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GULF TIMES SPORT



UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Inter Milan, PSG and Liverpool sweating on last-16 spots

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QNB STARS LEAGUE

Unbeaten Al Duhail face in-form Al Sadd

'The difference between us is only one point and that makes the game difficult'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail will face their toughest test of the season as the leaders are away to Al Sadd for a blockbuster QNB Stars League clash today. Duhail have not lost a match since February 2017, an amazing unbeaten run that has spread over 22 months and 41 matches.

But today, an in form Al Sadd will fancy their chances against the defending champions and go on top of the table. Duhail, who had a healthy eight-point lead over arch-rivals Sadd not long back, have struggled for form recently.

They have been held to draw in consecutive matches against Al Rayyan and Qatar SC, which means the Nabil Maaloul's side have just one-point cushion going into today's key clash. On the other hand Jesualdo Ferreira's Sadd has been on a roll, swatting aside their opponents easily.

Al Sadd are coming off a 4-1 victory over Al Shahanian, with Baghdad Bounedjah scoring goals for fun. The Algerian striker last week became the Qatar league's all-time top scorer in a single season when he took his personal tally to 28 goals after scoring twice against Al Shahanian.

And Bounedjah will once again be a key pawn form Sadd against Duhail, who will be happy with a draw. Meanwhile, Sadd captain Xavi Hernandez is back from injury and will look to anchor the team in the midfield.

Ahead of the game, Sadd coach Ferreira declared the winner of today's game may determine who will be the best team this season.

"All our matches against Al Duhail were exciting and full of goals, but unfortunately we were not happy with those matches because they beat us in many games. I do not agree that the recent results of Al Duhail were due to injuries. Why do you talk about injuries? The winners of this game may determine who will be the best," Ferreira said yesterday.

The Portuguese manager felt

his team was under more pressure, having lost to Al Duhail in the title race in previous seasons.

"We are under more pressure than Al Duhail. They are the leaders and have won the league title more than once. And regardless of injuries, they are in a better position. I wish our fans turn out in large numbers and we need their support," said Ferreira.

"Our players do not need any psychological preparation for this game. They know how important the match is and both teams have a great desire to win. The players have had regular training and there was no special training for this match. Everyone knows that the game pits the two best teams in Qatar. The difference between us is only one point and that makes the game difficult," he added.

Meanwhile, Duhail coach Maaloul was hopeful his side will put in a show worthy of the occasion. He too conceded that the encounter could prove a turning point in the league in which Duhail have 36 points, with Sadd close behind on 35.

"There was not much time to prepare for this game against Al Sadd. This is an important game for both teams and the winners will have an edge in the race for the title," Maaloul said.

The Tunisian coach blamed Duhail's recent unimpressive run to injuries to Nam Tae-Hee, who is out for the season after suffering a knee ligament tear, while Luiz Martin looks doubtful after getting a knock against Qatar SC.

"Our team has a few injury worries and we did not have many options in our last match against Qatar SC, which ended in a draw. I feel our players will rise to the occasion against Al Sadd and prove that we are the leaders not by default. Both sides know each other's strengths and weaknesses and the match has much at stake," said Maaloul.

The match was rescheduled from week 9 due to Al Sadd's semi-final match against Iran's Persepolis in the AFC Champions League, which the Wolves lost on aggregate. The kick-off is at 6.30pm at the Al Sadd Stadium.



Al Duhail striker Youssef El Arabi (right) trains with his teammates yesterday.



Al Sadd captain Xavi (left) and midfielder Gabi train yesterday ahead of their QNB Stars League match against Al Duhail at Al Sadd Stadium.

CRICKET

Qatar open U19 WC qualifiers campaign with victory over Thailand

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar made their first appearance in the ICC Under-19 World Cup Qualifiers Asia Division Two as they defeated hosts Thailand at Asian Institute of Technology Ground in Bangkok by six wickets yesterday.

Hosts decided to bat first after winning the toss, but were bundled out for just 92 in 36.2 overs with Samil Sadiq (four for 12) and vice-captain Shubh Agarwal taking seven wickets between them.

Qatar played patiently and chased the target in 37.4 overs at the expense of four players. Saud Kamal finished the match with a flourish, staying unbeaten on 12-ball 18, including a four and two sixes.

Sadiq gave a thrilling start to the match for Qatar as he removed opener Satarut Rungreang off his very first delivery for one. The home team could not overcome the setback and kept losing players regularly and were struggling at seven down for 44 at one stage.

Sadiq, Agarwal (three wickets) and Patrick Kumara were the ones to cause the damage. Kongkidakon Ruengrotchannachai was able to resist a bit before falling to Agarwal for 10 in 57 balls.

Down the order, Kokiad Chatwong rallied a bit and managed to move the team's score to 92 with an unbeaten 18-run knock off 24 balls with two boundaries.

Chasing the modest target, Qatar began steadily with openers Solaiman Mohamed (19 with three fours) and Dhanitha Hettiarachige (20 off 93 balls) putting together 25 runs before their partnership was broken.

After skipper Hussain Khan fell cheaply for 10, Syed Tameem and Saud Kamal pushed the team to the victory. Just before the triumph, Tameem was dismissed by Rungreang but Kamal saw the team home.

Rungreang bowled well to grab three wickets for 17 runs in five overs but the target was too modest to threaten Qatar.

The winners will next face Oman today. They will have a day's rest before taking on Saudi Arabia and Bhutan on successive days.



Qatar players celebrate taking a wicket during the match against Thailand in Bangkok yesterday.

FOCUS

QCA to celebrate Qatar National Day with Asian stars T20 match

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Cricket Association (QCA) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) have teamed up to mount a memorable celebration of the Qatar National Day at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium on December 18.

The Association, with the support of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), will host a Twenty20 cricket match between Asian stars and Qatar national team players, QCA president Yousef Jemah al-Kuwari said yesterday.

During a press conference yesterday, attended by MoI Public Relations Officer Lt Hamad Ali al-Jahweel, al-Kuwari said, "The Qatar National Day is a very significant event for all of us in Qatar. We wish to contribute to its massive success like the previous years with a T20 match between Asian Stars (International) and Qatar stars."

"This match, of course, would have not been possible without the support of QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, QOC secretary-general Jassim Rashid al-Buenain and the Ministry of Interior. We extend our deepest gratitude to them for extending their backing and co-operation in organising this match at the Asian Town Stadium," he added.

Al-Kuwari stressed that cricket is one of the most popular sports in Qatar and played by a huge number of people from Asian sub-continent communities here. "We love and respect all those who are living here. So this is our social responsibility to

host sporting activities to involve them," he said. "We've already launched a social media campaign to reach out to cricket fans. We're delighted to say that we have already received about 50,000 likes and hits



Qatar Cricket Association president Yousef Jemah al-Kuwari (centre) speaks to the media during a press conference in the presence of Ministry of Interior's (MoI) Public Relations Officer Lt Hamad Ali al-Jahweel (left) and MoI's Community Reachout Co-ordinator Faisal al-Hudawi yesterday.

mostly from the members of the communities of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

"The feature of the Asian stars team is that we tried to include players from many countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangla-

desh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. We hope that a large number of fans will turn up at the venue to support the match and make the Qatar National Day celebrations an event to cherish for a long time," the QCA president said.

For his part, al-Marri said, "It is our big pleasure to join hands with the QCA for this big cricket match to celebrate the Qatar National Day. The ministry appreciates the efforts such as this one to involve various communities, co-operate with the QCA at every level and we wish the event a big success."

Also present during the press conference were MoI Community Reachout Co-ordinator Faisal al-Hudawi, QCA Operations manager Manzoor Ahmad and QCA Domestic Cricket head Gul Khan Jadoun.

Ahmad said the QCA has made elaborate arrangements to engage the crowd during the match with a variety of dance and musical performances. All the players have confirmed their participation and we're anticipating a thrilling match on the big occasion of the Qatar National Day.

Jadoun added that there is a separate seating arrangement for families and they can enter the stadium through Gate 7.

ASIAN STARS TEAM: AFGHANISTAN: Asadullah Khan, Mohamed Yamin Ahmadzai; SRI LANKA: Ajantha Mendis, Asela Gunaratne; PAKISTAN: Umar Gul, Fawad Alam; BANGLADESH: Mohamed Elias, Mohamed Ashraf; NEPAL: Mahamad Hasim Ansari, Sanjam Regmi; INDIA: Venkatesh Prasad.

QATAR TEAM: Inam-UI Haq (captain), Tamoor Sajjad (vice-captain), Mohamed Rizlan, Faisal Khan, Malik Awais, Hafiz Tanveer, Hafiz Nadeem, M Noman, Imran Ashraf, Iqbal Chaudhary, Kamran Khan, Zabeeruddin, Gayan, Khurram Shahzad. Reserve Players Qalender, Dharmang, Naveed.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

QFA president Sheikh Hamad re-elected for another term

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Football Association president HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani was re-elected for another four-year term till 2022 at the General Assembly of the body held yesterday. The QFA General Assembly also retained members Saud al-Mohannadi, Hani Ballan and Ahmed Abdulaziz al-Buanain.

Meanwhile Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad al-Thani, president of Al Ahli, was signed in as the new member of the Executive Committee along with Abdulrahman Majid al-Qahtani. The QFA gathering took place at Sheraton Hotel in the presence of representatives from 17 QNB Stars League clubs. The QFA President said: "I thank the QFA family that has gathered here today. We welcome everyone at the meeting which was called to elect new office bearers and to discuss key football matters."

He added: "The next four years are very important for QFA. Qatar will host the 2022 FIFA World Cup as well as other key football tournaments. We have to prepare strong teams at the junior and senior levels. Qatar's junior team will feature at the 2019 FIFA U-20 World Cup in Poland next year."

The QFA President said: "The QNB Stars League is producing good players and our clubs are getting stronger. I am sure we will get even better at

the club football. Our player Abdulkarim Hassan won the AFC Player of the Year award recently which is a great achievement. Next year Qatar will feature in Copa America. We are looking forward to an exciting time for football in this country."

Key football matters will be discussed in the coming weeks and months with presidents of club under a committee that will be chaired by Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad, it was revealed. The QFA President underlined the importance of attracting fans to the venues to watch football matches during a regular season. He stressed overall the game of football remained healthy in Qatar. The minutes of the previous General Assembly were also discussed in detail.

In the coming days and weeks, QFA will discuss the development of U-23 League with the Ministry of Culture and Sports. Reports from the previous season were also discussed in detail during the General Assembly on Monday. Officials said budgetary matters were also debated yesterday.

Chairman of the Electoral Commission Abdullah Hamed Mulla also spoke during the General Assembly. The top vote was received by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, who received 17 votes and won the presidency.

At the end of the General Assembly, the QFA President thanked the clubs "for the great support of federation for helping develop the game on professional lines." The QFA chief hoped the new members would "create exciting



Qatar Football Association president HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani (centre) poses with other officials after being re-elected for another four-year term at the General Assembly of the body yesterday.

opportunities to take the game forward in Qatar." He thanked the out-going officials for their "meritorious services"

The QFA made a special mention of thanking the media for their "high contribution in taking football to every

home in the country." The QFA President wished al-Mohannadi success in his bid to become the AFC President.

For his part, al-Mohannadi thanked the clubs for their support and thanked the QFA President for his leadership.

SPOTLIGHT

Ronaldo urges Messi to try something new and come to Italy

'I've played in England, Spain, Italy, Portugal, while he's still in Spain'

AFP
Milan

Cristiano Ronaldo has urged long-time rival Lionel Messi to be more like him and push his limits by challenging himself in another league than Spain. "I'd like him to come to Italy one day. I hope he accepts the challenge like me, but if he's happy there then I respect that," Ronaldo told the Italian press yesterday.

The two strikers have been rivals for the past decade winning five Ballon d'Or trophies each before their domination was broken by World Cup runner-up Luka Modric last week. Asked if he missed the 31-year-old Argentinian, who has spent his entire senior career at Barcelona, Ronaldo replied: "No, maybe it's him who misses me... I've played in England, Spain, Italy, Portugal and for my national team, while he's still in Spain.

"Maybe he needs me more... For me, life is a challenge, I like it and I like to make people happy. He's a fantastic player and a good guy, but I don't miss anything here. This is my new life and I'm happy. I left my comfort zone and took on this challenge here in Turin, everything has gone well, I've proven I'm still an incredible player," said Ronaldo.

Ronaldo joined Juventus for 100mn euros (\$114mn) last summer as the Turin giants bid to lift the Champions League trophy after two runners-up finishes in the past four seasons. To mark his 150 days in Italy he gave interviews yesterday to three leading sports dailies.

"I had different options. I won't say which but I had them. Juventus is a solid club. It has a long history," he said of his decision. "I knew the atmosphere in the stadium. I'd played several times in Italy. I like the city, the people and the club. I

Cristiano Ronaldo joined Juventus for 100mn euros last summer. (AFP)



knew it could work. I couldn't be 100% sure I was joining the best club in the world. After nine years at Real Madrid it was difficult to compare. Now I'm 100% sure it was the right option."

Ronaldo has scored 11 goals this season, bringing his career total to 584. Finishing second in Ballon d'Or voting to Modric, said Ronaldo, just motivates him even more. "Of course I'm disappointed, but life goes on and I will continue to work hard," said the 33-year-old.

"On the pitch I've done everything to win the Ballon d'Or, numbers do not lie, but I'm no less happy if I do not win, I have wonderful friends and a family, I play in one of the best clubs. Congratulations to Modric, who has earned the award, but next year we will meet again and I will do everything to win the prize again. Do you think I'm going home and crying?"

Juventus play Young Boys in their final Champions League group game in Swit-

zerland tomorrow, having already booked their place in the knockout rounds. And Ronaldo is hoping his experience of winning the trophy five times can serve his new team. "The Champions League cannot be an obsession, you have to think about it calmly," he warned. "Yes we all want it but we have to get there step by step. Look at the game against Manchester United (2-1 defeat), if it had been a quarter-final we would have gone out. You need a little luck."

FOCUS

Seventh edition of Workers' Cup kicks off in grand style

The seventh edition of Workers' Cup, the annual football tournament organised by the Qatar Stars League (QSL) and sponsored by Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), kicked off on Friday.

A total of 28 teams, equally divided into seven groups, are competing this year. Matches are played on Fridays at the Al Sadd Stadium. The final is scheduled for 25th January, 2019. The tournament's main objective is to promote a culture of sport and healthy lifestyle in the community of migrant workers engaged in various projects across the State of Qatar, especially those related to the infrastructure of 2022 FIFA World Cup.

In Group A, defending champions Nakheel Landscapes began their campaign with a narrow 2-1 win over Black Cat. In the other match in Group A, Siraj Ahammed scored five times as Youth Club came up with a near-flawless performance to see off DicoTech Qatar 6-0. Tarik Maati also got on the scoresheet.

In Group B, Medgulf Construction pulled off a 4-2 win over Trags & Agency Services, while CRC Dora and Trags Engineering played out an entertaining 2-2 draw. The Group C action

saw Larsen & Toubro cruise to a 6-1 win over HKB Contracting and Galfar Al Misnad and Spartan Ready Mix share the spoils after battling to a 0-0 draw.

In Group D, Prince Martey and Williams Akolgo each netted a hat-trick as Doha Pest Control notched up a thumping 8-0 win over CCC, while Delta Doha Corp rode on a brace from Tripen Rai to prevail over NAAAS Group by a 2-1 margin.

Group E witnessed victories by five-goal margins. Hamis Bukunya Kitagenda scored all goals as Mowasalat downed Aktor 5-0, while Shapoorji Pallonji got their campaign under way with a 5-0 victory over Teyseer Services. In Group F, Group 4 Security emerged as 1-0 winners against Teyseer Security and Petroserv registered a 6-1 win over AG Middle East.

Petroserv were powered by Victor Awine's hat-trick. Group G action saw Power International strike a dramatic late equaliser to hold Al Asmakh FM 1-1. It was followed by Taleb Group's 15-0 win over Boom Construction in what was the highest victory margin in the opening week. Sadiq Olalekan Kolapo, Franklin Gyawae and Isaac Ameyaw all scored a hat-trick for Taleb Group.



A total of 28 teams, divided into seven groups, are competing in the seventh edition of Workers' Cup.

BOTTOMLINE

Al Sadd's Ferreira and Boundedjah win QNB Stars League monthly awards

Al Sadd's Jesualdo Ferreira and striker Baghdad Boundedjah were named QNB Stars League's best coach and best player respectively for the months of November and December.

Under Ferreira, Al Sadd played five matches in the 2018-19 season QNB Stars League's Weeks 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15) and won all of them, collecting the full quota of 15 points. Ferreira's men scored 27 goals while conceding just four, with 56 shots on target and 13 against it. According to STATS, the official statistics and figures provider for the QNB Stars League, Al Sadd made an

average number of 663 passes, of which 588 were successful. Short passes numbered 429 and forward passes 201. There were 18.8 crosses (7.2 from the left and 11.6 from the right). They also made 20 tackles and nine dribbles. Al Sadd made 66 final-third entries and 41 penalty-area entries. Shots for reached 23 and shots against eight. The average number of shots on target was 11.

Boundedjah, meanwhile, scored 10 goals and gave six assists in five matches. The two goals he scored against Al Shahania helped Boundedjah become the Qatar league's all-time top scorer in a single season as he took his per-

sonal tally to 28 goals. The Algerian surpassed Brazilian striker Clemerson Soares' record of 27 goals set in the 2007-08 season for Al Gharafa.

The technical analysis of Boundedjah released by STATS, the official statistics and figures provider for the QNB Stars League, showed he spent 476.0 minutes on the pitch. He made an average of 34.5 passes, of which 26.8 were successful. He scored all his goals from inside the box.

The physical aspects revealed that the ace striker covered a total distance of 9,272.6 metres with a high speed distance of 582.2.



Al Sadd coach Jesualdo Ferreira (left) and striker Baghdad Boundedjah pose with their QNB Stars League's monthly awards.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Inter Milan, PSG and Liverpool sweating on last-16 spots

Inter will rely on Group B winners Barca to do them a favour and see off Tottenham

Reuters
London

The bid to reach the knockout stages of the Champions League reaches its climax this week with Inter Milan, Paris St Germain and Liverpool among seven clubs sweating on taking the remaining four places for the last 16. Today's a number of blockbuster encounters will take place as Liverpool hope for one of those magical European nights at Anfield against Napoli in Group C, while Inter will be relying on Group B winners Barcelona to do them a favour and see off Tottenham Hotspur.

Juergen Klopp's Liverpool, sitting third in the group on six points behind PSG (eight) and leaders Napoli (nine), must win to have any chance of progress while the Serie A side need just a draw at Anfield to guarantee their spot in the next round.

Napoli could even lose and still go through if PSG lose to Red Star Belgrade. Should Neymar and co prevail in Serbia, Liverpool would need to win 1-0 or by two goals or more due to pip Napoli on their head-to-head record.

Liverpool's Egypt striker Mo Salah certainly looks capable having scored a superb hat-trick at Bournemouth in the Premier League on Saturday. If Napoli, PSG and Liverpool all finish on nine points, the Merseyside club would finish top with second place determined by the scoreline at Anfield.

A group stage exit for PSG would be humiliating for new manager Thomas Tuchel given the club's Qatari owners' desperation to see the French champions conquer Europe. They have reached the knockout stages of the Champions League in every season since 2012-13 but have never gone on to reach the final.

After claiming one point from their first three matches in Group B Tottenham looked out of contention but consecutive wins against PSV Eindhoven and Inter mean they head to the Nou Camp in second place and knowing a win will guarantee them a place in the last-16 for the third time.

Luciano Spalletti's Inter side, who are level with Tottenham on seven points but below them on head-to-head, lost 1-0 to Serie A leaders Juventus on Friday but will be heavy favourites at home to bot-

Barcelona superstar forward Lionel Messi attends a training session in Barcelona yesterday, on the eve of their Champions League match against Tottenham Hotspur. (AFP)



tom side PSV who have just one point from seven matches in the Champions League this season.

Tottenham lost 4-2 against Barcelona in the home leg at Wembley, but may have an advantage in the fact that Barca have already qualified as group winners and may take a leisurely approach as they wind down for the mid-season break. Mauricio Pochettino's team also do not necessarily need a win, as merely matching Inter's result will do.

Tomorrow, Lyon and Shakhtar Donetsk will face each other in the final showdown

for a last 16 place in Group F. The French side sit second on seven points, two ahead of the Ukrainians and so only need a draw to qualify.

Shakhtar must get maximum points to seal their fifth appearance in the competition's round of 16. The 12 teams who have qualified already for the knockout stages are Ajax, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Juventus, Manchester City, Manchester United, Porto, Real Madrid, Roma and Schalke 04. However, only Barca, Porto and Real have clinched top spot in their

respective groups.

TODAY'S CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE FIXTURES

GROUP A: Club Brugge vs Atlético Madrid; Monaco vs Borussia Dortmund

GROUP B: Barcelona vs Tottenham Hotspur; Inter Milan vs PSV Eindhoven

GROUP C: Red Star Belgrade vs Paris Saint Germain; Liverpool vs Napoli

GROUP D: FC Schalke 04 vs Lokomotiv Moscow; Galatasaray vs FC Porto

SPOTLIGHT

Neymar likely to start for PSG against Red Star

AFP
Belgrade

Neymar is set to start Paris Saint-Germain's crucial Champions League tie at Red Star Belgrade if he comes through a pre-match training session unscathed, coach Thomas Tuchel said yesterday. "I think if training goes well today (Monday) then it's obvious he will play," the German said.

The world's most expensive player came off early in the 2-2 draw at Bordeaux on December 2 after hurting the same groin he injured playing for Brazil against

Cameroon in November. The Brazilian could line up alongside France World Cup winner Kylian Mbappe to form a potent PSG attack. Mbappe praised Neymar's ability in the pre-match press conference. "It's a massive advantage for us, we'll see on Tuesday all the quality he has," he said. "He'll be there and he'll prove his quality by helping us win."

The Parisians need a victory in Serbia today if they are to guarantee a place in the last 16. Liverpool face Napoli in the other Group C fixture with the Reds needing to clinch all three points at Anfield to have any chance of advancing.



Paris St Germain's Kylian Mbappe (left) and Neymar train at the Rajko Mitic stadium in Belgrade, Serbia, yesterday. (Reuters)

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Iceland's Hallgrímsson to coach Al Arabi

AFP
Doha

Heimir Hallgrímsson, the Icelandic coach who steered his country to their first ever World Cup finals, is to take over at Qatari league side Al Arabi, the club announced yesterday. His appointment was confirmed in a video message on social media, hashtagged #WelcomeHeimir.

A press conference to unveil the 51-year-old officially is expected to take place today.

It will be Hallgrímsson's first job since standing down as Iceland's national team coach following the Russia World Cup earlier this year.

His time with Iceland saw the country achieve unparalleled success, qualifying for its first ever major tournament, the 2016 Euros in France, when Hallgrímsson was joint manager alongside Lars Lagerback.

It was during that tournament, Iceland famously beat England 2-1 in the knockout stage. As sole



manager, he guided Iceland to this year's World Cup, their first ever global tournament.

However, Iceland failed to win a single game and were knocked out at the group stage. As part of the preparation for the World Cup, Hallgrímsson took his Icelandic side to play a friendly in Qatar in November 2017. Al Arabi currently stand mid-table in the 12-team Qatar Stars League at the halfway stage, 15 points behind leaders Al Duhail.

CONFIDENT

Spurs can cause Barcelona upset, says Pochettino

Reuters
Madrid

Tottenham Hotspur can defeat Barcelona at the Nou Camp today to secure a place in the Champions League knockout stages, their upbeat coach Mauricio Pochettino has said. Spurs must equal or better Inter Milan's result at home to already-eliminated PSV Eindhoven to clinch a last-16 spot that looked improbable after just one point from their opening three group games before consecutive home wins

over PSV and Inter.

Pochettino's opposite number Ernesto Valverde said earlier on Monday that he would make a number of changes to his team with Barca already qualified as group winners but Tottenham's Argentine coach is taking nothing for granted.

"We're going to be ready to compete in the best condition that we can," Pochettino told a news conference yesterday.

"I'm optimistic, I think we come here at our best and we need to prepare and think about the game we are going to play, not what Barca will do. Barcelona have a great team of 24 players with great qual-

ity. To be one of the best teams in the world you need a squad who can show their quality, and they are all here because they deserve to be."

Having beaten Leicester City 2-0 away in the Premier League on Saturday with a rotated XI, Pochettino is expected to recall talismanic striker Harry Kane, who was rested.

He indicated that he will make changes given the gruelling schedule English sides face over the Christmas period. "We're playing 12 games in 40 days and have no pause in December," said the Spurs boss. "If you don't rotate it's difficult, but

what Tottenham offers players is the opportunity to grow and play well in the same way no matter who is playing."

Tottenham captain Hugo Lloris said Barcelona would give his team a tough game, no matter what changes they make. "It's always a special game to play against Barca in the Nou Camp, it's a special place, one of the best," the French keeper said.

Barca top the group with 13 points ahead of Spurs and Inter on seven and PSV with one. Tottenham are above Inter on their head-to-head record having lost 2-1 away and won 1-0 at home.

FOCUS

Klopp demands Liverpool produce unique display against Napoli

AFP
Liverpool

Juergen Klopp has called on Liverpool to produce "something special" when they face Napoli in a do-or-die Champions League showdown today. Klopp's side must beat Napoli at Anfield to stand any chance of progressing from their group into the knockout stages. A 1-0 victory or any two-goal win will see the Reds through.

Liverpool have a long history of success on big European nights on their own ground, dating all the way back to the memorable European Cup quarter-final win over Saint-Etienne in 1977 that kick-started their continental reign. That gives Klopp hope as he prepares to face a major test against Napoli, who are second in Serie A and unbeaten in Champions League Group C, having defeated Liverpool 1-0 when they met in Italy in October.

The Italian side have continued to



Liverpool manager Juergen speaks at press conference yesterday. (Reuters)

look strong despite losing manager Maurizio Sarri to Chelsea in July, with Carlo Ancelotti taking over and Klopp knows Liverpool will have to produce one of their most dominant displays to

advance.

"We really need to make sure we are ready for Napoli. It's difficult to come in after a successful coach such as Sarri and make changes but they are so

good," Klopp said. "We know the result we need, and it's difficult because Napoli are dangerous on the counter attack and good defending. They are a typical Italian team. But if something special is possible, then it's here, and we will try that."

Liverpool go into Tuesday's match in good spirits, having gone top of the Premier League on Saturday when they won 4-0 at Bournemouth and previous leaders Manchester City lost 2-0 at Chelsea. Klopp, however, is certain that his players will not get carried away, either in the Premier League or in Europe, given the defeats they have suffered in their group this season.

"We will not get carried away. We know how difficult it is," he said. "We are not the most experienced side but we know our way and which way we will go all the time. The league is not important at the moment because tomorrow we play Napoli. We were confident before the away games in Napoli and Belgrade, and that didn't help."

Klopp, meanwhile, has commended

former Liverpool player Raheem Sterling for the way he dealt with alleged racist abuse directed towards him while playing for Manchester City at Chelsea on Saturday. Chelsea and the Metropolitan Police are investigating the allegations after a video was posted on social media that showed the England winger being shouted at by Chelsea fans as he collected the ball behind the goal. On Sunday, Sterling published a post on Instagram saying that British newspapers are helping to "fuel racism" because of the way they portray young black footballers. He also wrote in the post that he "had to laugh" when he heard the alleged racist remarks during the game because he expects "no better". "I watched the game and I think I saw the situation when he went for the corner and I saw a few guys shouting," he said. "I didn't hear, I'm not sure if it was possible to hear what they shouted, but I already thought his reaction was just brilliant."

"You saw his face. He gave the right response, not to react for these people.

They don't deserve any reaction, they don't deserve any respect. I am obviously not surprised that things like this still happen but I like the fact that we put the finger on it and say: 'You cannot say what you want, it is not possible.'"

Napoli coach Ancelotti believes Liverpool are good enough to win the Premier League, but the Italian is convinced his Napoli side can knock them out of the Champions League on Tuesday. Napoli arrive at Anfield on the back of a 12-match unbeaten run in all competitions, and defeated Liverpool 1-0 with a late Lorenzo Insigne goal when the sides met at the Stadio San Paolo in October.

"The Premier League is always a competitive league. Liverpool has the possibility to win," Ancelotti said. "The fact that they started really well means that it's possible that they can do it."

The Napoli boss is fully aware of the impact that the Anfield atmosphere could have on today's match, but said that neither he nor his players would be intimidated by it.

SPOTLIGHT

River edge out Boca to win Copa Libertadores title

River prevails 5-3 on aggregate after the first leg finished 2-2 and reclaim the trophy they had last won in 2015

AFP
Madrid

River Plate won the Copa Libertadores by beating their fiercest rivals Boca Juniors 3-1 after extra time on Sunday night, bringing an end to a final tainted by violence and moved more than six thousand miles away from Argentina.

Boca took the lead through Dario Benedetto but Lucas Pratto equalised before Juan Quintero and Gonzalo Martinez scored in extra time, aided by Wilmar Barrios being sent off, to win a fittingly dramatic contest for River.

It means River prevailed 5-3 on aggregate after the first leg finished 2-2 and reclaim the trophy they had last won in 2015, lifting it for the fourth time in their history. "We have shown we are superior," River's Leonardo Ponzio said. "After trying to stay quiet about everything that happened, we showed on the pitch we were better."

"The only thing I feel is sadness for not winning the cup and giving it to the people of Boca," Boca coach Guillermo Barros Schelotto said. Postponed on three occasions and then relocated from Buenos Aires to Madrid, the supporters of these two great clubs showed in the Santiago Bernabeu why this fixture had been billed as one of football's greatest ever.

Lionel Messi, Antoine Griezmann and Diego Godin were among the 62,200 in attendance. But, despite the bouncing huddles in the streets, the plumes of blue and red smoke, the swinging scarves, fluttering flags and fans that were chanting in their seats three hours before kick-off, there was nothing to extinguish the lingering sense of regret.

There was no repeat of the scenes that cast a shadow over Argentinian football and saw the original game at



River Plate players celebrate with the trophy after winning the second leg match of the all-Argentine Copa Libertadores final against Boca Juniors in Madrid. (AFP)

River's El Monumental on November 24 postponed, when around 50 fans attacked Boca's team bus and left some of their players injured.

Madrid, which will also host the Champions League final in June, was chosen in part because of its record of

hosting major events and the security, which included around 2,500 police officers, did its job before kick-off.

Fans were separated into zones either side of the stadium and had to go through checks even to enter the area immediately surrounding it. The shame

was only that the operation was not as thorough 15 days ago and that a minority decided to take advantage.

Both clubs were allocated 25,000 tickets, with 5,000 of those reserved for residents of Argentina. The fear had been most of those buying would be

tourists and neutrals, but the atmosphere suggested different. Both teams had initially refused to play in Spain's capital but as the losers, Boca's sense of grievance will now become more entrenched.

They felt River were responsible for

the chaos two weeks ago and should have forfeited the trophy. They took their case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, but the appeal was rejected on Saturday. When the players shuffled out two hours before kick-off to inspect the pitch, they held up their phones to capture the thousands already inside and the view of a stadium most of them had never played in before.

The cheers grew louder when they came out for kick-off. Then there were whistles as the teams swapped ends and each were greeted by their opponent's fans behind the goal. Jonatan Maidana was playing for Boca when they last won the Copa Libertadores 11 years ago and, now in the red and white of River, he almost gave his former club an early lead, slicing just over his own crossbar.

The game lacked quality but came alive one minute before half-time. Nahitan Nandez's superb pass split two River defenders and Benedetto kept a cool head, guiding into the corner, before taunting the beaten Gonzalo Montiel.

River had been inferior but improved. Their first real attacking move was also a brilliant one as Leonardo Ponzio and Quintero exchanged passes before the latter pulled back for Pratto to sweep home. The game meandered towards full-time and seemed destined for penalties until Barrios was shown a second yellow card for a tackle on Exequiel Palacios and soon after, Quintero struck.

It was a goal worthy of winning the tournament, as he collected 25 yards out, glanced up and whipped the ball in off the underside of the crossbar. Leonardo Jara almost snatched a late Boca goal but his shot nicked the outside of the post. Then, with Boca's goalkeeper Esteban Andrada up for a corner, River added the final touch. Martinez ran the ball into the empty net and River's substitutes and staff were already pouring onto the pitch to begin the celebrations.

FOCUS

Bayern's Robben may retire at end of season

AFP
Berlin

Arjen Robben says he may retire in June after confirming he will quit Bayern Munich when his contract with the defending Bundesliga champions expires. Robben, who turns 35 in January, confirmed in yesterday's edition of magazine *Kicker* that he will quit the Bavarian giants at the end of the season: "that's a fact".

"Of course it's a big step, which you don't just make in one day. I thought about it a lot and it feels good that it's now out, also for the fans and the club. It was the right point in time."

Having missed the last two games with a thigh injury, Robben could make his return when Bayern face Ajax away in the Champions League tomorrow. Both teams are through to the last 16 and Bayern need only a point in Amsterdam to win Group E.

Robben also missed Saturday's 3-0 league win at home to Nuremberg which left Bayern third in the table and nine points behind Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund. Bayern's senior bosses are planning a squad clear-out for next season and Robben says now is the right time to go, despite two stunning goals in the 5-1 thrashing of Benfica a fortnight ago.

"The game against Benfica was a nice confirmation that I can play at the highest level," he added. "On the other side, the club wants to change the face of the team and I want to prepare my future. I am simply happy and grateful that there is clarity for both parties."

However, Robben says he currently has no plans past the end of the season. "That's not entirely clear, perhaps I will stop playing - it's about waiting and seeing what possibilities there are," he said. "If offers come in, I'll really consider them 100% and if it's something nice, I'll play on, but if no ideal offers come, then that could be it."

"I have three children and they



also must be happy, so it's not just about offers from China or places in the desert. The family plays a very important role in every decision of mine."

After spells at Chelsea and Real Madrid, Robben joined Bayern in 2009 and the highlight of nearly a decade with the Bavarian giants was his winning goal in the 2013 Champions League final at Wembley to seal a 2-1 victory over Borussia Dortmund. The fleet-footed, injury-prone Dutch veteran, named Bundesliga player of the year after his first season in Germany in 2009/10, has won 19 titles so far with Bayern and collected his seventh German league title last May.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea suspend fans after Sterling racial abuse row

AFP
London

Chelsea have suspended four people from attending their matches while the club carries out an investigation into allegations Manchester City star Raheem Sterling was racially abused during Saturday's Premier League clash.

Television cameras apparently caught a Chelsea fan aiming racist abuse at England winger Sterling during the Blues' 2-0 win over City at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea and the British police are investigating the incident, which has provoked widespread condemnation amid fears football is returning to the dark ages of racism that blighted the sport in the 1970s and 1980s.

Chelsea have taken swift action to temporarily suspend four fans until they have concluded their probe, with the threat of permanent bans if they find evidence of racist behaviour. "Chelsea Football Club has suspended four people from attending Chelsea matches pending further investigations into allegations regarding the behaviour of supporters towards Raheem Sterling during our match against Manchester City on Saturday," a Chelsea statement read. "Our investigations into



Manchester City star Raheem Sterling suffered alleged racial abuse during his side's defeat against Chelsea. (AFP)

this matter are ongoing. We are fully supporting the police investigation and any information we gather will be passed on to them. Chelsea Football Club finds all forms of discriminatory behaviour abhorrent and, if there is evidence of ticket holders taking part in any racist behav-

iour, the club will issue severe sanctions, including bans. We will also fully support any criminal prosecutions."

Meanwhile, The Professional Footballers' Association said yesterday it stood "shoulder to shoulder" Sterling. In an Instagram post on Sunday, Sterling accused British newspapers of helping to "fuel racism" with the way they portray young black footballers.

A statement from the organisation added: "The PFA condemn, in the strongest terms, the increase in racial abuse our members have been receiving from the terraces. We encourage all clubs to take the strongest possible action for fans found guilty of racially abusing players. We commend Raheem for his professionalism during the incident and the statement he made via Instagram on Sunday. We stand with him in calling for the press to consider the coverage of all footballers carefully, and to end their imbalanced coverage aimed at young, black players."

In his Instagram post Sterling, 24, referred to a story from January about City teammate Tosin Adarabioyo reportedly buying an expensive house despite never having started a Premier League match. "The young black kid is looked at in a bad light. Which helps fuel racism and aggressive behaviour," Sterling wrote.

"So for all the newspapers that don't

understand why people are racist in this day and age all I have to say is have a second thought about fair publicity and (d) give all players an equal chance!"

The PFA was also critical of the media's portrayal of Sterling, who has previously faced negative publicity, often for non-football issues. "We have been aware for a few months of the targeting Raheem faces in the press - it is evident that he is often singled out and treated more harshly than his colleagues," its statement said. "As such, these stories are fuelling racism within the game, as reports of racist abuse continue to rise."

Former England and Liverpool player John Barnes was the victim of persistent racism during his playing days, including monkey chants and having bananas thrown at him. The 55-year-old feels prejudice and discrimination extend far beyond football and stems from "hundreds of years of indoctrination".

"When people talk about, 'Oh isn't that terrible what happened to Raheem Sterling?; you speak to black people in the inner cities and they say 'this is what we go through every single day' Barnes said.

"It's not a surprise to us. It's prevalent in society as you go into the inner cities and see how disenfranchised and what a lack of opportunities there are for members of ethnic minorities."

LA LIGA

Villarreal sack Calleja, appoint Garcia Plaza

AFP
Madrid

Javier Calleja has been replaced as coach by Luis Garcia Plaza at struggling Villarreal after winning just three matches this season, the Spanish La Liga club announced yesterday. The 'Yellow Submarine' lost 3-2 at home to Celta Vigo at the weekend and now sit one place and three points above the relegation zone.

However, they are top of their Europa League group and will qualify for the next stage if they draw at home against Spartak Moscow on Thursday. Stepping into Calleja's shoes until the end of the season will be 46-year-old Garcia Plaza who returns to the club for a second spell, having spent the 2005-06 season in charge of Villarreal B. The 40-year-old Calleja was youth coach at Villarreal when he stepped up to take over as first team boss from Fran Escriba who was fired in September 2017. He had earlier spent seven years as a player with the Yellow Submarine. Calleja is the fifth coach in La Liga to be sacked this season, following the dismissals of Eduardo Berizzo (Athletic Bilbao), Leo Franco (Huesca), Julen Lopetegui (Real Madrid) and Antonio Mohamed (Celta Vigo).

IBRAHIMOVIC STICKING WITH LA GALAXY, AC MILAN 'EVALUATE' FABREGAS

Milan: Zlatan Ibrahimovic will not be leaving LA Galaxy to return to AC Milan, the Italian club's sporting director Leonardo said on Sunday, although they are studying the possibility of signing Chelsea midfielder Cesc Fabregas.

"Ibrahimovic will not return to Milan," Leonardo told *Sky Sport Italia*. "He gave his word to the LA Galaxy that he would renew his contract. We thought about his return and he thought about it too, but he's keeping his word and will remain in MLS."

"He always said from the start that if the LA Galaxy satisfied his conditions, then he would remain. They are doing that and he will stay there. It would have been a marvellous story and a strong signal, but it will not be possible."

Ibrahimovic played for AC



Milan from 2010 to 2012, winning a Serie A title with the club, before moving to Paris Saint-Germain and then Manchester United. The 37-year-old joined LA Galaxy this season and has a contract through the 2019

season with the Major League Soccer side.

He was recently named the league's Newcomer of the Year, defeating record England goalscorer Wayne Rooney among others for the award. Leonardo said Milan were "evaluating the conditions" to sign 31-year-old Spaniard Fabregas, a former Arsenal and Barcelona player.

"Unfortunately, with the Financial Fair Play issue it has become a puzzle and a difficult one to work out. The owners want to invest, but there are parameters to be respected."

Meanwhile, Brazilian midfielder Lucas Paqueta arrived in Milan on Sunday ahead of his 35m euro (\$40.4m) signing. "He'll be a reinforcement, is young and can certainly give us a hand," added Leonardo of the 21-year-old Flamengo player.

NBA

Bucks edge Raptors 104-99 in battle of top Eastern teams

'We're resilient. We've got a coach that has confidence in us every night win or lose'

AFP
Los Angeles

The Milwaukee Bucks bounced back from a disappointing defeat with a big win in Toronto on Sunday, edging the Raptors 104-99 in a battle of the NBA's top Eastern Conference teams.

The Raptors still own the best record in the league at 21-7, but they suffered a second straight defeat after falling 106-105 to the Brooklyn Nets on Friday.

Malcolm Brogdon's back-to-back three-pointers with 1:07 remaining first tied the score then put the Bucks up 100-97, a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

Brogdon scored 18 points. Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 19 and matched his season-high with 19 rebounds for Milwaukee, who fell to the two-time defending champion Golden State Warriors on Friday.

Brook Lopez also scored 19 for Milwaukee, who became the first team to beat the Raptors twice this season.

RESULTS		
New York	107-119	Charlotte
Toronto	99-104	Milwaukee
San Antonio	110-97	Utah
Detroit	108-116	New Orleans

"We came off a tough loss to the Warriors, we knew we needed this one going into this back-to-back," Brogdon said. The Bucks, who improved to 17-8, host Cleveland on Monday. He said shaking off the loss to Golden State wasn't difficult.

"We're a really good team this year," he said. "We have a lot of confidence in ourselves. We're resilient. We've got a coach that has confidence in us every night win or lose."

Toronto have dropped two straight for the second time this season and have lost three of their last four.

Serge Ibaka scored 22 points and Kawhi Leonard had 20 for the Raptors. But Kyle Lowry went scoreless for the first time this season, missing all five of his shots.

He did produce seven assists, and Toronto coach Nick Nurse said the Raptors didn't play badly offensively.

"We did a lot of things well enough to win the game, but we just didn't score," said Nurse, who admitted to concern over missed shots at the rim and missed open looks from the perimeter. "That's more the question," he said of solving those shooting woes. "Can we get a little confidence back, get a little pep in our step?"

HOLIDAY FUELS PELICANS

Jrue Holiday and Julius Randle combined for 65 points to lead the New Orleans Pelicans past the Detroit Pistons 116-108.



Milwaukee Bucks guard Malcolm Brogdon goes up to make a basket against the Toronto Raptors at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

Holiday and Randle rose to the occasion after star teammate Anthony Davis was hobbled by a sore hip after a clash with Detroit's Blake Griffin in the first quarter.

Davis returned to the game in the third period but finished with just six points on two-of-seven shooting with nine rebounds, four assists and five blocks.

"He was probably 50 percent," Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry said. "But just having him out there - defensively I thought he

did a great job for us.

Holiday filled the void with 37 points, one shy of his career high. He tied a career-best with six three-pointers. He pulled down five rebounds, handed out five assists and came up with three steals.

Randle added 28 points with six rebounds and five assists.

"Everybody stepped up and played well when we needed them to," Gentry said. "Obviously, Jrue did a fantastic job controlling the game."

Elsewhere, the San Antonio Spurs defeated the Utah Jazz 110-97, avenging a 34-point loss to the Jazz on December 4.

DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points and Rudy Gay had 23 points and 15 rebounds as the Spurs put together two straight wins for the first time since they won four straight from October 27-November 3.

The victory was the 1,210th of coach Gregg Popovich's career, moving him into a tie with Pat Riley for fourth place in NBA history.

SPOTLIGHT

Lakers working on trade for Ariza

Reuters
New York

Looking to add a proven defender this season while also retaining cap flexibility this offseason, the Los Angeles Lakers are in talks to acquire Trevor Ariza from the Phoenix Suns, ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski reported on Sunday.

According to the report, the main sticking point is finding a third team to complete the deal. The Suns' desire, according to the report, is "to land a playmaking guard and a draft asset as the price of unloading Ariza."

To that end, Wojnarowski reported, the Lakers are looking to include guard Kentavious Caldwell-Pope in the deal, though it appears he would go to a third team. Caldwell-Pope,

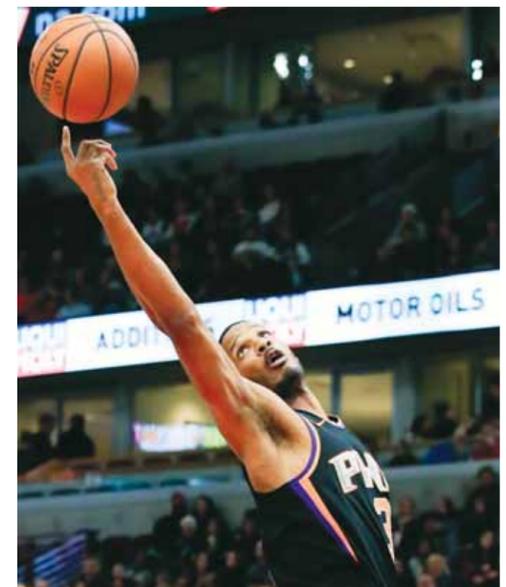
25, has full veto power over a trade per the one-year, \$12 million contract he signed this offseason.

"The Lakers have shown a willingness to work with his agent, Rich Paul, if there's a deal that might increase his role and possibly get him signed to a deal this summer with a new team," Wojnarowski reported.

Players signed this offseason as a free agent cannot be traded until Saturday.

Ariza is also signed to a one-year deal, a \$15 million pact he signed after five seasons in Houston. Among the teams the 33-year-old Ariza has played for is the Lakers, with whom he won an NBA championship in 2009.

He is averaging 9.7 points, 5.5 rebounds and 3.3 assists this season. The Suns are a league-worst 4-22 this season.



Phoenix Suns forward Trevor Ariza reaches for a rebound during the NBA game against the Chicago Bulls at the United Center in Chicago on November 21, 2018. (EPA)

Free agent Keuchel in high demand

The annual offseason fight for pitching is on, and Dallas Keuchel is becoming one of the most coveted arms on the free agent market. Keuchel, 30, won the 2015 American League Cy Young Award and spent seven seasons with the Houston Astros, including three 200-inning campaigns.

He could be the next domino to fall in the offseason chase for starting pitching, following the seven-year, \$140 million pact between Patrick Corbin and the Washington Nationals finalized last week. Keuchel is the top target of the Atlanta Braves, per MLB insider Jon Heyman, after the team lured third baseman Josh Donaldson and brought back catcher Brian McCann. The Braves are rightly

dominant in the rotation, led by Mike Foltynewicz. But Atlanta is no shoo-in for Keuchel's services, per multiple reports. The Cincinnati Reds, Toronto Blue Jays and Philadelphia Phillies - who offered Corbin a five-year, \$100 million deal before the former Arizona starter picked Washington - are all chasing Keuchel. Keuchel is not an overpowering ace but highly effective nonetheless. He was 12-11 with a 3.74 ERA last season and has a career 3.66 ERA as part of a 76-63 record. ESPN reported one pitching-needy team will not bid for Keuchel - the New York Yankees. While the Yankees were in on Corbin, reports indicate they are focusing on getting lefty J.A. Happ locked down.

NHL

Fleury gets league-high 17th win as Vegas tops Dallas

Reuters
New York

Marc-Andre Fleury had 22 saves to pick up his league-leading 17th victory of the season to help lead the Vegas Golden Knights to a 4-2 victory over the Dallas Stars on Sunday night in Las Vegas.

William Karlsson, Reilly Smith, Alex Tuch and Ryan Carpenter each scored goals for Vegas, which improved to 8-2 in its last 10 games, won its fifth straight home contest, and bounced back from a 5-1 loss at Los Angeles on Saturday afternoon. Colin Miller added two assists.

Martin Hanzal and Esa Lindell each scored power-play goals for Dallas, which had a four-game winning streak snapped. Miro Heiskanen added two assists and Ben Bishop had 24 saves for the Stars, who lost for the first time in regulation in 11 games (9-1-1) against Pacific Division teams this season.

Hanzal, playing just his second game of the season after undergoing spinal fusion surgery last March, picked up his first goal of the season to give Dallas an early 1-0 lead by being in the right place at the right time. Heiskanen fired a shot from the top of the right circle and the puck caromed off the leg of Hanzal skating in front of the net and past Fleury.

Vegas tied it near the end of the period when Carpenter, standing alone by the left side of the net, shoveled in a rebound of an Oscar Lindberg shot for his first goal in 41

RESULTS		
Vancouver	6-1	St. Louis
Winnipeg	7-1	Philadelphia
Boston	2-1	Ottawa
Montreal	3-2	Chicago
Anaheim	6-5	New Jersey
Las Vegas	4-2	Dallas
Edmonton	1-0	Calgary

games dating back to last season. Karlsson then gave the Golden Knights the lead midway through the second period with his 10th goal of the season, firing a wrist shot from near the dot in the left circle through Bishop's pads. Tuch made it 3-1 with his 10th goal of the season, slapping in a bouncing puck in the slot through Bishop's pads.

The Stars cut it to 3-2 at the 8:33 mark of the third period when Jason Spezza rifled a pass from the top of the right circle, past the top of the crease, off the skate of Lindell and into the left side of the net. It was Lindell's fifth goal of the season.

Fleury, making his 10th consecutive start in net, then came up with three saves during a four-minute power play after Shea Theodore picked up a double-minor for high sticking Taylor Fedun and drawing blood.

Dallas, called for too many men on the ice penalty with 1:07 left, still pulled Bishop with 50 seconds left and Smith sealed the win for Vegas with an empty-net goal 22 seconds later.

BOESER'S HAT TRICK LEADS CANUCKS IN ROUT OVER BLUES

Brock Boeser scored three goals and Elias Pettersson had a goal and four assists as the visiting Vancouver Canucks defeated the St. Louis Blues 6-1 on Sunday afternoon.

Bo Horvat and Nikolay Goldobin also scored for the Canucks, who gained their second straight victory after having won just once in their previous 13 games. Goaltender Jacob Markstrom made 21 saves, losing a bid for his first shutout of the season in the third period. Jordan Kyrou scored his first career goal for the Blues, who lost by the same score Dec. 1 at Arizona. St. Louis goalie Jake Allen, who passed Glenn Hall to move into third place in franchise history with his 17th career shutout Friday in a 1-0 victory against Winnipeg, was pulled in the first period after allowing three goals on six shots.

Boeser opened the scoring at 2:31 on a fluke goal. Pettersson stole the puck behind the Blues' net and fed Boeser, whose shot from the slot went high. But the puck bounced off the glass and ricocheted back over the crossbar, hitting Allen in the back of his left leg pad before trickling over the goal line.

Pettersson made it 2-0 at 12:46, gliding over the blue line before taking a wrist shot from between the top of the faceoff circles that deflected off a defenseman's stick and over Allen's shoulder.

Allen's afternoon ended when Boeser scored on a snap shot from the right faceoff circle at 14:06 off a two-on-one break with Pettersson.



Vegas Golden Knights goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury makes a save as Dallas Stars centre Martin Hanzal looks for a rebound during the third period at T-Mobile Arena. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

SPOTLIGHT

Molinari named European Tour Golfer of the Year

Agencies
London

Francesco Molinari was named the European Tour's Golfer of the Year for the first time yesterday, capping a stellar season in which he won the British Open to become the first Italian major champion.

A panel comprising members of the golfing media chose Molinari to be the recipient of the distinguished prize following a magnificent 12 months on the European Tour in which he secured a first Rolex Series title in the BMW PGA Championship, a maiden Major victory at The 147th Open Championship and played a starring role in Europe's Ryder Cup win in France.

Molinari's first triumph of a memorable 2018 came at Wentworth Club where he finished two shots clear of Rory McIlroy to win the BMW PGA Championship, having finished runner-up in the event 12 months previously. He came close to adding another Rolex Series victory the following week by carding rounds 66-66-66-65 to finish runner-up to his Ryder Cup teammate Thorbjørn Olesen in the Italian Open in his homeland.

The 36-year-old's standout per-

formance in 2018 would come in July, though, where, playing alongside 14-time Major Champion Tiger Woods, he held his nerve in tricky conditions at Carnoustie by carding a bogey-free final round of 69 to lift the Claret Jug and become the first Italian to win one of golf's four Major Championships.

He followed that with another top ten finish in August at the US PGA Championship, before creating more history in The Ryder Cup the following month, forming a memorable partnership with Tommy Fleetwood en route to becoming the first European to win all five points from his five matches against the United States.

Fittingly, it was also Molinari's victory over Phil Mickelson in the Sunday Singles at Le Golf National which reclaimed The Ryder Cup for Europe.

Molinari then rounded off a remarkable year by becoming the first Italian to win the Race to Dubai Rankings presented by Rolex, holding off Masters Champion Patrick Reed and 2017 Race to Dubai Champion Fleetwood to finish the year as the European Tour's Number One. "It is a huge honour to be named the Hilton European Tour Golfer of the Year," said Molinari, who received the award yesterday at the London Hilton on Park Lane. "So many



great names have earned this honour and I feel very proud to join them.

"It is an award that means a lot to me and is a nice way to end a very special year. Winning at Wentworth, in one of our biggest events, gave me a lot of confidence for the summer, but obviously winning The Open at Carnoustie, becoming my country's first Major Champion, was incredible.

"To then go on to win the Race to Dubai and be part of that European Ryder Cup team in France was amazing.

I'll always look back on this season and be proud of what happened."

Keith Pelley, Chief Executive Officer of the European Tour, said: "There is so much to celebrate after another fantastic season on the European Tour which saw so many of our Members excel on the global stage and 12 in particular during a spectacular Ryder Cup in France. "But it is right that we pay special tribute to Francesco Molinari who repeatedly made history this year. Francesco is not just a phenomenal

golfer, he is a wonderful person too and throughout this season he consistently reminded us what a magnificent ambassador he is for our game. He is a thoroughly deserving winner of the 2018 Hilton European Tour Golfer of the Year award."

Iain Carter, BBC Golf Correspondent, who was part of the panel, said: "The list of monthly winners and nominees for this year's award shows the depth in talent and nationalities on the European Tour. Matt Wallace made a

compelling argument with three victories and Patrick Reed also merited massive consideration after winning the Masters, but Francesco Molinari's story in 2018 was absolutely outstanding.

"To win at Wentworth, then lift the Claret Jug at Carnoustie, and then back that up by winning five points at The Ryder Cup and win the Race to Dubai is up there as one of the great years in European golf.

"Francesco has always been one of Europe's elite players, but in 2018 he became a global superstar and separated himself from his peers."

Fellow panellist Nick Dougherty, Sky Sports Golf Presenter, said: "There were many stand-out performances on the European Tour in 2018, including Oli Fisher's historic 59, Tommy Fleetwood's 63 in the final round of the US Open and Matt Wallace's victory in Denmark when trying to earn a Ryder Cup wildcard. "But they all pale into insignificance compared to Francesco's performance under pressure at Carnoustie. That felt special, particularly his putt on the 18th when you look at who he was playing with. "He also won at Wentworth, which is massive when you look at the list of previous winners there, and then he produced that performance at Le Golf National."

NFL

Dolphins stun Pats; Chiefs, Saints win

'They could throw it deep or run one of their 'desperado type' plays'



Ryan Tannehill (left) and Kenyan Drake of the Miami Dolphins celebrate their win over the New England Patriots at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami. (AFP)

AFP
Los Angeles

The Dolphins scored a touchdown on a wild final play Sunday to edge New England 34-33 in Miami and put the Patriots' NFL playoff plans temporarily on hold.

The Patriots led 33-28 with seven seconds remaining, but couldn't stop what coach Bill Belichick dubbed a "desperado" play. Dolphins quarterback Ryan Tannehill took the snap and connected with Kenny Stills, who made a 14-yard gain before shovelling a lateral pass to DeVante Parker.

Parker made it another five yards then flicked another lateral pass to Kenyan Drake, who raced in to complete the 69-yard gain for the winning TD.

"They could throw it deep or run one of their 'desperado type' plays," Belichick said of what he thought the Dolphins' choices were coming down to the wire. "Twenty-yard pass, and then it turned 'desperado'."

It was the fifth defeat in the Patriots' last six trips to Miami, and prevented them, for now, from clinching a 10th straight AFC East division title.

"The way it ended sucked," said New England tight end Rob Gronkowski, who was on the field in a defensive role and was the last Patriot player with a chance

to stop Drake.

The Dolphins, who erased five deficits on the way to victory, improved to 7-6 to keep their slim playoff hopes alive.

SAINTS, CHIEFS PLAYOFF BOUND

In the late game, on a chilly Chicago night, the Bears defense was lights out as they held the Los Angeles Rams to a meagre amount of points with a 15-6 victory.

The New Orleans Saints and Kansas City Chiefs, meanwhile, punched their playoff tickets - the Saints locking up the NFC South division crown with a 28-14 victory over the Buccaneers in Tampa and the Chiefs securing a playoff spot with a 27-24 overtime triumph over the Baltimore Ravens.

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes connected on a stunning cross-body fourth-down pass to Tyreek Hill to keep a game-tying fourth-quarter touchdown drive alive.

Kansas City's Harrison Butker missed a 43-yard field goal as time expired in regulation, but made a 36-yarder in overtime that proved the difference after the Chiefs stopped the Ravens on fourth down in the extra period.

While the Chiefs clinched a playoff spot, the AFC West title will be in the balance when they face on Thursday division rivals the Los Angeles Chargers, who beat the Cincinnati Bengals 26-21.

The Saints, coming off a shock loss to

RESULTS

Indianapolis	24-21	Houston
Carolina	20-26	Cleveland
New England	33-34	Miami
Giants	40-16	Washington
Jets	27-23	Buffalo
Baltimore	24-27	Kansas City
New Orleans	28-14	Tampa Bay
Atlanta	20-34	Green Bay
Denver	14-20	San Francisco
Cincinnati	21-26	Chargers
Pittsburgh	21-24	Oakland
Detroit	17-3	Arizona
Philadelphia	23-29	Dallas
Rams	6-15	Chicago

the Dallas Cowboys, had to rally to beat the Buccaneers. New Orleans trailed 14-3 at halftime, but their potent offense led by quarterback Drew Brees came alive in the second.

Brees completed 24 of 31 passes for 201 yards with a touchdown and an interception.

Elsewhere, the Indianapolis Colts halted the Houston Texans' nine-game winning streak with a 24-21 triumph in Houston. The Texans lead the AFC South division at 9-4 with the Colts and Tennessee Titans tied at 7-6.

The Green Bay Packers, who sacked coach Mike McCarthy after last week's embarrassing loss to the Arizona Cardinals, also rebounded, beating the Falcons 34-20. Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers completed 21 of 32 passes for 192 yards and two touchdowns.

Elsewhere, Dak Prescott threw his third touchdown pass to Amari Cooper on the first possession of overtime, and the Dallas Cowboys continued their march toward the division title with a 29-23 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles.

On third down, Rasul Douglas mistakenly tipped the pass into the air and Cooper grabbed it and had an easy stroll into the end zone from the Philadelphia seven for the 15-yard score.

In Chicago, quarterback Mitch Trubisky completed 16 of 30 passes for 110 yards with one touchdown, but it was the Bears defense that provided the fireworks by holding the Rams to just 214 yards of offense.

Los Angeles quarterback Jared Goff completed just 20 of 44 passing attempts for 180 yards with zero touchdowns and a career-high four interceptions. He was also sacked three times by the Bears defense.

"Our goal is to play late in the season," said Bears defensive tackle Akiem Hicks. "As long as we keep doing what we do, we are going to be a good defense for a long time."

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

England ease past NZ 2-0 to meet Argentina in quarter-finals

IANS
Bhubaneswar

England outclassed New Zealand 2-0 in the first crossover match of the Men's Hockey World Cup here at the Kalinga Stadium yesterday.

England, who will now take on Olympic champions Argentina in the first quarter-final tomorrow, scored their first goal in the 25th minute as Will Calman got on the scoresheet with a field strike.

Luke Taylor converted a penalty corner in the 44th minute to help England score a comfortable win. The English were the better team against Black Sticks in the opening two quarters, carving out more goal scoring opportunities than their ninth-ranked opponents. In the opening exchanges, England could have taken the lead in the fifth minute from a penalty corner but failed to.

After a barren first quarter, England drew first blood in the 25th minute when Calman deflected in a high ball from skipper Phil Roper from the left flank.

Two minutes later, a Liam Ansell strike from close range went inches wide.

New Zealand came close to

reducing the margin in the 49th minute but Stephen Jenness' shot from inside the box was parried away by England goalie Pinner.

In the final minute of the match, New Zealand secured another penalty corner but Pinner made a smart save to keep a clean slate and keep intact England's record of never finishing below eighth in the World Cup.

In the other game, France reached their first quarters by edging past stubborn China 1-0. They will take on Australia in the last-eight stage tomorrow.

Timothee Clement sounded the board in the 36th minute.

Viktor Lockwood raced to the baseline with a daunting run down the left flank and cut back to Maximilien Branicki in the centre. Branicki then unleashed a fierce reverse stick at the far post which was deflected by Clement into the net.

The final two cross-over playoff matches take place today, with Belgium taking on Pakistan at 16:45IST with the winner playing Germany in the quarter-finals. The 1900 match will be contested between Netherlands and Canada, with the winner setting up a quarter-final clash against host nation India.



Action from Men's Hockey World Cup 2018 match between England and New Zealand at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar yesterday. (IANS)

GOLF

Kizzire and Harman win golf QBE Shootout

AFP
Miami

Patton Kizzire and Brian Harman eagled the par-five 17th on Sunday to seize victory in the QBE Shootout in Naples, Florida, ahead of Graeme McDowell and Emiliano Grillo.

Harman and Kizzire were one behind McDowell and Grillo when they arrived at Tiburon Golf Club's 17th in the fourball final round of the unofficial team event founded by Greg Norman.

Both hit iron shots close and when Kizzire holed his eagle putt they leapfrogged McDowell and Grillo, who had pulled one ahead with their seventh straight birdie

at 17.

"We knew we needed at least birdie and eagle was a bonus," Kizzire said.

"He had a great iron shot in there close and freed me up, and I hit a good one, too. We both had looks at it. I putted first and made it."

Kizzire and Harman carded an 11-under final round of 61 for a 30-under total of 186.

McDowell and Grillo had a total of 10 birdies - three on the front nine before their streak of seven from the 11th through the 17th - in a 10-under 62 for 187.

It was McDowell's second straight runner-up finish in the event, after finishing tied for second with partner Shane Lowry last year.

HORSE SHOW

Shaheen Lembarak, Wasa win gold at Qatar Arabian show

Al Shaqab horses won gold in the Colts and the Fillies championship

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Mohamed Mubarak al-Sulaiti Abdullah's Shaheen Lembarak and Nasser al-Hajri's Wasa emerged as the champion stallion and champion mare respectively, while Al Shaqab horses swept the colt and fillies championship in the 21st Qatar National Purebred Arabian Horse Show at the Al Shaqab Indoor Arena on Sunday.

Shaheen Lembarak, who had topped Class 12 for four-six-year-old stallions earlier on Sunday, edged out Nasser Mohamed Mesfer al-Hajri's Gazwan Al Nasser in the championship round for gold.

The latter had to be content for silver for the second straight edition of the show, after collecting 17 points to Shaheen Lembarak's 18. Al Sraiyah Stud's Amaar Al Nasser won bronze with 12 points.

Wasa collected a total of 22 points out of a possible 24 for her gold in the Mares' Championship. Al Nasser Stud's Bshaier Al Nasser and Mesfer Mohamed Mesfer al-Hajri's Deema Al Nasser took silver and bronze respectively.

Al Shaqab's Zuhayr Al Shaqab, winner of Class 6A for yearling colts earlier on Sunday, amassed an almost a unanimous approval of the judges with 24 points, to win gold in the colts' championship. Al Reeh Stud's Amir Al Reeh and Al Nasser Stud's Badiea Al Nasser finished second and third in the championship round respectively.

Siwar Al Shaqab brought home second gold for Al Shaqab in the fillies championship collecting 20 points for the gold, while Sheikh Nawaf bin Nasser al-Thani's Hattan Al Nasser won silver with 15 points. Assayel Al Uwaynah Stud's Magna MS had to settle for bronze with 10 points.

Siwar Al Shaqab had booked her spot in the championship round with a win in the Class 3A for Yearling Fillies on Day One of the championship on Friday.



Mohamed Mubarak al-Sulaiti Abdullah's Shaheen Lembarak won the gold in the Stallions Championship in the 21st Qatar National Purebred Arabian Horse Show at the Al Shaqab Indoor Arena on Sunday. PICTURES: Juhaim



Nasser al-Hajri's Wasa emerged as the champion mare at the horse show.



Al Shaqab's Zuhayr Al Shaqab won gold in the Colts Championship.

TENNIS

Activities launched ahead of Qatar ExxonMobil Open

By Sports Reporter
Doha

ExxonMobil Qatar and the Qatar Tennis Federation (QTF) have launched a series of promotional activities ahead of the 2019 Qatar ExxonMobil Open, which will take place at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex from December 31, 2018, to January 5, 2019.

A ribbon cutting ceremony at Doha Festival City marked the launch of the promotional activities, in the presence of Saleh al-Mana, vice-president and director of Government and Public Affairs for ExxonMobil Qatar; Tareq Zeinal, General Co-ordinator of Qatar ExxonMobil Open, and Karim Alami, Tournament Director.

At the centre of this year's activities is an exciting and creative environmental awareness campaign, which ExxonMobil Qatar launched on November 27, 2018 to run through January 5, the last day of the tournament. The campaign revolves around a dugong mascot called Morjan and his family Toola and Marah, as it aims to help raise awareness of the dugong population that lives in Qatar's waters.

Morjan, Toola and Marah's names were chosen by students through a competition that took place at government schools in October. The winning students were present at the launch ceremony.

"We're pleased to announce the start of promotional activities



Qatar ExxonMobil Open tournament director Karim Alami (left); Saleh al-Mana, vice-president and director of Government and Public Affairs for ExxonMobil Qatar; and tournament's general co-ordinator Tareq Zeinal at the launch of promotional activities at Doha Festival City.

for the 2019 Qatar ExxonMobil Open together with our partner the Qatar Tennis Federation," said Alistair Routledge, President and General Manager for ExxonMobil Qatar. "Today's event will help get the word out that this outstanding annual sporting event is coming to Doha very soon. I'm also pleased to announce that we are raising awareness of a local environmental conversation issue in this year's tournament activities."

Zainal said, "We are proud of our tremendous association

with ExxonMobil in promoting tennis in Qatar. The 27th Edition of the event is coming up in three weeks from now and we hope tennis fans will enjoy another spectacular tennis experience with us."

Alami added: "Qatar ExxonMobil Open is one of the signature events in Qatar's sporting calendar. We are once again reiterating our commitment to promoting tennis as much as possible as well as creating a fun-filled atmosphere ahead of

the tournament. We are proud of what we've been able to do together with Qatar ExxonMobil and I believe this year's tournament will be bigger and greater."

Talking about dugongs, Dr Mohamad al-Sulaiti, Research Director, ExxonMobil Research Qatar, said, "It's wonderful that this year's promotional activities highlight a local conservation issue - the protection of dugongs. This is an important issue for us in Qatar, but unfortunately many people who live

here don't know much about this fascinating marine mammal or how it is under threat.

"Dugongs play a vital role in ocean ecosystems - they cycle nutrients within the ecosystems in which they forage. It is critical that we protect their key habitats and manage key threats. But to do so, we need to engage communities, foster stewardship and improve knowledge, and this year's campaign is going to be a great help in accomplishing this."

As part of its environmental awareness campaign, ExxonMobil Qatar is inviting social media users on Instagram and Twitter to visit stands located in Doha Festival City, Villaggio Mall and Souq Waqif, and take a photo with Morjan. They can then participate in a competition by posting their photos with the hashtag #Dugongs_matter for a chance to win valuable prizes and also learn more about dugongs, which are listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

ExxonMobil Qatar has planned two other competitions for their social media followers on Twitter and Instagram to help educate the general public about Qatar's dugong.

The 2019 Qatar ExxonMobil Open will bring together some of the world's top players to compete for the trophy and a share of the prize money. Confirmed tournament participants include Novak Djokovic, Dominic Thiem, Stan Wawrinka, and David Goffin.

MOTORSPORT

Qatar Cross-Country Rally to open 2019 FIA World Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Officials at the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) have announced initial plans for next year's Qatar Cross-Country Rally (QCCR), the opening round of the FIA Cross-Country Rally World Cup. The event will take place over five stages on February 21-26, 2019.

The QCCR will be the first round of the prestigious FIA series for the first time since it joined the championship in 2012. It will feature live televised start and finish ceremonies on the Pearl and five demanding desert special stages.

"We are delighted that the Manateq Qatar Cross-Country Rally will be the opening round of the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Rallies for the first time in 2019," said QMMF president and Organising Committee chairman Abdulrahman al-Mannai.

"We have great pleasure in

inviting drivers and riders from around the world to enjoy the challenges and demands that our off-road terrain and difficult navigation throws up. We have again tweaked the format for the 2019 edition. Our start ceremony and prize giving will both take place at the fabulous location of the Pearl and will feature live television coverage.

"Our team has laid on a challenging five-day route through the remotest and most spectacular parts of the State of Qatar and we look forward to welcoming competitors and showing our traditionally warm Arabic hospitality and support."

Rally headquarters and the media centre will be based at the new Losail Sports Arena, adjacent to the Losail International Circuit, and a bivouac will be located outside the main indoor facilities.

The ceremonial start will take place from 18.30hrs on February 21 and the five desert sections will take centre stage from February 22-26 before the ceremonial finish on the Pearl.

Lavillenie, Umtiti meet at Aspetar



Olympic pole vault champion and world record holder Renaud Lavillenie (left) of France meets compatriot and FC Barcelona star Samuel Umtiti at Aspetar, the orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital, in Doha. Aspetar plays an essential role in the development of sports in Qatar. Shaped by its vision to be a global leader in sports medicine and exercise science by 2020, the pioneering hospital has become a preferred destination for athletes to experience world-class medical service.

SPOTLIGHT

Aurenche is beIN's new vice-president for sports content

beIN Media Group, the leading sports, media and entertainment group, has appointed **Martin Aurenche** as vice-president of Sports Content, responsible for the group's media rights acquisitions and distribution around the world.

The strategic move comes just weeks after Yousef al-Obaidly was appointed as CEO of the group by chairman Nasser al-Khelaifi, signalling an exciting new phase of development for the global media company, which holds the single largest portfolio of sports rights of any global broadcaster in the world.

Aurenche has been instrumental to beIN Media Group's rapid expansion and remarkable success over the past few years, having been with the group from the very beginning when it launched its channel in France in 2012, and managing major relationships with international rights holders as well as negotiating key acquisitions.

Only this month, Aurenche headed the beIN negotiation team that secured Ligue 2 rights in France for a four-year term, complementing beIN's existing rights to Ligue 1 for that period; and secured UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League rights for Digiturk - beIN's subsidiary and the biggest pay-TV network in Turkey - until 2021. More broadly this year, Martin has supervised multiple tender processes with major rights holders such as UEFA, the English Premier League and the International Handball Federation. Aurenche, who is also a fully



qualified lawyer, will now lead and manage beIN Media Group's Central Acquisitions Team globally - responsible for both rights acquisition and distribution - principally spending his time in the key group offices in Paris, London and Doha, but also focused on the group's important interests and operations in the Americas and Asia.

Commenting on the appointment, al-Obaidly said, "I'm delighted to announce Martin's appointment. I've worked closely with Martin over the past seven years and his knowledge, experience and reputation across the industry is second to none, and will be a real asset as we embark on the next phase of our international growth."

Aurenche himself added: "I'm thrilled to take on this new position at such an exciting time for beIN Media Group. I look forward to continuing to work with our teams to strategically invest in premium rights in existing and new markets so we continue to deliver value for our partners and - most importantly - give our subscribers the best content and viewing experience on the market."

SPOTLIGHT

SC secretary-general praises power of sport at Oxford summit

HE Hassan al-Thawadi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), discussed sport's power to strengthen international ties, increase dialogue and break down social barriers during a summit at the University of Oxford in the UK.

During the Sports & Digital Diplomacy: A Vision for the Future summit, which was organised by the University of Oxford, in collaboration with SOAS University of London, al-Thawadi said sport had the power to positively change people's lives.

"Nothing brings people together - and breaks down social barriers - like sport," said al-Thawadi. "People's passion for sport - in particular football - transcends linguistic and socio-cultural differences."



HE Hassan al-Thawadi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC).

Al-Thawadi continued: "In 2022, fans from across the world will visit Qatar, with the vast majority visiting an Arab and Middle Eastern country for the first time. And like we saw this summer in Russia, I'm confident that through football, people will see our country and region in a positive light. Negative stereotypes will be dispelled and - thanks to football - we will bridge the gap between East and West."

Hosted by Dr Corneliu Bjola, from the University of Oxford, and Dr Simon Rofe, from SOAS University of London, the event was attended by academics and practitioners in the field of sport and digital diplomacy, including representatives from Unesco, the UN, Special Olympics UK and the Red Cross.

Sport's ability to teach life skills was also discussed, with al-Thawadi referencing Generation Amazing, one of the SC's flagship legacy programmes.

"Our Generation Amazing programme, which harnesses the power of football to bring people together and teach new skills, is currently active in seven countries. Whether it's leadership, teamwork or communication skills, football helps us to provide people with the skills they need to succeed in all areas of their lives," he said.

Also, during the event, the SC's Communications director Fatma al-Nuaimi discussed digital diplomacy, including Qatar's approach to sharing information.

"Social media helps us to share our messages directly with mem-

bers of the public," said al-Nuaimi. "Social media also allows us to have two-way conversations, which I see as a positive when it comes to shaping the fan experience in 2022."

Al-Nuaimi also discussed the recent World Cup in Russia and said there was plenty Qatar could learn from the tournament. "Much of the media - and many fans - had a negative perception of Russia before the World Cup. But the tournament was a great success - everyone felt safe and was warmly welcomed by the Russian people. We are already engaging closely with our Russian counterparts, along with our colleagues at FIFA, to see how we can build on this positive sentiment ahead of our own tournament in 2022," al-Nuaimi said. (SC.qa)

CRICKET

India end 10-year Australia drought in first-Test thriller

Wicketkeeper Pant takes record-equalling 11 catches as Australia lose by 31 runs



Captain Virat Kohli (centre) and Ravichandran Ashwin (right) celebrate India's victory over Australia in the first Test in Adelaide yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Adelaide

India won their first Test on Australian soil in a decade yesterday, bowling out the home side in a nail-biting finale to clinch the opening match and raise hopes of their first ever series victory Down Under.

Wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant pounced a world record-equalling 11 catches for the match as India, after setting an improbable target of 323, finally dismissed Australia to win by 31 runs on day five at Adelaide Oval.

Australia, attempting what would have been a record chase at the ground, gallantly battled to 291 before Josh Hazlewood became the last man to fall to Ravichandran Ashwin, who finished with 3-92. Shaun Marsh made 62 and Tim Paine 41.

It was a huge breakthrough for captain Virat Kohli's men, who went 1-0 up with three Tests to go after becoming the first Indian team to win the opening match of a Test series in Australia.

Pant took the plaudits after matching the record of 11 catches in a Test held by England's Jack Russell and South Africa's AB de Villiers.

India's last Test success in Australia was at the WACA Ground in Perth in 2008, and the previous one in Adelaide was 2003. They have now won just six times in Australia in more than 70 years.

But with the home team missing banned batsmen Steve Smith and David Warner, Kohli and his team sensed ahead of the tour that this could be their opportunity to make history by winning the series.

"I'm super-proud of the bowlers, to have four bowlers and take 20 wickets is a great achievement and something that we haven't done in the past. "It shows us that if the batsmen step up regularly, we will be gunning for a win in every Test match."

'SHATTERING'
Paine, who fell to a rash shot after lunch, said the defeat was "shattering" but he was proud

Scorecard			
INDIA 1st Inn	250 all out	N. Lyon	not out 38
AUSTRALIA 1st Inn	235 all out	J. Hazlewood	c Rahul b Ashwin 13
INDIA 2nd Inn	250 all out	Extras	(lb6, b1, nb3) 10
AUSTRALIA 2nd Inn (o/n 104-4)		Total (10 wickets, 119.5 overs)	291
A. Finch	c Pant b Ashwin 11	Fall of wickets:	1-28 (Finch), 2-44 (Harris), 3-60 (Khawaja), 4-84 (Handscomb), 5-115 (Head), 6-156 (Marsh), 7-187 (Paine), 8-228 (Starc), 9-259 (Cummins), 10-291 (Hazlewood)
M. Harris	c Pant b Shami 26	Bowling:	Sharma 19-4-48-1, Bumrah 24-8-68-3, Ashwin 52-5-13-92-3, Shami 20-4-65-3 (3nb), Vijay 4-0-11-0
U. Khawaja	c Sharma b Ashwin 8	RESULT:	India win by 31 runs
S. Marsh	c Pant b Bumrah 60		
P. Handscomb	c Pujara b Shami 14		
T. Head	c Rahane b Sharma 14		
T. Paine	c Pant b Bumrah 41		
P. Cummins	c Kohli b Bumrah 28		
M. Starc	c Pant b Shami 28		

of the way the team took it to the wire.

"We thought we could win, no doubt about that. We saw how the pitch is playing and told ourselves we are going to dig deep, but unfortunately, myself, Travis (Head) and Shaun couldn't bat long as long as we should have."

Australia resumed the final day needing another 219 for victory with four wickets down, but lost their last two specialist batsmen before lunch, shifting the odds heavily in India's favour.

Marsh and Head had started cautiously, grinding out 11 runs in the opening seven overs before seamer Ishant Sharma struck with the score on 115, bowling a bouncer that caught Head's bat as he tried to fend it off and Ajinkya Rahane took the catch at gully.

Paine joined Marsh and they upped the ante, capitalising on some loose balls from Shami to chip away steadily and close the gap.

Marsh brought up a valuable 50 - his 10th in Tests - with a

SELECTION

England keep faith with Test squad for West Indies tour



(From left) In this November 26, 2018, picture, England's Moeen Ali, captain Joe Root, Ben Foakes, Ben Stokes and Rory Burns watch the run out of Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis (not pictured) on a screen during the third Test in Colombo. (Reuters)

AFP
London

England kept faith yesterday with the squad that delivered a Test whitewash in Sri Lanka, naming the same 16 players who finished that tour for the series against the West Indies.

That means no place for Surrey's Ollie Pope, who was initially selected for Sri Lanka but left early to get game time with the second-tier Lions side, and a reprieve for Kent's Joe Denly.

The uncapped 32-year-old was not required during the 3-0 win but will once again travel as batting cover for the three Tests, ahead of Pope and his overlooked county colleague Jason Roy.

Wicketkeeper Ben Foakes was a late addition in Sri Lanka after an injury to Jonny Bairstow and takes his place as a first-choice pick after collecting man-of-the-series honours.

The 15-man one-day squad also has a familiar look as the countdown to next summer's World Cup continues.

Left-armers David Willey re-

turns and Mark Wood is included ahead of Olly Stone, who made his bow in Sri Lanka.

Ben Stokes and Alex Hales have both been named in the ODI squad after a disciplinary hearing into their roles in a fight outside a Bristol nightclub in 2017, with all-rounder Stokes also in the Test squad.

"Ben is obviously in all England formats and is one of our leading cricketers in this country," national selector Ed Smith told Sky Sports.

"Alex has been a central part of the white-ball team for a number of years. He's currently missed out on selection at times but when he's got his opportunities, he's taken them."

"So nothing has changed. They are available for selection, they have been selected and that's the situation - that's what is appropriate for me to consider as a selector."

England are due to play three Tests, five one-day internationals and three Twenty20 internationals on their tour of the West Indies, which starts next month.

The T20 squad will be announced at a later date.

Sri Lanka's Dananjaya suspended from bowling over illegal action

Reuters
Bengaluru

Sri Lanka spinner Akila Dananjaya has been suspended from bowling in international cricket with immediate effect after an independent committee found his bowling action to be illegal, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday.

Dananjaya was reported for a suspect action following Sri Lanka's first Test against England in Galle last month.

The 25-year-old's bowling action was assessed on November 23 at the National Cricket Centre in Brisbane, where the straightening of his elbow during deliveries was found to exceed the 15-degree tolerance limit.

Dananjaya's international

suspension will also be recognised and enforced by all national cricket federations for domestic cricket events played in their own jurisdiction, the ICC said.

However, Dananjaya may be able to bowl in domestic cricket events played under the auspices of Sri Lanka Cricket.

He will now undergo remedial work on his action and will be allowed to resume bowling in international cricket if his modified action passes the 15-degree rule.

Dananjaya has claimed 27 wickets in five Tests for Sri Lanka since making his debut against Bangladesh in February.

He has also bagged 46 wickets in 30 one-day internationals and 14 wickets in 16 Twenty20 internationals.