

Team India win QGL Ryder Cup golf tournament

Team India survived some anxious moments before they beat Team World to win the 7th edition of QGL Ryder Cup golf tournament organised by Qatar Golf Lovers at the Doha Golf Club. Team World were leading 5-4, but team India pulled it back to win next three matches and seal the contest 7-5. The event was sponsored by Sal Contracting & Trading Company.

Indian ambassador P Kumaran was the captain of Team India, while Clark White led the World Team which consisted of golfers from Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France and Denmark. 48 golfers played 12 matches on a two-man scramble format for the 12 points up for grabs.

Kumaran teaming up with Arnab Jain led from the front scoring the 'best nett score' and were declared 'best Indian team' while David Brazeau and Steve Harris won the 'best World team' prize. The prizes were also awarded to Uzma



Prize winners pose after the 7th edition of QGL Ryder Cup golf tournament organised by Qatar Golf Lovers at the Doha Golf Club.

Mir for 'longest drive' (ladies), Kumaran ('longest drive' men), Andrea Smilsky ('longest putt' ladies), Tony Sibley the

(longest putt men), Keera Buchanan the ('closest to pin') and Ann MacKay the ('closest to rope'). Other winners were:

Clark White ('closest to pole in bunker'), Naem Nanji ('closest to pin on second shot') and Andreas Bork ('closest to pole').

NBA

Warriors down Grizzlies, register eighth straight win

Toronto maintain grip on Eastern Conference standings with win over Utah



Golden State Warriors' Klay Thompson (right) shoots the basketball against Memphis Grizzlies' Mike Conley during the game in Oakland on Monday. (USA TODAY Sports)

AFP
Los Angeles

Klay Thompson scored 27 points as the Golden State Warriors stretched their winning streak to eight games with a 117-101 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies on Monday.

Thompson was one of five Warriors players in double-digits as the NBA champions overcame a sluggish start to wrap up a comfortable victory at Oracle Arena.

After an evenly contested first half finished at 58-58, the Warriors produced a breathless burst of scoring in the third quarter to pull clear.

They outscored the Grizzlies by 34 points to 15 in the third, effectively killing off the game going into the fourth.

The victory leaves the Warriors on top of the Western Conference with a 10-1 record.

Kevin Durant had 22 points for the Warriors while Stephen Curry had 19.

In Denver, the Nuggets maintained their hot streak with Jamal Murray scoring 48 points in a 115-107 win over the Boston Celtics.

Point guard Murray drained five three-pointers in his points haul while laying

RESULTS

Miami	120-115	Detroit
Houston	98-94	Indiana
Orlando	102-100	Cleveland
Chicago	116-115	New York
Oklahoma City	122-116	New Orleans
Denver	115-107	Boston
Toronto	124-111	Utah
Golden State	117-101	Memphis
LA Clippers	120-109	Minnesota

on four assists and hauling down five rebounds.

The victory saw Denver improve to 9-1 to keep pace with the Warriors in the West.

Boston's scoring was led by Kyrie Irving with 31 points while Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum chipped in with 15 points apiece.

Irving meanwhile was incensed by Murray's late attempt at a three-pointer as the clock ran out in the fourth quarter, grabbing the ball and hurling it into the stands in disgust at the 21-year-old's perceived lack of respect.

"The ball deserves to go in the crowd

after a move like that," Irving said. "So I threw it in the crowd."

'NO DISRESPECT'

Nuggets head coach Michael Malone denied Murray had been showing disrespect to the Celtics.

"He's young, he's still learning," Malone said.

"You never want to disrespect anyone. I think it wasn't disrespect; he was trying to get to 50 points, which you understand. But our veterans talked to him, and it's something he'll learn from."

The Toronto Raptors maintained their grip on the Eastern Conference standings with a 115-107 win over the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City.

Raptors point guard Kyle Lowry was the standout performer for the visitors with 17 points, seven rebounds and 11 assists. Toronto star Kawhi Leonard did not play after failing to recover fully from a foot injury.

The Oklahoma City Thunder meanwhile notched their fifth consecutive win at home with a victory over the New Orleans Pelicans but suffered an injury scare to star Russell Westbrook.

Westbrook needed to be helped off court after spraining ankle in the Thun-

der's 122-116 victory.

The 2017 NBA MVP grimaced in pain after rolling over on his ankle as he landed on Pelicans player Anthony Davis's foot after going up for a rebound in the third quarter.

Westbrook attempted to get up and hobble off on his own but eventually needed assistance as he limped straight to the locker room. The Thunder later said Westbrook appeared to have suffered a sprained left ankle.

Westbrook has only recently returned to action after missing the first two games of the season following knee surgery.

The 29-year-old, who has averaged a triple-double for the past two seasons, had scored 17 points when he left the game, with seven rebounds and nine assists.

Oklahoma City recovered from the loss of their talisman to secure their fifth straight victory and improve to 5-4 for the season.

Paul George scored 23 points and Dennis Schroder weighed in with 22 off the bench as the Thunder hung on for the victory. New Zealander Steven Adams had 18 points.

The Pelicans fell to 4-6 after the loss, with Julius Randle leading the scorers with 26 points.

RECOGNITION

Ohtani among rookie finalists for MLB awards

Reuters
New York

Los Angeles Angels two-way player Shohei Ohtani is one of three finalists for American League Rookie of the Year honours, the Baseball Writers' Association of America announced on Monday.

Ohtani batted .285 with 22 homers and 61 RBIs as a hitter and went 4-2 with a 3.31 ERA in 10 starts. The other two finalists are both infielders for the New York Yankees — Miguel Andujar (.297 average, 27 homers, 92 RBIs) and Gleyber Torres (.271-24-77).

The National League finalists for Rookie of the Year are outfielder Ronald Acuna Jr. of the Atlanta Braves, right-hander Walker Buehler of the Los Angeles Dodgers and outfielder Juan Soto of the Washington Nationals.

The winners for the award named after Jackie Robinson will be announced on Nov. 12.

Outfielder Mookie Betts of the Boston Red Sox is one of the three finalists for AL MVP honours. Betts led the American League with a .346 average and had 32 homers and 30 stolen bases.

Third baseman Jose Ramirez of the Cleveland Indians and center fielder Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels are the other finalists.

Batting champion Christian Yelich (.326) of the Milwaukee Brewers is one of three finalists for NL MVP honours. The others

are Colorado Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado and Chicago Cubs infielder Javier Baez.

The MVP winners will be announced on Nov. 15.

Washington Nationals ace Max Scherzer (300 strikeouts) is among three right-handed finalists for the NL Cy Young Award. Scherzer is looking to win for the third straight season and fourth time overall, his first coming in the AL with the Detroit Tigers in 2013.

Jacob deGrom (MLB-leading 1.70 ERA) of the New York Mets) and Aaron Nola of the Philadelphia Phillies are the other finalists.

Tampa Bay Rays left-hander Blake Snell led the majors with 21 wins and is one of the finalists for AL Cy Young honours. Corey Kluber of the Cleveland Indians — who won for the second time last year — and Houston Astros' ace Justin Verlander (who won in 2011) are the other finalists.

The Cy Young winner will be unveiled on Nov. 14.

Alex Cora of the Boston Red Sox is one of three finalists for the AL Manager of the Year award. Kevin Cash of the Tampa Bay Rays and Bob Melvin of the Oakland Athletics are the other finalists.

The NL finalists are Bud Black of the Colorado Rockies, Craig Counsell of the Milwaukee Brewers and Brian Snitker of the Atlanta Braves.

The winning managers will be announced Tuesday.

All of the award winners will be revealed on the MLB Network.



MLB

A's Beane named Executive of the Year

Reuters
New York

Following an unexpectedly strong season for the Oakland Athletics, Billy Beane captured the inaugural Executive of the Year award handed out by Major League Baseball.

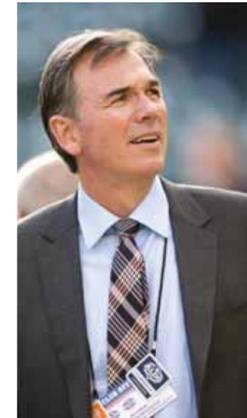
The honour was announced at the general managers meetings Monday in Carlsbad, California. Milwaukee Brewers GM David Stearns and Tampa Bay Rays GM Erik Neander tied for second in the balloting among the 30 teams, which each received one vote.

Beane, the Athletics' executive vice president of baseball operations, built a team that posted a 97-65 record, the fourth-best mark in the major leagues, despite having the lowest Opening Day payroll of the 30 teams.

After coming in last place in the American League West in 2015, 2016 and 2017, Oakland earned a playoff berth this year but lost 7-2 to the New York Yankees in the AL wild-card game.

Beane's farm system produced two Gold Glove-winning infielders, Matt Chapman and Matt Olson. Preseason newcomers included outfielders Ramon Laureano and Stephen Piscotty, and the A's bolstered their pitching staff with the in-season acquisitions of starters Mike Fiers and Edwin Jackson and relievers Jeurys Familia, Fernando Rodney and Shawn Kelley.

Beane is best known as the subject of the book *Moneyball* that examined his front-office strategy, and he was played by



Brad Pitt in the movie version of *Moneyball*. Prior to the new MLB-issued award, Beane was selected Major League Executive of the Year by Baseball America in 2002 and 2013, and he was chosen Executive of the Year by *The Sporting News* in 1999 and 2012.

Stearns led the Brewers to the best record in the National League, 96-67, and their first NL Central title in seven years. They reached the playoffs for only the third time since their lone World Series appearance in 1982, losing in the NL Championship Series to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Neander's Rays went 90-72 and helped popularise the new pitching trends of "openers" and "bullpenning" beginning games with a relief pitcher instead of utilising the traditional rotation of starting pitchers expected to work deep into games.

NFL

Mariota, Titans take down Cowboys

Reuters
New York

Marcus Mariota passed for two touchdowns and rushed for another to lead the Tennessee Titans to a 28-14 victory over the Dallas Cowboys on Monday night at Arlington, Texas.

Mariota completed 21 of 29 passes for 240 yards and tossed scoring passes to running back Dion Lewis and tight end Jonnu Smith. Lewis had 122 total yards (62 rushing, 60 receiving) and safety Kevin Byard recorded an interception as the Titans (4-4) snapped a three-game losing streak.

Dallas quarterback Dak Prescott was 21 of 31 for 243 yards, two touchdowns and the interception. Amari Cooper caught five passes for 58 yards and a touchdown in his team debut, and fellow receiver Allen Hurns also caught a scoring pass for the Cowboys (3-5).

The Dallas defense repeatedly had issues stopping Tennessee, which converted 11 of 14 third-down opportunities. The Titans outgained the Cowboys 340 yards to 297, sending Dallas



Tennessee Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota (second from right) runs for a fourth quarter touchdown against Dallas Cowboys at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Monday. (USA TODAY Sports)

to its third defeat in four games.

The Titans took a 21-14 lead when Mariota hit Smith for a 7-yard scoring pass with 5:44 left in the third quarter. Mari-

ota put the ball deep into the grasp of Lewis and pulled it out as Dallas defensive end De-

Marcus Lawrence approached, and instead shovelled it ahead

to Smith, who darted through the middle of the field for the touchdown.

Tennessee extended the lead to 14 when Mariota rushed for a

9-yard score with 4:38 remaining in the fourth quarter.

Dallas turned the ball over on downs with 1:31 left, and the Titans ran out the clock, sealing the game with Mariota's 3-yard keeper on third-and-1 from the Tennessee 22-yard line.

Prescott threw two touchdown passes in the first half, and the score was tied at 14 at the break.

The Cowboys struck first four plays after Lawrence strip-sacked Mariota, with linebacker Sean Lee recovering at the Tennessee 15. The touchdown came when Prescott tossed a 4-yard scoring pass to Cooper — recently acquired from the Oakland Raiders — with 6:12 left in the first quarter.

Tennessee tied the score with a 15-play, 80-yard drive that was culminated by Derrick Henry's second-effort 1-yard run with 9:35 left in the half. The Titans moved ahead when Lewis fielded a screen pass from Mariota and navigated for an 18-yard score to make it 14-7 with 4:11 remaining.

The Cowboys countered with a 10-play, 78-yard drive. Prescott connected with Hurns for a 23-yard touchdown to knot the score with 39 seconds left.



GYMNASTICS

To say Simone Biles is America's greatest athlete is an undersell

Olympic star overcame a kidney stone and rare blunders at the Doha 2018 Worlds and still won a medal in every event. Her only competition is herself

By Bryan Armen Graham
The Guardian

Observers have long since exhausted the well of superlatives when it comes to Simone Biles. The 4ft 8in, 105lb sprite from suburban Houston had emerged as a once-in-a-lifetime talent even before her star-making coronation at the Rio Olympics, where she fulfilled her long-held promise with four gold medals in seven unforgettable days. Turns of phrase, margins of victory, records broken: these languages are entirely ill-suited for translating her unique physical genius, which, truly, must be seen to be believed. That Biles is the best athlete in America today, which she is, feels like an undersell.

Take her showing at last week's world championships, where the 21-year-old became the first woman to win a fourth all-around world title and the most decorated female gymnast ever. The outcome itself was unremarkable: Biles has won every major team and individual all-around competition she's entered since her senior career began in 2013, a dumbfounding run of consistency that prompted the sport's cognoscenti to declare her the most talented gymnast in history before she'd competed in an Olympics.

What stood out was that Biles, one could reasonably argue, was having the worst big competition of her career – and she still won a medal in every single event.

What can you say about that? Last week's championships in Doha marked Biles' first international meet since winning the Olympic all-around championship, the sport's most coveted title. Maybe it was the rust of a two-year layoff, which included more than 14 months away from the gym and those famous six-hour-a-day, six-day-a-week training sessions. Or that she'd spent the night before the competition began in an emergency room with a kidney stone that was too big to pass, and was left with no alternative but to soldier through the pain since doping regulations precluded her from prescription medication that could have alleviated the discomfort.

Whatever it was, Biles was not herself in Thursday's all-around. She sat down on her vault in the opening rotation, marking her first fall in more than 60 career routines at worlds or the Olympics. The shock only redoubled when Biles fell off the beam in the third rotation, prompting a look of conster-



Simone Biles of the US became the first woman to win a fourth all-around world title in Doha last week. (AFP)

nation that not even her outstanding performances on the uneven bars and floor exercise could fully erase.

Yet Biles not only won but won by a record margin, outpacing Japan's Mai Murakami by 1.693 points. Even not at her best, she was the best. And it wasn't particularly close. "It doesn't show who I am," a disappointed Biles said afterward, the gold medal dangling from her neck. "And that's kind of disappointing."

The American's two falls might have proven fatal under the perfect-10 judging system that governed the sport until 2006, where maximum scores were capped and falls were a mandatory half-point deduction. But the current open-ended system includes a difficulty score that accounts for more than one-third of the final tally – and Biles' "d-score" for the all-around was 2.7 points greater than any of her competitors (compared to 0.6 higher in Rio).

Falls under the present rules are an automatic full-point deduction, but the start values for Biles' routines give her a cushion that's practically insurmountable. For years the most common refrain underpinning Biles' greatness was that she could fall multiple times

and still win, but after a half-decade of metronomic consistency the theory was finally put to the test on Thursday – and it passed comfortably. She could have fallen a third time and still taken gold. "Instead of thinking I could win," said Murakami, whose score would have earned the gold in Biles' absence last year, "I was thinking: 'Oh, Biles can fall.'"

Thursday's result might have been controversial if Biles' supremacy, her ability to perform skills no other woman in the world could even credibly attempt in competition, wasn't plainly evident. The fact is, Biles is so far ahead of everyone else it's almost embarrassing. She's performing elements an entire generation of successors will struggle to approach and it's hard to recall having seen anything like it before in any sport.

Where the old system rewarded competitors for downgrading their routines, the current rules incentivise the sort of boundary-pushing athleticism that, it must be said, elevates gymnastics as a spectator sport. There's no room for playing it safe. Say what you want about it, but open-ended scoring encourages competitors to push their craft forward, the purest distillation of the Olympic spirit:

Faster, Higher, Stronger.

Biles' uneven routines in Qatar weren't limited to the all-around, but there were far more peaks than troughs during the week. She managed a silver medal in the bars after a 14th-place finish on the apparatus in Rio, showing off a dramatic improvement in her weakest discipline. The overall haul of four golds, a silver and a bronze makes her the first American to medal in every event at a major competition – team, all-around, vault, bars, beam and floor – and the first woman of any nationality to do it since Romania's Daniela Silivaş at the 1988 Olympics.

She capped her record-breaking week with a gold in Saturday's floor exercise final. It's long been Biles' favorite discipline, not simply because it offers the broadest canvas to showcase her uniquely brilliant physical skills, but because it scarcely feels like a discipline at all. (As her former coach Aimee Boorman told me in Rio, that's where "she just plays")

There are few analogues in sports for the slack-jawed wonder that Biles elicits on the floor. To behold her spacetime-cheating routine to clinch her fourth gold on Saturday was like watching Vince Carter flout gravity in the NBA dunk contest or Maradona sla-

lomping through half the England team at Azteca Stadium. After the most trying competitive week of her life, it offered the clearest callback to her Rio breakout and, perhaps, a glimmer of what's to come.

The records will only continue to topple in the run-up to the 2020 Olympics. Biles is now level with Russia's Svetlana Khorkina as the most decorated female gymnast in world championships history with 20 career medals and will almost certainly eclipse Vitaly Scherbo's all-time mark for either gender (23) at next year's worlds in Stuttgart. And then Tokyo, where she can become the oldest woman in more than five decades to win the Olympic all-around title and the first repeat champion since Vera Caslavská did it for the former Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The greatest champions are defined not by winning when they're peaking and all the tumbler are aligned in their favor, yet by how they persist and problem-solve and pull it from the bag when they're not at their best. But for Biles, who remains so far ahead of everyone it's going to take the sport years to catch up, the stakes of those gut-check moments are notably subdued. Her only competition is herself.

US Olympic moves to disband USA Gymnastics body

AFP
Los Angeles

The United States Olympic Committee said Monday it had begun moves to disband the country's governing body for gymnastics, accusing the sport's rulers of failing to grapple with the aftermath of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal. USOC chief executive Sarah Hirshland said in a statement Olympic chiefs had started formal proceedings to revoke USA Gymnastics' status as the governing body for the sport in the United States.

In an open letter addressed to US gymnasts, Hirshland said USA Gymnastics had failed to "change its culture, to rebuild its leadership, and to effectively serve its membership". "You deserve better," Hirshland told gymnasts in the letter.

USA Gymnastics has lurched from one self-inflicted debacle to the next as it has struggled to rebuild in the wake of the Nassar abuse case, the worst scandal in US Olympic history.

Former US team doctor Nassar was jailed for life earlier this year after abusing more than 250 athletes, including several stars of the United States' gold medal-winning teams at the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. The beleaguered governing body, which had been accused of covering up Nassar's crimes, has been in a state of perpetual crisis ever since the scandal erupted.

Last month, newly installed chief executive Mary Bono resigned after just four days following an outcry by Olympic stars Simone Biles and Alexandra Raisman. Bono had taken over from chief executive Kerry Perry, who had resigned after just nine months after criticism of her performance by USOC.

Perry's departure came after the appointment and swift resignation of elite coach Mary Lee Tracy – who had made comments supportive of Nassar in 2016 when allegations of abuse against him had begun to emerge.

'UNFAIR TO GYMNASTS'

USOC had warned it was prepared to take the ultimate sanction of revoking USA Gymnastics' status as a governing body unless it put its house in order. In January, USA Gymnastics board of directors resigned en masse at the behest of USOC.

In her letter to US gymnasts on Monday, Hirshland said Olympic chiefs had given up hoping that USA Gymnastics was capable of reforming itself in the post-Nassar era.

Hirshland said USOC had concluded that "the challenges facing the organization are simply more than it is capable of overcoming in its current form."

"We have worked closely with the new USAG board over recent months to support them, but despite diligent effort, the NGB continues to struggle," Hirshland said.

"And that's not fair to gymnasts around the country. Even weeks ago, I hoped there was a different way forward. But we now believe that is no longer possible." USOC's complaint seeking to dissolve USA Gymnastics in its present form will now go before a review panel which will convene a hearing on the case.

The review panel will issue a report and give a recommendation which will then go before the USOC board of directors, who will determine whether or not to formally strip USAG of its governing body status.

The move to decertify USA Gymnastics was welcomed by Rachael Denhollander, the first gymnast to come forward with allegations of abuse against Nassar.

"After overseeing the abuse of 100's of children by Larry, national coaches and club coaches, it is high time for this organisation to end and a new one, truly dedicated to athlete safety, to begin," Denhollander wrote on Twitter.

"A COMPLETE regimen change should start now. This is for every survivor."

Hirshland meanwhile stressed that US gymnasts would continue to compete in events as normal, with the full support and backing of the Olympic committee.

"In the short-term, we have to work to ensure that USAG gymnasts have the support necessary to excel on and off the field of play.

"We are building plans to do just that. In the long-term, it will be the critically important responsibility of the recognised Gymnastics NGB, whether the existing organisation or a new one, to lead gymnastics in the United States and build on the supportive community of athletes and clubs that can carry the sport forward for decades to come.

"We are prepared to identify and help build such an organisation."

NHL

Bruins overpower visiting Stars 2-1 in OT



Dallas Stars goaltender Anton Khudobin (left) blocks a shot by Boston Bruins' Brad Marchand (centre) during the NHL game in Boston, Massachusetts, on Monday. (USA TODAY Sports)

Reuters
New York

Brad Marchand scored a five-on-three power play goal with 31 seconds remaining in overtime to lift the Boston Bruins to a 2-1 win over the visiting Dallas Stars on Monday.

The Stars were whistled for two penalties in an 11-second span during overtime, first for too many men on the ice and then on a crosscheck by Esa Lindell against Marchand, and Boston eventually made the play to win.

Marchand took a pass from David Krejci after an assist from Torey Klug and beat Dallas goaltender Anton Khudobin low on the glove side for the game-winner. The victory was the first in three overtime games for the Bruins this year.

The loss snapped a three-game winning streak for the Stars, who

are 3-1-1 so far on their six-game road trip.

FLYERS 5, COYOTES 2

Claude Giroux scored two goals and Sean Couturier led a goal and an assist as Philadelphia finished a four-game road trip without a regulation loss after a victory over Arizona in Glendale, Ariz.

Shayne Gostisbehere had a goal and an assist and Oskar Lindblom scored into an empty net late as the Flyers went 3-0-1 on a Western trip that began with victories in Anaheim and Los Angeles and included an overtime loss to San Jose on Saturday. Alex Galchenyuk and Michael Grabner scored for the Coyotes, who had a five-game winning streak broken.

CAPITALS 4, OILERS 2

Devante Smith-Pelly finished with one goal and one assist, and Jakub Vrana, T.J. Oshie and Alex Ovechkin added goals as Wash-

ington defeated visiting Edmonton.

Washington, which still is looking for consecutive victories this season, snapped a two-game losing streak.

Goalie Phoenix Copley earned his second win of the season and the second of his NHL career. The rookie finished with 31 saves, including 11 as he blanked Edmonton in the third period.

DEVILS 5, PENGUINS 1

Brian Boyle had a natural hat trick as New Jersey broke a three-game losing streak by defeating host Pittsburgh, which lost its fourth straight.

Boyle, who recently announced he was in remission after being treated for leukaemia, got his first career hat trick on Pittsburgh's Hockey Fights Cancer night. He scored the final goal of the first period and the only two of the second.

Will Butcher had a goal and

two assists, Travis Zajac scored, and Jean-Sebastien Dea had two assists for the Devils. Keith Kincaid stopped 35 of 36 Pittsburgh shots. Jamie Oleksiak scored for the Penguins.

CANADIENS 4, ISLANDERS 3

Joel Armia scored in the fifth round of a shootout as Montreal rallied to beat host New York, which saw its five-game winning streak end.

Armia scored the lone goal of the shootout when he ripped a wrist shot over Thomas Greiss to complete Montreal's comeback from a 3-1 deficit.

Canadiens backup goaltender Antti Niemi capped a 21-save performance by making five shootout saves. Jonathan Drouin, Max Domi and Artturi Lehkonen scored in regulation for Montreal, which rallied from a 3-1 deficit. Casey Cizikas had two goals for the Islanders, who also got a goal from Valtteri Filppula.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Midfielder Fernandinho the glue binding surging Man City together

'Ferna would make any manager the happiest or luckiest in the world'

AFP
Manchester

Among a dazzling array of mid-field options, it is the often unheralded Fernandinho who Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has relied on most in another stunning start to the season for the Premier League champions.

The Brazilian will face old club Shakhtar Donetsk today as City seek to make amends from the only blip of their campaign so far, a shock 2-1 defeat to Lyon in their last Champions League home game. If any reminder was needed over Guardiola's influence, he was banned from the touchline that night.

Since his return, City have won nine and drawn one, a 0-0 stalemate away to Liverpool, of their last 10 games, scoring 29 goals and conceding just two in the process. Although fulsome in his praise of the maturing centre-back pairing Aymeric Laporte and John Stones, Guardiola's defensive philosophy is dependent on a team effort to keep the ball as far away from City's goal as possible.

"Always we try to convince our players as far away the ball is from our goal, we are safe. It's much, much better. The moment the ball is around our box, anything can happen," said Guardiola. "In 10 years I was always concerned, always focused, maybe more than any other thing, in defending well. The only difference is we do it far away from our goal."

Central to that philosophy is Fernandinho's ability to not just read the game and quickly regain possession, but also use the ball soundly as a springboard to City's attack. "There is always a relation. When you attack good, you defend well. When you defend well and are solid, you attack better," added Guardiola. Despite turning 33 earlier this year, Fernandinho has started all of City's 14 Premier and Champions League matches this season, while the



Manchester City's Danilo (left), Fernandinho (centre) and Bernardo Silva joke around during a training session in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

more creative talents of David Silva, Leroy Sane, Bernardo Silva and Raheem Sterling have had to live with Guardiola's rotation policy.

"Ferna would make any manager the happiest or luckiest in the world," said Guardiola ahead of City's 3-0 win in the Ukraine against Shakhtar two weeks ago. "He is a joy to have as a player — he

is very special. He will always be a special player for me to work alongside."

Guardiola knows very well the dual demands of Fernandinho's role having won the European Cup in his days as a player in the same position for Barcelona. Fernandinho received arguably the highest praise from his manager when he claimed even Guardiola the player

couldn't force his way into the current City juggernaut given his form.

So far City's failure to land Jorginho, who instead choose to follow Maurizio Sarri in the move from Napoli to Chelsea in July, to share the burden as the midfield anchor hasn't proved costly. Instead, Guardiola's men show no sign of a slip in standards from their record

100-point Premier League campaign last season, as evidenced by a 6-1 annihilation of Southampton on Sunday.

It is the Champions League that remains the holy grail for City's owners, though, and despite the Lyon stumble, another win against Shakhtar will put them well on course to make the last 16 for a sixth straight season.

Pulisic back for US friendlies v England, Italy

Los Angeles: Borussia Dortmund star Christian Pulisic was named in the United States squad to face England and Italy in friendly internationals later this month but there was no place for veteran midfielder Michael Bradley.

Pulisic, 20, missed last month's friendlies against Colombia and Peru but has been recalled to the squad along with fellow Bundesliga-based player Weston McKennie for the games on November 15 and 20. Pulisic has only played 89 minutes of international football in the last 13 months but has enjoyed a good run of form with Dortmund.

US interim manager Dave Sarachan has been in charge of the side for just over a year following the team's shock failure to qualify for the World Cup finals in Russia. With Major League Soccer into its postseason, Sarachan has named an expanded training squad of 28 players for the international break.

The squad will be whittled down to 24 on November 11. As well as Pulisic's recall, Sarachan's squad also sees call-ups for Fulham midfielder Luca de la Torre and Malmo's Romain Gall. Gall, 23, has scored 14 goals in 30 games during his career in Sweden. Sarachan said he wanted to use the games to give younger US players the opportunity of playing in "big games."

"With the availability of some players that we didn't get to see in the last fixture window due to injury, the thinking is this roster gives us depth with young players that still need the experience of big games, especially games abroad," Sarachan said.

Former captain Bradley had been omitted in order to give the 31-year-old a break. "After having earned 142 caps, his need for these games is far less important than it would be for players with less experience," Sarachan said.

"At this stage, it made sense to give him some extra time off and also allow these games to be a platform for players that lack that kind of experience." The USA face England on November 15 before playing Italy in Genk, Belgium five days later.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Huddersfield beat Fulham for first victory

AFP
Huddersfield

Timothy Fosu-Mensah's first-half own goal gave Huddersfield a 1-0 home win against Fulham and their first Premier League victory of the season on Monday night. Fosu-Mensah headed into his own net, under pressure from Town's Christopher Schindler as Huddersfield halted an eight-game home run without a top-flight goal and moved above Fulham and Cardiff at the foot of the table.

The Terriers' winless league run stretched back to April — 14 league games in total — but manager David Wagner was able to celebrate on the night of his third anniversary in charge with a morale-boosting victory.

Fulham's fifth successive league defeat did little to ease the pressure on boss Slavisa Jokanovic, whose side's own run without a league win was extended to eight matches. "I don't care who scored it or how we performed," said Wagner. "People know we can perform better. The pressure was on for both teams but how we fought — we left everything on the grass. It was deserved. First half we were clear and second half we were able to keep them away from our goal."

"This is huge for us. We have the winning feeling back. For sure it is one of the most important wins we've had in the last three years. Everybody needed this belief back. It's massive for us."

Huddersfield almost halted their barren spell in spectacular fashion when



Huddersfield Town's coach David Wagner (second left) celebrates with players after win over Fulham. (AFP)

Philip Billing's 30-yard thunderbolt struck the crossbar in the 15th minute. Steve Mounie headed Aaron Mooy's cross tamely over soon after and Alex Pritchard's brilliant effort from outside the area was expertly clawed away by Fulham goalkeeper Sergio Rico.

But Huddersfield's agonising wait for a goal at home was finally over in the 29th minute, making it 659 minutes in total. Chris Lowe crossed deep from the left and German centre-half Schindler saw his header deflect into the net off Fosu-Mensah.

It was the 29th goal conceded this season by Fulham, who did not manage a single effort on target before the break, such was Huddersfield's whirlwind first-half performance. Fulham boss Jokanovic sent on Kevin McDonald and Cyrus Christie for Luciano Vietto and Fosu-Mensah at the interval and the Londoners began the second half with more intent.

Christie's cut-back was cleared behind by Hogg and Mooy headed away the corner. The Terriers continued to harry and chase and Pritchard fired narrowly off target in the 68th minute. Substitute Mc-

Donald had been forced out of the action due to a knock but Fulham began to make a fist of it.

Schindler blocked Aleksandar Mitrovic's shot and Andre Schuerrle's effort was ruled out for an offside decision against the former in the 74th minute. Schuerrle shot off target again, while Town substitute Isaac Mbenza also spurned two half chances when sent through on goal in the closing stages. Town were not to be denied however — and the first top-flight meeting between the two sides since 1952 ended in their favour.

SPOTLIGHT

Hoffenheim hope to keep Lyon guessing in make-or-break tie

AFP
Berlin

Hoffenheim expect "a cauldron" atmosphere at Lyon today in their make-or-break Champions League tie with head coach Julian Nagelsmann hoping to keep the French side guessing.

Hoffenheim must win in France to draw level on five points with Lyon, who can qualify for the last 16 with a victory, and enjoyed a confidence-boosting 4-1 thrashing of Bayer Leverkusen away in the Bundesliga on Saturday.

"In Lyon, we have to bring the same passion to the pitch as in Leverkusen — then we can get a victory. It's going to be a cauldron, so we have to fight as a unit," said Hoffenheim goalkeeper Oliver Baumann.

Hoffenheim's England Under-21 winger Reiss Nelson, 18, was just as adamant before the team's short flight to France yesterday. "If we play like we did at Leverkusen, we can win," insisted Nelson, who has scored five goals in six league games since joining on loan from Arsenal and has been outstanding in recent weeks.

Nagelsmann's Hoffenheim know they will be unable to finish in the top two if they lose at the Groupama Stadium and Manchester City win at home to Shakhtar Donetsk in the other Group F tie.

While the French are unbeaten in Group F, Nagelsmann's team are still chasing their first win, but the Germans outplayed Bruno Genesio's side for long periods when the teams drew 3-3 in Sinsheim a fortnight ago.

Despite the Ligue 1 club leading twice, Hoffenheim substitute

Joelinton rescued a point in added time with the equaliser.

The 22-year-old Brazilian, who has scored four goals in as many games, also scored twice in the romp at Leverkusen and Nagelsmann insists their away performance on Saturday would have kept Lyon guessing.

"They will certainly have looked at the game at Leverkusen — and still do not know exactly how we play," said Nagelsmann.

"That was very important for the self-confidence — the guys realised that we can be successful in different ways. We are able to defend high up — but we can also counter and defend more deeply," he added.



Hoffenheim coach Julian Nagelsmann during training yesterday. (Reuters)

FOCUS

Leicester rename foundation in honour of late owner

AFP
London

Leicester City's Foxes Foundation will be renamed The Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha Foundation in honour of the club's Thai chairman, who tragically died in a helicopter crash, the Premier League side an-

nounced yesterday. On top of the millions he poured into funding the club's rise from English football's second tier to surprise Premier League winners in 2015/16, Vichai also donated generously to the local community of Leicester since buying the club in 2010.

The Thai businessman, who started duty free King Power stores, was killed along with four others when his heli-

copter crashed in the car park of Leicester's King Power Stadium on October 27, shortly after attending a 1-1 draw with West Ham.

"Since its formation in 2011/12, the Foundation has raised almost £2m for local charities, helping fund a renovation of Leicester Royal Infirmary's Children's Outpatient Ward and life-saving equipment desperately needed by the Chil-

dren's Intensive Care Unit," Leicester said in a statement.

"Under its new name, The Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha Foundation will continue to build on that life-changing work in a way that reflects the generosity, care and love of a man who made over £4m in personal donations to the city's universities, hospitals and charities in recent years."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Bale under scrutiny as Madrid feel the love for Vinicius

In his last nine matches, Bale has been substituted seven times, five of those when his team were chasing a goal

AFP
Madrid

“Bale es fantástico”, Real Madrid’s interim coach Santiago Solari said, but still took him off in the 71st minute against Real Valladolid on Saturday. Madrid were drifting towards a 0-0 draw at their Santiago Bernabeu home and, searching for inspiration, it was Bale’s number 11 that came up.

He departed to whistles from the fans even if Solari, perhaps deliberately, spared him being replaced directly by Vinicius Junior. Nevertheless, the 18-year-old came on two minutes later and made the difference, his shot deflecting in to give Madrid the lead. “Another day, Gareth will score,” Solari said. “And everyone will celebrate.”

But those quickest to criticise Bale are circling again ahead of the trip to Viktoria Plzen in the Champions League today. Support for Vinicius has been intense and Bale is seen as the one standing in the way. “Vinicius puts Bale in trouble,” read the frontpage of AS on Monday. One week into his still-temporary tenure at Real, Solari is confronting the familiar problem of how to get the best out of Bale, now the team’s most potent threat.

This season, free of both injury and Cristiano Ronaldo, he started well, posting four goals and two assists from his first six games. But an adductor problem last month, combined with the team’s crash under Julen Lopetegui, disrupted his rhythm. He has returned but is still not fully fit. His performances have lacked edge.

Still, the number of times Bale has been substituted has been a surprise, not least because his withdrawals have often come in the moments when Madrid should need him most. In his last nine matches, Bale has been taken off seven times, five of those when his team were chasing a goal.

Once, with the game at 0-0 against Atletico Madrid, he was replaced due to injury. The other four – while level with Athletic Bilbao and Valladolid,

and trailing Barcelona and Alaves – the reasoning was less obvious.

Those calling for Vinicius to take Bale’s spot perhaps overlook the Welshman’s 24 goals in 41 appearances last season. Two of them won Real Madrid the Champions League final in May. Vinicius, signed from Flamengo for 45mn euros in the summer, is a precocious talent but he has fewer appearances for Real in his career than Bale has goals since August.

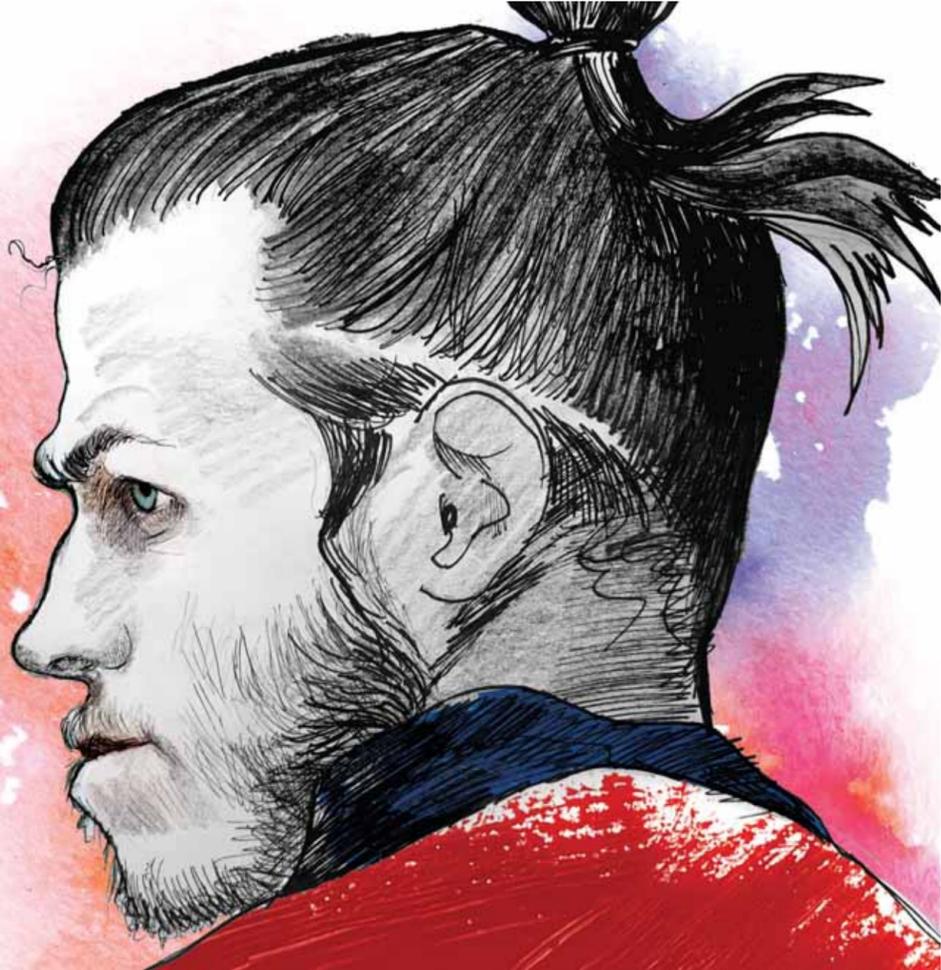
“Footballers cannot fight against what goes on around them,” Solari said. “The media, the fans, they are excited about Vinicius and that is fantastic, but his virtues are as evident as his weaknesses and his age. He has had almost no time to mature.”

If Solari believes the excitement around the teenager is worth harnessing, perhaps the Brazilian could slot into a front three alongside Bale, rather than instead of him. Benzema’s early form has also dipped but he plays the role of an attacking pivot as well as anyone. Marco Asensio, who started against Valladolid, has been quiet while Isco is still regaining fitness after appendix surgery. Finding the right combination, and extracting more from Bale, is likely to be top of Solari’s priorities.

Discounting the Copa del Rey win over Mellilla, who play in Spain’s third tier, four of Madrid’s last five goals have come from their left-back, central defender and an own-goal. “It’s a very bad patch we’ve gone through,” said Sergio Ramos on Saturday.

Club president Florentino Perez could yet be tempted into the transfer market in January, particularly after UEFA abolished their rule on players being cup-tied in European competitions. Harry Kane, Robert Lewandowski or Eden Hazard are no longer restricted like before.

But for Solari, the time is now. Beat Plzen today and even a draw away to Celta Vigo this weekend might earn him the job until the end of the season. A lack of alternatives means Perez would do well to look again in the summer, as long as Solari can keep them ticking over in the meantime. To do it,



he will need goals, and Bale.

All Times in GMT

CSKA Moskva vs Roma (1755); Valencia v Young Boys (1755); Olympique Lyonnais

v Hoffenheim (2000); Manchester City v Shakhtar Donetsk (2000) Viktoria Plzen v Real Madrid (2000); Juventus

v Manchester United (2000); Bayern München v AEK Athens (2000); Benfica v Ajax (2000)

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FIXTURES

SPOTLIGHT

Sanchez gives Manchester United options at Juventus

AFP
London

Alexis Sanchez has endured a torrid start to his Manchester United career but hinted at better things to come with an impressive display in a central role ahead of the Champions League match against Juventus.

The injured Romelu Lukaku missed the 2-1 win at Bournemouth on Saturday and Marcus Rashford started on the bench as Jose Mourinho opted for a three-man forward line, with Anthony Martial and Juan Mata deployed either side of Sanchez.

The former Arsenal man was instrumental in United’s first-half equaliser, setting up Martial, and will be disappointed to have been substituted towards the end of the game. The match, won by substitute Rashford in injury time, was a rare high point for the Chile international, who has struggled to find his feet since arriving at Old Trafford in January – it was his first league start since September 22. Following the much-needed win against Bournemouth, Mourinho praised Sanchez and spelt out his preferred system, saying he did not need a traditional centre-forward to lead his attack.

“The way I like to play is with three attacking players where there is not a clear definition of the winger as a winger,” he said, adding that he likes wide men with a striker’s appetite.

“And I always had that in my team, with the wingers scoring a lot of goals, sometimes even more goals than the striker,” he said. “So it’s not impossible at all to have in the same team at the same time Rashford, Lukaku, Alexis for example. But today Romelu was not available and we thought that Alexis could do what he did. What he did, he had



Manchester United’s David de Gea and Alexis Sanchez during a training session yesterday. (Reuters)

a good assist, he had some mobility, he created some problems but then in the second half I knew that by having the two brothers on the bench, Rashford and (Jesse) Lingard, I knew that the brothers could come in and also make an impact.”

United now travel to Juventus for another date with former favourite son Cristiano Ronaldo, two weeks after they were outplayed during a 1-0 defeat at Old Trafford that left them five points adrift of the Italian champions in Group H. Despite Mourinho’s stated preference for a multi-dimensional attack, keeping Lu-

kaku out of the starting line-up will be tricky, with the manager proving loyal to his muscular front man. The Belgium international, who has not found the net for the club since mid-September, is not the only United forward who has gone off the boil, with Rashford also struggling despite his goal at the weekend.

Martial’s goals have been pattering over the cracks during United’s recent mini-recovery, with the Frenchman earning the manager’s trust at last.

Former United defender Rio Ferdinand believes Rashford should be given a run in the

starting line-up, even though he said it is not clear what his best position is yet. “You look at Lukaku. His goalscoring record is up there, it’s fantastic, he scores goals,” added the TV pundit.

“But in the best teams you need more than that. You need to be able to bring other people into play, you need to be able to complement other players in your team, things have to be set up off you. At the moment, I see in a Man Utd shirt that some things break down in Lukaku. And that affects other players in the team, like (Paul) Pogba and Lingard, who want to play off people.”

FOOTBALL

Bayern boss Kovac focused on AEK amidst off-field pressure

AFP
Munich

Under-fire Niko Kovac insists he is shutting out this weekend’s crunch Bundesliga showdown to focus on steering Bayern Munich to the verge of a Champions League’s last 16 spot by beating AEK today.

Bayern’s head coach kept cool when bluntly asked if this could be his last week in charge as defeat at Dortmund on Saturday could leave defending champions Bayern seven points behind in the Bundesliga. “That is a hard question. Dortmund is on Saturday and perhaps we should talk about the games against (AEK) Athens,” said Kovac in yesterday’s press conference in Munich.

“If we win, we have 10 points and we could be through. Sure, the game on Saturday is important, but for me only tomorrow’s match (against AEK) is important. I hope the way we play will also be good and that we will win convincingly.”

Bayern can reach the knockout stages with two games to spare if they beat Greek champions AEK at Munich’s Allianz Arena and Benfica lose at Ajax in the other Group E match. Bayern will be without winger Arjen Robben, who has a knee injury, and playmaker Thiago Alcantara, who has torn ankle ligaments, while they are waiting on the fitness of attacking midfielder James Rodriguez.

However, off the field Kovac is under pressure on all sides. Another lacklustre performance on

Saturday saw his misfiring side draw 1-1 at home to Freiburg to sit third in the Bundesliga table – four points behind leaders Dortmund.

His attack are simply not finishing their chances while the defence is leaking goals. On Monday, German magazine *Kicker* claimed Kovac has lost the support of stars Mats Hummels, Thomas Muller, Franck Ribery and Arjen Robben, but midfielder Joshua Kimmich insisted the players are still behind Kovac.

“Absolutely! The coach can not help it, if we got into a spot of bother against Freiburg,” said the Germany defender. “The statistic that the last eight shots (on Bayern’s goal) went in shows we haven’t had much luck. That is not anything against (Bayern goalkeeper) Manuel Neuer. It’s about how we defend and how we use our goal chances, we have to be more aware. At the end of the day, it’s us on the pitch – not the coach.”

Despite winning 2-0 at AEK two weeks ago, when Javi Martinez and Robert Lewandowski scored the goals, Kovac expects a hard test against the Greek champions. “It was a hotly contested game in Athens, we could have scored one or two in the first half and it was decided late on, so I am expecting a tough game tomorrow,” said Kovac.

He desperately needs a big win to boost confidence in Bayern’s ranks. “You can not always justify everything, the fun and the joy are there, but we need another game, which we win by three or four goals, and the tension will release,” said Kovac.



Bayern Munich coach Niko Kovac (third right) watches as players train. (Reuters)